

Chapter 106

Eziah

The dust settles a bit, helping me sift through the carnage before me. Kaif is nowhere in sight. Lorelei is half buried beneath the rubble, her skull crushed by fallen debris, her body mangled. Dominic is getting to his feet while Casen lies motionless on the floor. I move toward him, and Dominic helps me, rushing toward him and pulling away the debris. Casen groans, and I let out a breath of relief.

“Where is Kaif?” I murmur, peering around.

“No idea,” Dominic says, moving toward the rubble. “Kaif?!” he calls out, and I hear the tremor in his voice. Grabbing Casen he stands, his bones snapping and realigning as Zyan heals him.

“Where is Casey?” he asks, his eyes wide with fear.

“I haven't seen her down here,” I tell him, my voice shuddering.

“You two get out! Get Temperance out and find Casey. Eziah, find your mother for me,” Dominic says as he starts pulling rubble away. I swallow, knowing that means he is not expecting to find Kaif in a good way.

I climb the stairs with Casen, Temperance in my arms. “Kaif!” Dominic calls, and I hear a muffled cough. Stopping, I glance over my shoulder to see Dominic ripping through the rock, his shadows escaping him as he tosses rock and concrete aside, revealing Kaif. I suck in a breath.

“I can't leave him like that!” I scream, setting Temperance on the ground. Casen moves to help me unbury Kaif with Dominic.

“Casen, get my mother!” I call out to him and he rushes off. Kaif is bleeding profusely, a thin steel rod piercing through his chest from the concrete. I gasp at the sight, and Dominic's hands clamp down on his chest. I move more concrete and rock, trying to find his legs.

“He's not dea...d” Kaif rasps out, causing me to stop in horror. I look at Dominic, who is instantly grabbed from the ground and flung against the wall. The roar that leaves Satish charges the air with electricity. Kaif grunts trying to pull himself free while I pivot and duck. Satish's claws rake down my face, my blood sprays the ground and steals my vision as I hit the ground.

“Time to see what you Gods are made of!” Satish snarls, kicking me in the face. My head whips back, and I hear Kaif's roar, just at the same time I see Satish stalk toward me.

“Malachi shift!” I urge my wolf as I get to my hands and knees to see Temperance stir. I gasp, only to have the air forced from my lungs when he kicks me into the wall of rock and rubble. Satish is almost completely healed, blood coats him but doesn't pour as he snarls, grabbing a piece of rebar, snapping it out of the concrete as he moves toward me. Yet, I am stunned, frozen in place when I see Temperance's eyes, purple like two amethysts. The growl that leaves her makes Satish pause and he turns slowly.

“Sis, I'm so glad you survived just in time to watch me kill your mate!” he spits, turning back to me. Yet the moment he turns, I lift my hands, blinding him temporarily with light. He clutches his face at the same time I see Temperance shift, only she doesn't look like Nova or Shadow.

Her fur glows an intense violet, and her eyes shine like the sparkling gems they resemble. I'm in awe. She's magnificent, terrifying and beautiful all at once. Satish hesitates, but Temperance doesn't. She launches herself at him with a ferocity that leaves me breathless.

Satish lunges at Temperance, now in her stunning ultraviolet wolf form, she deftly evades him. Her claws, glowing in the same color as her eyes, rake across his skin, leaving glowing purple wounds. Her teeth sink into him, injecting a glowing poison that writhes through his veins. Satish, clawing at his chest, turns to attack, but Kaif intervenes, tackling him with such force that they both get pinned to the wall by a rebar jutting from Kaif's chest. Kaif, undeterred by his own pain, faces Satish with an unyielding gaze.

“You think you can play God?!” Kaif sneers, pulling himself off the rebar, blood oozing from his wound. “Gods don't die!” he adds, staggering back.

Temperance, unfazed by her brother's monstrous form, steps closer before lunging at his throat. The sound of his neck snapping under her powerful jaws fills the air, blood gushing out as Satish's lifeless body slumps to the ground, the cruel grin still frozen into his wolf form.

As Temperance shifts back into her human form, I rush to her, wrapping my arms around her. Kaif groans nearby, struggling with his injuries. I turn to see Dominic, who's as shocked as I am at Temperance's transformation.

“Well, that was a surprise! An ultraviolet wolf,” Dominic muses.

“No. She said she's a Liora,” I correct him, confused.

Dominic laughs lightly. “I know what an ultraviolet wolf is. Celeste was rumored to be trying to turn herself into one,” he explains.

