

## **Kings Breeder 931**

### [Chapter 931](#)

\*Jared\*

Eliza was gone too long. I tracked her down to the bathroom and found her lying on the floor, moaning.

“Eliza!” I scooped her into my arms and shook her gently.

She groaned and her head lolled to the side.

“Eliza? Wake up, my love.” I patted her face gently.

She just groaned and turned in my arms.

Panic rose in my chest. What happened to her?

There was a yellow powder all over her face and shirt. This wasn't good. She had a foreign substance on her and was stuck in some unconscious state.

It reminded me too much of how Lena had been when she was poisoned.

I needed to get Eliza to the White Queen.

I got her into the back of the car. “We need to get to King Xander and Queen Lena right now, double time!”

The driver peeled away from the curb and sped through the streets.

Lena and Xander weren't that far. They were staying in Winter Forest. The driver pulled up in front of their hotel. I tossed him a tip and carried Eliza inside. I went straight for the front desk.

“I need to see Queen Lena, right now,” I demanded.

“Sir... is she alright....” the concierge pointed to Eliza.

“No! She's the queen's cousin and I need to get her to Queen Lena immediately!”

“Okay, yes, of course.”

The concierge made a call and a few moments later, Xander appeared in the elevator. He took me in and looked at Eliza.

“Goddess! Let's go, now.” He waved me into the elevator. “The concierge said it was important but....”

“More like an emergency!”

“You could have called me directly,” Xander said, frowning slightly.

“Yeah, next time my wife ends up unconscious, I'll call first.”

Xander pursed his lips. “I just meant....”

I sighed and nodded. “I know what you meant. Thanks.”

The elevator doors opened to the top-floor penthouse and Xander let us in. I brought Eliza to the bedroom and laid her on the bed.

Lena rushed right over and put a hand on Eliza's forehead. She seemed to be reading Eliza's energy.

"What happened?" Lena asked.

I shrugged. "I'm not sure... we were out to lunch and she went to the bathroom. I found her like this when she didn't come back...."

"You didn't inhale any of this, did you?" Lena pointed to the powder on Eliza's face and shirt.

"No. I mean... I don't think so."

"If you haven't started hallucinating, you're probably fine."

"Hallucinating?" I glanced at Xander.

"The yellow powder is a very powerful hallucinogenic, mind-altering substance. I've had... some experience with it."

"The baby? Is the baby okay?" I asked frantically. I was about ready to jump out of my skin as Lena ran her hands over Eliza.

I didn't know what she was doing, but apparently, she was figuring something out.

She held her hands over Eliza's stomach and hummed softly. After a moment, she opened her eyes and nodded.

"The baby is fine. As for what it's doing to Eliza...." She brought her hand back to Eliza's forehead and hummed more.

I paced back and forth next to the bed. Any time Eliza made a sound, I looked at her, holding my breath and hoping she'd open her eyes.

Xander came back into the room and handed me a mug of warm, steaming tea.

"It'll take the edge off. We need you calm and clear."

I nodded and gulped the tea down in one big gulp. Almost immediately, a state of heavy relaxation settled over me. I stopped pacing and sat on the bed beside Eliza. I took her hand in mine and looked at Lena.

"What's going on?"

Lena frowned and stepped away from the bed. "From what I can tell, Eliza is in some kind of dream state."

"Like you were?" I asked, raising my eyes to hers.

"I doubt it. I drank my poison. Eliza clearly inhaled this. Besides, the poison I drank was meant to keep me in a suspended state that would lead to my death. The goal here wasn't to kill Eliza."

Lena glanced at Xander. I saw the look they shared but I kept my focus on Eliza. I squeezed her hand, silently begging her to come back to me.

My heart wasn't racing anymore but I was still worried about her and the baby.

"What was the goal?" I asked, keeping my eyes on Eliza.

Lena sighed. "I'm not sure. It is rare that hallucinogenic substances are used for killing. More than likely, it is being used to show Eliza something."

"Something like what?" I asked, my voice hitching. "You said it was mind-altering."

"Jared, the best thing we can do right now is wake Eliza up and hopefully, the substance hasn't had a chance to fully do what it was meant to do."

I nodded. "Yeah, can you wake her?"

"I can try. But I'm going to need a few things. Xander...?" She handed the king a small list.

"I'll be back in a few minutes." He nodded and kissed Lena on the cheek before leaving.

"What are you going to give her?"

"I'll make a potion, similar to the one that Rosalie made for me. But this one will be altered to match the substance Eliza was given."

I nodded and squeezed Eliza's hand.

She didn't respond to me at all. It was like she couldn't feel my touch, even though she was just in some dream state.

"We should clean her up. That powder is still potent."

Lena left for a moment and returned with a bowl of water and a cloth. I took them from her.

"I can do it."

She nodded and stepped back.

I wrung the cloth out and carefully wiped the yellow powder off of Eliza's face. I carefully wiped out her eyes, around her nose and mouth, and down her neck.

"Can we get her some clean clothes?" I asked.

"Of course."

Lena ducked out of the room for a moment and came back with some fresh clothes. She left again, respectfully allowing me to take care of my wife.

I changed Eliza's clothes and made sure to wipe away any traces of the yellow powder still on her skin.

Once I had her dressed again, I went out of the bedroom and found Lena making a potion and Xander hovering nearby.

They told me where to put the cloth and dirty clothes and then I went back to Eliza. I took her hand and stroked her fingers.

“Soon, Eliza. You’ll be awake again soon.”

Lena and Xander returned and Lena had a mug of some steaming liquid in her hands. She handed me the mug.

I cupped the back of Eliza’s head and angled her head up. I pressed the mug to her lips and tipped it, causing the liquid to pour into her mouth.

Nothing happened for a moment and then Eliza coughed and sputtered, blinking her eyes furiously.

I jumped back as she pitched forward, coughing and pounding her chest.

Lena went to her side and rubbed her back.

“That’s it Eliza, get it all out. You’re back with us now. You’re safe.”

Eliza’s coughing eased and she lifted her eyes. I saw her look at Lena and Xander. She smiled brightly.

“Thank you! I don’t know what happened. You two... you saved me.”

“Uhh... Elize...” I waved my hand, catching her attention.

She turned to me and her face paled. She leaned back toward Lena.

My heart pounded suddenly when I saw how she recoiled from me. Her eyes shone with betrayal and... terror. She wrapped her arms around her protectively, like she thought I’d hurt the baby.

“What are you doing here?” Her voice was almost fearful.

I creased my brow. “What do you mean? You were showing me the Light Realm, don’t you remember?”

She shook her head and looked at her cousin. “What is he doing here?”

“Elize, he came here for you, to be with you and the baby,” Lena explained.

“No.” Elize shook her head and looked at me again. “No. It’s too late. You need to leave, now!”

“Elize... what happened... you were given a powerful substance. What did it do?” I reached out to her and she recoiled further. I didn’t want to scare her, so I stepped back.

What was going on?

“Leave! I don’t want anything to do with you!” Elize’s voice was shrill and hysterical.

I stared at Elize for a moment and then looked at Xander and Lena. They both shrugged.

“Elize, Jared is the one who saved you. He found you and brought you to me for help.”

“I love you Elize, that’s—”

“No! Get out! Get out! I don’t even want to look at you!”

Elize screamed and kicked at the comforter.

Xander grabbed my arm and pulled me out of the room.

"What the hell?" I gasped.

"Jared, I know this isn't easy, but she's pregnant and can't get worked up like that. I think it's best for Elize and the baby if you wait down in the lobby until we can sort this out."

I looked back at the door. I could still hear Elize sobbing, completely distraught.

What had she seen in the dream state?

"I agree." I nodded.

I headed out of the penthouse and walked down the hotel stairs. It was not easy to leave Elize alone but Xander was right, the baby was at risk if she got too worked up.

My heart clenched in my chest. I couldn't believe how upset she got from seeing me. She was like a completely different person.

Was that even possible? Lene did say that the substance had mind-altering abilities. Had someone changed Elize's mind?

Xander and Lene could calm her down. They'd figure out what was going on. Clearly, she didn't have a problem with them, just me.

Sighing, I shook my head. There were a few other people in the stairwell, jostling around.

A petite woman came up the stairs holding something in her arms. She clutched it protectively to her chest.

The woman was jostled by a couple of burly men rushing down the stairs.

She lost her footing and cried out as she tipped backward.

I sprang to action, vaulting down the stairs and catching her. I put my arms around her and helped her upright.

"There you go. Are you alright?" I asked, setting her on her feet again.

"Oh, thank you, so much." She lifted her head and smiled wickedly at me. "Oh, yes. Thank you!"

She lifted the item in her arms, a bowl filled with yellow powder.

I released her quickly and jumped back.

Too late....

She blew on the bowl and yellow powder filled my eyes, nose, and mouth.

The last thing I heard was her laughter as I tumbled into darkness.

"Thank you! I don't know what happened. You two... you saved me."

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### [Chapter 932](#)

I opened my eyes to see Lena and Xander peering over me. Relief swept through them both and Lena stepped away.

I sat up and rubbed my eyes. I felt stiff and sore, and like I was just coming back from a bad hangover.

"How are you feeling?" Lena asked.

"Like someone spiked the punch," I groaned.

Xander handed me some water. "This should help. You gave us a bit of a scare, seeing as Eliza just woke up from the same thing."

"Eliza?" I arched an eyebrow. "What about her?"

Xander pursed his lips. "You don't remember? Just a few hours ago, you brought her to Lena because she was exposed to some kind of substance that put her in a dream state. You helped us heal her."

"How's the baby?" I asked. My concern for the child blossoming fully.

I noticed Xander look at Lena. He seemed confused.

"Are you not worried about Eliza?"

I scoffed and set my water aside. "Why would I be? I only came here to remind her that I'm the father of her child... the one she ran off with to try and hide out in the Light Realm with to keep it away from me."

"That's not...."

"Well, she has another thing coming to her if she thinks I'm not going to exercise my Dark Realm rights. That child is mine." I pointed to myself.

Admittedly, the details of what Xander described were a little fuzzy. I vaguely remembered seeing Eliza passed out, and all I could think was that I hoped her ineptness hadn't caused harm to the baby.

Hearing that the baby was fine made me feel a little better, but what I couldn't figure out was why Lena and Xander were looking at me like I had twelve heads.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Am I not better? I'd like to get back to the Dark Realm as soon as possible. Am I well enough to travel after this mess?"

"Jared... you seem kind of... different," Lena said. "A few hours ago, all you cared about was saving Eliza and now you want to leave her? We don't even know what happened to the two of you."

"If I was concerned, then it was for the baby. Eliza means nothing to me. I just wanted to remind her that I have just as much right to that child as her."

"Don't you want to see her before you leave?" Lena's voice was a little hopeful.

I scoffed and rolled my eyes. "Why? You told me the baby was fine. I understand she can't travel right now. But, I don't need to stick around any longer."

Lena huffed and put her hands on her hips. "Jared, this isn't you! Can't you remember just a few hours ago?"

I looked at Xander. "Is your wife on drugs?"

Xander glared at me. "Careful, Jared. She's not the one acting out of character here. We're just trying to help you and Eliza. We want to know what happened to the two of you."

"Great, when you find that out, let me know. Until then, I'm going back to the Dark Realm." I tried to stand up but Xander stopped me.

"You're not well enough to travel," he growled.

