

Kings Breeder 951

Chapter 951: Seeing Green

Lucas

While Sasha's gaze was averted, I let my eyes roam over her profile and tried not to think about how we were both nearly killed by that rogue, how she almost got hurt. My heart squeezed in on itself at the thought.

She was so close to me. I could feel her warmth radiating off her body. I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to pull her into my arms and make sure that nothing ever hurt her again. But I knew that wasn't an option. Not right now, at least.

I couldn't deny that my feelings for Sasha were growing stronger with each passing moment. It wasn't just a physical attraction anymore; I genuinely cared about her. But I also knew that I couldn't act on those feelings.

I calmed my anxiety at almost losing her by reminding myself that she was there, she was alright. But then she was moving away.

I frowned as the bed swayed from Sasha's weight getting off of it, I suddenly wanted to shove "Doc" out of my way and go throttle the smiling baker before yanking Sasha back to my side.

Where she belonged, I could feel my wolf add, but I brushed that thought away as quickly as I denied the impulse to rip Jay's throat out as he led her away.

First Stone Hamline, now this. Men flocked to my Sasha like moths to a flame, and I wanted to be the flyswatter that beat them all away.

I sighed as Doc began swabbing my wounds and Sasha disappeared into the next room with Jay. Sasha's sudden departure from the room left an empty feeling in my chest. I couldn't help but feel like I needed to protect her from anyone who might dare to come close to her.

My wolf was restless, pacing back and forth within me, growling lowly. It was almost as if he could sense my unease. I took a deep breath, reminding us both to stay calm. In truth, she was not ours, and we couldn't stop her, shouldn't stop her, from....

I heard a shower go on and my head snapped in the direction of the sound. My heart rate quickened as I imagined Sasha standing under the hot stream of water, the droplets cascading down her skin, and I couldn't help but feel a surge of jealousy toward whoever got to witness that sight.

"There," Doc said, pulling me from my thoughts. "All fixed up. Don't go pulling your stitches. No shifting for a week, you hear?"

"I hear."

I looked down at myself and realized Doc had managed to stitch me up without me feeling a thing while I'd had my mind on Sasha. He'd also taped down bandages.

"First train is in three hours," Doc said, rising and snapping his bag shut. "I suggest you get some rest."

"Thanks, Doc," I replied, settling back into the pillow.

But, I couldn't get comfortable. When I was finally able to think about something other than Sasha, I sternly reminded myself how much of a cluster we were in with regard to the library project.

I admonished myself—I really needed to focus....

Sasha was a distraction—a beautiful distraction, but a distraction nonetheless. I couldn't afford to fail again, not if I wanted to be Head of the Royal Engineers.

With a scowl, I thought of Stone Hamline, running to King Xander behind my back again, gloating over how f****d up my project had become while his museum restoration project, in the capitol itself, was going along swimmingly.

I thought about the cozy scene of just the two of them in the trailer and the fact that the bastard had the audacity to try and horn in on my Sash—my intern.

A new thought made my blood run cold.

What if the library project did tank... and Sasha was reassigned... to him.

I stood from the bed and walked over to the window, pulling the curtain aside to peer outside.

The streets of the small town were dark and quiet, the only sounds coming from the occasional car passing by. The moon was high in the sky, casting a pale light over everything.

But my mind was elsewhere, my thoughts consumed with Sasha and the way her body had felt trembling as it pressed against mine when I held her.

I couldn't understand why it was so hard to resist wanting her. I shook my head and inhaled the delicious scent of soup and baked bread. I ventured toward the kitchen to see Jay standing over the stove.

He stepped to the side for a moment and I saw a small radiator with Sasha's clothes drying on it, including her bra and a pair of pink panties.

My jaw clenched and I growled low in my throat.

I don't know what possessed me, but I rushed past Jay and snatched up her undergarments.

When I looked back at that bastard Jay, he was biting his lips as though trying not to laugh.

"What about this is funny?" I snapped.

"Well, Sasha said you two were just boss and intern. But considering how you're acting over her delicate laundry, you'd think she was your mate," Jay chuckled.

I glared at him. The man had no sense of self-preservation if he was laughing at me now.

"Her delicate laundry," I seethed, ignoring his implied question, "doesn't need to be hanging up in your kitchen."

Jay held up his hands. "Whatever you say."

"Now that that's settled, would you mind being a good patient and lying back down before you pull those stitches?" Doc grumped.

"And her new clothes—where are those?" I asked, still ignoring the doctor.

"In the bathroom with her." The shower turned off and Jay bit his lips again. "I think you'd better get back in bed before your intern learns about this little display."

I grunted and clenched my fists. The man had a point. "Don't go telling Sasha about this," I warned Jay.

"What am I supposed to tell her happened to her underwear?" Jay asked, still trying not to laugh.

"They got singed and you threw them away." I heard rustling in the bathroom and imagined Sasha drying off, running a towel over her shapely breasts....

Goddess, what was wrong with me?

I shook myself and stomped back into the bedroom before I was caught. I shoved Sasha's underwear and bra under the pillow and went back to cool down by the window.

I heard her soft footsteps enter the room and turned around to see Sasha holding a dinner tray with a bowl of soup and two cups of tea. She was wearing an oversized sweatshirt and pants that fit at the waist, but were far too long. Her hair fanned around her in a wavy, wet halo.

"You should be in bed," she scolded as she set the tray on the bedside table and hurried to help me from the window and back into bed.

As she tucked me in, Sasha's scent enveloped me, and I couldn't help but inhale deeply. She smelled like lavender and baked bread, a perfect combination that made my mouth water.

"Thanks," I mumbled, not wanting to make things more awkward than they already were.

"Of course," Sasha replied softly, pulling away and settling onto the edge of the bed. "Doc said you can have some soup. You need to eat and get back some energy."

I nodded, accepting the bowl of soup and taking a sip of the warm liquid. She smiled at me as she brought her tea cup to her lips.

I cleared my throat and looked away.

"I'm sorry about earlier," I said, referring to our near-death experience. "I should have been more careful."

"It wasn't your fault," Sasha replied, placing a comforting hand on my arm. "We both made it out okay, that's all that matters."

I turned to look at her, grateful for her understanding. "Thank you," I said softly.

We fell into a comfortable silence, the only sounds coming from our sips of soup and tea. The tension between us seemed to dissipate, replaced by a sense of calm and warmth.

Eventually, Sasha finished her tea and stood up, signaling the end of our moment of peace. "Get some rest," she said with a smile.

"Don't leave."

The words slipped out of my mouth before I could stop them, and I felt my cheeks flush with embarrassment. Sasha turned back to look at me, her expression surprised.

"What?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

"I mean..." I trailed off, unsure of how to explain myself. "Just... stay with me, please?"

Sasha hesitated for a moment before nodding and settling back onto the bed, her hand still resting on my arm. I felt a sense of relief wash over me as I stared up at the ceiling, her warm presence calming me.

"Lucas?" Sasha's voice broke the silence.

"Hm?" I replied, turning my head to look at her.

"About earlier...." She trailed off, her fingers tracing small circles on my arm. "I wanted to say... thank you, for saving my life."

I felt a lump form in my throat as I thought about what could have happened if I hadn't been there to protect her.

Sasha knelt beside the bed, putting us nearly face to face. She blew on the steaming tea, her warm breath skittering over my cheeks.

"You blew on my tea," I remarked, a smile tugging at my lips.

"Oh." Sasha blushed. "Force of habit. I also didn't want you to get burned."

"Thanks," I said as she handed it to me.

I sipped the still-over-warm tea but didn't complain. It burned going down and was just the wake-up call I needed.

"So, I'm going to have to speak to King Xander before we do any more work at the library site. I'm sure Stone has already trotted off to give a less-than-favorable report," I said, putting on my business face.

Sasha nodded. "Does that mean I don't come to work for a while?"

"You don't come to work for a while," I confirmed. "If worse comes to worse, you'll be given a different work study."

"Oh." Sasha looked as disappointed as I felt about the idea. "I was really happy with this one."

"Me, too," I responded, though my reasons were starting to get a little cloudy.

I set my mug down and Sasha fluffed my pillow, and I had to quickly reach behind and pull her bra and panties out of her view. Thankfully, she didn't notice as she began tidying up the dishes.

"I'll wake you up when it's time to go," she said. "Get some sleep."

"What about you?" I asked.

"What about me?" Sasha responded.

"When are you going to sleep?"

My question was answered three hours later, when, squeezed into Jay's somewhat smaller clothes, I sat next to Sasha on the train home. We had a private compartment, but then most of the train was laid out that way.

"... as long as it's just artifacts down there, King Xander might let us continue," I was explaining when I felt a soft thump against my shoulder.

I looked over, and her blond little head was resting against me, her breathing deep and even.

I smiled as soft strands of her hair tickled my chin, getting caught in the stubble on my jawline.

I gently brushed the hair away from her face, taking in the peaceful expression she wore as she slept. It was a side of Sasha I hadn't seen before, vulnerable and innocent. It made my heart ache in a way that I couldn't explain.

As the train rumbled on, I found myself lost in my thoughts, wondering if it was possible that I had always had such strong feelings for Sasha Wentley.

[Chapter 952: Scuttled](#)

Sasha

"Let me get this straight," Amanda said, glancing at me over the top of her martini glass. "Lucas—face slap Lucas—saved your life twice yesterday?"

"I saved him, too," I reminded her, "but... yeah, I guess that's the gist of it."

