

## The Warrior's Broken Mate – Chapter 121

The new shadows lunged again, faster than ever, and I felt the Sorcerer's power thrumming through them like a heartbeat I could almost hear. My claws flared, the light sizzling with energy, but no matter how fiercely I struck, the darkness kept reforming, relentless and hungry. I stumbled backward, breath ragged, sweat stinging my eyes, and for a moment—just a fraction of a second—I felt doubt. The air around me thickened, heavy with menace, and a cold shiver ran down my spine. Every instinct screamed to fight, to resist, yet the shadows whispered promises of despair, clawing at my resolve with each impossible strike. I gritted my teeth, refusing to yield.

And then it came.

A pulse, deep inside me, unlike anything I had felt before. Not just light—a resonance with the shadows themselves. I felt their movement, the way they twisted and obeyed the Sorcerer's will. And I realized, with a thrill of fear and hope, that I could bend them, redirect their motion, force them against him. The sensation was intoxicating and terrifying all at once, a raw power humming beneath my skin. Every shadow around me seemed alive, waiting for my command, responsive to my intent. I could feel the Sorcerer's influence weakening as my control strengthened, a dangerous, exhilarating edge sharpening with every heartbeat.

"Elias!" I shouted, gripping his arm. "I can—watch!"

He looked at me, uncertainty flickering across his face. "Lyra—careful! That's risky!"

The new shadows lunged again, faster than ever, and I felt the Sorcerer's power thrumming through them like a heartbeat I could almost hear. My claws flared, the light sizzling with energy, but no matter how fiercely I struck, the darkness kept reforming, relentless and hungry. I stumbled backward, breath ragged, sweat stinging my eyes, and for a moment—just a fraction of a second—I felt doubt. Fear whispered in my mind, urging me to retreat, but somewhere deep inside, a stubborn defiance burned. I clenched my fists, forcing my pulse to steady, and prepared to strike again, knowing this battle would not end until one of us fell.

The Sorcerer's eyes widened in disbelief. "Impossible! You... you cannot!" His hands waved frantically, trying to regain control, but the shadows shrieked, spinning out of his command. They lashed at him, striking with a fury he had intended for us.

The new shadows lunged again, faster than ever, and I felt the Sorcerer's power thrumming through them like a heartbeat I could almost hear. My claws flared, the light sizzling with energy, but no matter how fiercely I struck, the darkness kept reforming, relentless and hungry. I stumbled backward, breath ragged, sweat stinging my eyes, and for a moment—just a fraction of a second—I felt doubt. Fear whispered in the edges of my mind, urging me to falter, to let the shadows overwhelm me, but deep inside, something stubborn and defiant stirred, refusing to surrender, demanding I rise again despite the impossible odds.

“Keep going! Don’t let up!” Elias shouted, driving a wave of fire into the shadows still resisting me.

I felt the surge of power, intoxicating and terrifying. My body trembled, claws burning, every nerve alight with raw energy. But this wasn’t just strength—it was control. For the first time, I wasn’t reacting to the Sorcerer. I was leading him, dictating the flow of the battle, shaping it with every thought, every heartbeat. The very air seemed to bend to my will, charged with the promise of what we could accomplish.

The Ash Queen moved beside us, her hands steady, her gaze fixed on him. She didn’t need to speak. Her presence bolstered me, pushed me further, amplified the light coursing through my veins. I realized then that our magic was not separate—it was intertwined, a single current of power flowing through four of us, focused, unstoppable, as if the universe itself had aligned to our purpose. Together, we were more than formidable; we were inevitable.

The Sorcerer stumbled, trying desperately to reclaim his control. His voice cracked as he yelled, “No! You cannot—this power is mine!”

I felt the final resistance in the shadows falter. The enormous tendrils twisted, writhing, and then, under my command, they surged at him, striking with the force of his own darkness turned against him. He screamed, stumbling back, the energy that had once obeyed him now tearing at him, consuming his control. Sparks of shadow clung to his robes, hissed through the air like living fire, and for the first time, I saw fear flicker in his eyes—a wild, desperate panic. Every movement he made was met with relentless opposition, his own power rebelling, twisting, and crushing him from within.

Elias pressed forward beside me, a burst of flame igniting the remaining shadows. “Now, Lyra! Finish it!”

I gathered every ounce of light, shaping it into a final, brilliant surge, weaving the shadows themselves into a spear of pure energy aimed at the Sorcerer. His eyes widened in horror as he realized his defeat was imminent. He tried to flee, tried to shield himself, but it was useless—the shadows obeyed only me now, and the light was unstoppable. The air crackled with power, every molecule trembling under the force I commanded. Even the ground beneath us seemed to recoil, as if the world itself recognized the inevitability of his downfall. His desperate cries echoed, fading into the overwhelming brilliance that consumed the space between us, leaving no corner untouched by its searing, unrelenting force.

With a final, deafening roar, the Sorcerer was completely engulfed, his twisted, dark form dissipating under the relentless twin assault of my brilliant light and the thrashing, manipulated shadows. The chamber shuddered violently, stones cracking and dust raining from the ceiling, air vibrating with residual, lingering energy, and then, slowly, an eerie, tense silence fell over the ruined hall.

I dropped to my knees, chest heaving, claws dimming as exhaustion swept over me. Elias staggered to my side, sweat streaking his face, his eyes wide with awe, and for a moment we simply breathed together, the weight of what had just happened settling around us like a heavy, silent shroud. Our hearts pounded in unison, each beat echoing the danger we had narrowly escaped.

The Ash Queen stepped forward, her presence calm but commanding. “You have done what few could. You have discovered the true extent of your power, Lyra. You have learned not only to wield light, but to bend darkness itself.”

I looked at her, still trembling. “I... I didn’t know I could... I just... I had to protect-”

Her gaze softened. “You have a purpose greater than you realize. That purpose will guide you, and your power will grow. But remember this—he will return, and he will come stronger. This is only the beginning.”

“Yeah. It’s always just the beginning.” I scoffed.

Elias let out a shaky laugh. “Well... intense is one word for it.”

I smiled, though exhaustion weighed heavy on me. “Yeah. Intense is one way to put it.”

But deep inside, a spark of certainty burned brighter than ever. We had survived, and now I truly understood the depth and scope of the power that pulsed within me, raw and untamed. The Sorcerer had underestimated me, underestimated us all, blind to the strength we carried. And when he returned, there would be no mercy, no hesitation—I would be ready, every step calculated, every strike precise.

Because now, for the first time, I was not just defending. I was commanding, shaping the battle itself. I was leading, unstoppable and unyielding. I was a force he could not control, a storm he could not predict, and the very air around me seemed to hum with my newfound authority.

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The chamber was quiet now, though the air still hummed with residual energy, the echoes of magic and struggle lingering like smoke in the corners. My claws dimmed slowly, the brilliant light fading into a soft, lingering glow, leaving my hands tingling and raw. I sank to my knees, exhausted, every muscle trembling from the effort, every breath sharp and shallow.

Elias knelt beside me, shoulders sagging. His bow and arrow lay across his lap, still warm from the flames he had wielded. For the first time in what felt like hours, he allowed himself a small, shaky smile. “We... we actually did it.” He said, disbelief threading his words. “I thought we were done for.”

I shook my head slowly, still catching my breath, the adrenaline keeping the trembling at bay. “No.” I said softly. “We won this fight, yes—but he’s not gone. He’s... he’s regrouping. Planning. “My words sounded hollow even to me, but the truth of them weighed heavier than any exhaustion.

The Ash Queen stepped forward, silent, her eyes scanning the chamber with calm precision. I felt her power pressing gently against mine, a steady, unyielding pulse. “He will return.” She said quietly, her voice like the fall of ash on stone. “And when he does, he will be more dangerous than ever. But what

you have discovered—what you have learned—will be the key. Your light, Lyra... it can command even his darkness. Few have ever achieved that.”

I looked down at my claws, still faintly glowing, and felt a shiver of awe. “I... I didn’t know I could do that. I didn’t even know it was possible.”

Her gaze softened, almost maternal, though sharp with authority. “Power lies dormant until it is tested. Fear, desperation, necessity... these awaken it. You have survived because you have courage, and because you have purpose. That purpose is stronger than fear, and stronger than any shadow.”

