

Chapter 86

Kaif

Marabella's pain vibrates through the bond, and I feel my link to her breaking. Kyan's anguish hits me like a tidal wave, nearly stopping my heart, as it sinks somewhere cold. My hands hit the stone walls, my power surging and fizzling out as I try to open the portal back home.

“No! Please,” I beg, needing the portal to open.

“Kaif, get it open!” Kyan screams within me.

“What do you think I am fucking trying to do?” I snarl when it feels like the air is being sucked out of my lungs. Eziah gasps once again behind me, and I turn just in time to see him collapse on the floor just as I feel the first flicker of the bond. Like an open flame caught in the first touches of a storm. It flickers and I feel Kora disappear, and my panic surges along with my magic as I hit the wall.

“Open!” I scream before trying to feel for Lucas. Yet, all I feel from my son is unconsciousness.

“Open!” I scream, a surge of power unlike any I've ever felt before courses through me. Panic, fear, and an unyielding desperation form a concoction so potent it feels like it could rip apart the very fabric of the universe. The darkness within me, the shadows I've always harbored but never fully unleashed, begin to claw at its restraints.

“Kaif? What are you doing?” Dominic asks as the room shakes.

“Breaking it, breaking the veil,” I tell him, seeing the cracks of the protection Hades has on this place splinter.

“You could kill us,” Dominic warns, but I don't care.

My voice is a roar, echoing within the confines of the cage that held me for so long. “Open!” I demand, hands outstretched, fingers splayed. The shadows intertwine with my soul, pulsing in tandem with my frenzied heartbeat as I pull on magic I haven't used since the day the daggers were created, the same magic that cursed me.

Something not of this universe, something Hades made sure to lock, chipping away at it with each mortal life I was forced to endure. I close my eyes and focus on the power of the Octavian bloodline. Their ancient magic, the echoes of their spirits, call out to me.

The shadows surge, answering the call of my anguished soul. Dark tendrils spiral and merge with the residual energy of the Octavian witches, creating a swirling vortex of immense power. With a violent crack, the veil that separates this realm from the Octavian kitchen shatters, the portal appearing before me. The raw, primal force is overwhelming, like a tidal wave crashing over me. The bond between Marabella and me tugs, pulling me in her direction.

I don't wait. I sprint, using the residual energy from the shattered portal to fuel my pace. The world around me blurs as I crash through the front door and race through the streets. My heart pounds in my chest, my senses heightened, every fiber of my being focused on reaching her.

The scene that unfolds at the carnival is one of chaos and devastation. Buildings lie in ruin, their structures cracked and crumbling. Lights flashing erratically, casting eerie glows that mix with the shadows that seem to be everywhere. The once jubilant setting is now akin to a war zone. Dead bodies lay everywhere, so much bloodshed, rides are upturned and some burning.

The pit in my stomach grows as I race out and spot Rose, her form wracked with sobs as she clutches Corina. I approach them, my voice urgent, raw with emotion.

“Where’s Marabella?”

But before Rose can answer, a gut-wrenching wail draws my attention. I freeze, my blood turning to ice. At the end of the street, under a flickering streetlight, Jonah is on his knees, clutching Marabella’s lifeless form.

“No...” The word is barely a whisper, but the sheer weight of my denial is palpable. My strides become frantic as I rush toward them, my world narrowing down to the scene before me. They are all I can see.

I drop to my knees in disbelief, my gaze fixed on Marabella's still form. The silence is deafening, and all I can hear is the sound of my own labored breathing.

Jonah looks up, his eyes red-rimmed, his face streaked with tears. “You can fix her, you can bring her back, right?” he pleads.

Gently, I take Marabella from him, cradling her against my chest. The coldness of her skin is a stark contrast to the warmth I've always associated with her. Her face, once full of life and laughter, is still. The spark in her eyes extinguished and the bond silent. A void, nothing.

My eyes sting with tears as I tangle my hands in her hair, my heart aching with each stroke of her soft skin. Kyan's cries rip through my veins like lightning.

Despair takes root in me with every second that passes, and I force myself to breathe. Taking a deep breath, I focus all my energy on reviving her. I pour every ounce of my magic, every shred of my being, into willing her back to life. But nothing happens.

