

## Chapter 51

Eziah

I stare at him dumbfounded as we walk back the way we came. Pondering his words, I try to make everything fit, but it's like trying to put a puzzle together with the wrong pieces. We are missing something, something crucial because even with all this information and the uncanny resemblance to Stellara and Temperance, it still makes no sense to me.

“So what now?” I ask, hoping Kaif can shed some more light on this entire situation.

“Well, for one, we have a funeral to attend, secondly we need more information and the only place that information will be found is the Moon Goddess realm.”

I nod in agreement. “If there was information there, it would have to be in the grimoire of Celeste, right?” I ask Kaif.

“Or the fountain of the past, unless you can track down my brother. He was Celeste's right-hand man, until he went missing,” Kaif says. I stop in my tracks.

“I thought you were the only warlock in the coven?” I ask him and he sighs. “It was because he went missing. Celeste sent him on a goose chase he never returned, haven't seen him since no matter how many times I've returned,” he tells me.

“But if he were Lycan he would have reincarnated, so he'd have to be in the fountain of vessels somewhere.”

“Unless Hades got a hold of him, Hades knew how close Celeste was with him, hated him more than he hated me,” Kaif chuckles, and I shake my head.

“What about sisters?” I ask him curiously. Kaif is a bit of an oddity to me, and I know he doesn’t like speaking of his past.

“Nah, just my older brother, he was two years older than me, he helped along with me to start the Lycan curse. His power was stronger than even mine, hence why Celeste always kept a tight leash on him, mostly,” he explains. As we near the iron gates, Kaif flicks his wrist, blasting them open, while his grip on my hand tightens.

“Ready?” he asks me, and I watch Kyan’s eye bleed black, fully letting me know Kaif was in full control of Kyan’s body at this moment.

“No, but anything to get out here, this place makes me queasy,” I tell him, and he laughs wickedly when I see the pantry back in the Octavian manor. The entry shimmers, and I see the kitchen table and part of the kitchen, which is empty.

Kaif shoves me through and portaling out of here is nothing like portaling out. The air is frigid and cold, and I can taste burned almonds in the back of my throat. All at once, it feels like it's pulling my soul from my body while simultaneously shoving it back inside me, it's hard to explain yet not something I want to experience again. However, it makes me wonder if that is how Marabella feels when she tries to enter the Moon Goddess realm.

The moment we step into the kitchen, I get a strange sense something is wrong. Very wrong. The energy here is severely off when I hear growling. My stomach sinks, and our group all but race from the kitchen into the foyer to find Temperance breathing heavily, her body heaving. She looks rabid as Marabella, my mother, and Maddox try to calm her down, uncertainty in their eyes.

“What did you do to him! Where is he?” she screams, tugging at her hair as she is backed into a corner when I notice my other hand out trying to calm her.

Temperance smacks her head with her fists. “Make them stop, make them stop!” she screams, her eyes clenched shut.

“Shh, no one is trying to hurt you,” my father says, halting, his burned hand shaking as he attempts to reach out to her when I sense Shadow come forward. The change in her is almost demonic, and my heart stutters in my chest. A feral ticking sound escapes the back of her throat, her growl savage. Maddox growls back at her, yet my Dad turns on him.

“Back off, she’s scared,” he warns Maddox when his eyes fall on me briefly.

“That’s what they all say,” Temperance speaks, but the voice is that of Shadow. My father straightens when I see claws slip from Temperance’s fingertips. She has no control, she is not in her body. My mother also sensing this, edges closer, yet one thing is clear, my mother is not clouded by darkness, her shift having cleared all the energy that usually taints her.

“Shadow!” I snap, moving into the room and grabbing her attention. Her head tilts in my direction.

“You lied,” Shadow murmurs.

I move slowly, ushering my father away and putting myself between them. “I haven’t lied.”

