

Kings Breeder 901

[Chapter 901](#)

Jared

"I delivered the messages as you asked. All our allies have agreed to help and are awaiting further instructions," Archer told me. He handed me a list of everyone he'd delivered my messages to.

"How are we going to get Aries's followers to betray him? They think his cause is just," Brandt mumbled, pacing back and forth in front of the table.

We had a newly updated map spread out that pinpointed the location of Aries's current encampment.

The moment that we got enough of his supporters to abandon him, we'd move in for the attack.

"Rumors. We all know how damaging rumors can be to anyone's reputation. We just need to think of the right thing... it could be the truth for all I care, as long as it will make people abandon him," I suggested.

"What about Hestia? We could say that he conspires with witches. Other shifters don't always like that." Archer shrugged.

I stroked my chin. "That could work."

"You know, there are a lot of shifters following him because he's convinced them that you are the one he wants to put on the throne," Brandt said, perking up suddenly.

"He did, but he assured me it was part of a ruse and he would be the one claiming the throne," I said.

"Right, but if the others find out that Aries is planning to seize power for himself and had you arrested by the Royal Guards, it would put a big hole in his case." Brandt grinned and bounced his eyebrows.

I smirked. "Yes, I like that plan. Colluding with the Royal Guards would be bad enough."

Archer chuckled. "I like it. Let me send word to our allies. They will start spreading the rumor and we'll wait to hear about how Aries's supporters respond."

"We should know soon enough. I imagine the reaction will be swift." I nodded.

Archer sent out the messages. I didn't like the idea of waiting around. But what else could I do?

As the sun set, I was worried my wolf would take over again. He'd been soothed and docile since Eliza and I had finally talked and spent time together.

By the time the sun was down and the moon was rising, he still hadn't battled me for control.

I sighed and made my way to a tent to get a few hours of sleep. There was a large part of me that did want to return to the village and hold Eliza all night.

Right now, I needed to focus on ending Aries's rebellion. Having my wolf act out was counterintuitive.

I slept restlessly, waking and reaching for Eliza often. Eventually, I gave up and I went outside.

It was in the predawn hours of morning. The sky was barely gray and the scent of dew hung in the air. There was a lamp on in Archer's tent.

When did he find time to sleep?

I joined Archer, who was still pouring over his maps. He mumbled to himself and scribbled notes on a notepad.

"Did you sleep?" I greeted.

Archer tensed and looked up. "Uh... not yet. Brandt returned a few hours ago and confirmed that our message had been delivered with the rumors we want spread. He even managed to scrounge up a witness who saw you being arrested by Royal Guards at Aries's mansion."

"Wow, that's lucky," I muttered.

"Now, I'm just waiting on word from our scouts that Aries's men are disbanding from the various encampments." He tapped little blue dots on the map, indicating the smaller encampments.

I nodded. Finally, it felt like we were gaining control of the situation again.

"Did you sleep, Jared?"

Sighing, I shook my head. "Not very well. I thought I'd check on things."

"Your wolf seems to be... subdued."

I scoffed and tossed my head back. "He's placated. There's a difference."

The flap on Archer's tent flipped open, and Brandt walked in. He seemed breathless.

"Archer, Jared, scouts are coming in from all the encampments. They are breaking up. Aries's supporters are going home!"

I glanced at Archer. He nodded. "Good news."

"What about the main encampment?" I asked, tapping the large red blot on the map.

"Two scouts came three hours apart. Both reported that large numbers of Aries's supporters left the camp," Brandt reported.

"There will be die-hard loyalists who won't leave him. But once the bulk of his forces break up, Aries will have no choice but to return home."

I growled. "We're not letting him get that far! He's not even going to leave the encampment!"

"Good call."

We waited until one more scout returned from the large encampment. He reported that everyone who was leaving had left, and that Aries's remaining forces were minimal.

My warriors would easily be able to overtake them.

"Alright, it is time to end this!" I announced.

We quickly broke up the camp and headed straight for Aries's encampment. It wasn't far, and we'd make it there before midday.

I didn't even stop when Aries's encampment came into view. Pulling my clothes off, I shifted and raced toward the camp, leading the charge.

"Awwoo!" I howled, calling my warriors to me and announcing my arrival.

We raced between the tents. I pounced on the first soldier I found and bit down on his shoulder. He screamed and fell to the ground, bleeding out.

The camp erupted in fighting as my warriors attacked mercilessly.

We'd waited until only Aries's loyal followers remained so that no innocents would be caught in the crossfire.

I pounced on another soldier, raking my front claws down his side. He crumpled to the ground.

Blood splattered my fur, but I wasn't about to stop. I shook it off and dove into the center of the battle.

Brandt and Archer stayed at my sides. The three of us tore through the camp, taking down anyone who got in our way.

We ran through the tents, ransacking them and looking for any trace of Aries.

At the beginning of the attack, I'd relinquished control to my wolf. He wanted a fight—needed a fight—and he was all too eager to destroy.

His power surged through me with each soldier we attacked and took down.

'Jared, I don't see any sign of Aries,' Archer reached out with the mind link.

'Keep going with the attack. Don't stop until every loyalist is dead. I will take care of Aries.'

I broke off from Archer and Brandt. They led my warriors onward, destroying the camp and anyone they found in it.

My wolf was disappointed to break away, but the thought of tearing Aries to shreds was enough to spur him onward.

We sniffed through the camp, turning over everything we found, seeking any scent that would mean Aries was nearby, or had been there at all.

The only scents that we found were faint, days old.

Had Aries fooled us again? Had he already slipped away before we made our attack? That wasn't possible, was it!?

Growling, my wolf stuck his nose to the ground and kept sniffing.

We ran to the edge of camp where there was a large tent, larger than the rest. It was heavily guarded.

That had to be where Aries was hiding. He was too much of a coward to enter a fight his men were losing....

I raced at the guards, grabbing one by the leg and dragging him off. Circling around, I sank my teeth into the arm of another, yanking and tugging until I heard his shoulder crack.

The guard screamed and struggled against me. I yanked again until his arm came off completely.

The other guards ran off when I growled and lifted my blood-soaked jaw.

They were cowards, just like their leader.

My wolf and I pushed into the tent, ready to destroy Aries.

Empty—the tent was completely empty.

'The remaining loyalists are retreating.' Brandt informed me. 'Should we pursue them?'

'No. They're not a threat anymore. They've seen where their rebellion will take them.'

I regrouped with Archer and Brandt. We shifted back and found some clothes in the destroyed camp.

The rest of the warriors combed through the debris, looking for anything that would be useful for figuring out what Aries was up to.

"Where is Aries?" Brandt asked.

I shrugged. "Not here. He must have known we were coming and slipped away while his loyalists fought."

"Of course, he did," Brant snarled and rolled his eyes.

"It doesn't matter. The only place left he has to go is to his mansion. We'll catch up with him there. And if he isn't there, we'll send word that anyone who harbors him will be held accountable for his crimes, too. Everyone will turn on him then."

"You really hate this guy," Archer said, chuckling.

I snorted and nodded.

Something tugged inside of me, and I got the strong desire to return to the village and see Eliza. It wasn't my wolf that urged me to go. It was another feeling. Some kind of... sense that told me I had to get back to her.

Sighing, I shook it off. "Clean this place up. Gather whatever intel you can and let me know if there's anything useful."

"Yes, of course, Jared," Brandt nodded. He ran off to join the others.

"Are you going to race back to the village?" Archer asked, wagging his eyebrows at me.

"That's the plan."

Archer nodded. His brow creased and he held a hand up. "Hold that thought for a moment."

I followed my gaze and saw a messenger running into the camp. He came right up to me.

"J-Jared...." he gasped and clutched his sides. Bending forward, he gasped and choked like he'd been running for a very long time.

"What is it?" I demanded.

If he'd run so hard and so long, it had to be urgent.