The surrounding darkness intensifies, fed by my grief and despair. Streetlights explode, plunging the entire city into darkness, a mirror to the

void I feel inside. The taste of ash and despair fills my mouth as I pull her limp body into my lap. It's impossible, it's cruel — not her, not now.

“No... No!” My voice fractures as I shake her, desperation making my fingers tremble against her cold skin.

“Marabella, wake up! Please, wake up!”

I lay a palm against her chest, attempting to call forth the magic within me. But it's faint, like the dying embers of a once roaring fire, the power I'd unleashed to break the veil having drained me. It's not enough, not nearly enough.

Fury boils up, white-hot and fierce. I tilt my face to the darkening sky, rain lashing at my features. “You cowardly gods!” I shout, my voice echoing into the stormy abyss. “You take her from me? After everything! This is your twisted game?!”

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Jonah sobs, rocking back and forth, hands clutching his hair, his pain only serves to intensify ours.

I can feel the weight of centuries, the weight of all the losses and heartbreak, bearing down on me. “Is this my destiny? My punishment? Curse me, take me! Not her!” Tears blur my vision. “Damn you! I've suffered enough! I'll give everything, all of me! Just bring her back!” I beg.

“We broke your fucking curse, what more do you want from us!” Lightning flashes across the sky and thunder rumbles, echoing my anguish.

With that, I channel every ounce of magic left in me. Letting it surge through my veins, pulling the very fibers of existence, desperate for a sign, a flicker of life from Marabella. My fingertips glow, the dim light spreading, casting eerie shadows over her lifeless form.

“Please,” my voice breaks. “Just give her back to me.” Yet nothing, not a flicker, nothing but the cold void of a broken bond.

The air is thick with tension, a palpable weight that feels almost suffocating. I glance down at Marabella's lifeless form in my arms, and my heart contracts with such pain that for a moment, it feels like I might not breathe again.

Lightning arcs across the sky, each brilliant flash matching the fury coursing through me. Thunder crashes with such intensity that the very earth seems to tremble beneath us when my thoughts go to her mother.

Grief intertwines with my rage, amplifying my pain and spurring me to greater acts of desperation. “Katya!” I bellow into the encroaching storm.

“You claim dominion over life and death! You, with your mighty power and endless games! Where are you now?!”

My fists clench, shaking with the intensity of my emotions. The rain assaults my skin, each drop feeling like a stinging rebuke. But my focus is unwavering. “I know you can hear me, Katya!” The thunder grows louder, the rain hitting harder, trees sway and bend in the storms' fury.

“What of you, Hades? I know you revel in my suffering, but this is too much, even for you. We broke your curse, you bastard.”

Lightning pierces the sky, thunder rumbling like a roaring beast. But I remain defiant. “You've watched over me for centuries, puppeteering every move, delighting in my agony. Come down now! Show your face!”

Drawing a ragged breath, I press a glowing hand to Marabella's chest, hoping against hope that the fates would heed my plea. “You want to torment someone? Take me. But not her. She doesn't deserve your wrath.”

Thunder rages, and the wind whips around me, pulling at her clothes, and hair. My heart shatters further with each second that passes. I stare upwards, where the storm is fiercest, knowing she watches, knowing she listens. Knowing all the fates do, they watch and do fucking nothing.

“Please!” My voice cracks from raw emotion. “We stuck to the rules. I've played your game. But not now. Not with her.”

Where is her mother? How can she watch her daughter die and do nothing?

My gaze remains fixed on the heart of the storm, desperation surging. “I know the balance you hold so sacred. But fuck your balance! I don't care what you need to sacrifice, or what consequence I need to pay. I'll pay it tenfold. Just bring her back.”

The world around me continues its tumultuous dance, indifferent to my pain. But I can't relent.

From the dark void, a portal appears, and Katya steps out. She looks like hell, her form barely holding together. But I have no sympathy for her right now. “Where the fuck were you?” I snarl, not caring for an answer.

Her eyes are wide and filled with terror as they land on her daughter. “Marabella, no,” she chokes, seemingly in shock. I watch her, feeling the anger seethe and broil within me. Katya reaches for her daughter. She kisses her and pulls away. “No, baby, please,” Katya wails, leaning down and kissing her again and again. Her hands glowing as she tries to bring her back, yet each time she does, her magic wanes, her power flickers.

I'm losing patience. “Heal her! You're a goddamn Gemini Moon Goddess! Why isn't she healing?!” My voice echoes with the power of my emotions.

