

Chapter 41

Casen

Seizing the moment, I thrust my palm against his chest, unbalancing him. He tumbles off the porch, stumbling down the steps with a graceless thud. “You don't want to do this,” I warn him, my voice hardened with resolve.

“I think it is long overdue, brother,” he retorts, the venom in his words almost tangible. The moonlight illuminates Vince's features, casting an eerie glow on his features. His eyes reflect a feral glow. His face is contorted with rage as we clash on the front lawn. He springs back on his feet with a snarl, launching himself at me recklessly, given his state. I shift into predator mode, my eyes narrow, my nostrils flaring, my teeth bared in a savage snarl. I block his first punch, only to land mine. My knuckles bruise as I focus on landing punch after punch.

We clash, an explosive collision of strained brotherhood and past grievances. But I'm sober, my reflexes honed, my training with not only the pack but Eziah evident in every counterstrike. My fists find their mark repeatedly. His attempts to attack falter under my relentless assault, suddenly, the pack house door opens, and I see Sage stumble out bleary-eyed and in her dressing gown, followed closely by Andrei. She glances at us and then at Rose's house, heading in that direction, while Andrei makes his way to us.

However, I am distracted quickly when Vince staggers back onto his feet and tackles me to the ground. We wrestle, and his hand encloses on the dropped beer bottle. It crashes down onto my face, and I snarl, my face

cracking like porcelain, and blood floods my vision, but I still manage to turn things around. With a surge of strength, I throw him off me and leap back onto my feet.

Wrapping my fingers around his throat, I hear Andrei yelling—and for a moment, hesitation flickers through me. But then Vince begins to choke out Rose's name in a mocking tone, “You were always a sucker for a damsel in distress,” he sneers, sending rage cascading through me once again.

With rage-filled strength, I lift him slightly, slamming him hard against the ground as he struggles desperately against my grip on his neck. “Where is she!?” I roar, but then an ear-splitting scream pierces the silence.

Sage. Her fear-laden cry wraps around my heart, squeezing it with an icy grip, making me twist to look over my shoulder. Vince, taking advantage of the situation, tosses me off him. Sage stops at the stairs in front of Rose's house, her wide eyes glinting with terror in the dim light. I long to abandon this pointless fight and follow, but Vince relentlessly demands my attention, a drunken storm that refuses to die down. Andrei gets between us—shoving us easily in opposite directions.

Another piercing scream slashes through the air, this one filled with anguish. My heart stumbles over a beat at the sight of Sage staggering out the door with Rose limp in her arms before she collapses, kneeling beside her daughter's unconscious form. “Andrei!” her voice carries the pain with it, freezes my lungs, and sinks my stomach. Her cry for Andrei rings out, and my stomach sinks.

Andrei's icy composure shatters at the sight of his fallen daughter. His gaze swivels from our petty feud to the chilling scene of his wife clutching their daughter before him.

“What have you done?” he roars at Vince, his voice an echoing thunderclap. His eyes are blazing infernos, his fury palpable. With a

growl, he throws himself at Vince, all Alpha authority replaced by paternal rage. He punches Vince so hard that his head snaps back before kicking him and throwing his body against the tree by the steps.

Emerging from the house with adrenaline and speed, Malik seizes Andrei, his muscular arms a vise around the raging Alpha as he rips him backward. “You can't kill him, they're mates. You'll only be hurting Rose if you do,” he warns Andrei.

The scene grinds me to a standstill, a horrifying view of how nightmarish my life has spiraled within a couple of days. My gaze travels to Vince, now bloody and beaten. However, a twisted smile sits on his lips. His laughter rings out, a cold, harsh sound. He wipes his bloodied lip, his grin a slash of white and red in the darkness. “Exactly, Alpha. You'll hurt your precious Rose. Although she's more of a fucking weed these days.”

Andrei's snarl ripples through the night as he lunges at Vince again.