My stomach sank as I immediately thought of the feeling I'd had, the desperate desire to return to Eliza. My heart raced as I waited for the messenger to catch his breath.

"I-I'm sorry... I have a cramp...."

"Get him some water," I ordered Archer.

He disappeared for a moment and returned with a bottle. The messenger took it eagerly and guzzled it down.

He finished the water and wiped the back of his mouth with his hand.

"We received word from Aries at the village. He's kidnapped Eliza and taken her hostage."

"WHAT!" I exploded. My wolf rippled under my skin, seconds from breaking free and racing after Eliza. My vision blurred and cleared over and over again as I fought the transformation.

Archer put his hand on my shoulder. It steadied me enough to regain control.

The messenger took a half step back and gave me a sheepish look.

"The message is that if you want her to stay alive, you need to meet him alone in his mansion," the messenger reported.

"That's not happening," Archer growled.

"No, it is happening." I held a hand up to Archer. "This is perfect. He wants to meet alone, I will finally get to destroy him."

[Chapter 902](#)

Eliza

I came to and immediately realized I was in motion. I was moving fast, bumping around all over the place and sliding back and forth.

I was lying on my side. My ankles were bound, my wrists tied behind my back, and a thick gag was stuck in my mouth.

Once I gained my bearings, I realized I was in the back of a Jeep. Wind rushed around me. It must have had the doors and windows removed, the way we were bumping all over the place.

We were probably off-road. Jeeps were good for that.

Voices in the front seat caught my attention.

I rolled over, grunting as my wrist twisted uncomfortably. I saw Aries in the front passenger seat. Someone I'd never seen before was driving.

They were talking about Hestia and Jared. I strained my ears to listen to what they were saying.

"She's just a means to an end. It is Jared that Hestia is really after," Aries said.

"What does Hestia want with him?" the driver asked.

"I don't know. I don't really care, either. She can do whatever she wants with him, as long as she replenishes my army. That was the deal."

"Why does that matter?"

"Jared has been a perpetual thorn in my side. I'm going to make him wish he never crossed me with some of the oldest, most brutal methods of torture you can imagine."

"Haven't those been outlawed for centuries?"

"Sure, but does it matter? He's a miscreant. I'm going to cut off his fingers one knuckle at a time and then feed them to him. He'll be too broken and scared to ever get in my way again."

My stomach churned at the thought. It was absolutely horrific, hearing Aries describe what he was going to do.

I struggled against my rope bindings, grunting. I tried to shift but my energy felt sapped as if I were drugged.

Aries immediately stopped talking. He turned over the car seat and smirked at me.

"Ahh, you're awake. That sedative must be wearing off. No worries, we're almost there. Did you hear about the special event I have planned for your mate?"

I tried to say something but the gag muffled my words. I glared at Aries and snarled. He could talk all he wanted, but he wasn't going to get away with this....

Aries chuckled. "You don't have to worry, darling. Once Jared is dead and the Dark King is overthrown, you can be my Luna Queen—the Luna Queen of all Egoren. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

I shook my head and hissed curses at him through my gag. They just came out as muffled grunts.

"I like your fire, Eliza. That is exactly why I want you to be my Luna."

I rolled my eyes. He was absolutely delusional if he thought I'd ever agree to that. Why would he think that I would want to be his Luna Queen?

I pushed at the gag with my tongue and tried to call out for help. Hardly any noise made it through the thick fabric and I groaned, dropping my head to the floor of the Jeep trunk.

I recognized the scenery, or what I could see of it. Aries was taking me back to his mansion.

'Jared, please come get me soon. I don't want to be alone with Aries a second longer than I have to be!' I pleaded silently.

The ride smoothed out and the Jeep came to a stop. Aries hopped out and yanked the trunk open. Effortlessly, he dragged me out and threw me over his shoulder.

I kicked and struggled against him but with my bound ankles and wrists, I didn't make much progress.

Aries carried me through the mansion to a room. He dropped me on the floor.

My joints ached from the impact. He leaned over me and cut the bindings off my wrists and ankles. The knife touched the back of my neck.

I stiffened but then the gag loosened and fell off my face.

"Make yourself at home, dear Eliza. You're an honored guest. If there is anything you need, just let me know."

Aries left and closed the door. I heard it lock behind me.

Right, I was an honored guest locked in a room.

Sighing, I stood up and rubbed my wrists. The rope had cut into my skin, leaving red marks on my wrists and ankles.

I looked around the room, my eyes landing on the bed. I froze and felt all the blood drain from my face.

Hestia was lying in the bed. Her breathing came in deep, rasping hisses, her skin pale and pulled tight over her bones. She looked like a living skeleton, so thin and emaciated.

I'd never seen her look so awful... how had she gotten this bad in just a few days?

It was obvious that she was dying. Her sunken eyes settled on me and her pale lips pulled up in a terrifying grimace. She looked like a corpse.

There was a shifter sitting on the bed beside her, dabbing at her forehead and arms with a wet cloth.

"Eliza, I only dreamed you'd come," Hestia hissed. She tried to lift her hand but her thin, bony arm trembled and it fell back to the bed.

Before I could say anything, two shifters came in from the adjoining bathroom. They were both naked.

The women lay on the bed beside Hestia and each lifted one of her weak hands, placing it on their bodies.

Hestia's sickening smile widened a bit more. The women shivered and moaned. I watched as their bodies trembled and withered, their skin turning to a leathery husk around their bones as Hestia sucked the life out of them.

I was horrified to watch, but I couldn't look away.

Hestia's attendant pulled the two dead bodies off the bed and shoved them against a wall.

Immediately, I noticed that Hestia's body fleshed out some. She didn't look as pale or skinny. I could tell she was still weak, but her breathing returned to normal.

"Are you going to do that to me!?" I cried, pointing to the dried up, mummified bodies.

Panic coursed through me. Was this how I was going to die, to slowly and painfully have the life sucked out of me?

Hestia's attendant helped prop her up on pillows, and she shook her head at me.

"Your Light Realm energy does nothing for me. There would be no reason."

I couldn't help but sigh with relief. It was a little silly, seeing as Hestia hadn't said she was going to spare me. She just wasn't going to suck my life out.

"What do you want?" I snapped, my voice was much stronger than I felt.

"I am a true servant to the Dark King Lycaon, one of the few left," Hestia said. "To him, connecting the realms is an affront to his power, and it has unsettled the natural order of things."

"You already tried to convince me that the realms needed to be closed and separated. But they've been open for generations and things have been fine. Are you sure it isn't your ego that doesn't want the Light and Dark Realms connected?" I crossed my arms.

It was dangerous to taunt her. Hestia was weak, but I knew she could still harm me.

"When the realms are unbalanced, it is a slow decline, one that most people don't notice. I am sensitive to the dark energy because of my connection to Lycaon."

"Again, I ask if it is your ego that drives your stance."

Hestia sniffed. "This is a matter of saving our realm. I am the only one...."

"Blah, blah, blah. Right, you're the only one who can save the day and you're the only one who knows what is going on. Hestia, I've heard it all before."

"But have you listened!?"

I bit back my retort. Apparently, being held against my will again made me unusually feisty.

"You see, Soren Black was not originally of this realm. He crossed over from the Light Realm many years ago."

"I know the history," I muttered, glancing down.

"Soren was close to the White Queen at the time. He brought that influence to the Dark Realm with him, creating a severe imbalance. The light energy existed in both realms, but the dark energy was only in one, hence the imbalance."

"But if that happened years ago, and the rift was open so long ago, wouldn't we see the effects before now? Speaking of, what is even happening? I haven't seen anything that would indicate this cataclysmic imbalance."

Hestia sucked in a long, drawn-out breath. Slowly, she exhaled. I could tell that she was annoyed.

"His presence disrupted the balance of dark energy. It insulted Dark King Lycaon and his legacy. It disturbed the will of the first Dark King and the future of the true heirs of Egoren!"

"True heirs...." My voice trailed off into the distance. That was a question for another time.