My eyes dart to Kaif as I help him up with Dominic's help. “The Gemini twins!” Kaif and I say in unison, realization dawning on us.

“So a Liora Gemini?” I ask, still trying to piece it together.

Dominic clarifies, “No, Liora is her name. It makes sense now why I thought I knew her from the Shadow realm. It was never Temperance's shadow that visited it, it was Liora. She wasn't a twin in the traditional sense. One twin sacrificed for the other, their souls merged. Now, they are

one and the same, Gemini, only ultra. One is the human vessel, the other is the wolf.”

I'm stunned by the revelation. “Where are Shadow and Nova?!” I ask, concern etched on my face.

“You're looking at them whole,” Dominic answers, and relief washes over me.

I accidentally drop Kaif, and he lands with a thud.

“Oh shit!” I mutter, rushing to help him up. Kaif's scowl is both painful and defiant.

“Don't even think about kissing me!” he snarls, half-joking.

“I'd rather die!” he adds as his father, and I help him to his feet.

“Now, where is my son?!” Kaif asks, his voice laced with concern.

“Kat's got him with Ezra,” Dominic informs us, bringing to mind my father, who was bitten.

“Calm Eziah, your mother knows better than to sacrifice a mate bond,” Dominic reassures me, easing the frantic beat of my heart.

Chapter 107

Katya

The air is thick with the scent of death, the ground having turned to mud beneath our feet, a heavy silence punctuated by labored breaths and the occasional groan of pain from the were-bears. Ezra stirs beside me, my thumbs caressing the side of his face. I thought I lost him, that I was too late by the time Mateo got him to me. His eyes flutter open, tears streaking my face in relief. The Reaper Wolves lie motionless around us, their threat extinguished, while Sage leans wearily against Andrei, who managed to revive her.

“I wonder where Lucas took Casey?” Sage's voice is barely a whisper, her gaze distant and troubled as she stares around dazed.

Lucas, still unconscious, is cradled in Mateo's arms, his dark hair falling across his brow and his face pale. Lucas looks battered and bruised, splotchy patches of black and yellow cover his body like a rash, but is okay. Mateo gives him a little jostle and suddenly, he gasps, jolting awake, his small hands clutching at Mateo's shirt, eyes wide with fear and confusion.

“Dad?!” he murmurs.

“Right here kiddo,” Kaif growls, and we all turn, looking toward the mine that is crumbling behind them as they walk out. Kaif settles beside me with Eziah's assistance.

I lean toward him, seeing the wound bleeding in his chest, his lungs wheezing with each ragged breath he takes. His dismissal of help is both stubborn and endearing.

“No! You're not healing me; I can heal myself. It's just a punctured lung,” he rasps.

I eye him skeptically, knowing his pride often masks his pain.

“Casen?!” Eziah asks, peering around, and I watch him subtly do a head count.

“Here!” Casen's voice is strained as he sits up, having collapsed in a heap after helping us out here. Eziah steps forward, helping Temperance the last few steps before embracing her tightly.

“You're okay!” he breathes into her hair before stepping back and surveying her closely. Temperance nods, yet I can feel energy rippling around her. Something fundamental has changed within her. Yet I do not question, too exhausted both mentally and physically.

Dominic clears his throat, and I turn my attention before cringing at what he's holding. He tosses a severed head at Chief, who is drenched in blood. Chief catches it with a grimace.

“I wasn't digging out the rest of her, but better safe than sorry,” Dominic states matter-of-factly. “Chomp away!” he tells Chief, who glares at the severed head of Lorelei.

Suddenly, Lucas's small voice cuts through, “What happened?!” I turn my attention to Lucas, who is curled protectively in Mateo's arms, and I lean toward him. Kaif then gently reaches out with one arm, settling it around Lucas's shoulders as he gives a few comforting pats to his back before dragging him out of Mateo's lap into his. Lucas leans into his father, his voice soft, filled with exhaustion and confusion.

“Where's Casey?” Lucas's question hangs heavy in the air and a sinking feeling settles in my chest

Sage pulls out of Andrei's arms and looks at him, her expression a mix of confusion and fear. “You got her out?!” she says, but Lucas shakes his head.

“I couldn't find her!” he whispers before looking at me.

My gaze shifts to the old collapsing mine, and my heart nearly stops in my chest at his words. Casen is already sprinting towards it when I force open the mindlink with Casey, despite the pain I know it will bring her, since she hasn't received her wolf yet.