Shadow laughs manically. “But you did, just like Satish, just like Nova, just like all of them. They always lie, I don’t like liars,” she tells me, yet now her attention is solely on me, I feel some semblance of relief. I see her eyes flicker, and I know Nova or Temperance is fighting to regain control of her. Yet, how effortlessly she is able to take that control worries me.

“You all lie,” she hisses, but I can see the spark of madness in the Shadow, she isn’t sane, no part of Temperance is sane yet despite knowing this, I know I can tame them. I need Shadow to realize I won’t hurt them.

I know Shadow is a major player when it comes to Temperance’s actions, her thoughts. Instinct tells me Shadow is the one that kept them safe, while Nova complied to keep them alive. Shadow was the one that fought for them, did the hard stuff. The things Nova couldn’t even do.

“Then leave, you’re free to leave,” I tell her. She watches me for a second before her eyes dart to the door.

“Eziah?” my mother whispers behind me. I know she is worried about unleashing Shadow into the city, the very much human city not far from here.

Yet, I know the only reason Shadow comes forward so easily is because Temperance is scared. I’ve figured out two things when it comes to Temperance. When she feels safe, she can hold strong and keep control. Now I know why. Shadow and Nova are her fight and flight.

When the mind bends, it will do anything to protect itself, just as her wolves will. They’re not only her wolves, but each one ruled by different aspects of Temperance. When Temperance was being abused, Nova hid her. Kept her safe, locked her in the dark, so she wouldn’t have to endure. Yet what Nova couldn’t endure, that’s when Shadow would come forward to fight, to endure the worst parts, making me wonder what was worse than what they went through at the hands of her brother.

“You’re lying, I’m your mate, you won’t let me go,” she snarls.

“So you do recognize me?” She huffs, seething that I caught her out on a lie. “Now who’s the liar?” I ask her.

“Of course I recognize you, who do you think is blocking the bond from Temperance and Nova?” she asks.

## Chapter 52

Eziah

My brows furrow in confusion at her words, but I notice how her eyes dart toward the door again. She wants to run.

Moving toward the door, she growls at me, thinking I am locking her in. “Mom?” I call through the mindlink and she startles hearing my voice. I haven't used the mindlink in so long besides talking to Casen. It feels foreign to open it to anyone else.

“Eziah,” she breathes back, opening it to allow both my fathers in.

“She'll run,” my mother warns me.

“I know, but none of you move,” I tell them, and I cut the link. Gripping the door handle, I shove the door open and step outside into the harsh bite of the wind. Looking back inside the manor, everyone remains frozen in place, all eyes on Temperance.

“So, are you leaving?” I ask her. The moment the words leave my mouth, she is out the door. I hear the door close as someone shuts it, but instead of chasing her, I follow slowly. She runs for the forest instantly, and I cross the fields following, wondering where on earth she thinks she is going when she stops on the tree edge. She stares up at the huge, dark forest, which gives me the creeps. I can tell by Shadow's demeanor, she can sense something is wrong with the forest here, yet can't quite place what it is.

Sitting down, I feel my wolf come forward, he's on edge, not wanting me to lose our mate. “It's a witch's graveyard!” I call out to her, and she freezes. Shadow turns slowly, her eyes darting nervously toward the manor when she notices it is only me.

“Why do you keep the bond from Temperance?” I ask her, not giving her too long to think about whether to attack me or not.

For a long while, she walks the forest edge, ignoring my question. “That forest is dense, cursed in my opinion, if you want to leave, tell me where to take you, and I will drive you.”

Shadow pauses, glancing at me. “Why?” she asks suddenly.

My brows lift, yet I answer her anyway. “Because you’re not my prisoner,” I tell her

“You lied,” she replies.

“About what?” I ask her, wondering which lie I told.

“You promised to keep her safe, you left her!” she says bitterly. I shake my head at her words.

“I never left her, I was still there kind of, I went to the underworld with Kaif trying to find answers about what she is,” I answer. Temperance eyes glow and I can tell Shadow is thinking of my words, trying to sense the lie within them.