We were back in Nostalgia, but it was earlier in the evening and Bite of the Wolf was a bit ambitious for this time of day. Not to mention, it was a weeknight. So, Amanda and I both sipped apple martinis and caught up on our adventures—mostly mine, since the hunky boy in calculus didn't take long to describe. At least she got his number.

"And there's some weird temple under the library?" Amanda whispered, as I'd told her that part in the strictest confidence.

"Yeah. Hopefully, it doesn't stop construction altogether," I replied glumly.

"It would stop you from seeing a certain someone, though I'm getting the impression you wouldn't mind so much anymore," Amanda grinned.

I groaned and dropped my head to the table. "Honestly, I just don't know anymore. He's not at all like we were as kids. Okay, a little bit, but he's a lot more serious about his career than I expected. I kind of figured he was just going to use being cousin to the White Queen to get whatever he wanted out of life. But he's... not like that."

"And he seems to want to slip you a little black sausage," Amanda teased crudely.

"Amanda!" I hissed, scandalized. "That's gross! Besides, I don't even know if it's true. He keeps wanting to be close to me...."

"He called you 'precious,'" Amanda butted in.

I felt my cheeks get hot. "Well, yeah, he did. But that's beside the point. He keeps calling me his 'intern,' too. And every time we get really close, he shifts gears and begins talking about the library project. I just... I don't get it."

Amanda tapped perfectly manicured nails on the tabletop. "Maybe he's trying to keep professional boundaries because he's, you know, technically your boss?"

"Then why in the Moon Goddess's name doesn't he keep it that way?" I almost sailed in despair.

Amanda's eyes twinkled mischievously. "Maybe he can't. Guys don't always think with the big brain, you know?"

"You're beyond hope. You know that, right?" I sighed.

"I just tell it like it is," Amanda replied, completely unrepentant.

A dark storm entered the bar. The temperature felt like it dropped considerably.

"Well, speak of the devil," Amanda breathed, leaning to the side slightly so she could check out his ass.

I rolled my eyes. "One, he doesn't seem to be in that kind of mood, and two, he's kind of mine... or something... right?"

"A girl can still show a little appreciation," Amanda said dreamily. Then she shook her head and gave me a shove that nearly knocked me off my chair. "Go get 'em, Lemon Tart."

I shot her a look before picking up my martini and going to brave the crackling storm cloud that was Lucas Black.

"Hey," I said, sliding onto the barstool next to him just as he ordered a whiskey shot. "Is everything okay?"

Lucas slid a large amount of money across the bar. "Keep 'em comin'," he intoned before turning to me. His eyes were already bloodshot. Either he'd been crying, which I doubted, or Lucas Black had started the party before he arrived at Nostalgia.

"Um, Lucas," I said in a soft whisper, "it's the middle of the day. You probably shouldn't...."

"It's over, princess," Lucas interrupted.

My heart squeezed. We were over? We hadn't even started....

"What do you mean, it's over?"

"The library—whole project's been terminated. They found bodies—well, remains—down in the temple. King Xander said artifacts are one thing, but disturbing the dead is quite another."

My heart sank. "Oh Lucas," I said, pressing my hand over his. "I'm so sorry."

Lucas turned his hand over palm up and threaded his fingers through mine. "Don't worry, princess. They'll find you a new work study."

"I liked this one," I replied softly, looking down at our joined hands.

"Me, too," Lucas said throatily. He rubbed his thumb in little circles over the back of my hand.

I swallowed. "I suppose that means you get assigned to a different project, too. Maybe we'll be assigned to the same one?"

Lucas snorted. "Doubt it. I'm in the dog house."

"What? Why? It's not like you put a temple under the old library," I said.

"No. But I didn't spot the bodies, either. Stone went back to the site this morning with an archeological team, and they uncovered a kind of catacombs straight away. The king's pissed I went to him to ask to keep a lid on things without doing it myself."

I squeezed his hand. "Lucas, you were attacked last. We were on a train home this morning. You couldn't possibly have gotten together a team and—"

Lucas slammed his fist on the bar, making the whiskey in his next shot slosh over the edges of the glass. "I had forty men on site yesterday. Hell, Herb was already down there. Would it have killed me to ask him to take a look around?"

"The same Herb that nearly got killed, along with me and a few others, when the ground imploded?" I said.

Lucas paused, then lifted his second whiskey shot to his lips. "Point taken."

I put my hand over the top. "Lucas. Let's do something else, okay, other than drinking?"

Slow music played in the background. Lucas looked out at the small, empty dance floor. "Okay, princess," he said, setting the glass down. "You give me a dance, I'll stop drinking."

I glanced at the dance floor. "Lucas, almost nobody is here, and no one's dancing."

"Gives us plenty of space, then, doesn't it?" Lucas slid off his barstool and tugged me off of mine, into his arms.

My heart skipped a beat, then began pounding overtime. "Lucas, this isn't the dance floor."

Lucas pulled our joined hands against his chest, his other arm circling my waist and holding me close. "Does it matter?"

I looked around. Amanda was giving me a thumbs-up. The rest of the patrons seemed more interested in their drinks.

"I guess it doesn't," I whispered.

"Good." Lucas swayed his hips, swaying me with him.

He was so warm, and his toned body melted into me where I was soft. We were so close I could feel his heartbeat, and while it was steadier than mine, it wasn't entirely even either. He wasn't unaffected. I made his heart beat fast—me.

I made eye contact with his chest, feeling flustered by our dancing.

"Look at me, princess," Lucas breathed in my ear.

A shiver of desire rolled down my spine.

I raised my eyes to his throat, then up to meet his silver-flecked, gray eyes. They were burning with lust... and something... else?

"How about we get out of here?" Lucas whispered.

I knew what he meant. My mouth went dry and I licked my lips to moisten them, my emotions in turmoil.

Lucas followed the movement of my tongue. "Let's get out of here, princess." He tempted me again.

I could feel what he wanted pressed against my belly, and I let out a little whimper that only he could hear. I was so conflicted....

Lucas dipped his head, his lips almost brushing mine.

I held my breath in anticipation.

A hand clapped down on Lucas's shoulder, startling us both out of our reverie.

"Mind if I cut in?"

Lucas and I dragged our gaze from each other at the same time.

"Donovan?" I asked, feeling as though I were coming out of some sort of fog.

"Donovan," Lucas said between his teeth. "Yes, actually, we do mind."

Reluctantly, I disentangled myself from Lucas, who growled low in his throat and shifted around to hide... certain... things.

"Donovan, what are you doing here? I thought you were on a diplomatic mission to Norwind?" I touched his arm, then noted there was a light bruise on his cheek.

"Negotiating didn't go well," Donovan grumbled, shooting Lucas a suspicious look. "Who's Mr. Handsy?"

I looked at Lucas, who had a dark expression on his face. "This is Lucas Black. He was the site director at that library build I told you about."

"That one you were chomping at the bit to get on? Yeah, I remember." Donovan looked Lucas up and down. "Still doesn't explain why his hand was crawling toward your ass."

I turned apple red. "Donovan, that's very rude. Lucas and I—"

"Are old friends," Lucas cut in. "And I don't think it's very friendly to be eyeing Sasha's ass."

"I was eyeing your hand," Donovan snorted.

I reached for Lucas's hand, but to my surprise, he pulled away, making me feel as though I'd been stabbed in the chest.

"So, steamy s*x on the dance floor is the new, professional way bosses treat their interns these days?" Donovan snarked.

Angry streaks of red colored Lucas's cheek bones.

"We're..." I looked at Lucas in confusion. "We're not boss and intern anymore. The library project was scrapped."

Donovan turned back to me. "Oh, Sasha, I'm so sorry," he said. He took my hand. "I know how much you were looking forward to it. Guess neither of us have had much success."

"No." I looked down at our joined hands and gave a little tug.

Donovan let go easily.

"Aren't you a little old to be chasing college students, Donovan?" Lucas asked archly.

"Oh for Goddess's sake, you two! Donovan and I are friends. Friends. Lucas and I...." I trailed off, no longer knowing how to define us.

"Are old friends," Donovan finished for me. "Yeah. You said so before. And you're one to talk, Lucas.

We're about the same age, right?"

"I suppose," Lucas grunted.

"Do I have to be here for this conversation?" I asked. I sounded testy, but Donovan had just kiss-blocked me and Lucas had gone all cold again.

"No." Lucas's eyes narrowed on Donovan one more time, then he stepped away. "I was just leaving."

"Um... I didn't say I was going to go with y—" I began.

"I'm leaving," Lucas said with emphasis.

I blinked. "W-what?"

"He's leaving." Donovan draped a casual arm around my shoulders. "Come on, let's go refresh that apple martini of yours."

"Lucas?" I asked, trying not to sound hurt. I was certainly confused.

Lucas raised his hand and smoothed my hair behind my ear, his thumb brushing my cheekbone. "This was always a bad idea, princess. If I'd been sober..."

I smacked his hand away. Anger began to boil in my gut, bubbling up to full-blown rage. "You wouldn't have made a move on me if you were sober?"

Lucas shook his head. "No."

I raised my hand to slap him again, then thought better of it and curled my hand into a fist at my side. "Fine. Have a nice life, Mr. Black."

"Sasha...." Lucas murmured.

It was still enough to raise goosebumps on my skin. But I wasn't going to let him humiliate me anymore. "You said something about my apple martini?" I said pointedly to Donovan.