She whimpers the moment I force myself into her head.

“Casey baby, where are you?” I ask, my voice a mix of urgency and dread.

“With Daddy” she replies, and my heart skips a beat.

“And where is Daddy?” I press on, looking at her father running toward the mine tunnels. Everyone is on their feet, rushing toward the mining warehouses.

“We are on the bridge. Aunty Kat, I'm scared! It's cold here, and Daddy is being strange!” Casey's sob echoes in my mind.

“Which bridge, sweetie? What does it look like?” I urge.

“The one on the way to the mines, near Pop's pack!” she answers, her voice trembling.

I break out of the mindlink, turning to Casen, my voice echoing through the air.

“Vince has her at the bridge leading to Andrei's pack!” I yell out, the fear in my voice unmistakable. Everyone around us stops and stares, understanding the gravity of this information.

Casen halts, his face draining of color as if his blood has turned to ice. His eyes are wide with fear and anguish, and I can feel the pain radiating off him in waves. For a moment he stands frozen, then he takes a deep breath and starts running for the bridge and his body starts to contort. But before Casen can go any further and shift, Eziah moves.

He doesn't say a word but moves swiftly towards Casen and touches him. The moment he does, they both disappear from our sight into a portal Eziah opens.

My heart stutters and beats frantically. How did we not see him take her?! As the portal closes behind them, I notice Dominic's silence and when I look up at him, his face is etched with worry. Dominic's eyes are glazed over and he pales.

“Wh...What did you see?!” I choke out, knowing that look on his face all too well.

“Death!” Dominic murmurs, and Sage is on her feet instantly.

“Casey?!” she gasps, and Dominic's eyes move to Lucas.

“Get me to the bridge!” Dominic seizes my arm when Kaif gasps. We all turn to see Kaif clutching air.

“Lucas?!” Kaif's frantic voice has everyone on their feet. Chief and everyone jump up alert looking for the threat.

“The bridge!” Dominic says, hands fumbling blindly as his eyes turn white. Kaif grabs his father. “What did you see?!” he growls.

“Vince jumps...with Casey!” Dominic urges, grabbing Kaif's arms.

“Lucas?!” Dominic shakes his head. “I can't see, I... I... Get to the bridge! You have to get to the bridge!!” Dominic urges as blood slips from his tear ducts as he searches for a future I hope doesn't come true. Within seconds, Kaif is gone, and I try to portal out, but I can't, having used all my energy to bring Ezra back.

“What's going on?!” Temperance stutters.

Chapter 108

Casen

We stand at the edge of the river, the dark waters lapping against our feet. The bridge spans above us, painting a charcoal gray in the sky. The sun is yet to rise, but golden glimmers of light are starting to creep through the leaves of the trees. The moment we spot the bridge, both Eziah and I run for the road.

My heart is pounding in my ears as Eziah and I approach cautiously. Vince sits on the guardrail, his feet dangling in the air, with my daughter cradled in his lap. The scene is surreal, like a nightmare playing out in slow motion, as my feet stop dead on the asphalt. Eziah sucks in a breath and Casey turns, noticing us first, her face streaked with tears. A second later Vince turns his head to look at us.

“Don't come any closer,” Vince warns.

“Vince, don't do this!” I call out, my voice steady despite the turmoil inside me. “We can talk about this!”

Vince's eyes, red from crying, meet mine. “You wouldn't understand, Casen!” he sobs. “You were always the golden boy, the good twin. I've always been the fuck-up, always second to you.” My eyes move to Casey, my hands shaking with fear of her falling.

Eziah steps forward, his hands raised in a calming gesture. “Vince, you're scaring Casey. Let's get her down from there, and we can sort this out.”

Vince's gaze flickers to Casey, who is crying, reaching out toward me. His expression softens for a moment before hardening again. “I want Rose back!” he says, his voice breaking. “I'm sorry for what I did to Malik! I wish I could take it back. I wish I could take it all back!”

“You can make things right, Vince. Just hand Casey to me. We'll figure this out together!” I plead, inching closer.

Suddenly, Lucas appears on the other side of the bridge. Eziah's eyes widen, and he signals Lucas to stay back. Vince looks at Lucas, then back at Casey, and shakes his head, tears streaming down his face.

“I always fuck everything up!” Vince murmurs, pressing his face into Casey's neck. “Don't cry daddy!” Casey murmurs, patting his face. I swallow, knowing she doesn't understand the danger she is in. Yet, my heart beats harder each second knowing he holds my heart in his hands in the form of my daughter.