Malik holds him back using all his strength. At that moment, Zyan surges forward, hearing him talk of our mate like that only amplifies his fury. I yield to his influence, and my body responds, shifting partially. Talon-like claws replace my fingernails, and my canines elongate, becoming deadly points. Vince's laughter rings out again, a challenge and an insult rolled into one.

“You won't do anything, Zyan, Rose needs a mate,” Vince crows, his face twisted with cruelty.

Zyan growls low in his throat, and I join him, my voice melding into one fierce roar of rage.

“You're right, she does,” Zyan snarls, stalking him. Vince's smirk only broadens.

Zyan and I menacingly stalk toward Vince, our eyes raging with fire. His words hang in the air, dripping with a false sense of superiority. Unexpectedly, a snarl rips through us both, sending chills up my spine.

“Good thing she has two,” we hiss in unison. His smirk fades away as I bare my sharp claws, ready to strike.

Without warning, we pounce, claws outstretched. My fingers slice through the air, aiming for Vince’s smug face. A gut-wrenching scream echoes through the night as my claw sinks into his flesh. Blood splatters against the ground. He stumbles backward, clutching at his mutilated face. His shriek rings out loudly, a scream of pain and surprise. The scent of fresh blood mingles with the cool night air, as he clutches his face.

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Zyan stalks Vince and just as we reach down to grab him, another scream rips through the night, echoing cries of grief and despair. It seizes me by the soul, an iron grip that yanks me back from my focus on Vince. Sage's cry is raw, laced with the agonizing sorrow of loss, a scream I've heard before. It's a sound I wouldn't wish upon anyone, and it hurts, oh, how it hurts to hear it. It's the sound that brings death.

It's nothing to do with the loss of heartbreak, it's far, far worse, it is the sound someone makes when their soul shatters into a million pieces. It's the sound that only a parent can make when she loses a child. The sound of their soul being ripped apart, destroyed, completely obliterated when they realize their reason for living was taken from them.

Vince, his face a gruesome display of lacerations, gasps, clutches his chest. His eyes are wide, unblinking, as if he's confronted by the ghost of death itself. His arrogant laughter is no more, replaced by a palpable sense of terror that sends a chilling wave through me and has me staggering back.

Then the next second, Andrei drops to his knees, his dominant Alpha exterior crumbling. The sight of him, broken, gives weight to the tragedy unfolding around us. Vince echoes Sage's cry with a breathless, "No!" His voice wavers between the lines of shock and disbelief. Time slows down, and everything around me ceases to exist as I watch horrified, a sense of cold dread slivers through my body, making my bones ache. My stomach sinks, yet that sinking feeling does not leave, instead it keeps plunging into a bottomless pit.

Turning around, vertigo washes over me when I spot Sage crying, Rose in her arms as she rocks back and forth. “My baby, she's not breathing, she's not breathing!” she wails. I stagger at the sight, feeling like I’ve been punched brutally in the stomach as Zyan howls in my head.

“Rose?” I choke on her name when the sound of a soft, innocent voice makes my heart clench.

“Poppy?” Casey. Our Casey, wandering out in her pajamas, her eyes clouded with sleep and confusion. My breath hitches as I take in her delicate face, the way her wide eyes flicker from one horror to another, attempting to make sense of the nightmare unfolding around her. “Mommy....” Her gaze lands on Sage, cradling Rose's limp body.

“Mommy!” she shrieks, the sound piercing me like a dagger. Time warps around us, slows down as if mocking our desperation.

My heart goes ballistic in my chest as Casey darts towards her mother, her small form running like she is being chased by death itself. She discards the bear clutched in her hand—the one Malik gave her—its soft thud muffled by the night's chaos as she screams for her mother.

My gaze whips back to Vince sprawled on the ground, gasping for air as if each breathing itself is a struggle. The sight of him, panicked and full of fear, triggers something within me. Instinct. Panic. Fear. A primal concoction that sets my muscles in motion before my mind has a chance to catch up.

“Mommy! Mommy!” Casey's heart-wrenching cries reverberate around me as I reach her and pull her away, her tiny body shaking with unrestrained sobs as she screams for her mother. My attention splits between the two women in my life.