Katya suddenly pushes me away, her power sending me skidding back. “I was trapped in the Moon Goddess realm, you think I wasn't trying to get back! Where the fuck were you?!” she shrieks back, a wildness in her eyes.

But all I see is red. In a blind fury, I launch my magic at her. “Helping your son! Now fix her! Bring her back!” I bellow, my voice echoing around us. Kyan tries to tell me to stop, yet I see only fury... how did she not see this!

She falls beside her daughter, before reaching for her again and pulling her close, her sobs tearing through the tense atmosphere. “I'm too late,” she whispers, a brokenness in her voice.

I refuse to accept that, and I reach down, snatching her off her mother, who wails. “You can't, can you?” I ask her. Katya looks up at me, heartbroken. There has to be a way.

“Kora passed into the fountain, I tried, I tried to send her back, I tried to get here, I was too late,” Katya breaks.

I shake my head. “No! I won't accept that,” I tell her, and she looks at me in horror.

Jonah's voice breaks through my thoughts, a frantic note in his tone. “What are you doing?” he demands.

Without hesitation, I open a portal. “I need to get her home,” I mutter, my voice thick with emotion. Jonah grabs me, but I shove him through the portal too. “No, Corina,” Jonah says as the portal shuts.

“Rose has her,” I snarl.

Suddenly, I'm back in the familiar surroundings of my home. The kitchen, the place where we've shared countless meals and memories. But now, it's just a space filled with the echoes of what was and what might never be again.

Kyan shoves forward, and Dominic's eyes lock onto ours, a myriad of emotions flashing through them when his eyes fall on Marabella. “Is she? Oh, Goddess, no,” Dominic gasps.

“Fuck the Moon Goddess,” I growl, shoving past him and Eziah who is unconscious on the floor.

“What are you doing?” he questions, panic evident in his voice.

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I move swiftly, running upstairs to the altar room and laying Marabella on a table, searching for the right grimoire. I hear footsteps on the stairs as I start ripping grimoires from the shelves. “Kaif! What are...” Dominic doesn't finish.

“No, the other grimoire,” Kyan snaps in my head and my eyes move up to the shelf above.

“Kaif!” Dominic urges.

“I'm bringing her back,” is my curt response.

But Dominic's voice is filled with a cautioning tone, “You don't know what state she'll be in,” he warns.

“I don't care,” I shoot back, a dangerous edge to my voice.

My fingers brush against an old tome, and an idea forms in my mind. A way to bring her back. But it's dangerous, forbidden. I remember Hades, and how he brought his son back by linking his son's life force to his sisters. The memories fuel our determination.

Light flickers uncertainly as the storm outside rages, shadows of ancient beings shift on the walls, as the weight of a thousand years of history fills this room. Grabbing Marabella, I lay her lifeless body in the middle of the pentagram on the floor, then turn back to the table, and start flicking through the pages of one of the grimoires.

The room is thick with tension. Dominic's voice pierces the silence. “You bring her back, you don't know what state she'll be in.”

I tighten my grip on the aged book in my hands. “I don't care, I won't let her die.”

“She is dead! Your grandmother, Kaif! The rabbit, she won't be the same. I can't let you do this.” I could hear the desperation in Dominic's voice, but Kyan and I are beyond reasoning.

I angrily pull another book down, flipping through its old pages, searching for a way, any way, to reverse this nightmare. Dominic's pleading eyes meet mine. “Magic has limits, Kaif. Some things we shouldn't meddle in. It's unnatural.”

And his words make me snap, “I'm unnatural!” The weight of my desperation building. “I can't lose her. Not her.”

Kyan and I, we both feel our souls rotting inside. Without Marabella, life is a void and if we can't feel her, we don't want to feel anything whatsoever.

Dominic reaches out, trying to comfort me, but I smack his hand away. His voice is soft but stern, “Kaif, you know you shouldn't do this.” When he changes tactics, calling out for his son. “Kyan, reason with him, you know the consequences of doing this,” Dominic says.

I chuckle, the sound almost unhinged. “Who do you think suggested bringing her back here? We don't care what state she comes back in, we'll take care of that later.”

Dominic's voice took on a desperate tone, “What about what Marabella would want?”

