

Kings Breeder 991

[Chapter 991: Wave on Wave](#)

Lucas

The sound of waves crashing against the shore gradually woke me up. Dawn's early light was creeping over my naked body.

And not just mine—Sasha's pale skin was almost luminescent as she lay on my chest, my shirt draped over her to keep out the cold. Sometime during the hours, and hours, and hours we'd spent making love, I'd had the good sense to tuck it around her.

I should have been satisfied, sated beyond anything I'd ever felt before, but I still wanted her desperately... my love, my mate.

When I traced my fingertips down her spine, however, Sasha sleepily swatted my hand away. "You keep that c**k to yourself. Goddess, I may never walk again," she groaned.

"Aw, Sasha baby, are you sore?" I asked, going from horny to concerned in less than a second.

"Yes," Sasha said, pushing her hands on my chest to try to get up, but her legs were too wobbly.

I chuckled, and Sasha gave me a look that should have killed me. "This is your fault," she sniffed.

"It is." I leaned up and gave her a quick kiss before standing with her in my arms.

Sasha squealed as I swept her up, then sighed and looped her arms around my neck. "If you want to be as aggressive as you were last night, you're going to be carrying me around all the time."

"Mm." I kissed her again, slow and sensual. "But, wasn't it worth it?"

Sasha's whole body turned pink with a blush, and I grinned. "Fine, okay," she said. "Maybe just every once in a while."

"Like when we find out we're mates," I suggested.

"Yes, that is a very special occasion. But I mean what I said. I would have chosen you anyway," Sasha replied.

I smiled. "That makes it even more of a special occasion."

Sasha looked down at the ground and sighed. "Luna Alison is going to kill you."

I followed her gaze and saw the very shredded dress laying there on the sand like some kind of sea ghost. "Probably. If she does, know I love you."

Sasha placed her hand against my cheek. "I love you, too."

After encouraging Sasha to pull my shirt more tightly around her to cover her more completely, we strode back up to the packhouse.

Luna Alison met us at the door and arched an eyebrow imperiously at me. "The dress?"

"Er..." I swallowed. "I think it might be salvageable?"

"Liar." Luna Alison heaved a deep breath. "Well, I'll send you the bill for it, then. It was such a lovely dress."

"Sorry," Sasha said meekly.

"I know you are. He's not," Luna Alison snorted.

"Yeah... well... better get us back up to our bedroom before we wake the whole household." I coughed.

Joy came down the stairs with George in tow. "Now you're worried about waking the household?" George chuckled.

"George. Let them be," Joy murmured.

"What?" Sasha asked.

Joy winced. "Open windows."

Sasha's jaw dropped. "Oh no."

"Oh yes," George replied. "Though perhaps I should say ohhhhhh, yesss...."

Joy thumped him in the chest with the back of her hand. "Sorry, Sasha. I just didn't think it'd be a good idea to go down to the beach and let you know we could hear you...."

"Oh, sweet mercies of the White Queen," Sasha moaned, burying her face in my shoulder.

George gave me a thumbs-up behind Joy's back.

I bit back a grin. "I'll get us upstairs. Don't worry, love."

"We're never coming out again," Sasha groaned.

"You'd better. Oliver's here with his Luna. He's waiting for you in Robbie's study," Luna Alison said.

"Best we go get cleaned up and dressed then," I replied, more serious now that the outside world and our "mission" was encroaching. I began carrying Sasha up the stairs.

"No shower s*x. He's already been waiting an hour," George called after us.

Sasha groaned again in embarrassment.

An hour and one quickie in the shower later, Sasha and I scuttled into Robbie's office. Sasha looked both very sexed up and very mortified as we stood against the back wall, pretending we'd always been there.

Robbie, Oliver, and Elaine, his Luna, all turned and looked at us.

"About time... and don't you look like a very happy man," my brother said, looking me up and down.

I slid my arm around Sasha's waist and held her to my side. "I am a very happy man."

"Haven't marked your mate yet?" Oliver observed.

"He wants flowers and a string quartet," Sasha mumbled, her cheeks flaming.

"Well, then it's going to be a while. Apparently whatever's going on here is pretty serious. Mother said Sasha is to be protected at all costs," Oliver relaid.

I hugged Sasha more tightly to my side. "That goes without saying. I'm not losing sight of her for a second."

"You just solidified the mate bond. I'd be very much surprised if we see you outside your cabin the entire journey," Oliver snorted.

"Does everyone know we had s*x on the beach?!" Sasha complained.

"Probably," Robbie, Oliver, and I said together.

"Cabin?" I asked while Sasha hid her face on my shoulder.

"Yes. We're taking my ship to the Winter Forest. Get packed. We're leaving as soon as possible," Oliver commanded.

"No quickie before coming down," Elaine said, shaking a finger.

"Sure thing," I responded, ushering Sasha back out of the room.

Two quickies and a small amount of packing later—I really had been hard on Sasha's wardrobe—Sasha and I descended the stairs, me holding our bags slung over one shoulder, and holding her hand with my free one.

Oliver raised an eyebrow at us. I tried to keep my game face, but Sasha was almost purple with embarrassment, so we were well and truly found out.

"Mhm," Elaine murmured.

"In our defense..." I began.

Sasha shook her head emphatically at me.

I shrugged, then held up two fingers when she wasn't looking.

Oliver chuckled and gave me a thumbs-up.

"What?" Sasha asked, twirling to look at me.

Elaine came over and patted her on the shoulder. "It's a guy thing. Don't worry about it."

Sasha eyed me suspiciously, but luckily for me, Brady and Phoebe came downstairs at that moment.

I patted Sasha on the top of her head. "It's okay. We can talk about something else. Right now, let's get on the ship."

Sasha sighed and nodded, and then we stepped outside the pack house together.

As we made our way back down to the docks, Sasha kept looking behind us, a regretful look on her face.

"I wish we could stay here forever," she finally whispered.

"How about we stop here on our way back? They're a growing city. They might need engineers," I suggested.

Sasha looked up at me and squeezed my hand. "Honestly, I'd give it serious consideration. If this quest ever ends."

"I'm telling you, if there's a third orb, you and me, we're done with this s**t," I growled, ushering her up the gangplank onto Oliver's ship, the Zephyr.

"Yeah," Sasha said absently. "You might be right about that."

I went and stashed our things in the cabin Elaine indicated, then walked back onto the deck, where Sasha was leaning against the rail.

She seemed so fragile, slim body rocking with the waves, long, black hair running riot in the breeze. I wondered how the Moon Goddess, in her infinite wisdom, had chosen Sasha. I wished she hadn't. I wished we could have a normal courtship, and deal with normal problems, such as what to do about her schooling and technically sleeping with, and later being mated to, a Royal Engineer of some note.

Okay, maybe not a lot of note these days, but Sasha's confidence in me really boosted my own. If someone as gifted as she was regarded me as talented as well, it was sweet balm for my wounded ego.

I approached her from behind and wrapped my arms around her, anchoring us both to the rail with my hands as she turned around and laid her head against my chest.

"This is serious, isn't it? Your mother thinks I'm in trouble," Sasha said quietly.

I kissed the top of her head. "My mother thinks we're in trouble. You're not going anywhere without me."

Sasha snuggled into me, wrapping her arms around my waist. We hadn't yet left the tropics, yet it felt like there was a chill in the air.

"I love you, Sasha baby," I whispered into her hair, feeling the mate bond growing stronger by the second. I knew the stronger the bond got, the harder it would be not to mark her. But I really did want to give her flowers and violins.

"I love you, too, Lucas," Sasha said, her words muffled by my shirt.

We just stood there on the deck, taking a quiet moment for ourselves. Goddess only knew when things were going to go spectacularly to hell again.

Because I had a terrible feeling they would.

Sasha

The wind settled down and the waves gently lapped against the hull of the ship as the sun set, making our little world darker and darker.

"I think we'd better turn in," Lucas murmured in my ear, kissing my neck.

I knew exactly where "turning in" was going to lead, and my whole body heated up at the knowledge.

"Lucas," I whispered, lifting my lips to his. "Be gentle. I'm sore."

"I will, Sasha baby. I'll be gentle." Lucas took his hands off the railing so he could take one of mine, then led us back toward our cabin.

As the door shut behind us and Lucas pushed his hands up under my shirt, I clung to him and let him play with my body with absolute trust.

He cupped my breasts and looked deep into my eyes, then captured my lips in a searing kiss while thumbing my n****s through my bra.

"Don't you dare ruin that bra, Lucas Black. It's my favorite, and one of the only ones I have left," I warned him, though at the same time I was sliding my hand into his pants.

"Mhm," Lucas agreed absently. He nibbled along my neck, and I knew he was going to make the mark he usually did. I was forever going to have a hickey on my neck; I just knew it.

I rubbed his hard d**k as he swelled in his pants. "Be nice to my clothes, Lucas, I mean it."

"Then you'd better take them off quick," Lucas hissed, pressing against my hand.

"Won't you be cold?" I teased, lowering his zipper.

"Not for long," Lucas growled.

I smiled and quickly stripped out of my clothes, just barely going fast enough for Lucas, who tried making a grab for my panties while I took off my bra.

"Naughty," I said, swatting his hand away. "And be nice to the panties—I only have so many pairs left!"

"Obviously they haven't met me yet, then," Lucas grinned, his erection standing out proudly in front of him.

I did a little shimmy as I pulled my panties down and off, and the hunger in Lucas's eyes was worth every bit of effort.

"Time's up," Lucas croaked and tackled me to the bed.

I laughed, then moaned as Lucas took my n****e in his mouth, nudging my legs apart. The touch of his fingers between my legs sparked fire all through me, and I rubbed against him with need.

"Do you want something?" Lucas inquired innocently.

"Lucas... please!" I gasped.

Lucas withdrew his fingers and replaced them with the head of his large c**k. We both groaned as he pushed into me.

"Wrap your legs--yeah, just like that, Sasha baby," Lucas grunted, yanking my hips to his so he was as deep as he could go.

I wrapped my legs around his waist and whimpered while he began thrusting, giving me exactly what I needed.