“Take her!” I order Sage, hastily passing Casey to her, not giving her a choice, before turning my attention back to Rose.

I'm met with a terrifying sight. Rose is on the floor, her eyes half closed and her chest unmoving. I take in her body, searching for any signs of life before dropping to my knees beside her and grasping for a pulse at her neck. Nothing. Tears well in my eyes as I hear Casey's cries echoing around me and Sage's breath catches in her throat.

My hands move without thought, as if my body knows what it's doing even when my mind cannot keep up. I don't think, just act. My teeth sink into her neck, the mark of our bond imprinted upon her skin, infusing her with my strength, with Zyan's strength. Seconds later, my hands are pounding against her chest, attempting to restart her heart.

Time ceases to exist as I fight for Rose's life, a primal urgency surging through me. Nothing else matters but the little girl in front of me as I attempt to revive her mother from death. Every beat of my own heart resounds in my head like a clock ticking away the seconds until I'm successful or succumb to failure.

The world around me fades away until there is nothing but Rose and me. All that exists is this moment – this terrifying, desperate moment – and I will not give up, no matter how cruel fate might be. He can't take her from me.

All at once, a single sob breaks through my concentration, and I blink out of desperation to see Sage kneeling beside us with tears streaming down her face. Casey clings onto Rose's limp form as she cries out for help.

“Come on, Rose,” I urge, my voice strained. With a sharp bite to my wrist, I let my blood trickle into her mouth, hoping that my healing essence will stave off her impending death.

“Daddy, stop! You're hurting her!” Casey's wails split the air, echoing the turmoil within me. My heart breaks with every desperate push against Rose's chest.

Andrei suddenly joins, dropping to his knees, kneeling beside us. His gaze, once full of fury, now flooded with a father's desperation. "It's working," he breathes, slapping my hands away. His assurance strengthens my resolve, knowing if he can feel flickers of her pack-link means she has a chance. I let him take over, standing back as he continues performing CPR.

Suddenly, Zyan surges forth, pushing through the barrier of my control. Our shift unfolds, and my massive wolf form overshadows Rose's fragile, limp body. His nose, now stronger and keener, sniffs around, tracing the invisible lines of her injuries.

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Zyan's inspection reveals crushed ribs beneath her blood-soaked shirt, the discovery triggering a feral growl from deep within his chest. Our teeth, now far sharper and more precise, nick at her skin, trying not to wound but to heal.

"He's eating her!" Casey's wail cuts through the night, her small hands tugging at Zyan's fur. But he ignores her. Werewolf saliva, known for its potent healing properties, is stronger than my blood. Each lick, each nip, pushing his saliva into her bloodstream.

"He's helping her, Casey. Daddy's helping mommy," Sage chokes, attempting to comfort my distraught daughter. Zyan then shifts his focus to the gash on Rose's forehead, his tongue lapping at the wound, each stroke forcing it closed. Once that's healed, his nose searches, sniffing for any further damage when Andrei speaks.

"Mark her again, Zyan," he orders my wolf. Zyan doesn't hesitate and Casey screams, not understanding we aren't hurting her, we're trying to save her. Her fists thump his back, her fingers tangling in his fur as she tries to yank him back while she flails in Sage's arm.

Suddenly, Rose lurches upright, a gush of my blood sputtering out of her mouth as she gasps in massive lungfuls of air. The sight is gruesome yet glorious. Her eyes flutter open, a glimmer of life returning to their depths. It's a sight more beautiful than any sunrise I've ever seen as Zyan pounces on her, licking her face frantically, attempting to heal the scratches covering her when she suddenly freezes. Zyan pulls away, sensing her distress.

As we crouch over Rose, Zyan's massive form dwarfing her, she backs away. The terror reflected in her eyes as she takes in my giant wolf sends a jolt through me. Then, her hand collides with my face, the slap sudden and startling, a harsh interruption to her shriek of "Dad!" Her voice is frantic. .

