

Chapter 91

Eziah

I slowly come to, my mind foggy and my body feeling as though it's been hit by a truck. The sound of voices washes over me, angry and frustrated tones swirling together.

"...don't even know where to begin! We have to find them!" I hear my mother arguing with someone.

"The entire city is on lockdown. We've covered every inch, and still nothing!" Kyan growls angrily. "They aren't in the city! If they were, my men would have found them! I even have the human authorities out looking for them."

Struggling to sit up, my vision blurs momentarily. The familiar luxury of Kyan's penthouse apartment in the casino he owns surrounds me. Through bleary eyes, I catch Kyan pacing, Dominic with a stern look, Jonah leaning against the wall, and Rose looking distraught. All three of my parents stand in a tense cluster. Something is very wrong.

"What happened?!" I croak out, my throat dry.

Rose rushes to my side, handing me a glass of water. "Easy there Eziah. A lot has transpired."

I drink deeply, the cold water soothing my dry throat. "Where's Temperance?!"

"They've been taken by Satish and Vince. They took Lucas and Casey too," Rose murmurs, her eyes glistening.

“Marabella?!” I ask, looking around.

“Alive, but unconscious. She hasn't woken, and we...” Dominic trails off looking at Kyan who has a haunted look on his face. I look at Jonah, his face holding the same worry.

“We what?!” I ask, waiting for an answer. My mother sighs heavily despite never aging, this entire ordeal seems to have added years with the lines of worry evident on her face. Her eyes are hollow, and the gold light in them seems to have dimmed.

“We don't know what state she'll be in. Kaif brought her back with black magic and used the shadows.”

“Marabella is the shadows!” I remind her, the shadows can't hurt her.

“Exactly what I've said!” Kyan snarls angrily, glaring at Kat.

“Yes, but people don't always return the same Kyan, you know this. You need to be prepared for the worst in case....” Kyan glares at his father.

“She won't be rabid! And even if she is, any of you dares touch her...” He doesn't finish, instead he calms some when Jonah wraps an arm around across his chest, pulling backward.

“Calm down, she'll be fine!” I just managed to hear him whisper to Kyan. Kyan doesn't calm down any, but also doesn't fight Jonah after his next words.

“Corina is in the next room, we don't want to wake her. She is traumatized enough. Settle down!” Jonah warns him once again.

My heart plummets. A surge of rage builds within me. “So, what's the plan?!”

“We can't rush into this, not after what Satish did. We don't even know what he is!” Kyan states as he diverts his attention to me and away from his father.

“What do you mean ‘what he is’?!” I question, my gaze darting between them.

Jonah steps forward, meeting my eyes. “Satish isn’t just a werewolf, Eziah. He has powers—God-given powers and strength or something. Even Marabella couldn't stop him.”

My gaze drifts to Rose, who had previous encounters with Satish. Meeting my eyes, she nods, confirming Jonah's claim.

“He's more than we thought. Some kind of hybrid or mutation, perhaps?” she says, looking over at Casen who stares glaring at the muted TV when my mother's phone *pings* indicating a message.

“Andrei and Sage are on their way to the city, his men have been out scouting too. He's also ringing the other packs to be on the lookout. They're aiding in the search,” my mother adds.

A sense of foreboding washes over me, but before I can process the information, Dominic's challenging voice pierces the air, addressing Kyan.

“What did you discover from Mnemosyne in the Underworld?” Dominic inquires, looking at his son.

Kyan hesitates, a shadow of discomfort crossing his features. “Reaper wolves were created by Hades. That they can't be killed. I know you thought you got rid of most of them in the city.”

Dominic's disbelief is palpable. “I *did* kill them. I watched Lorelei and Dior get buried with my own eyes,” he warns Kyan, the edge in his tone jarring. I know Dominic has a history with the reaper wolves, yet even after these years, it doesn't seem to have lessened, but then again, I doubt I will get over what they did to Temperance. If anything, knowing Temperance has intensified my hatred for them.

Kyan's voice lowers, and there's a gravity to it, I've never heard before. "You didn't. Only the were-bears can truly kill them..." Kyan looks at me and sighs.

"In Hades's memories, he created the were-bears to kill them after he observed them unburying themselves after being killed and putting themselves back together. He tried everything to kill them, but he couldn't... I'm sorry Dad, but chances are they're still alive."