“We don’t belong here,” she finally says.

“Then where do you belong?” I ask her, and that question seems to confuse her more. She growls, turning toward the manor, assessing the road she has now just noticed she ran past. “You can run out there if you must, but are you really protecting Temperance?” I ask her. She pauses once again.

“I’m the only one that protects her!” she screams furiously. “They hate me, they all hate me, especially Nova. But I am the one who kept her safe!” Shadow spits at me venomously.

“You don’t need to keep her safe from me, you can rest now,” I tell her. She laughs, the sound is haunting and makes my teeth ache.

“And let you break them more? Pick up the pieces when you’re done with her?” she asks.

“I am not Satish,” I remind her. “But Satish is out there somewhere, she is safest with me, with my family where we have the power to take him down, it’d be a suicide if he stepped foot here.”

However, the next question shocks me. “Will you mate her?” she asks me.

“Excuse me?” I ask her.

“Fuck her, do you plan on fucking her?” Shadow asks so crudely, it throws me off guard.

“That will be inevitable once she goes into heat, but I won’t hurt her, nor would I force her,” I tell her.

“I won’t let you,” she warns me.

“I get that you want to protect Temperance, but you’d only be hurting her by preventing that during her heat,” I remind her. She stares at me for a second.

“You will give her the serum.” Shadow states. My brows crease in confusion further.

“What are you talking about?” I ask her.

“The heat serum, so you can impregnate her!” she screams at me. “Nova couldn’t do it, she could never do it, that is why she hates me. But I am sick of doing it, I am sick of being the one to do it!” she screams.

“I won’t let you, I won’t let you,” she shakes her head, clutching handfuls of hair when it clicks into place for me. Nova suffered the abuse handed down by her brother’s pack. Shadow endured and suffered the abuse of her brother, forcing her heat.

“Satish forced you to mate with him?” I ask her in horror, and she cringes at my words. “Did he ever tell you why?” I ask her.

Some parts of me hate having to ask these questions because I know it causes her pain reliving them. Another part hates hearing the filthy things done to her, yet I can't help them if I don't know what his agenda was. *I will kill this man.*

“He wanted to recreate what we are, something about our blood being blessed and the only thing that can kill an Octavian, but he needed pure blood,” she answers, looking away.

“Pure-blood Gemini?” I ask her, and she nods. “Like your mother, I guess?”

“I don't understand, you're a pure-blood Gemini,” I remind her.

“Yes, but we, Satish didn't know about Nova, she never tried to heal anyone, not until that day, I had no choice. I had to make sure he didn't realize what we are,” Shadow says, confusing me further.

“He thought you were Temperance?” I ask and she nods.

“He didn't realize we had the ability to heal, that I have the ability to use both,” she tells me.

I tilt my head, trying to understand what she meant. “Both what, your venom and healing ability?”

“No, only Nova can heal, that is why she hates me.”

I try to make sense of what she is telling me, having never heard anything like this before.

“So he thinks your bite can kill only?” she nods. “Yes, he believed we were an anomaly, that he traced our heritage back, that we should be able to heal and kill, Nova never healed us, I refused to let her once I figured out what he wanted from us. He never realized there were two us inside her,” she answers, wandering closer.

“I still don't understand,” I admit.



“I killed them,” she says robotically. I blink at her, even more confused.

“Killed who?”

“I don’t want to kill anymore,” she whispers, her voice barely catching on the wind.

“The pack members?” I ask, trying to work it out when it hits me.

“The babies,” I murmur, and she swallows.

“Nova almost got us caught when the babies came. Satish took them. Nova would scream and beg. He told us he was taking them to an orphanage, the second one we found out what he was truly doing, he was drinking their blood, experimenting. Nova was being dragged back to the cage when she heard the cry, she escaped, catching him, by then it was too late. I felt her magic, I felt it surge and knew she was going to try to heal the baby, he would have known, figured out that we were pure,” Shadow tells me, and my stomach sinks at her words.