Elias leaned back against the stone wall, wiping sweat from his brow. “I guess that makes you the ultimate shadow-bender now, huh?” He said, trying to lighten the mood, though his voice carried the fatigue of battle.

I chuckled, though it was shaky. “I guess...but don’t get used to me being calm. This was... exhausting.”

The Ash Queen’s eyes flicked to the far side of the chamber, where remnants of the Sorcerer’s shadows still shimmered faintly, dissipating slowly into nothingness. “He is patient.” She said. “He waits in the spaces between battles, gathering strength. And when he strikes again, it will be with cunning and cruelty. You cannot let your guard down. You must prepare, train, and strengthen what you now control.”

I swallowed hard, the weight of her words sinking in. The idea of another confrontation, one even more dangerous than this, made my chest tighten. But beneath the fear, a spark of resolve flared brighter than any shadow. We had survived, and I had discovered something about myself—about my power—that even I had not fully understood until this moment.

Elias reached over, his hand brushing mine briefly. “We’ll do it together.” He said quietly, his voice steady but warm. “Whatever comes next, we face it as a team. I’m not letting you do this alone. You’re my strength as much as I am yours, and I won’t step aside.”

I nodded, grateful for the reassurance, though the exhaustion clung to me like a second skin. “I know. And I...I need to be ready. For him, for everyone he could hurt...for my baby.” The words caught in my throat, a fierce protective surge forcing the tremble from my lips.

The Ash Queen’s gaze softened at that, and I could feel her acknowledgment, almost a blessing. “Your connection, your love... it strengthens your power. It is part of why you survived, and why you can bend the shadows. Never forget that it is not just the magic itself, but what drives you to use it, that defines your strength.”

Elias reached over, his hand brushing mine briefly. “We’ll do it together.” He said quietly. “Whatever comes next, we face it as a team. I’m not letting you do this alone, not now, not ever. Even if the path grows darker, even if everything feels impossible, I’ll still be here beside you, holding on.”

I drew in a full breath and pushed myself upright, ash clinging stubbornly to my arms and hair. Elias rose beside me, his movements slow, deliberate. Together we moved through the wreckage—the shattered sigils, the jagged scars carved deep into the floor, the acrid smoke, and the faint crackle of dying magic that still hung like static in the air. Every step echoed the battle’s memory.

The Sorcerer was gone, but the air still throbbed with his presence, like a heartbeat pulsing deep within the castle. I tightened my grip on my bow and pressed forward, every step heavier than the last.

The Ash Queen led us forward, her presence both guide and protector, though she spoke little. I could feel her assessment of our abilities, her calculations of how we might survive the next encounter, and it filled me with a mixture of awe and determination. We had been tested, and we had survived. We had learned. But the real test—the one that would define everything—was yet to come.

As we made our way out of the chamber, I glanced back once more at the shattered remnants of the darkness. “He won’t stop.” I murmured. “He’ll be back.”

The Ash Queen’s voice was soft but unyielding. “And when he returns, you will be ready. You have learned to command what others fear. That knowledge is a weapon far greater than any Elias squeezed my hand gently. “Then we’ll face him.” He said firmly. “But, why were you trying to convince Lyra that she was better off without me? When we were in your castle.” Elias said, eyeing the Queen suspiciously.

“I needed to know who I was dealing with. If she would give up her mate for power. Or if she loved you too much to stay here and command this realm with power.” The Ash Queen answered.

Her whole act earlier was just that—it was an act. She was pretending, putting on a front to see how I’d respond. She wanted to test me, to figure out if I was really who I said I was, or if I was just faking it, trying to be someone I wished I could be but hadn’t quite figured out how to become.

I nodded, feeling a fierce determination building inside me. The Sorcerer might come back stronger, smarter, and more ruthless—but so would we. We had already survived the impossible, turned the darkness against him, and found a power inside myself I never knew I had. I wasn’t going to back down, not now, not ever. Whatever came next, I was ready to face it head-on.

For the first time, I believed—not blindly, not with hope alone—but with certainty. We could fight him again. We could win. And we would.

Because now, I was not just defending. I was commanding. I was leading. I was a force he could not control—and I would not let him take what mattered most.

The castle around us seemed silent, but I could feel the pulse of his presence echoing faintly in the walls, a reminder that the battle was far from over. And as we stepped out together, ready to regroup, train, and prepare for the inevitable return, I knew one thing with unwavering clarity: the next confrontation would be

even greater, and I would face it with every ounce of power, determination, and light I could summon.

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We climbed the rough, twisting path up to the Ash Queen's castle. The sky was streaked with purple and red as the sun dipped behind the jagged peaks. Elias walked right beside me, quiet but tense, gripping my hand like he was holding himself back from acting. Between us, the Ash Queen sat with her usual calm, her dark eyes scanning the land like a predator guarding its territory.

The castle rose out of the mountain like a shard of black glass, its towers sharp and crooked, casting long shadows over the valley. Guards stood everywhere as we got closer, their blackened armor carved with runes that glimmered faintly in the fading light. The closer we came, the tighter my chest felt. The whole place felt alive and waiting—like it was daring us to enter.

The carriage stopped at the main gates. The Ash Queen flicked her fingers, and the guards saluted at once, their armor clanking like a drumbeat. I stepped down, my boots hitting the stone with a firmness I hadn't felt in days. I was done hiding. I was done running. The sorcerer who had haunted us—who had destroyed so much—would finally face me. And I was ready.

Inside, the castle smelled of ash and metal. Torches lined the walls, flickering and casting everything in a molten glow. Servants moved quickly and quietly, tending to fires and preparing rooms. Despite the warmth, the air felt heavy with tension. Guards were everywhere—hallways, towers, even staircases. The Ash Queen clearly expected trouble. Or maybe she just never took chances.

"I want this over." I muttered to Elias as we walked down one of the endless corridors. My voice was low but sharp enough to make him flinch. "I'm done dealing with him. I want to take the fight to him."

Elias shook his head. "I know, but—"

"I'm serious. No more waiting, no more running. He's gotten away with too much. I can already control his minions. I don't need practice." My words came out harsher than I meant, but they were true.

The Ash Queen's footsteps echoed behind us. "You are confident." She said, her voice smooth but firm. "Perhaps too confident."

I didn't look back. "I've seen them. I've controlled them. I can do this. I just... I want him to feel it."

She sighed softly, almost human in her weariness. "You underestimate him. Commanding his minions is not enough. The sorcerer is no ordinary foe. He bends shadows, warps minds, and draws power from fear itself. One wrong move, and even your control will break."

I clenched my fists. "I don't care. I'm done running. I'm ready."

She gave me a long, searching look—half assessing, half sad. “Very well. But listen, if not to me, then to reason. He is patient. He studies weakness and exploits it. He appears invincible because he twists the very essence of what he fights. Your power over his minions is a weapon, yes, but not enough. You must understand the full scope of what he can do.”

I fought the urge to roll my eyes. I’d heard warnings before. But as she spoke, I realized she wasn’t exaggerating.

“He can twist time in small areas.” She said quietly. “Moments can stretch into hours, or hours collapse into seconds. He can weave probability, bending chance to his favor. Worst of all—he can enter the minds of those he studies. He learns your fears, your regrets, your hidden desires, and uses them against you.”

I swallowed hard. I’d always assumed I could face him head-on. But the idea of him knowing my every thought, every hesitation, every fleeting fear sent a cold shiver crawling down my spine, making my stomach twist in uneasy anticipation.

“And yet.” She went on, “he has weaknesses. He feeds on arrogance and distraction. He cannot resist testing his enemies, and in doing so, he reveals cracks in his own armor. Your challenge is to stay focused while giving him no chance to see inside your mind.”

I nodded slowly, letting her words sink in. She was right—he’d expect me to be reckless, to act without thinking, to be predictable. And I wouldn’t give him that advantage, not now, not ever.

We reached the rooms she had prepared. They were large but somber, with dark tapestries on the walls and a fire roaring in the stone hearth. Elias dropped into a chair, rubbing his face. I stood by the window, staring out at the sharp peaks. The sky darkened, and the first stars pricked through the black.

“Rest.” the Ash Queen said. “Tomorrow, we plan. The sorcerer is clever, but even he can be outmaneuvered. You’ll need more than power; you’ll need cunning.”

