

Chapter 55

Celeste

I'd been alive for centuries. Millenia even. Yet, it never got any easier to talk about Phoebus. But I had to make this right; I had to fix the mistake I'd made with Jennine. I could not allow the same thing to happen a second time.

"You have a brother?" Violet gasped.

"I do. Even deity's' have family." I smirked.

"Whoa." She took a step back. "So then, you must have Mother?"

"My Mother's name is Thia. My Father is, I suppose in simple terms, what you would call the Universe."

I didn't receive a reply, I assumed she was processing this information. So, I continued.

"I cannot remember a time when my brother and I got along. And I have been alive a long time. Where I prefer to quiet and peace of moonlight, Phoebus prefers to rage and burn like the sun. I content myself with caring for others, but he enjoys playing games. Horrible, horrible games." I let my eyes close, memories flashing to the beat of my words.

"The first creation of mine was werefoxes. Did you know that?"

"No."

"Stunning creatures. I cherished them so much; I went on to create more children. Bears, wolves. I should have stopped at the witches." I sighed.

"But I created vampires too. I suppose some could argue I myself was greedy. Phoebus certainly thought so. I had so many children to adore and love, and they loved me as well. I use to come cloaked to bonfires where

they would dance and sing my name to the Heavens. Perhaps that was also sinful." I mused out loud.

"My brother would frequent the mortal world, 'visiting' my creations. He would plant all manner of heinous thoughts in their minds, thriving on the chaos he caused. It wasn't until I created the Hybrids that I saw how truly evil he was."

Even with my eyes closed, I could sense the tension from Violet. Both her and Hala listened to my story intently, hanging on my every word. Their heartbeats were in sync, accelerated from the anticipation.

"Your histories will never show how amazing the Hybrids were Violet. That knowledge has been wiped from any memory, every parchment. Once, they were harmonious, living in peace with other species. That all ended with Arthimeus." His name burned on the way out. The memory was so clear, even now. I forgot about the girl and her wolf, forgot about the forest. I was reliving my worst mistake now, my chest tightening with every breath.

"He was a vampire wolf Hybrid. One day, he led a group of hunters into the forest. He was so strong, and quick. Agile. A true leader. Phoebus was also in those woods though. Never in the hundreds of years of my life would I have guessed what he had planned. His anger and envy towards me drove him to confront Arthimeus that day. He gave him a 'gift' of his own, one borne by hate and blood. He turned my child into a monster, right under my eyes. When I next decided to look in on the village, I was horrified to see it had been razed to the ground. Women lay amongst the rubble, holding their offspring in eternal embrace. Men had had their hearts torn from their bodies; limbs strewn about."

My head fell forward, a desperate cry of anguish falling from my lips.

"I found Arthimeus. Eventually. He was in a cave, his teeth sunk into the neck of his Father, drinking his blood to sustain himself. I seeped for the loss of so many precious souls. So many innocent souls..." I drew my

knees up, resting my chin on them. "When next I saw my brother, he gloated at having appropriated one of my creations, shaping them into his own. He vowed that the love I had enjoyed would be snuffed out, like a candle in the wind. And so, I watched as my once peaceful children terrorized each other. Murdering one another. It is true the Hybrids fancied themselves above all other species, but that was only planted by Phoebus in the first place. As if the nightmare could not get any worse, the vampires turned against me, joining the Hybrids."

"Now I understand why they did. You see Violet, I live by the rules set in place for me, even when I don't want to. I cannot interfere with the freewill of my children. The consequences would be disastrous. I watched helplessly as one after another vampire was slaughtered, until finally, they lost hope in me. So, they did what they thought they had to do in order to survive."

"What did you do?" Violet asked. She was leaned against my rock, her eyes misty and wide. I reached one hand out to gently caress her cheek.

"I had a daughter." I told her.

Hala whined under me, the sound ending in a broken cry.

"I don't understand." She placed her hand over mine.