I was just standing there like an idiot, listening to Hestia's insane ramblings when I should have been thinking of a way out.

Quickly, I glanced around the room.

There was one window by the bed and the locked door behind me. It wasn't a good situation. Escaping through the doors was an impossibility. Aries had his mansion protected by his remaining guards.

The window was an option, but probably not a good one. I had to at least be on the second floor. Aries had taken me up a flight of stairs. Or had he taken me up two?

Either way, jumping out the window would lead to my death, or at least several broken bones.

Hestia was still babbling on about something to do with the light and dark realms. I'd tuned her out while thinking of my escape plan.

The better thing to do would be to wait for Jared to amass his forces and come for me. He would have a much better chance at rescuing me, and I knew it wouldn't take long for him to get word of my kidnapping.

His wolf wouldn't let him hesitate.

All I had to do was stay alive long enough to give Jared time. That meant stalling.

I'd need to keep Hestia talking.

The first questions that popped into my mind were about Hestia's statement concerning the "true heirs" of Egoren. It sounded like more nonsense.

I remembered what Jared had said about Hestia's desire to close the passageway between the two realms. That seemed to be all that Hestia really wanted.

"Hestia?" I cut off her ramblings.

She coughed and leaned forward a little. Her attendant rubbed her back and handed her some water, helping her drink.

"Yes?" she asked in a strangely cordial tone.

"Is it possible to close the bridge between the two realms? Would that solve the problem and restore balance?"

Hestia stared at me for a moment. Suddenly, she burst out laughing, which sent her into another coughing fit. She laughed and coughed at the same time.

What was she thinking?

[Chapter 903](#)

Jared

I ordered my men to stay just out of Arie's territory.

They weren't happy about it, but they didn't have a choice. I was going to take out Aries and rescue Eliza, even if that meant I had to face him alone.

As I approached the mansion, I noticed there were not nearly as many pack members or guards around as before.

Had Aries been abandoned by his pack, too?

It seemed like our rumors about Aries only being after his own revenge and working with the Royal Guards to kill me had worked.

I didn't have to fight my way into the mansion, and it was obvious from how quiet it was that the place was almost completely empty.

It didn't matter if the way was clear or what Aries wanted. I was ready to give my life to free Eliza.

When I'd heard the news of her capture, my wolf had nearly lost control again. He'd been placated when I allowed him to take the lead and run all the way here. But I needed to confront Aries in my human form and stare him down face-to-face.

I looked in both directions down the entry hall. To the left, it was empty. To the right, I saw a servant woman standing by a closed door.

She bowed her head to me.

"Aries is expecting you, Jared. Follow me." She curtsied and opened the door behind her.

I followed her into another hallway. She didn't say anything as she led me down the hall to another closed door.

She paused at the large door and opened it, motioning me inside.

It was the doorway to the banquet hall, the same room where Aries had thrown his celebration for Eliza and me when we got married.

The room looked different now. There was a huge banquet table with seats all the way down both sides and at the heads of the table.

Only two people sat at the table, side by side, at the head opposite the door.

Aries was casually slicing into a rare steak, a glass of wine beside his plate.

Eliza sat next to him, her face pale, a filthy gag in her mouth, and her wrists and ankles tied.

I clenched my fists at my sides and took a deep breath. Just under the surface, my wolf stirred but I asserted control.

"Alright, Aries, I'm here. You can let Eliza go."

Aries set his fork down. He took a sip of wine, slowly swishing it around in his mouth.

My patience was hanging by a thread....

"And what will you give me in return?"

"I'm ready to lay down my life in return for Eliza's freedom." I held my arms out to the sides.

Eliza shook her head vigorously and mumbled through the gag.

Aries smirked. "You know, there's nothing I'd like more than to see you dead."

"Then make it happen. But first, you need to set Eliza free."

I wasn't about to take Aries's word on it. But as long as he set Eliza free and she was safe along with our child, the rest didn't matter.

"Well... that is intriguing." Aries sighed and glanced at Eliza. "Unfortunately, as much as I would like to see you dead, you're not here to die. You're not here for me at all."

"Excuse me?" I arched an eyebrow.

"You're here for me."

A shiver ran down my spine as Hestia came into the banquet hall. She was dressed in a very expensive dress, but her skin was pale and the clothes were practically hanging off of her, showing just how thin she was.

"Oh, Jared, don't stare. It is unbecoming. You may be ready to sacrifice yourself, but you have a much greater destiny to fulfill."

"What destiny?" I ground out through gritted teeth.

"You must set things right and bring Egoren back in line with the will of the true Dark King, Lycaon."

Scoffing, I took half a step back. What the hell was she talking about?

I turned away from Hestia and looked at Eliza. She was my only priority here. I had to get her out, and if that meant playing along with Hestia for a bit, I'd play.

Eliza met my eyes and shook her head slowly, subtly.

Was she trying to tell me not to do what Hestia wanted? Well, that was a given. But if Hestia needed to think I was playing along....

"Alright, if you're certain that I am meant to fulfill this destiny, what is it that you need me to do?" I crossed my arms and glared at Hestia.

"Slow down, big guy."

Hestia smirked and went behind Eliza's chair. She ran her fingers along the back of it.

I narrowed my eyes at her.

Eliza was staring right at me, eyes wide. I wished I could communicate with her and let her know she had nothing to worry about. I couldn't show it on my face or Hestia and Aries might have seen it too.

I noticed that Aries had gone back to eating his steak and drinking wine. It seemed inappropriate for him to do that while Eliza was sitting there tied up.

Just another reason to rip him apart.

"Don't play games, Hestia. I think we're well beyond that."

"Alright, fine. Before you do anything, the plan is to erase all traces of the White Queen's influence in this realm."

I glanced at Eliza. "Why? Why now?"

"Because, the damage it has done to our world is almost irreparable unless we act soon. We need to get rid of the access between worlds to stop Light Realm energy from flowing in here."

"And that will fix the problem?"

Hestia shrugged. "It is a start."

"No more games, no more vagueness. If you want my help, tell me everything."

"Well, it is also my intention to put the true heir on the throne. Once that is done, and the White Queens

have been put to an end, we can begin to fix the problem."

"But only if everyone from the Light Realm leaves forever," I pointed out.

My eyes fell to Eliza again. She was pale. I thought she couldn't tell that I was just playing along, and that worried me.

But she was still vulnerable, and my only concern was getting her out safely.

"You already rejected her. It won't be that hard to bear."

I sucked in a sharp breath and gritted my teeth.

"Aries, will you be ready?" Hestia turned to him, releasing her hold on Eliza's chair. A moment of relief went through me.

"I'm ready. Where will I meet you?" Aries wiped his mouth with a napkin. His plate was finally empty.

"I've raised you a new army of wild rogues. They are in the North, waiting for your command."

Aries nodded. "Then I'll head north."

"Good. I'll meet you in the Northern Wilderness."

Sighing, Aries rubbed his belly and stood up.

It was like he was intentionally showing off his full stomach and the good meal he'd eaten.

I wondered how long it had been since he'd fed Eliza. She looked too pale and she was pregnant. She needed to keep up her strength and health.

"Well, that is all I've got for now. I need to start preparing for my journey north." He patted his stomach again and walked around the table.

"Aries," I called to him.

"Hmm?" he smirked slyly at me.

"I promise you that one day, you will answer to me for everything you've done."

"You think so?" Aries arched an eyebrow at me.

"I know so." I lowered my voice to a deep growl.

"I'd be careful if I were you, Jared. You shouldn't make such threats."

"And why is that? After everything you've done, you think I'll let you get away with it?"

Aries shrugged casually and rolled his eyes toward Eliza.

"She is quite exquisite, isn't she?" he whispered.

My wolf growled and pawed in my head. I forced him back down. As much as I wanted to let him loose and rip Aries to shreds, Eliza was still in danger. Hestia had control over her, and I couldn't risk anything happening to her.