“I don’t need practice.” I said again, though the firelight caught the strain in my face. “I already know how to control his minions. We just need a plan to corner him.”

She studied me with sharp eyes. “You underestimate the cost. Controlling his minions isn’t just willpower—it’s a connection, a tether. It makes you vulnerable in ways you can’t yet understand. Do you know how to endure their rage if they break free? Or protect yourself from his power when he comes for you personally?”

I clenched my jaw. I’d heard all this before. Warnings. Lessons. But I could feel the hunger inside me. I was ready. More than ready.

I knew she was trying to help me. Trying to warn me. But I didn’t want to hear it. Even though I probably needed to.

She let the silence stretch, then spoke again, softer this time. “There’s one more thing. He has allies. Creatures who have given up their will completely. They’re shadows in daylight, whispers that become screams. You may control his lesser minions, yes, but these others... they don’t obey. And they will come for you, without mercy.”

Elias groaned from his chair, leaning back as if her words were a weight. “Why tell us all this now?” He muttered.

“Because you must understand the battlefield before stepping onto it.” the Ash Queen replied. “Step forward blindly, and your victory may be hollow—or worse, you may not return at all.”

I turned from the window, letting the fire warm my face. “I’m done with warnings.” I said firmly. “I’ve survived everything he’s thrown at me so far. I’ve learned more than I ever wanted about his methods. I’m not afraid anymore.”

The Ash Queen’s lips curved into a faint, knowing smile. “Good. Courage without wisdom is foolish. Wisdom without courage is meaningless. You have courage. That may be enough... if you temper it with awareness.”

I nodded and let her words sink in, not saying how much I already knew—or how I’d learned some of it the hard way. Elias rubbed his temples and muttered something about needing more coffee. I didn’t care. Planning and practice were almost over. Action was coming, and I was ready for it.

We spent the rest of the evening walking the halls, looking over maps and talking through plans. The Ash Queen showed us weak spots in the sorcerer’s defenses, warned us about traps he’d set in distant places, and told us about dangers we hadn’t faced yet. Every detail she gave only made me more determined and impatient.

By the time night fell, the castle felt tense and expectant. Guards patrolled the corridors, alert and watchful. Servants moved quietly so they wouldn’t break the silence. And in my chest one steady thought burned brighter than fear or doubt: I was ready.

I was ready to go after him.

No more waiting. No more hiding. No more excuses.

The sorcerer would soon find out what I could do—and I would make sure he never forgot it.

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The Ash Queen’s castle felt alive, but not in a welcoming way. Every corridor, every staircase, every shadow seemed to watch us as we moved through the darkened halls. Despite the firelight flickering

against the blackened stone, the place was cold. Not the kind of cold that bites the skin, but the kind that presses on your chest, like the walls themselves weigh down on you.

Elias walked beside me, quiet, his usual energy muted. I could tell he was running on exhaustion, the kind that comes from keeping your body moving when your mind screams for rest. I wasn't much better. My muscles ached, and the lingering taste of smoke and blood from our last encounter made every breath heavy.

The Ash Queen led us to our chambers, her steps measured and deliberate. "You both need rest." She said simply, her voice carrying authority without harshness. "Tomorrow, we begin planning the final moves. Tonight, you recover."

I wanted to argue. I wanted to say I was ready, that waiting was a waste, but something in her tone stopped me. There was no compromise. Rest was not optional.

The chambers were surprisingly comfortable, at least for the Ash Queen's standards. Thick rugs covered the cold stone floors, and soft, warm blankets were folded neatly on the beds. The room smelled faintly of herbs and smoke—something meant to soothe the mind and body.

Elias flopped onto the bed without hesitation, letting out a long groan. "I don't know if I can sleep." He muttered, rubbing his eyes. "My brain won't shut off."

"You need it." I replied, sinking onto the edge of the bed. "We're not going to be any good against him if we collapse halfway through the fight."

He gave me a sideways glance, skeptical but too tired to argue. "Yeah, I guess. Easy for you to say—you're always bouncing around like you're ready to tackle the world."

I huffed, letting a small smile escape despite my exhaustion. "Right now, I just want to not think about him for a little while. That counts as rest, right?"

The Ash Queen lingered by the doorway, her dark eyes studying us. "Rest is not weakness." She said softly. "It is preparation. Your mind and body must be aligned if you hope to face him."

I nodded, letting her words sink in. There was truth there. I'd been running on adrenaline and stubbornness for too long. If I wanted to end this, I needed more than anger—I needed clarity.

Once she left, the room fell silent except for the crackling of the fire. Elías rolled onto his side, pulling the blanket over himself like he could hide from the world in its folds. I stayed seated for a moment, staring into the flames, letting the warmth seep into my bones.

Slowly, I felt my muscles loosen. The tension that had been wrapped around me for weeks- the constant edge of fear and frustration—began to ease. For a little while, I could pretend that the sorcerer wasn't out there, waiting, planning his next move.

"I don't usually sleep this early." I said quietly, not expecting an answer.

"You think this is a normal situation?" Elias mumbled from under the covers, half asleep but still aware. "Because last I checked, normal is not what we're living."

I chuckled softly, the sound quiet and tired. "Fair enough."

He shifted closer to the edge of his bed, his face serious despite the exhaustion. "Lyra... tomorrow's going to be dangerous. I know you're ready to take him down, but—just... be careful. Don't let your fire make you reckless."

I looked at him, really looked at him. His eyes, heavy with fatigue, still held that unshakable loyalty and determination. I wanted to tell him I knew that I wasn't reckless, but words felt small compared to the weight of what we were about to face.

"Elias." I said finally, "I promise... I'll be smart. But I'm not holding back anymore. He's caused too much. It ends soon."

He nodded slowly, exhaustion winning over argument. "I trust you." He said, and for the first time in days, his voice was calm. "Just... don't forget to breathe."

We lay down then, letting the blankets swallow us, the firelight flickering across the walls and ceiling. My mind wandered at first, replaying past battles, mistakes, and moments where we'd barely escaped with our lives. But slowly, those thoughts began to fade, replaced with a strange, almost peaceful emptiness.

Sleep came unevenly. I drifted in and out, sometimes waking to the distant echo of footsteps in the castle, sometimes slipping into a deep, dreamless rest. When I woke, the fire had burned low, and the room was bathed in the gray light of dawn seeping through the tall, narrow windows.

Elias stirred beside me, stretching with a groan that sounded like it came from his very bones. "Morning already?" He asked, blinking at the dim light.

I yawned, sitting up and rubbing my face. "Yeah. Feels like we barely slept."

"Barely, but maybe enough." He said, giving a small grin. "I feel... surprisingly human, actually."

I smiled back, feeling a rare flicker of calm. "Good. Because we'll need every bit of that human-ness today."

The Ash Queen appeared in the doorway before we could linger, her presence quiet but commanding. "Good. You have rested. That is the first step. Now, you will eat, then we will strategize."

We followed her through the hallways, the guards giving us respectful nods. The castle was quieter in the morning, the tension still there but softened by the lack of immediate danger. Servants moved with

purpose, offering bread, fruits, and warm tea, which I took greedily. The Ash Queen ate lightly, observing us both, her gaze never leaving my face for more than a moment.

Once we were fed, she led us to a smaller chamber lined with maps, charts, and a few small figurines that looked like miniature soldiers. She set them on the table with deliberate care. Today, you learn not just how to use what you already know, but how to anticipate him, to predict his moves. Commanding his minions is only one part of this fight. Strategy is the rest.

I nodded, feeling the weight of responsibility settle on me again. My body had rested, my mind had cleared somewhat, but there was still so much to prepare for. The Ash Queen pointed out areas where the sorcerer might try to ambush us, traps he had set that only someone who understood him could predict, and weaknesses in the way his minions moved when unchecked.

Elias watched closely, asking questions, making observations. I realized, as we worked together, that resting had actually helped. My mind was sharper, my thoughts clearer, and even my control over the sorcerer's minions felt steadier, more precise.

Hours passed quickly, filled with quiet discussion, careful planning, and small demonstrations of how I could bend the lesser minions to my will. The Ash Queen guided us without dominating, letting us feel capable while warning us against overconfidence.