“So after that, when Satish would force the heat, I took over. Pretended to be Nova, and Temperance. He didn't know she could heal. Couldn't know we are pure.”

“How many of your children did he kill?” I ask her. “Only the two, I made sure we never got pregnant after that,” she says. She looks at the forest.

“I won’t let you mate her, I won’t kill any more babies,” she whispers.

“You didn’t kill them, Satish did, Shadow,” I try to reason and she smiles sadly.

“He killed the first two, subsequently, the moment I realized Temperance was pregnant, no matter how much Nova would beg, I made sure to end it,” she tells me.

“I... Don’t,” I try to find words to understand when she flashes her teeth at me.

“You bit yourself. You killed off the pregnancies. That’s why Nova hates you?”

“That's why I hate myself. Instinct says to protect our young, yet I was killing ours off,” Shadow whispers. I suddenly understand why Shadow is the way she is, why she trusts no one, why she fights the way she does. She’s not only been fighting Satish, she has been fighting Nova and Temperance to keep them alive.

## Chapter 53

Eziah

I watch her for a moment. It is clear that Shadow is just as if not more comfortable in Temperance's body than Temperance is. She doesn't trust anyone, and I don't blame her. Those she should have been able to trust hurt her the most.

Her eyes dart to the thick woods again, her nose crinkles slightly. “You can smell them?”

“The power of hundreds of dead, scorned witches? It's a bit hard to miss it.” She shrugs.

She watches me, unsure of my intentions, but I can tell that part of her wants to trust me. Perhaps it's the mate bond. Or maybe she is finally realizing I could have hurt her already, yet haven't. “So, Temperance, she can't hear you when you have control?” I ask her, and she tilts her head to the side.

“She can, but only if I allow her to,” she admits.

“What about now?” I ask her, and she swiftly shakes her head.

She looks down at her hands. “I don't like putting her in the dark, but sometimes the dark is better, it's safer.”

“Do you think Temperance would agree?” I ask her, and she seems to ponder my words for a second before finally she answers.

“No, but that's because she hasn't had to see the things we have. If I could remain oblivious to it, I would rather sit in the dark than stare at these hands. People crave power, but that's because they haven't seen the damage it does first hand yet,” she admits.

“That is what Satish wants from you? Power?”

She sighs heavily. “I don't know, I wish I did. But whatever he wants her for, I know it's nothing good, our body is proof of that, nothing good will ever come from that monster, only death.”

“So you never heard anything, never saw anything? I hate asking these questions, but any information will help us, help with Temperance. I would rather not traumatize her further by having Dominic force her memories. Well, yours and Nova's.”

“No,” says a choked sob, a guttural cry of anguish that chills the bone. Her eyes are a window to a tormented soul. She fixes on mind, her next words dripping with the weight of a thousand unspeakable horrors.

“I've stood at that edge, let it chew at my essence, so she'd never see how bloody our hands are,” she laughs, the sound so sinister she sounds as crazy as she looks. Right then her canines slip out, her eyes flickering and her aura darkens, cloaking her. Black shadows like spilled ink ripple through her aura, threateningly.

“The things she bore witness to are enough to destroy the soul, destroy the mind. Used and abused, violated again and again. Begging, crying, screaming, nothing worked, yet still, she didn't break. So I broke for us. I let them defile me, so she'd remain untouched. I turned into the monster she feared, the monster Nova feared.” Venom drips from her teeth, turning a silver color.

She continues. “I took that on, she was our hope. We would endure for her. She is my sanity. Temperance is the fraying thread holding us together. Break Temperance, and you unleash a cataclysm from which there's no return.”

“Satish tried to break us, to unleash the Gemini within us. But I couldn't let him have it. Nova understood it, that kind of power doesn't belong in anyone's hands. Not mine, not his, but you break Temperance, we are our

names. Nova, Temperance, Shadow.” My brows furrow in confusion, yet fear tugs at my gut, and I fear nothing, yet looking at this side of my crazed mate, I fear her.