He got the hint and used his arm around my shoulders to turn both our backs on Lucas. "I did, indeed," Donovan replied.

When I looked back a few moments later, Lucas was gone.

An emptiness filled my soul.

Damn Lucas f*****g Black anyway!

[Chapter 953: What's Mine](#)

Lucas

I stood outside of Nostalgia, just outside Sasha's view. Donovan kept his arm securely around her shoulders and plied her with drinks. She was madder than a wet cat, and kept drinking, more than I was comfortable with.

But then, I'd been nearly plastered by the time I'd gone to the bar. The only reason I left home at all was because Brady, the asshole, finally hid the booze.

Donovan. If he hadn't inserted himself into our little world, I might have Sasha beneath me right now, I thought, palming her luscious breasts while exploring her sweet mouth with my tongue. Then I'd have gone lower, and lower still, until she begged for it. And being the gentleman I was, I would have given it to her, long into the night.

I shook my head to clear it of those thoughts. Just as I did, I met Donovan's eyes through the paned glass.

He smirked at me and kissed Sasha's temple.

I wanted to throw him through the glass, then rip him apart with my bare hands. I wanted to f**k him up. I wanted to f**k him up bad.

I wanted to kill him.

I pictured a dozen scenarios.

Then Donovan excused himself, finally taking his hand off Sasha, and headed for the bathrooms.

I considered going back inside and just claiming what was mine; having her for those brief moments soothed my wolf and calmed my rage. But while I was still contemplating the pros and cons, Donovan himself came around the side of the building. He must have used the service exit.

"Problem?" I growled, trying not to picture his lips brushing against my sweet Sasha's temple.

Donovan folded his arms, trying to look all big and bad. But I had at least two inches and forty pounds of muscle on him, so I just flicked my eyes over him in disdain.

"Look, if you're not going to make your move," Donovan said, "you need to step off. Some of the rest of us aren't all twisted up about what we want."

My eye twitched. "'We'?"

"It's just an expression. Look, Lucas, buddy, you have to either go in there and snatch her up, or man up and let her go. I've been working on that girl going on three years now. She's just about in the bag. I don't know how you got an in with her, but it's not fair to the rest of us for you to go toying with her emotions. Makes it real hard to get her in the sack, if you know what I mean," Donovan griped.

Yeah, I really was going to kill him. "You just want to get her in the sack, is that what you're telling me right now?"

Donovan shrugged. "I mean, it's a good start. I really like this girl, and I think we'd have a lot of fun rolling around in the hay. If it goes deeper than that, you know, great. If we have some fun and go back to being friends, that's fine, too. You are way too intense, man."

"I see," I seethed.

"Look, I understand if you need to get in and out and on with your life. Scratch that itch or whatever. But after that, I'd appreciate it if you'd disappear. I've got plans for this girl—"

I grabbed Donovan by the throat. "That girl's name is Sasha, and she deserves better than an asshole like you pawing her over."

Donovan coughed, grabbing my wrist. "Dude," he choked out, "let go!"

Instead of letting go, I dragged Donovan by the throat right up into my face.

"If you so much as breathe on her, I swear by the White Queen's mercy, I will tear you apart. Got it?"

Donovan managed a nod, and I let him go. "Jeez, if I knew she was that important to you—"

"You're going to go in there, make your excuses, and leave. and I'm going to watch you all the f*****g way, from Sasha to taxi. Do I make myself clear?"

"Crystal." Donovan dusted invisible wrinkles out of his clothes and headed back the way he came.

Ten minutes later, the bastard was in a cab, cruising back to whatever hole he crawled out of.

I still couldn't seem to peel myself away from the wall until Sasha left her barstool and rejoined her flamboyant, but capable friend Amanda. Even if Sasha got totally sloshed, I knew Amanda would get her home.

It was time for me to head that direction as well. I walked around the block to where Ian was lounging against my car, reading a newspaper.

"Let's go," I said gruffly, and Ian quickly tossed the paper in the car, understanding I wasn't in the mood for any of his shenanigans.

He opened the back passenger door and I flopped into the soft leather, letting the cool of it clear my head.

I was stone sober and in one hell of a predicament.

I still wanted Sasha Wentley.

"You look less plowed than I thought you'd be," Brady said when I walked in the door.

"Sasha Wentley was at the bar," I replied without preamble, going to the fridge and pulling out the orange juice.

"Mimosas or screwdrivers?" Brady asked, turning in his chair.

It was then that I saw behind him a shifter I'd never seen before. She was plump with brown bouncy curls and lips that no doubt usually carried an infectious smile.

Now, she was just concerned. "The work-study intern?" she asked with keen interest.

I scowled at Brady while I poured myself a tall glass of juice.

"Sorry. Lucas, this is Phoebe. Phoebe, this is Lucas," Brady said.

Phoebe stood, wearing one of Brady's robes, and came to shake my hand. "I'm so pleased to meet you. Brady's told me so much about you."

"Clearly," I grumped.

Phoebe blushed and Brady waved her back over to the table.

"Take a seat," he said. "Lay down your troubles."

"In front of Phoebe," I muttered, though I did take a seat just the same, gulping orange juice to chase the last of the alcohol away.

"Yeah, in front of Phoebe. She's my fiancée." Brady grinned at me and Phoebe held out her hand to reveal a ring with a diamond the size of a small asteroid.

I whistled. "Wow. When did all this happen?"

"Took her to dinner last night and popped the question. She said yes. I am a very lucky bastard." Brady gave Phoebe a besotted smile.

Phoebe giggled.

Come to think of it, I'd been so wrapped up in the library project, I hadn't been keeping track of Brady's private life. "Congratulations," I said, raising my orange juice to them.

"Thanks," Brady replied. "Can't wait for the two of you to get to know each other better. Now, you don't have to say yes, because I can get my own house, but I was wondering if you'd mind if Phoebe lived here, now that we're engaged."

I chuckled at their hopeful expressions. "Absolutely. I'd miss having your sorry around, and I should get to know your girl better."

"I cook!" Phoebe said, her smile indeed infectious.

"That's great," I replied. "Can't wait to see what you come up with."

Phoebe beamed while Brady speared me with a look. "Speaking of girls...."

I groaned and pulled my hand over my face. "Sasha f*****g Wentley."

"Why do you say it that way?" Phoebe asked. "I had a composition class with her at the university. She's a really nice gal."

"You go to school with her?" I asked, ignoring her rebuff.

Phoebe nodded. "I mean, we're in completely different majors, but we both had to take our generals and we ended up in class together."

"You ever take a class with a guy named Donovan?" I pressed, still picturing that bastard laying a kiss on Sasha's temple.

"Donovan Clarke?" Phoebe made a face. "What a sleeze. I swear he's chasing every girl on campus. Of course, he's all smarmy about it, making you think you're the only one...."

Brady's eyes flashed red. "Did something happen between you two?"

Phoebe blushed. "First year, I'm embarrassed to say."

"He ran around on you?" Brady hissed.

Phoebe drew little circles on the table. "Yes," she murmured.

Brady took her hand and kissed it. "I'd be happy to kill that asshole for you."

Phoebe leaned her head against his shoulder. "Thanks, love."

I liked what I was hearing less and less. "He strings along multiple women at a time?"

"Yeah. Only he's really sneaky about it," Phoebe sighed. "You don't know until it's too late. And he's persistent. He'll play the long game or the short game to get what he wants. I mean, why not? He's got a whole host of girls to sleep with while he's making a move on the next."

"So, let's say, hypothetically, he was putting the moves on Sasha. And, hypothetically, I almost crushed the bastard's throat and warned him off her. Would he stay away?" I asked slowly.

Phoebe hung her head. "Getting a girl away from her current boyfriend is his favorite game. If you showed interest...."

I growled low in my throat.

"So, hypothetically, why didn't you just squeeze the life out of the fucker?" Brady grunted.

"Because I didn't know who I was dealing with. Fuck." Just as I was about to say more, the office phone rang.

I nearly knocked my chair over getting up, imagining all kinds of terrible scenarios that would have Sasha calling me. I took the stairs two at a time and was breathless when I grabbed the receiver. "Sasha?"

There was a pause. "No," came the voice of King Xander's assistant. "But I would appreciate it if you would call her. The king would like you to take a couple of days to wrap things up at the northern library site. While we look for a different work-study project for Miss Wentley, she may as well shadow you at the job site."

I took a few deep breaths to get my heart to settle down, then replied, "I'll let her know."

"Excellent. A list of duties will be couriered to your house. After you've completed the list, you can leave the rest to the archeological team."

"Understood," I said, and after the assistant's polite send-off, I hung up the phone and sank into my chair.

Brady and Phoebe poked their heads around the doorframe. "Not Sasha?" Brady asked, stating the obvious.

"No." Then I groaned and smacked my forehead. "Damn it all. We need to wrap up at the library site and she still hates me."

"So you're back to square one," Brady observed.

"Fuck." I looked up at them. "You want to watch me do the walk of shame, don't you?"

"Definitely," Brady said while Phoebe nodded enthusiastically.

"You really are perfect for each other," I muttered as I picked up the phone.

And dialed the number of the last person in the world who wanted to hear from me.

[Chapter 954: A Cold Wind](#)

Sasha

Lucas asked me to meet him at the library site, and, as I stood over the dark hole that had derailed both our career plans, I still couldn't figure out why I'd agreed.