"Were-bears?!" my father Mateo blurts out, bewildered. The room is filled with echoing murmurs of confusion. Everyone's gaze shifts to my mother. She sighs, an old weariness evident in her eyes. "I've always said they weren't my issue. But yes, even I am shocked to learn they were one of his creations."

Before anyone can react, Dominic, overwhelmed with denial, storms out the door, slamming it behind him. The echoing sound magnifies the tension in the room.

"Do you want me to go?" Jonah asks, looking at Kyan.

"No, let him calm down. He knows obviously he didn't get them all, he's always known, but I think it touched a nerve to learn those responsible for mom might still be alive."

I clear my throat, trying to redirect the conversation to something more constructive. "We need to devise a plan. If Satish has them, they're in grave danger."

Kyan runs a hand through his hair, his face lined with stress. "We can't rush this. Not after what Satish demonstrated. We don't even fully grasp what he is."

"What do you mean?" The question slips out, my heart rate increasing.

"But where does this leave us?!" The weight of our predicament settles heavily on my shoulders.

“Leaves us back to trying to figure out what he is and why he took them.” My father Ezra states, looking around at everyone.

“I'm waiting on one of our men, he went to check the human archives and our werewolf council archives for anything and everything we can find on them.” Jonah says and Kyan nods.

“So we know nothing until then,” my father sighs.

“Not true, we know some things. Well, I know I killed his son, unknowingly,” Casen admits.

“And I... I killed his girlfriend and my one-minute mate,” my father, Mateo, adds, his voice thick with worry as he glances at my mother.

Kyan seems lost in thought. “My father killed his mother. But if she's a Reaper Wolf, then she could still be alive.”

“And Vince owes him money, which ties my father's pack to them,” Rose adds.

“Great!” I say sarcastically, “So all three of our families are linked to this monster, making it even harder to predict his next move and slimming our chances of getting them back alive!”

“No,” Kyan says firmly, shaking his head. “He wants something. Revenge would've been swift. Why take them when he could have killed them?!”

Before anyone can ponder on that, a knock echoes throughout the room.

“That'll be one of my men,” Kyan says, moving to answer the door. “Hopefully, he has found something useful on the Reaper Wolves and Satish.”

As the door opens, I can only hope that whatever we find will lead us to Temperance and the others. Because we're running out of time and I can't seem to feel her. It's like she is knocked out.

Chapter 92

Eziah

I try to absorb everything being said, each revelation weighing heavily on me when my mother speaks while we wait for Kyan to return. “What has Temperance told you about Satish?” my mother questions, her face filled with worry.

“Not much, only that he's her half-brother,” I reply, pausing momentarily as memories flood back. I glance over at Casen, the urgency clear in my gaze. “When we found her, Casen discovered old photos. Temperance, she... she had a baby.” I shudder at the thought.

A collective gasp fills the room.

“A baby?!” my mother echoes, her eyes wide.

“Yes, Shadow confirmed it,” I elaborate, clenching my fists. “They hid the entire pregnancy from Temperance, even blocked it from her memory. Because... Because the baby was Satish's.”

The room grows eerily silent, each person grappling with this disgusting revelation. “But she mentioned that Satish constantly experimented on things. He was furious when the baby was born. He believed Temperance had only one wolf and for some reason was trying to breed her.”

“He didn't realize about her second wolf?!” Casen asks, his voice filled with disbelief.

I shake my head. “No. Shadow said they concealed her being Gemini from him. To be honest, Temperance herself didn't even know she had two wolves until after she escaped. Shadow hid it from even her.”

“Why hide it? Shadow could've bitten him, made an escape,” Casen questions.

“Not if he's immune to her bite,” I respond, recalling Shadow's caution. “I believe she knew he was immune, probably due to his experiments. She got her first wolf, Nova, at thirteen. It wasn't until she was eighteen that Shadow appeared.”

Rose, with a worried frown and wide eyes, asks, “So, what happened to the baby?!”

“From what Shadow saw, I think Satish killed the baby... and drank its blood,” I disclose, the words heavy in my throat.

The horror in the room is palpable, but I continue, “Temperance is unaware she had a child. After that incident, Shadow ensured they never conceived again.”

We sit in contemplative silence and Kyan returns, taking a seat at the dining table, pouring over a pile of paperwork. “Find anything useful?” My father, Ezra, leans over to catch a glimpse. Kyan shakes his head, and I rest mine on the back of the couch. I can feel a headache coming on, and I hope it's just stress and nothing to do with Temperance being hurt.