Lucas captured both my hands and held them above my head, threading our fingers together. His fiery eyes watched my breasts bob and sway as he rocked us both with his powerful movements.

When I came, he came with me, both of us crying out each other's names. Then, without removing his thick d**k, Lucas rolled us onto our sides, his arms going around me to hold me tight.

[Chapter 992: Misgivings](#)

Sasha

I snuggled into him, still panting, and kissed his shoulder.

Lucas feathered soft kisses over my hair. "Goddess, it only keeps getting better."

"Mhm," I agreed breathlessly.

"I love you, Sasha baby," Lucas whispered, and when I tipped my head up, he captured my lips in a passionate kiss.

We were going to make love again, now. I knew that, even before Lucas rolled me underneath him once more. I didn't know if we were ever going to get enough of each other.

After our third time, though, we both decided we needed to sleep. Lucas laid on his back and tucked me into his side, my cheek resting on his shoulder.

He was soon snoring, but I was thinking about the trickle of his satisfaction I could feel between my legs. Lucas hadn't pulled out once.

Was I going to be up to my eyeballs in babies soon?

I chewed my lip. I wasn't sure I wanted that... well, not now, anyway. Holding Lucas's baby in my arms was not a bad thought, but one that was unwelcome right now. I had things I still wanted to do. I wanted to complete my degree and become a Royal Engineer.

The quest we were on was already delaying that, and I had no idea how long I'd be derailed. But I did know I didn't think I wanted to be swollen with child by the time we got back to the Dark Realm.

I sighed and began scooting away from Lucas. I needed to think.

"Mmm... Sasha baby?" Lucas murmured, making a sleepy grab for my arm.

"I'm just going to walk around the deck a little bit," I said softly, giving him a soft kiss. "Don't worry. I'll be back soon. You rest."

"Hmmm... go with you?" Lucas asked.

I hesitated. Did I want Lucas to come with me? I needed some alone time with my thoughts. But I also didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"Actually, I was hoping to be alone for a bit," I said, trying to sound as gentle as possible.

Lucas blinked his sleepiness away. "That sounds ominous. Is everything okay, Sasha? Did I do something wrong?" he asked, his voice laced with concern.

"No, no, of course not, Lucas," I reassured him, placing a hand on his chest. "I just need to clear my head. You know how I get sometimes. Just... I want to be alone for a little bit, okay? I really will be back soon."

Lucas nodded his understanding and then captured my hand and kissed my wrist. "Don't make any big decisions without me, okay?"

"Okay," I promised, and I kissed him again before sliding out of bed and pulling on a robe.

I hoped Lucas would get back to sleep, but I also doubted he would. If he'd told me he "needed to think," I'd be awake like it was mid-afternoon. I really didn't want him to worry, but I needed this.

I slipped on a pair of flats and made my way up to the deck. There were lanterns going here and there to help the nighttime crew see, but they were hardly necessary. The moon was large and round in the sky. The stars shone like little licks of flame in the darkness.

Pulling the robe around me against the bracing wind, I went to the railing and stared down at the black sea, the moonlight reflecting on the crest of every wave.

The mate bond was more powerful with every passing second. All I wanted was for Lucas to hold me, touch me, make love to me. It blasted every other thought out of my head. Lucas was the new center of my universe.

It frightened me.

How was I going to tell Lucas I didn't want to be a mom and wife yet?

I put a hand on my lower belly, knowing the risks we kept taking in that department. I hoped I wasn't already pregnant.

I really did need to talk to him about condoms or pulling out or... something. We weren't exactly in a position for me to go get birth control, given all the traveling we were doing.

Maybe when we got to the Winter Forest I could visit a pharmacy and pick something up. But I wasn't going to do it behind Lucas's back. No, we needed to have a serious conversation.

Feet padded along the deck behind me.

"Lucas," I said, "we... we need to talk."

When there was no answer, I turned around and jumped.

"Hello, Sasha," the old man who'd invaded my dreams and visions said.

His eyes flashed red in the shadows, but I could see he was smiling. I felt my heart pounding, and my feet tried to back up as he took a step forward.

"Y-you," I gaped. I looked around, but somehow we were alone. There was not one crewmember to be seen.

"Yes, me. Somebody's been naughty," the man tsked.

I turned to run, only to find myself colliding right into him. How had he moved so fast?

I scurried backward and swallowed against the increasing fear that crawled up my throat. "How are you here? What do you... what do you want?" I stammered.

"I just don't think it was a good idea to let you mess around with the Slipstone as long as you have."

I gulped. "I don't have it right now."

"Oh, I know. It's with your mate," the man replied. "I'm perfectly fine with him having it. It's not as though he can do anything with it."

"I... what did I do wrong?" I asked.

The man shrugged. "If I told you that, you'd just keep screwing things up for me. No, I think it's time we bid you farewell, dream dancer."

"Bid... what are you going to do to me?" I squeaked.

"Oh, I've heard drowning isn't a bad way to go," the man said.

I looked behind me at the now ominous dark water. "Please, don't...."

The man raised his hands and the wind picked up.

I wasn't going to hang around to see what happened next. I turned from the rail and began running across the deck. "Lucas!" I cried. "Lucas, help!"

Rain fell like icy daggers from the sky, and the wind blew me back, even as my feet slid on the rough wood of the deck.

"He can't help you now, 'princess.'" The man chuckled, twisting his wrist so the wind became like a wall, pushing me back toward the railing.

I fought it, fought the storm, fought the wind. I conjured my own dream dancer powers and pushed back, trying to make the rain stop and the wind die down.

As I started to make a little progress, the man twisted his hands again, and it became a war of wills.

He may have wanted to drown me, but I didn't want to die. And I'd be damned if I went down without a fight....

The man growled and summoned more of his power, perhaps as much as he had, and brought the storm to a head, adding lightning to his repertoire.

I managed to dodge the crash of the lightning, feeling the sizzle against my back. It burned a hole in the deck. I glared at the man and conjured something of my own, hitting him with hail.

Whatever he was doing to keep the crew away, to keep us in our own little world, must have been very draining, because I was slowly gaining the upper hand. As the man was driven to his knees by my hail, I walked over to him, moving my own hands in a bid to blow him overboard.

"How do you like it?" I snapped, pushing both hands at him and conjuring the wind.

The man grimaced. "This is so undignified," he sighed.

Then, he disappeared....

I looked all around me, noting the storm had died down, but the crew still wasn't back. That must have meant he was still here, somewhere.

I sensed a presence behind me, but it was too late. As I whirled around, the man gave me a hard knock to the head with the heel of a dagger.

"So undignified," he repeated distastefully and, as I staggered, holding my head and watching the world spin, he grabbed me by the hair.

"Ngh," I groaned, seeing more stars than just the ones in the sky. "Let me go!" I tried twisting away, but my world swam and I had no choice but to let him drag me across the deck.

"I haven't had to do something this barbaric in eons," the man muttered, grabbing my upper arms and dragging me up over the railing.

I kned him in the balls.

The man grunted, cupping himself. "You are such a pain in the ass."

I struggled to get down from on top of the railing.

The man gave an evil smile and held up his hand.

I slipped on a sudden patch of ice as he disappeared again.

As I tumbled over the side of the ship, screaming my head off, I just barely saw a flash of Lucas running across the deck.

"Lucas!" I shouted for him as the inky black sea rushed toward me. The sharp salty sting of its embrace knocked the wind out of me, and I couldn't see a thing as I fought against the current of the ship's wake to make it back to the surface.

When the freezing air hit my skin, I hungrily sucked in several breaths.

I heard the boat's engines whirling and I felt myself being pulled further away into the open sea.

I flailed around, trying to swim my way back to the boat, but I didn't know which way to go. The seawater stung my eyes and impaired my vision, so I couldn't even see the outline of the ship.

I opened my mouth to cry out for help but was knocked back beneath the surface by a sudden wave... and then everything went black.

I opened my eyes with a sharp gasp. Everything around me was cold and dark and I felt myself floating in the air. Had I died?

"You are not dead, Sasha," a warm voice echoed around me.

I saw a sliver of light emerge from the darkness getting wider and brighter as I floated toward it. I tried to remain calm and in a flash, I found myself in a vast, silver landscape, with a large, glowing, silver orb hanging above me.

The Moon Goddess was standing in front of me, her silver hair flowing down her back like a waterfall. Her eyes were a deep blue and seemed to hold the entire universe within them.

"Welcome back, Sasha," the Moon Goddess said, her voice like the wind. "I have been expecting you."

"Expecting me?" I asked, confused. "Where am I and why am I here?"

[Chapter 993: After You](#)

"It's not like anything I've seen before. It's definitely dark magic, but there is something more to it. I can't quite say what it is. It took the energy I put out and threw it right back at me."

I took a step back, panting heavily as I looked at the storm. My mind raced as I tried to come up with another way to get through the barrier. I could feel Sasha's distress growing stronger, and my heart clenched at the thought of her being trapped in there alone.

"I don't know what's doing this, but I have to get Sasha out of there!" I cried desperately.

Brady nodded and tried simply walking up to the storm and pushing his hand inside. He winced and pulled it out quickly. His hand was completely frozen. "Well, good thing I'm a vampire," he muttered, grabbing a lantern and holding his hand over it.

"This is awful," Oliver sighed, starting to pace around the storm, looking for weaknesses.

I howled and let myself shift, my wolf already close to the surface as he was concerned for his mate.

"That might work," Oliver said.

Everyone watched as I gouged great claw marks in the wood of the deck, taking a running start at the storm. I launched myself into the air...

... and landed hard, in human form, half overboard on the opposite railing.

Oliver and Brady quickly ran over and pulled me back onto the deck.

"It's magic, alright," Oliver muttered. "It turned you back."

I howled again, but this time could not conjure my wolf. It was as though the storm was holding him at bay, though he snarled within me to get out.

"I don't know what to do, Sasha!" I yelled at the sky. "Tell me what to do!"

If she heard me, I couldn't tell, because only silence greeted my statement.

"We are supposed to protect her at all costs," Oliver said. He picked up an anchor and threw it at the storm.

The crew got the idea and started coming up with everything from barrels to boat hooks, attacking the storm as though it was a great behemoth of a sea monster.