"Fine, whatever, play your games. But I do not want to see Eliza. If something happens with the baby, you can tell me all about that!"

Lena came over to me and sat on the bed. "Can I ask you some questions?"

I groaned. "Is that really necessary?"

This whole thing was starting to annoy me. I didn't know how much clearer I could be. They were acting like they didn't know that Eliza had been a pain in my butt since the moment I brought her back to the village.



She'd served her purpose, to have my child. And now, she thought she could just run off with that child and hide out in the Light Realm.

No, that wasn't happening.

"Jared?" Lena snapped her fingers in front of my face.

"Okay, I'm not playing your game anymore. Get out!"

Lena sighed and backed away. Slowly, she left the room.

Xander stayed behind and crossed his arms.

"I'm sorry that this happened to you, whatever it is. I'm going to figure it out. Honestly, it is beyond my knowledge."

"What happened to me? What are you talking about?" I arched an eyebrow.

"You and Eliza were both exposed to a hallucinogenic. I think it altered your minds somehow."

I scoffed. "That's not possible. I know what I feel. I know what I remember."

"And that's the problem. But you need to tone it down a bit Jared. My wife was about ready to slap you and if you upset her, I'm not going to help you anymore."

I bit back my remark. I didn't really think that I needed help, but Xander and I were just starting to piece together our brother relationship. I wasn't ready to toss that aside.

"Look, I'm going to call in my Uncle Theo. He has more knowledge about this kind of thing than me. Plus, he is related to us, not Eliza. Is that acceptable?"

I nodded slowly.

A few hours later, Xander returned with Theo. I'd met him once before when Eliza was dragging me all around, so intent on breaking the curse. It had been an agonizing journey, even though the curse was broken.

She was always making googly eyes at me like she thought that any second, I'd magically fall in love with her.

As if!

"I'm not familiar with a yellow powder... Jared, can you tell us what you do remember?" Theo asked after Xander and I filled him in.

"About what?" I snarled.

"About Eliza," Theo clarified.

"Oh... her. Well, from the moment I brought her to my village, she has been nothing but a pain in the ass. She's been trying to win my affections, always getting in my business and insisting she help me out with things."

"Is that so?" Theo asked, raising an eyebrow.

"You have no idea what it is like to have a lovesick puppy following you around. It's like she thinks that just because we are mates, we're destined to be together." I rolled my eyes.

Xander cleared his throat. "Jared... that is what that means."

"Whatever. The point is, I wanted her to keep house and have my children. Apparently, that was too much to ask because she decided to run off to the Light Realm and try to take my child from me!"

Xander and Theo exchanged a look, similar to the look that Xander and Lena had shared earlier.

"What, what is it?"

"That's not exactly how things went down, Jared. And if it is how they went down, can you blame Eliza for wanting to get away from you? According to you, you treated her like a house slave and a breeder," Theo said.

"Because I bought her at an auction, as a slave!"

"Oh boy...." Xander bowed his head.

Theo creased his brow and stroked his chin. "Actually, I've heard of something like this before...."

"You have? How do we fix it?" Xander asked, perking up.

"Unfortunately, what I remember isn't the same as this yellow powder. This is similar to what the Dreamberry is capable of but... there are differences."

I saw the excitement leave Xander's eyes.

"So, we know nothing?" he asked.

Theo shrugged. "Jared, you don't remember this, but you are actually in love with Eliza. Very much so. I only met the two of you once before, and I could tell how much you loved and cared for her. You'd do anything to protect her and that's why you came to the Light Realm, to be with her."

I shook my head. "No. That's not possible. You're making this up. I came here because I wanted to remind her that I'm claiming my child, no matter what realm she hides in."

"You know what? I think there's something more proactive than trying to get Jared to remember what really happened since he met Eliza," Xander jumped in.

"What's that?" Theo asked.

"We should just destroy Hestie. This is obviously her doing. Somehow, she found someone in the Light Realm to do her bidding. If we destroy her, then hopefully, the spell will break."

"That's one possibility. Either way, she's caused more than enough damage and we should get rid of her,"

Theo agreed.

"If you're going to take down Hestie, I want to be a part of that. She's after my child, you know."

"We know," Xander and Theo said together.

I could tell that both of them were completely fed up with me but I couldn't figure out why. They'd both witnessed me end Elize before and they'd never made up all these lies about me loving her and being devoted to her.

"Security footage at the museum and hospital identified the women responsible for the powder. She was apprehended and questioned," Xender told me. "After Elize's incident, we realized that Hestie was in the Light Realm and she confirmed it. She is a native of the Southern Jungle, and George has confirmed some strange activity outside of New Dienny."

"George?" I questioned.

"Elize's brother. He is working on an excavation near the jungle he will help guide us through."

I pursed my lips, knowing I ought not to make a comment on the competence of any of Elize's family members.

Xender continued, "So, our best bet is we will find Hestie in the Southern Jungles of the Light Realm. I don't have anything more specific than that but with the right forces and the right allies, we should be able to corner her and finish her off."

"I'm not much for fighting these days, but I did put in some requests to the witches of the Dark Realm.

They've agreed to meet us there and scout the jungles to help you hunt her down. They'll back you up if it comes down to a fight, too," Theo said.

"Good, let's get going then. The sooner she is dealt with the sooner I can return to the Dark Realm." I got off the bed and headed for the door.

Theo cleared his throat.

I glanced at him over my shoulder.

"Aren't there a few things here that you should attend to first?" he inquired.

"Like what?" I arched an eyebrow.

This was starting to get old. I felt like they were playing games with me to try and throw me off balance or something.

"Elize will be staying here in the Light Realm," Xender reminded me.

"Ahh, right. I should put extra security on the house to ensure that Eli... the baby is safe. I'm going to call Archer and my men to get involved."

It didn't take long for Archer and my men to arrive. They brought Scerlett with them. She had a basket full of things I didn't recognize.

"What's all this?" I pointed to the basket.

Scerlett sighed and glanced at Archer. He nodded encouragingly.

It was an odd exchange. Archer was my Bete and one of my closest friends. Scerlett was also someone I knew and respected.

“These ere some of Elize’s things. I thought I’d bring them for her to try to help my Lune remember her home.”

“Lune?”

Scerlett didn’t reply. She heeded into the house where Elize would be steying so my security could keep the beby sefe until Hestie was defeeted.

I turned to Archer. “Lune? Why is everyone ecting so delusionel?”

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“These are some of Eliza’s things. I thought I’d bring them for her to try to help my Luna remember her home.”

“Luna?”

Scarlett didn’t reply. She headed into the house where Eliza would be staying so my security could keep the baby safe until Hestia was defeated.

I turned to Archer. “Luna? Why is everyone acting so delusional?”

### [Chapter 933](#)

\*Eliza\*

The things Lena and Xander told me about Jared were confusing. I knew for a fact they were wrong. My memory wasn’t lying. Why would they try to convince me otherwise?

As soon as I was well enough, I went back to my house. According to Lena, Jared bought me the house, but I didn’t think that was true.

It wasn’t just a house; it was a home, where I could see myself raising my child and giving them a good life, far away from the Dark Realm and Jared.

He’d never buy me anything like that, and I would never want to accept anything like that from him.

The day I got home, my mom met me there. I was glad to see her. I remembered her always telling me that Jared was bad news. It had taken me a while to figure it out but finally, I’d learned.

"How are you feeling, dear?" she asked as she fixed me some soup for lunch.

I sat at the kitchen table, a horrible feeling of despair building in my stomach and I just knew it was because Jared was still hanging around.

He was staying with Xander, and fortunately, they had Hestia to worry about.

"I'm fine, Mom. Just a little... confused."

"Confused about what?"

She dished up two bowls of soup and joined me at the table.

"People keep telling me things that I don't remember happening. It's like I lived two lives or something."

"Eat your soup," my mom said, tapping the side of my bowl.

I complied, mulling over everything that had happened recently. Everyone had been telling me that the awful Jared I remembered wasn't the real Jared.

But if that was true, why hadn't he tried to come to see me again? He was staying as far away from me as I would expect. He hadn't done anything to make me think he was this "decent" Jared they all talked about.

"Well, if you don't feel like Jared is a good man, then no one should pressure you into rekindling your relationship." She smiled across the table at me.

I smiled back. Having my mother's support was helpful. I couldn't remember her being that friendly and supportive all the time, but I was glad she was on my side with this one.

"Thanks, Mom. I appreciate that. I just wish I knew what everyone was talking about. I don't know what to believe."

I finished my soup and my mom started to clean up. She was being so supportive, but I could tell there was something else she wanted to say.

"Mom, is something bothering you?"

She sighed and turned around, facing me. "Honey, I don't want you to feel like you have to listen to everyone else, especially when it goes against what you believe right now."

"But...?"

She smiled humorlessly. "But I don't want you to wake up three years from now and realize you made a mistake. Living with regrets is not something I want for you."

"How could I regret keeping my child away from him, here in the Light Realm? He's... awful." I looked at my lap. Even as I said the words, they felt so cruel and harsh.

Was that because I still had feelings for him, after everything he'd done?

My mom came over and put her hand on my shoulder. She squeezed gently.

“Eliza, I want what is best for you and my grandchild. I might not have always thought Jared is good for you, but he has surprised me in the past. He bought you this house, and he has worked really hard to build a relationship with me and your father.”

I scoffed and narrowed my eyes. Standing up, I walked away from my mother and crossed my arms.

“Why are you saying these things?”

“Because you know that I wouldn’t lie to you, Eliza. I’ve always been honest, even when you don’t want to hear it.”

My mother’s words hung heavily around me. She was right. No matter what, I could count on her being honest, even brutally honest.

“You know, he did save you from becoming a breeder. I’ve heard the stories the kids are telling each other, stories that you told them.”

I shook my head, still struggling to wrap my mind around that. I liked what my mom was saying. I liked what my friends were telling me. But my memories just didn’t back it up.

“Hey you two, I’m not interrupting, am I?” Scarlett came into the kitchen with a wide smile.

“Scarlett! How’d you get here?”

I ran to her and hugged her. She grunted, almost dropping the basket in her hands.

“Um... what do you mean? I came with Archer when Jared sent for him.”

I let Scarlett go and she set the basket on the kitchen table. She sighed and unruffled her shirt.

It was surreal to me to see Scarlett there, out of Jared’s village. She’d been held there just like I was, unable to break free or run away. When I’d left to help Lena, I’d regretted not being able to take her with me.

“I can’t believe Jared let you come here....”

Scarlett creased her brow. “I didn’t ask for his permission. Besides, Archer told me I was needed.”

“Yeah but, you were a prisoner there, just like me.”

Scarlett pursed her lips. She looked around me at my mother.

“I’ve got to get to the store and do some grocery shopping. You girls will be fine here on your own?”

“We’ll be fine, thank you,” Scarlett nodded.

As soon as we were alone, Scarlett took my hands and squeezed.

“Lena and Archer filled me in on what’s been going on. I’m really sorry that all of this has happened to you, Eliza. I know things feel... confusing, but please believe me when I say that we all just want to help.”

I nodded, my eyes welling with tears a little. I did know that all my friends and family wanted the best for me. It was the only reason I entertained the notion something in my memories was wrong at all. But

that didn't change my memories or my feelings.

We sat together in the living room and Scarlett told me about my life with Jared.