Most of the records seem irrelevant, but suddenly, my father instructs, “Wait! Go back.”

Kyan flips back to a page showcasing a criminal record. The woman in the photograph. “That would be Satish's mother,” Kyan tells him. “She has quite the record with both our authorities and the human ones.”

My father seems to ponder that for a second, his eyes trained on the woman's picture, and I sit up a little higher to see.

“Her husband ... What was his name?” My father's voice is tense, demanding.

“Donovan,” both Kyan and my father echo simultaneously.

The room is thick with anticipation. “You know them?” I ask, puzzled.

“Yes. I wiped out their pack,” my father admits, shooting a glance at my other father and mother.

“Blue Mountain Pack!” Mateo whispers, the realization evident in his eyes.

Kyan looks between them. “Blue Mountain Pack?!” my mother questions.

“Yes, a few years before I met you,” he admits.

“I remember hearing that. I didn't want to move to your pack because of the rumors,” my mother admits and my father raises an eyebrow at her. “I didn't know you back then!” she deadpans.

“So another reason for Satish to hate us,” I remark with a sigh.

My father continues, “Yes, but that might explain a few things. Those who surrendered were spared. Many were women, and a few men.”

Kyan nods in understanding. “That's standard procedure.”

Yet, my father's expression grows dark. “Yes, but now I'm questioning something else.”

Kyan leans in, “What?”

“Jackson. A significant number of the women went to his pack,” my father divulges.

My mother's eyes widened in horror. “Some went rogue, but the majority... It now makes me wonder if they were trafficked. Because the men willingly went rogue, making me wonder if it was knowing they'd eventually return.”

Nodding in agreement, Kyan muses, “So that's how Jackson secured the allegiance of the rogues?”

My mother chimes in, “Yes, but from what we know, many were promised a pack for their aid.”

“Or perhaps they were assured the return of their wives and sanctuary?” my father counters. “Consider this: none ever dared to challenge my pack. But targeting mine and then Andrei's? We had the largest packs it was suicide, rogues were rarely ever a threat to either of our packs before that.”

“So Satish's mother had a pack?”

“No, her husband's father did. Which, actually, where did you locate Temperance?” my father asks.

“In the middle of fucking bumfuck-ville,” Casen says, and my father opens a phone, pulling up some maps. He hands the phone to Casen. “Where, exactly?!”

Casen pulls the location up, showing my father, who presses his lips in a line. “Right between Blue Mountain Pack and Jackson's.”

“But the pack belonged to Temperance's father,” I remind him.

“Yes, but the settlements where we caught the rogues after the attack on Andrei's are scattered all through that area. There were sightings everywhere, and drop off locations for the trafficked women.”

“But Satish's father removed him from his mother, he would have been young when that happened?”

“Satish is Andrei's age, my age. Temperance may have been younger, yes, but that still would have made him around 17-18 when his father took him. I doubt he would have just cut his mother off after all that time.” he does have a point.

“So he might have seen the attack on Blue Mountain pack, then?”

“Or, that could have been when his father took him too?” my father adds in.

“And then he kills his father when he learns Temperance was getting the pack and locks her away. And now is what? Seeking revenge on everyone whoever wronged him?” I ask and everyone looks at each.

“Possibly,” Kyan says. Great, but how does Temperance come into any of this stuff, and what was he trying to achieve by breeding her?

Chapter 93

Andrei

The tension between Sage and me is palpable. She's always been headstrong and fiercely independent, but every so often, her fiery nature makes me want to lock her away for her own safety. Of course, she'd never let me.

"You are safer here locked down in this house!" I snap, my frustration bubbling over. I don't want to see her hurt, yet she is not fucking understanding or taking no for an answer.

"Don't you dare think you are leaving me here when my daughter needs me in the city and my granddaughter is out there with that fucking monster somewhere!" she retorts. Her voice carries that edge I know too well, the same edge when she turns manic too, which appears to be more frequent these days.

I move to shut down the house, but before I can, she smashes the control panel. I flinch, feeling the near miss on my hand. "Whoops! Looks like I'm coming. Can't lock me in now!" Her voice is thick with triumph, and she drops the now broken bat we have in the cupboard in the hallway.

I grab her, spinning her around, but the sight of elongated canines and wild eyes stops me. Sienna, her wolf, is just below the surface and her coming forward means she's willing to tear me to pieces until either I make her submit or let her rip me apart.

