

## Chapter 7

“No!” I scream and claw to come forward, not wanting to be back in the dark. If we are escaping, I want to see. Nova’s newfound zest for freedom keeps me secure in our mind, trapped in the abyss only to listen to the thumping of her heartbeat, and feel the pain she ignores from shifting. She can’t block out the thunderous sounds of a chase that echoes around us. My mind wanders back to Shadow, who is still trapped back there in her cage, a cage I know she won’t escape for a long while since we have run. One we will be locked in if we are caught, that’s if he doesn’t kill us this time.

“Nova please!” I plead, unable to handle the darkness after what feels like forever of her running.

Knowing what she is attempting to do is almost more tortuous than imagining the things my brother has let happen to our unwilling body. Hours could pass, seconds, years in this confinement and I would not know otherwise. Trapped in here, time becomes irrelevant, lost in the nothingness of my thoughts, lost in the all-consuming worry of if this will be the last time I breathe, feel. Lost in thought, wondering will this darkness be the last thing I see.

Nova grunts, her speed picks up, and she howls loudly. “Nova, what is it?” I yell at her.

“I tripped one of their boogie traps.”

“What sort?”

“Wolfsbane, I’m fine. I can keep going,” she says, shoving me back out.

But when I feel her start to weaken, I know something has gone horribly wrong, especially when I am suddenly given glimpses of our scenery.

Nova groans and her pain rattles through me, her back leg throbbing to its own beats and she snarls angrily. Greenery makes its way through the veil that separates us, although I can tell it is luminescent. I shove with all my might, finding very little resistance when suddenly my bones start snapping as we are forced to shift back.

“You need to run, I can’t keep going. I’m sorry. We never should have risked it,” Nova murmurs when the smell of damp soil hits my nose, before literally hitting my nose when I faceplant the ground. Nova is forced to shift mid run, and I find myself ass up and face down in the dirt.

Lifting my head, I blink trying to take in where we are. I claw at the soil, trying to push off with hands that feel like putty. My vision blurs as I lose my ability to see in the dark without Nova’s enhanced vision, which makes me realize she must have made some distance because it wasn’t dark when we left.

Pain radiates up my leg. With a groan, I peer around and find myself in the forest. Forest that is so dense I can’t see between the gaps of the trees, and the lack of light doesn’t help. Gone is the greenery, and now all I see is shadows and outlines.

“Get up! We are running out of time. I made it only ten minutes once they shot me,” Nova yells at me. I clutch my thigh, the burning pain worsening, only for my fingers to come into contact with a dart. No! I choke.

“Quick, find somewhere to hide, you need to cover your scent, or we need to get to the road, it’s our only chance,” Nova urges. But what’s the point? She is down, and I won’t last very long with wolfsbane in my system myself, or be able to defend myself when they catch us.

“We have to try; we are as good as dead anyway now. Just keep heading down,” Nova says as the sounds of running and rustling reaches my

dulling hearing. Plucking the dart from my leg, I grip a nearby tree trying to haul myself up. I stagger from vertigo that sweeps over me, and I stumble forward. With those few short steps, a gasp leaves my lips when I find myself falling.

My body seems to propel forward when I find myself rolling down a huge embankment. Sticks and rocks pummel my body as I try in vain to stop myself smashing and rolling down the steep hill. By the time I reach the bottom, I am bloody and covered in cuts from rolling through the lantana bush that covered the entire mountain side—finally coming to a stop as I hit a tree. Howls ring out loudly through the night, and I peer around into the darkness. Getting up seems impossible, and I don't want to, yet once again Nova pushes me, urging me to at least try despite it being pointless. So reluctantly, I crawl out of the huge prickly bush and get to my feet.

“It's not pointless; we are nearly at the back roads. We just need to keep going down. The lantana will be hard to get through with their fur. We can do this; we aren't caught yet.”