“I can take you to see Rose, we can work this out, Vince. You have the mate bond still, this can be fixed,” I lie.

“No! It's too late. She won't ever forgive me. What's done is done!” Vince whispers, his voice filled with resignation as he peers out at the raging river below.

“Maybe if Mom and Dad were still here, perhaps I wouldn't have fucked all this up. We would have been okay,” Vince murmurs to the wind.

“Vince, please, just...” My world stops, the petrified image of her face forever burned in my memory.

In the blink of an eye, Vince leans back, pulling Casey with him as they plummet off the bridge. Time seems to stand still as we all scream, our voices echoing across the river as my feet move. My heart thumps, threatening to jump out of my throat to the echo of Casey's screams.

“Daddy no!” Casey screams, the sound sending my blood cold. My feet move, hands reaching for her when I see Lucas. My mind tries to register how he moved faster as he grabs Casey's shirt and tumbles over with them.

Kaif portals in at that moment, his face twisting in horror at the sight. He lunges toward the edge, diving after them. The water below churns violently as bodies hit it. We hear the splash. A portal opens up just in time

for Kat, Dominic, and everyone else who steps through to witness the act. Sage's scream along with Kat's unite in pure horror

Clutching the railing, I lean over to see Vince surface first, his pained agonized scream of hitting the rocks rings out loudly, blood tinging the black water. Within seconds, we are all racing for the river. Vince crawls out using his arms, his legs broken and mangled, gasping for air. Eziah quickly moves to haul him out, but there's no sign of Casey or Lucas as Kaif and I run the river's edge before we both jump in, fighting the current and feeling for them.

Sage is hysterical, screaming that Casey can't swim. We all frantically search the water, everyone running along the riverbank, while Kaif and I frantically feel for their bodies, my heart pounding with fear and desperation.

“She can't swim! She can't swim!” Sage wails.

“I can't sense their auras!” Eziah yells out, his eyes scanning while my hands feel. Minutes tick by, each one making the situation more dire.

Then, from further down, a gasp. “Mommy?!” Casey's voice carries over the water. We all spin around to see Lucas, soaked and shivering, holding Casey against the riverbank.

Relief floods through me, and I run to them, scooping Casey into my arms. She's cold and trembling, but alive. Kaif grabs Lucas, and I wrap Casey in my warmth, trying to shield her from the morning chill as I search her, peeling her wet clothes off, expecting broken bones but finding none. Chief comes over, offering us his men's coats, and Kaif and I quickly cover them when my legs give out from under me.

The adrenaline ceases as relief floods me. I look at Kaif clutching Lucas, who is breathless. Kaif nods, kissing his head and tucking him closer. “Good boy, that's my boy!” Kaif whispers while Lucas tries to catch his breath.

Vince, meanwhile, is a broken mess. His body slowly healing, he sits, clutching his hair, a look of anguish etched on his face. I approach him, passing Casey off to Kat. She turns, taking Casey, knowing what will come next.

“Kaif, come on, let's get them away from the river,” Kat calls to him.

Kaif, I can tell, wants to kill Vince himself. He looks at me doubtfully, wondering if I can or should kill my twin. Yet all I feel is anger, boiling over. The moment the kids are out of sight, I grab him, our foreheads colliding with a sickening crack.

“This time you won't be coming back!” I snarl, dragging him to the river's edge.

I hold him under the water, his struggles weakening until they stop altogether. When I finally let go, his body has no color, and his lips are blue. I glance at Kat who no longer holds Casey, her edges shimmer, and she disappears, sucked to the Moon Goddess Realm. I don't let him go straight away, I need assurance he isn't coming back, I won't make the same mistake twice. When she returns, she gives me a nod and I let go. His body floats away, carried by the current, and I stand upright.

Eziah waits by the edge of the river, he clamps a hand on my shoulder as I pass him. “Let's go home!” he tells me, and I nod.

Climbing back up to the bridge, I find everyone gathered silently. The were-bears stand at the edge, their eyes on the horizon.

“Ready?” Kaif asks me as I take Casey from Andrei. I nod, and he opens a portal, as does Kat. Casey, in my arms, looks back at the were-bears as I move toward the open portal. “Aren't they coming too?” she asks, her voice small.

“No, sweetie. They're going home, just like we are,” Andrei responds, wrapping an arm around Sage, turning back, I see Chief smile and wave. “In another life,” Chief tells us just as the sun illuminates his face.