"He saved you from that awful auction and he let Archer care for me after I lost my son. Jared has always been a fair and decent man. I know you don't remember it that way, but we both owe him a lot."

"I wish I remembered things that way. If I did, maybe I wouldn't be so confused." I sighed and shook my head.

"Look at your left hand. See that moonstone ring you're wearing? You haven't taken that off, even after everything." Scarlett grabbed my hand and held the ring up.

"What about it?" I couldn't remember where I got the ring but taking it off seemed... wrong somehow.

"Jared gave you this ring. It is your engagement ring! The two of you are married and you're Luna of Midnight Sun, his pack."

I shook my head. "No... that can't be right..."

Scarlett chuckled. She hopped off the couch and brought me the basket she'd carried in.

"Come on, these are some of your things from your life in Jared's village. Maybe they'll trigger a memory."

She plopped the basket in my lap and sat back down.

I sifted through the items. There was a broken artifact, a certificate of sale from when I was sold, and a gold chain necklace with a locket pendant.

Creasing my brow, I lifted the pendant and held it up to the light. I practically forgot about Scarlett as I opened the locket and listened transfixed as familiar music played.

"That's my song... I composed it when I was young and..."

As I listened to the song I saw flickers of memories in my mind... Jared sacrificing himself for me and our baby, hiking and swimming together in a remote village, snuggling with his wolf all night long.

Gesping, I closed the locket end put the necklece down.

"Whet is it?" Scerlett's eyes were wide end hopeful.

"Where did this locket come from?"

"Jered geve it to you. It belonged to his mother, end thet song is one of the first clues thet the two of you were feted to be together."

Confusion rolled eround in my stomech.

Those memory fleshes seemed so distent but they felt reel. The feelings thet ceme with them were so strong end powerful.

"Elize?"



"I think I should talk to Jered."

Scerlett and Archer were able to arrange the meeting with Jered. He came to the house, which made me nervous. I wasn't sure how I would feel about him being in my home, in my space.

"Why am I here?" he asked, crossing his arms. His look was hard and unflinching, just like in my memories.

I licked my lips, nervously trying to ignore his attitude as I took in a deep breath and smoothed my hands over my thighs.

"I found something, and it brought up some questions for me and my memories. Maybe it will do the same for you." I pulled the pendant out of my pocket and held it out to Jered.

He sneered. "Why do you have that?" He snatched it from my hand and stuck it in his pocket.

"According to Scerlett and Archer, you gave it to me."

Jered rolled his eyes. "Why would I give you my mother's necklace? It is the only thing I have of her!"

"I don't know." I shrugged. "I'm just starting to think that maybe... our memories aren't as reliable as we think."

"Oh, really? And what is it you think you remember?"

I sighed and chewed the inside of my cheek. "Well, I heard the song in the locket. It is one that I wrote when I was a little girl."

His brow furrowed even more. "When I heard it again I saw memories of us together happy, hiking and swimming together on a private island..."

I trailed off and glanced at Jered. His brow was deeply furrowed and he looked like he was seriously considering what I said.

"Maybe if you listen to it—"

Suddenly, he frowned and shook his head.

"I don't know what you think you know, but none of that has ever happened. There's no private island, and I would never trust anyone with this necklace, least of all you!"

I bowed my head, tears stinging my eyes again. My wolf seemed unusually somber. This was how Jered always treated me. Why was it making me so sad right now?

"I've said it a hundred times, but if you need me to say it again, I will. So perk up your ears and listen really well, because I do not want to have to repeat myself again!"

I swallowed and stiffened my spine, lifting my eyes to meet his and show him that I was listening.

"The only good thing you can do is deliver my child safely. That's all I want from you, nothing more. I will never want anything more."

I took his words to heart. There was no love between us.

I scoffed and wrapped my arms around my stomach. "I will deliver my child safely; you don't need to worry about that."

"Good. Then once it is born, you can bring it to my village or I can come and get it, the choice is yours."

My mouth dropped open and I gaped at Jared. He really did mean to take my child away....

Anger boiled through me and I yanked the moonstone ring off my finger. I threw it at Jared.

Instinctively, he caught it.

"If you think you can take my child from me, there are a great many people that will never let that happen, including your brother, the king!"

Gasping, I closed the locket and put the necklace down.

"What is it?" Scarlett's eyes were wide and hopeful.

"Where did this locket come from?"

"Jared gave it to you. It belonged to his mother, and that song is one of the first clues that the two of you were fated to be together."

Confusion rolled around in my stomach.

Those memory flashes seemed so distant but they felt real. The feelings that came with them were so strong and powerful.

"Eliza?"

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### [Chapter 934](#)

\*Jared\*

I opened my palm and looked at the moonstone ring in my hand. She’d thrown it at me, but I hadn’t gotten a good look at it.

The ring was familiar, but I couldn’t place it.

I frowned and creased my brow. The ring sparked a strange memory. I saw the gardens back at my village and a flash of Eliza walking toward me in a wedding dress. Was it true? Did we get married? Did I really love her?

I scoffed and shook my head.

“The choice is yours. But either way, it will come to pass.” I put the ring in my pocket with my mother’s necklace and left Eliza’s house.

I wasn’t sure why I held onto the ring but I couldn’t help it. Something about it made it impossible for me to let it go.

I headed back to the hotel to meet up with Xander and Theo. They were still working on a plan to get Hestia in the Southern Jungle.

While I walked back to the hotel, I thought about the strange flash and the feelings that came with it. My wolf was restless and agitated. I wasn’t sure if that was because he was upset by the memory or upset that it had gone away so quickly.

Whatever I’d seen, it didn’t change how I felt about her.

Theo and Xander were waiting for me in the penthouse. When I arrived, they both stopped talking quickly and I knew that they’d been talking about me.

“What’s going on?” I closed the door gently and locked it, knowing we couldn’t be disturbed while coming up with a plan.

“Scarlett called Archer and he called me,” Xander said, “about your little visit with Eliza.”

I scoffed. “What about it? I thought we were here to talk about Hestia.”

“We’ll get to that,” Theo said, a deep rumble in his voice that told me I should listen.

Theo nodded to a nearby chair and I took a seat. This was such a waste of time. I knew they were just going to talk at me about Eliza and try to convince me that my memories and feelings weren’t real.

Even with that little memory flash, I couldn’t fathom ever loving her.

“Jared, we’ve worked hard to restore our family’s image and honor. The way you’ve been treating Eliza, it is reminiscent of the days of Sebastian, and it doesn’t sit well with any of us,” Theo said.

“I’m NOT Sebastian!” I glared at my brother and uncle.

What was this, some kind of intervention?

“We know that,” Xander jumped in. “The point Theo is trying to make is that even if you can’t remember loving Eliza, there’s no reason for you to treat her like a breeder slave.”

“I did buy her as one.”

Xander sighed and shook his head. “Maybe so, but that doesn’t mean you have to treat her that way. It is a really shitty way to treat anyone, especially someone that you loved and that cares a lot about you and is carrying your child.”

“Look, I’m not an i\*\*\*t. I find it very strange that everyone else remembers this past where I’m in love with Eliza when I don’t remember it. Obviously, something is going on here that is... unusual.”

“I’m glad you can see that much,” Theo grumbled.

I shot him a look. “I might even be willing to entertain the notion that I was in love with her and that is somewhere buried in my memories. But the truth is, I don’t love her now and I might never love her again. So, can we move on?”

It wasn’t like they didn’t have a good reason to be concerned. I didn’t like the way I was treating Eliza. I never treated anyone like that.

For some reason, whenever I thought of her, the anger, resentment, and frustration just boiled over. It was unlike anything I’d ever experienced with anyone else in my life.

When I thought really hard about it, I didn’t even know where that frustration came from, or the desire to treat her like crap.

No one in my village would ever describe me as rude, mean, cruel, or vicious. So, why was I acting that way with her?

“We’ll make sure that you get your real memories and feelings back,” Xander said, nodding.

“Until then, I suppose I can look at making arrangements with Eliza after the child is born. Will that put your minds at ease for now?”

Theo sighed and shook his head, disappointment evident in his eyes. The way he looked at me, I felt like my own father, who I never met, was showing just how disappointed he was in my character.

Xander wore a similar look, his lips pulled down in a frown.

I shrugged. It was the best I could offer at this point, and they were either going to have to be okay with it or not.

“Good, that’s settled. So, Hestia is in the Southern Jungle. How are we going to defeat her?” I steered the conversation back to where I wanted it to be.

“From what I’ve learned, there is a temple in the Southern Jungle where we can get some intel on Hestia, her powers, and her goals. The archeologists just unearthed it and are still digging through the artifacts.” Xander pointed to the spot on the map where the temple was located.

“Archeologists,” I grumbled.

Why did everything in this place have to remind me of Eliza?

“Eliza’s brother, George, is heading the excavation team. He’s agreed to meet with us at the temple site and show us everything relevant.”

“Great...” I sighed heavily.

Going after Hestia was supposed to be a distraction from everything going on with Eliza. It wasn’t having the desired result.

Theo stayed behind and promised to be in touch with any more information. Xander and I took a boat with his soldiers and my men to the Southern Jungle. We didn't talk much. I had nothing left to say on the matter and it seemed that Xander could sense I wasn't going to be in a talking mood.

George met us at the entrance to the dig site. He gave me a look, like I was a bug that needed to be squashed.

"This temple is very old and a lot of the artifacts are delicate. You two need to be careful." When he spoke his warning, he looked directly at me.

"We understand the importance of this find and will treat it respectfully." Xander agreed, nodding.

"What is the importance of this temple, again?" I asked as George led us into the dig site.

The temple had been buried for centuries, and large chunks of it still were. From what I could tell, the archeologists had only managed to unearth certain parts of the temple.

Several hallways were filled in with dirt and were inaccessible.

Large, stone pillars rose up throughout the site; many were broken off at the top. Even the broken ones were so tall, I had to crane my neck back to see the top of them.

When this temple was standing, it had to have been massive.

"There are some murals up ahead that have the information you're looking for," George explained. "Our restorers are working to repaint the graphics in the same style as they were originally done. We've even found some old texts that have a lot of interesting history and lore."

"I'd like to look at the texts," I said.

George glanced over his shoulder at me and narrowed his eyes.

"They aren't ready to be handled. I have expert recreators working to translate them and reprint them on more durable material."

I wasn't surprised that George had a problem with me. He was Eliza's brother.

"We'll start with the murals. I've heard that pictograms and hieroglyphics can tell just as elaborate stories as old texts." Xander stepped in again. I knew he was trying to keep the mood civil.

"It's true," said George. "We've learned more about our history from wall paintings than old writings."

George led us through a narrow, dark hallway. The walls crumbled a little and I got the sense there was a massive amount of dirt piled on top of this hallway, threatening to break through the ceiling at any moment.

On the other side, the hallway opened into a large chamber that was almost perfectly intact. There was a tile floor with some cracks in it and marble walls. The large pillars rose to a ceiling that had crumbled away and light shone in, sun rays illuminating the intricate murals etched onto the walls.

"This entire section is about King Lyceon and what he was doing when he was in the Light Reelm." George waved his arm over a particular section.

I went up to the well and started studying the images. Hestie was so intent on destroying the Light Realm to preserve King Lyceon's legacy, but according to the well, Lyceon spent a lot of time in the Light Realm before the Dark Realm existed.