The fall air had become crisp, and I hugged my sweater more tightly around me as a cold wind cut through my clothes.

If I didn't know better, I could have sworn the breeze came from the temple below.

Where in the Moon Goddess's name was he? I had an uneasy feeling about this temple and its excavation. As excited as I had been to come and work on the library project before, now I felt I couldn't leave the site fast enough.

"Lucas?" I asked when I felt a presence behind me. I whirled around, but no one was there.

I shivered. I shouldn't have come early. The foreman and the workers were gone, to be replaced by archeologists and, no doubt, a representative or two—or seven—of the Lycaon Church.

A creeping sensation crawled up my spine, and I turned back to the hole. I could have sworn I heard a dark cackle.

"Sasha, you shouldn't stand that close," Lucas said, his hand shooting out to grip my arm.

I jumped. I hadn't even heard his approach. "I—"

I looked back around and realized I'd somehow gotten myself right to the edge of the hole, my toes almost hanging over.

"Sweet mercies of the White Queen!" I gasped, grasping Lucas's shirt as he pulled me away.

"You almost gave me a heart attack," Lucas admonished me, wrapping his arms around me and pulling me against his chest. "It looked like you were about to jump."

Jump? I felt sick to my stomach.

"I don't... I don't remember getting that close," I murmured into his shoulder.

"Yeah, well, don't do it again." Lucas huddled me away a few meters, then deliberately took my shoulders in his hands and forced some distance between us.

I frowned. Here was that hot and cold Lucas again. "You asked me here because...?" I prompted, wrapping my arms around myself now that I no longer had Lucas's warmth.

"There are some things that need to be wrapped up before we can completely abandon the construction project," Lucas said, his voice brusque and businesslike. He held out a list that had the royal seal broken on it.

I took it and looked it over. "Short list," I observed.

"You have somewhere else to be?" Lucas asked, raising an eyebrow.

I rolled my shoulders back. "I might."

"Where? With Donovan?" Lucas asked.

Did I detect jealousy? "He's just a friend," I said, exasperated.

"He wants to be more," Lucas rumbled.

"Lucas, he can want all he wants. That's not going to change things between us," I replied. I folded my arms. "Why does it matter to you, anyway?"

"You know why it matters," Lucas murmured.

I turned my face away, about to push my hair behind my ear, when he did it for me. "I really don't get you, Lucas Black."

Lucas gave a long-suffering sigh. "That's the problem."

“What, that you're making it impossible to understand you?” I grumbled, turning back to him.

“No. That you don't have to get me,” Lucas said.

I threw up my hands. “Ugh, you make no sense!”

“I know.”

“And you're being completely unfair! I've had thermoses that run less hot and cold!” I ranted, frustrated past caring what came out of my mouth.

“I know.”

“What in the Moon Goddess's name is going on with you?!” I demanded.

Lucas raked a hand through the soft waves on top of his head. “You know what I want.”

“I knew what you wanted back at the bar, but now I have no damn clue,” I responded.

“I want to move up in the Royal Engineers. That means I can't... I just can't go around sleeping with my interns,” Lucas sighed.

“‘Interns’? As in more than one? Are there a whole bunch of us? Should I be starting a Lucas-is-a-dickhead support group?!” I snapped.

Lucas squeezed my arm. “You know it's just you.”

“Then why did you have to put it that way? I'm not 'interns.' I'm Sasha.” I knew I looked wounded when I glanced up at him, but I couldn't help myself.

Lucas groaned and pulled me against him again, letting his warmth and the tantalizing citrus-rosewood scent of him seep into me. “I'm sorry, princess. I know it doesn't make any sense to you. But I just... I can't be seen....”

His words trailed off and I shoved away from his chest. “You can't be seen with me? Are you afraid that people might get the wrong idea? Or are you afraid they might get the right one?”

“Sasha—” Lucas reached for me again.

I dodged his hands. “Blah blah... Lucas Black... blah blah... Royal Engineers... blah blah... Reputation... blah blah. Your career comes first. Message received loud and clear, asshole.”

He looked at me as if he was at a loss for words. But he didn't deny my assessment. Why would he risk his career for someone like me? It stung, but I got it.

I took a step back, my eyes fixed on the ground. “I think I should go.”

“Sasha, wait,” Lucas pleaded. He reached a hand toward me but then dropped it again. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and nodded.

When he opened his eyes again he made a strangled sound, and I looked behind me. I was at the edge of the temple hole again.

"What the...?" I gasped.

"Sasha, for the love of all that is holy, knock it the f**k off!" Lucas yelled, grabbing me by the arms and pulling me a few paces back, only to give me a shake. "I get you're pissed off at me, but you can't keep doing that. It's dangerous!"

"I-I didn't mean...." I stuttered in confusion.

"You know what? f**k this. Go home, Sasha, and don't come back here. You'll be reassigned soon enough," Lucas snarled. "I won't have you playing stupid games around the work site."

"I wasn't—"

Lucas turned me roughly in the direction of the road back to town and gave me a shove. "Go!"

I wanted to tell him I hadn't consciously gone back to the hole. I wanted to tell him something was wrong, something dark and evil. I wanted to tell him I was scared.

Instead, I fled down the road, tears stinging my eyes.

Damn Lucas Black anyhow.

The pages of my notebook flapped as I ran, and I didn't notice until one started tearing. I stopped, only to feel like the forest was closing in around me. Eyes—eyes were everywhere, watching me.

I shoved the notebook in my bag, not caring how many pages ripped, and kept running, my chest tight with exertion and claustrophobia, as though the trees were wrapping around me.

I'd never felt more relieved in my life than when I broke the border of the town, the trees snapping back like a rubber band. I leaned over and clutched my knees, breathing hard, sweat trickling down over my forehead and into my eyes, along with my hair.

"Sasha?" a voice asked.

My head came up, and I locked eyes with Doc, who put up his hands in a sign of peace.

"You look terrible, dear. Let's go to the bakery," Doc said soothingly.

I started to shake my head, then looked at my watch. It was another two hours until the next train. "O-okay."

Doc took my hand in his wrinkled one and tugged me along at his slower pace to Jay's bakery.

I don't know what sort of mess I looked like, but Jay's eyes widened as soon as he saw us, and he hurriedly set up a table and chairs.

"I'd take you upstairs, but I have to keep an eye out for customers," Jay said, pressing a steaming cup of tea into my hands.

He'd brewed tea? When?

I looked down at the tea, then at my watch. Half an hour had passed? How?

Doc pressed the back of his hand against my forehead and took my pulse. "Your heart's fluttering faster than a hummingbird," the doctor tsked.

"Sorry," I whispered, not even sure if one was supposed to apologize for their own pulse. "I-I had a bit of a fright."

Jay and Doc looked at each other. I glanced at my watch again. Another seven minutes had passed. What was going on?!

"Where is your mate, Sasha?" Jay asked slowly.

"Mate?" I echoed.

"The man who was here with you the other night, the one who was attacked by the rogue," Jay continued, his tone still soft and slow. "Lucas."

"Lucas isn't my mate," I whispered.

Another three minutes—at least time seemed to be catching up to itself.

Jay snorted. "Could have fooled me."

"I'm not twenty-one yet," I babbled. "I will be soon. Even if Lucas was my mate, I bet he'd reject me. He doesn't want me messing up his career."

"I don't think he'd reject you," Jay said. "But that's beside the point. What happened?"

"Lucas. He sent me away," I confessed.

"You're pale and shaking because Lucas sent you away?" Jay bristled. "Did he do something to you?"

"He-he shook me," I choked.

Jay scowled and Doc swore under his breath. "I think I'm going to go have a word or two with Mr. Not-Your-Mate," Jay growled.

I shook my head. "No. He shook me because I nearly jumped down the hole."

"The hole?" Jay repeated.

Doc was pressing a cool cloth to the back of my neck. "The hole in the ground on the library site—an underground temple, right?"

Jay blinked at Doc and my jaw dropped. "How did you know?"

"I'm Doc," the doctor replied.

"He's Doc," Jay agreed.

"Why would you jump down that hole? That's awfully foolish. You might have broken your fool neck. No wonder he shook you," Doc said sternly.

I couldn't help it. I burst into tears. "I don't know!" I wailed, terror making my voice shake. "It's like it was sucking me in!" I gripped Jay's arm. He put a hand over mine.

"Sucking you in." Doc stroked his chin.

"What, does that mean something?" Jay asked.

Doc shrugged but still looked thoughtful. "I think... there is always a reason for people to bury things. It's generally in the hope they are never found."

"You think it might be... evil?" Jay asked, crossing himself.

"I haven't been there. Sasha would know better." Doc looked at me. "What do you think, Sasha? What kind of feeling did you get from the temple?"

"Cold." My voice trembled. "Cold... and h-hungry, like it would swallow me alive. Then it was like... it was like there were eyes everywhere, watching me."

"I'm gonna go with evil, then," Jay said, looking a bit shaken himself.

Doc didn't look much better. I hadn't meant to scare them, but at least they weren't calling me crazy.

"You believe me?" I whispered.

"Sasha," Jay said, squeezing my hand. "You fended off a rogue with rusty farm tools and didn't blink an eyelash. Now you're a jibbering mess. Something happened out there and it wasn't good."

"You should talk to your m—Lucas." Doc's tone was stern.

"I-I can't right now," I swallowed. "I can't go back there right now."