"Just as I bestow gifts on you, my mother bestowed a gift to me. I bore a daughter, a true daughter, of my own flesh and blood. She was my greatest love. I raised her out of sight of the carnage below, and the watchful eyes of my brother. I made her strong, but gentle. Loving, but unyielding. A princess, and a warrior. Like anyone of you, I gave her a gift. A black wolf, marked by me and me alone. Against my own heart, when she ready, I sent her down to the mortal world. I watched over her, always. She held true to me, fighting amongst allies and ending the war."

"Arthimeus had passed already, leaving his cruel mission to his son. And then to his son after him. By the time my daughter was ready to leave me,

generations had passed on Earth. The grandson was the last Hybrid to exist, until they no longer existed at all." I laughed mirthlessly. "Maybe I was wrong. Maybe what I did next is my biggest mistake."

Violet's hand trembled over mine; her breath shaky.

"I could not find it in myself to forgive the vampires. Their betrayal of me was of their own doing, not by any means of Phoebus. It was petty of me, foolish even. In my anger, I took the gift that Phoebus had given Arthimeus, giving it to them. I watched in silence for centuries as they drank the lifeblood of others to survive. When they could not, they weakened, suffered. I truly felt it was a fair punishment." My hand slipped away from Violet, falling to my side loosely. "Until I realized I was no better than my cruel, merciless brother. But it was too late; Once a gift is given, no matter how cruel it is, it cannot be taken away."

My vicious tale came to end, the memories subsiding, but leaving behind the pain. Always pain. It was as much a part of me as the love I showed to my children. Never ending, never fading, a constant reminder of what and who I was, and what I had done. Beside me, Violet sank to her knees, weeping quietly. Hala echoed her cries, despair wafting in the air around the three of us. But I knew I could keep them here much longer. She needed to hear it all before I sent her back.

"Do you understand now?" I asked her.

She nodded, wiping her face. "You are not evil Celeste." She raised her head. "You made a mistake."

"One of the many repercussions of watching over mortals. They make frequent mistakes." I smiled humorlessly. "Sooner or later, I was bound to make a few too."

"Phoebus is talking to Jennine, isn't he?"

I nodded once.

"Who am I to you?"

"You are my child, but not my daughter. I will never have another true daughter." I blinked tears away. "But you are special Violet. You are the key to the war that hasn't happened yet."

"My pack is barely surviving, even now, with Jasper and I at the head. How can I prevent a war?" She cried desperately.

"I cannot tell you what I do not know. I don't know my brother's plans. I wish I did. All I know is that he has Jennine's ear, and sooner or later, he will show himself to her, if he hasn't already."

Violet jumped to her feet. Hala echoed her human's movement, ears flattening and a snarl ripping between her teeth.

"You have no information for me at all!" She shouted at me. "You saddled me with this responsibility, when I am literally the worst person for the job!"

Her eyes held an amount of fear that broke my heart. My feet slipped off the rock, hovering inches above the ground. I stood before her, unknowingly just as afraid as she was.

"There is no time to be wasted doubting yourself." I let a tiny bit of my aura fill my words. It had the desired effect; Violet quieted, staring at me with awe. "You are the one I trust with this Violet. You and those closest to you. I have faith you will not fail!"

"What if we do?" She whimpered.

"That is not an option. Phoebus must be stopped! Jennine is simply his puppet this time. But don't underestimate her either. He is no longer playing games; Failure this time means the end of all of us."

"I can't do it Celeste." She stepped further away from me, her head shaking side to side. "You have to choose another. I'm not strong enough."

"Doubting yourself, again!" My voice filled the forest, the branches of the trees bowing to my authority. Hala fell to her knees, her head to the

ground. Violet, on the other hand, stood straight and tall, a look of steel in her eyes. My heart and aura settled as I watched her withstand the power of a Goddess. My expression softened, my feet moving towards her. "You are your mothers' daughter. So much stronger than you realize. You will succeed, just as she did."

I cupped her cheeks, leaning in.

"What was your daughter's name?" She asked quietly. I froze.

"Elsa."

"What happened to her?"

My lips touched Violet's forehead gently. I whispered against her skin, "This you must remember child; She died."

There was the familiar shimmer of the air. When I opened my eyes, I was alone in the forest.