By mid-afternoon, we paused. The room was quiet except for the crackling of a small fire in the corner. I stretched, feeling the tight muscles in my back loosen, and realized for the first time in weeks that I was ready—not just emotionally, but physically and mentally.

Elias leaned back in his chair, a faint smile on his face. "I think... we might actually stand a chance." He said quietly, almost to himself.

I nodded, looking at the maps and figurines on the table. "We have to. There's no turning back now."

The Ash Queen studied us both, her expression unreadable, then finally spoke. "Good. That is enough for today. You have rested. You have prepared. Tomorrow, you step closer to the final confrontation. Keep your minds clear and your hearts steady. This fight will test you in ways you cannot yet imagine."

We nodded in unison. For the first time, I didn't feel the constant panic, the pressure to act immediately. Rest has given me perspective. Rest has given us strength.

As we returned to our chambers later, I felt a quiet determination settle over me. The sorcerer awaited, and soon we would face him. But for now, I allowed myself to breathe, to feel human again. I allowed Elias to do the same.

Tonight, we rested. Tomorrow, the fight will begin.

And I would be ready.

## The Warrior's Broken Mate – Chapter 125

The castle was quiet, almost eerily so, as night fell over the emptiness of this realm. The corridors were dark, the only light from flickering torches in distant halls. In our chambers, a single fire crackled, throwing golden warmth across the stone walls. For the first time in weeks, there was a moment of calm, a pause between battles, both real and those still looming in our minds.

After we both showered and returned to our chambers, Elias leaned against the doorframe, eyes soft in the firelight. I sat on the floor by the fireplace, staring into the flames, my mind half on the sorcerer, half on the unusual quiet around us. The day's tension, the constant edge of planning and fear, had finally ebbed enough for us to notice each other again—not as fighters, but as people.

"You've been quiet tonight." He said, voice low and steady. "Usually, you're pacing, plotting, scowling."

I let out a tired laugh. "Maybe I'm... tired of being on edge. Maybe I just want a moment to... breathe without thinking about him."

Elias stepped closer, his presence warming the room. "You've earned more than a moment." He said gently. "We've both earned it. All this planning, all the running... it leaves little space for living."

I looked at him, noticing the firelight on the exhaustion in his face, the softness in his eyes. "I don't even remember the last time we had a night like this." I whispered.

He reached for my hand, fingers brushing mine, deliberate but tentative. The contact sparked warmth stronger than the hearth. "Then let's make this night count." He said softly. "No strategy, no sorcerers. Just us."

I felt a lump in my throat, relief and longing mingling. I nodded, letting him pull me gently onto the bed. The blankets smelled faintly of herbs and smoke, but it didn't matter. The warmth between us, the shared quiet, was enough.

We lay there for a moment, side by side, hands intertwined. I rested my head on his shoulder, and he draped an arm over me, pulling me close. The closeness was comforting, grounding, a tether to reality amid chaos.

"You know." He murmured, lips brushing my hair, "I've thought about you more times than I can count these past weeks... especially when things were falling apart. You kept me going."

I pressed closer, letting the fire's warmth mingle with his. "I could say the same. You've always been steady, even when everything else was falling apart. I couldn't have done any of Elias used his thumb and forefinger to lift my chin. He leaned down to kiss me, and I wrapped my arms around his neck, not wanting to let go.

In one fluid motion Elias rolled on top of me, using his arms as leverage so he wasn't putting his whole weight on me.

I dug my nails into his back, trying to pull him closer, as if it was possible.

Elias used one hand to start moving up and down my body as he started to remove pieces of my clothing until I had nothing left.

I pushed his shorts down as far as I could before he kicked them off and discarded them on the floor.

His erect c\*\*k sprung free, pressed against my thigh as Elias started rubbing his hands down my sides until he reached my center and started rubbing it. I moaned gently as he pulled his clit. head back to look at me, to stare me in the face as he was rubbing my clit.

"So wet alright?" He smirked.

He aligned his c\*\*k with my entrance and he pushed it straight into the hilt, causing me to moan even louder.

I wrapped my legs around his waist as he started thrusting into me so slowly that it was almost painful. Not in a bad way. But I needed him. He knew that I needed him.

He was playing with me, thrusting a little faster as he kissed down my neck. I pressed my head into the pillow, giving him easier access as he moved harder and faster.

"Oh f\*\*k. Don't stop that, baby," I moaned.

"You like that?" he asked, looking at me.

"You know I do," I moaned.

He slowly moved his hand between us, rubbing my clit while thrusting. I lifted my head, and he held it against his chest. I kissed and licked his chest and neck, making him growl. The vibrations rocked through me as I neared release, my body heating, and Elias saw it in my eyes.

"Let go, baby," he whispered.

Almost obeying him, my orgasm shook me as Elias reached his, nearly collapsing on top of me. He looked me in the eye, kissed me gently, then rolled over, pulling me to lay my head on his chest.

A sweet reminder of what we fight for: our love and our family back home.

For a long time, we stayed like that, listening to each other's breathing, feeling our chests rise and fall in sync. The world outside the castle, the looming threat of the sorcerer, faded. It was just us, and for a few hours, that was enough.

Elias tilted my chin, turning my face toward his. His eyes searched mine, silent questions in the half-light. I met his gaze, heart racing. I leaned forward, pressing my lips to his in a soft, lingering kiss. It wasn't hurried—patient, tender, full of all we hadn't said.

He responded instantly, deepening the kiss. His hands rested on my back, holding me close, grounding me as my pulse quickened. We pulled apart slowly, just enough to catch our breaths, foreheads touching.

"I missed this." He whispered, his voice rougher than before. "I missed... us."

I smiled against him, feeling a heat in my chest that had nothing to do with the fire. "So did I. I didn't realize how much until now."

For the next few hours, we stayed intertwined, talking quietly about everything and nothing. Elias shared small stories from his childhood, things I'd never known—memories of laughter, fear, and curiosity. I told him of the moments I had kept buried, doubts and fears I'd never admitted. With each word, the distance between us closed, leaving only trust and intimacy.

We laughed quietly at little jokes, soft murmurs that made the room feel alive in a way it hadn't since our arrival. I felt his hand brushing my hair, his fingers tracing gentle patterns across my arm. Every touch was an unspoken promise, a reassurance that whatever came tomorrow, we would face it together.

At one point, Elias leaned back against the headboard, pulling me against him. "I don't know what tomorrow holds." He admitted. "I can't promise it'll be easy... but I can promise I won't let you face it alone."

I rested my head on his chest, feeling the steady beat of his heart. "I don't need promises about the future." I said softly. "I just need you here, now. And right now... you're enough."

He kissed the top of my head, and I felt the tension that had coiled in me for days start to unravel. The fire flickered, shadows danced across the walls, and for the first time in what felt like forever, I relaxed completely.

We didn't need to speak. Words felt unnecessary. The closeness, the warmth, the shared quiet—they spoke for us. Every brush of our hands, every sigh, every heartbeat in sync carried more meaning than any strategy, battle plan, or warning from the Ash Queen.

Eventually, exhaustion from the day overtook us. Elias's hand found mine one last time as sleep tugged at him, and I pressed a kiss to the back of his hand. "Sleep well." I whispered.

"You too." He murmured. And as the fire burned low, we both drifted into sleep, wrapped in each other's arms, the weight of the world momentarily forgotten.

Even as the shadows outside the chamber stretched and the castle remained watchful, the night held its own magic. There were no threats, no strategies, no enemies—only warmth, trust, and the fragile intimacy we shared.

In that quiet, I felt a certainty I hadn't felt in weeks. No matter what came next, no matter the sorcerer's power, I wouldn't face it alone. Elias would be there. Together, we could face anything.

Drifting into dreams, I held onto that thought, letting it anchor me. The night was fleeting and precious, but it reminded me of what I was fighting for—not just survival or victory, but the moments that made life worth everything: laughter, trust, and the warmth of the person beside you.

For that night, at least, the castle felt a little less like a fortress and more like home.

## The Warrior's Broken Mate – Chapter 126

The air was thick with smoke and ash, curling against my skin and stinging my eyes. The world seemed to hold its breath as Elias and I stood side by side, with the Ash Queen looming behind us, her obsidian crown glowing faintly in the dark. Across the broken stone courtyard stood the sorcerer, cloaked in shadows that seemed alive, writhing and twisting as though eager for blood. His eyes burned like twin embers, locked on us with a hatred that was old and patient.