I ran my hand along the pictures, studying the story of the twins and their power. It was clear to me that the light and dark powers were strongly interconnected, and it was impossible for the dark to thrive without the light.

"This is incredible," I murmured.

"Hestie thinks that destroying the Light Realm is what Lyceon wanted, but according to this, he didn't hate the Light Realm, resent it, or think that it was demeriting to the Dark Realm," Xender murmured.

"Then what is Hestie really up to? Has she misinterpreted what Lyceon stood for?" I questioned.

"You know, you might want to worry a little less about what Hestie is thinking and a little more about how you're going to fix things with Elize." George's voice cut into my thoughts.

I glared over my shoulder at him.

"I'm here to prevent a threat to both realms, not talk about relationship drama."

George sniffed. "Seriously? Do you even remember why you went to stop Hestie?"

I frowned. "Because she's caused a lot of problems."

"Right... she's caused nothing but problems for the entire Light and Dark Realms, and you somehow took that personally because you were just so committed to both of them?"

I creased my brow and looked at Xender. He ducked his head and I could have sworn I saw him hiding a smile.

"Okay, then, enlighten me. Why did I go to stop Hestie?"

"Hestie threatened Elize and your unborn child. You knew that Elize would never feel safe enough to be your wife and remain with you in the Dark Realm until Hestie was destroyed. Does that sound like someone who doesn't love her?"

I glared at George. Why did he have to get into my business?

"Now, if you want to stop throwing a tantrum like some angry teenager, come with me. Otherwise, if you insist on treating my sister like garbage, you can stay here and we'll handle Hestie."

George waved us along.

Xender didn't say anything in my defense, and I had no good argument to shoot back.

I followed George and Xender. It wasn't great, but if I wanted to face Hestie and get rid of her once and for all, I'd have to keep my head down and go through the motions.

George brought us to a camp just outside the archeological dig where several Dark Realm witches had gathered. We were deep in the jungle, and only someone who knew where we were would find us here.

Xander and George spoke to the witches and had a good time. I felt like such an outsider. No one seemed to pay me any mind, so I headed to bed.

Lying on my bedroll, I pulled my mother's necklace out and the locket popped open. Its familiar song filled the air.

My eyelids grew heavy and I slipped into a dream. Eliza was waiting for me on the other side. Somehow, I knew this wasn't just a dream.

It was a memory.

We held each other close, hunkered down in a small shack while a massive sea storm raged outside.

Despite the darkness all around us, I was filled with nothing but love, devotion, and appreciation for her.

Memories of the time we spent in the boarded-up shack with nothing but a fire for warmth and light swelled in my chest as I remembered all the promises we'd made to each other then.

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### [Chapter 935](#)

My heart clenched so violently in my chest that it woke me up. I stared at the tent around me, taking a moment to reorient myself.

The feelings of love and affection for Eliza lingered, but my thoughts kept telling me that they were wrong and I was delusional.

What was I supposed to believe?

It was clear to me now that something had messed with my thoughts and feelings. I told Xander and Theo that I might never love her again. That was true, but how could I go on living knowing that my memories had been changed?

I needed to get my real memories back. The rest could sort itself out.

Sighing, I sat up and yawned. We had a lot to do today. Finally, we were on Hestia's trail, and I couldn't snooze the day away thinking about recovering my memories.

I joined Xander and George at the center of the camp. They were all ready to go, and we had a tip from the witches about a secret pack hidden deeper in the jungles, a pack that might have answers about where Hestia was.

"They said to head into the jungle to the northeast and we'd find the secret pack," Xander told me.

"What is so special about them?" I shouldered my pack and we headed into the thick, dense trees.

"Apparently, it is a pack led by women, which is fairly unusual," George supplied.

We waded through the jungle and trekked until mid-afternoon. It was sunny, hot, and humid. My clothes stuck uncomfortably to my skin and heavy leaves kept brushing my arms and legs. The air was filled with sounds of birds and large, buzzing insects.

"There's something up ahead. It looks like a small village," Xander called back from the front.

The jungle paths were so narrow we had to walk in single file.

We hurried our pace to the village. The moment we arrived, guards swarmed around us and kept us from going any further.

Xander cleared his throat and stepped up. "Hello. We mean no harm. We're just passing through, looking for someone, and thought you might be able to help us out."

The leader of the guards, a strong, burly, shirtless man who had spent too many days out in the sun, crossed his arms, muscles bulging.

"We haven't seen anything, and we wouldn't tell you if we did."

"Hugo, that's enough." A woman's voice floated into the circle.

The large man immediately relaxed and bowed his head. He stepped aside, clearing a path into the circle.

I'd never seen a man like that respond to a female so submissively. George's intel was right; this pack had a female Alpha.

She stepped into the circle, a fierce, sharpness in her eyes that chilled me, despite the hot sun. She stared at each of us, one at a time, taking us in. Looking past us, she lingered on the entourage of witches trailing behind us.

Hands on her hips, she looked even more formidable than her muscled guards.

"Tell me what you're after, and perhaps I can help."

Her eyes landed on me. Xander and George looked to me as well.

"We're looking for a witch from the Dark Realm. She may be hiding out here, or around here."

The female Alpha threw her head back and laughed. When she looked at me again, she had a cold hatred in her eyes.

This was a woman I didn't want to cross....

"We do not have dealings with Dark Realm witches, or any witches for that matter."

"Are you sure? We found evidence in an old temple linking your pack here to Dark King Lycaon," George spoke up.

The female Alpha scoffed. "Perhaps, hundreds of years ago. Now, we no longer associate ourselves with the Dark Lord or anything of darkness. Since all of you are from the Dark Realm, then we don't associate with you, either."

She turned up her chin and gave us a dismissive wave.

"Well, this was a waste of time," I grumbled.

Xander shook his head. "Please, we're not here to cause trouble. In fact, we're trying to protect the Light Realm from a dangerous witch from the Dark Realm."

"You have plenty of Dark Realm witches. Why do you need more?" She arched an eyebrow at the witches behind us.

"They are here to help, too. They do not like what this one witch has done and how she's sullied their name. We just want to get who we're looking for and leave. We'll leave you in peace and we'll return to the Dark Realm." Xander was really working his diplomatic power.

I guess there was a reason he was king.

"Hmm... well, if it gets you out of our midst, then I suppose there is no harm in you searching our territory. I can't promise you'll find anything. As I said, we don't associate with darkness."

Xander bowed his head. "Thank you. We won't disrupt your day-to-day activities."

"See that you don't!" the Alpha barked.

"I do have one more question before we head off on our search. Is there anything you've noticed happening in the jungle recently, anything dark and mysterious?"

The ice in the Alpha's eyes melted for a moment, and I caught a glimpse of uncertainty in them.

"My scouts have reported some disturbing activities of late..."

"Disturbing, how?" I asked. My heart thudded faster. Hestia was the queen of disturbing.

"People have gone missing, some from our pack, some from surrounding territories. When we've recovered bodies, which doesn't happen for everyone, they seem... different. They're empty husks, like all their insides were sucked out."

My jaw clenched. I'd seen that same thing before.

"Hestia," I growled as the memory came back to me sharp and sudden.

A dried up husk was all she left behind when she sucked the life energy out of someone.

"You're sure?" Xander turned to me.

I nodded. "I've seen her do it."

"That's... disturbing." Xander's eyes darkened.

"As I said," the Alpha added.

"We should follow any trail your scouts have discovered. It could lead us straight to her." I turned my attention back to the female Alpha.

She nodded.

Growls erupted from the nearby bushes and suddenly, rogues leaped from the leaves, crashing down on us.

"What is this!?" the female Alpha cried. "You set us up!"

"This isn't us!" Xander snapped. "These are Hestia's wolves. The timing is too convenient."

"Fight them back! Kill them all!" the Alpha cried to her pack.

Rogues closed in around us. There were hundreds of them, coming from all directions. I tossed my pack on the ground and launched toward the nearest rogue. When I grabbed him, he vanished in a puff of smoke.

I glanced around and noticed several others disappeared when they were struck.

"Some of them are just illusions!" I shouted. "Find the real rogues, track them!"

The fighting continued.

I punched my way through three more fake rogues.

It was some kind of trick or spell Hestia used to turn a few wolves into an army. It could keep us busy for a long time, trying to separate the fakes from the real ones.

I pounced on a rogue sprinting right toward me. He didn't turn into smoke. I held onto his back and wrapped an arm around his neck, squeezing tight.

The rogue whimpered and stumbled, falling hard on the ground. I rolled off of him.

He jumped up, wheezed, and limped off into the bushes.

"Xander, George, I'm going after one that's retreating," I shouted into the chaos.

"We're coming." Xander punched through a fake and the two of them raced to me.

The pack could handle the rest. Most of them were just dust and shadows.

"He was limping pretty badly. We should follow at a distance, not overtake him. If he thinks he's being followed, he might lead us in another direction," I whispered.

I motioned to the ground and we all lowered ourselves.

“Did you hear that?” Xander asked, head whipping in another direction.

“The guy ran this way,” I pointed.

“I swear I heard something over here. I’ll go check it out. You follow your guy. This could be another lead.”

“We should stay together....”

“No, I got this. I’ll catch up if it turns out to be nothing.”

Before I could argue further, Xander disappeared into the jungle. I groaned; I really didn’t want to be alone with George. He’d made his feelings about me very clear.

I looked to George and he shrugged.

We headed after the injured rogue. About a mile into the pursuit, I was starting to worry about Xander. I hoped he hadn’t run into trouble.

“Woah, I think I heard something over there.” George pointed off to the left.

“I didn’t hear anything.”

“I better take a look. It could be Hestia’s hideout.”

“Or, we could keep tracking the rogue we know is taking us there....”

“You keep tracking him. I’ll take a look in this direction.” George hurried off before I could stop him.

What was going on? It was insane for us to split up while we were hunting Hestia. I gasped and stopped for a moment. It was insane, and it was probably Hestia’s doing.

Growling under my breath, I kept tracking the injured rogue. He led me deeper into the jungle to a cave.

As soon as I came out of the underbrush, I froze, all the blood draining from my face.

Hestia had her hands wrapped around George’s shoulders and she was sucking the life out of him.

Or trying to.

George struggled against her, making her lose her grip over and over again.

“Whether by sucking your life out or crushing your skull, I will kill you!” she threatened.

“Hestia!”

Her head snapped in my direction. She smirked and beckoned me closer with a nod.

“How wonderful this is, Jared. I dreamed you’d come.”

“I’m here now. And you’ve come to fight a losing battle. We all know how weak you are.”

Hestia scoffed. “Only fools think they’ve won before the battle is fought.”

“Every time you’ve come after me, I’ve pushed you back further and further. This is the last stand. You have nowhere to run. You have no servants waiting on you. You’re alone... but I’m not.” I glared at her.

“Is that so? I seem to recall you pushing the love of your life and the mother of your child away recently.”

My confidence faltered for a moment. Hestia knew more about my lost memories than I did....

Could I fight her if she could use my lost memories against me? What if I killed her and all chances of restoring them were lost?

“You’re not going to kill me, Jared, not here, not now... not until after I show you the future.”

I scoffed. “What future?”

“King Lycaon’s future. Take my hand, and I will show you the answers to all your questions.”

She held one hand out to me, keeping the other firm on George’s shoulder.

I needed to get George away from her or she’d kill him. It was true; Hestia had put forth a lot of questions, and I couldn’t deny that I was curious about the answers, especially since she seemed convinced it had to do with me and my destiny.