I managed to catch my breath, then looked at the lanterns... the oil lanterns.

"Captain, forgive me, but I'm about to roast your ship a little," I apologized.

The captain caught my drift and broke open a barrel of kerosene himself.

He and the crew dumped a semicircle in front of the storm. Then everyone stood back as I threw a lantern at the kerosene, the lantern breaking and the kerosene lighting skyward.

The storm shivered, almost breaking, and I saw, briefly through the swirling rain, a man waving his hands at it.

Sasha was waving her hands as well, fighting him.

"Wish we could get in there," Brady said in frustration.

"Indeed." Oliver looked at the captain, and more kerosene was added to the extinguishing flames.

But we just couldn't keep the fire going. The power from the storm drained its oxygen and kept putting it out, and there was only so much kerosene on the ship.

"Sasha!" I tried to yell above the storm when it weakened again. She didn't so much as turn her head.

"f**k," I swore, not knowing what else to do.

Oliver came up to me and put a hand on my shoulder. "Enough, brother," he said quietly. "Enough. We are not strong enough to overcome this magic, no matter what else we try. We can only hope Sasha is."

I sagged to the deck and dropped my face into my hands. Sasha was in battle with some powerful, dark mage, and there was nothing I could do to help her... nothing.

As I sat there, feeling helpless, a sudden realization hit me. If I couldn't physically help Sasha, maybe I could find a way to reach her through our bond. I closed my eyes and focused all of my energy on her, on our connection. I could feel her fear and her determination, her intense concentration as she fought against the storm of dark magic.

Brady sat down next to me and we watched the storm and prayed, while Oliver spoke with the captain and the rest of the crew attended to the semicircle burn on the deck.

"Please," I begged the Moon Goddess. "Please let her be okay."

The minutes ticked by like hours. We all watched the storm, wondering when it would end.

As I sat on the deck, battered and beaten, a faint glimmer caught my eye. It was Sasha, her figure almost translucent as she fought the man. My hope surged as I realized the storm was weakening.

Her movements were swift and calculated, her hands glowing with otherworldly energy. Her face was set in a fierce determination, and I knew that she wouldn't give up without a fight.

The man, another dream dancer I presumed, was strong, though, and he fought back with equal ferocity. His powers were immense, and I could see the strain on Sasha's face as she struggled to hold him off. But she was holding her own, and I knew that the tide of the battle was slowly turning in her favor.

Finally, and abruptly, the typhoon stopped, the water dropping to the deck in a great sploosh that nearly swept half of us overboard.

I gripped the mast, then tripped over the wet deck to get to Sasha.

"Sasha!" I called, just as I saw her slip on top of the rail and tumble overboard.

"Lucas!" she screamed. "Lucas!"

Her cries tore at my heart, and I ran to the rail, shocked to find it icy.

"Dark magic," the captain grunted again. He and Oliver stopped me from jumping overboard.

"I have to save her!" I protested. "Let me go! LET ME GO!!!"

The captain pressed a life preserver into my hands. "Then go get her. But be smart about it."

I tied the life preserver to my waist and dove overboard.

The water ravaged me like icy claws, trying to suck me down into its darkness. But I had the life preserver, and I clung to it. "Sasha!" I yelled. "Sasha!"

An undertow kept sucking at my legs, and I tried to swim in ever widening circles, but kept being pulled under the surface, saved only by my tether to the life preserver.

"Sasha!" I choked, coughing water as I surfaced once more.

I had almost despaired of finding her when I saw something pale and white bobbing in the water.

With great effort, I heaved myself through the water, coming up beside an unconscious Sasha. Her head was bleeding.

"Sasha," I lamented, pulling her to me, my other arm wrapping tightly around the life preserver. I could feel her heartbeat against my cold skin and thanked the Moon Goddess for that, at least.

Sasha didn't respond.

I turned back toward the ship, treading water, but the ship kept getting further and further away. I realized they didn't know where we were, or where to look for us.

"HEY!!!" I yelled, trying to be heard above the waves. "HEY!!! OVER HERE!!!"

Either they didn't hear me or couldn't come to us, because the distance just kept getting wider and wider.

The undertow was also sucking at both of us, getting stronger. I desperately clung to Sasha, but eventually, I lost my strength, or the undertow became too powerful... or, more likely, both.

A large wave crashed over us, and Sasha was ripped from me, dragged bobbing across the sea.

I tried to go after her, paddling for all I was worth. The waves continued, and I continued to be dragged further and further away from my Sasha as they pulled me under and swirled me around.

Panic set in as I struggled to reach the surface, my lungs burning with the need for air. I fought against the pull and finally broke through to the surface.

I was alone

"Sasha!" I howled, in more pain than I could express at being torn from my mate.

"I love you, Sasha!" I called, tears stinging my eyes more brutally than the cold water that stung my body. "I love you. I love you!"

There was no answer in the night.

[Chapter 994: You Don't Have a Choice](#)

Sasha

I blinked my eyes open and yawned, rolling onto my knees. Sand clung to my clothes and dusted my skin.

Sand....

Rubbing my eyes, I looked around at the beach I was on. Waves lapped at my feet. My clothes were a little torn and I was a bit sore and achy, but it was nothing I couldn't handle.

I stretched my arms and rolled my shoulders back.

My hair was still wet and matted to my face. It was sticky and clingy, coated with salt. My clothes were a bit damp and chafed uncomfortably.

The sun was still rising. How long had I been out? The last thing I remembered fighting with that dark mage and then was being tossed around in the ocean. And... was it a dream, or was it a vision of the Moon Goddess?

I tried to remember what she said about me being chosen, but it was fading fast from my memory.

Sighing, I bowed my head. I needed to get back to the ship and find Lucas.

I stood up and brushed the sand off my arms and pants. It was coarse and gritty, leaving my skin a little rough and chapped.

Where was I?

I went to the edge of the water, looking out at the horizon. The ocean was still dark. The sun was low on the horizon but I couldn't tell if it was rising or setting. I had no idea which direction I was facing. The world was still cast in a heavy shadow.

The sea was much calmer now than it was when I went into it.

The baby hairs on the back of my neck prickled.

Swallowing hard, I turned toward the tree line behind me. My legs and knees felt stiff and tried to fight me as I turned.

At the edge of the tree line, a pack of wolves emerged. They were close to the beach, their front paws buried in the sand.

The pack stood perfectly still. They weren't growling at me and their eyes weren't narrowed, but they were muscular, large, and tense like rubber bands ready to snap.

I licked my lips, suddenly noticing how dry and cracked they were. My legs wobbled slightly. Maybe it would be better for me to run right back into the water.

"Be still." A strong, firm voice spoke from the trees.

A man appeared, walking between the wolves. He was tall and slender but I could see prominent muscles hidden beneath his clothing. As he walked between the wolves, he nodded to them and they backed off several steps.

The man walked right up to me and took my hand. He raised it to his lips and kissed my knuckles.

My jaw dropped open and I stared at him. Who was this guy? What was he doing?

I snatched my hand back like he'd bit me.

"Who are you?"

He smirked, his devilishly handsome features widening with his smile. His deep eyes brightened humorously as he took me in.

"My name is Michael. And I must ask, are you an angel of the Moon Goddess?"

"Uh...." I creased my brow and leaned away from him. Flashes of my vision with the Moon Goddess crossed my mind.

"We could sense your arrival on our shores because of the power you emanate. It is so very delicious, and feels much like the Moon Goddess."

I smiled tightly and rocked back on my heels, feeling my wolf urging me not to trust him. "I wasn't sent by the Moon Goddess. Actually, I was traveling by ship and there was a storm that knocked me overboard. I really need to get back to my ship."

Michael nodded. "Yes, of course. I can assist you. Come with me, and I will get you fully restored before sending you to your ship."

He held an arm out toward the wolves and the path through the trees.

I glanced back at the water. There were no ships anywhere in sight. It was early in the morning, or was it late in the evening?

"Don't worry, first thing in the morning, I will help you get back to your ship. Right now, you are soaking wet and have been tossed around by waves. You should eat, get fresh clothes, and rest," Michael coerced with another charming smile.

I nodded slowly, still unsure about going along with him.

"I have many ships at my command. I can send them out in every direction to find your ship."

His offer was very enticing and my stomach rumbled a little. I did need to eat, and a warm shower sounded great. Plus, my clothes were a little torn.

He seemed friendly enough but I still wasn't sure if I should trust him. Some stranger out of nowhere promising me everything I needed—it seemed a little suspicious.

Two of the wolves shuddered and I heard the popping sounds of their joints as they shifted back.

I felt my cheeks burn red as two naked men stood there with spears.

From the forest, other armed shifters emerged with swords and other weapons. It didn't seem like I had much of a choice. None of them were threatening toward me or anything. I still didn't want to argue with a bunch of muscley guys with weapons.

"Alright, thank you." I nodded to Michael.

He smiled again and guided me down the path, all his shifters and armed guards close behind us and around us.

The forest path went deeper and deeper, the trees getting larger, leaves thicker. They blocked out the light, but I didn't feel like the forest was dense. It felt light and tropical, with a cool breeze off the ocean. The leaves rustled lightly and I could hear crickets singing happily.

The path let out into a clearing. In the setting sun, I saw the beautiful gardens and several women and children shifters moving about on the grounds. There was a large packhouse at the far end of the clearing. It glinted golden in the setting sun.

There was a swimming pool, several fountains, and all kinds of recreation areas. This packhouse looked more like a resort.

I gaped as I continued down the solar light lined path. This was truly a hidden gem in the middle of nowhere.

Michael escorted me inside to a guest room. The entire packhouse was clean and polished, like a hotel or something.

"This room is prepared for a guest visit. You'll find everything you need inside—a connected bathroom with towels, soaps, hair brushes, and anything else you'd need to clean up. The dresser has clothes of all sizes. Choose whatever you like that most suits you."

"Th-thank you," I muttered, peeking into the room. The bed had a gossamer canopy around it and matching curtains to the private balcony. The balcony doors were open, letting fresh air into the room.

"I'll have a hot meal brought up in the next half hour. These men will be here, should you need anything at all."