"You should have stayed hidden." He hissed, his voice carrying like a whisper made of knives. "Now you've walked straight into your own graves."

Elias shifted forward, muscles tense, his wolf just beneath the surface. The air around him bristled with power, and the growl deep in his throat was a warning that made the shadows falter for only a heartbeat. "Not today." He snarled.

The sorcerer raised his hand, and the shadows surged forward. Creatures spilled out of the blackness—things with too many limbs, claws dripping with smoke, their faces warped and twisted like nightmares given flesh. Elias lunged into them with a roar, tearing through with brute force, his claws flashing in the dim light.

I lifted my hand, drawing on the magic that pulsed through me, ready to strike at the sorcerer himself. But before I could release it, he turned his gaze fully on me. Visit [j-o.b.\\_n-i-b-.,com](http://j-o.b._n-i-b-.,com) to read the correct story. The world around me seemed to bend, a shiver racing through my skull. His lips curled into a smile, and his voice slithered into my mind like poison.

He isn't your mate.

The words echoed, heavy and absolute. I blinked hard, shaking my head, but the ground swayed beneath my feet. "No." I whispered to myself.

The sorcerer's voice grew stronger, weaving around my thoughts. He is your enemy. He has always been your enemy. You just couldn't see it until now.

Pain stabbed behind my eyes. My heart clenched, as though the bond I felt with Elias was being tugged and twisted into something false. I stumbled back, pressing a hand to my head.

"Fight it!" The Ash Queen's voice rang sharp, like a bell breaking through fog. Her dark figure moved to my side, but the sorcerer lifted his hand and sent a wave of shadows between us, cutting her off.

The world narrowed to him and me. His eyes burned brighter, and the whispers in my head multiplied, crawling through every memory. Think, girl. Every time you've been hurt, every time you've doubted yourself, who was there? Was it him? Or was it me, waiting for you to finally see the truth?

I gasped. Images flashed before me—Elias standing too close with his fangs bared, Elias snarling in battle, Elias's claws dripping with blood. My heart lurched, my breath ragged. The bond that had always felt like warmth now prickled cold, like a chain tightening around my chest.

"No." I said, but my voice cracked.

Across the courtyard, Elias was fighting with everything he had. He tore through shadow beasts, his body moving like a blur of fury and strength. His shirt was ripped, blood streaked across his arms, but he didn't stop. He didn't even look at me. The sorcerer's creatures kept coming, clawing at him, trying to drag him down.

And yet... part of me wondered if he wasn't fighting for me, but against me.

The sorcerer's laugh slithered through the chaos. That's it. Let yourself see clearly. He has never been yours. He is the blade pressed against your throat.

My knees buckled. The courtyard flickered in my vision, fading in and out. One moment, Elias was slashing through monsters. The next, I saw him turning toward me, teeth bared, eyes filled with hate. My pulse thundered in my ears.

"Stop." I begged, though I didn't know if I was speaking to the sorcerer or to the images clawing through my mind.

The Ash Queen's voice echoed faintly, but I couldn't make out the words. The sorcerer's whispers drowned her out, wrapping around me tighter and tighter.

And then Elias's voice cut through, raw and desperate: "Fight him, baby! He's in don't let him win!" your head-

For a second, the bond flickered. I felt it again—the pull of him, strong and sure, the warmth that had always tethered me when the world fell apart. My chest heaved, and I clung to that thread like it was the only thing keeping me alive.

But the sorcerer was relentless. He pressed harder, his words digging like claws. He isn't calling to you. He's trying to control you. Just as he always has.

The thread frayed. My body swayed forward. My magic burned at my fingertips, ready to strike—but I couldn't tell if I was aiming at the sorcerer or at Elias anymore.

Elias's roar filled the air as he crushed the last shadow beast in his path. He staggered, blood dripping from his side, but his eyes never left mine. "I'm right here!" He shouted, voice breaking. "You know me. You feel me. Don't you dare believe him!"

Tears blurred my vision. My heart screamed that Elias was mine. But the sorcerer's whispers wrapped tighter, like chains binding my very soul.

He is not your mate. He is your destroyer. Strike him down before he strikes you.

I raised my hand. Power surged, light crackling at my fingertips, aimed at the man I loved.

"No—please—" Elias stumbled closer, ignoring the wounds across his chest, ignoring the creatures that tried to claw at him. His voice was broken, desperate. "Don't do this. Look at me, look into me. You know who I am!"

For a heartbeat, I faltered. My magic wavered. The bond pulsed faintly again, like a heartbeat inside my own.

The sorcerer's smile widened. He whispered one last time, his voice honeyed and cruel. Choose, girl. Him or me. If you hesitate, you'll lose everything.

My body trembled violently. My magic flared out of control, scorching the air. I screamed, torn between love and doubt, between truth and lies.

And then, in the chaos, I felt something break—like a wall shattering deep inside me. My power exploded outward, a shockwave that sent dust and stone flying.

When the world cleared, I was on my knees, panting, the courtyard cracked beneath me. Elias was standing only a few feet away, bloodied, eyes wide. His hand was outstretched, as though he'd been about to touch me.

But the sorcerer was gone.

Or rather... he wasn't gone. He was inside me.

I could feel him crawling beneath my skin, his laughter echoing in my skull. The shadows clung to me, wrapping around my arms, sinking into my veins. I screamed again, clutching at my chest as the darkness poured in.

Elias's face drained of color. "No." He whispered. Then louder, a broken cry: "No!"

The Ash Queen shoved her way through the debris, her eyes blazing like molten fire. "She's becoming his vessel—stop her before it's too late!"

Elias lunged toward me, desperation tearing across his face, but I lifted my head before he could reach me. The shadows curled around my body like chains, and when my gaze met his, it was no longer mine. My eyes glowed with the sorcerer's cruel fire. My lips parted, trembling, but the voice that slipped out was not my own.

"Hello, wolf." The sorcerer purred through me, smiling with my stolen mouth. "Shall we finish what we started?"

## The Warrior's Broken Mate – Chapter 127

The courtyard was silent except for the crackle of falling ash. My body trembled as shadows crawled over my skin, sinking into me like living chains. My eyes burned, and though I tried to speak, only the sorcerer's voice poured out.

"Finally." He hissed through my lips, flexing my fingers as though testing the weight of my body. "A vessel strong enough to carry me."

Elias froze only a few feet away. His chest heaved with ragged breaths, his shirt torn and soaked in blood. I could see the horror in his eyes, but also something sharper beneath it—rage, desperation, love.

"Let her go." He growled, his voice raw. His claws glinted in the dim light, but his hands shook. "You don't belong in her."

The sorcerer laughed, the sound echoing through me until it felt like my ribs would split. She's mine now. The girl opened her mind to me. All it took was a whisper, a seed of doubt, and look how quickly she bent."

I screamed inside my own skull, but the sound never reached my throat. I could see, hear, feel everything—but I wasn't in control.

The Ash Queen stepped forward, her crown glowing faintly as shadows tried to bite at her. You always underestimated her, sorcerer." She said coldly. "That will be your downfall."

"Empty words from a fallen queen." He sneered. "You couldn't stop me before. What makes you think you can now?"

The Ash Queen's gaze flicked to Elias. Her eyes were sharp, calculating, though I saw worry etched in the tight line of her mouth. "We need to sever him from her spirit." She said quickly. "While he's still binding himself. If we wait, the merge will be permanent."

Elias's head snapped toward her. "How?"

"There's only one way." Her voice dropped, low and dangerous. "Force the bond with you, wolf. Drive it deeper, anchor her to you so tightly that the sorcerer cannot root himself."

The words cut through me like lightning. Force the bond? My heart—what was left of it—lurched at the thought. But the sorcerer only laughed again, curling my lips into a smile.

"You think love will save her? How... quaint."

Elias's jaw clenched, his gaze locked on me. His eyes shimmered, golden and wild, his wolf straining at the edge of his skin. "I'll do whatever it takes."

The sorcerer raised my hand, and black fire sparked to life in my palm. "Then you'll die trying."