“Home!” Chief murmurs, his men's voices of relief follow saying the same thing. The next second, they start to burn, their bodies disintegrating into ash. Yet, they make no sound of pain, their smiles never leave as the sun illuminates the bridge completely.

They served their purpose, and now, they can return to where they belong.

“They're gone!” Casey pouts, her eyes filling with tears and her bottom lip quivering. I kiss her cheek. “They'll be okay, they were smiling,” I tell her, and she nods sadly.

“Death isn't always the end,” Lucas tells her, taking his father's hand.

Casey nods sadly and sighs, wrapping her arms around my neck, and I step through Kaif's portal.

Chapter 109

Casen

The portal leads to the Casino and we step into the penthouse apartment, living room. Rose is the first to notice our arrival, her voice echoing softly, “Jonah, they're home!” Her eyes light up with relief and joy, but they quickly focus on Casey in my arms.

Rose rushes over, her movements a blur, and her relief is obvious.

I open my arms, and she steps forward, scooping her daughter into them. Casey's face lit up with delight and she squealed with joy as they embraced. A wave of relief sweeps through the bond and I wrap my arms around them both.

“Vince?!” Rose utters, her eyes lifting to mine, searching for answers. I kiss her forehead, whispering comfortingly, “He won't ever hurt you again!” I can feel her relief through our bond, a comforting sensation that envelops us both.

Jonah emerges then. His eyes widen and greets his son with a kiss on the cheek before embracing Kyan. I half expect Kyan to shove him off, but he doesn't instead they crush Lucas between them, and Kyan's forehead presses against Jonah's. “Ella?!” Kyan's voice is tinged with worry.

“No change,” Jonah responds, the heaviness in his voice echoing around us. Kyan sighs, the weight of the world seemingly resting on his shoulders. “Hey, she'll come back to us!” Jonah reassures him.

Lucas looks up at his fathers. “Mommy?” he asks, his voice small.

“She's still sleeping,” Jonah tells him gently, brushing the hair back from his eyes.

The scene is interrupted by little Corina, rubbing her eyes sleepily as she emerges from the room down the hall. The sight of her father and Lucas brings a bright smile to her face, and she rushes into their embrace. “Daddy!” she exclaims, wrapping her tiny arms around Kyan’s legs. He lifts her, planting a kiss on her cheek.

“Were you sleeping?” he asks, and she nods against his shoulder.

“I missed you. I thought you weren't coming back!” she confesses, her voice muffled against his neck.

“Nothing would stop me from getting back to you, your mother, or Dada,” Kyan assures her, his words a balm to her worries. Jonah wraps his arms around them, Lucas caught snugly between them.

Kat and Ezra, along with Mateo, seem exhausted but relieved. Ezra's head rests in Kat's lap on the couch, his eyes closed in a moment of peace. Mateo watches them, his expression a mix of worry and relief as she leans against him.

Temperance stands awkwardly to the side, her eyes darting around the room as if unsure of her place. Eziah remedies that quickly, pulling her onto his lap in the armchair.

“So that's it?!” Sage asks, breaking the comfortable silence.

Dominic laughs, stretching his back. “I bloody hope so! I'm getting too old for this shit. My back is killing me!” he groans.

“Tell me about it! My fucking knees are killing me,” Andrei grunts, and we all chuckle as Kat shakes her head at them.

Andrei wraps an arm around Sage, pulling her close. “So, what now?” I ask, voicing the question on everyone's mind.

“Now, we clean up the mess they've left,” Kat states firmly.

“And we rebuild the manor,” Kyan adds, determination clear in his voice, and Jonah nods.

Eziah looks at Temperance, gripping her chin gently and turning her face toward his. “And we go home,” he tells her, a promise in his eyes. She nods, leaning into him.

“And where will that be?” Dominic inquires, his curiosity piqued.

“To my pack, as long as Temperance is happy to go there,” Eziah replies, his gaze seeking her confirmation. Mateo's hopeful look doesn't go unnoticed, and

Temperance's eyes flicker violet for a moment. “As long as we're going back whole,” she states.

Rose gasps beside me as Temperance's eyes and hair shimmer momentarily, a hint at what she has become. I lean into Rose, whispering, “I'll explain later,” as she watches Temperance with awe.

“Whole?!” Eziah questions, a mix of confusion and wonder in his voice.

“She changed, right? For like a second?” Jonah asks, trying to make sense of what he's witnessed. “I didn't imagine it?!” He looks to Kyan for confirmation.