"Casen!" Her words, filled with terror, summon my name in a second, sending ripples of pain and regret through me. She scrambles back, scooting backward on her hands and feet to get away from me, colliding with the railing of the stairs, her eyes clenched shut as if trying to erase the image of my wolf from her mind.

Her hands lift and instinctively grip our fur, as if to fend off an anticipated attack. A gut-wrenching realization that sends a knife through my heart, Vince and I are identical twins and so are our wolves. How many times has Vince's wolf attacked her?

"Dad!" her scream is shrill and makes my ears ring. "Casen!"

In an instant, Zyan recedes, and I shift back. "Right here, Rose," I soothe, my voice straining to keep steady. "It's me, Casen." My reassurance seems to break through her fear as her hands touch my face for a fleeting moment before she releases a shaky breath as I clutch her face. Her eyes are filled with tears, they brim and tip over, streaming down her face.

"You came back," she whispers, her words slicing through me, a painful reminder of our shared past and the severed bonds.

"Always for you," I assure her, my heart heavy with unspoken words and swallowed regrets, her fingers going to her neck. "You marked..." But our moment of reunion is cut short as her eyes widen impossibly wide, and she gasps, "Casey! He was going to get Casey?" she panics, clutching my arms.

"Right here," Andrei's voice breaks through her frantic horror. I lean aside, letting Rose's gaze navigate past my body to Andrei holding Sage and

Casey close, her tiny form nestled against him like a protective shield. The sight of her daughter safe brings an audible sigh of relief from Rose. Her eyes connect with mine again, the unspoken question burning in their depths makes my gut clench. Vince.

As I follow her gaze to Andrei, his expression turns understanding, his eyes darting past me. He stands, and I look over Rose's shoulder, revealing the empty space where Vince had been. My heart drops into my stomach.

“Where's Vince?” I demand, my voice echoing ominously through the eerie quiet.

Andrei stammers, pointing to an empty spot, his eyes wide with panic. “He's... he was... He was right there.” I look out where he is pointing.

“Wait... No! Malik!” His voice breaks on the last word, and my blood runs cold.

The sight that greets us makes my heart seize. Malik, the man who helped raise me and Vince, and has always been my rock, lies crumbled on the ground. His body is still, too still. There's no sign of Vince, only the broken, bloody body of the man who has always treated us like his sons.

Andrei stumbles off the veranda, running over to him and falling to his knees beside Malik's lifeless form. His hands shake as he gently lifts Malik's head onto his lap, a sight that sends waves of despair washing over us. The silence that follows is deafening, interrupted only by Casey's whimpering and the heavy sound of our collective heartbreak.

“Malik...” Andrei's voice chokes on the name. The lines on his face deepen, etching a map of despair and anguish that no Alpha should bear. I watch as the man who's always been our stronghold, an Alpha, crumbles under the weight of his loss, his body convulsing with silent sobs.

A howl pierces the silence, a mournful sound that ripples through the pack. One by one, the others join in, their voices intertwining into a symphony

of loss and pain at losing their own. I see figures rush out of their homes, staggering over to Malik and Andrei.

Rose chokes as she peers over at her father and Sage hands me Casey. I grab the throw off the rocking chair on the porch, pulling it over my lap. I take her. "Is Uncle Malik okay?" she asks, and Rose sobs while all I can think is about his mate and children. Heidi definitely would have felt his loss by now. But she isn't here. I just hope Lia is with her to help hold her together.

I clench my fists, my nails digging into my palms. Vince's escape comes at a terrible price, the cost paid in Malik's life. The sight of Andrei hunched over Malik's body, the sound of the pack howling their anguish, and the reality of the devastation wrought by my brother... it all collides in a wave of sadness and rage.

The night has bled into a horrendous nightmare, leaving us all reeling. But as the darkness gives way to the promise of a new dawn, we're left with the harsh realization that, amidst our joy for Rose's recovery, we've suffered a loss that has shattered the pack. Before she can see me, she looks pale in the dawn's early light, her eyes brimming with unshed tears.