"Soon, I will be sitting on the throne of Egoren. When I do, Eliza will be my Luna Queen."

I scoffed. "Aren't you forgetting that Hestia is trying to eradicate all traces of the Light Realm? She'd never allow Eliza to remain here as your queen."

Aries frowned, like he'd only just realized that. He looked at Eliza and then back at me.

"As I said, soon I will be on the throne. You should be careful of who you threaten because soon, I will be the one in power."

"Keep dreaming...."

"And if you do not show me respect, then I will make sure that the first time you and your brother meet are at your executions!"

Aries snarled and stormed out of the room. I stared after him. He was starting to get unhinged. He seemed desperate and bordering on delusional.

How could he think that Hestia would allow Eliza to be his Luna if she didn't want anyone of the Light Realm in the Dark Realm?

I ran my hand down my face and turned back to Hestia and Eliza.

"Are you going to set her free now?" I arched an eyebrow.

Hestia inspected her fingernails nonchalantly.

"How can I be sure that you'll do what I want if she's not under my control? This was my plan from when I captured her in the woods. Now, I can finally make it happen. The one who controls Eliza, apparently has all the power."

"Hestia!"

"Uh-uh." She wagged her finger at me. "You have nothing to bargain with."

"I won't do what you want as long as Eliza is tied up and bound."

Eliza's eyes widened. I glanced at her and she shook her head again, trying to warn me not to do what Hestia asked no matter the consequences to herself.

Unfortunately, Hestia was right. I didn't have anything to bargain with.

Sighing, I put my hands on my hips and looked around the banquet hall. Aries had played this too perfectly.

I hadn't expected him to have Hestia here calling the shots. He'd counted on that, and I'd fallen right into his trap... their trap.

"I promise that I won't touch Eliza. She will be spared and well cared for. As long as you serve me and do as I say." Hestia laughed a rasping, harrowing laugh.

Something was off about her. She was slightly hunched over now, and it looked like she was getting weaker and weaker.

My eyes fell on Eliza's pale face again. She looked around wildly, her eyes shifting between me and Hestia. I could tell she was confused and trying to figure out what was going on.

I pulled my eyes from Eliza and looked to Hestia again. She was watching me carefully.

"How do I shut down the bridge between the Light and Dark Realms?"

[Chapter 904](#)

Eliza

I couldn't believe what I was hearing... Jared wasn't just listening to Hestia, he was going along with everything she was saying. What was worse, it seemed like he was actually going to do what she said.

He wouldn't, would he?

I kept trying to catch his gaze, but he would only look at me for short periods of time.

Even when he asked questions about me and my family that could have been out of concern, his voice was flat and emotionless.

I tried to signal him with my eyes, but it was hard to get him to look at me.

What was he doing?

I tried to speak but the gag muffled my words. Jared hardly spared me a glance.

Why wasn't he looking at me? Why didn't he understand?

Hestia was asking him to do something insane and dangerous....

"Destroying the bridge won't be easy," Hestia drawled. "Had you asked me a few weeks ago, this would be a very different conversation."

"Well, I'm not cursed anymore. Are you sure it is me you want to help?" Jared asked.

Hestia smirked. "Of course. You are, after all, the one who should be sitting on the throne."

Jared scoffed and hope filled my chest. That was the same line Aries had given him, more or less, and he hadn't cared.

"You see, Egoren has a true Dark King, one blessed by the original King Lycaon. And it isn't the brother sitting on the throne." Hestia's eyes brightened.

Suddenly, I felt a shift in Jared's presence. There was no longer a sense of indifference about him. Instead, he seemed like he'd come to a decision.

I saw the gleam in his eyes and it chilled me to the bone.

"What do I need to do?" he asked.

My heart screamed in my chest. I sighed and bowed my head, despair creeping through my veins.

I needed to stop this madness. I needed to stop Jared, but he was definitely ignoring me and his face was unreadable.

What the hell was going on!?

Maybe Jared was just playing along. That was possible. He could be trying to gain Hestia's trust, but it was hard to tell.

"As I said, a few weeks ago, it would have been much easier. If you'd still had your curse shadow and the Cryptex...." Hestia trailed off.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Jared asked.

"Well, the curse shadow and the Cryptex together were a potent, powerful combination that could close the bridge. But you had to break the curse and destroy the Cryptex in the process."

Hestia scoffed.

"Are you trying to bore me to death? I guess there's another option?"

Hestia smirked. I looked between Hestia and Jared, watching their strange interaction. Jared didn't seem happy about following her instructions, but he was still going along with it....

"Yes, there's another way. It is not as easy as the curse shadow and the Cryptex, but it will still work. Although... getting the relics required won't be easy."

"What relics?"

Hestia walked down the long table, dragging a sharp nail over the table top.

The sound, like metal grinding on metal, sent a shiver down my spine. I winced and cringed.

"Fortunately for you, Jared, the relic you'll be looking for can only be used by a select few, and you're one of them. You carrying the blood of the Dark King as his descendent."

"Tell me about this relic," Jared demanded snippily.

Hestia had a way of dragging things out. She was grating on my nerves, and I was just a bystander at this point.

"You need to find the bones of the First Witch."

I saw the crease in Jared's brow.

"What the hell is that and where do I find it?"

The corner of Hestia's lips curved up in a half-smile. She clicked her nails on the table.

"The bones of the First Witch can be found at the stone circle. It is a powerful relic that can amplify other relics and magical items."

"Do I get any more information than that?"

Hestia pouted. "You're a smart boy. You'll figure it out."

Either Hestia didn't know where the relic really was, or she was playing more games.

"Combine the relic with a moonstone that can control the flow of energy between the two realms. Add a splash of Dark King legacy blood and... abrakadabra, the bridge will close."

"That's it?" Jared arched an eyebrow.

"That's it."

He nodded and stroked his chin. I could tell he was thinking hard about something. But I still couldn't figure out what.

Jared couldn't really be considering closing the bridge between the realms, could he?

That was madness....

My mind raced in a million different directions. I couldn't let Jared go through with this plan. Whether he was playing along or not. But how was I supposed to help him while I was tied up and gagged?

I chewed on the gag and tried struggling against the bindings. It caused me to tip in the chair and I almost fell on the floor.

"Alright, I'll find the relic and I'll close the bridge. You can let Eliza go now," Jared said.

My eyes snapped to him, but he was looking at Hestia.

"You have no need to keep her tied up. I'm here, I'm following you, and I'll stay here."

"And you'll do what I say?" Hestia asked.

I noticed how she was hunching over slightly. She looked a little paler than when she'd first arrived. It was possible the strength she'd gained from sucking her last victims dry was fading already.

"I will do as you ask." Jared confirmed.

My heart sank and I looked down. It wasn't worth my freedom if Jared went along with Hestia's craziness.

"Good enough...."

Hestia came up behind me and untied my wrists and ankles. She removed my gag last, but she continued to skulk around the banquet hall.

I rubbed my wrists and my cheeks. My jaw ached from the gag.

It would have been nice if I could have a moment alone with Jared, but I knew I couldn't ask.

"Eliza, you're free to go now. Thank you for your assistance." Hestia waved an arm at me dismissively.

I stood up and walked over to Jared.

He was tense and closed off. I noticed that he still wouldn't look at me directly. I tried to stand in his way and catch his eyes, but he was still avoiding me.

"Jared?" I spoke aloud for the first time. My voice croaked, hoarse and unused.

He must have had a plan. I wanted to stay and help him with his plan so we could defeat Hestia and Aries once and for all.

"I want to help you," I said.

Jared sighed and looked at Hestia. "Can we have a moment alone?"

Hestia shrugged. "Don't be too long. We have work to do." She walked out of the room without another glance.

"Okay, Jared, what is going on?" I asked the moment we were alone.

Jared turned to me, glaring. His eyes sharp and unfriendly.

I took a step back.

"Jared?"

"What are you still doing here? Hestia set you free. You should go!"

"What!?" I gasped.