"We are wasting time! Either you drive or I will! Which is it, Andrei?!" she snarls.

Reluctantly, I release her and climb into my car. She slides in next to me, and we speed down the road, the only sound is the engine's roar. However,

the longer we drive, the thicker the tension and heavier my guilt. I love this woman, but she drives me crazy. I feel both indignation and like an asshole for yelling at her.

Sage is usually placid unless it involves the kids or me, so I knew she would be fired up when she learned of what happened, especially with the panicked phone call we received from Rose. The guilt of our argument weighs on me. Her recent emotional struggles torment me daily, the fear of losing her once more always lurking. "I'm sorry," I murmur, taking her hand and pressing my lips to its back.

She smiles sadly, nodding once but returning her gaze back to the window, and I sigh, focusing on the road when suddenly bright lights flood the car's interior, causing me to squint into the rearview mirror.

"What the hell?!" I mutter as our car jolts from a forceful hit.

"Who is that?" Sage asks, her voice laced with confusion and a hint of fear.

"No idea. Hold on." I push the car to its limits, but the vehicle behind us relentlessly pursues.

"Grab my phone and ring Jonah! Tell him we think someone is following us," I tell her, and she reaches for the glove box.

"Hang on!" I tell her, my gaze fixed on the road ahead as I maneuver us away from our pursuers. That's when it happens: blinding headlights appear from the opposite direction of oncoming traffic, as they put their high beams on.

My vision blurs in and out as I slam on the brakes, our car skidding on the asphalt before coming to an abrupt stop just inches away from a head-on collision. I suck in a sharp breath and close my eyes for a few seconds until everything comes into focus again.

Sage is still calling Jonah, but her voice is cut off by a violent impact from behind as the car rear ends us again, sending us careening down the street

towards a barrier at full speed. I brace myself and turn sharply to avoid it, but it's too late. The tires screech as I narrowly miss the car coming toward us, only to hit the barrier. The airbag deploys and there's a loud crash that causes my ears to ring.

I open my eyes slowly as Sage reaches over to unbuckle her seatbelt. We both look around in shock and disbelief; we are on the bridge that runs above the river. My mind reels with what just happened, while all sorts of questions race through my head about who was chasing us and why they were so determined to get whatever it was they wanted from us.

My mind whirs, my body pinned in place by the twisted metal wreckage. I hear a faint groan, coming from Sage. "Sage?!" I yell, trying to free myself from the car.

"Andrei!" Sage cries out groggily. Her voice is a balm and a curse at once. The car's exterior is lit up once more, revealing figures approaching.

A face appears at Sage's window. "Oh, that looks like it hurts?!" a man taunts. With one swift motion, he cuts her out and drags her away, leaving me trapped and helpless. I watch in horror as he takes her away while she screams and thrashes. I begin to frantically pull and push against anything that might help me free myself from the twisted metal web encasing me.

"I will fucking kill you!" I shout, thrashing around. But my attempts are futile. The world narrows to the sound of an engine and the sight of a van taking Sage away.

The car is struck once more, sending it precariously teetering near a bridge. Engine sounds rev in the distance, an impending doom I can't escape. Another hit, and the world drops out beneath me as the car plunges into the river below.

The sound of the car hitting water makes me suck in a breath, only to lose it from how cold the water is. I am surrounded by darkness and cold as the icy water rushes in, filling up the car. The weight of it presses down

on me, making it even harder to move or breathe. I know that I need to focus, to try to escape before this crushing pressure takes the last of my breath away.

My mind races with thoughts of Sage.

With my last bit of remaining strength, I reach for Donnie, calling out to him in my mind and urging him to shift, so he can get us out of this mess we are in before it's too late. But between the blood loss and the pressure, everything begins to blur around me. My lungs begin to scream for air, but there is none left; all that is left is a stream of bubbles floating up towards the surface from where I lay suspended in the dark abyss beneath the river.

The darkness begins to take over as my vision fades and I feel myself slipping away into oblivion. Finally succumbing to the depths, I take one last breath before closing my eyes for what may be their last time. My body spasms, fighting for air it's not going to receive, all while Sage screams in my head to stay with her.

"I'm sorry my love," I manage before I take a breath, only it's water instead, yet weightlessness falls over me. I blink in the darkness as an overwhelming calmness washes over me as the darkness grows darker and that weightless feeling turns numbing, then... nothing.