Michael pointed to two of his guards. They had long, sharp swords at their sides and stood stiff, at the ready.

They weren't just there for my convenience. They were there as guards.

"You said I'd have whatever I needed, right?" I asked, meeting Michael's eyes. I gave him a warm, friendly smile.

"Yes, of course."

"Could I use a phone?"

For a fleeting moment, I saw the friendliness flicker out of his eyes. I blinked and the next second, he was smiling and his eyes were twinkling again.

"My apologies, but that is one request I cannot grant. Once you're cleaned up and have your meal, I would love the chance to speak with you. Would you grant me an audience?"

I bit my lip and glanced at the guards again.

"I suppose I owe you that much." I nodded.

Michael smiled again and bowed to me as he backed down the hall.

I knew I was a prisoner there, of sorts, but that didn't stop me from taking a warm shower. I lathered my hair and massaged my fingertips down to my scalp, washing away the salt and grime from the sea.

My thoughts drifted to Lucas. I hoped he was alive and okay. The sea had been treacherous, pulling us this way and that, dragging us under. I'd swallowed more than a few mouthfuls of water. But we'd been separated and he hadn't washed up on the same shore as me.

I sighed and shook my head in the water, rinsing all the suds out. A fresh towel awaited me in the bathroom.

My greatest hope was that if I survived the storm, Lucas would too. He had to.

I found some clothes in the dresser. They weren't quite my size—the pants were a little baggy and the shirt a bit tight, bunching up under my arms. It was better than getting back into the sandy, torn clothes of mine that still stank of the salty sea.

A knock on the door pulled me from my thoughts. My stomach growled again and I skipped to the door, excited for that meal I was promised.

Michael stood there with a covered tray in his hands.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Is that my meal?" I eyed the tray like a ravenous, wild dog. My stomach ached with hunger and I just wanted him to hand that steaming, mouth watering tray over and leave me to devour it in peace.

"While you're enjoying this specially made meal, I thought it would be the perfect opportunity for us to talk," he said, entering the room and setting the tray on a small table.

"Um... sure...."

I quickly pulled the lid off the tray and inhaled the delectable aroma of mashed potatoes, steamed peas, and a roast chicken breast. I picked up the knife and fork and plopped down in the chair, ready to devour.

"I found it a marvelous surprise that a woman of your... uniqueness arrived on my shores. It was a great gift to receive from the Moon Goddess."

I frowned and glanced sideways at Michael.

"I told you, the Moon Goddess didn't send me."

"Perhaps not directly, but your sudden appearance is certainly divine intervention."

I got the feeling that Michael wanted my help with something or wanted something from me. I swallowed the food in my mouth and sighed.

"Is there something I can help you with?"

Michael's eyes brightened and he clapped his hands together once.

"I was hoping you would ask. You see, I find myself in need of a Luna, and you, with your unique power, would be the perfect candidate." He looked at me hopefully.

I stared at him for a moment, feeling a rug had been pulled out from under me. That was not what I expected....

Who was this guy? We'd just met.

"Oh... well, the thing is, I have a mate already."

Just thinking about Lucas and wondering if he was all right made my heart flutter.

"Hmm." Michael stroked his chin. His eyes darkened and he spoke more to himself than to me. "Well, that can be dealt with."

An uneasy feeling coiled in my stomach. I realized just how dangerous of a situation I was in—lost, in some stranger's pack where everyone was loyal to Michael. No one knew where I was.

Slowly, I put my fork down.

"Michael, I really appreciate the offer but... I'm going to have to decline.

Michael scoffed. "That's going to be a problem, you see. You don't have a choice."

[Chapter 995: The Treacherous Sea](#)

Lucas

I couldn't believe it... I lost her. I lost Sasha in the waves. With powerful strokes, I pushed toward the nearest shore. She couldn't have gotten far, and she probably got washed up on the shore.

I ignored the waves as they crashed on my head, salt water pouring into my mouth. I spit it out and kept swimming.

The moment I felt sand beneath my hands, I jumped up and tore my clothes off like they were on fire. I shifted and stuck my nose in the air, searching for a familiar scent, searching for Sasha.

From what I could tell, this sandy beach was the only land in any direction for miles. She had to be here.

My wolf and I searched all over the beach. When I couldn't find a trace of her in the sand, I headed into the tropical forest.

The warm air and the heat from the sun dried my fur quickly. Grass tickled my legs and paws as I raced through the underbrush, searching for a hair, a scrap of clothing, anything.

When the sun finally set, my wolf and I were exhausted. I found a place to sleep. It was hard to give up the search but I needed to rest. Otherwise, I wouldn't be of any use to Sasha.

On the second day of searching, I finally caught her scent. Immediately, the matebond flared and my heart swelled in my chest. I could feel it pulling me toward her.

Her sweet scent and the connection between us got stronger the closer I got to her. It was like a lighthouse, guiding me through the fog and keeping me away from treacherous rocks, bringing me straight to her.

I heard some voices in the distance. Immediately, I tucked myself behind a tree and shifted back to human form. Straining my ears, I focused on who was talking and what was being said.

The forest was pretty quiet. Some insects buzzed, but I hadn't heard any birds at all and I hadn't seen any bigger animals.

The voices were the first sign of shifters I'd come across. They were getting further away, the wind carrying their words out of earshot.

"Damn," I muttered.

Shaking my head, I scouted the area. I didn't see any guards on duty but there was an obvious path through the forest. I followed them down the path, at a safe distance, sticking to the trees, bushes, and shadows.

The path opened up into a clearing. I didn't see any other shifters, but the hotel-like house at the other side of the clearing, and the scent, told me that this was a pack territory and packhouse.

I pressed myself against the hedge fence and listened for those voices. They were close by but I still couldn't hear them.

Crouching down in the bushes, I crawled closer, careful to avoid crunchy leaves and fallen sticks.

"Alpha wants us to keep searching. He says her mate can't be too far...."

I froze when the first words became clear.

They were talking about a woman and her mate. That could be Sasha....

"Plucked her right out of the ocean, like she was delivered by the Moon Goddess herself..." the second speaker's voice was gruffer and annoyed.

He didn't sound like he appreciated this new woman.

Hearing that she'd been pulled from the ocean made me certain that they were talking about Sasha.

Was she in the packhouse?

My wolf whined in my head, urging me toward the packhouse. He felt her presence there. I needed to find a way to get to her.

Scanning the area, I took in the gardens, the hedge fence, and what I could see of the packhouse. Soon, the sun would set and I could get closer to the packhouse and figure out their guard schedule and the best ways to get in and out. Right now, it was too risky.

When the guards spoke again, my ears perked up.

"Alpha Michael sent patrols out into the forest and over the beach. Their orders are to kill the dream dancer's mate when they capture him."

My heart clenched. That had to be Sasha.

I chuckled under my breath. They wanted to find me and kill me? Like I was going to let that happen.

Patiently, I waited for the sun to set. I clenched and unclenched my fists, fidgeting from side to side. It was the slowest sunset ever. I felt like days passed as I waited for darkness to cover the packhouse.

When the dark, shadowy fingers of night reached out and covered the landscape in a blanket of black, I made my move. I slipped through the hedge fence but stayed at their bases, crouched down. I used their shadows to help hide my movements.

Those guards had been very helpful. They told me without knowing it that the packhouse security was stretched thin because of the patrols in the forest and on the beach. It would be much easier to get to the packhouse.

Suddenly, a patrol of two guards appeared ahead of me, walking right in my direction. I looked for a way to get out of sight, but short of launching myself through the hedge fence, there was nowhere to hide. Causing a ruckus would draw too much attention.

"f**k!"

I glanced from side to side, thinking fast. I knew what to do.

I ruffled my hair, messing it up as much as possible, and I threw myself flat on the ground, moaning loudly.

"What was that?" one of the guards asked.

"It came from up ahead!"

Their footsteps pounded toward me and I lay still, groaning and writhing like I was in pain.

"Hey, you, what are you doing here?" the first guard asked, pointing a spear at me.

Slowly, I held my hands up in surrender.

"P-please... help me...."

I saw the look the guards exchanged. They lowered their weapons and one held a hand out to me.

"What happened to you?" he asked.

I grabbed his hand and he helped me up.

"There was a storm. My boat sank." I came up with a lie, thinking fast, and trying to use a believable story that wouldn't link me directly to Sasha.

If they found out I was her mate, they'd kill me on the spot.

"Man, that was a bad storm. Stay with him, I'll get some supplies." One of the guards ran off.

"You crawled all the way here from the beach?" the guard that stayed with me asked. He arched an eyebrow and I noted the suspicious look in his eye.

I nodded slowly and sighed heavily, sagging. I needed to make this look real.

"I wanted to get as far away from that wretched sea as possible. I collapsed here from exhaustion and... hunger...."

The second guard returned and gave me a fresh pair of clothes. He also handed me a protein bar.

"Thank you!" I snatched the bar from him and devoured it, selling the "starving" angle I was going for.

"Come with us. We have a few questions for you."

I nodded, mouth full, but when I took a step toward the packhouse, the guard shook his head.

"This way."

He motioned to a break in the hedge fence that led back into the woods.

I masked my surprise, swallowing the large chunk of food in my mouth. This wasn't what I'd expected. I needed to be on guard here.

"So, what kind of boat were you on?" the first guard asked.

"A little sailing rig." I shrugged and popped the remainder of the protein bar into my mouth.

"And you say a storm sank the ship. It must not have been very sturdy."

"It was a family boat. Been in the family for generations. The old girl wasn't built for a storm like that."

They walked me deeper into the woods, farther from the packhouse.

"And where were you sailing from?" the second guard asked.

I glanced at the guards. Neither of them looked at me. They didn't seem particularly interested in what I had to say.

"I came from my home up the coast."

"And where were you going?"

"Nowhere." I shrugged again. "Sometimes, it is nice to just go for a sail."

The guards walked me to another small clearing. It was far enough from the packhouse that I could barely feel the matebond anymore. There were other guards spaced around the clearing.

This was bad. It looked like the kind of place they took people for executions.

In the center of the field was a tall, wiry shifter with a big smile.