I can see the truth in her eyes, she means every word she speaks, but I still can't fathom what she is trying to tell me.

“What do you mean?” I ask, trying to understand.

“To seize a soul, yours becomes the sacrificial fee.” My brows furrow. She laughs like a maniac, her fingertips turning to sharp blades as they rake down her face.

That is when I see the spark of something, Malachi senses her before I recognize the change in her. Nova. Nova is shoving forward, fighting Shadow, whose hands grip stronger, like she is using me to anchor her.

Shadow suddenly gasps and lets me go, she staggers back. Her eyes flicker oddly as all sides of Temperance, all alter versions of herself, go to war with each other. Yet nothing is as scary as watching her argue with herself. Nova just as fired up when provoked as two voices split the air.

“Stop this, Shadow!”

“He'll break her, break us!” Shadow snarls angrily at thin air, hands clawing at her hair, body shaking.

“Eziah, do something, they're tearing her apart, tearing themselves apart,” Malachi urges as my skin ripples. “Eziah!” Malachi snarls in my head when she suddenly goes stiff as if blank. Frozen in place, I hold my breath, waiting for her to take one and to see who now has control.

“Temperance?” I murmur, getting to my feet. My heart thuds erratically in my chest.

Temperance giggles, and my hands shake as I clutch her face.

“Temperance?” I whisper, trying to draw her back to the present when her eyes roll into her head. Her lips move quickly, as the wind through the

forest picks up strength, echoing the voices of hundreds of witches. The sound rings out, sending goosebumps across my entire body.

“Steal a soul, and yours descends into the void's embrace. Yet, gift it forth, another soul you'll erase. Bound by the spell, a covenant of endless night. Beware it's dark allure, for it hungers for the universe's light.”

Her eyes flicker and blood streams from her nose, eyes, and ears.

“Eziah?” she chokes before collapsing, my hands moving to catch her limp body as the witches' echos taunt me, growing fainter.

“What do you want with her!” I scream out to the dark, looming forest.

“I think it's time we find that out,” comes my mother's voice behind me. I spin around to see everyone watching, yet my mother is the only one that approaches.

“What is she?” I ask my mother in horror. Her eyes soften, and she glances at Temperance limp in my arms. Yet, I hear the sincerity in her voice, hear the anguish in her voice.

“I don't know, her fate was never mine to control, just as Kyan's wasn't. I wish I knew, but I can only see what's created by the moon.”

“What does that mean? WHAT DOES ANY OF THAT MEAN!” I scream at her, feeling desperation rise in my chest. She looks at me sadly.

“You're the moon goddess! You should have all these answers. You should know!”

“I wish I knew, Eziah, I could only see what I was allowed to see, what you know is what I know. What you saw of her in the fountains is what I saw. My hands are tied, I can't help something I don't understand,” she tries to reason as Kyan suddenly shifts and starts walking toward us.

“I can't fight for her if I don't know what I am fighting against, mother,” I spit at her.

“Then stop fighting, I learned with Marabella that sometimes things aren't worth fighting for, sometimes they are worth embracing, surrendering to them.” I go to argue when she holds up a hand.

“Not forever, but until we figure this out,” my mother tells me.

“And how do you suggest we figure this out!” I snap at her when Kaif's huge furry form comes up behind her.

“By finding my brother!” he states.

“And where is he?” I growl, stomping off toward the manor.

“Not where is he, but who is he?” my mother yells out behind me, and I stop. Turning on my heel, I look at her.

“Who?” I ask while looking between her and Kaif.

“Bane,” my mother smiles.

“Bane? As in Bain, the mute giant from the Moon Goddess realm? Seline's Bain?” I ask in shock. Kaif huffs.

“Clearly, he hasn't changed then,” Kaif mumbles, folding his arms across his chest.