The blast tore toward Elias, searing the air. He dove aside, rolling across the cracked stone, the fire exploding behind him. He came up on his feet with a snarl, blood dripping from his arm where the blast had grazed him.

"Fight him!" He shouted, his voice cracking. "I know you're in there. Don't let him take you from me!" Elias pleaded.

Inside, I clawed at the darkness smothering me. I felt the bond pulsing faintly, buried beneath the sorcerer's chains. It flickered like a candle in a storm, fragile but still there. I reached for it, desperate.

The sorcerer hissed. "Stay down." Shadows slammed through me like iron bars, shoving me back into silence.

Elias charged. His claws raked across the stone as he lunged for me, but the sorcerer was faster. He raised my arm, and shadows whipped out like blades, slashing across Elias's chest. He staggered back, blood staining his skin, but didn't stop.

The Ash Queen raised her hands, summoning fire that burned white instead of black. It clashed with the sorcerer's shadows, forcing him to turn part of his focus to her. "Now, wolf!" she shouted. "Push the bond—force her to remember you!"

Elias leapt again, dodging the shadows that lashed out at him. He grabbed my shoulders, holding me tight even as I thrashed under the sorcerer's control. His golden eyes burned into mine.

"Look at me." He demanded, voice trembling. "You know me. You know my soul. I am yours— you are mine. Nothing can change that."

The sorcerer spat through my lips. "She belongs to no one but me."

Elias shook me, not in anger but in desperation, his forehead pressing against mine. His voice dropped to a whisper, rough and broken. "Please, baby. Feel me. Remember the first time we touched. Remember the bond snapping into place. That wasn't a trick, it wasn't a lie. It was us."

The words pierced the shadows like sparks in the dark. I felt them, raw and real, tugging at the thread deep inside me. I pushed against the sorcerer's grip with everything I had, clawing toward that thread.

The sorcerer snarled. "No!"

He lashed out, flooding my veins with black fire, trying to drown me. My scream tore soundless inside my chest. My body jerked, and Elias's grip almost slipped.

The Ash Queen's fire roared higher, pushing the shadows back for a heartbeat. "Anchor her now, Elias, before it's too late!"

Elias's eyes glowed like the sun breaking through storm clouds. His voice rang with command and love all at once. "I claim you. Now and always. You are mine, and I am yours. Nothing—no sorcerer, no shadow—can ever break that."

The bond flared.

It was like a floodgate bursting. Heat seared through me, not from the sorcerer, but from Elias. Golden fire surged down the thread, wrapping around my soul, burning brighter than the shadows could withstand.

The sorcerer screamed, his voice twisting through my throat. "Stop! You'll tear her apart!"

But I clung to the warmth, to Elias's love, to the truth of who we were. The chains cracked, shadows splintering. Light poured through the cracks, burning the darkness from the inside out.

I gasped, my own voice breaking through for the first time. "Elias-!"

The sorcerer roared in fury, fighting to stay rooted in me. My body convulsed as the two forces ripped against each other, threatening to tear me in half.

Elias held me tighter, refusing to let go. His wolf snarled through his voice. "Then I'll tear you out of her myself!"

The Ash Queen's fire surged, slamming into me—not to burn me, but to burn the sorcerer. The shadows screamed as they recoiled from the heat, writhing and twisting.

And then the bond between Elias and me exploded in a wave of golden light.

The shadows ripped free from my chest, dragged out in a violent rush. I collapsed into Elias's arms, my breath ragged, my body trembling.

For a heartbeat, I thought it was over. That we had won.

But the sorcerer was not gone.

The shadows tore from me and coalesced a few feet away, writhing and screaming. They shaped themselves into a body—his body—taller, darker, more monstrous than before. His eyes glowed with endless hate.

“You think you can cast me out?” He snarled, his voice no longer bound to mine but louder, deeper, shaking the courtyard. “All you’ve done is set me free.”

Elias pulled me behind him, his claws bared, his chest rising and falling like a storm. The Ash Queen stepped to our side, her fire burning hotter than ever, her crown glowing like a second sun.

For the first time, I saw fear in her eyes.

The sorcerer spread his arms wide. Shadows poured from the ground, crawling up the broken walls, blotting out the faint light of the moon. The air grew so heavy I could barely breathe. “This is no longer a battle for a vessel.” He said, his voice echoing like thunder. “This is war.” Elias growled low, his body coiled to strike. I clutched his arm, still trembling, my chest aching where the sorcerer had been.

The Ash Queen’s gaze flicked between us. “We bought you back.” She said quickly, “but it won’t be enough. To end him, we’ll need more than fire and claws. We’ll need—”

Her words cut off as the ground split open beneath us, shadows spewing upward like a black tide. The courtyard shattered, and creatures larger than any we’d faced clawed their way into the world, eyes glowing red.

The sorcerer smiled, his teeth sharp as knives. “Shall we finish what we started?”

The monsters turned toward us, their roars shaking the broken stone.

Elias pulled me close, his golden eyes blazing. The Ash Queen raised her hands, her fire sparking to life again.

The shadows were closing in, making us realize that he wasn’t going to give up. Not until we are all dead.

## The Warrior’s Broken Mate – Chapter 128

The courtyard was breaking apart under the weight of the sorcerer’s shadows. Creatures clawed out of the ground, their eyes burning like embers. The Ash Queen’s fire blazed, Elias’s wolf roared, and I clung to the bond holding me together, still raw from the fight to reclaim myself.

But even with the three of us standing shoulder to shoulder, I could feel it—this wasn't a battle we could win here.

The Ash Queen must have felt it too. Her crown flickered dimly, her dark eyes sharp. She turned toward us, shouting over the roar of the shadows. "We cannot fight him on the surface. His power runs too deep here."

Elias slashed through a lunging beast, sending it crumpling to the broken stone. "Then where?" he growled.

"The heart of the realm." She said, her voice like steel. "The source of all magic in this land. If we reach it, we can use its energy to sever him from this world forever."

The sorcerer laughed, his monstrous form towering above us. "You dare seek the heart? You'll never make it alive."

I shuddered. The shadows at his command were endless. He wasn't bluffing.

Elias bared his teeth, his golden eyes blazing. "Then we'll carve our way through."

The Ash Queen raised her fire higher, pushing the shadows back just long enough for us to move. "Follow me." She snapped. "The tunnels below will lead us there."

We ran.

The ground shook as creatures slammed against the stones, their claws scraping, their howls echoing in the ruined courtyard. The Ash Queen led us to a jagged hole in the earth, the entrance to the tunnels. She leapt down first, her fire lighting the darkness. Elias grabbed my hand, squeezing tight, before pulling me with him into the abyss.

The air below was damp and heavy, filled with the stench of mold and smoke. The tunnels were rough-hewn, twisting veins of rock that cut deep into the earth. The Ash Queen's flames lit the way, shadows dancing across the walls.

But we weren't alone.

The first creature came at us almost as soon as our feet hit the ground. It crawled out of the tunnel wall, its body thin and stretched, its claws too long for its frame. Elias lunged forward, slamming it into the rock and snapping its neck with a vicious twist.

"Keep moving!" the Ash Queen barked. "He'll throw everything at us down here."

And she was right.

The tunnels became a gauntlet. Shadows crawled out of every crack, hissing and clawing. Some were small, skittering things that swarmed like insects. Others were hulking beasts that barely fit in the tunnels, forcing us to fight in tight, suffocating spaces.

Elias tore through them with savage fury, his claws ripping through shadow flesh. His wolf snarled and snapped, his strength a wall between me and the darkness. The Ash Queen's fire cut through the gloom, searing anything that came too close.

I summoned light of my own, magic burning at my fingertips, blasting back the creatures when they overwhelmed us. But every spell drained me, and the bond in my chest still ached from the sorcerer's possession.

His voice followed us, whispering through the tunnels. "You cannot reach the heart. Even if you do, it will kill you before it saves you."

I flinched at the echo, pressing a hand to my temple. His words slithered like before, but weaker this time. I clung harder to Elias's hand, grounding myself in his warmth.

"Don't listen to him." Elias said, his voice rough but steady. "He's afraid. That's why he's trying so hard to stop us."

The Ash Queen glanced back at us, her fire lighting her sharp features. "Elias is right. He knows the heart is his end."