Jared crossed his arms. "Eliza, you can't help with this."

"Why not? I've helped you before. Finding old relics and making sense of them is my expertise. Remember, I'm an archaeologist," I reminded him.

Jared scoffed. "Then let me rephrase this. I don't want you to help me."

"I...."

My jaw dropped open. Had I just heard Jared right? My heart raced erratically in my chest and my palms started to sweat. I rubbed them on my dirty pants.

Aries and Hestia hadn't given me a change of clothes or anything since they'd brought me here.

"You don't want me to help?" I asked slowly, enunciating each word.

"No. I don't know how to make that any clearer. So go, get out of here!"

"Jared! What are you saying? We're supposed to be in this together. Isn't that what we vowed?" I held my left hand up, showing him my wedding ring.

Jared closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. He gave an annoyed sigh and shook his head.

"Look, you've been helpful in the past. You know you have. You helped me break the curse and I appreciate what you did."

"You appreciate it?" I scoffed.

"What more do you want me to say? You helped, now it is over."

My mouth dried up like the desert and my heart palpitated. "What's over?"

"This, us, whatever we had. I don't need your help anymore. I need you to leave."

"Why...."

Tears pricked my eyes and I blinked them back. I wasn't going to cry. Jared had never been this mean to me before, at least not like this.

His words were so harsh. I couldn't help but feel the sting of what he was saying, but I refused to believe it was what he really meant.

After everything we'd accomplished since he rejected me, it was so out of the blue. I had to believe it was an act, for Hestia.

"I just can't do this anymore, Eliza. You've become... a burden, a headache, and it is too much for me. I have real, major problems to deal with and I can't be looking after you every step of the way."

"When have you ever had to look after me? I've carried my own weight and been nothing but useful to you." I poked Jared in the chest.

He grunted and stepped away.

"It's the truth. I'm sorry if that is upsetting, but look at this mess... twice, you've been kidnapped. I always have to show up and rescue you."

"Um... I believe the last time I was kidnapped, I showed up to rescue you after you slit your wrists open and rejected me!"

"And that's where this all should have ended. And yet, you got kidnapped again and I'm here to clean up the mess. I have to save the Dark Realm, my realm, and I can't worry about you getting taken again. Go home!"

I thought over all of Jared's words. He was going above and beyond with this act. He was getting meaner and meaner, and that just wasn't like him. The only times I'd seen him like this before were when he was trying to protect me.

Was that what he was trying to do now? Was Jared being mean so that he could save me from whatever he really had planned?

I looped my arms around myself. If that was the case, more than ever, I wanted to help him.

My heart stopped racing and I took a deep breath, gaining control of myself.

My wolf hadn't gotten upset at all. Did she know that Jared was just acting?

"I don't believe you," I said in a hushed whisper.

Jared threw his arms up and snarled. "That's really not my problem is it!? Without the mate bond, I have no feelings for you. The mate bond and the curse were what bound us together, what held me back. They are both gone, now. I can become who I was always meant to be."

"Y-you can't mean that...." My chest ached and my eyes stung with unshed tears. This wasn't Jared. "You were going to restore the mate bond."

"Until I realized it would be a waste of time. My destiny is much, much bigger than you can imagine and now, without you, I can achieve it all."

I looked into his eyes and held his gaze for a moment.

"Go back to the mansion. I have no use for you here." He waved dismissively at me.

Reaching up, I touched his cheek. He jerked away, but I put my hand on his face again. He didn't pull away this time but he still scowled at me.

"Whatever you are really planning, I want to help. I'm going to help because that's what we do for each other, okay?"

[Chapter 905](#)

Eliza

"I do not want or need your help, Eliza." Jared snarled my name and pulled away from me.

My hand dropped limply at my side. "This isn't you, Jared. What happened? Why are you acting this way?"

"What do you mean?" He glanced over his shoulder, arching an eyebrow.

"You're so... mean... this isn't you!"

"You're so sure that you know who I am?"

"Of course, I know. We're married, you're my mate, the father of my child..." I looped my arms around myself, an unconscious smile tugging at my lips.

"Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you really don't know me at all. You really don't belong here either, Eliza!"

I put my hands on my hip and narrowed my eyes at Jared.

He glared right back and we were silent for some time.

"Where do I belong, then?" I asked. "If not with you, then where?"

"You misunderstand. It isn't just with me that you don't belong, it is in this realm. You shouldn't be in the Dark Realm at all!"

"Why? Because Hestia doesn't want any Light Realm energy here? Jared, as long as I've known you, you've never cared about that."

"I see now that I was wrong. Being connected to the Light Realm is a mistake. I can correct it and I will." He pointed his thumb to his chest.

"You want me to return to the Light Realm and then you'll close the bridge, forever?" I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

My hands trembled and I shoved them in my pockets so Jared couldn't see. I could have believed that he was just trying to send me away so I'd be safe while he took on Hestia, but now... Did he really want to get rid of me?

I couldn't tell anymore.

"No, I don't want you to go back to the Light Realm." Jared shook his head.

My heart fluttered slightly and I raised my eyes to his face.

He had a dark scowl etched in his features and my heart sank quickly.

"I'm going to destroy the bridge between the realms. Since you're pregnant with my child, my heir, I can't allow you to return there."

"Your heir?" I scoffed.

Since when did Jared need an heir? Since when did he think of our child like that?

"You'll go back to the pack mansion and stay there until you give birth. After that, you can go wherever you want. Though, you probably won't be able to return to the Light Realm at that point."

He tossed a dismissive wave at me.

"You're not taking my child. I don't care who you think you are or what you think you're doing, you're not taking my child!" I stamped my foot.

Jared arched an eyebrow. "I'll do whatever I want with my child."

I shook my head, my body numb and unfeeling. I didn't know what to think, how to feel. This wasn't the Jared I knew and loved....

Had Hestia put some kind of controlling spell on him? Was he even acting on his free will?

"Good. That's settled. You don't belong here and you don't belong with me."

"So, you really want me to leave...?" I whispered.

"I don't want or need your help, so it would be best if you left."

"You can't do this, Jared! You can't seriously be thinking about doing what Hestia wants. Have you even thought about it?"

"I have. It is clear to me now. The Light Realm is poisoning the Dark Realm. I have the power to stop it, so I must!"

"But what will happen to the realms? How do you know it won't destroy the Light Realm completely? Would you risk that... would you risk my entire family?"

"The Light Realm doesn't matter... only the Dark Realm, my home." He thumped his palm against his chest.

I shook my head again and gasped. He really sounded like he believed what he was saying.

After everything that happened, had Jared finally snapped? Had he given in to the Dark Lord impulses that ran through his veins?

He was sounding more like King Sebastian or someone like Luther. Did the Dark Realm drive everyone insane?

"Jared, please, don't do this! You can't help Hestia. She wants to destroy the Light Realm, my entire family. She wants to get rid of everyone with the White Queen bloodline. That includes your brother's wife! Do you really want to set that example for our child?"

I pleaded passionately. Part of me wondered if I'd have more luck dropping to my knees and begging him.

"You'd follow along with her at the expense of our child, your child. The one you claim is your heir?"

Jared's shoulders tensed. It was for a second, the briefest second, but it happened. I hadn't imagined it, I know I didn't....

Sighing, Jared turned his back on me.

"Hestia!"

I chewed the inside of my cheek. Was he calling her back to tell her that he wouldn't do her bidding? Maybe he'd at least bargain for my life and the child. I had to believe that part of him still cared about

the baby as more than just his heir. He'd been so happy... but... had it all been some temporary relief after the curse was broken?

Hestia could spare us if Jared made a case....

"Done already?" Hestia asked, striding back in.

"Eliza is upset. She might try to do something stupid. I don't want that."

My stomach sank and I bowed my head. No, Jared wasn't going to fight for me. He had really forsaken me and our marriage.

"Lock her up somewhere she won't hurt herself or interfere."