My mother stops next to me, her hand cupping my face. “We'll get the answers you need, son. But first we have a funeral to attend, then it's time to go home.”

## Chapter 54

Rose

“Ten minutes, Casey, then we need to get dressed,” I call out as I sit on the top step and watch her rush toward the swings. Malik’s funeral is today, and I will have to face Rebecca, Alisha, and Marley. Yet, the moment I sit down, I feel them, feel the eyes of my pack watching me.

When did trauma become normal? At what point did it become accepted? I feel their judgmental eyes peering at the wreckage of my house. Is it pity in their eyes? Or are they judging me for putting up with it for so long? Or are they wondering what sort of Alpha I'd be if I let my mate treat me so badly? Sure, one could pick apart my faults. Point out opportunities I had to speak up. They see my weaknesses and point them out like I am not already aware of them.

My skin crawls at their attention, I nervously glance around before remembering he isn't here. He is not breathing down my neck, not watching to see if I am stepping out of the character he made me into. *Act normal, Rose, act normal.*

Hearing footsteps behind me, I tense, instinct kicking in. “It's Casen, Rose, calm down,” Poppy, my wolf, urges. His scent hits me a moment later, and the tension in my body lifts slightly. Yet doesn't leave completely.

Casen sits next to me on the top step, his hand moves to my knee. I'm unusually antsy this morning. I didn't wake to rough hands, or hungover slurs, I don't know how to act, I don't know how to be. It's like being thrown into an unnatural environment, everything is alien, I find my reactions in tune with another reality.



*Act normal, Rose, act normal!*

But how do you act normal when your normal is not theirs? What is normal?

“You okay?” Casen asks, and I stare at him, seeing the same face that haunted me for years. It takes my mind a few seconds to recognize the softness in his eyes, and the question in his words. Vince never cared enough to ask if I was okay. And heaven forbid I complain about anything, so I find myself staring blankly at him. Unable to answer a simple question.

“Say something, Rose,” Poppy urges, and I swallow thickly. “Casey loves the park, I’ll get her ready soon, so we can go, but if you want to leave earlier, I can get her ready now?” I tell him, turning my attention back to Casey swinging back and forth, with a smile on her face.

“That isn’t what I asked, Rose,” Casen murmurs. It takes me a minute to realize I went back to habit. Directing attention away from me, it’s something I do when my parents question. Redirection, avoid, don’t answer, what if it gets back to him?

I don’t say anything, I don’t know how or what to say. The feeling of walking on eggshells is a dread that affects every part of daily life. Every step taken, every word spoken is a calculated risk—will this be the moment that shatters the fragile peace?

Even though I know physically he is not Vince, my body knows no different, especially since they’re a mirror image of one another. Some part of me knows Casen is safe, yet I can’t seem to bring myself to act out of habit. You don’t realize the habits you develop in that sort of environment, a subconscious skill set for navigating a minefield. It’s like being institutionalized, confined within invisible walls. Your body learns before your mind does; a raised hand makes you flinch, a sudden movement sends adrenaline coursing through your veins. Even the slightest touch, which should be a source of comfort, becomes tainted with

a visceral fear because the only touch you've known for so long has been a violent one.

Casen, seeming to sense my unease, changes the subject, thankfully.

“I ordered another bed, I can't sleep in Casey's tiny bed, I feel like I'm going to break it,” Casen chuckles.

“I can sleep in there with Casey, it's fine,” I tell him.

“You and Casey can have your beds back.”

“I don't mind, I'd offer to sleep on the couch, but it is currently in pieces,” I laugh nervously. Casen stares at me for a second, and I swallow, wondering if I said the wrong thing?

“Rose, I ordered another bed, it will arrive this afternoon,” Casen says slowly.

Tension ripples through me, under his gaze. “I should go iron Casey's dress,” I tell him, getting to my feet when he grabs my wrist, tugging me to him.