“Nothing escapes you, son,” Andrei chuckles.

“It's Liora, Temperance's sister,” Eziah explains, clarifying the mystery surrounding Temperance's transformation.

Jonah nods but then looks puzzled. “Isn't she dead?”

Kyan rolls his eyes. “We lived in a haunted manor, and you're concerned about the dead?”

“Yeah, but they looked dead. She looks very much undead, and our ghosts didn't possess anyone!” Jonah points out logically.

“Aunty T is a zombie?!” Corina asks innocently, her question drawing laughter from Temperance.

Mateo approaches Eziah and Temperance. “You'll come back and take over the pack, take your place as Alpha?” he asks, hope evident in his voice. Eziah looks at Temperance, seeking her agreement.

She nods, and Mateo's relief is palpable. He approaches them, embracing them both. “Finally!” Mateo breathes, Eziah hugs his father back and Temperance kisses Mateo's cheek.

Suddenly, the burns covering his skin begin to glow, the rough scars smoothing out as he looks at his hands in disbelief as he pulls back.

“Whole!” Temperance murmurs, a touch of embarrassment in her voice. “I'm sorry, Liora should have asked, but she knows I can't stand Eziah's guilt.”

Kat observes them, her eyes thoughtful. “It doesn't weaken you!” she murmurs, her words meant for Temperance, who looks at her, puzzled.

“You healed him?!” Eziah realizes, awe coloring his tone.

“We figured we should return the favor,” Temperance whispers, stepping closer to Eziah.

He leans down, kissing her tenderly. “You never needed healing. You've never been broken in my eyes,” he whispers, his words echoing my own feelings for Rose.

As the morning rises, everyone eventually retires to different hotel rooms for some much needed sleep. The weariness of the past events catching up to us all. Casey settles into bed easily, and Rose wanders into the master room closing the blinds to block out the light. Fresh out of the shower, I approach her, noticing the sadness in her eyes.

“Casey down?” I ask softly, wrapping a towel around my waist.

She nods, and I can sense her mixed emotions – relief at having her daughter back but sorrow over the loss of Vince. She buries her face in my chest, her body trembling with suppressed sobs.

“I know, I know you loved him,” I reassure her, stroking her hair.

Her guilt hits me like a wave, and I pull back slightly to look at her. “What's wrong?” I ask, concerned by her sudden guilt.

“I can finally breathe!” she whispers, her tears staining my skin. “My biggest fear wasn't that he'd kill me, but that if he did, I would have left Casey with him.”

I wipe her tears. “I love him, Casen, but I also hate him. How is it possible to love and hate in a single breath?” I nod, feeling the same way.

“It's okay to hate him. It's okay to love him still. I feel the same. He was my brother, but the man he became was a stranger,” I tell her, and she nods.

“Hating him doesn't mean we can't still love him, Rose,” I tell her.

She lets out a breath, her arms tightening around me. “I just wished it was one or the other. It wouldn't hurt like this,” she whispers.

“It would be easier, but you never loved that man Rose, neither did I. That wasn't Vince. We loved the man we knew he could be but chose not to be. We loved who we wished he was, not who we got,” I tell her.

She peers up at me, and I lean down, kissing her. This time, there's no hesitation, no fear – just us as she kisses me back.

Epilogue

Temperance

Watching Eziah play with Corina and Lucas, constructing a makeshift fort from a table and sheets and two chairs, fills me with a warmth I've rarely felt. We are watching the kids as Dominic goes to grab dinner and Rose and Casen go to grab some things from the store. Tomorrow we leave to head back to Eziah's parents' pack so Eziah can take over.

As they giggle and create together, my heart swells with love for this man who will soon lead his pack as Alpha. Despite the nervous flutter in my stomach, I'm eager for our new life, our home.

Reflecting on my past, I realize I wouldn't change a thing. Each horrid thing, each heartbreak, led me to Eziah, to this moment of peace. Liora's voice echoes in my mind.

“He'd be a good father.” I smile, agreeing silently, but not ready to share him just yet. For now, I'll cherish having him to myself.

“But I think I'll be selfish and keep him as just mine for a while longer,” I tell her.

Eziah emerges from the fort, Corina clinging to his back, and he settles beside me while Lucas assesses the fort structure they built.

“Go get your dolls,” Eziah tells Corina when Jonah comes rushing out of the room up the hall. Eziah sits up, alert, his fear hitting me. “She's awake! Mara is awake!” Jonah says, and I look at Eziah.