“Marabella is not here, and given our cursed bloodline, God knows where she is!” I yell, frustration boiling over. My fingers flip through pages rapidly, looking for the right spell. When I catch Dominic eyeing one of the spells, I stop at it.

“No, not that one,” he warns, but I am too focused on the book in front of me.

“Jonah, get over here! Go get Eziah!” I call out.

“You need something better, something...” Dominic trails off, scanning the book.

“Life force energy spell,” I murmur.

Dominic looks at me puzzled. “What?”

I explain, recalling how Hades brought back his son after Celeste had killed him.

“Hades tied his son's life to Stellara, making them demigods, not full gods. That's why Hades left them in this realm.”

Dominic's brow furrow, “Eziah isn't a God. He's only a demigod. You'd be turning them into ordinary wolves, ending the Gemini line.”

I know he's right. “Forget Eziah, I know what I'll do.” My mind races, trying to figure out how, without erasing that part of her.

I shake my head. Dominic's eyes widen, “What are you doing?”

“I'm tying her to me,” I declare, grabbing a dagger. As I start carving a sigil into my chest, I can sense their eyes on me. I then turn to Marabella, ripping open her shirt. Jonah steps forward in protest, grabbing my wrist.

“What are you doing?” His voice is full of disbelief.

“Bringing her back,” I growl.

He releases my grip, his face filled with shock and confusion. I can feel anguish, feel his worry for our son, our family. He doesn't think I can bring her back. “We should be searching for Lucas. My mate is dead.”

“Lucas will be fine,” I reassure him.

His voice rises in disbelief, “How can you say that? A psychopath has our son!”

Ignoring his panic, I continue carving the sigil into Marabella's chest. “Lucas can wait.”

“Lucas is just a child!” Jonah exclaims, his voice filled with desperation.

But I know a truth he does not. “No, Lucas has somehow absorbed Hades’s power when we broke the curse, or was blessed with it, I’m not a hundred percent sure.”

His face goes pale. “He what?”

“Only Hades can open up the portal to his realm,” I try to explain, but Jonah interrupts me, confusion evident in his voice.

“But you opened it!” Jonah says.

I shake my head, “Give me your hand.” Without hesitation, he does. I try to make him understand, “I thought I was the one opening it, but it wasn’t me. It shouldn’t have been possible,” I tell him while I focus on pouring his blood down her throat by holding her mouth open. If we have any chance of bringing her back, I need her back whole, and Jonah is part of her as he is me.

He stutters, “You’re saying our son... is cursed or blessed with the magic of *Hades*?”

“Yes,” I confirm.

The weight of that truth hangs heavy in the air. I move, clicking my fingers. Candles ignite around the room, casting an ethereal glow. Taking a deep breath, I slice my hand, letting the blood drip around the circle.

Dominic’s voice, filled with anguish, reached my ears, “You do this, when she dies, you’ll die,” Dominic warns him. “There won’t be any coming back,” he adds.

“Life isn’t worth coming back to if she isn’t in it, I don’t want a life where that woman isn’t by my side,” I tell him.

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Eziah

Dominic nods slowly. “Give me the blade,” Dominic says, and I look at him.

“You're a dark entity Kaif, I saw what became of my mother when my father brought her back, and also you know what became of that old witch.” At first, I think he is trying to talk me out of it when he continues, “Let's not let that happen this time, fear of history repeating itself, kept me from bringing back my wife. I have lived with that regret for decades, I won't allow my son to have the same regret. So if you're doing this, you're not harnessing just your energy, you'll use the entire Octavian covens, but you alone, even as a demigod, can't harness that kind of power.” Dominic swallows and the manor's energy seems to ripple angrily like it knows where he is going with this.

Dominic's eyes search mine, and for a moment, I see a flash of pain. A shared understanding of love, loss, and the lengths we'd go for the ones we love.

I can sense the presence of thousands of spirits in the manor, watching, waiting. They won't give up their magic easily. But I won't stop until I take it.

“You understand what that means?” I ask him. “You're willing to cleanse this place, our history? The manor?”

“She changed him, she saved my son,” Dominic whispers, looking at Marabella.

I shake my head, “No, Marabella, didn't save just your son she saved all of us.”

Dominic nods. "So I guess it's my turn to return the favor."

I turn to look at Jonah, knowing he can't be in here for this.

"Jonah, get Eziah out of the house, grab whatever you can and take these," I tell him. Dominic hands him an armful of grimoires.