Chapter 94

Katya

The chill of the night seeps into my bones as we search for Dominic through the paths of the city cemetery. My mates walking alongside me, their presence a source of both comfort and protectiveness. So much has happened recently that our bond has been placed on the back burner. We are always so busy catering to everyone else, I have almost forgotten what it was like when it was just us in our little bubble. So, even if the reasoning behind us being all in one place is horrid, I don't take it for granted.

The air is thick with unease, and somewhere deep in my heart, I can sense Dominic's torment like a storm on the horizon. The way he stormed out of the penthouse apartment, I could tell he was furious, his aura magnificent like all Octavian's, yet I could sense the heartbreak radiating from him loud and clear.

“There,” Ezra points up the back. I had forced myself into Dominic's head earlier, demanding where he was, and finally, we found him.

We find him in the dark, a silhouette against the backdrop of disturbed earth and open graves. He's digging furiously, muttering to himself in disbelief and anger. His once pristine suit is covered in mud, his clawed fingers and hands relentless against the soil.

Ezra jumps into the next grave, where Dominic is maniacally excavating Dior Shivani's resting place.

“Dominic, enough,” he says firmly, but it's like he's speaking to the wind. Ezra tries to grab his shoulders but is shoved back, and I feel Maddox press forward, his temper just as quick as a click of his fingers these days.

I shake my head, reminding Maddox Dominic is a friend, not an enemy, and Ezra's eyes flicker.

“I killed them, I killed them, I saw them die, but why aren't they here!” Dominic's voice is a snarl, his eyes wild with desperation as he resumes digging.

Ezra looks back at Mateo, and me, confusion and concern mirrored in our eyes. The sight of Lorelei's empty grave beside Dior's slices through me, proof of the horrors Dominic thought he had buried.

The sound of wood splintering under Dominic's relentless efforts breaks the tension. Ezra growls, Maddox close to the surface, and he rips the casket lid off to reveal nothing but bones.

“He wasn't a reaper wolf,” I gasp, the implications dizzying.

“No, he was a reaper wolf,” Dominic insists, his voice tinged with hysteria.

“Reaper wolves can't die, Dominic. We've established this,” I counter, but the certainty in my voice is a brittle thing.

Dominic looks between the graves, his mind struggling to reconcile the impossible. He moves to Lorelei's empty resting place, and it's there that his façade crumbles. “I promised I'd make them pay. I failed her; I failed Kyan,” he sobs, the sound tearing at my heart.

“You killed Dior. You killed him; he was the main one.” Ezra tries to comfort him, his voice a steady anchor in the tumult of Dominic's unhinged emotions.

“The main one that hurt her, yes, but not the one pulling the strings... that bitch is the one that kidnapped her. Let him do that to her,” Dominic states.

I exchange a haunted look with Mateo and Ezra. Dominic's past, his wife's suffering, it's a dark chapter we've never fully discussed. Mostly because we never wanted to pry too much, knowing it's a sore spot for Dominic.

His confession paints a vivid picture of vengeance and wrath, a cycle of violence we're all too familiar with after meeting Sage, so I can only imagine the horrors his wife endured.

"I carved him up like he did her... I made sure he paid," Dominic's words are almost lost under the weight of his anguish.

"Maybe Dior was just an ordinary werewolf," I suggest, my voice barely a whisper as I contemplate the skeletal remains of him. But the rest of these graves are empty, torn apart coffins, just like Kyan described; they'd clawed themselves out of the grave.

"Come on, let's get you home and cleaned up while we work this out."

"No, he was definitely a reaper wolf, he healed like her, he wasn't human, also not just a typical wolf, he was a savage, no remorse, nothing, an empty unfeeling vessel like the rest of them," Dominic urges.

"But if he is a reaper wolf, how would you have managed to kill him but not the others?" I question, and he glares at Lorelei's empty grave.

"I don't know, but I made her watch; I made her beg for his life before I made her watch me end him. She watched every cut, and slice, watched me remove his limbs, and I made sure she heard and witnessed every scream as I removed each limb and then carved the same thing into his chest as he did her with the dagger..." Dominic's brows furrow.

"Carved what into his chest?" Mateo asks, but Dominic is glancing between both graves, a confused look on his face.

"The dagger," he murmurs softly.

"The what?" Ezra asks when a sudden, agonizing pressure clenches my stomach, and I double over, gasping; I feel like I'm choking, choking for air. The Moon Goddess realm is calling me; it's a summons I've fought against countless times.