She stares vacantly at the wall of the house, her guilt evident through the bond I now share with her. She thinks this is her fault, but I know it's Vince.

The fact he killed Malik worsens it because the man loved us; he loved us like the sons he never had, took us in when we had no one. Vince betrayed him, betrayed everyone. "He's gone, isn't he, Daddy? Uncle Malik is gone; it hurts my chest. Why does it hurt as it did with Mommy?" Casey cries, and Rose's lip quivers when Casey tucks her face in my neck.

I tuck her closer to me before opening my other arm to Rose. She stares at me for a second, and the next, she crashes against me. I kiss her hair, tugging Rose closer and also using her body to shield Casey from my nudity. Glancing out at the pack, they all sit on the cold grass surrounding

Andrei and Sage, hugging her mate while he mourns for his friend, their pack member.

Vince will pay. For Rose, for Malik, for our pack, he will pay, only this time I'll make sure he stays dead.

Chapter 44

Eziah

Dominic's words replay in my head, "It's time to call on your mother." Yet, the thought of calling on her brings anxiety. For the most part of the last four years, I've evaded her, our relationship strained.

Hearing a knock on the door, I glance up from staring at my phone to see Marabella pop her head in the bedroom door. "How is she?" Marabella asks, peeking at Temperance. I glance at her; she is still passed out and hasn't woken up since whatever the Octavian shadows did to her. She's out cold, yet her eyes move rapidly beneath her eyelids.

"I'm not sure; the bond feels weird, numb almost," I admit. Marabella nods and steps into the room. Closing the door a little, she points to the phone in my hand. "Are you about to call Mom?" she asks, and I sigh heavily.

"We need answers, and Mom is probably the only one that will have them." I brush my fingers through my hair and move over on the bed to lean against the headboard. Marabella takes a seat at my feet, peering over at Temperance strangely.

"What?" I ask her, tugging the blanket up over my mate to cover her more. She shakes her head, "Nothing, I just find it odd that she accesses the shadow realm, it's kind of creepy. You'd understand if you'd ever been there," she tells me, lifting her hand to touch her. I grip her wrist, eyeing her. "What are you doing?"

I worry seeing the bizarre look on her face. "I can't hurt her, she is the shadows, Eziah, much like I am, but she's also light, like you." I let her

go. “You want to see if she is immune to you?” I ask her. She chews her lip nervously, yet I can see her curiosity.

“Go on then,” I tell her, dropping my hand on Temperance’s shoulder just on the off chance she isn’t. Marabella touches her, and I can see the shadows slivering like veins beneath her skin. Her magic morphs as it tries to taint Temperance, but nothing happens, nothing whatsoever.

“Is your curiosity satiated now?” I ask her, and she chuckles.

“Sorry, it’s not every day I find someone besides family that is immune to me,” she answers. I nod and look back down at the phone in my hand. Marabella watches me for a few moments before she goes to leave, but then she stops suddenly. Her eyes widen as she steps away from Temperance and me, looking towards the door in dread, then turning back to me with a guilty expression on her face. “What?”

“Eziah, I think it may not be necessary for you to call Mom...” As soon as those words escape Marabella’s mouth, another knock sounds at the door downstairs, and my heart skips a beat in dread or excitement—I can’t tell which one.

Marabella looks at me guiltily and chews her lip, “I already did... and that will be her,” she falls quiet, and I sigh.

“Of course, you did.” I roll my eyes. I stand up from the bed, phone in hand, as Marabella walks out of my bedroom. She looks back at me with an apologetic expression before disappearing down the hallway.

I take a deep breath, trying to calm my nerves. My mom’s arrival was unexpected, but not entirely surprising. After all that happened recently, she probably heard about it through the supernatural grapevine, which means she most likely knows I’ve also been avoiding her and drove straight past home without dropping in.

I head down the stairs, my heart in my throat as I can feel her presence growing ever closer. Already, I hear Dominic talking to her from the entrance of our home as I make my way down.