“They'll catch us, you know they will,” I tell her. Stumbling blindly, I keep walking, using the trees to hold me up. The howls grow louder before suddenly a new scent, one I am not overly familiar with, overwhelms my senses. The smell of an exhaust in the distance pollutes the air. Blindly, my hands reach out seeking the next tree as I try to pull myself up the small hill when the sound of an engine in the distance reaches my ears.

“Quick, that's a car.”

“What if it is Satish or one of his men?” I groan tasting blood on my tongue, my entire body aches.

“We have to try!” Nova pleads, she lends me what little energy she has to me when a surge of adrenaline hits me. I start racing to climb the embankment to the other side, where I hear the car about to continue down the mountainside.

Just as I claw my way to the top, the howls that follow us disappear, which makes me more nervous. Seconds pass when a car zips past at blinding speed. Seeing I am too late, I nearly give up when Nova shoves forward with me, with another surge of adrenaline.

“There has to be another road,” she says, forcing my unwilling body to cross the road and climb the barrier. The moment I step one foot over it, I find air beneath my feet. Once again, I am somersaulting down another steep hill. I feel every bump, hit, and graze, and I am sure this fall will kill us as I come to a stop at the bottom with a hard thud. My head bounces off the ground, making my teeth rattle as pain explodes through my skull and steals my vision temporarily.

Even Nova is giving up her fight after that fall. She can feel me weakening, the wolfsbane slowly burning through my system. I can tell she is incapable of shifting to take over, yet also too weak to fully control my body. With a groan, I get to my hands and feet to find I am on flat ground. I stagger blindly through the trees and once again hear the car.

Determined to either make it stop or let it run me down, I use the last of my energy to run. My legs have finally lost all feeling, my body feeling foreign as I will it to keep going when I feel gravel beneath my dragging feet. I lift my head, but I see no car. A whimper escapes my lips when lights suddenly cast my shadow on the gravel road.

Sluggishly, my brain tries to figure out what that means when I hear a horn blare and the sounds of tires screeching, dust burns my eyes as I turn to find a car racing straight toward me. Death is heading right toward me when I hear her. “Move damn it!” Shadow screams at me. My heart thuds harder as I look for her. *She escaped, I think, she got out too.*

“Move Temperance!” she screams, and my eyes widen as a car slides across the road, spinning out of control.

“Help her Shadow, she’s in shock!” Nova whimpers in my head, too weak to come forward. Shadow? But where is she? I wonder when I feel a

shove, my body lurches to the side and I look for Shadow who shoved me just in time to see the hood of the car.

The pain of the car colliding with my body is horrific but not as painful as my body being skinned on the gravel road when I am flung backwards.

Everything hurts, and I feel like I have been skinned alive and chucked on an ant's nest. The burning pain is horrendous and all I can focus on. The sound of car doors opening and slamming makes me open my eyes to see the car about twenty meters away, its lights burning my retinas.

“She came out of nowhere! Where did she come from? Fuck, Eziah I didn’t see her, can you save her?” I hear a loud, frantic voice ask.

“Nova?” I murmur but get no answer, I try to focus on breathing, content with death taking me at this point. I could accept death now if only it takes the pain away.

“Eziah?” the same voice says as their footsteps grow closer and my vision begins to fade, while my heartbeat grows louder in my ears.

“Eziah?” The man repeats, but my mind is slipping away like the dust in the cool breeze.

“We found her?” another voice speaks into the darkness that is taking me.

“What are you doing, help her!” Silence follows when I feel hands grab me, and sparks dance across my skin. Then I feel the motion of being rolled over. I want to open my eyes, force them to open to find the delightful source that is erasing the pain and making my skin tingle.

“Wait, what did you say?” The first man who spoke speaks again. “It’s her. It's Temperance.” At the mention of my name, my blood runs ice-cold while I try to figure out how he knows my name. Which pack member do I know by the name of Eziah? However, the name doesn’t ring a bell. If only I could see his face, maybe I would know which monster is holding me because his voice I do not recognize or his scent that makes my nose tickle.