I brace myself out of habit, getting ready to defuse the situation, knowing I have eyes on me. Slipping the mask back into place, it's astonishing how after time, it does not remain a mask, it becomes another persona, another version of you, until eventually, it becomes you.

Casen pulls me down a step and pulls me down in front of him until I'm sitting between his legs. “I'm not Vince, you don't need to hide from me,” Casen whispers. “You don't need to fear me, Rose. Just be you, you're free now, I won't let him hurt you,” he tells me.

Free... to be me?

“I know that,” I murmur while I ponder who I am? I feel Poppy is also questioning his words. Has Vince really destroyed us so badly that he eroded away any sense of self we had left. Have we merely turned into

creatures of habit? Freedom was something we craved but never saw ourselves actually getting.

What is freedom when all you've known is emotional whiplash? I now realize I've become conditioned to equate love with fear, intimacy with danger. Leaving that environment feels like stepping out of one prison only to realize you're still shackled by another—your own learned behaviors, your own ingrained fears.

The world outside might have changed, but your internal world is still a haunted place, where every act of kindness is scrutinized, every expression of love held up against a painful history of betrayal.

So how do I be me, when I have no idea who that is anymore? I feel so lost.

“I can feel the cogs turning in your mind, just be Rose, that is all. Nothing is expected of you, nothing is coming for you. Just be, Rose, we'll figure out the rest,” Casen assures me, yet it does not lessen my tumultuous thoughts.

I nod my head, shocking myself when I lean back against him. It helps that Poppy's influence is behind the action. Her reassurance, resolving some of the conflict that tells me to do the opposite.

“I'm sorry, Rose. I should have come back sooner,” Casen whispers, and I peer up at him over my shoulder to find him staring down at my neck where his mark lays.

“You don't need to apologize, Casen, I was the one that rejected you. None of this is your fault,” I remind him. It's not his fault, it is mine. Shamefully so, and I let it continue, driven by fear and also my own naive thoughts. I was so young, I thought the mate bond would kick in, and he would change, until I was eventually in too deep, eventually I saw no way out. The shame of my own weakness, I know, will forever haunt me.

I thought I was protecting her, protecting my daughter, protecting my pack, protecting my mother. But when did I stop protecting myself? The what ifs will forever haunt me, but I also know I will learn to live with them, if Vince taught me anything it's that I am adaptable, I can adapt to my environment.

We sit there in silence, and I feel like I can breathe, but part of me wonders for how long. Seeing a car pull up, I shake myself out of my own head.

“Finally,” Casen sighs. I peer up to see Aunty Kat's car pulling in, and I swallow guiltily. I usually avoid her, only now I realize how badly I wish she'd seen me. But I know her hands are tied. Sure, she would have untied them had I truly let her know, and that would have had consequences.

I know things have been strained between my parents and her; I've heard my parents on the phone to her when they thought I wasn't there. I know how much I broke them while Vince broke me. Yet enduring him was always better than the alternative, at least I thought it was. But now, seeing how badly everyone wanted to help but couldn't, makes me wonder if it truly was the only choice.

I hated hearing my father beg her to step in. So I tried to avoid her mostly. I know what it's like to be torn between acting or surrendering. Sometimes surrendering is the best solution, especially when it's not just your life you're gambling with.

Casen gets to his feet, and I do the same when I see the rear door open up and Eziah steps out, followed by a girl. Only as I move closer, following behind Casen, do I recognize her and immediately I stop.

## Chapter 55

Rose

Casen, noticing my hesitation through the bond, also stops and looks at me questionably. “Rose?”

“She can't be here,” I murmur.

Casen tilts his head, looking at me for a second. “Who can't be?”

The girl also stops. She watches me for a second before tugging on Eziah's hand. He whispers something to her before lifting his gaze to me, making me wonder if she recognizes me. But I never saw a girl out there before, yet I did see a picture of one, and this girl has the exact same eyes.