"Hello, I'm Alpha Michael. My guards tell me you were caught in the storm a few nights ago and your boat sank," he said, his grin widening creepily.

An uneasy feeling settled in my stomach. This guy was a snake, someone who couldn't be trusted.

"It's true. I came from Mirage and got lost in the storm."

"Mirage? Is that where you're trying to get back to?"

I nodded. "Yes."

"Well, that is easy enough. I will have one of my guards mark a map for you and you can make your way back. It isn't too far of a journey on foot." The Alpha snapped to one of his guards.

The guard promptly pulled out a map and began marking it with a pen.

"My thanks." I nodded again.

"So, you'll be on your way?"

I sighed and looked up at the night sky. Stars were blinking into view. "It's late. I haven't had a good meal or a good rest since the storm. Do you have a spare bed for the night?"

"Of course. How rude of me. You can shower, have a meal, and rest. However, you must leave first thing in the morning. We are not in a position to offer long-term assistance."

I noticed his smile tightened, a clear display of asserting control over his anger.

"My thanks."

Two guards escorted me back through the forest, but they didn't take me to the pack mansion. They brought me to an outbuilding where the matebond was still too weak. I needed to find out where Sasha was being kept.

As soon as I was alone, I grabbed some fresh clothes and went into the bathroom. I locked the door and turned the water on full force. I let the water run for a few minutes without getting into the shower.

Looking out the window, I made sure there were no guards below. I threw the window open and pulled myself onto the ledge. Carefully, I grabbed the rooftop and pulled myself up, my arm muscles tensing and bulging under my full weight.

From the roof, I could see several other buildings, including the pack mansion.

Smirking to myself, I hopped from roof to roof. The closer I got to the pack mansion, the more I felt Sasha. She had to be there.

The matebond guided me to the opposite side of the pack mansion roof. I looked down over the edge and saw several private balconies. Only one had closed doors. It had to be where Sasha was being kept, as a prisoner.

I hopped down on the balcony and saw Sasha throw open the window. My heart swelled and I smiled, seeing that she was safe and well dressed.

My smile faded when I noticed she wasn't alone. There were guards escorting her out of the room.

"No!" I tried the balcony door and snapped the lock. The room was empty when I got inside.

I slipped into the hallway, intent on following them.

I stopped dead when a dark figure stepped onto the path. I froze ready to fight.

"Well, well, you look like s**t," Oliver said. Relief flushed over me as I recognized his voice and he stepped into the moonlight.

[Chapter 996: You'll Be My Luna](#)

Sasha

"Hey, is anyone out there?" I knocked on the door, hoping a guard was nearby to hear.

The door yanked open and a large, beefy guard glared at me.

"Why are you making all this noise?" he snapped.

I took a step back. What was I doing? I couldn't let this guy intimidate me. Crossing my arms, I glared right back.

"I've been locked in here for days. Is this how your Alpha treats his guests!?"

The guard smirked and shook his head.

"You are feisty, aren't you? No wonder the Alpha likes you."

I rolled my eyes. "That doesn't answer my question."

"Well, as it turns out, the Alpha has asked that you join him for dinner. He's holding it in your honor."

"My honor? After keeping me locked in a room for days?"

"Don't act so surprised. He just wanted to make sure you weren't hurt or sick or anything. It was as much for your own protection as for the pack's."

"Hmph." I didn't buy it. "Well, you can tell your Alpha that I'm not hungry."

"Then you'll join him for the company." The guard handed me a large dress box. "Be ready in an hour."

Before I could protest, he shut the door and locked it again.

I set the box on the bed and opened it up. Gasping, I touched the stunning dress inside. It was nicer than any dress I'd ever seen before.

As much as I didn't want to accept a gift like this, I knew I didn't have a choice. Michael was determined to have dinner with me and if I refused, he might stop treating me like a "guest" and start treating me even more like a prisoner.

I put the dress on and examined my reflection in the bathroom mirror. The dress was a form-fitting, long ballgown. It was silvery-white satin with a scooped neckline that was lined with a string of pearls, and the belt at the waist was made of pearls and diamonds. It was a spaghetti-strap dress with an open back.

Inside the box, there was a pair of matching elbow-length gloves that were encircled by a diamond and pearl string around the opening.

I couldn't deny how gorgeous the dress was.

Exactly an hour later, the bedroom door opened again and the guard from earlier held his hand out to me.

"Ready to go?"

I turned my nose up. "I don't really have a choice, do I?" I was cooperating, but I didn't want him to think I was happy about it.

I followed the guard into the hall where another guard waited for me. As the door to my room closed behind me, I thought I heard a sound, like metal snapping.

When I turned around, one of the guards grabbed my arm.

"Let's go. We can't keep the Alpha waiting."

He tugged me down the hall, and I forgot all about the weird sound.

The guards brought me downstairs to a large dining hall.

There was a long, rectangular table taking up the hall but there were only two place settings at the table, at the far end. One setting was at the head of the table and the other was on the adjacent side.

A massive chandelier hung down from the ceiling with hundreds of little candles flickering, casting reflections of light on the crystal gems all over the massive light fixture.

There was a pair of taller candles on the table between the place settings and a vase of large red roses.

The guards brought me to one of the chairs.

"Sit," one demanded.

I noticed that Michael wasn't there. "Where's the Alpha?"

"The Alpha will join you shortly."

The guards left me alone. I sat in the chair, alone at the table. The dining hall itself was a gorgeous room. There were large, curved windows spaced out against the walls. In between the windows were beautiful, old paintings.

Red, velvet curtains hung on the windows, pulled back by brass hooks.

I imagined many extravagant balls thrown in this room.

Several minutes passed and Alpha Michael still hadn't joined me.

Was this some kind of game or joke? He invites me to dinner and then stands me up?

I wasn't too bothered by that, but it wasn't like I could just stand up and get out of here. There were several doors leading into the dining hall and I had a feeling they were all guarded.

At least, this meal would let me get a better feel for Michael. I hardly spent any time with him but I needed to figure out how to convince him to let me go. First, I needed to get to know him a little more so I had a better idea of how to convince him.

The dining hall double doors opened and Michael strode in, a bright smile on his face.

"My apologies, dear. I had an unforeseen situation I needed to attend to."

He swept down the full length of the table and stood beside me. Before I could react, he grabbed my hand and kissed the back of it.

"I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long."

I glanced at the candles, long drips of wax hanging off of them. They'd been freshly lit when I arrived.

"Nothing's wrong, I hope," I said as Michael took his seat.

He grinned and shook his head. "Nothing you need to worry about."

Michael motioned behind him.

A small door in the wall opened and several servants came in.

I watched with wide eyes as one brought a bottle of wine, pouring us each a glass. A second servant poured us ice water, and a third servant brought our bowls of soup for us.

After serving us, the servants with the drinks stood against the walls, their pitchers at the ready to refill our glasses.

"I think you'll really enjoy this—a fresh seafood chowder, made from scallops and mussels we harvested ourselves, right from the ocean. The broth has a bit of a zip to it, so I hope you like it spicy."

He winked and popped a spoonful into his mouth.

The soup smelled delicious and I hadn't eaten all day. I ate silently, enjoying the white wine that was paired with the seafood, as well.

The next course came out. It was a pasta dish with fresh shredded parmesan and a delicious butter, herb sauce.

A new kind of wine was introduced for our pasta dish.

The meal was beyond extravagant. I couldn't figure out why Michael had put all this together for me.

"You know, I can't thank you enough for your hospitality and the kindness you've shown me. Have you heard anything from your ships? Have they found my boat?"

Michael blinked at me and I caught the slight falter in his smile.

"They have not reported back yet. I fear the storm may have done more damage to your ship than previously thought."

I looked down and nodded. As much as I didn't want to believe it, it was possible. The storm had been bad enough to throw me overboard. The entire boat could have suffered.

"You'll let me know when you hear anything?" I lifted my head, giving him a hopeful look.

"Of course," Michael assured. "How are you enjoying your meal?"

I looked down at the perfectly cooked, sauce smothered filet mignon, asparagus, and roasted potatoes.

We were given red wine with the steak.

"Delicious." I nodded. "Umm... Michael, do you think it would be possible to send a message to my family? I'd like to let them know I'm okay and alive. They're probably worried sick."

Michael pursed his lips. "I can make that happen. If you write the letter and tell me where to deliver it, I will see that it gets there."

"Thank you."

I reached for my wine. It was too soon to ask him to let me go. I just wanted to see how he would react to my requests. Eventually, I'd learn how to negotiate with him.

For dessert, the servants brought us another red wine, a dessert wine. They paired it with a delectable looking chocolate mousse topped with fresh strawberries and raspberries.

"A toast." Michael lifted his glass.

Playing along, I lifted my glass, too.

"Welcome to the pack, Sasha." He clinked his glass to mine and took a sip.

"Oh... um—" I set my glass down without drinking.

I saw Michael's frown and the deep look of disappointment in his eyes.

"You must know that you belong here. Otherwise, the Moon Goddess wouldn't send you to us."

"I don't think it was the Moon Goddess who sent me," I muttered.

I thought back to the night on the boat deck. That old man had been there and caused the storm and made me go overboard, not the Moon Goddess.

"Perhaps that is a point of perspective. You see, we've heard about the powers of dream dancers, and it is something our pack has coveted for a long time."

"Why?" I creased my brow.

Michael shrugged off my question.

"Because of your powers, you will make an excellent Luna to stand beside me."

My jaw dropped open and my eyes nearly popped out of my head. What was this guy talking about? He thought I was going to be his Luna?

That wasn't possible. I already had a mate. My life existed far away from this secluded pack with Lucas and my family. I didn't even know him and he didn't know me.

"You don't know me or anything about me. How can you think I'll make a good Luna?" I bowed my head and worried my hands in my lap.

If this guy was that delusional, I was in a lot more trouble than I originally thought.

"Come now, don't be modest. Dream dancers are very special and rare. You would not be gifted such a power if you weren't born to lead. You were born to be a Luna, and the Moon Goddess delivered you right to me."

Michael laughed and held his arms out to the sides.