“Shh, I got you, Temperance. You’re safe with me.”

*Lies*, I think to myself, *he is one of Satish’s men*. This is all a ruse for me to put my guard down. I know all too well those words and promises of safety are anything but. I know I’m dying and can feel death stealing my life source, but what about Shadow? Perhaps, maybe, he’ll help her?

“Wait, that’s her. I hit your mate?” comes that frantic voice when warmth engulfs me and the pain fades. I suddenly lose not only my sight but my hearing. In a last-ditch effort, I try to tell him to save her, that he must have hit her too.

“Shadow....” her name leaves my lips with my last breath as oblivion sucks me under.

## Chapter 8

Eziah

The hillbilly pack turned into yet another dead-end. Instead, we were stuck there for hours while Alpha Satish showed us around his shitty little pack. It wasn't until they brought out a pig on a spit that I called it a night. It was bad enough we got stuck there for so long. I wasn't dining with them, if you could call it that. Especially not after watching them shovel shit and not wash their hands.

We had been driving for 30 minutes, both of us defeated. Malachi stirs nervously beneath my skin. He has also lost hope. He thought for sure we would find her there, now that hope died along with mine.

"I'm sorry, Eziah," Casen says, finally adding words to the air. We had been driving in silence, both of us stuck in our thoughts about what comes next.

Sighing, I glance at Casen, wondering what he will do now that our mission to find my mate failed. He is technically rogue. As am I. We both turned our backs on our packs to search for her, although Casen was banished from his pack.

I wonder if my mother will forgive me. We have barely spoken besides texts. Although I speak with Marabella regularly, I'm not even sure if I am welcome there after what I did to dad. None of them trust me, or more correctly, trust Malachi. My magic can't affect my mother or sister, yet my father. I shake my head, not wanting to remember.

"So, what are you going to do?" I ask, turning in my seat to look at Casen.

"No idea. I haven't spoken to Rose in years. She never answers her phone. Sage and Andrei..." Casen sighs.

“They’ll forgive you if she does,” I tell him. That is one thing I was sure of. They loved Rose, and I know Andrei loves Casen like a son.

“Yeah, but she will never forgive me. Not after what I did.”

“You killed your brother for her. For her Casen!”

“And if I didn’t?” he says, staring out the windshield. My brows furrow in confusion. My mind drifts back to the fountain of the past. My mother ripped into me real good for meddling with the past. She locked me out of the Moon Goddess realm, so I couldn’t enter. She warned that meddling with the past will alter the future.

I tried to see exactly what Casen did to Vince. Rose wanted answers and so did I because he never spoke of it. No one knows exactly, and my mother refuses to tell me. My mother has always kept that part locked away. When I questioned how she kept his death secret from Sage, she would always give me vague answers and repeat what Casen has always said, well, the little he has said.

That was when dad and I got into a fight. Ares never should have challenged Malachi. Ares may be part Demi-God thanks to mom’s mark, but he was no match for Malachi. If Maddox hadn’t gotten to him in time, I hate to think what would have happened.

“What do you mean?” I ask. Casen glances at me and shakes his head.

“Nothing, forget I said anything,” he mumbles, taking the turn around the bend leading onto the last road before we hit the highway.

“So, are you going home to Rose? Or do you want to come home with me?”

Casen shrugs. “Are you even welcome home?” he asks, and I sigh.

“I guess I’ll find out. Marabella told me dad wants to retire, he can’t keep up with the pack and help mom. Apparently, she spends more time in the Moon Goddess realm than she does in our world,” I tell him, and he nods.



“Have you spoken to them?” Casen asks.

“Kinda, not really. Only via text.”

“Yeah, same with me. I texted Malik to tell him I was coming home, and he told me not to,” Casen tells me.

“Did he say why?” Casen shakes his head.