"I'll go," Jay said, standing. "Doc, you get her on the train and get her out of here. If this evil is after her, she needs to be as far away from it as possible."

"Agreed," Doc replied.

"And if you don't mind watching the store?" Jay added.

"We'll keep an eye on it," Doc reassured him.

Jay nodded and headed out to the street.

"What if he gets hurt?" I asked Doc.

"Better he try to warn others away from the place than evil sucking us all in," Doc said.

He had a point. "But what about—"

"Young lady, all you need to worry about now is getting on that train. We'll handle the rest," Doc interrupted.

I nodded, shakily pushing my hair behind my ear.

I just needed to get on that train. Doc helped me to my feet and wrapped a coat around my shoulders. As we walked toward the train station, I couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. Lucas was still at the site.

Would he be okay?

[Chapter 957: Dark Discoveries](#)

Lucas

'Something bad....'

Sasha's words rang in my head as I tried to focus on finding a new project to write up a proposal for. There were plenty of sites in Egoren that needed attention.

But I couldn't shake Shasha's warning about the temple from my mind.

Part of me wanted to believe she'd been spooked by her near-fall, but I knew that couldn't be it. It seemed crazy to risk my career by reporting her 'feelings of evil' to King Xander. But, if there was something to it, I would be to blame if people got hurt because of it.

I warred with my options for the better part of an hour before I cursed out loud and went to find Brady.

He was waiting in the hall.

"Need to talk?" Brady asked, those damn lips twitching again.

"Shut up," I grumbled. "Where's Phoebe?"

"Sleeping."

"You still catch spooky vibes, don't you?"

"Can I sense the difference between good and evil? Yes," Brady said. "Why? You want me to go hit Donovan Clarke again?"

"You hit him?" Jealousy curled in my gut.

"One of the most satisfying things I've ever done," Brady confirmed. "Wouldn't mind doing it again."

I grunted. "Some things a man wants to do for himself."

"For his mate," Brady corrected me, his eyes twinkling.

"She's not my mate," I muttered, though my heart thudded when I said it.

"You don't know that," Brady said. He sighed and shook his head. "Anyway, what's up?"

"Sasha says there's something evil at the site."

"You don't believe her?"

"I don't know. But, I believe she believes it. I want to go back over to the site." I didn't know I'd decided that until the words were out. Brady followed me as I hurried to start packing bags with what I'd need for exploring in the darkness from my engineering supplies.

"What? Now?! It'll be after midnight by the time the train gets there! It'll be the last train out. There won't be one back until morning!" Brady protested.

"I need to know. And now that the Lycaon Church is involved, they're not just going to let me stroll over there in the daylight," I reasoned, slinging my bag over my shoulder.

"You could just report it," Brady pointed out. I waited for him to play the potential scenario out in his head. "Yeah, you would both look unstable. But, if you're caught out there...."

"I'll just have a look and see," I muttered. "Will you come with me?"

Brady laughed. "Yeah, um, no."

"Why not?"

"Because it's crazy."

"Scared?" I teased.

"Engaged," he reminded me.

"Right," I said and headed for the door. "I shouldn't have asked."

"Where will you stay until morning?" Brady asked, falling into step beside me.

"I know a guy in town," I assured him.

Brady raised an eyebrow. "Did you let him know you were coming?"

"No time." My tone was clipped.

"You know I'm not letting you go out there alone, right? You could very well die out there...."

"Are you coming?" I held up the second bag for him and he snatched it from me.

We fell into a companionable silence as we headed for the train station, which surprisingly lasted the several hours it took to get out to the site.

The way Brady's eyes slipped from side to side as we made our way down the road at the edge of the woods and past the barn Sasha and I had made our stand in made me realize, with rising dread, that he sensed something out there.

"Rogues?" I asked, not sure why I was so hopeful.

"Yes... and no. That's not the only thing out there," Brady said quietly.

I groaned and raked a hand through my hair. "Great. Just great."

"Well, as long as we don't bother with whatever it is and it stays here...." Brady began.

"We're bothering it," I said.

Brady looked at me. We could see each other just fine under the moonlight, as both of us were a mature shifter and vampire, so no flashlight was needed. His glowing eyes were incredulous. "You've got to be kidding me."

"I am if something has latched itself onto Sasha. That's what she said. I'm not leaving here until we get some answers," I replied firmly.

"Latched itself onto... so that's what that was," Brady mumbled.

"What what was?" I asked.

"When I grabbed her wrist to get her out of the bar, away from Donovan, I got this little zap of... something. But it was gone so quickly, I barely clocked it." Brady looked out into the woods again and shivered. "Lucas, my man, I know you're worried, but there are some things you just shouldn't f**k around with."

We reached the library site. The temple area was roped off with a single industrial flood light shining down into the hole.

"Are you sensing anything?" I asked

Brady stopped cold. "Evil alert."

"Color me surprised," I said, rolling my eyes, and then I remembered something. "A good bit of the old library burned down a few years ago, all the way through the foundation, and there was nothing but dirt beneath. There was no sign that a temple had ever been here, so this whole situation feels way off."

I saw that the archeological team had already built a scaffolding down into the hole. "Convenient," I observed, touching a ladder.

Brady caught my arm. "This is a bad, bad place. We need to get the f**k out of here. Now."

I shook him off. "Not until I have my answers." I put my foot on the first rung of the ladder, readjusting my bag on my back before descending.

Brady stayed up top for the longest time, me looking up at him from the temple floor, him looking down at me with a pained expression on his face. "Lucas...."

"Either help me or don't," I snarled, tired of his shying away.

Brady sighed and half climbed, half floated down into the temple with me. "I'm going to regret this. We both are."

"I won't regret anything as long as my Sasha stays safe," I grunted, starting to poke around.

"My Sasha," Brady muttered, but he began circling the small space from the other side.

There was an open corridor leading off one of the walls, and after finding nothing but innocuous books and other artifacts sitting in organized rows in the main area, Brady and I focused our attention on it.

The floodlight did not reach that far, nor did the moonlight, and I was just getting out a flashlight when something crunched beneath my feet. I looked down and saw bone.

I jumped back, slamming right into Brady.

"Sweet mercies of the White Queen!" Brady breathed, gripping my shoulders. "There have to be at least a hundred skeletons down here!"

A hundred? I flicked on my flashlight and shone it down the corridor, revealing a kind of catacombs. Skeletons, now meticulously assembled and tagged, filled the space, some spread across the floor, others in little notches carved into the walls.

My stomach turned.

Brady stepped carefully into the corridor and began reading some tags. He murmured to himself more and more as he moved further down.

"What? What is it?" I asked, as though there could be something worse than the discovery of an old Lycaon burial ground.

"Carbon dating," Brady said. "They all... died at the same time." He looked around. "All of them. This is just one generation of people."

I took a step back, shocked. "Plague?"

"No, none detected. Cause of death on all of these is a question mark," Brady said, making his way back down to me. He shook the dust off his clothes and grimly cast his eyes back over the temple proper. "The evil isn't coming from there, anyway."

"Where is it coming from?" I turned around, looking around the space myself. Aside from being dusty, it was pristine, all laid out in a grid by the archeologists.

Brady was like a bloodhound. He walked over to the altar and began feeling around, his brow furrowed in concentration.

There was a low click, then a grating sound.

Brady went into the narrow space between the altar and the wall. I followed him, squeezing in next to him so we were hip to hip.

A dark space had been revealed under the altar. A dark space with....

"Is that the White Queen?" Brady echoed my confusion.

"Yes," I said, staring at the statue.

"But this place is supposed to be an ancient temple, isn't it?" Brady continued.

I nodded. "It is."

"Egorens don't worship the White Queen. They never did. Did they?" Brady asked.

"They did not," I confirmed as something glinted behind the statue in the darkness, catching my eye.

"Then what the hell...?" Brady trailed off as I reached behind the statue.

"I don't know," I admitted. My hand closed on something smooth and round.

The ground trembled.

"f**k, Lucas, what are you doing?!" Brady shouted as dust from the shaking walls filled the air.

I knew it was risky, but something compelled me to tug on the object.

"Hopefully finding some answers," I said. I gave a tug and the round object fit snug in the palm of my hand. I held it in the torch light to see it was an orb. A warm light seemed to glow from inside, but I didn't have time to think as the floor beneath us began to buckle.

"Lucas, put it b—!"

I grabbed Brady's arm, ramming the orb in my pocket, and ran for the scaffolding.

We scrambled up it, getting clear of the edge just as the hole groaned beneath us.

Brady and I ran and jumped clear, barely in time to get out of the way as the temple collapsed into itself, turning into so much rubble.

Breathing hard, we headed away from the site and back to the dark streets of the town.

When our feet hit the smooth pavement of town we stopped running, and I pulled the orb out of my pocket.

"I think we might have found what we're looking for."

It wasn't glowing anymore. I handed it to Brady.

"It's a marble ball. It doesn't even have an inscription," Brady muttered, turning the orb over in his hands and handing it back.

"I know this is going to have our answers," I said, not sure how I knew. But deep in my bones, I was sure of it.

"Is it talking to you or something?" Brady asked.

"No. But this has to be the key to whatever is going on. I'm going to contact my cousin Eliza Crimson," I decided, tucking the orb into my bag.

"The archeologist who works with the Lycaon church?" Brady asked.

"Yes," I said.

"They send her all over the place. It might take her forever to get here to take a look at it," Brady pointed out.

I raked a hand over my hair. "You have a better idea?"