I clenched my fists, frustration coiling in my stomach.

This guy was never going to let me go. He decided I belonged to him and that was all he cared about. He wasn't going to give me a choice.

Suddenly, panic fluttered in my heart. No one knew where I was. No one was looking for me. I was stuck in this territory with a psycho Alpha who thought I belonged to him.

"You look pale, my dear. Is something the matter?"

I gritted my teeth to hold back my fear. "I'm just surprised. This wasn't what I expected."

Michael chuckled. "Don't worry, I'm not the only one that will get something out of this. When I say you'll be my Luna, I mean that fully. I will mate with you and complete that bond."

I felt the blood drain from my face and I kept my head down. It didn't sound like I'd have a choice on that, either.

"And together, we will breed many children. Strong, powerful children that are superior to all the rest!"

[Chapter 997: That's Enough](#)

Sasha

I blinked at Michael feeling that it wasn't possible that I heard him right.

"Um... you want me to be your Luna? But I already have a mate."

Michael shrugged casually. "It is easy enough to take care of a mate. You might grieve him for a time but in the end, you'll see it is best. You'll want me to take you once you don't have him."

"What!?" I gasped.

Was Michael seriously talking about killing Lucas just to get me for himself? A sick feeling filled my stomach. This guy was a certifiable whack job....

"You can't do that. I'll never agree to anything you want if you hurt him."

"Oh, such an empty head on that pretty body. You're fortunate that it is your power and not your intelligence I'm after. Otherwise, you'd come up lacking."

I clenched my fists under the table, anger boiling inside of me. Silently, I dared him to insult me again.

"If you think that's the way to my heart—"

"I'm not after your heart. I'm after your power. Therefore, it doesn't matter what you want or what you have. I will take what I want from you. I thought you would have figured that out by now."

I frowned, my heart sinking slightly. In this situation, I was powerless. There was no way I could stand against Michael and his entire pack.

"No!" I cried.

Anger raged inside of me, boiling my blood and I felt a cold darkness invade my mind. It burst out of me in a wave and the table shot across the room. It tipped over, scattering food and plates everywhere, before slamming into the far wall.

Wine glasses shattered on the stone floor, all the plates were smashed.

The servants standing against the wall yelped and cowered at the display of force.

What was that? Had I caused that? I looked at my hands curiously. I didn't even touch the table, right?

"What...." I shook my head.

"Well, well, it looks like you have a little more up your sleeve than you've been letting on."

"No... I mean, that wasn't me."

Michael arched an eyebrow. He looked at the table and the ruined meal smeared across the floor.

All I could do was shake my head over and over again.

When Michael turned to me again, I saw the fear in his eyes. There was no mistaking it, even though he masked his features well.

"Aren't you just full of surprises?" His eyes widened slightly when he spoke. The confidence in his voice faltered.

Yes, he was definitely afraid. He probably hadn't realized that my power was more than just something to possess and covet. My power could be used as a weapon, as a defense.

Honestly, I hadn't known that, either. My mind reeled in a million directions.

I'd never done anything like shooting a table across a room before. I stared at the table again as servants ran in and started cleaning it up. Their hands shook and I could see just how scared and nervous they were.

Were they scared of me?

I covered my mouth with my hands. I'd really done that. My power was strong, and I didn't even know how to use it. This time it was a table, but what if next time it was a person?

My eyes lingered on the red smears of meat that had been crushed by the table. It almost looked like blood.

"No matter. I will tame you and get what I want."

"That's not going to happen!"

A new voice entered the dining hall. I whipped around and saw a cloaked figure enter. He had an arm raised like he was going to sweep us all away with one gesture.

My stomach twisted in knots. He was the one who was on the boat deck with me. He caused the storm that pushed me overboard.

"Who the hell are you?" Michael sneered. "How did you get past my security?"

"You may call me The Immortal," he shrugged casually. "Your security was no match for me. As for your plans with this one, I cannot allow it. Her power has grown too strong and she must be contained."

"Contained?" I squeaked. I shrank in my chair.

Man, I wished that big table was still in front of me. I wouldn't feel so vulnerable or exposed.

I saw Michael's eyes brighten with curiosity. He looked at me and back at The Immortal.

"Who are you? Why should I take orders from you?"

"I'm no one to be trifled with. I have powers you can't even imagine, and your security here is no good against me. Don't try anything or you will find out the hard way that I'm not bluffing."

Michael clamped his mouth closed. I got the sense he'd been about to call the bluff until The Immortal mentioned it.

Apparently, that was enough to convince Michael that this guy was serious.

The Immortal sighed and turned to me. He bowed his head like it was heavy with regrets or sorrows.

"There was a time when I helped your mother suppress your powers, your darkness. I thought that if it was hidden from you, it wouldn't be a danger."

My mind flashed back to the time when my mother held me down so he could pry my tooth out. Is that why she'd done it, to keep me from my dark powers? And now he was here to contain me because of them?

"You...!"

I pointed fiercely at him, all words escaping me. From the moment I saw him, I felt a dark sense of familiarity. He'd been there during one of the most traumatic moments of my life.

"Unfortunately, since she now has her wolf, she's growing into her power. It is becoming stronger and more dangerous. The only way to save us all is to end her!"

I wrapped my arms around myself, pushing the memories away from that day.

He was talking to Michael like I wasn't even there. From the look I saw on Michael's face, he was about a second away from obeying this guy and killing me.

"There is darkness growing around her and inside her. Eventually, her powers will become a danger to everything and everyone. It has to end here and now before she can become a destroyer."

I creased my brow, his words sinking into my head. Was it true? Was I dangerous?

I bit my lip and looked at the table I'd thrown across the room in anger. Any emotional outburst could cause that.

Maybe if I could learn to control it...

"You can't come to my home and make demands."

Alpha Michael's voice pulled me from my thoughts. He grabbed my arm and ripped me from the chair.

My shoulder popped and I groaned, getting to my feet to ease the tension.

"She belongs to me, as do her powers. If they are as dangerous as you say, I could use that to my advantage. The one who controls her will be all powerful to either protect others or destroy them."

My heart sank. Was I just a weapon now, a way for Michael to get more power? I saw a flash of an image of what that would look like. I didn't know if it was a vision of the future or my own imagination.

I saw Michael keeping me in chains, torturing me and starving me until I complied. He'd take me to another pack, offer my power to protect them. If they joined him, they'd be safe. If they refused, he'd use my power to obliterate them.

A shudder ran through me and I shook the images out of my head. I'd never let myself be used like that.

"And I will breed more children with her powers—an army of pure destruction at my back and call!"

Michael threw his head back, cackling like a crazy man, his eyes wild and bloodshot.

"Kill this intruder!" He ordered, pointing at The Immortal.

Michael's guards sprang to action. They jumped into the center of the room, swarming around The Immortal.

I watched, wide eyed with terror, as he used his powers to defend himself, sending the guards flying across the room. They hit the walls with such force, they broke bones and opened gashes.

Blood spurted everywhere, and the groans and yelps of pain filled my ears.

My pulse raced in my ears as I watched so many shifters getting hurt as they rushed in again and again, trying to take out The Immortal.

I looked down at my hands. Was this power of mine truly dark and dangerous? I could sense something dark and cold inside me shifting, growing. Ever since I got my wolf, I felt different.

Was that my power waking up? I had more questions than answers.

I wondered if I should even believe The Immortal. He talked about memories that I had, but I still didn't understand the context. I was too young at the time to remember everything.

Why should I believe him? He could be just as crazy as Michael, seeking to use me for his own good.

My heart clenched in my chest. I missed Lucas. He was the only one who didn't want to use me or exploit me. Where was he?

"Ahh. Ahh!"

One of the soldiers was thrown against the nearest wall, a sickening crunch echoed through the sounds of fighting and he crumpled to the floor. I saw his fingers twitch, but the light quickly left his eyes.

"Michael, stop this! Your men are dying needlessly." I pleaded.

"We are defending our home from an enemy. I won't stop!"

"An enemy that is far more powerful than you and your men. They'll be slaughtered."

Michael sneered. "Then they've done their duty. It is about time you and I make our escape."

"I'm not going anywhere with you!" I pushed away from him and ran to the center of the room.

Maybe my power was dark, but I didn't have to use it that way. I wasn't going to let a m*****e happen here. These people didn't need to die or get hurt.

I raised my arm into the air and focused on the same feeling I had when I threw the table across the room.

Closing my eyes, I concentrated on it, imagining the force I'd need to stop the fighting without hurting anyone.

I took a deep breath, focusing on my thoughts and feelings. Inside, I felt the swell of my power rising like the tides.

I snapped my eyes open and threw my arms down. My power erupted from inside of me, shooting out in all directions.

Like a strong wind, it knocked everyone back—Michael, his guards, the servants, and even The Immortal all flew in opposite directions around the dining hall.

They landed on their backs with grunts and groans but I knew they weren't mortally wounded. I made sure to control the force I used.

"That's enough!" I shouted.

Silence filled the room as everyone stared at me with shock and awe. My power had never been this strong before. I felt the weight of it inside me, pulsing like a heartbeat.

It was a part of me, but I didn't have to let it control me.

[Chapter 998; Leave This Place](#)

Lucas

"Where the hell have you been?" I grumbled.

"After you and Sasha got knocked overboard, I hopped on another boat and came to track you down," said Oliver. "Sorry that it took so long."

"How long?"

"Two days."

"Ugh. It seems like a lot longer than that."

"I brought a bunch of my best men here to get you. We have a ship anchored nearby and are ready to go. Brady and Phoebe are with them. Where is Sasha?"

I glanced around the open area we were in. It was too exposed.

Grabbing Oliver's arm, I pulled him into Sasha's room so we wouldn't get spotted by a pack member.

"She's with the Alpha of this pack, I think. It is my best guess. But I don't know what he wants from her. I think she's a prisoner."

Oliver nodded. "My intel suggests the same. Though, it doesn't seem like the Alpha intends to hurt her."

I saw his eyes flick around the room.

"These are rather nice accommodations."

I scoffed. "Yeah, you should have seen where he stuck me."