"You are so concerned for her wellbeing?" Hestia asked, arching an eyebrow.

Jared scoffed. "She's pregnant with my child. I don't want harm to come to the baby."

"I understand." Hestia clapped rapidly and her personal attendant, along with some of Aries's guards came into the banquet hall.

They approached me, and I took a few steps back.

Hestia shook her head. "None of that now. Grab her!"

"No! Jared, don't do this! Don't let this happen!"

I tried to run but the guards captured me in seconds. They dragged me to Hestia, each one holding my arms tightly. I could already tell my skin was bruising under their grip.

"Wait!" Hestia held a hand up.

The guards stopped instantly.

"Jared, be a dear and take Eliza's engagement ring."

"Why?" Jared hissed.

"It has a precious moonstone in it. We need that moonstone for your task."

Jared rounded on me, his eyes sharp.

I shook my head. "Please, don't. You gave this to me, it is a symbol of our relationship."

I tightened my hands into fists.

"Then it is fitting that it should be destroyed," he said coldly.

Jared grabbed my fist and forced my fingers open. I squeezed and squeezed against him but he was relentless.

He pried my fingers apart and grabbed my ring finger, pulling the engagement ring off. It chaffed against my skin and snagged on my knuckle but Jared kept pulling.

"Ow...." I whined as it flew off my finger.

"Take her to the East Wing," Hestia demanded.

She waved her arm and the guards dragged me toward the door.

"No! No! Let me go!"

I twisted in their grasp and struggled, kicking the ground and trying to get away.

The guards tightened their grip on me and kept pulling.

"Jared!" I shouted to him, craning my neck to see him as the guards dragged me away.

I saw Jared standing behind Hestia, placing my engagement ring in his pocket.

Tears flooded my eyes and I bowed my head. They streamed down my cheeks, dripping off my chin.

I couldn't fight anymore, sniffing and shaking with silent sobs as the guards dragged me up the stairs to the east wing.

I still couldn't believe what had happened.

The guards pushed me through a door and slammed it shut. It locked with a click and I heard their footsteps retreating.

Immediately, I curled in a ball and cried. My finger throbbed where Jared had ripped off my ring. I hugged myself and rocked back and forth, sobbing.

"What am I doing?" I hissed at myself.

Sitting up, I wiped the tears off my face. I sniffled and shook off the tears that still threatened to fall.

"I can't just lie here and give up!"

I jumped to my feet and tested the door knob.

Locked.

I pushed down on the knob and slammed my shoulder into the door. It barely budged. I kicked the door and started pounding my fists against it.

"Hey! Let me out! Let me out!" I screamed, hammering my fists on the door and kicking it until my toes and hands ached.

No one was listening, and the door was totally solid.

I turned around and pressed my back to the door.

I went to the window and threw the curtains back. The window wasn't locked.... I threw the window open and stuck my head out, trying to look down to see how high up I was.

Clang!

"Owww...." Clutching the top of my head, I backed up.

Squinting through the open window, I saw bars around the window. I couldn't see them in the dark. I'd smacked my head off of them pretty good.

Bars on the window. I was literally in a cage....

My wolf snarled and paced in my head. She didn't like being confined. I didn't like being confined either.

I checked the bathroom and the closet too but there were no other windows or possible ways to get out of the room.

One way in and one way out, but it was locked....

"Hasn't anyone ever heard of fire safety?" I grumbled, flopping down on the bed.

It was really comfortable, more comfortable than most of the beds I'd slept on in the Dark Realm.

Suddenly, I realized just how tired I was.

All the adrenaline drained from me in seconds and my arms felt like lead weights at my sides.

Sighing, I looked at the locked door. This was hopeless. I had no way of getting out of here or sending a message.

Jared had totally lost his mind, or was acting like it.

What was I supposed to do? How was I supposed to get out of here?

I knew I had to escape because I couldn't let Hestia carry out her plan. If Jared really was helping her... I'd have to stop him along with her.

It wasn't the happiest thought but the Light Realm was in danger, my entire family was in danger.

My body ached all over and I laid down on the pillows. They were so soft and silky and as soon as I lay down, I knew I wouldn't get back up.

Fresh tears sprang to my eyes and I let them fall this time. Crying exhausted me even more, and I let that exhaustion take me over.

[Chapter 906](#)

When my eyes opened, they were crusted with dried tears. I rubbed them with my fists and sat up.

It was still dark but completely quiet and still. I sat up and noticed that the door to my room was open. The hall beyond was completely dark.

I shivered and hugged myself. A soft breeze blowing in through the window.

I swore I'd closed that before going to bed....

Someone had definitely been in my room. Quickly, I patted myself down and checked to make sure nothing had changed.

I still had my clothes on, nothing was missing... except the ring that Jared had ripped off my finger.

Sighing, I slowly got up and peeked out my door into the empty, dark hallway. I strained my ears and listened to the mansion.

Silence.

I couldn't hear a thing—no whispered voices, no distant footsteps. I got the sense that the entire mansion was empty.

It also felt like every light in the mansion was turned off.

I stepped out of the room and walked up and down the hallway. All the other doors were closed. I tested one of them and it was locked.

That was weird.

This whole thing was weird.

But it was dark, I was alone, and I was out of my room....

This was my chance to escape. I raced back to the room I'd been trapped in and came to a screeching halt.

Wait, before I ran off, I needed a plan.

Jared was about to do something extremely stupid. Whether it was to do what Hestia wanted or to face off with her alone, both ideas were bad....

I needed to catch up with Jared and Hestia.

Or, maybe I needed to go to the capital and get in touch with my cousin. She could help, and it was only fair to warn the Alpha King and Luna Queen about the potential dangers coming.

They needed to know about Hestia and Aries, especially if they succeeded in their plans.

I shrugged and looked around the room. All I knew was that I didn't have time for both.

Returning to the bed, I sat on the edge and weighed my options. Maybe Jared had communicated some kind of message to me in all the things he said.

I bit my lower lip and forced myself to think about all the things he said.

Automatically, my heart rate increased. I rubbed my chest, trying to soothe it as all the pain rushed back.

He'd been so cruel and violent, like a completely different person.

It was still hard for me to believe he'd acted like that. I closed my eyes against the pain and focused on the words he'd said to me.

Multiple times, he'd mentioned the mansion and me returning to the mansion.

It was the one thing he'd repeated the most, other than not wanting or needing my help... was that his hidden message? Did he want me to go back to the pack mansion?

But for what purpose?

No, that couldn't be the only message. There had to be something deeper.

"Urgh!" I jumped up and started pacing. "Come on brain, work."

I had to think fast. For all I knew, Hestia and Jared were already at the stone circle.

I paused.

But which stone circle? There was one near the packhouse and then there was the stone circle where I was cursed.

They were pretty far away from each other, and if I picked the wrong one, it would be all over....

Had Jared told me which one they were going to?

He kept telling me to go back to the pack mansion. Was that code to go to the stone circle near the pack mansion?

Then again, Jared did know that I didn't like to follow the rules or his instructions. He might have said to go back to the pack mansion so that I'd go to the stone circle where I'd been cursed.

This was impossible. How was I supposed to figure it out and come up with the right answer? He hadn't given me much to go on.

But Jared was going to need all the help he could get when dealing with Hestia. He might have thrown me aside, but I wasn't going to leave him out there to face all this alone.

I couldn't wait around here any longer. I went to the closet and dug around, finding a backpack and some clothes to throw in there. I'd need to stop by the kitchen on my way out and grab some snacks.

I turned to leave the room and light from the open window caught something on the dresser. It glinted brightly.

Gasping, I ran over and picked up my engagement ring....

Jared must have left it for me on the dresser. How else would it have gotten there? Hestia wouldn't have left it; she needed it to complete the ritual and enact Jared's plan.

My heart thudded heavily and I slipped the ring back on my finger.

I held my hand up and examined the ring. It was back where it belonged.