We pressed on. The tunnels narrowed, then widened into caverns that seemed to stretch forever. Stalactites dripped with dark water, and the air grew warmer the deeper we went. The earth itself hummed faintly beneath our feet, a pulse that matched the rhythm of my heart.

The closer we got, the stronger the pull.

But the sorcerer's resistance grew too.

Halfway through a cavern, the ground shook violently. Shadows erupted from the stone itself, forming a beast twice the size of Elias. Its body was smoke and bone, its maw filled with jagged teeth.

It lunged at us.

Elias shoved me aside, slashing at its chest, but his claws passed through like mist. The creature slammed him into the wall, the sound of stone cracking filling the air.

“Elias!” I screamed, throwing a ball of dragonfire at him.

The Ash Queen hurled fire at it only seconds later, flames exploding across its form. It shrieked, staggering back, but didn’t fall.

I forced magic into my veins, my body shaking from the strain. I raised both hands and poured everything I had into a single burst of light. The blast ripped through the cavern, searing the shadow beast into nothing but smoke.

Silence followed. My legs buckled, and Elias caught me before I hit the ground. His chest was bleeding where the beast had thrown him, but his eyes burned with determination.

“You’re stronger than you think.” He whispered, brushing his hand against my cheek. “Don’t ever forget that.”

I swallowed hard, trying to steady my breath. “Not without you.”

The Ash Queen’s voice cut through the moment. “We don’t have time. The heart is close.”

We stumbled forward again, deeper into the tunnels. The air grew hotter, the hum in the earth stronger. It was as if the world itself was calling us onward.

But so was the sorcerer.

His laughter rolled through the tunnels, cold and mocking. “You think you’re winning. You think the heart will save you. But the heart takes as much as it gives. You’ll burn in its fire before you ever wield it.”

I pressed my hands over my ears, but it didn’t block him out. His voice wasn’t in the air—it was inside the earth, inside me.

Elias snarled, his golden eyes glowing faintly in the dark. “Ignore him. We’ll end this, together.”

The Ash Queen slowed, her fire dimming to a soft glow. “We’re here.”

The tunnel opened into a vast chamber. The heart of the realm.

It was beautiful—and terrifying.

At the center of the cavern rose a column of light, pulsing with raw power. The earth itself seemed alive, glowing veins running through the stone like rivers of fire. The air hummed, thick with magic so strong it made my skin prickle and my chest ache.

I staggered closer, drawn to it like a moth to flame. The bond in my chest flared, aching for the power that radiated from the heart.

But before we could reach it, the shadows closed in.

Dozens of creatures poured into the chamber, more than we had seen in the tunnels. Their eyes burned red, their claws scraping against the stone. And behind them, towering at the far side of the chamber, stood the sorcerer himself.

His form was darker, sharper, more monstrous than before. His eyes glowed like fire, his grin wide and cruel.

“You made it.” He said, his voice echoing in the chamber. “Now watch as I tear the heart from this realm and claim it for myself.”

The creatures surged forward, a wave of shadow and fury.

Elias roared, his wolf exploding to the surface as he leapt into them, claws flashing. The Ash Queen unleashed a storm of fire, her flames searing across the cavern. I summoned light, blasting shadows back as they tried to swarm me.

But they just kept coming.

The sorcerer raised his hands, and the heart itself flickered, its light dimming under his control. The cavern shook violently, stones cracking and falling from the ceiling.

“No!” the Ash Queen shouted. “He’s trying to corrupt it—if he succeeds, the realm will fall.” My blood turned to ice. We couldn’t let that happen.

I turned to Elias, who was locked in battle, his claws tearing through another beast. “We have to get to the heart!” I cried.

He slashed one last creature aside, his chest heaving, his golden eyes blazing with the bond between us. He grabbed my hand, gripping it tight.

“Then we fight our way through.” He said.

The Ash Queen's flames roared higher, her voice ringing out like steel. "Protect her! If she reaches the heart, she can stop him."

The creatures closed in, the sorcerer's laughter echoing through the chamber.

And with the heart pulsing just out of reach, we plunged into the shadows, fighting with everything we had.

## The Warrior's Broken Mate – Chapter 129

The cavern shook as the sorcerer's shadows poured toward us, a tide of claws and teeth. The Ash Queen's fire blazed brighter than ever, holding them back in bursts, but even her strength was beginning to fade. Elias's wolf tore through the creatures, his golden eyes wild, but still they kept coming.

The heart pulsed at the center of the chamber, its light flickering under the sorcerer's grip. The glow was raw, alive, its power pressing against my skin like fire and lightning all at once. I staggered closer, drawn to it, even as fear coiled inside me.

"That's the only way." I said, breathless. "The heart—it's the only thing strong enough to destroy him."

The Ash Queen snapped her head toward me, her face grim. "If you take it into yourself, girl, the realm will bind you here. You'll never leave."

Elias slashed a shadow beast in half, his chest heaving. He shifted back, looking at me then, his eyes burning with both love and fear. "No." He growled. "Not her. There has to be another way."

The sorcerer's laughter rolled through the chamber. "Yes, wolf. Let her try. Let her burn. The heart will consume her before it ever harms me."

I pressed a hand to my chest, feeling the bond pulsing between Elias and me. The sorcerer's words dug sharp, but for once, I didn't falter. The bond was alive, strong, unbroken despite everything. And in that moment, a thought struck me.

"What if..." My voice shook, but I forced the words out. "What if we don't face it alone? What if we take it together?"

Elias's head snapped toward me. "Lyra—"

"No, listen." I said quickly, my hands trembling but my heart steady. "The heart binds whoever claims it. That's what the Queen said. But our bond—it links us. If we share it, if we let the heart flow into both of us... then neither of us will be tied here. We'll carry it together."

The Ash Queen's eyes widened. For a heartbeat, she looked almost shaken. Then she gave the smallest nod. "It could work. If your bond is strong enough, the heart may divide itself between you. It will make you protectors of the realm—but it will not cage you."

The sorcerer snarled, shadows writhing around him. "Fools! You think love is enough to claim the heart? It will tear you apart."

But Elias was already moving toward me, blood streaking his skin, golden eyes burning brighter than ever. He cupped my face with his trembling hands, his breath hot against mine. "If it means saving you—saving us—I'll risk everything."

My throat closed, tears stinging my eyes. "We do this together. Always."

He pressed his forehead against mine. "Always."

The Ash Queen's fire surged behind us, holding back another wave of shadows. "Do it now!" She shouted. "Before he corrupts the heart completely!"

Elias grabbed my hand, our fingers locking tight. Together, we stepped into the glow of the heart.

It was like walking into a storm.

The light seared through my skin, flooding into me, into us, like fire poured straight into our veins. I screamed, my body trembling, but Elias's grip held me steady. His presence in the bond burned bright, wrapping around me, grounding me.

I'm here, his voice whispered through the bond, strong and steady. Hold on to me.

I clung to him, our souls pressed together, our love blazing hotter than the fire that threatened to rip us apart. The heart pushed, wild and furious, trying to tether itself, but it couldn't decide. Not one vessel. Two.

So it chose both.

The light split, half flooding into me, half into Elias. Our bond flared brighter than ever, weaving us together with golden fire. The pain became something else—something sharp but pure, like the birth of something greater.

The cavern exploded with light. The sorcerer staggered back, shrieking, shadows writhing like they were burning alive. "No! You cannot wield it! It's mine!"

I lifted my hand, light blazing from my palm. Elias mirrored me, golden fire sparking from his claws. Together, our powers merged, a torrent of searing light and flame.

The shadows howled as the blast tore through them, unraveling the creatures into smoke. The sorcerer roared, his monstrous form buckling under the force. He clawed at the heart's energy, trying to drag it into himself, but we pushed back harder, our love blazing brighter than his hatred.

"You will never have her!" Elias roared, his voice shaking the chamber.

"And you will never break us!" I screamed, pouring everything into the bond

The heart surged again, answering us, pouring its raw magic through our joined hands. The power of the realm itself flowed into us, not to consume, but to complete.

The sorcerer's body began to tear apart. Shadows ripped from his form, unraveling like smoke in the wind. His scream shook the cavern, his voice filled with rage and fear.

"No! I am eternal! You cannot destroy me!"

"Yes, we can." Elias growled.