“I will only take your hand if you release George.”

Hestia glanced at George. She shrugged and tossed him aside like he was nothing. She thrust her hand out to me.

“Don’t do it, Jared. She’ll suck your life out!” George cried.

I eyed Hestia’s hand suspiciously.

“All the answers are waiting for you.”

I grabbed her hand. Her thin, bony fingers latched onto me like a vice. Instantly, I weakened, my energy getting pulled from me, siphoned off like through a straw, bringing me to my knees.

### [Chapter 936](#)

Though my body weakened, I felt something stirring in my mind. Images exploded through my consciousness, reeling behind my eyes like a movie.

Images of Hestia’s future played like a horror movie.

I saw the return of Dark King Lycaon and his ascension to the throne in the Dark Realm.

“No,” I whispered, my strength fading faster.

Hestia cackled in my ear. I didn’t have the strength to push her back.

“Oh, yes. This is the future that will happen. The Dark King will rise again, and that’s not even the best part.”

“The Dark King has been dead for thousands of years. He can’t come back!”

“He will. I’ve seen it. Even Mila has seen it. And you haven’t even heard the best part.”

I shook my head. What more could she have to say? I didn’t want to know the rest. I wanted to go back to the Dark Realm and stop this from happening.

“You see, your child will become Lycaon’s heir and will carry on his legacy.”

“NO!” I cried.

“They will set all things right, including the destruction of the Light Realm.” Hestia laughed wickedly.

“I will never let that happen!” I roared.

My wolf growled and overtook me. I didn’t even resist. I shifted and broke free from Hestia’s grasp. My wolf leaped on her before she could react.

Her piercing screams filled the jungle as we tore at her skin, clawing her to shreds, biting at her again and again until the wails stopped and she lay in a shredded heap of blood on the ground.

I stepped back, blood soaking the fur around my mouth and my paws.

Hestia was dead.

But I knew it wasn’t over.

My wolf and I paced back and forth in the clearing in front of the cave. Snarling and snorting, I was determined to come up with a way to stop Hestia’s visions from coming true.

Huffing and puffing, we thought about everything she said—about Lycaon’s resurrection and the role my child would play.

I refused to believe it.

“Jared... oh my Goddess...” Xander ran into the clearing and slid to a halt. He stared at Hestia and then looked at me. “What happened?”

I growled and kept pacing back and forth on my wet paws. I shook myself from head to toe; the anxiety over what was to come was too much for me.

“It’s okay, Jared. She deserved it. Come back and talk to me now. I need to know what happened. George found me... he said that you let Hestia suck the life out of you.”

I snarked and shook my head again.

Xander sighed and bowed his head. He knelt on the ground in a submissive position.

“Jared, you can’t hide behind your wolf forever. You need to talk to me. Whatever Hestia told you... if you don’t tell me, there’s no way I can help you stop it. I can’t help you protect Eliza and your child.”

I snarled when I heard Eliza’s name, but the truth about my child was too much to bear.

With a whine, my wolf conceded and I shifted back.

Sighing, I dropped to my hands and knees, too weak to hold myself up.

Xander ran over and gave me a spare pair of clothes. Slowly, sluggishly, I pulled them on.

“Damn, she did a number on you.” Xander grabbed my chin and lifted my head.

His eyes were filled with concern as he looked me over. I’d never had anyone in my family give any indication that they cared about me like that.

“I’ll be fine. I just need to regain my strength. A hot meal, a good night’s sleep—”

“Jared, you look like shit.” Xander arched an eyebrow at me.

“No matter. We can’t stay here in the jungle. I can walk back.”

“George is waiting for us back on the path. We were able to destroy the remainder of Hestia’s rogues.”

“It’s not enough,” I muttered.

Xander held a hand out to me. I gripped it and he pulled me to my feet.

“What do you mean, ‘it’s not enough?’”

We headed back toward the path. I took a deep breath and scratched my eyebrow.

“Hestia showed me a glimpse of the future. I think it’s going to happen whether she’s alive or not and.. it isn’t pretty.”

“You can’t believe anything she showed you. She’s the one who rewrote your memories, remember?”

“This was real.” I nodded. “I can feel it in my bones. Darkness is coming for us.”

I wrapped my arms around myself and shuddered. The haunting images of the future with Lycaon chilled me to the core.

We caught up with George and headed through the jungle. I didn’t want to talk about what I’d seen.

After filling Xander and George in on the basic premise, I shut down. It was too much to think about, let alone talk about.

I was still so weak that we had to stop and rest several times so I could regain my energy.

“Here, try this,” George handed me a flower blossom.

“You want me to eat a flower?” I arched an eyebrow.

He smirked and nodded. “Trust me. It is a natural stimulant and will boost your energy.”

I took the flower and rolled it between my thumb and forefinger for a moment. I had my suspicions about George, but he seemed genuine. He probably didn’t want to be stuck out in the jungle longer than necessary.

I popped the flower into my mouth. It was tangy and a little spicy. Immediately, I perked up.

“Wow, that really works. Let’s get moving again.” I jumped to my feet.

“It doesn’t restore your energy, just stimulates you. So, you still have to take it easy,” George warned.



As we headed back toward the ruins, I decided it was time to leave the Light Realm. If Hestia's vision was going to come true, I wanted to try to stop it. I'd have to be in the Dark Realm to do so.

"I'm going back to the Dark Realm," I announced after we left George at the temple ruins.

He wanted to get right back to work on the archeological dig.

"What? You want to go back now?" Xander asked.

He glanced over his shoulder at me. I nodded, my shoulders sagging slightly. The flower George recommended was already wearing off.

"You can't trust what Hestia showed you. It was all a show to shake you up."

"I don't think so." I sighed.

"Why not?"

Xander wasn't being confrontational or anything; he was just curious about my thoughts.

"I don't know. I can't explain it. But I feel it. She was so convinced it was going to come true and... I'm still haunted by the image."

I closed my eyes and bowed my head, putting my hands on my temples.

I felt a warm hand come down on my shoulder. "You've got to let it go, Jared. Hestia was a master manipulator."

"It doesn't change the fact that I need to protect my child. If there's even a chance that what Hestia said was true, it means that my child is in danger, and I need to protect them by ending any chance that they will be in the Dark Realm." I looked up as I spoke, hoping Xander understood.

He was a father; he would do anything to protect his kids.

Xander creased his brow. "What does that mean, exactly?"

"It means that I'm leaving Eliza and the baby behind... forever."

"Jared, that's a mistake."

"How can you say that? You're a father. Wouldn't you do anything to protect your children?"

Xander frowned. "Leaving your children behind isn't a way to protect them."

I shook my head. "It doesn't matter. This is what Eliza wants, anyway. I know I've treated her terribly and even though I don't feel love for her, I remember some of... our past. To make up for how I've treated her, I will grant her this."

"You know as well as I that if Eliza had her real memories intact, she wouldn't want you to leave."

"It doesn't matter." I shrugged. "I need to keep this dark future from coming true."

Xander continued to look at me with a strange, almost pitying look. I didn't like it and I didn't want it.

“What am I supposed to do with this, Xander? I don’t even know who I am anymore! Hestia showed me a future, one that I’m somehow involved in, and my child, which makes it seem like no matter how much we fight to be good, we’ll always end up in darkness.”

Groaning, I threw my arms out to the sides and took a few steps away from him.

“You’ve been through a lot, Jared. No one is doubting that. But pushing away the people you love, the people who care about you... that isn’t the answer.”

“What people I love? I hate the woman I’m supposed to love. I think it would be best for everyone if I just... go home.”

“I think you’re wrong about that, but I won’t argue the matter further. You can make your own decisions. Just don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Xander gave me a salute.

We finally made it out of the jungle and got a car back to the penthouse hotel. Xander didn’t bother me while I showered, changed, and ate a large meal. Once I was done, I felt much better.

“Xander, thank you for everything. I need to meet up with Archer and plan my return home.”

Xander nodded. “I’ll be in touch when we make our way back.”

I nodded and headed down to the lobby where Archer was waiting.

“Can you get the men ready? We’re going back to the Dark Realm.”

Archer creased his brow. “Is Eliza coming with us?”

I shook my head. “It’s... complicated, but she needs to stay here with the baby.”

“Jared, are you sure?”

“I’ve thought about this a lot! She’s staying, end of story.” I snapped.

Archer took a half step back and held up his hands in surrender. “Alright, I won’t ask again.”

“Good. I do need you to head back to her house and give her the message that I’m heading back to the Dark Realm and she and the baby can remain here indefinitely. I’m sure she’ll be pleased with that news.”

“Right... what happened out in the jungle?”

I arched an eyebrow. “Archer, I’m not interested in talking about this more. Xander already grilled me about my decision.”

“Alright, I’ll deliver your message and collect Scarlett. She’s coming back with me, regardless of how you feel about Eliza.”

I nodded. There was no reason I could think of why Scarlett shouldn’t return to the Dark Realm.

[Chapter 937](#)

\*Eliza\*

With each passing day, more of my memories returned. It was like a fog was slowly lifting from my mind, and I knew that everything I felt toward Jared was wrong.

He never kept me as a slave or a breeder. We'd been powerfully, passionately in love, and this was one more thing we were going to overcome.

"Here's your breakfast." My mom set a plate of eggs and bacon down on the table in front of me.

Scarlett sat across from me, drinking coffee. I sighed heavily and looked longingly at the beverage.

"Have you considered drinking decaf?" Scarlett smirked and set her steaming mug down on the table.

"It doesn't taste the same." I wrinkled my nose.

"Eat, girls. Your food is getting cold." My mom clapped her hands and left us in the kitchen.

I grabbed my fork but I wasn't all that hungry. I kept thinking of Jared and how my real memories were becoming clearer.

If the changes Hestia made to my mind were finally clearing up, that must have meant that she was defeated.

"Scarlett, I think it's finally happened. I think Jared and Xander were able to defeat Hestia."

Scarlett's eyes widened and she perked up. "Do you think that means Jared's memories are starting to come back, too?"

I shrugged and bit my lower lip. "I'd like to think so. But I'm not sure."

It would mean everything to me if Jared's memories came back on their own, like mine were doing. We could put all this behind us and focus on getting things ready for our baby.

"They should be coming back home any day now and give us the good news." I sucked the grease off the end of a strip of bacon.

After my mom dropped lunch off in the afternoon, Archer arrived with a few of Jared's men. I recognized them from the Dark Realm.

Scarlett and I waited on the porch, but it was just the three of them. Jared wasn't there.

I went down the steps to greet them.

"Hestia is defeated, isn't she?" I asked.

Archer nodded, though his face was somber. He bowed his head respectfully to me.

"It is with great joy that I can finally bring this news. Hestia is dead. She is no longer a threat to you or your child."

My heart lifted and I smiled. I wanted to hug Archer. But I heard Scarlett's excitement behind me, so I didn't.

When Archer raised his head, he still wasn't smiling, and I knew that there was more news—bad news.

“Archer, what's going on? Where's Jared?”

My stomach sank. Had something gone wrong when they fought Hestia? I was certain that if anything happened to Jared, I would know about it.

“Jared has returned to the Dark Realm. I'm sorry, Eliza, but he still doesn't remember loving you. He thinks it is best....”

I didn't hear the rest of what Archer said. His lips kept moving but my ears rang loudly and my body felt numb.