"Why, what are you doing?" Jonah worries and Dominic looks at him.

"Get outside and take Eziah with you, we are cleansing the Manor."

"Like with sage?" Jonah asks, making Dominic snicker.

"No, we are about to banish 1000's of dead witches to harness their magic to bring Marabella back."

"I understood that part," Jonah says.

"You can't be in here for this," I tell Jonah, my voice firm. The manor might not survive this, but that's a sacrifice I'm willing to make. For her.

"They aren't going to want to leave, Jonah," Dominic warns him.

"Pardon?" Jonah looks at me, trying to understand.

"Kaif is tying his life force to Marabella's to bring her back, he needs magic, he needs their magic, and they'll fight him for it." Jonah's eyes hold mine.

"Not all dead want to leave this realm, Kaif using their magic, they may very well kill him to stop him from banishing them when he takes it," Dominic tries to explain.

Jonah's eyes are filled with a mix of fear and understanding. "But you're staying?" he asks, glancing at Dominic.

Dominic's voice is unwavering, "Yes, if they want to harm my son, they have to get through me first."

I prepare myself, ready to harness the magic of thousands, to bring Marabella back, no matter the cost. Jonah, finally understanding, does as he is told while I start the incantation.

I clench my hands, holding tight to the medallion in my right, and a witch's dagger in my left. The air around me shifts and crackles as I feel the power emanating from the Octavian ancestors. My heart is racing as I stand firm against their challenge.

Dominic stands beside me, his expression determined, unwavering.

The Octavian ancestors rise, their translucent forms circling the pentagram. Their expressions are stern, foreboding, emanating lingering energy as they move to thwart our efforts.

My voice echoes through the room as I begin to recite what must be done to complete the ritual, "By the threads of fate entwined, time's decree we now bind. Life to life, soul to soul, make what was fractured whole."

As I speak those words, a surge of energy pulses through us.

The house starts to shake and crack as the souls that are trapped here and in the shadow realm draw forward angrily. Hissing, they swirl around us like a cyclone of spirits anguished by our presence. I can feel their anger radiating, so potent it sends chills down my spine.

The manor trembles fiercely as if there is an earthquake beneath it, but Dominic does not dare move nor speak out of fear of breaking my concentration. Or worse yet—tempting fate by making a mistake and dooming our bloodline once again. The windows start to shatter one after another, each sounding off like alarms signaling. It is palpable, the force of it shaking the very foundations of the Manor as I continue my invocation.

The powerful energy wraps around us like a whirlwind, creating an invisible shield that prevents anyone outside from penetrating our sacred circle. The power intensifies with each word spoken, and soon enough,

the house begins to shake and crack — as if in protest against what's happening inside its walls.

The souls trapped here scream in anger and pain as they attempt to break free from their prison. The shadow realm roars with a loud boom, opening as everyone cursed from my past lives is brought forth!

As darkness descends upon us, lightning bolts piercing through the night sky outside as if providing flashes of insight for those who have eyes open wide enough to see it clearly. All the ghostly Octavian men of our bloodlines stand there frozen in shock, realizing exactly what kind of repercussions this spell could bring about. Knowing full well how huge of karma imbalance this will cause within their lineage should I cast them out, yet they fail to realize, forever caught in their time, that Marabella is our balance. That she already freed them.

But as the tension escalates, a change in the tug of war of their resistance takes place. Ghostly figures of women begin to appear, shimmering in the dim light. I recognize them — the wives of my past lives. Each one a representation of love lost, of pain endured, and of sacrifices made. My heart beats rapidly as I prepare for them to join the Octavian's against me.

To my shock, instead of confronting me, they step inside the pentagram. Each of them approaches, before stepping through me. It's an overwhelming sensation — a rush of memories, love, pain, and a lifetime's worth of emotions. They pass through me, leaving behind a residue of their essence.

However, the last to step forward is one I never expected to see again.

Luna, the one who started it all.

Tears blur my vision as our eyes meet. “How? You were trapped in the talisman,” I manage, my voice choked with emotion.

She nods, a sad smile gracing her face. “After escaping, I hid in the shadow realm. I couldn't face you again, not after everything.”

Her gaze drifts to Marabella, lying lifeless in the center of the pentagram. “We both made mistakes,” she says, her voice a haunting whisper. “But you got something right with her. She broke the curse, she set us free, she set you free.”