Together, we unleashed the heart.

The blast of light filled the chamber, brighter than the sun, searing through every shadow, every creature, every crack of corruption. The sorcerer shrieked one final time, his body splitting into fragments of black smoke before the light swallowed him whole.

And then—silence.

The cavern stilled. The shadows were gone. The sorcerer was gone.

The heart pulsed once, twice, then settled, glowing soft and steady at the chamber's core. Its energy hummed inside us now, shared between Elias and me, woven into our bond.

My knees buckled, and Elias caught me before I fell. His chest heaved, sweat and blood streaking his skin, but his eyes burned golden and alive.

"We did it." He whispered, pressing his forehead to mine. His voice was raw, but filled with awe.

"Goddess, we actually did it."

I let out a shaking laugh, tears streaming down my cheeks. "Together."

"Always." He breathed.

The Ash Queen approached slowly, her fire dim now, her crown glinting faintly. She looked at us, her expression unreadable for a long moment. Then she bowed her head, just slightly.

“The sorcerer is gone.” She said. “The heart has chosen you both. You are its protectors now. Guardians of the realm.”

Elias tensed, his arm tightening around me. “Does that mean we’re bound here?”

The Queen shook her head. “No. Because you share the heart, it will not chain you. You may leave this realm when you wish—but its power will always flow through you. And when the realm calls, you will hear it.”

A shiver ran down my spine, but it wasn’t fear. It was purpose.

Elias brushed a strand of hair from my face, his golden eyes soft. “So we can go home.”

I nodded, pressing my hand against his chest, feeling the steady beat of his heart. “But we’ll never truly leave. We’ll always be part of this place.”

The Ash Queen’s gaze lingered on us, her voice quiet but firm. “Then may you guard it well. For though the sorcerer is destroyed, darkness always finds its way back. The heart will need you again one day.”

Her words hung in the air like a warning, sharp and heavy as iron, but I didn’t falter. For the first time in what felt like forever, I wasn’t afraid. Not with Elias beside me. Not with the heart within us, pulsing steady like a promise.

We turned back toward the tunnels, the faint glow of the heart lighting our way, casting warmth into the shadows. The realm was safe—for now, though its silence reminded us that peace was always borrowed, never permanent.

## The Warrior’s Broken Mate – Chapter 130

The climb out of the tunnels felt endless. My body ached from the fight, my chest still humming with the power of the heart. Elias’s hand never left mine, steady and warm, guiding me even when my legs wanted to give out. The Ash Queen moved ahead, her firelight leading us through the dark.

When we finally reached the surface, the air shifted.

I blinked against the sudden brightness, raising a hand to shield my eyes. For a moment I thought the world was on fire—but then I realized it wasn’t fire at all. It was sunlight.

Real sunlight.

The sky stretched wide and clear, painted in gold and blue. The heavy clouds of ash that had always hung over the realm were gone. The air was fresh, sweet, filled with the smell of grass and flowers instead of smoke and rot.

Elias froze beside me, his chest heaving, his golden eyes wide. "What... what is this?"

I followed his gaze. The land stretched out before us, alive in a way I had only ever dreamed of seeing again.

The blackened forest was green once more, trees rising tall and strong, their leaves shimmering in the sunlight. Flowers bloomed across the meadows in every color, their petals swaying in a gentle breeze. Rivers that had been choked with ash now ran clear and bright, sparkling like crystal.

And the villages-

I gasped. Houses stood whole again where only ruins had been. Smoke curled from chimneys, but it was the smoke of fires cooking meals, not burning destruction. People moved through the streets, their laughter ringing in the air, children chasing one another as if war had never scarred this place.

Animals bounded across the fields—deer, foxes, birds, even great stags with antlers like trees. Even the dragons in the sky. Life was everywhere, vibrant and unbroken.

The realm had been reborn.

Elias's hand tightened around mine. He turned slowly, taking it all in, his face a mixture of awe and disbelief. "This is... this is what you've been fighting for."

Tears burned at the corners of my eyes. "Yes." My voice was barely a whisper. "This is how it used to be. Before him. Before the shadows."

Elias swallowed hard, his jaw tightening as he stared at the forests, the rivers, the people. For so long, he had only known this land as broken and cursed. Now, for the first time, he saw it as it was meant to be.

"It's beautiful." He said, his voice rough. "I didn't understand before. I thought... I thought maybe you were clinging to something that couldn't be saved. But this-" He broke off, shaking his head as if words weren't enough.

I pressed closer to him, laying my head against his chest. His heartbeat was steady, grounding. "This is why I couldn't give up." I said softly. "Because I knew the realm could live again. And now it has."

The Ash Queen stepped past us, her dark robes catching the light of the sun. Her crown glowed faintly, no longer burdened by the weight of shadows. She surveyed the land, her expression softer than I had ever seen, a quiet awe in her eyes.

"The heart has done its work." She said quietly. "The realm is whole again." Her gaze shifted to us, sharp but not unkind, as if she could see into the very core of who we had become. "Because you claimed it. Because you became its protectors."

I felt the truth of her words deep in my bones. The power of the heart still pulsed inside me, alive and steady, woven through my bond with Elias. I was no longer just myself—I was part of the realm, and it was part of me, its strength flowing through every vein, every breath.

Elias must have felt it too. His hand pressed against his chest, just over his heart, his eyes flicking to mine. “It’s inside us.” He said. “I can feel it. Like it’s... breathing with us, like it’s alive and knowing we’ll protect it forever.”

I nodded, wiping at my eyes. “It chose us.”

He let out a shaky laugh, pulling me closer. “Then we’ll guard it. Always.”

The Ash Queen studied us for a long moment before bowing her head. “Then may the realm prosper under your watch. I was its queen once, but my time has ended. Now it belongs to you.”

The weight of her words sank in, heavy but right. Elias looked at me, his golden eyes steady. He didn’t need to say anything—I could feel it in the bond. We hadn’t just saved the realm. We were tied to it now, its guardians, its shield. Its heartbeat was ours, and ours was its.

But it didn’t feel like a cage. It felt like purpose, like every step we took mattered more than anything else in the world.

We walked down into the fields together, the grass soft beneath our feet. Villagers paused as we passed, their eyes wide with recognition. Some dropped to their knees in reverence, others simply smiled with tears in their eyes, reaching out to touch us or whisper words of gratitude. The air itself seemed lighter, filled with the warmth of lives restored and hope renewed.

Children ran up, fearless, their laughter ringing out as they danced around us. One small girl pressed a flower into my hand, her eyes bright. “Thank you.” She whispered, before darting back to her friends.

Elias stared after her, his throat working. He turned to me, his voice quiet. “I’ve fought for survival my whole life. I’ve killed more than I can count. I never thought I’d fight for... this.” His hand swept out to the meadows, the people, the laughter. “For life. For beauty.”

I touched his face, tracing the line of his jaw. “Now you see why I couldn’t let go. Why I had to fight, even when it seemed hopeless.”

He leaned into my touch, closing his eyes. “I see it. And I’d fight it all again, a thousand times, if it meant standing here with you now.”

The bond pulsed between us, stronger than ever, carrying not just love but hope. The realm was alive, and so were we.

The Ash Queen’s voice carried behind us, low and sure. “This is only the beginning. Shadows will return one day. But with you as its guardians, the realm will never fall again.”

Her words lingered in the air, not as a warning, but as a promise.

Elias slipped his arm around my waist, pulling me close as we walked forward. The sun was warm on our faces, the sky endless above us, the land reborn at our feet, stretching in every direction like a promise.

For the first time in so long, I felt peace, a quietness that settled deep in my chest.

And yet... deep inside, I knew this was not the end. The heart had chosen us, not just to heal the realm, but to guard it against whatever darkness might come, lurking beyond the edges of light.

Elias felt it too. He glanced at me, his golden eyes steady and certain, full of unspoken understanding. "Whatever comes next." He said softly, "we face it together."

I smiled through my tears, squeezing his hand with all the strength I had. "Always." I whispered back, feeling the weight and warmth of our bond.

We stood there on the hill, watching as the realm stretched out before us, whole and shining once more. The forests swayed in the breeze, rivers glittered in the sun, laughter rose from the villages.

The realm was alive again. Exactly the way I remembered it.