I staggered slightly, bumping into someone else who caught me and held me steady.

“We should get you back inside.” I heard Scarlett's voice as if she was speaking underwater.

It was low and fuzzy, coming through in muffled spurts.

I didn't resist as Scarlett led me back to the house. I was barely aware of my body or my surroundings.

How could Jared still not remember? When Hestia died, it cleared my mind. Why didn't it clear his? Was he given a larger dose of the poison? Was the spell used to change his memories different than the one used on me?

Scarlett sat me on the couch and someone got me a glass of water. I started to come back to myself and saw Archer and Scarlett giving me concerned looks.

“I should go after him.” I set the glass aside and tried to stand.

Scarlett grabbed my shoulder.

“You can't, Eliza... the baby. Remember, you can't travel until the baby is born and strong enough to make the trip.”

I sighed and sank into the couch. It wasn't easy to accept, but Scarlett was right. I needed to think of my baby first.

“I've got to head back to the Dark Realm as well; Jared is expecting me,” Archer announced. He held a hand out to Scarlett. “We should leave immediately.”

Scarlett looked at me.

I nodded. “Go back to the village. I'll be there as soon as I can.”

She shook her head. “No, I'm not leaving you here alone.”

“Wha—” Archer gasped. His jaw dropped open.

Scarlett glared at Archer and I saw how quickly he composed himself under her gaze.

“I'm staying here. I'm not leaving my Luna behind!” Scarlett insisted.

Archer didn't look happy about Scarlett's decision but he nodded and didn't argue again.

"Scarlett, I'll be fine. I have my parents and my family here."

"Yes, I know and now you also have me."

"It's okay. I know that Gage—"

"Gage is safe. He is loved and cared for by everyone in the pack. Archer will make sure that he is well cared for."

"I can't ask you to stay behind for me."

"I didn't have to ask you to help me find Gage. You saw that I felt alone and scared and you helped me. Eliza, you took me by the hand and showed me the world can be a scary place full of bad people and terrible circumstances but with a good friend by your side it doesn't have to be a lonely one as well."

I looked down at my hands.

"You are brave and you are strong. But, no one knows better than me how scary it can be to be pregnant and alone. I am doing this as much for you as I am for Jared and everyone back in the village. I have faith that you and Jared will overcome Hestia's trouble, and she will not win."

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Four Months Later

I slipped my baby into the bassinet. Fast asleep, I couldn't get enough of looking at that adorable face that looks so much like Jared.

"Knock. Knock." Declan knocked and announced his presence at the same time.

He did that every time he came to visit.

I smiled and headed into the living room.

"Shh. The baby is just going down for a nap." I put my finger against my lips.

"Sorry." Declan gave me a sheepish look.

I smiled and went to a laundry basket, folding the baby's clothes. There was never a shortage of baby laundry.

"These visits are starting to become a regular thing," I teased.

Declan grinned and pulled a few onesies out of the basket, folding them and stacking them with the others.

"I don't like the idea of you being alone here with a baby."

I sighed and shrugged one shoulder. "I'm never alone and I'm not in any danger here. Hestia is defeated, and I've got Scarlett and my family looking out for me."

"You're still raising a baby on your own."

"I've got Scarlett and my parents." I picked up the folded clothes and stacked them back in the basket.

Declan was sweet, but his frequent visits were clearly hopeful. He wanted more from me and I couldn't give him that. I still loved Jared, and I wanted him to remember me and the love that we once shared.

I could tell that there was more that Declan wanted to say, but Lena showed up to visit the baby and she sent Declan back to the ranks of the Royal Guard.

"The baby is napping, Lena," I warned as she headed to the nursery.

"I'll be quick. I just want to see that gorgeous little face."

She giggled and ducked into the nursery. A couple of seconds later, she came out and sighed.

"I can't believe how beautiful that baby is. I want another one now." She sat with me on the couch.

"How are you doing, Eliza?"

"Honestly, I'm not feeling all that exhaustion and complicated adjustments to motherhood that everyone warned me about. My baby is perfect." I glanced sideways at Lena and smirked.

She shook her head. "You're lucky!"

"Well, it has almost been long enough for us to go to the Dark Realm."

Lena shot me a concerned look.

"Once he sees the baby, I think his memories will come back," I explained.

"Eliza, I didn't want to tell you this before because things with your pregnancy were... complicated, but Jared didn't exactly leave because he doesn't remember you."

"What!?" I gasped, feeling my eyes go wide.

Lena sighed and nodded slowly. "Xander told me that he was starting to get his memories back, at least, some of them. He didn't feel love for you but he remembered loving you, and some other things."

"I don't understand. Why would he leave, then?"

"Xander told me everything that happened when Jared confronted Hestia—rather, everything Jared revealed. One of the things he told Xander was about a vision of the future that really scared him."

I creased my brow. It was hard to digest. Jared's leaving wasn't because he didn't remember me or remember loving me, because he still hadn't come to me and talked to me about it....

"I don't know all the details, but I got the gist of it. Hestia showed Jared a dark vision that involved your child, and he was concerned that if he had you and the baby come back to the Dark Realm, that future could become a reality and your baby would never be safe."

I covered my mouth with my hand and shook my head.

My heart softened when I thought of Jared. He was still trying to protect me and our child, even if he didn't remember loving me.

I just wished he would have talked to me about it. We could have come up with a solution together.

"I have to go see him."

"Eliza, Jared left to keep you and your baby out of the Dark Realm. You might want to consider that before taking your baby right where Jared doesn't want the two of you to be."

I bit my lower lip in thought. "I can't let him sacrifice his place in his own child's life. If nothing else, he should at least get the chance to meet his baby," I argued.

Lena nodded. She didn't try to discourage me again.

The baby monitor crackled and cries came through.

"I've got to get the baby."

Lena let herself out and I headed to the nursery. I scooped my baby up looking into the sweetest and most precious face. Whenever I looked into those gorgeous eyes, my heart swelled with love and hope for Jared and my child.

He promised we'd be a family and I was going to hold him to that, regardless of the danger he thought we were in. He'd also promised we would work on things together, and I was going to hold him to that, too.

While Scarlett and I packed for our trip to the Dark Realm, my mother came over to help.

"Eliza, I thought you were over all of this."

She sat on the couch and watched as Scarlett and I got things together for ourselves and the baby. We had a long trip ahead of us, and traveling with a baby was never easy, or so everyone kept telling me.

"No, Mother, I was never over it. The plan was always to go see Jared when the baby was big enough to travel."

"If he wanted to see you and the baby, he had every chance to do so, Eliza. He could have come back for you and he didn't."

I shook my head. "He did come back for me, Mom. Before Hestia took his memories, my Jared made sure I understood how much he loved me. And even now I know it's that love that's keeping him away. He thinks he's protecting us and—"

"You don't know that for sure." She interrupted me.

I narrowed my eyes at her and pursed my lips. "I do. I understand why he did it because I've made the same choice. I rejected him and walked away from him because I thought the Dark Realm would destroy us. I was wrong, and he came here despite my choice to leave."

I stopped talking and my mother sighed heavily.

"You're absolutely sure about this?"

My mom seemed dead set on keeping me from going back to the Dark Realm. I wasn't having it.

"I've made up my mind." I nodded firmly.

My mother smiled kindly. "Alright, then I will go with you for support."

## [Chapter 938](#)

Scarlett, my mother, and I went straight to the palace in the capital, where Xander and Lena got us set up in guest rooms. I got the baby down in a bassinet and Scarlett read me the most recent letter Archer had sent her.

"Still no mention of Jared," Scarlett said with a sigh. She folded the letter and tucked it in her pocket.

"It's okay," I said as I opened my suitcase and started unpacking.

As much as I wanted to rush back to Midnight Sun, I took Lena's words to heart. Jared had real concerns for the baby's safety. Just showing up out of the blue might have been a mistake.

"I just wish he would tell us something! I mean... any kind of hope for you would be ideal."

"Scarlett, I appreciate your concern. Jared and I will see each other again and we can figure it all out then."

"You're handling this a lot better than I would be."

"I have new strength now, new focus." I glanced at the bassinet and smiled at my baby's sleeping face.

"I understand."

"How are you two settling in?" My mom entered the room. She had a warm smile on her lips.

"We're settling." I went to the bassinet and put my hand on my baby's stomach.

"Three... I'm sorry, you three." My mom winked at Scarlett.

"Just fine. I heard from Archer again and I'm excited to see him soon. It has been so long!" Scarlett giggled and covered her mouth giddily.

I couldn't help but smile too. It was good to see her smiling so brightly. I felt bad that she was here with me rather than with Archer. She'd given up time with her mate and her son.

"You'll get there soon enough. Actually, I'm thinking you'll be seeing Archer and Jared sooner rather than later."

"Are they coming here?" Scarlett perked up.

My mom grinned and shook her head. "Not exactly. Well... not yet. I know the two of you are eager to get back to the village, but I had another idea."

She smiled slyly. I knew that look. My mom was planning something.

"What are you planning?" I tilted my head at her.

"The palace is the safest place in this realm. It is also neutral ground for you and Jared. I think it would be a good idea to get him to come here and see for certain where things stand between you."

"That is a good point, Mom, so what are you planning?"

"I think the best thing to do is to get Jared to come to the palace by sending out an invitation."



"I doubt that Jared will come running to the palace when we tell him I'm here. Even when Archer comes to get Scarlett, he might not be able to convince him." I went back to my suitcase and started unpacking again.

"Then we need to come up with an invitation that he'll be unable to refuse." She gave that sly smile again.

"Oh, I've got an idea," Scarlett spoke up. "The kind of thing that no one can resist, especially when it comes from family."

"What's that?" my mom asked.

"A ball. This is a palace, isn't it?"

"That is a good idea," I agreed.

"We just need to make it an event he won't want to miss."

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\*Jared\*

After getting home, I saw how far along the renovations had come. Throwing myself into work kept my mind off of everything else, so I focused on the next stage—getting running water and plumbing into all the buildings in my village.

It was long, tedious work. I thought if I worked hard during the day I would be too exhausted to think about Eliza at night. But inevitably, memories of her lying next to me or in my arms came back to haunt me.

Over time, those visions began to lose their strength and promises between me and Eliza came back stronger and stronger. The only problem now was that the old memories were mixed in with the ones Hestia had given me. It was all too confusing.

I loved her and hated her at the same time. I wanted to be with her and wanted her as far away from me at the same time. I had no idea what to think or feel about her anymore. I knew in my heart she deserved better than that.

And then there were the nightmares of Hestia's vision for my child's future....

Ever since I faced off with Hestia, I couldn't shake them.

They were the main reason I'd left Eliza safe with her family in the Light Realm.

It was always the same—her predicted future of a Dark King rising to power, one that had a thirst for blood, vengeance, and darkness. And that Dark King taking my child as his heir, claiming my child and turning them into a monster.

As my mind worked to sort out the truth of everything, I worked hard with the crew to dig up half of the village streets to install the piping.

"How's it coming?" I asked the contractor at the end of another long week.

"We have half the village outfitted with the new pipes. Once the other half is done, we'll be able to get the water running into everyone's homes."

I nodded, standing over a deep trench that used to be a road. Workers were in the trench laying down the plumbing and sewage pipes.

It had been months, and they still only had half the village done.

Sighing, I headed back to the pack house.