“No, just said that it is best for me to stay away.”

We take another turn, and I sigh. The music station we were listening to starts crackling, and Casen reaches for the dash to change the station when I see something out of the corner of my eye.

“Casen!” I yell, seeing the figure dart onto the road. Casen lifts his head and gasps, blaring the horn while hitting the brakes. I am tossed forward in my seat. My eyes go wide when I spot the naked girl. Her eyes lock onto the car, screeching toward her like a deer trapped in the headlights.

The car skids, the sounds of tires screeching, dust going everywhere and obstructing my vision. Then, I see another figure take her place; it almost appeared to have shoved her.

The car screeches to a stop, but not before the hard thud is heard. Pain rattles through every part of my body, and Malachi howls loudly in my head. This is a reaction we usually only get from our mate when she is badly hurt.

The burning pain slivers over every inch of me. I feel like my skin is burning when the car stops and Casen, cursing in panic, shoves his door open.

“What was it?” Casen says, and the dust starts to settle, the lights lighting up the road to reveal the girl has been tossed about 20 meters down the road. Casen whimpers, seeing it is a girl. I glance around, looking for the other person I am sure I saw as I climb out of the car.

Malachi tries shoving forward as the scent of her blood reaches my nose, setting him off.

“She came out of nowhere! Where did she come from? Fuck! Eziah, I didn’t see her. Can you save her?” Casen asks, but I stand in shock, my mind refusing to work as I stare at the girl. Malachi shoves me from within, and I stagger toward her, my eyes still scanning for the other person I saw.

“Eziah?” Casen yells at me while my heartbeat grows louder in my ears, her scent overwhelming me. Temperance...

“Eziah?” Casen repeats, but my mind is slipping away like the dust in the cool breeze.

“We found her,” I murmur, more to myself than Casen.

“What are you doing? Help her!” Casen yells as I grab her and roll her over. Sparks dance up my arms and her scent floods my system and Malachi growls menacingly.

“Mate!” barely audible slips past my lips, yet loud enough for Casen to hear.

“Wait, what did you say?” Casen staggers back, his hands up in the air realizing who he hit. Only then do I realize Malachi is half in control.

“It’s her. It’s Temperance,” I tell him, shoving Malachi back who wants to kill him for hitting our mate.

“Shh, I got you, Temperance. You’re safe with me,” I tell her when I catch another scent. One I have smelled before, Satish!

“Wait, that’s her. I hit your mate?” comes Casen’s frantic voice, and my canines elongate. *I will fucking kill him.*

“Shadow....” my mate whispers, snapping my attention back to her healing body, her wounds becoming mine, setting me on fire as I heal her. A name I haven’t heard for years spoken. I heard it once, only once, when

my mother let me see. It was the girl she spoke to, another prisoner of that pack.

That must have been who pushed her. My head turns, looking into the darkness of the forest before I scoop my arms under her lifeless body.

“Shadow!” I call out loudly, looking into the darkness.

“Huh?” Casen asks, stepping closer to Temperance. Malachi snarls through me and Casen jumps back.

“Shadow!” I yell out again, hoping the girl will step out of the darkness.

Casen turns, looking into the woods. After a few attempts, I guess she must have gone home to that pack.

Tugging her closer, I bury my nose in her neck, inhaling her scent. She is skinny, broken, and frail, as if she hasn't been fed or seen sunlight in, well, years. “Eziah you're...you need medical attention,” Casen murmurs.

Lifting my head, I look at Casen. “No, what I need is for you to take me back to her pack.”

“What?” Casen asks, stepping closer while stripping his shirt off. He tosses it over her naked body before sniffing her.

“Alpha Satish...” he snarls before I turn toward the car.

“Wait, Eziah, you're hurt,” Casen calls out.

Ignoring him, I move toward the car with my sleeping mate. I wasn't leaving her only friend there, and now I know where she came from. They will all pay.

With their fucking lives.