More than that, it was a sign from Jared. He'd left it here so Hestia couldn't do her ritual, which meant that he didn't really want to help her.

He left it to show me that he still cared.

My heart fluttered and I smiled, spinning around in a circle.

This was his plan....

I ran down to the kitchen and stuffed some snacks in my bag and ran to the front door. I pulled it open, my wolf salivating in my mind, ready to shift and track Jared's scent.

I stopped dead on the front porch.

It was Archer. He ran across the lawn toward the mansion.

"Archer?" I squinted into the darkness.

"Eliza?" He slowed down and breathed heavily, catching his breath.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

The backpack slid down my arm and hung in the crook of my elbow. I adjusted it quickly.

"Jared came here looking for you. He insisted on coming alone but told me to wait three hours and then follow."

A smile broke across my face. "Then he does have a plan!"

Archer creased his brow. "A plan for what?"

"What did he tell you was going on?"

"Nothing. He just took off and contacted me through the mind link to tell me to follow him after a certain amount of time. What... what happened?" Archer's eyes roamed over the quiet, dark mansion.

"Well, Aries and Hestia are working together again," I said. "Aries took me captive to get Jared to come here. Hestia wants him to destroy the bridge between the Light and Dark Realms," I said in a rush.

"Jared wouldn't do that."

"Well, he made it sound like he was going to. Aries went north to meet up with his new army that Hestia raised for him. Jared and Hestia left to... get an artifact to destroy the bridge between realms." I sighed and looked at my feet.

"Eliza, where did Jared go?"

I shrugged slowly. "I don't know. I think he tried to tell me but...."

"What did he say?"

"Okay, I know that Hestia is looking for an artifact in a stone circle. She didn't say which one, and the two I know of are the one near the pack mansion and the other where I was cursed."

"And he didn't give you any indication of which one he and Hestia were going to?" Archer looked at me expectantly.

"Well... umm... he might have."

"Come on, Eliza, think. Whatever he told you would be something only you understood."

I nodded and scratched my chin, thinking through all the different things Jared had said.

It didn't hurt that much this time. With my ring back on my finger and knowing that Jared had a plan, I could think through it all rationally.

I remembered the whispering winds around the stones before the Cryptex came to life and sliced through my hand. Hestia also said the bones amplified artifacts. That would definitely explain that.

My mind kept coming back to his insistence that I return to the pack mansion. At the very least, he wanted Hestia to believe I would go where he said. She would have no other reason to think I'd go anywhere else.

"He wants us to go to the stone circle where I got cursed." I said firmly.

"You're sure?"

"Yes. I thought about everything he said and I'm sure. He knows how much I like to do the opposite of what he says." I grinned.

Archer shook his head at me. "We better get going. Follow me."

He led me away from the mansion, but I knew we weren't going in the direction of the stone circle.

"Umm... Archer, where are we going?"

"The rest of the men are at a nearby encampment. We need to regroup with them and then we can go after Jared. But we need numbers."

"I don't disagree with you on that."

As we went, I thought about what Hestia told Jared he had to do.

"Archer, do you know of anything called the Bones of the First Witch? Hestia said it was some kind of artifact."

"Hmm..." Archer frowned slightly. "It doesn't sound familiar. Are you sure that's what it's called?"

"Yes. I hadn't heard of it either."

"It sounds pretty ominous."

I nodded in agreement. Anything to do with witches, bones, and artifacts couldn't be good.

When we got to the camp, Archer immediately had his men pack everything up. He stuck close to me, and I got the feeling that I was being babysat.

I took that to mean that Jared still cared about me. He probably left instructions with Archer to protect me.

That made me feel a lot better.

As we set off to the stone circle with a large force behind us, I thought of more questions for Archer.

"How rare are moonstones in this realm?" I held out my engagement ring.

"That depends. Some of them are really rare, like the one on your ring. Others are a lot more common."

"And if Hestia wants to use a moonstone to do something like break the bridge between the two realms, she'd need a powerful moonstone."

"Yes, probably one of the rare ones. Moonstones are funny. With a lot of gems, the bigger it is the more valuable it is. With moonstones, it is all about the purity of the stone. Some of the smallest are the most pure, and they are the most powerful."

I thought about what Archer said, tucking my left hand in my pocket. Hestia would be pissed when she found out that Jared didn't have the moonstone.

Then again, this was Hestia. She probably had a backup plan and a whole pocket full of moonstones. She wasn't the type to take chances.

Her desire to have Jared remove my ring could have been her way of making him prove that he was loyal to her.

Just in case, I slipped the ring off my finger—no sense taking it right back to her. My heart was heavy as I handed the ring to Archer and told him to have a messenger get it to the palace. If my parents were still there, then they would know that the ring and the message that came with it were from me.

If Hestia did have spare moonstones, then Jared's attempts to stall her wouldn't work.

"Hang on Jared, just a little longer. We're almost there," I whispered to myself.

[Chapter 907](#)

Jared

I could tell that Hestia was weak as we traveled to the stone circle. She had her servants with her, but we still had to stop frequently throughout the day.

Hestia always played it off as wanting her palanquin bearers to rest, but I could tell it was for her own benefit.

Either way, Hestia was still dangerous. She looked weak, but I had no doubt she could still be a danger to Eliza. I had to keep her focus on me and keep Eliza safe.

If I said or did anything wrong, Hestia would go after Eliza and our unborn child.

When we stopped for the third time in one day, I sat down on a rock far from the group.

Hestia had her servants to tend to her. They never bothered me, thankfully.

I breathed in deeply, taking in the fresh air. We'd be at the stone circles by nightfall, despite Hestia's persistent stops.

Moving slowly had its advantages. It gave Eliza a chance to catch up with Archer and figure everything out.

The look in her eyes when I'd sent her away still haunted me—so much pain, hurt and betrayal. I never wanted to hurt her like that, but I had to in order to protect her from Hestia.

At first, I'd only played along to try to discover what Hestia was after. She'd been playing games with us right from the start, and if I wanted to learn her true motives, I needed to show her I was willing to listen by shutting Eliza out.

The more Hestia revealed, the more I knew I had to get Eliza away from her.

My mind wandered back to when Eliza and I were in the Light Realm. We'd gone to Ciana and Theo for help.

Ciana had spoken to me directly on the phone. She'd told me not to tell Eliza what she had to say because we both knew that Eliza wouldn't listen.

Her message had been cryptic and I didn't understand it at the time. It wasn't until Hestia mentioned the stone circles that I'd realized I had to push Eliza away completely.

Ciana had told me back in the hotel that Mila had shared a vision of the future with her.

Future visions were not something I was used to thinking about or talking about. But Ciana had assured me the visions were real.

She said that Mila didn't usually share her visions because they were hard to interpret, but this vision was about Eliza and it was pretty straightforward.

Ciana told me that if I ever had to go back to the stone circle where Eliza was cursed, I had to go alone, without Eliza.

Beyond that, I didn't need to understand the vision. Knowing that she couldn't go with me was enough.

The things I'd said....

Groaning, I bowed my head into my hands. I'd had to say some of the cruelest, harshest things to get her to stop trying to help.

I hated saying anything that brought tears to her eyes, and she'd had those tears in her eyes when she was dragged out of the room at Aries's mansion.

It had broken my heart to see her go like that. I just had to keep telling myself that she wouldn't accept what I was saying, not really.

Since Ciana had warned me about the stone circle and because Eliza had been attacked by the Cryptex there, her hand getting mangled and the curse taking her over, it was a no brainer to keep her as far away as possible.

Besides, it would only get Hestia to cooperate and reveal more of her plan if she thought I was on her side.

By now, Eliza would be on her way back to the mansion. At least, that's what I hoped. I'd tried to drive that point home when talking to her.

She'd be safe there while I took care of Hestia.

I glanced up and saw how far the sun had moved in the sky. Sighing, I stood up and stretched my legs.

"Let's go Hestia. We're losing daylight." I knocked on the post of her palanquin.

