

## S. Lord 954

### Chapter 954 Slow but Steady

It had been one week since Alice woke up. There were no aftereffects of the Blood Incursion, and Alice's soul regenerated nicely. Since she received four Soultraits to hold her soul in place, Alice wasn't even in pain. Training was a little bit difficult because it was impossible for her to access her Soultrait Symbols while she was healing, and she couldn't leave the Origin Expanse either. Alice needed Michael's SoulStar Fragments to recuperate. Otherwise...she would have already left.

"I want to visit my parents. I want to tell them that I'm fine and talk to them about everything that has happened," Alice had announced one day. Michael had been about to tell her there was no way she could leave but kept his mouth shut until he found the right words to respond.

"It might take a while to fix your Soul. You might not be in pain right now, but that is because I've been constantly infusing SoulStar Fragments into your soul. I...won't hold you back from returning to your family if that's what you want, but I hope you can postpone your return," Michael said after giving his words some thought.

"I could leave the Origin Expanse, return to my family, and come back every 24 hours to get my daily dose of SoulStar Fragments," Alice Zenovia responded without hesitation.

Michael nodded slowly, and a myriad of thoughts flashed through his mind: "That works... Yeah, that would work."

'Calm down. She will not leave you forever. Obviously, Alice wants to see her family again. No matter how much I dislike this idea, I must accept it. She might hate me if I say no now.'

He smiled, but the sadness in his eyes was apparent. Alice winced and took a step closer to him. She raised her hand and was about to touch his cheeks when she froze. Her hand pulled back, and her old, icy expression replaced her surprised features.

Michael and Alice hadn't talked much throughout the last week, but their situation improved slightly. Alice asked only a few questions and never mentioned their relationship with a single word, but she opened up a little. Her questions focused more on who she was and what had happened in the Tritan Alliance when she was away – Kaleb had already told her everything, but Alice asked him nonetheless. She even asked about Olivia Blaze, Oliver Zeus, and so on. Alice's questions were simple initially, but the last few questions were tougher. Michael was forced to tell Alice that the Blaze household had been in the Sacred Desert and that the Sacred Desert was now in his control. He didn't want to explain the situation in-depth, but Alice was adamant. Thus, Michael told her about his war with the Blaze family and that he and his people killed everyone. He didn't go into detail but reassured that the subjects had been spared.

When he told Alice about Olivia and her actions – upon Alice's request – she asked him to see his memories for the first time. She wanted to see what Olivia had done.

Michael didn't know if Alice would be fine seeing everything, but she reassured him that she wanted to see everything. That was what Michael did. He showed her what Olivia did through his memories, including their chats through the Expanse Prism. Their chats, Michael's thoughts and worries, and how Michael looked at Alice were clearly shown in his memories. He showed her everything she wanted to see. Nothing more, nothing less.

After seeing the memories, Alice was confused for a while and stopped asking questions. Still, they talked occasionally. Alice was cold, but her attitude toward him changed. She was different than she used to be. 'Why is she timid all of a sudden? Is she afraid of discovering more about our relationship...or how close we were in the past? Or is it something else?' Michael wondered while holding eye contact with Alice.

[She does look timid behind the farce of confidence, but I think you're mistaken. I think she is afraid of not meeting your expectations. You are still in love with the old Alice, and the woman standing before you doesn't think of herself as the same old Alice you remember. She is afraid to fall in love with you because you still love the same old Alice...but what if she cannot become the woman she used to be? What if she is different, and your love for her vanishes? After all, you love an Alice with different memories than the one standing before you.] Nôv(el)B\\jnn

Michael's lips parted to respond something to Jormungandr aloud, but he realized the World Serpent might not be wrong. What would happen if Alice fell in love with him again...but he clung to the same old Alice? He wanted his Alice back and never even thought about the possibility of Alice being 'different' than she used to be.

The torrent of thoughts tortured Michael, and he only regained his senses when he heard Alice's voice.

"Are you okay? If you don't want me to leave, I can wait a little. Either way, I still need to find a way to travel smoothly to the Tritan Alliance."

"I..." Michael sighed inwardly. He was strong enough to fight Divine Lifeforms and had no problems clashing with the God Curses inside him, but he couldn't gather the courage to speak to Alice. He was afraid that every word he said would hurt her. And that was something he didn't want to do. He didn't want to hurt her. "I can help you to travel to the Tritan Alliance. It's not difficult if you have the right connections and devices," Michael smiled, swallowing his sorrow and frustration but still speaking some of his deepest thoughts aloud. "You will come back, right?"

Alice's lips twitched once, but she nodded, "I don't think I can leave this place forever without feeling like I'm doing something wrong. It doesn't feel right to leave you behind. I...don't want to do that."

Michael swallowed hard. Hearing this might not mean much to others, but it meant much to Michael. Alice didn't want to leave him! He smiled, genuinely this time, and jumped into action. Michael explained to Alice how to use the bridges at the Nest and went into the finest details regarding using the Compass Relic. Alice nodded slowly, her expression impossibly hard to read. Michael chose to go on and beyond to help Alice. After all, she didn't want to leave him. All she wanted was to see her parents. Then, she would come back.

That was perfectly fine. It might help Michael a lot. After all, Katharina Zenovia liked him.

Alice listened patiently but tilted her head at the end of his explanation.

"This is going to be complicated. I don't know where I will have to travel once I leave the bridge," Alice said after a moment of hesitation. She looked at him intently as if hinting at something, but Michael didn't notice anything.

"That won't be a problem. The Compass Relic wi--.."

"I don't think it will work," Alice intercepted.

She clears her throat, her heart beating wildly.

"How about you come with me?"