Brady thought for a moment, then shook his head. "No, you're right. She's probably your best bet."

"Our best bet," I responded.

"Oh hell no. I'm finished with this. One collapsing, buried out-of-place temple to the White Queen is enough for me. You are not going to drag me into whatever that thing is doing," Brady said, putting two fingers together in a warding cross.

"Come on," I said.

"Not a chance. I've got a good thing going with Phoebe," Brady reminded me.

My shoulders sagged. "What if it was Phoebe who felt something latch onto her?"

Brady was quiet for a long time, then he sighed. "Fine, fine. But don't ask me to hang onto it for you."

"I won't."

Brady tipped his head at the imploded temple site. "What are we going to do about this?"

"We were never here," I intoned.

[Chapter 958: Gone](#)

Sasha

"Sasha," Amanda said, giving me a shake.

I yawned and blinked owlishly at the clock. "Sweet mercies of the White Queen, Amanda, it's nearly dawn. Don't you have class this morning?"

"I do, but I was on the dorm phone all night with Chelsea—boy trouble—and the line beeped, so I switched lines, and it was Lucas," Amanda said hurriedly.

"Lucas Black?" I asked, peering at her in the low lighting.

"Do we know another Lucas?" Amanda responded with an eye roll. "He's waiting for you on the line right now."

I wanted to tell Amanda I didn't want to talk to him, roll over, and go back to sleep, but I wasn't going to make her into my errand girl. With a groan, I pulled myself out of bed and padded down the hall in boys' boxers and an oversized T-shirt to take the phone.

"Lucas," I groused. "Do you have any idea what time it is?"

"I need you," Lucas replied without preamble.

I blinked, pulled the receiver away from my ear to stare at it, then put it back to my ear to listen once more.

"... dream dancer?" Lucas was saying.

"What?" I asked. "Look, Lucas, if you're going to phone me for s*x while you're drunk and then..."

"Haven't you been listening?!" Lucas asked, exasperated.

"I was trying to figure out if you'd lost your mind... so... no...?" I replied.

"For the Moon Goddess's sake, Sasha, I'm talking about the temple, not s*x," Lucas said.

I felt my cheeks get hot and was glad he couldn't see me this mortified. "Oh. Um... sorry... um...."

"Forget it. Not important right now," Lucas sighed.

"Okay, so, it's still almost two in the morning," I said, shifting the phone to my other shoulder.

"I need you to use your dream dance abilities on something I found in the temple. I'll explain when I see you," Lucas responded. "Get dressed and meet me outside your dorm in fifteen minutes."

"But—"

"No buts. Get a move on," Lucas ordered.

I grumbled something under my breath but agreed. After hanging up, Amanda cornered me in our dorm room.

"So?" she asked. "Did Mr. Yummalicious call you for some... private time?"

I shook my head, then nodded, then shook my head. "No... I mean, not the way you're thinking. He needs me to use my dream dancer gifts to help him with something." I kicked off my pajamas and yanked on a sports bra, panties, pants, and a sweater.

"Your dream dancer gifts? Please tell me that's a new euphemism for s*x," Amanda whined.

I looked at her and couldn't help but laugh as she stood there in frilly, pink, nearly see-through lingerie and was worried about my s*x life. "No. I can't believe he remembers I am a dream dancer. I haven't used my abilities around him since we were kids."

"You two really need to go at it and get it out of your systems," Amanda lamented. She plopped down on her bed. "Well, I'll have high hopes for you anyway. Have fun, and do everything I would do."

I snorted and strode out of our dorm room just as Amanda was snuggling down to go to sleep.

By the time I got downstairs, Ian was already standing next to Lucas's sedan, holding the back door open for me.

"We have to stop meeting like this," I said to the long-suffering chauffeur.

"All part of the job, ma'am," he grunted back, though he didn't sound particularly happy about it.

I gave him a sympathetic look before Lucas reached over and tugged me inside the car.

I almost landed in his lap.

"Home, Ian," Lucas barked, and the chauffeur quickly closed our door and got behind the wheel, turning us back in the direction of Lucas's house.

I settled myself next to Lucas, smoothing down my sweater self-consciously. "What is this about?"

"I've been debating whether to bring you in since last night," Lucas murmured, raking a hand through his hair. It bounced back into its stylishly messy-on-top coif. "I'm still not sure this is the right decision."

"Bring me in on what? What decision?" I asked, starting to get peeved. It was nearly sunrise and I should have been getting ready for a new work-study.

"We found something," Lucas said, looking at me, his gray eyes troubled. "Brady and I went to the temple last night, and we found something."

"In the temple?" I responded. "What was it?"

"Well, there isn't exactly a temple anymore. As soon as I took the artifact, the whole thing collapsed." Lucas stared out the window as though watching it happen again. "I brought it home. I have a cousin, Eliza, who might be able to shed some light on it, but she's far away and won't get here for weeks."

"The archeologist," I remembered.

Lucas nodded. "But you also showed us once when you were starting to use your powers that you were a dream dancer. I don't know if you use your abilities much anymore...."

"It's not like they go away, Lucas," I said dryly.

"That's what I'm counting on," Lucas replied. He slid his hand over mine and squeezed it, looking back from the window at me. "It's in my house. I'm going to show it to you when we get home. But if it's... something truly evil... that you think is going to hurt you... I'll destroy it, and that will be that."

I stared into his silver-flecked gray eyes. It was like they danced with stars. I shook my head—not the point. "You're really worried about me," I said.

"I am," Lucas admitted. "But I can't think of any other way to see if this is the thing that's been haunting you."

"Okay," I agreed. "I'll try. I'll try, Lucas, but you have to know I can't control what I see. It'll reveal what it reveals, whether it makes sense or not."

"I'll take it," Lucas said as we pulled into the pea rock driveway in front of his house.

Ian dashed around to let us out, but Lucas was faster. He gave me his hand and pulled me out of the sedan as Ian huffed off to the side.

Lucas's arm went protectively around my waist as we mounted the stairs into his home.

"Is it in the foyer?" I asked, my muscles tensing a bit. If Lucas was nervous, I had the feeling I ought to be scared out of my mind.

"No, no, of course not. Phoebe might stumble on it there. No, it's in my office," Lucas said.

His office—last time we'd been in there, we'd had one hell of a fight. Now I was letting him take me there to study what might be a cursed object. I was starting to really not like that office of his.

Brady stood at the top of the stairs, just out of view, so when we reached the upper landing we both jumped.

"You're not seriously going to have her look at it," Brady hissed, his voice low.

Ah. Phoebe must be asleep, I assumed.

I reached out and patted Brady on the shoulder. "It's okay," I said, proud my voice wasn't quivering. "I'm happy to do it."

Brady grumbled something, but followed us to Lucas's office just the same, stopping right outside the door. He'd drawn his line in the sand.

Lucas went behind his desk and opened a wood panel that looked like a drawer, but actually housed a safe.

Immediately, I felt a sense of dread, even before I saw the black-veined, white marble orb in Lucas's hand.

"I... don't think I should touch it," I wheezed as my lungs seemed to fail me and I backed away. "Please put it back in the safe."

"Destruction it is," Lucas grunted, slipping it back in the safe. "I'll bring it back to the construction site and use the tools there to break it apart."

"I am totally on board with that plan," Brady said from the doorway.

I put a hand to my head, my other hand going around my belly. "I don't feel well."

Lucas's eyes lit with worry and he put his arm around me again. "Let's get you back downstairs," he said, ushering me out of the office. "I'll get you some wine to settle your nerves. I'm sorry I brought you here, Sasha. It was a mistake."

"No, it was good to at least try to figure out what it was. I'm sorry I couldn't help more," I replied, seeing Brady slip back into his bedroom.

"No, I'm sorry," Lucas began, settling me on the sofa.

The world spun a bit and I groaned. "Lucas. Just get the wine, please."

"Right, of course," Lucas said. He trotted off in the direction of the kitchen while I fought a dizzying haze that had come over me.

It was hot... so hot in here.

I pulled at my sweater, finally lifting it over my head without thinking.

Lucas returned just as I was about to slide it off my arms. I froze. He froze.

"Sasha?" Lucas asked throatily, his eyes on my bra.

I quickly dropped my sweater back down despite the heat. "Sorry. It's just so hot...."

Lucas's eyebrows pinched together. "It's not, Sasha. It's actually a little cool in here." He sat down next to me and offered me a glass of wine.

I tried to take my glass, but my hands were shaking too much.

Lucas set his glass down and leaned over me, putting the glass to my lips.

"Oh, Sasha, my princess, what have I done?" Lucas breathed. He pulled the glass away, his eyes now focused on my lips.

Now my world spun for a different reason. I licked my lips, and Lucas groaned, leaning in closer.

When his lips were a hairsbreadth from mine, the air around me shimmered and became hazy. Through the haze, I could see Lucas reaching for me, but his touch went right through me and he disappeared.

No... I disappeared.

I was left in a void, surrounded by darkness. Panic seized me as I desperately looked for a way out.

"Lucas!" I called out, but my voice echoed back to me, hollow and empty.

The darkness seemed to press in on me, suffocating me. I felt myself spinning and closed my eyes, trying to calm myself down. But that only made the sensation worse. I was alone, lost in this void with no escape.

When I felt myself stop spinning, the flicker of torchlight illuminated the world around me.

I was in some ancient building, the air carrying the scent of the ocean. I knew from that scent alone I was no longer in the capital.