Oliver chuckled. "Look, my men are standing by. The best thing to do is regroup with them. Sasha isn't in any immediate danger. We can wait on the edges of the territory until everyone is asleep and get her out unnoticed."

I nodded. It didn't sit well with me.

Sasha had been all dressed up in a fancy dress when I saw the guards come for her. What would Alpha Michael want with her? Why did he need to get her all dressed up for it?

My wolf snarled in my head, urging me to start busting down doors to find her.

I pushed the urges away. There was a part of me that wanted to ignore Oliver's suggestion and go get Sasha now, even if just to see what that scheming, grimy creep wanted with my Sasha.

Oliver and I joined the rest of his men on the grounds. He ordered them to spread out and stake out the mansion and the surrounding territory. He sent several of them to keep the pathway to the ship clear. Once we got Sasha, we wanted to make a quick, clean exit.

I hunkered down in some bushes with Oliver. We could see without being seen.

It was only about seven at night. We had a long wait before everyone was asleep.

"You know, I'm guessing that even in an isolated place like this, Alpha Michael has night patrols."

"Of course, he does. I've got that covered. My men are watching closely and reporting their patterns back to me. We already know where Sasha is being held at night. It'll be easy." Oliver blew off my concerns.

I wasn't as optimistic as him. Something uneasy stirred in my stomach. I felt like assuming this would be easy would get us all in trouble.

It sounded like Oliver planned for any problem, but I knew there were always other variables.

My heart lifted when I saw some of the lights in the pack house going out. It meant people were winding down and going to bed.

Soon, Sasha, very soon... I'd have her back in my arms where she belonged.

Movement on the path to the mansion caught my eye.

"Uhh... Oliver...."

"I see it, I see it."

His eyes glazed over and I could tell he was talking to his pack through the mindlink.

"It's a man in a cloak of some kind. He has some kind of powerful aura around him." Oliver squinted his eyes and pressed his fingers to his temple like he was trying to listen harder to the mind-link.

"Damn!"

"What? Who is it?"

"No one good," I growled.

"Don't go flying off the handle just yet," Oliver warned. "An unexpected guest could be a distraction if we need it."

"We don't know if he is unexpected."

Oliver shrugged. "Then we just need to keep an eye out. I've got plenty of them scattered around the territory. Trust me, brother, I'm all over this."

I waved him off and watched the cloaked figure as he approached the mansion. No one else seemed to notice him. One guard stopped him at the front door and then quickly backed off.

It looked like the guard was afraid or something.

The man went inside and disappeared.

More waiting.

I began plucking at blades of grass, my mind sifting through different situations that Sasha was dealing with.

Alpha Michael had purposefully kept us apart, or tried to. Did he know that we were mates? Was he trying to keep us separated? What did that mean?

My wolf growled suddenly as a thought occurred to me.

Was this all an elaborate scheme to seduce her?

I gritted my teeth together, a muscle in my jaw twitching. If he even laid a hand on her, I wouldn't stop to ask questions. I'd just rip him apart.

I slammed my fist down on the ground.

"Dude, what are you doing?" Oliver glanced over at me.

"Oh... just letting my imagination get the better of—"

Oliver held a hand up to silence me. "I'm getting a report. It looks like something is happening inside, in the dining room. The Alpha, Sasha, and that cloaked guy are there."

I balled my hands into fists. "What is it, what's happening?"

"Um...."

I looked around the bushes and saw all the security guards running into the mansion.

"We can't wait Oliver. Something bad is happening."

CRASH!

I sprang to my feet and sprinted toward the mansion, ignoring Oliver as he called out to me. If security was heading in there and things were crashing around, I wasn't leaving Sasha to fend for herself and get hurt. I didn't care if Oliver backed me up or not.

I raced through the front corridor, my shoes skidding on the waxed floor as I turned toward the dining hall. At least, I thought it was the dining hall. More security guards were running in that direction.

My heart hammered in my chest and I silently pleaded with Sasha to hold on for me.

When I got to the entrance of the dining hall, I saw the mess.

The table was tossed aside and the cloaked man was near the center of the room. All of Michael's guards attacked him at once and he easily tossed them aside with powerful magic.

I stopped dead, my heart seizing up when I saw Michael gripping Sasha's arm.

For the moment, she was out of harm's way. I couldn't get to her with all the guards flying around. They were like living projectiles in the air.

Quickly, I scanned the room. There had to be a way to get to Sasha and escape with all the chaos.

Oliver caught up to me, panting.

"I've got our retreat covered. Get Sasha and let's go."

"That's kind of the problem," I growled. I ducked and pulled Oliver down just in time to avoid getting hit by a security guard who got blasted through the air.

When I looked up again, I saw Sasha walking to the center of the room.

"What are you doing?" I spoke aloud.

"Lucas, you have to stop her. We need to get out of here and she's getting right in the middle of it."

"I know, I know."

Sasha raised her arms above her head. There was something still about her. She wasn't panicked or fearful. Her movements were deliberate and precise.

I held a hand up to Oliver.

"Wait... something's happening."

Sasha threw her arms down and a blast wave exploded from her. All the guards, servants, and everyone else in the room were swept up in her power, knocked back all around the room.

The shockwave stopped short of striking me and Oliver.

I let out a breath I didn't even know I was holding.

"Now's our chance. Get her and let's get the hell out of here."

I didn't reply to Oliver. I raced into the room and grabbed Sasha's hand before the others recovered.

She turned her eyes to me. They were blank and vacant like she was looking straight through me, not seeing me at all.

"Sasha?"

She didn't respond. In her eyes, I saw something moving, creeping, just under the surface. It was dark and eerie.

I swallowed hard, resisting the urge to pull away from her. Instead, I pulled her close and hugged her, kissing her quickly on the lips.

"Come on, Sasha, we have to get out of here while we have a chance."

She blinked several times and looked around at the people scattered across the floor.

"Did I do that...?"

"You did. We don't have time to talk about it, though. Oliver is waiting for us. It is time to get away from this horrible place."

I cupped her cheeks and kept her focus on me. Her eyes still seemed distant and lost. I leaned in and kissed her again.

This time, she responded, kissing me back. That was good.

"Ready to get out of here?" I grabbed her hand and squeezed.

She sighed and I saw her shoulders sag. It looked like a huge weight lifted from her.

"Yes, please. I'm ready to go."

I slipped my arm around her shoulders and tucked her close to my body. There was no way I was letting her out of my sight now. Bad things always happened when I did.

We rushed to a side door where Oliver's men were waiting for us. I glanced at the unconscious bodies again. Some of them were already recovering and getting their wits back.

"Head straight down this path to the beach. My men are guarding the path and we will cover your retreat," Oliver explained.

"Thank you." I clasped Oliver's hand and nodded to him.

"What's family for, eh?"

I smirked and headed down the designated path. Sasha seemed weak as we walked. She lay all her weight against me, her steps lagging slightly.

"Are you alright?" I murmured against her hair.

"Fine... just... tired."

Her voice was distant and far away. I imagined that the power she used took a lot out of her.

We made it to the beach, where a longboat was waiting. Two of Oliver's men rowed us out to the ship anchored nearby.

I got Sasha settled in a cabin, with a comfortable change of clothes, where she could rest. While Oliver and the rest of his men loaded back on the ship, I watched Sasha sleeping. She succumbed to fatigue quickly.

That was probably for the best.

I rejoined Oliver on deck once the ship was in motion.

"How is she?"

"Exhausted, but resting." I stood beside Oliver and we looked out over the ship's wake.

The lights from the pack mansion faded slowly as we moved away from that isolated pack. I was glad to put it to our rudder.

"We'll reach Winter Forest in just a few days. Mom is waiting for you."

"Of course...."

[Chapter 999: All This Way for Nothing](#)

Sasha

I avoided Lucas's suggestion that I was pregnant. It wasn't that I didn't think it was possible. I just had other things that were more important to focus on right now, like getting the second orb. *Sasha*

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"I've walked around this thing a dozen times. We've searched every nook and cranny for a way in."

"I've walked around this thing a dozen times. We've searched every nook and cranny for a way in."

I glanced over my shoulder at Lucas. His head bowed, he looked so sensitive and vulnerable like he was admitting defeat. My heart swelled and I wanted to take him in my arms and comfort him.

"What if I told you that you missed a spot?" I asked.

Lucas looked up and arched an eyebrow at me.

"Over here." I beckoned him with a nod and walked up to the temple well.

Underneath the well, there was a large crevasse in the ground. It was probably made from a big rockslide in the past, but the opening was clear. I could smell fresh air coming from the crevasse, which meant that it was open-ended, probably inside the temple.

"It's just a big crack in the ground."

"Smell the air, silly. It's fresh. It doesn't smell earthy at all. This crevasse opens up somewhere else, and I'm betting it is inside the temple."

Lucas narrowed his eyes at me. "You can't know that. We don't know what the condition of the passageway is like. It could be blocked."

"Sure, but it is probably easier to clear than these monster boulders stacked around the temple."

"I'm not too keen on you attempting to throw yourself down another hole in the ground," Lucas growled.

"We have to get into the temple, Lucas. This is the best bet. If it's a dead end or something, then we'll come back up and keep looking."

Lucas begrudgingly agreed. We called the others and got some lanterns before heading underground.

The crevasse was large enough to walk through, standing straight up. The lanterns showed that the walls were solid and the entire tunnel was a strong structure.

"Based on the angle of these curves, I'm willing to bet this tunnel is sturdier than the entire temple." I ran my hand along the curved wall.

"You know, you can leave work behind sometimes." Lucus shook his head endearingly at me.

The passage wasn't very long but the opening on the other side was incredibly narrow. I poked my head through and looked around quickly.

"Yes, it opens up into the temple. But I don't think we can squeeze through." I crammed myself into the opening and got one arm through before I couldn't push my body anymore. The crack was too tight.

Lucus pulled me out. "We've got tools to widen it."

Lucus's men came forward with pick axes. While they carefully chipped away at the rock to widen the opening, Lucus made me sit and have another snack.

Now that I was out of the tent and moving around, I felt a lot better and a lot stronger, but he was so cute when he worried about me.

I glanced up at him as I munched on my trail mix.