Lucas jumps to his feet and rushes down the hall when a knock sounds on the door. “We'll let you guys have your moment, I will get the door,” Eziah tells Jonah, who nods thankfully.

Rose, Casen, and Casey arrive. “Are you guys heading off?” Eziah inquires. Rose confirms with a nod, and Casey, eager to play, darts past them.

“She is seeing her mother, she'll be out in a minute,” Eziah tells Casey.

“Marabella is awake?!” Rose asks hopefully. Eziah smiles and nods.

“Literally, just woke up,” Eziah tells her.

“Casey, stay out here. Let Lucas and Corina see Aunty Mara first,” Rose tells Casey, who wanders over to the couch with her dolly, and so does Casen.

Moving back to the couch, Eziah turns to look at Casen. “Are you coming tomorrow?” Casen asks him.

“Of course!” Eziah answers.

“What's happening tomorrow?” I ask.

“Uncle Andrei hands the pack down,” Eziah explains, and I nod, smiling at Rose.

“Are you nervous about being Alpha?” I ask her, and she shrugs.

“Not really,” she says, and Casen brushes his fingers through her hair.

“What about you, Casey? Are you excited to be going home?” Before she can answer, Lucas and Corina come out with Kyan. Kyan approaches, his tired eyes betraying his worry for Marabella.

Kyan looks at Eziah and nods toward the room. “Everything alright?” Eziah asks. Kyan steps closer to Eziah and I get up when Eziah motions for me to. Stopping at his side. Kyan is a mess, his eyes glassy like he never slept last night. He peers down the hall.

“What is it?!” Eziah asks worry, lacing his tone.

“She lost Kora,” he informs us, his voice laden with grief. Eziah sighs heavily, shaking his head.

“Marabella?” I ask him, and Kyan looks at me.

“Relieved to be back, but grieving her wolf,” Eziah nods sadly, and I know how that feels. But saying that I never truly lost mine, they just turned out to be something else entirely, they were vessels for their true identity, Liora.

“You go see her, she asked for you,” Kyan tells him.

I turn to sit back on the couch when Kyan stops me. “You too Temperance. You're family, you can see her too,” he tells me, and I look at Eziah. He inclines his head to follow him when Casey speaks up.

“Can I see her Uncle Kye?” Kyan chuckles.

“Go on rugrat, quick before she falls asleep, she's tired,” Kyan tells her, and I hold out my hand for Casey. She grabs it bouncing on her feet excitedly as we follow Eziah.

The moment we step into the room, Marabella sits up higher. Jonah sits next to her watching her. Eziah moves to her instantly and hugs her. Marabella squeezes him tight. “You had us worried,” Eziah tells her.

Pulling back, he smiles sadly. “Kyan told me about Kora,” Eziah tells her, and her lip quivers, eyes turning glassy.

“Always a sacrifice, right?” she murmurs.

“Damn wolf is such a martyr!” Eziah says exaggeratedly with a roll of his eyes. Marabella snickers, but her sadness is evident, and Eziah grips her hand.

“So I guess you're like mom now, no wolf?”

“We'll find out eventually. Or maybe I'm human,” Marabella states, shrugging.

“You're not human, your aura still holds the shadows,” he tells her.

“Kyan said the same thing,” she says, looking at Kyan over his shoulder.

Noticing me, Marabella smiles. “You look better,” she tells me.

“I'm glad you're awake,” I tell her, not knowing what else to say.

Thankfully, Casey's impatience causes distraction and Marabella smiles. “My turn! My turn!” Casey says, climbing on the bed, Kyan grabs her, helping lift her on the bed.

“Yes, your turn, munchkin,” Marabella says, reaching out for her.

“Gentle, Casey,” Jonah tells her. Marabella raises an eyebrow at him.

“She's fine! Come here, sweetie,” Marabella tells her, hugging her tight.

Casey pulls away, showing Marabella her doll. “Lucas saved me, Auntie Mara. I can't swim, but he saved me!”

Marabella smiles sadly. “Yes, Uncle Jonah told me, said he portalled?” she asks, looking at Kyan, who nods.

“He still won't tell us how he reached her and opened a portal in midair,” Kyan sighs.

“We fell in the mensymney place, the water was really cold, and sticky,” Casey says, patting Mara's face with her hands. Marabella looks at Jonah and Kyan before pulling away to look at Casey.

“Fell where?” Casey tries to pronounce the word when Kyan speaks up.