Columns rose around me in long rows, seemingly without end in all directions. These I recognized as being quite similar to the ones that had been removed from old structures to create new ones in the capital and elsewhere.

Only these were uniform and meant to be there. I could feel it.

I also felt overwhelming fear and dread, which slapped over me as soon as I had my footing in this new place. It drove me to my knees, though I knew it was not my own. It was coming from this place. The whole structure emanated with it.

It hurt... it hurt so much, a harsh pounding in my head and then a slitting pain.

I pressed my hands to my head and screamed.

[Chapter 959: Who Is Sasha?](#)

"I do have my own projects to discuss with the king," Stone said, his smile of delight setting my teeth on edge. He did have to emphasize the fact that he was responsible for more than one project, where I had managed to f**k up my one and only.

"Come!" the king said before I descended into name-calling like a child who'd had his lolly taken away.

Stone swept into the king's receiving room ahead of me, deliberately cutting me off.

I had to consciously not stomp in after him.

"Your Majesty," Stone said with a deep bow.

I figured I ought to follow suit, White Queen's cousin or no.

"Stone. Lucas," King Xander acknowledged us. "Good to see you both. Now, I want that update on shutting down the northern library project. Have you completed your tasks?"

I blinked at King Xander. "Yes... as I told you yesterday, Your Majesty, we have gotten things completely shut down. The workers have been paid and sent to other projects.... What?"

King Xander and Stone were both eyeing me. "Who's Sasha? And I don't recall us speaking yesterday," the king said.

"My intern," I replied, a sinking suspicion beginning to form in my gut.

Stone let out a great big guffaw. "Can't even remember the name of your own intern! Her name is Rachel, not Sasha."

Color rose to my cheeks, but it wasn't nearly as disturbing as the realization that they wouldn't be kidding around like Ian and Brady. They really had no idea who Sasha was.

"You really should be more polite, Lucas. I know you didn't particularly want an intern, but forgetting her name is very rude, especially given the hard work she's been putting in," King Xander admonished.

I looked back and forth between them. "You don't know Sasha Wentley," I wheezed. "She had the queen's...."

Both of them looked at me as though I'd lost my mind. "Who?" King Xander asked impatiently.

My world spun. I was going to throw up. Moon Goddess save us all.

What happened last night?

Memories slammed back into me like a train. I'd gone to kiss Sasha... and....

That wasn't a dream. She had really disappeared.

Disappeared completely, it seemed, from existence.

"I need to go," I said, trying to keep it together even as my world became unglued at the seams.

"I think you may be under too much stress," King Xander observed with concern. "Go home and lay down. We can continue this another time."

I bowed, my heart galloping in my chest. "Thank you, Your Majesty." I took long strides getting out of the king's receiving room. Once the doors closed behind me, I broke into a run.

The guards eyed me curiously, but jumped out of my way as I pelted past them. "The university, Ian. NOW!"

Ian must have taken an inch of tread off the sedan's tires peeling away from the palace.

Professor Augustine was just entering the engineering building when I caught up with her. She whirled around when I grabbed her shoulder, almost smiled, then took in the state of me. "Lucas Black, what in...?"

I was doubled over with my hands on my knees, sweat pouring down my forehead.

"P-Professor..." I gasped, heaving in lungfuls of air. "Sasha... Sasha Wentley...."

Her confused reply was predictable, and shattering. "Who?"

I gripped her upper arms and gave her a shake, desperately trying not to accept. To reorient the world."Sasha Wentley, your student!"

Professor Augustine's eyes grew wide and frightened. "Lucas! Get a hold of yourself! I have not one Sasha in my class." She patted my cheek as I lowered my arms. "Did this person steal something from you?"

Oh yes. Sasha had stolen something from me. I knew it by the hollow feeling in my chest.

"I—" I shook my head. "I'm sorry, Professor Augustine. I thought... I don't know what I thought...."

"You go get some rest, love," Professor Augustine suggested kindly. "I think you've overworked yourself to a frazzle."

On any other day, that would be true. But today was a day like no other. I managed a tight smile. "You're right," I said, stepping away from the professor. "You're right. My mistake."

Professor Augustine nodded and pattered her way into the engineering building.

I walked onto the quad and leaned back against a tree. There was only one place left to go, one person who could possibly remember Sasha as I did.

With a heavy heart, I made my way to Sasha's dorm, going straight to the room she shared with Amanda.

I raised my hand to knock, but the door flew open, revealing Amanda and a girl I didn't recognize. The dorm room behind Amanda had changed. Sasha's beautiful designs no longer marched along the walls in perfect rows. That was how I knew—I knew she was really gone.

Amanda looked surprised. She leaned in the doorframe and her eyes traveled my body up and down. "Well, hey, handsome, what can I do for you?"

"Nothing," I whispered, moving away from her. "Nothing... wrong room."

"Could be the right room, depending on your perspective," Amanda replied in a flirty tone.

I fled, down the hall, out of the dorm, across the quad, and to where Ian was parked.

"Sir?" Ian asked as I slid glumly into the back seat of the sedan.

"Home," I said. I pinched my eyelids, refusing to cry in front of Ian.

"Right away, sir," Ian replied, much less sassy than usual.

Maybe he could sense something was wrong. Or maybe he also thought I was crazy. It didn't matter, really. What could possibly matter now?

I sat up suddenly.

The orb....

Ian didn't need to be told. He put his foot down on the gas and we practically flew the rest of the way to my house.

I jumped out of the sedan before it came to a complete stop.

"Sir!" Ian called after me as I scrambled over the pea rock driveway and into the house, bounding up the stairs to my office.

That damn orb....

I wrenched the door in my desk open to reveal the safe, taking it right off its hinges and splintering the wood. As for the safe itself, it took me three finger-trembling tries to finally get it open.

When I saw what was inside, my knees gave out beneath me and I buckled to the floor.

It was empty. The safe was empty. The orb was gone, just like Sasha.

"How do I unfuck this?"

I was on my... I'd lost count... scotch when I ran out of the supply in my office. It was late, past two in the morning. It was tomorrow again, the day I'd shown the orb to Sasha and it had taken her from me. Twenty-four hours now without her, living in a world without her.

Without her.

I weaved my way down the stairs, an ice cube clanking in my glass. Brady had given up on me hours ago when I'd thrown my other tumbler at his head and told him to get lost. He was with his Phoebe now... his Phoebe.

Where was my Sasha?

I made my way to the liquor cabinet, wondering if I should just drink straight from the bottle. But my refined, courtly manners just wouldn't let me. Still, there was nothing saying I couldn't get a bigger glass.

The floor was uneven beneath my feet, or at least it felt that way, rolling like ocean waves as I wobbled to the kitchen. I took the largest drinking cup I could find—a hot pink gallon mug with palm trees on it that Brady had gotten as a joke on vacation—and dumped the contents of the bottle into it. As an added nod to refinement, I also dropped a single ice cube into the cup.

I was just taking my first swig when the air began to shimmer. Damn, had I been crying? I rubbed my eyes, but they were bone dry.

Suddenly, Sasha, pale as a ghost, was standing before me.

I choked on a lump in my throat and raised my hot pink cup to her image. "Here's to you, princess," I slurred.

"L-Lucas?" the image spoke and held the orb up before dropping it like a hot potato.

I felt it bump against my toe. I looked down at it and it took my inebriated mind a few extra moments to register that the orb was back and it was real.

My gaze snapped back up. Sasha was still there, still wearing the sweater she'd worn when she disappeared. The vacation mug slipped from my fingers and hit the floor with a loud thunk, splashing very expensive scotch all over the kitchen floor.

"Sasha?" I whispered.

Sasha hugged herself as though frightened and nodded at me. "Lucas, am I home?"

Ignoring my scotch-covered clothes and the very orb I wanted to drop kick into the sun, I ran to Sasha and wrapped her in my arms, a tidal wave of relief flowing through me.

"Sasha," I murmured into her hair. "Sasha. My beautiful, brave princess."

Sasha burst into the very tears I was holding back and clung to me, gripping my shirt as though I could anchor her to this world.

I hoped I could.

"You were gone," I whispered. "You were gone a whole day."

"A whole day?" Sasha responded, her voice shaking.

I shook my head, her soft hair catching in my stubble I hadn't bothered to shave. "I talked to everyone—everyone—and no one knew who you were. No one remembered you. You didn't exist for a whole day."

"I... didn't exist?" Sasha gasped.

"Moon Goddess... I was so scared," I said, stroking her hair, holding her tight.

We were so close I could feel Sasha swallow.

"Where did you go?" I asked.

[Chapter 960: Out of Time](#)

Sasha

I started with the kiss... or almost kiss. Or rather, I simply said, "When we were drinking wine...." to give us both an out.

Lucas nodded, his stubbly chin grazing against my temple.

"And I disappeared. I went somewhere... else," I explained.

"Where did you go?" Lucas asked.

I closed my eyes, still able to envision the place clearly in my mind.

As I knelt and screamed in the place of vast rows of columns, shimmering ghosts floated out from the ether, surrounding me. They seemed to block out the emotions that weren't mine that had threatened to tear me apart.

I was grateful on the one hand. On the other hand, I was surrounded by ghosts.

Ghosts....

My own fear began creeping up inside, but the ghosts didn't mob me and remained benevolent and protective around me, so eventually I calmed down. I stood and took a really good look around.