As I reach the bottom, my mother, and Dominic step into the foyer. Her eyes go straight to me in shock—she never changes, always appearing younger than me, stuck how she was forever since becoming a moon goddess. Everything fades away: there stands Mom with Dominic at her side—eyes wide in shock and staring right at me like time has suddenly stopped all around us. Her beauty is still mesmerizing despite all these years that have passed; trapped in time, refusing change or age. Her dark black hair falls perfectly around her face, and her golden eyes, identical to mine, peer back at me.

My mother holds my gaze, hers full of secrets never spoken but felt deeper perhaps than any words could express within one lifetime alone...

“Hello, son,” my mother finally speaks, breaking through our trance-like connection while simultaneously evoking another emotion altogether—relief? Perhaps welled up inside somewhere deep below where I have been holding back memories strained by my mistakes and words I never thought I could take back...

I nod slowly, feeling feelings stir inside again—warm happiness filling every cavity nearly forgotten. “Mom”

“What? Is that it? No hug? You're just going to stand there and stare at me?” she asks, her lips tugging in the corners slightly while my face splits into a grin. For so long, I've tried to picture what it would feel like to see her again. I take a deep breath and walk towards her, then throw my arms tightly around her, and I don't want to let go. I feel comforted by her familiar embrace. The warmth that Mom always had before. I breathe in the comforting scent of vanilla that lingers on my Mother's clothes, feeling each second pass—our reunion more welcoming than I could have ever

imagined it being. It was as if... my mother had been waiting for this moment all along just as much as me...

Seeing her again always excited and scared me; my thoughts always made me doubt this moment, shadowed by how much I hurt her. Worried she wouldn't forgive me after what I did to my father. But now I realize she never hated me for what I did, that it was all in my head, and I am still her son. Despite everything.

She holds me for a few moments longer, long enough to make sure I know it's ok, before pulling away slightly. Her eyes search mine as if she is looking for answers in every crevice of my soul.

Yet, I have so many questions too.

"I guess I have some explaining to do," she admits, and I glance at Marabella when Jonah comes out of the kitchen, a phone clutched tightly in his hand. "Yeah, you do. I just got off the phone with my father!" Jonah growls angrily. Dominic steps in his way, blocking his path, and my brows furrow when my phone suddenly starts ringing in my hand. Glancing down, I see it is Casen.

"Settle down, Jonah; Kat is here to help, isn't she," Dominic says, trying to be the voice of reason.

"Help?" Jonah scoffs just as Kyan wanders out. He casually leans against the kitchen door frame, arms folded across his chest, seemingly just as angry as Jonah.

"Jonah?" Marabella exclaims, looking at her mate's alarmed. "What's got into you?" she worries while I glance between them all, trying to figure out what is happening. Did I miss something?

"You have every right to be angry, Jonah, but all this was for the best," my mother says calmly.

Jonah scoffs. "Vince killing Malik was for the best? Or do you mean bringing back that psychopath so that he can abuse Rose?"

“Wait, what happened to Malik?” I blurt in panic, my eyes darting back to the phone in my hand.

“Malik's dead! Vince killed him, and I just learned all these years Vince has been abusing Rose,” Jonah snarls, furious; his eyes flash and flicker, and fur grows along his arms as he fights the urge to shift.

My heart races in my chest at his words, *Malik is dead? Vince killed Malik?* Staring at my mother, she purses her lips and then presses them in a line.

“Firstly, I never brought Vince back! Secondly! The alternative was a lot worse. You should know by now, Jonah, I don't like playing god, and Malik's death was unavoidable.”

“Of course it was! You brought that bastard back into our lives. He should have stayed dead!” Jonah bellows.

Kyan pushes off the door frame, and I see Kaif come forward just as his hand falls on Jonah's chest. “Let her explain; she must have her reasons,” Kaif's voice growls out in warning, telling his mate to calm down when Marabella steps forward-looking shaken.

“If you didn't bring Vince back then, who did?” she asks, and my mother's eyes go to me. My brows furrow in confusion when suddenly everyone's attention is drawn to me; I stagger back and shake my head.