Eliza had been the one who was good at organizing and overseeing the renovations. I could get it done, but not with the same efficiency as she could.

I walked through my slightly dug-up village. People were working and going about their daily lives, but I could tell that morale was down. It had been that way ever since I came back again without Eliza.

They missed their Luna. She'd always been out there connecting with them and inspiring them.

I didn't have that same personal touch, especially with how confused things still were in my mind.

I hoped that the running water would be enough of a morale booster, enough to bring smiles back to my people's faces.

When I got back to the mansion, Zoe was on the porch, her baby cradled in her arms. She'd had the baby a few months ago and volunteered in the nursery to spend more time with her son.

"Jared, is everything okay? You look... upset." She stood up, bouncing the baby in her arms.

"It's been a long day." I sighed.

"It's not even noon yet." She smiled brightly, a sweet, warm smile that always uplifted my spirits.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't be so negative around you." I shook my head and headed inside.

Zoe followed along. We went to my office so I could go over the remaining renovation plans again.

According to the papers on my desk, the construction was still on track. We were right on schedule.

"You've been working yourself too hard. Jared, you should really take a break. I was planning on taking little Jackson to a park this afternoon. Maybe you should come along."

I smiled and nodded. "I'd like that. But I do have to get some work done first."

"Well, I need to feed Jackson and get myself some lunch. I'll bring you a snack before we leave and see if you can pry yourself away." She giggled, her soft eyes lighting up with that adorable glow.

"Thank you, Zoe. You've been a big help."

I watched her slip out my office door.

She left me to my work. I sighed and leaned back in my chair. Having Zoe around was pleasant. She was warm and kind, she always knew the right things to say, and she liked to help me out.

Plus, seeing little Jackson filled my heart with a lot of joy. I just loved to imagine that my own child was like him... out there somewhere being cared after by a devoted mother, just like Zoe.

There were times when she tried to act seductive and coy. It was easy for me to ignore. As much as I enjoyed her company and friendship, I couldn't think of her like that.

Since I got back, people in the pack had been distant. Archer and Brandt were always off on missions. Miriam was cold and distant. Giselle had barely looked at me.

Soon, I suspected Archer would want to leave to be with Scarlett, and I'd have to find a new Beta. His patience was wearing thin.

Sighing, I ran my hand down my face. It was an impossible situation.

"Jared, I just checked the mail and saw this very official looking letter arrive." Zoe came back into my office.

Jackson wasn't in her arms but she was holding a baby monitor, a letter, and a plate with a sandwich on it.

"Who's it from?"

She set the plate down and handed me the letter. Zoe sat across from me and waited. I could tell she was eager to see what was inside.

I flipped the envelope over and saw the return address in embossed silver on the back. It came from the capital, from the palace, and King Xander and Queen Lena's names were on the envelope.

It was addressed to me in the same embossed silver writing on the front.

I pursed my lips, slicing it open with a letter opener.

"Were you expecting to hear from the king and queen?" Zoe asked.

I shook my head. "Normally, they'd send a messenger, not an official letter like this."

Inside the envelope was an invitation. It was thick cardstock with a green ribbon tied around it, the bow sealed with blue wax with the royal seal.

I popped the seal and untied the bow, revealing the invitation underneath. My eyes scanned over it and I frowned slightly.

"Bad news?" Zoe asked.

I saw her from the edge of my vision, leaning closer.

"No... it is an invitation to a ball. A naming ceremony to welcome the newest member of the Crimson Family."

Zoe creased her brow. "I didn't know that Queen Lena was expecting."

"She wasn't... this is for the child born to Eliza and Jared Crimson, recently returned to Egoren."

"Oh...." Zoe sounded disappointed. Then she looked at me and smiled. "Congratulations, Jared."

My heart swelled but then fell.

"Thank you but... being in the Dark Realm, my child is vulnerable."

Zoe smiled wistfully. "Then you should be there as protection."

She swallowed and looked down at her hands.

"Thank you, Jared, for taking me in and being a good friend to me when I had no one else. I know, you're going to go to the ball. You're a good man and will regret it if you don't."

I nodded. She was right. I was going to go to this big event.

"But, Jared," she said softly. "do you mind taking me with you?"

### [Chapter 939](#)

\*Eliza\*

I finished nursing and rocking the baby to sleep. As I put the baby down for a nap, Lena came into my room waving a piece of paper around.

"What's that?" I arched an eyebrow.

"This is the guest list—at least, the most up-to-date one. Do you want to see?" She held the paper out to me.

"That depends. Has Jared responded?"

Lena frowned, and I already knew the answer before she shook her head.

My chest panged and I clutched my heart. It seemed that Jared wouldn't be attending the welcoming, naming ceremony for his own child.

"There's still time, Eliza. Don't give up hope yet."

I shook myself out of my moment. "It doesn't matter. The naming ceremony isn't even for Jared. It is for my baby."

"That's true." Lena peered into the bassinet and smiled fondly.

"I'm sure he has a lot going on with the pack. With all the renovations Archer told Scarlett about in his letters, I'm sure he's busy. I'll let you know if he RSVPs."

"Thank you, Lena."

The morning of the ceremony arrived and Jared still hadn't responded. Other guests had arrived days in advance to get settled and give me their personal congratulations. I tried to keep my smile on, but I couldn't help but feel like one of the most important people in my child's life had no interest in being here.

Did Jared hate me that much? Had he never gotten his memories back? Did he think if he didn't come, I'd return to the Light Realm and our child would be safe there?

I just wanted to talk to him.

"He's here!" Scarlett burst into the room.

"Shh, the baby is napping!" I jumped off the edge of the bed, my heart in my throat.

"Sorry," Scarlett whispered, crouching down slightly. "I'm sorry, I can't help it, I'm just so excited. He's here!"

A moment of hope flared in my chest.

"Jared?"

Scarlett's excitement drained quickly. "Oh, I'm sorry, Eliza. I... I didn't mean to get your hopes up. Archer just arrived with Gage. Jared isn't with them."

I sighed and nodded. "Well, we should go greet them."

Scarlett's smile returned and she jumped up and down.

We headed to the entryway of the palace. A lot of guests were arriving since it was the day of the ceremony. Scarlett quickly picked Archer out in the crowd. She ran right over to him and threw herself into his arms.

I watched as Archer grinned and spun her around. It was hard to watch them, knowing that Jared wasn't even coming. But I smiled. I couldn't help but be happy for them.

"Archer, Gage." I nodded to them, joining only after Archer set Scarlett down.

"Eliza, you're looking lovely." Archer took my hand and kissed the back of it.

"You're flattering me. Does that mean you don't bring good news?" I arched an eyebrow at him.

Archer gave a sheepish grin. "Actually, the opposite."

"That's right, Jared sent us ahead with a message," Gage added.

"What message?"

"He's on his way. He just had to take care of a few things along the way." Gage nodded and grinned.

He had to take care of a few things? What could be so important that he would risk showing up late to his child's naming ceremony?

"He shouldn't be long," Archer agreed.

"Shouldn't be long with what?" Scarlett asked. She must have sensed my unease with the situation.

I thought hearing that Jared was on his way would be uplifting. I thought I'd feel hopeful. Instead, my stomach twisted uncomfortably, and I got the feeling I wouldn't like the reason he was running late.

"Archer, you better tell us the truth!" Scarlett demanded. She pointed sternly at the floor.

"Alright, Jared is running late because he had to escort Zoe and her baby back home." Archer kept glancing around like he didn't want to make eye contact with me. "It is just a detour."

"Who is Zoe?" I crossed my arms firmly.

"She's nobody," Archer said quickly.

Scarlett rolled her eyes. "She's a refugee from the capital. She was pregnant when she came to Midnight Sun and she saw Jared as her savior, so he was helping her out. She's nothing to worry about, trust me!"

I nodded, but my stomach gurgled uncomfortably. If Jared was prioritizing getting some other woman and her child home, did that mean there was something more personal between them?

"Come on, honey, it is time to get you in your dress." My mother put her arm around my shoulders and guided me toward the stairs. "Your father and brother will be here soon. The whole family is coming."

"How? You told them?" I glanced sideways at her.

"Of course, I told them. They all want to be here to support you."

"Thank you, Mom."

My eyes stung a little with tears. It was a good reminder that I could always fall back on my mom and my family, no matter what.

If Jared didn't come to the naming ceremony, I felt like I should return to the Light Realm. I'd have my family and their support, and my child would be safe.

I just wanted my baby's father to get the chance to be a part of their life.

At this point, I didn't think Jared was coming. He was off with some other woman. It was a good way to show me that he didn't care. I thought of how when I first planned to come to the Dark Realm, I was going to run straight back to the village and see him.

It was a good thing I hadn't done that.

"Cheer up, Eliza. He said he's on his way." Scarlett tagged along with me and my mom.

"I know."

I blinked back my tears, not wanting my mom and Scarlett to see them. They'd both done so much to help make this ceremony special.

Back in my room, my mom did my hair while Scarlett tried on different dresses.

"I know I'm not a guest of honor, but I still want to look good." She twisted back and forth in front of the mirror.

"You just want to look good for Archer," I teased.

Scarlett scoffed and met my eyes through my reflection. I stuck my tongue out at her.

She ran back into the closet and pulled out another dress.

"Is that so wrong? I haven't seen him in a while and I want to make a good impression." Her voice was muffled and far away as she rifled through dresses.

"It isn't wrong. Eliza, has your hair always been this unruly?" My mom groaned. She tried running a comb through it and it got stuck.

"Yes, it has. You just haven't brushed it for a while."

"Well, I'm not going to keep trying to comb it. I've got another idea." She grabbed a bottle of detangler and spritzed it into my hair.

"Okay, I think I found the dress. This one, right?" Scarlett twirled around, showing off the flaring skirt on the ballgown she'd chosen.

"Yes, that is the dress for you," I confirmed.

My mom finished with my hair and she did a good job pinning it up in all the right places. She left a few curls hanging loose and made them much more defined with a heat curler.

She quickly did my makeup and then went to retrieve my dress. "I picked this out especially for you and for this occasion. I think you'll really love it."

The dress my mom picked had a black lace bodice with an open back and long, lace sleeves. The skirt flared out at the waist like a true ballgown, all the way to my ankles.

"This seems kind of... dark." I ran my hands down the poofy skirt.

"Well, you aren't really the guest of honor, are you? That's your baby. You will be wearing contrasting colors when you hold the baby in your arms."

She held up the white baby outfit she picked out.

I smiled and nodded. "Alright, I like it."

I put the baby's outfit on and held them in my arms.

"This is your night. No matter who is here, or isn't here, it is your night, okay?" I kissed their forehead and cuddled them close.

We headed to the ballroom. Already, it was filled with lively music and so many guests. They were dancing and mingling. The ballroom was filled with chatter.

Lena and Xander sat on a tier at the far end of the room in thrones, overlooking the event.

Whenever I walked by someone, they paused to congratulate me and make little faces or cooing sounds at the baby.

It was a night of so much joy and love and appreciation, but I couldn't help notice that Jered still wasn't there yet.

Soon, all the guests were there, and still no Jered.

My heart sank, and all the pain and sadness that had been building welled up inside of me. I didn't think I could take one more cheery smile or one more congratulations.

The only person that was supposed to be here wasn't....

I knew this night was about the baby but I couldn't help it. Jered should have been here. It didn't feel right without him.