The air around me feels heavy, charged with the energy of being called home, a home I wish wasn't mine.

“Not another one,” I groan, fighting the pull of the other realm. Sweat beads on my skin, my vision tinges gold as I resist.

“No, I am needed here. I don't want to go back,” I plead to the unseen forces that bind me to an eternal duty.

Mateo's hands are on me then, his touch both soothing and restraining. “Go, deal with it. We'll handle Dom,” he whispers, his voice laced with the pain of separation.

My protests are a murmur, “I should be here.” But the pull is insistent, remorseless.

“You have a responsibility much bigger than just us. Go, we'll see you soon,” Mateo's words are a gentle command, and with a last, reluctant glance at the surrounding chaos, I let go.

The transition is swift, and I find myself in the familiar, echoing expanse of the fountains' room. My voice is sharp with fear and frustration. “Who was born or died?” I demand, scanning the fountains for an answer I'm terrified to receive.

Bane's face is a grim omen, and my heart drops like a stone into the abyss. “Is it Marabella?” The name escapes me in a whisper of dread as I rush to the fountain.

“There is nothing you can do,” Bain attempts to anchor me to reality, his voice a mix of reason and regret as he grabs me before I can see who it is.

“Who! Who is it?” I shriek, the fabric of my restraint tearing me apart as I fight against tossing him aside.

His arms are a vice, holding me back from the fountains. “Kat, you can't meddle, you could make things worse!” Bain's warning is a tide trying to

hold back the storm of my grief I know is coming; he wouldn't be pulling me away unless it was someone close.

But then I see him—Donnie—in the fountain, and my world narrows to a single, devastating point. “Donnie?” My voice breaks, a frail sound against the roar of my heart.

Bain's grip is iron, unyielding, as he wrestles me away from the edge. “No! No! Andrei!” I scream, my soul fracturing under the strain of his name, my heart splintering into a million pieces.

Even as we fall, Bain's resolve does not waver. “I will rip you to pieces if you try to stop me,” I vow, a promise of wrath and ruin.

“Then do it. I'm not letting go. You are welcome to put me out of my misery,” says Bain, his challenge steeped in the pain of understanding. “Every goddess has interfered, and each time it made things worse. You create the bonds; you don't meddle. Has history taught you nothing, Katya?”

“He's my brother,” I wail, my plea a blade against the stone of his will.

Bane speaks, his voice soft next to my ear. “Kora is my daughter, yet she is trapped in the fountain, detached from her vessel; I never once asked you to pull her out and to let Marabella go. She'll be free when Marabella dies. You think I don't want my daughter out of that fountain? Do you believe I didn't wish her home?” Bain speaks of the cruel tapestry of fate and consequence. His words are a chain, binding me to an unbearable truth neither of us wish we were burdened.

The realization crashes into me with the force of a storm—my burden is a crucible, one that I bear so that others may be spared the agony of choice, the terror of loss.

Chapter 95

Katya

I'm tired. Tired of the weight, of feeling the sting of death, of shouldering the blame for every inevitable end. I am a goddess, but now, I am also aching, devastatingly one of those who scream for their loved ones.

"I know, but this is your burden," Bain whispers, pulling me close.

"I'm sorry, my goddess, I'm sorry, but you must endure, so others don't have to," he murmurs. In his embrace, I understand the crushing, sacred duty of my existence. I am the Moon Goddess, not fate itself; I create bonds, I don't choose if they keep them, I am to watch but not meddle, keeper of bonds, the silent guardian of lives I am not to alter.

And as I cling to Bain, the echo of my own heartbreak is a requiem for the choices I cannot make, for the love that binds me, and for the lives that continue beyond my reach.

"Don't tempt fate; if I know anything from watching Celeste and Seline, the consequences are never worth it. Save him, and ten die in his place. Save those ten and one hundred in their place. You know the consequences, you know the rules, you play with fate, and fate will tip against you," I can't help but wail, my heartbreaking shattering and turning to dust.

"I'm tired, Bain, I'm so tired. I can't do this, I can't live like this, I can't. I watch and do nothing. They condemn me. Not only that, but when I do something, I condemn someone else. I'm never enough. I can't save those I love without condemning others. I'm tired of everyone dying on me. I'm tired of feeling their deaths; I'm tired of failing," I sob.