His deep eyes were focused on the work, but I saw the tenseness in the muscles in his neck and arms. He was ready to jump to my defense at any moment, for any reason.

I sighed happily and smiled to myself.

"We're in!"

I jumped up and followed the others through the opening into the temple.

Gasping, I froze and spun my head around on my neck. Inside, the temple was huge. It didn't look so massive from the outside with all those boulders around.

A few pebbles fell from a pile of rocks above, clattering to the tile floor.

"Everyone, be careful. One wrong move and all those rocks could tumble down on us," Lucus warned.

We went through the main entrance of the temple. Lucus commented that it looked almost identical to the one under the library.

"I've walked around this thing a dozen times. We've searched every nook and cranny for a way in."

I saw several paintings and small statues of the White Queen and Moon Goddess.

I saw several paintings and small statues of the White Queen and Moon Goddess.

My heart hammered in my chest and the same déjà vu I had from earlier returned. I approached one of the statues and stared into her marble eyes.

"What are you trying to tell me?" I whispered.

"Seshe, come this way. If I'm right, there should be an identical White Queen statue to the one at the other temple. That's where I found the orb."

I pulled myself away from the marble statue and followed Lucus and the others.

We went down a level into the catacombs.

I saw something etched on the walls.

"Can I have the lantern?"

One of Cere's guides came over and held the lantern up to the wall.

There were all kinds of symbols and pictographs carved and painted into the stone. I traced them with my pointer finger.

"This is all so... familiar," I muttered.

"Like a dream?" Lucas echoed my thoughts from the surface.

I nodded. "Yeah. But I don't know. It's more than a dream. I feel like I've actually been here before. I feel like I've seen these symbols and touched them just like this."

I ran my finger over the symbol again.

"Can you read them?" he asked.

"No." I sighed and shook my head. "It's like a tickle in the back of my mind. I know there is a memory there, but I can't access it."

"The statue isn't much further. We can grab the orb and worry about deciphering those symbols later."

We went through the catacombs, Lucas leading us to the massive statue of the White Queen deep in the bowels of the catacombs.

She stood there, her arm outstretched. Everything about her was just as Lucas had described her to me. The carving of the statue was beyond exquisite.

It was like standing at the feet of the Goddess.

I gasped and instinctively fell to one knee, bowing to her essence.

She commanded so much respect and love, yet there was a sweet tenderness on her face as well.

"Incredible... this statue is... identical to the one from the Dark Realm," Lucas mumbled.

I studied every detail and wondered how it was possible to create two statues that were nearly identical like that.

"All except for one thing." I stood up and pointed to her open palm. "There's no orb."

"That can't be!" Lucas ran to the statue's hand and looked. He frowned and creased his brow.

"I can't believe it is missing! We came all this way for nothing." My strength evaporated suddenly, and I plopped down on the ground.

It was too much....

We'd gone through too much to get here, and all for nothing.

"Weit, the lest orb fell off the stetue. It could heve been knocked loose by e rock slide." Luces went behind the stetue end started looking around.

I sighed end shook my heed, e sinking feeling filling me up. He could look ell he wanted, but I just knew it wesn't there.

"It hes to be here somewhere. Cere seid no one hes been inside for decedes. Where could it heve gone?" Luces's remblings sounded so fer ewey.

I sew him out of the corner of my eye, seerching high end low around the stetue. He ordered the others to look around too.

The guides end his men split up end started seerching the cetecombs. I heerd them talking to eech other but I couldn't heer whet they were seyng.

I wropped my erms around myself end shook my heed.

"All this wey for nothing," I whispered.

[Chapter 1000: Caught in the Storm](#)

Sasha

After leaving the village, we encountered dangerous terrain. It was back to rock climbing. I was a little shaky when it came to that, but Lucas double and triple-checked my harness and the ropes. *Sasha*

After leaving the village, we encountered dangerous terrain. It was back to rock climbing. I was a little shaky when it came to that, but Lucas double and triple-checked my harness and the ropes.

I tightened my arms around Lucas's neck.

I tightened my erms around Luces's neck.

In seconds, we were soeked to the bone. Our werm clothing turned to soggy, heevy weights clinging to us end slowing us down. I kept my eyes closed es much es possible, but when I did open them, I could berely see enything in front of me.

I couldn't imegine how Luces wes eble to see through it ell.

He never stopped. One step et e time, he trudged through the storm. Over the hemmering frozen drops, I heerd squelching sounds.

The mountein ground wes turning to mud. His hends slipped on my soggy clothing but he clung tighter to me.

I shivered, my lips quivered uncontrollebly es the cold senk into my bones. Silently, I hoped we'd get there soon. How much further could it be?

"Heng on Seshe, we're elmost there."

Luces's voice sounded so fer ewey. I could berely tell if I wes clinging to him enymore or if it wes e tree or e rock.

My body felt like it was freezing in this position. I didn't think I'd ever be able to bend my legs or arms any differently.

Finally, in the distance, I saw a soft glow. It looked like one of the camping lights we had for the tents.

It didn't take long for more of the lights to come into view. Then I heard the sounds of frozen rain on tent flaps and whipping fabric.

"We're here."

Lucas brought me to our tent and set me down. I rushed inside, stumbling and shivering.

Lucas came in after me. He immediately stripped out of his clothes.

"What are you doing?" I gasped, rubbing my arms to warm myself up.

"Body heat is the fastest way to warm up. See, your lips are turning blue."

He started pulling at my clothes. My numb fingers could barely grasp the zippers and buttons.

When we were completely naked, we slid under the extra blankets on the camping cot and snuggled close together.

I kept shivering, my teeth chattering, my skin covered in gooseflesh.

Lucas rubbed his hands up and down my arms, helping me warm up. My fingers ached with how pruned and wrinkly they were.

I was starting to warm up a little.

Outside, the winds howled and raged. Our tent whipped around and I worried it would fly right off the mountain side.

My eyelids drooped as fatigue took me over. I pressed my forehead to Lucas's chest, happy to be in his arms, even under these circumstances.

I fell asleep quickly.

Sunlight reflecting through the tent woke me. Yawning, I sat up and stretched. The blankets fell away and I realized I was still naked.

Quickly, I grabbed the blankets and pulled them back up just as Lucas entered the tent.

"Ahh, you're awake."

"How did everyone else weather the storm?"

"They're fine—a little damp, but no serious injuries and all the gear survived."

I nodded. "That's good. What do the mountains look like this morning?"

"Frozen puddles, some stiff mud. It should be easy enough to traverse. The guides have special boots for us that will help."

I quickly got dressed and put on the new boots Lucas brought me. Even though my clothes and shoes were dry, I still felt a chill deep in my bones.

There was a tickle in the back of my throat, too. My head felt like it was swimming, but I shrugged it off. It was probably just from the adrenaline from the storm.

"Lucas, the next time the guides try to warn you about taking a break, listen!"

He chuckled. "Noted. I'll pay more attention this time. According to the guides, we should be there by this afternoon. If you're ready, we can have breakfast and pack up."

I tightened my arms around Lucas's neck.

In seconds, we were soaked to the bone. Our warm clothing turned to soggy, heavy weights clinging to us and slowing us down. I kept my eyes closed as much as possible, but when I did open them, I could barely see anything in front of me.

Back on the trail, everyone was moving slowly today.

Back on the trail, everyone was moving slowly today.

By the time we stopped for lunch, I was sniffing slightly.

"Seshe, are you okay? You sound like you're coming down with something."

"I'm fine. It's just a lingering chill from the storm. I'll be fine." I brushed off his concerns.

When we packed up lunch, I felt myself shivering again like I had a fever. I ignored it for the time being. We were so close to the Old Temple and I didn't want Lucas to worry about me more.

"We've only got a couple more miles," Cere's guide told us.

The rocky terrain was rough. There were sharp, jagged stones in our way and rubble from landslides. We had to scramble and climb over the rocks.

Those last few miles felt like an eternity....

It was barely four in the afternoon when we finally made it over the last pile of landslide rubble and the mountains opened into a valley.

"There it is!" Lucas cheered. "The Old Temple."

In the center of the valley, the Old Temple, partially crumbled, was surrounded by sharp, pointed rocks and icicles, giving it an eerie look.

Relief swept through me. No, that wasn't relief, it was nausea.

I doubled over and spilled the contents of my stomach all over the rocks.

"Seshe!" Lucas came to me immediately. "What is it, what's wrong?"

"I don't feel so well." The chills ran through me more violently and I thought I might get sick again.

"Set up camp here. We'll get to the temple when Seshe is feeling better," Lucas ordered.

He got me back to bed and covered me with extra blankets.

Cere had given the guides an emergency medical kit, and Luca found something to help me chill and fever.

He touched my forehead and frowned.

"You're burning up. If you weren't feeling well, you should have told me."

I sighed and my teeth chattered again. "I didn't want to slow us down more."

Luca gave me the medicine. It helped the shivers and made my fever go away, but I still felt sick to my stomach.

The guides brought me some soothing soup. Luca spoon fed me a few mouthfuls before my stomach turned again.

"That smells... awful," I groaned, pushing at the bowl.

"It's just chicken noodle, nothing out of the ordinary."

"Taste it. I think it's gone bad."

Luca popped a spoonful in his mouth. "Seshe, it tastes fine. There's nothing wrong with the soup."

"I can't stomach it. I'm so dizzy and nauseous."

After a restless night of tossing and turning, my fever and chills kept returning and Luca had to keep giving me Cere's medicine. Thankfully, I woke up feeling a little better.

Luca sat next to the cot, his head down. He held my hand in his.

"Luca, wake up." I shook his hand slightly. "I'm feeling better."

Luca looked up and smiled. "You look a lot better. How about your fever and chills?"

"Gone."

"Okay, we need to get some food and water into you. You're probably pretty dehydrated."

At the mention of food, my stomach soured. I flopped back on the bed and clutched my stomach.

"I don't think I can eat."

"Seshe, what's wrong? Your fever is gone. Why are you still nauseous?"

"I don't know...."

I glanced at Luca. He had a thoughtful look in his eyes as he stroked his chin.

"Do you think... you're pregnant?"