A whimper escapes me when Kage appears beside her, not the young child but a full-grown man how I saw him last.

“Kage?” I choke, barely holding on to the power I'm drawing on.

“Now we set you free,” Luna adds. Her words pierce my heart.

The last barrier, the final layer of guilt and pain, falls away. Luna steps forward, cupping my face in her translucent hands. “I can't take back our past, but I can ensure your future.”

With that, she kisses me. It's a soft, heartbreaking touch, filled with centuries of longing and regret. It feels as though the very universe shatters around us. A resounding crack echoes as the power inside the pentagram reaches its zenith. Luna's shadows flow into me, adding to the maelstrom of energy.

Then the manor explodes.

When the dust settles, I find myself in the midst of chaos. The manor is gone, obliterated. Darkness envelopes everything, the weight of the silence palpable. Kyan sits up, his eyes frantically searching the rubble. When we spot a figure beneath the debris.

Kyan lunges forward, pushing through the rubble and pulling Marabella into his arms. Time seems to stand still. The weight of our actions, the sacrifices made, pressing down on us as we wonder if it was all for nothing. Everything we've endured, all leading to this singular moment. All leading to her.

The world holds its breath, as Kyan pulls her into our arms, he sweeps her hair from her face, hers covered in soot, when Kyan hears our father groan, peering around, we see him sit up. He gasps a shuddery breath as

he looks over at us and what's left of the manor. Jonah clambers his way through the wreckage, throwing debris to get to us, before falling to his knees. A sob escapes him.

“It didn't work,” Jonah chokes on a sob. Kyan sucks in a breath, and time seems to stop when finally Marabella takes hers.

Chapter 90

Temperance

I blink, forcing my eyes open, grogginess giving way to immediate panic. I'm in a van, the air heavy with a stale musk, and right across from me is Lucas. Even with his hands handcuffed and tape stifling his little cries, he's trying to stay brave. Those big blue eyes, full of innocence, reflect anger and determination.

Beside him, little Casey lies, seemingly unconscious. I struggle against my own bindings, the cold steel biting into my wrists. The van's movements are erratic, causing my stomach to churn with every bump and turn when I am suddenly thrown into the side as the van turns sharply. I groan and roll on my back.

Lucas locks eyes with me, and I stare up at him. He motions me to be silent with a tiny finger holding his bound hand up to his mouth and giving me a shush, he nods towards the front of the van. My heart sinks when I see Satish at the wheel and Vince beside him, both of them engrossed in a low conversation.

I reach for the mindlink, trying to establish one with Eziah. But there's nothing, just an ominous void. Panic rises, but I push it down, focusing on the immediate danger.

Suddenly, the van grinds to a halt and the back doors fly open, revealing a gloating Satish. "Hi sis!" he smirks, yanking me roughly out by my foot.

I plead, "Please, let the kids go. They have nothing to do with this."

A sharp slap from him makes my vision blur for a moment and my ears ring. He starts dragging me, the chilling cold of the ground seeping through my clothes.

“Open the cage!” he orders Vince, and the air in my lungs freezes at his words. Visions of a dog cage, my past prison, flash before my eyes. My pulse races, the walls of the warehouse we are in seeming to close in.

Shadow’s calm voice emerges from the recesses of my mind. *“Breathe, Temperance. Eziah will come for us. The Octavians will come for Lucas.”*

But the memories are too strong, too haunting. “I can't go back there! I don't want to be in the dark! Not again,” I whimper.

Nova joins in, her voice soothing, *“You won't. We're here with you. We won't put you in the dark,”* Nova promises, but I don't trust them.

My pleas fall on deaf ears as Satish flings me into a cage; the cruel metal cold familiar against my back. Lucas is suddenly dragged out and tossed in the cage next to mine, Satish rips the tape from his mouth. Though he's just a kid, there's fire in his eyes. Casey, still groggy, is carried away by Vince. Her faint cries pierce my heart as she cries for Rose.

I peer around at our surroundings to find men everywhere, and it seems Satish has found a new place to call home. Yet as I glance around, I don't recognize anyone here. These are new people; a new pack of some kind. Satish kneels in front of my cage, and I shuffle back. He peers over his shoulder briefly.