“I know, I know, but this is your burden. Seline made it yours because you can handle it; don't make it someone else's by meddling. You create the bonds, you don't create their lives, and you certainly don't create their deaths,” he whispers, tugging me closer.

“I'm losing everyone,” I murmur as I give up, the weight of everything crashing on me. What is the point of being a Gemini Moon Goddess if the only thing I can do is watch?

“You're not losing everyone. Marabella is alive.”

“We don't know what state she is in, or if she'll even wake up. Kora never returned to her vessel; Marabella has no wolf now.” I pause, thinking about that. “What if she is rabid? What if I am forced to kill my daughter?” I choke.

“We'll cross that bridge when we get to it; for now, we hold on to hope that Kaif can anchor her here,” he tells me.

“You say that like there is any hope left. I've seen the world from every angle, and it has shown me how cruel fate is. How cruel life is,” I say, my voice a mere whisper, brittle like the last leaf clinging to a forsaken tree in the dead of winter.

Bain grips my face, forcing me to meet his gaze over my shoulder, his eyes haunted by shadows of loss I can scarcely comprehend. “But it's also shown you beauty, Kat. Your mates are proof of that. If you can't find hope anywhere else, find it in them. Love breaks, recreates, and resolves,” he says, his voice trembles.

“Don't tell me you've lost hope with your mates still by your side. Because if you have, what chance do I have of ever seeing Seline again, of ever knowing her love?” His voice cracks. “Hope is all I have, Kat. It's the only thing that reminds me that I accepted this hell for a reason, that my love for her makes it worth it, that my love for my daughter is worth it.”

I swallow guiltily at his torment. He's been here a lot longer than me, yet he endured it for Seline and Kora. "Because if it wasn't worth it, why am I wasting away here? Why didn't I just die with her?"

I stare frozen, caught in the reflection of his torment, seeing in him the echo of my own soul's cries. "Bain, I—" But words fail me; what comfort can I possibly offer when my own faith is in tatters?

"Love, it's not just a memory. It's a promise, a vow that stretches beyond the confines of this cruel world. It's the reason I stand beside you now, why we endure these agonies. It's the belief that love is a force that even death cannot claim victory over. Love gives life to hope, and in turn, hope breathes life back into us." he tells me, and I nod. Bain kisses my forehead.

"It hurts, but it's not the end, it can't be. Or what is the point of all this?" he whispers, and I nod, turning back to stare at the fountains. He's right; if I give up on Marabella now, what chance does she have if her mother doesn't believe in her?

"Go home, Kat, go back to your mates," Bain tells me, and I nod, now I have to deliver the news to Rose, Jonah, and Sage. Getting up, I move toward the fountains. No doubt she is breaking down somewhere, and I now need answers: why is my brother dead? And where is Sage? Moving toward the fountains, I run my fingers through the water. Kora's little blob of light swims between my fingers, stuck in limbo, just like my daughter.

Only her tie to Marabella is completely severed, so even if Marabella comes back to us, Kora never will until Marabella's lifetime is over. That saddens me, knowing she is a big part of who Marabella is. I am about to pull my hand out of the water when Donnie's blob of light blinks. At first, I thought I imagined it. Then it blinks again, flashing like an SOS beacon.

"Bain?" I call out, and he instantly appears at my side.

“What's going on?” he murmurs, also puzzled. I remember Dominic's wolf doing that for years, his way of telling me Dominic was right there, clinging to life. Moving to the fountain of the past, I sift through the water, looking for Andrei's body. Some part of me thinks Donnie managed to shift to get them out of whatever trouble they found themselves in. Yet, I gasp when I see Andrei floating inside his car, his leg bleeding and filling the cab of the car with his blood.

I speed the time loop up to the present to watch Andrei be pulled from the car by someone or something, and he is brought to the surface when hands from on land are pulling him from the water. A man climbs out of the river, or at first, I thought a man, until the moon's silver light hits him, revealing a bear. I glance at Bain, who seems just as shocked.

The bear shifts back and starts compressions on Andrei's chest. My brows furrow, confused. “How are the were-bears there?” I ask aloud. “They're confined to the forest.”

“Yes, the original one, you need to remember Katya. Back then, all this was one forest,” Bain tells me. I peer up at him. “Never give up hope, sometimes it's all we got,” he tells me before turning me to the other fountain to see Donnie gone. I gasp, turning back to the present to see Andrei take a breath.

“Now, get home. You're no longer needed here,” Bain tells me.