Though at first glance it seemed this place was entirely made of columns, stretched infinitely in all directions, a soft glow to one side brought my eyes to far off torchlight, and a wall.

Though they didn't speak, I felt a kind of impulse from the ghosts to move in that direction.

I walked, my steps hesitant at first, then more confident as my ghost protectors remained around me. Strangely, I took only three steps and reached the wall that had appeared at least a mile off.

"What is this place?" I asked but got no answer.

The wall had glyphs etched into it of forgotten languages, not even recorded in modern libraries. They were beautiful prayers to the Moon Goddess. I had no idea how, but here I could read the words, even though I'd never learned them.

Between these prayers were stunning pieces of art, paintings and drawings, sculptures and bronze figures, renderings of all kinds of the Moon Goddess.

The ghosts did not give me time to linger over every piece, though each was exquisite.

Soft music of prayer and praise to the Moon Goddess threaded through the air, and I felt at peace.

The wall then led me into a great, round room. My ghost protectors fanned out along the walls of this room, which unlike the wall and the columns, was simply an iridescent white.

In the center of the room was an altar. And perched on top of that, on a white and gold pillow, was the bejeweled Moon Goddess herself.

I stumbled backward, not sure whether to bow, curtsy, or prostrate myself on the floor.

It was her... the really, really, real actual Moon Goddess herself.

I rubbed my eyes, peeked out from behind my fists, then pinched myself.

The pain told me this was no dream. I was standing before the Moon Goddess.

Standing.

I started to bow, then wiggled that into a curtsy, but the Moon Goddess simply held up one ethereal white hand.

In her other, the orb, the very one Lucas had showed me, appeared.

My stomach turned and I wondered what evil magic would put me back in the presence of that... thing.

"Take this," the Moon Goddess said, her voice as loud as a thunderclap yet soft as butterfly wings. "Save them."

Her tone brooked no argument.

With a wary cringe, I approached the orb, feeling nothing but peace and love from the Moon Goddess herself. What was I supposed to do? Say "no" to the Moon Goddess?

Who says "no" to the Moon Goddess?

I reached out and touched the orb, feeling it hum with a power I didn't understand.

The Moon Goddess nodded approvingly.

"Moon Goddess," I hazarded. "Who am I supposed to save?"

But the world was swirling again, and I was in Lucas's kitchen.

Seeing Lucas holding a hot pink palm tree mug the size of his head should have made me laugh. The bewildered expression on his face should have made me laugh more.

But I was afraid if I started laughing now, I'd dissolve into hysteria.

"Lucas?" I asked, his gray, bloodshot eyes drawing me in like gravity, holding me to this plane.

And then he was holding me... and emotions burst through me like fireworks of all kinds and colors.

I didn't tell him that part, though.

"... and now I'm supposed to save someone with that stupid orb," I concluded, mumbling the last into his shoulder.

Lucas let go of me just long enough so that he could transfer me to his side, his strong arm holding me against him.

"This orb?" Lucas asked, lifting it off the floor.

Scotch dripped off it like foul-smelling blood, and I jerked away from it and from Lucas.

"No," I murmured, shaking my head. "No. I can't. I...." I felt my eyes welling up. "I want to go home. I don't want that thing."

"Okay, okay," Lucas soothed, taking a step away from me with great reluctance. On both our parts. "I'll put it away somewhere. You don't need to go."

"I need to go," I insisted. "I want to go home. I want to go home!"

Lucas quickly dropped the orb in the sink and came back to me, taking my hands. "Stay, Sasha," he whispered. "Stay with me."

I couldn't. I just couldn't, not while that thing was here.

"I'm sorry," I said, and I backed away toward the door. "Ian?" I called. "Ian?!"

The chauffeur appeared in a pair of striped pajamas and an honest-to-Goddess sleeping cap. "Miss Wentley?"

"I want to go home," I begged, looking back at Lucas.

Lucas sighed. "Ian, don't bother getting changed. Just take Miss Wentley home."

Ian raised an eyebrow but gave an acquiescent nod. "As you wish."

I started after Ian, but Lucas corrected my course. "He'll pull around front."

Tears streaked down my cheeks as I looked up at Lucas. "I'm sorry," I whispered.

Lucas cupped my face, thumbing away my tears. "It's okay, my princess. We can work all this out later."

With a soft kiss to my forehead, he let me go.

I don't know how I looked returning to the dorm room I shared with Amanda, because the second she saw me, she pulled me into a hug.

"Damn, girl. Lucas trouble?" she asked, walking us into our dorm room.

"Why does it have to be Lucas trouble?" I mumbled, letting her sit me down on the edge of my bed.

"Girl, there is only one thing in the universe that can twist you up so hard you have that look on your face. And he's about six foot four with gray eyes, just-fucked hair, and an ass that's just begging to be grabbed," Amanda informed me.

I inclined my head. As much as Amanda's graphic description was feeding my little green monster, I had to agree with her. "He does have a nice ass."

"See? There you go. So how did Mr. Can't-Make-Up-His-Mind screw with your head today?" Amanda asked.

"He asked me to stay," I said.

Amanda's eyebrows almost disappeared into her hairline. "And this is a bad thing? I thought we'd been hoping he'd come to some kind of decision."

"I don't know if he's really decided, or was just trying to hold onto me, because I disappeared," I replied.

"Dis-disappeared?" Amanda echoed, blinking in confusion. "Okay, there's a story here I'm not getting."

I sighed, then told her the whole story, from my weird reaction to the orb and subsequent disappearance to Lucas's experience of me having been ripped out of the fabric of time and space, as though I'd never existed at all.

Amanda's jaw dropped. "Yeah, I would have left him with that f*****g orb, too. Moon Goddess. I can't believe I would have forgotten you!"

"Apparently, you hit on him," I grumbled.

"Well, that I can believe. If it weren't for the crazy s**t going on between you two, I'd climb him like a jungle gym," Amanda said.

"It's not that crazy," I hedged. "He's afraid getting involved with me is going to ruin his stupid career. I guess I'm kind of worried about the same—his career and mine. We're trying to keep it professional... but then we're not...." I trailed off, knowing just how convoluted it all sounded.

"Uh-huh," Amanda snorted. "What did he do to you, anyway?"

"Well, before the orb disappeared me, I think he was going to kiss me. Then when I got back, he hugged me and kissed my foreh—"

"I mean when you were kids," Amanda said. "Though I wouldn't mind revisiting this almost kissing, kissing thing you two have going on."

My heart sank as my mind went back to that day. But, I shook it off. "That doesn't matter right now."

Amanda's face turned uncharacteristically serious as she took my hand in hers.

"When you're blotted from existence and the Moon Goddess gets involved, I'd say everything between you and Lucas Black matters now."

"It's just a coincidence," I insisted.

"I'm not normally the one to talk about fate and destiny and all that, but look at everything that's happened since the two of you reconnected."

I took a deep breath and shook my head.

"It might help to just talk about it," she said sincerely.

"We were just kids," I began softly, "and he was a red faced, snot nosed, entitled little brat. He was irritating and obnoxious and... Goddess, he was such a jerk."

I took a moment to breathe. "There was a bracelet that I wore everyday. My mother told me it was for protection, like a talisman. It was old and irreplaceable. It protected me. One day Lucas snatched it off my wrist. He and his friends tossed it around trying to keep it from me... I cried and cried and finally he threw it on the ground and stepped on it. He broke it."

I trailed off, unsure if I could continue, but Amanda took my silence to mean that the story was over....

"That was a very shitty thing to do," she said. "I would slap him too. But, now you've almost kissed and made up, right?"

I smiled, letting the remaining details slip away unspoken.

"Almost, but that would be a mistake. We both could get in trouble for unprofessional conduct. I'm not going to let anything that has to do with Lucas Black ruin my future."

"What if your future is with him?" Amanda asked, batting her eyelashes.

"I... honestly don't know," I said softly. "It's not like I'll know if he's my mate or not until my birthday. And even then...."

"You would reject him?"

I shook my head. "No, he might reject me. He's very focused on his career. I'm... I don't know...."

"Pfft." Amanda waved a hand in the air. "He's hot for you like a man crawling out of the desert who spotted a vending machine. If you're his mate, what he's gonna do is get you in bed and then get you in babies up to your eyeballs. Even if you're not mates, you're gonna have hot s*x for the rest of your lives."

I wrinkled my nose. "I don't think I want to be up to my eyeballs in babies, at least not until I've established myself."

"Good for you," Amanda said, playfully slugging my shoulder. "Yeah, I want to take some time to explore and s**t before I meet my mate. Have fun, you know?"

"It's the turn of the century, Amanda. Women don't have to chain themselves to the stove once they meet their mate anymore," I chuckled.

Amanda shrugged. "So they say. But half the female student body are still going to university to get their missus degree."

"Their what?" I asked.

"Missus degree," Amanda explained. "You know, hoping their mate is a well-educated university guy with a good future ahead. I've seen so many girls drop out of my program once they hit twenty-one...."

I frowned. Come to think of it, so had I. Had times really changed so little?

"That's not going to be me," I said firmly.

"Me neither," Amanda agreed. "So, you know, don't put all the eggs in his basket. You never know. If he turns out to be one of those 'woman-get-me-a-sandwich' type guys, maybe you'll end up rejecting him."

I pursed my lips in thought.

Yeah, I decided. If it came down to it, maybe I would be the one rejecting him. Though, the idea made my heart ache.