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Phoenix 1

I didn't want to wake up from my deep sleep. No matter how many times I tried, I couldn't open my eyes. Maybe because I was afraid of the darkness that embraced me every time I tried to look around.

Or maybe it wasn't the sleep but the reality that I was trying to avoid.

Death.

I must have died and gone to the Moon Goddess.

After receiving this much hate, I didn't think any person would want to live. What was there for me in that world anyway?

I blinked in confusion and this time covered my eyes with my palm due to the bright white light. Was Moon Goddess playing some kind of a joke on me?

"Are you awake?" Someone asked me softly, and I smiled like a fool, thinking that this might be Moon Goddess.

"Hello," I mumbled, keeping my eyes closed, "I want to rest some more, Moon Goddess. All that hatred has made me tired. Okay?"

Moon Goddess chuckled softly, and I felt a soft touch to my cheek, "You are not dead, little one," she rubbed her knuckle gently on my cheek, "There is still a lot of time in that."

The touch reminded me of my mom before she started hating me. Out of nowhere, I felt tears pricking my eyelids.

"M..Mom?" Goddess. Why was I missing her? She was never there for me when I needed her the most.

"Uh huh," I felt a cold cloth against my cheeks, "Your tears will wash away the ointment, girl."

Ointment?

This time I did open my eyes and blinked several times, trying to adjust to the light.

The ceiling above was made of wood. A woman's face was leaning over me. Soft features, gentle eyes, and hair tied messily.

She must be middle-aged, but the calmness on her face was something that I found rare.

"Y...You're not the Moon Goddess?" I was feeling kind of stupid.

She chuckled, brushing a strand of hair behind

my ear, "Nope. Just a tired woman who loves baking. I'm Kiki."

Kiki?

She straightened and walked to the other side of what looked like a wooden hut.

"You were sleeping by the river when I found you. Thought you were dead," she shrugged, "but your heartbeat was good, so I brought you here."

I tried to sit up, but my body protested like it was made of wood. My cheeks stung a little.

Oh, no!

My hand flew to my face, and I turned slightly away from her, remembering my mask. She noticed it and smiled, "Don't worry," she pulled a stool closer to bed, "I applied a salve and thankfully it worked. Your worms are very naughty. It took some time to take the gunk out," she helped me up, "Life taught me better, so no need to feel conscious."

She placed a steaming bowl into my hands. The smell made my stomach growl embarrassingly loud.

"Bone broth," she sat on a stool, "It will give you strength. Wait... let me bring some bread too."

I stared at the bowl and then at her. She brought the bread and offered it to me.

I was still not sure if this was real or if I was dreaming.

"Come on," she nodded at me, "Take it."

I accepted the bread and gave a little dip in the broth.

"What's your name?" she asked me.

I glanced up in confusion, "Hmm?"

"What's your name, love? And please eat your bread," she pointed towards the bowl on my lap.

"Phoenix," the moment I said it, she started laughing. I looked up again in confusion and saw her shaking her head.

"I'm sorry... but seriously? Phoenix?"

"Yeah!" Ignoring the sarcasm in her tone, I moved my attention to the meal and started eating the bread after dipping it in the liquid, "Because I'm strong and risen from the ashes, so I think it suited me," I explained to her, chewing my food.

The bun was fresh, and the broth tasted delicious.

I never told anyone why I chose my name. She was the first with whom I shared this.

And then I realized another thing. She was the first person, after Jai, with whom I was relaxed,

without wearing a mask.

There was comfortable silence in the hut, and I didn't want to think about Luna Raya, so I shot her with the first question that popped up in my mind,

"You live here, Kiki?"

"Not exactly," she took the empty bowl from my hands and walked to the kitchen corner, "It's kind of a vacation getaway, my husband built it for me."

Just as I opened my mouth to speak, my loud burp beat me to it.

We both chuckled, and I shook my head, "Sorry for that. I was very hungry, and thank you for being so kind, Kiki."

Thank you for not being a douche bag like Raya or Kiara or Tina or Tamia or my mom or my father ...

Argh. The list was endless.

"Stop thinking and go to sleep," Kiki commanded me sternly, making me jump.

"Sorry?"

"Whatever it is, Phoenix. It can wait. Right now, your mind and body need rest. Go to sleep and then let's discuss what we need to do next."

Next?

There was no next.

I didn't want to go back to that pack. Maybe I could help Kiki around here.

"What do you do, Kiki? I mean for living?" As soon as I asked the question, my mouth got wide open for a big yawn.

"I'm a baker," she told me sweetly and then passed me a glare that resembled to my mom so much, "Now sleep!"

I rested my head back on the pillow and tried thinking about Jai. But my mind was so tired that it didn't give me enough time to think and pulled me into a deep slumber. 1

Fine!

I decided to take Kiki's advice for now, not knowing that this was not the last one.