“It was you?” Jonah growls accusingly, but I shake my head, having no idea what he's talking about, when my mother's voice pierces the air.

“He didn't mean to, nor does he remember! Now stand down, Jonah; if you want answers, I will give them, but first, you need to get yourself under control,” my mother growls, her eyes lighting up dangerously. While all I can think is, *what the hell just happened?*

Chapter 45

Eziah

A suffocating tension fills the room. Jonah's words carry an insidious sting, burrowing into everyone's hearts. It's a silent accusation, a challenge, thrown into the air, waiting for someone to address it.

“Jonah!” Marabella interjects, her tone stern and biting. “Mind your manners.”

But Jonah doesn't listen. I look over at him; a ticking time bomb, about to explode. I can't shake off the guilt I feel, even with my memory betraying me.

“I...” my voice trembles, “I can't remember...”

Mom's gaze softens. “You weren't meant to, Eziah. That night, when you followed me to the Moon Goddess realm, I only realized too late. I saw Vince's wolf in the fountain of life, you insisted on coming.”

“So, you saw him, and you saved him, then what. Just ‘whoops’?” Jonah scoffs.

It's Jonah's eyes that hold me, though. They're a whirlwind of fury, his blue irises swirling with darker shadows of betrayal. As much as my own confusion hammers within me, it's hard not to feel the weight of his pain. After all, isn't family the one thing we're supposed to protect?

“You brought that bastard back to hurt Rose?” Jonah snarls.

“He saved Rose, you have no idea what you're speaking of, don't blame him, he was only doing as he was told.” My mother steps in. Jonah scoffs and grips his hair.

“For once can you fucking speak and say what you mean, Katya?” Jonah sneers as the tension grows higher. The auras in the room are like a supernova, terrifying when charged the way they are now.

Dominic, ever the voice of reason, attempts to defuse the situation. His massive frame steps between Jonah and my mother. “Jonah, let’s all take a step back. Shouting won't solve this. We need to listen.”

But Jonah’s rage is a burning inferno. His face is a contorted mask of anger and confusion. “Listen? Listen to what, Dominic? More lies? More games?” His gaze shifts to my mother.

My mother takes a deep breath. Her golden eyes shimmer with deep emotion, betraying her strong exterior. “That night, I fully intended to let Vince meet his fate. But things didn't go as planned.” She hesitates, swallowing hard, her gaze locking onto mine. “Eziah, you followed me that night. I didn't realize you had stepped through the portal with me until we were both in the Moon Goddess realm.”

There's a weighted pause before she continues. “I saw Vince's wolf flickering, hovering on the brink of existence in the fountain of life. I knew what I had to do. But when I reached out to save him, I felt my strength leaving me.” She takes a moment, fighting the raw emotion in her voice.

“Eziah, you were the one who saved him for me. It was your energy, your life force, that pulled Vince back from the brink. I didn't want to bring him back but the consequences.” She shakes her head.

The room is silent, the weight of her confession settling over all of us. She looks pained as she confesses, “When we returned to the Moon Goddess realm, I had Bain help me erase that memory from you. It wasn’t something I wanted to do, but I had to protect you. If I hadn’t intervened with Vince, the consequences for all of us would’ve been catastrophic.”

I try to digest her words, searching deep within my memories for any recollection of the events she describes. The idea of Vince fleeing had always gnawed at my mind, but hearing this revelation? I never saw this coming.

“What consequences? It seems Rose is the only one that paid any consequences for yours and Eziah's actions!” Jonah yells.

“Your mother, Jonah. The moment I touched him, I saw a vision, one of about your mother and a man.” Confusion washes over all of us as we take in her words.

“What man, what are you talking about?” Jonah demands.

“I don't know, all I know is he isn't human, he also isn't a werewolf, he's something else. I searched for years trying to find out who and what he is. Vince owed him money, a lot of it, in my vision he came looking for Vince, but when he did, he recognized your mother from somewhere, it wasn't until I saw more of the vision I figured out how he knew her.”