“Mnemosyne?” he questions.

“Yep! That place, the water was sticky and so dark.”

“He took you to the underworld?” Marabella asks, horrified. Casey pulls a funny face.

“No, he took me home,” Casey states.

“Sweetie, the manor doesn't exist at the moment,” Eziah tells Casey.

“No, his real home! He said one day he'd be the Obsidian King. I can't wait!” she squeals. “His castle is so cool!” Casey claps her hands excitedly

while we all stare at her bewildered when Kyan moves closer to her and kneels next to the bed.

“Did he tell you anything else?” Kyan asks her.

Casey appears to think for a second. “Just that he has to set things right. That once he finds her, he can go back home,” Marabella gasps, and the tension in the room ripples. Casey, oblivious to it, continues.

“He also said I could visit whenever I wanted, but he has to find his mate first,” Casey babbles.

“His mate?” Jonah questions.

“Yes,” says Casey, nodding matter of factly.

“Lucas doesn't have a mate Casey, he is too little,” Marabella laughs nervously. Yet, my mind is reeling along with everyone else as we all watch Casey.

“Not yet silly! He said Celeste isn't even born yet. Lucas told me the fates cursed him for breaking the laws... Will he go to jail?” Casey asks, looking at Jonah.

“I don't want him to go to jail! How will we go to his castle?” Casey asks.

Marabella looks at Kyan and I can see the fear in her eyes. “He won't go to jail, he hasn't done anything wrong,” Jonah tells Casey.

“That's not what Lucas said. He said in his first life he cursed...” Casey looks at Kyan. “You!” she points at Kyan.

“Me?” he asks, pointing to himself and Casey nods.

“Lucas said he was cursed to become the abomination he helped create, that was his punishment from the fates,” Casey says, mispronouncing abomination.

“Casey, did Lucas ever mention anyone by the name of Hades?” Kyan asks her, and my heart races faster. She nods, leaning closer, and we all lean in too.

“He *IS* Hades,” she whispers. “But he prefers Luca,” she whispers before holding her finger to her lips. Everyone's shock is evident when she continues. “When Kaif’s curse breaks, he was to return to the bloodline he cursed to set things right,” Casey states.

“Can I go play with Corina now? I brought an extra dolly,” Casey says.

Marabella nods her head, and Casey rushes off screaming out for Corina. We all stand in stunned silence when Dominic walks in, his arrival breaks the tense silence, but his confusion only amplifies our own.

“Mara, you're awake!” Dominic says, rushing over to hug her. She hugs him back, but her eyes are on Kyan. Dominic steps back, looking at everyone. “Did I miss something?” Dominic asks, and I can only stare.

Dominic looks around at all of our stunned faces. “Well now we know why we couldn't find Hades,” Eziah murmurs, looking at Kyan. Dominic's brows furrow and he looks at Marabella.

She shakes her head. “No! Casey must be wrong,” Marabella says in denial.

“Wrong about what?” Dominic asks, looking at his son. Everyone turns their attention to Kyan.

“She's not wrong, it makes sense why he can open the portal to the underworld,” Kyan says, seeming thoughtful.

“Ah, is someone going to tell me because you all suck at charades?” Dominic says. Kyan's gaze lifts to his father's.

“So, where is Hades?” Dominic asks.

“He's been here the entire time,” Jonah says, standing up. Dominic looks at him when Kyan speaks.

“Lucas doesn't have Hades's magic like we thought,” he tells his father, who seems confused.

“Lucas IS Hades,” Kyan states, and Dominic staggers back in shock just as we hear footsteps rushing up the hall.

Lucas stops at the door, peering in. “Dad, can we have popcorn and watch the new Marvel movie?” Lucas asks, we all stare at him like he is an alien, but Jonah is quick to come out of his shock and recover.

“Yes,” he answers, and Lucas beams and is about to rush off. “Ah, Luca?” Jonah asks, using the name Casey just told us.

“Yeah, Dad?” Lucas says, coming back to look into the room, not seeming to notice his name change, or maybe he was just reflexively answering it as he returns.

“Ask Aunty Rose to make it, though. I don't want you to burn yourself,” Jonah tells him. Lucas nods and rushes off.

“My son is the King of the Underworld?” Marabella gasps, and we all look at her to see her eyes roll into her head as she faints.

“It appears so,” Kyan says, sitting beside her and brushing her hair from her face as he stares out the door.

“Hades is back?” Dominic gasps, and I hear Eziah suck in a breath.

The End.