“I know what a slut you are, so they'll get to play with you later, but first I have another use for you. Don't worry, they won't miss out on taking their turn,” he says with a wink. My stomach rolls at his words, and he laughs.

Suddenly, a woman emerges from the shadows, bearing an uncanny resemblance to Satish, and it takes me a moment to recognize her; his mother, Lorelei Thana. I've seen photos of her before, but never met the woman. “Mother, meet Temperance,” Satish introduces with a sly grin.

Lorelei sneers. “Looks just like her father! Poor kid.”

Yet, the woman's impatience is evident. “Where’s the other one?!”

“Being fetched,” Satish replies. “Soon we’ll have our revenge. But first we need the Gemini awakened, only then can we end The Moon Goddess and Octavian bloodlines.”

The woman nods and goes to leave when Satish grabs her arm, his eyes darting to me for a split second.

“Exactly how are you going to awaken the Gemini? I've tried. Are you sure it doesn't skip a generation? The Octavians, with that abomination of Kaif, return every twelve years. Believe me, there isn't a thing I haven't tried to awaken her. If she had two wolves, they would have shown by now,” Satish tells her.

Lorelei looks at me in the cage before coming closer and squatting down next to it. She peers in at me and smiles crookedly.

“She is Gemini, son. Her eyes give her away.” Lorelei watches me curiously, and I feel Shadow growl in my head.

“I know she has two wolves, it's in her DNA. It never skips a generation.”

Satish glares at me through the cage when the woman clicks her tongue. “Are you sure you've tried everything?” she asks him.

“Yep! Tortured her, even tried to breed it out of her, but the kid had something wrong with it, and stopped breathing not long after it was born. We've even tried to fuck her wolf out of her to bring it forward,” Satish says.

Baby? I question. What baby is he talking about? My twin?

“If she has a second wolf, there must be something wrong with it because it never shows.”

His mother tilts her head to the side, watching me carefully. “Or maybe she's been showing the entire time,” the woman says, and my heart races quicker all of a sudden.

“We’ll make her Gemini side awaken, don't you worry,” the woman tells her son as she rises to her feet.

A small laugh from Lucas breaks the tension. Despite his age, there's defiance in his voice. “You want to awaken the Gemini?!” he chuckles, drawing Satish’s attention.

“You have no idea what you're dealing with. You're all going to die!” he laughs, holding Satish's gaze without fear.

Kneeling before Lucas's cage, the woman taunts, “Death isn’t a deterrent, child. I've faced it countless times. And as for your grandmother, Sage? She'll be the first one to meet it for what she did to my son!” her voice drops to a chilling whisper, “her fate is just the beginning!”

Lucas holds her gaze then smiles, and my skin crawls with the way he stares unflinchingly at her, like she is a mere annoyance, not someone holding him, a child, captive.

“Death is but a moment. It's the eternity of suffering that follows which should truly terrify you. One thing about us Octavians is we can create worlds where pain has no end.”

The woman laughs mockingly. “You child, you don't know pain, but you will,” she tells him, rising to her feet. She starts walking off.

Lucas, despite his age, exudes a chilling calmness. “Pain?!” he begins slowly, voice dripping with dark amusement, which is so uncharacteristic of him. “Such a funny word. In order to know it, you must feel it. And you're right, I don't know pain. Do you still hear him? Do you wake up to Dior’s ghostly screams? When my father comes for me, he won't just save me, he’ll ensure those screams are the only thing you'll ever hear.”

The effect is instantaneous. Lorelei’s face contorts in a mix of anger and anguish, her eyes narrowing to slits. With a sudden fierce movement, she spins around, her claws shimmering in the dim light, ready to unleash her fury.

“You say you don’t fear death, but you still flinch at his memory!” Lucas laughs. The woman reaches for his cage and I move to my knees. Yet, Lucas just stares at her, unfazed when Satish thankfully grabs her.

“Mother, he is a boy! He knows nothing!” Satish tells her, which seems to calm her; she shakes off her son's hand and stomps off.

“He may be just a boy, but he clearly knows something because he knows how to get under her skin,” Nova says as she peers out my eyes observing Lucas; our vision shifts and for a split second, I see a mist-like substance around him, but then it is gone.

“Lucas?” I call to him.

“My father will come!” he says.

“Try to rest,” Lucas tells me, laying down on the concrete floor and turning his back to me.