"Mom, do you think you can take the baby for a bit? I need some fresh air."

I passed the baby to my mom and she went on chatting with my dad and a few other family members.

I rushed to the peeler doors, the tears I'd been holding back finally spilling free. My heart clenched, my lungs felt tight and constricted. I could barely see where I was going as I ran to the front door.

Just as I reached for the door handle, it was yanked open. I couldn't stop and I collided headlong with a strong wall of air.

I pressed my palms to the chest and pushed back, blinking quickly to clear my vision. I tried to apologize but strong, firm arms came around me and held me close.

Gasping, I looked up into Jered's eyes.

My jaw dropped and I stared at him. The warmth of his body against mine soothed me. His powerful arms were full of love and affection. His eyes locked onto mine and burned into my soul.

I was at a complete loss for words.

"Uh...."

He lowered his head and pressed his lips to mine.

The air rushed out of my lungs and I was helpless to resist. I kissed him back, lost in his touch.

After a moment, we pulled apart and I sighed.

Jered's thumbs brushed across my cheeks and wiped the tears from my face.

"What took you so long?" I asked, my lower lip quivering.

My mom finished with my hair and she did a good job pinning it up in all the right places. She left a few curls hanging loose and made them much more defined with a heat curler.

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The only person that was supposed to be here wasn't....

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"Mom, do you think you can take the baby for a bit? I need some fresh air."

I passed the baby to my mom and she went on chatting with my dad and a few other family members.

I rushed to the palace doors, the tears I'd been holding back all day finally spilling free. My heart clenched, my lungs felt tight and constricted. I could barely see where I was going as I ran to the front door.

Just as I reached for the door handle, it was yanked open. I couldn't stop and I collided headlong with a strong wall of a chest.

I pressed my palms to the chest and pushed back, blinking quickly to clear my vision. I tried to apologize but strong, firm arms came around me and held me close.

Gasping, I looked up into Jared's eyes.

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He lowered his head and pressed his lips to mine.

The air rushed out of my lungs and I was helpless to resist. I kissed him back, lost in his touch.

After a moment, we pulled apart and I sighed.

Jared's thumbs brushed across my cheeks and wiped the tears from my face.

"What took you so long?" I asked, my lower lip quivering.

### [Chapter 940](#)

\*Jared\*

Eliza's eyes were still glassy with tears, but I felt her heart beating rapidly in her chest. She fit so perfectly in my arms, and I couldn't help but feel like that was where she belonged.

A lot of the rewritten memories still swirled in my mind, but I kept them at bay while she basked in my presence.

I didn't want to hurt her, even if sometimes I felt like I didn't love her.

I opened my mouth to answer her questions but a loud chiming bell came from the ballroom.

"The naming ceremony is about to begin," a Royal Guardsman announced.

"Oh, that's our cue. We need to get in there!" Eliza grabbed my hand and pulled me into the ballroom.

I smiled lightly and went along with her antics. This was a special night and I had no intention of ruining it for her, or for anyone.

As we hurried into the ballroom, I caught Eliza using her thumb to touch up her makeup.

I squeezed her hand as she pulled me along, not wanting to let her go. We went straight for the table where Eliza's parents and brother were sitting.

Gemma held an infant dressed in white on her lap. The child had wide open eyes and little smile.

Eliza scooped the baby up and turned toward me.

I froze in place, staring at the baby who looked so much like a mix between Eliza and me. My heart swelled with so many emotions that I couldn't process it all.

I thought my heart might burst. Love flooded through me—happiness, amazement, and other emotions I had no names for.

At that moment, I knew without a doubt that I loved Eliza and wanted to be with her. The lingering doubts from Hestia's memory spell faded, and I couldn't imagine living my life without her for another day.

Eliza smiled, her cheeks turning red like she could tell what I was thinking.

"Jared, meet your daughter, Eloise Clara Crimson."

\*\*\*

One Week Later

I rocked Eloise gently, keeping her fussing at bay while Eliza slept in for once.

She was so adorable, so beautiful, and I hadn't known my life was lacking her until I saw her with my own eyes. She was the light of my life, the center of my universe, right alongside Eliza.

I noticed Eliza watching me.

"Oh, you're awake."

She stretched and nodded. "I was just enjoying the morning show. She seems to really like you."

"Well, I hope so. I'm her father." I smirked. "Hey, you need to get up and get moving. We're heading back to the village today."

"Oh right. I should feed Eloise first."

I nodded and handed her the baby.

While Eliza nursed Eloise and got them both ready for the trip, I made sure the rest of our things were packed. We stayed in the palace another week after the naming ceremony to spend some quality time with Xander and Lena, now that no one was poisoned, sick, or having their memories changed.

The journey home was quick. Xander loaned us some vehicles and a driver. I was glad to be heading back to the village.

Giselle and Miriam were waiting for us. They both gushed over Eloise and wanted to take turns holding her. It allowed Eliza and me to have free arms to unload all the luggage. Brandt and Gage helped bring the luggage in.

While Eliza was away, one of the renovation projects I had done was remodeling the Alpha suites on the third floor of the pack house.

"Come upstairs. I want to show you something," I murmured in her ear when she finished saying hello to everyone.

She retrieved the baby and we went up to the third floor.

Eliza gasped.

"Oh, my! The last time I was up here it was just dust and garbage. You really...." She walked from room to room, sticking her head in and staring, wide eyed and open mouthed.

"Yup. I had the entire thing cleaned and repainted. I also refurnished it. And... the job finally wrapped up a few days ago, but we got new, indoor plumbing outfitted through the entire village."

"Wow, Jared. You accomplished all your goals with the village."

"Almost all of them." I held my hand out to her.

Eliza smiled shyly and she took my hand. I led her down the hall to the last door she hadn't looked in yet.

"I wanted it to be a surprise, so I didn't say anything, but this is one of the reasons I was late to the naming ceremony."

I pushed the door open and showed Eliza the nursery I had put together.

After getting Zoe home, I had gone to a baby store and got everything needed to set up the nursery. I had it put together while we were at the ceremony to surprise Eliza.

Even then... when I was still so confused, I hoped she and our daughter would come home to me and I wanted to be prepared.

Eliza walked into the nursery.

"Oh, this is so cute." She ran up to the crib and pulled out a blue stuffed wolf. She bopped Eloise on the nose with the wolf's nose.

I stood in the doorway, watching Eliza look over everything in the nursery.

There was a mobile, a changing table, a rocking chair, and a bunch of little infant outfits laid out on the dresser.

I got a toy chest and filled it with toys and all kinds of stuffed animals.

"You think you might have gone a little overboard?" Eliza arched an eyebrow at me.

"I might have gone a lot overboard, but it is worth it."

Eliza giggled and set Eloise in her crib.

I waited for Eliza to put the baby down for a nap and then we went to the master bedroom.

"I had a new bathroom installed. We now have running water and electricity. The electricians are finishing up with the rest of the village, but soon everyone will have that, too."

"I can't believe this, Jared. It is like a dream come true. I know how much you wanted this."

I nodded and bowed my head. "It was all I could do to keep my hands and my mind occupied."

She blushed again and went to the bathroom. When she came back, her eyes were wide again.

"You had a bathtub installed and everything."

"I did. That was for you."

She giggled and shook her head. "How did you know that I'd come back?"

"I hoped for it, even if I wasn't sure that's what I wanted."

"And now?" Eliza creased her brow, her crazy curls curving around her face.

"I want you here. I want you by my side every day for the rest of my life." I grabbed her hands and squeezed.

"Jared... are you still worried about the vision Hestia gave you?"

I sighed and shrugged. "I know that Hestia would do anything to make that future a reality. But she's dead, and now I'm not sure if it will come to pass if someone else isn't determined to make it happen."

"I hope you're right. I... have my concerns. But Hestia wasn't the most reliable source."

I nodded in agreement.

"She seemed to really believe what she was saying... but without her hatred, I don't think it will come true."

I squeezed Eliza's hand and smiled, trying to lift her spirits.

"Our love is stronger than anything Hestia had planned. We will show our children a better way to live than in pursuit of power and control. We will show our children the best kind of love. As long as we keep up that tradition, I don't think we have to worry about them giving in to darkness."

Elize arched an eyebrow. "Our children? How many do you think we're going to have?"

I chuckled and shrugged. "However many you want."

She blushed again and smiled. "I think you're right, Jered. As long as we show our children love, kindness, and a fulfilling life, they won't be vulnerable."

I nodded. "This family will never let that future come to pass, not for as many generations as we're around."

"I believe you."

I pulled Eliza to me in a hug. I kissed her forehead and held her against my chest.

She sighed against me.

"Is everything alright?" I murmured.

"Jered... who is Zoe?"

I stiffened slightly. Who had told Eliza about her?

"She was a refugee who settled here for a time to have her baby. She wanted a quiet, simple life during her pregnancy."

"But you escorted her all the way back to the capital. You wouldn't do that for just anyone...." She bit her lower lip and refused to meet my eyes.

I sighed and cupped her cheek. "Eliza, she was a kind friend and a listening ear when I was in a confused, dark place. But that's all. I never wanted more from her."

"Are you sure?" she tilted her head slightly.

"Yes, I'm sure." I sighed.

Miriam had warned me that spending time with Zoe would come back to bite me in the ass. Eliza didn't seem mad or upset, though. She was curious.

I couldn't blame her. It must have been a shock to hear that I was escorting another woman around after we'd been apart for so long.

"Well, okay. It was a little confusing." She brought her eyes to mine.

I smiled. "Hestie might have messed things up for us for a while, but the truth is, I was too confused to make sense of my feelings, let alone start anything with anyone else. You were constantly on my mind."

Elize brightened and wrapped her arms around my neck in a quick hug.

From down the hall, Eloise's cries echoed. Elize and I quickly hurried to attend to our daughter.

When we got there, Miriam already had the baby in her arms.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"This little angel was fussing. Was I just supposed to let her lie there?" Miriam winked at us.

Holding the infant, she was completely transformed. I was used to Miriam being hard, rigid, and authoritative. All the judgment and reproach left her as she cooed at the baby.

"I can hardly argue with that," Elize agreed, laughing.

Miriam cupped Eloise's head. "Oh, I think someone has a wet diaper. That's why she's fussing. I can change her and put her back down. I'll even watch over her while the two of you finish catching up."

"Miriam, that isn't necessary." Elize stepped forward.

Miriam shook her head. "I haven't had any baby time yet. The two of you have had all the fun. Besides, Jared, you haven't finished showing Elize all the new upgrades."

I smirked at Elize and grabbed her arm, pulling her back toward me.

"Oh, I'm sure we can keep ourselves busy. If you need anything, we'll be around."

"Good, now go!" Miriam laid Eloise on the changing table and grabbed the diapers.

As we were heading through the door, I heard Miriam talking to the baby.

"You are going to grow up so strong and beautiful. I wonder what adventures you're going to have? Just like your parents."

Elize froze beside me. We exchanged a look, and I registered the same shock and dread I felt in her eyes.

She cracked a smile first and suddenly, we both burst out laughing.

Eliza arched an eyebrow. "Our children? How many do you think we're going to have?"

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"You are going to grow up so strong and beautiful. I wonder what adventures you're going to have? Just like your parents."

Eliza froze beside me. We exchanged a look, and I registered the same shock and dread I felt in her eyes.

She cracked a smile first and suddenly, we both burst out laughing.