“You're making no sense, like always, speaking in your riddles,” Jonah growls angrily.

“You say that like I have a choice.” My mother snaps, pointing a finger at him. “That same vision I watched him wipe out all of my brother's pack when Adrian tried to stop him taking her. Everyone died, Jonah! Everyone, whoever he is, he is something else.”

“Who?”

“From what I could tell he worked with the Reaper Wolves, ran it with some woman.” Dominic falls quiet, and we all know the history of his wife and how he enacted vengeance on her behalf. Except when he found the man who ran it, he found something more horrifying, it was a woman who orchestrated and ran the Reaper Wolves, making me wonder if it was the same woman.

Mom's eyes dart to Dominic. "He and this woman. They were working together."

The weight of Dominic's next words is palpable. "Why keep us in the dark?" He nods, knowing himself exactly how visions work.

Her response is fierce, "Sometimes my visions are just glimpses, you know this and so should Jonah. Changing the future could make things even worse."

Jonah's response is cutting, "You manipulate our lives, but yours remains untouched."

That hits hard. Mom, always so poised, starts to crack. Shadows dance in her eyes, the room grows cold, and her anger is a palpable force. "You think I enjoy this? Holding everyone's fate in my hands?"

"Spit it out, Kat, I haven't got time for fucking games, I am sick of the riddles, sick of the curses and moon goddess bullshit!"

"Jonah, stop!" Marabella growls at Jonah for how he addresses our mother.

"No, Marabella. One thing I know is her visions aren't always accurate. Fuck it changing the future, it's the present I'm worried about!" Dominic puts his hands out in a placating gesture, and Kyan reaches out for Jonah, trying to calm him down. But he is livid.

"So, you're telling me you have no idea who he is, that some psycho is after my mother, and you didn't think to warn us?" My mother says nothing, but I can see her aura growing angrier and angrier when I see the tremors of her curse line the edges before she snaps.

"You think I like this shit! You think I like playing god with who lives and dies? You're more than welcome to fucking try, Jonah. The shit I see, the things I feel, you wouldn't last one damn day with that weight on your shoulders. You have no idea what it's like knowing when your loved ones die, looking them in their face and smiling because you know there is

nothing you can do to prevent it without damning another! Speak in riddles? I don't have all the fucking answers! Some things I can't fix!" she screams when Dominic steps in front of her, her eyes blazing.

Dominic, sensing a breaking point, catches her. He grips her shoulders using his body as a shield protecting Jonah. "When did you sleep last, Kat or shift?" he asks.

"I'm fine," she snaps.

"You're not. Kyan ring Ezra and get Maddox here; he's in the city for a meeting with the human council today," Dominic says.

"Human council?" I ask.

"I will explain later, Jonah, you can come with me," Kyan says, grabbing Jonah's arm, but Jonah pulls away.

"No! Not until I know what the fuck is going on, its okay for her, her family is safe, it's mine she's letting die!" Jonah snarls.

The moment the words leave his mouth, I know all hell is about to break loose. And it does. When my mother snarls, Dominic is tossed back as the madness that sometimes comes over my mother takes full force. Within seconds she is on Jonah and Kyan shifts, allowing Kaif to take over. All while Marabella freaks out trying to stop. Who, I have no idea, because she is suddenly chucked in the deep end on who to protect; her mates or her mother. But the action lulls slightly as my mom grabs Jonah's face.

"You wanna see, you wanna see what I see, then you can play judge on what you would have done," she snarls, and Jonah chokes, his eyes turning white. But Kaif grabs her arm, his magic pours out and absorbs my mother's while she absorbs his back, both of them like batteries as they absorb the other in a battle of wills.

“No one needs to see that, Kat,” Kaif warns, “certainly not of their mother.”

Yet my mother is beyond recognition. I snarl, knowing the only one that can help her is the one man I've been running from for the last four years. My father. And I'm the only one besides Mom that can portal him here.