“She can't be here,” I panic, grabbing Casen's arms as he approaches.

“Calm down, who are you talking about?” Casen asks, looking alarmed.

“Her, he'll come for her, Satish will come for her,” I blurt and Casen tenses, regarding me carefully, yet my attention is on the girl.

“Did you say Satish?” Casen asks me, but I can only think about the danger she brings to this pack. “Rose!” Casen snaps, shaking me as I see Dominic Octavian step out of another car.

“How do you know Satish?” Casen demands, and my eyes go to him when I see my mother freeze as she approaches me. My eyes move to her behind Casen, and my lip quivers, knowing I just triggered something in her with his name. I hoped she would never know, never find out that I endured for her, to keep her safe from the man responsible for destroying her.

“Where did you hear that name?” she stutters before staggering forward. I shake my head, taking a step back, but her fear turns to anger at the

action and she grabs me. “Where did you hear that name, Rose!” she commands.

“I'm so sorry, Momma,” I whisper, and her eyes widen slightly. Her mouth opens and closes, and I can tell she is trying to find words. My father moves toward us along with everyone else, trying to figure out what the commotion is about.

“What's going on?” my father asks, touching my mother's arm. She jolts, looking between me and him. “Rose?” My father questions.

“She shouldn't know that name, how does she know his name?” my mother stammers, earning her a confused look from my father.

“Whose name?” he asks, looking expectantly at me. Yet, I dare not utter it. It haunts me like it haunts her. I've seen the tape, seen what he did to her, what he did to her mother as he beat her head in with a rock.

“Satish Thana,” my mother says when I hear a voice I haven't heard in years.

“Did you say Thana?” Comes the voice of Dominic Octavian. I swallow, knowing why that name sounds familiar to him. Just like my mother had fallen prey to the Reaper Wolves, so had his wife.

“Yes,” my mother answers, turning to face Dominic. “He was a member of the Reaper Wolves.”

Dominic shakes his head. “No, there are no Reaper Wolves left, especially none that go by that name, I made sure of it!” He shakes his head, and I swallow.

“What do you mean?” my father asks. Dominic holds up a hand, looking rattled.

“Thana was the last name of the woman who was running it, Lorelai Thana. I killed her husband, Dior Shivani, and they never had kids, and there were never any other Thanas I came across; believe me, I checked.

I made sure to eradicate both bloodlines!” Dominic states when Casen turns to look at the girl while everyone else turns to look at me.

“How do you know that name, Rose?” my father questions again.

“Vince put the pack down as collateral for a debt he owed, it's why I never took my position as Alpha. His debt would have fallen to me,” I answer, and my mother gasps, her hands cupping her mouth. “As long as I never took over, he couldn't touch our pack,” I murmur.

“Wait, that's why you wouldn't let us help you?” my mother asks, tears brimming in her eyes. I chew my lip to stop it from shaking.

“He said he'd come for you and Casey,” I choke on the words and my father growls.

“No, you must have the name wrong,” Casen argues, looking at Eziah.

“No, it is Alpha Satish Stell. That's his name. It must be a coincidence,” Eziah argues, shooting a concerned glance at the girl clutching his arm.

“Temperance Stell, Satish Stell right?” Eziah asks the girl whose name I now know. She tries to hide behind him. “Your last name, your brother's last name, you can tell them. They won't hurt you,” Eziah says softly, and her wide eyes peer around at us worriedly when she finally speaks.

“Satish is only my half brother. Thana was Daddy's original name. Lorelai refused divorce when he left his mother for mine, so he took on my mother's name to help hide Satish when he took him from his mother.”

“You're his sister?” I gasp in shock, horrified. She nods, looking away.

“So, Stell was your mother's maiden name?” Dominic asks her. Temperance nods again.

“Yes, only Daddy shortened it. He told me Satish's mother was crazy, and that he had to hide us before she ruined him, so he took the pack to the mountains and changed his name,” she murmurs.