"But we only just stopped." She glared at me through the curtains.

"We've rested long enough. I don't want to waste any more time."

"Fine," she sighed.

Her palanquin bearers lifted the transport and kept moving. Hestia just had to lay on a comfortable platform of pillows and blankets. I didn't even see why she needed to stop and rest. She didn't even get up and move around.

We arrived at the Stone Circle as the sun was setting.

The palanquin bearers set Hestia down in a spot where she had a good view of the entire site. They pulled the curtains back so she could see better.

"Light some torches and hang them on the tallest stones," she instructed.

"What are the Bones of the First Witch?" I asked as her little minions ran around, putting torches up.

The flames flickered around the stones, giving them a creepy, horror vibe.

"Exactly what it sounds like—the skeleton of the first witch is buried here in the stone circle. Her bones are quite powerful."

I wrinkled my nose. "You actually want me to dig up ancient bones? I thought we were after an artifact!"

Hestia chuckled darkly. "They are an artifact. They also happen to be bones. That isn't going to be a problem, is it?"

I sighed and shook my head. "No...."

"Well, you might as well start digging."

"What!? You don't know where they are buried?" I arched an eyebrow.

Hestia shrugged and wrapped a thick blanket around herself, stroking the fluffy fabric covering her shoulder with white, bony fingers.

"Somewhere inside the circle. That's all I know. My servants will help."

She clapped her hands and her servants moved into the circle. They dropped on their hands and knees and started to dig through the dirt around the stones.

"The legends say that her bones were separated as a way to disperse her power because together it was so potent, even in death. Based on tradition, her bones will probably be at the base of the larger stones."

Hestia's instructions made my stomach clench.

Digging up bones was definitely Eliza's territory as an archaeologist.

I wasn't sure how I felt about digging up an ancient, dismembered witch. Though, if I could get my hands on the bones first and hide them from Hestia, it could stop her in her tracks.

"You better be right about this," I hissed.

I went into the stone circle and dropped down at the base of one of the larger stones. The dirt was dry and tough, but I broke through to the softer soil underneath.

I scooped dirt up in my palms, tossing it aside and going back to my hole for more. Eventually, my finger grazed against something hard and smooth. I paused and glanced around quickly.

None of Hestia's other servants had found anything yet. They were all furiously digging, desperate to be the ones to find what their mistress was looking for.

Careful not to draw attention, I reached one hand into the hole and felt around the item I'd struck. It had the hardness and smoothness of bone. I felt around the edges and discovered an arm bone with tattered pieces of clothing hanging off of it.

"I found something!" one of the servants called.

"Me too, over here!"

"Bring the bones to the center of the circle," Hestia demanded.

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Soon, there was a leg, her ribs, a skull, and several finger bones. Every few minutes, another servant found more bones.

Soon, they'd have the entire skeleton except that arm I'd discovered. I needed to remove it and make it look like I hadn't found anything.

Whatever bad Hestia was going to make happen, it started with getting all the bones in the center of the circle.

I sifted my hands through my dirt pile, spreading it out and flattening it out some. While the others were focused on assembling the skeleton, I plucked the arm bone from the hole and covered it in the loose dirt around me.

I went to the next large stone and started digging around the base. When I had a shallow hole, I slipped the arm bone out of its hiding place.

"Hey, you found one!"

One of Hestia's servants pointed at me, crying out excitedly.

Dammit!

"Wait... you're not trying to bury it again, are you?"

"Uh..." I stared at her dumbly.

"What's going on!?" Hestia's voice thundered through the circle.

One of her palanquin bearers supported her weight as they came over from me.

I was busted....

"Jared found a bone but he was trying to hide it again!" the tattletale servant said, pointing at me again.

"Grab him!"

At Hestia's order, several of her servants pounced on me. They grabbed my arms and legs and hauled me into the center of the circle. I didn't even have time to drop the bone in my hand.

One of the servants wrestled the arm from me and brought it to the skeleton. Now they had the skeleton complete.

"Well, well. I will pretend that was an oversight on your part, Jared. But no harm, no foul."

Hestia glared at me.

I didn't believe that she wasn't angry at me. All I could do was silently curse that I'd been discovered. It wasn't like I was about to beat up a bunch of women and risk Hestia hurting Eliza.

"Alright, Jared, where's the moonstone?" Hestia held her hand out to me.

I nodded and patted down my pockets. Of course, I knew the stone wouldn't be there, but I needed to be convincing.

Frowning, I creased my brow.

"I swear I put it in my pocket...."

Glancing at Hestia, I quickly turned my pockets out and showed her there was nothing in them.

"Damn! I must have dropped it along the way...."

Hestia trembled, her eyes narrowing into dark, dangerous slits. "YOU WHAT!?" she roared, the ground beneath me shaking.

All her servants dropped to their hands and knees, bowing at her feet. They murmured softly.

"How could you lose it!? That was the final piece! I never should have trusted you. You're just incompetent and useless...."

As she ranted, I saw something in her change. She was getting stronger, standing on her own, waving her arms around.

Her palanquin bearer slumped over with a soft grunt and shriveled into a mummified husk.

"I will make you pay for your insolence, Jared!" Hestia cried pointing right at me.

The servants closest to her shivered and moaned, their life getting drained out of them.

Hestia was completely out of control.

A shudder ran through me and ice crept down my spine. This was bad.

Hestia took a step closer to me. My heart hammered in my chest and I scrambled backward.

If she got close enough, she'd kill me for sure....

[Chapter 908](#)

Jared

As bodies dropped around her, Hestia stood taller and stronger. She sneered, taking a step toward me. I noticed how her legs still trembled as she walked.

Even with all the new energy she'd sucked out, she was weaker than I thought, too weak to be a real threat.

"Argh!"

I leaped at Hestia, tackling her at the waist and knocking her down.

"Get off of me!" she groaned, rolling back and forth.

"I'm not going to let you hurt anyone else."

Hestia thrust her arms into my chest. Her magic knocked me back.

I landed hard on my back against the stone, sharp pain shooting through my back and my spine. For a moment, I lay perfectly still, trying to let the pain subside.

Hestia's body might have been weak, but she still had some magic. Was that what she was sucking energy up for, to do magic?

I sat up, glaring at her.

Hestia was partially hunched over. She looked pale and wrinkled again. One spell had taken a lot out of her. I could work that to my advantage.

"You forgot that I still have my magic," she hissed, smirking cruelly and standing up straight.

I could tell that she was trying to make herself look stronger and tougher than she was. "I didn't forget. But casting magic takes its toll on you."

Hestia sniffed. "It won't take much for me to defeat you."

Her eyes brightened and she held her arms out to me as she approached.

I glanced around quickly, looking for a way out. If I could run, maybe I could draw her fire and weaken her enough to overpower her.

"Uh-uh, you're not going anywhere!"

Hestia snapped her fingers and I felt the air close in around me, tightly. It kept getting tighter and tighter like a boa constrictor squeezing me.

I gasped, my lungs trembling as I wheezed, trying to breathe in. I tried twisting back and forth and crawling backward. I was stuck to the spot like glue.

"You won't get anything else from me! I'm not helping you," I hissed, my lungs heaving slightly.

"I'm a very patient woman," Hestia drawled. She hobbled toward me, clearly almost out of energy.

"Even if you won't help me, there is another of your bloodline that might."

"The Alpha King won't help you. He's too smart for that."

Hestia threw her head back and laughed. "Oh, my dear boy, I'm not talking about your brother. How narrow minded of you. Isn't your young mate carrying your child?"

I felt the blood drain from my face and I growled, struggling against Hestia's binding spell.

She hobbled over to me. I didn't want to underestimate her again. Even with how weak she looked and how badly she moved, I was willing to bet she had enough magic to knock me on my ass again.

"One day, your child will be born, and I will be there to influence them. They'll have questions about their father... who died before they were ever born. I will happily answer those questions in exchange for your child's help in finishing my ritual."

"No!"

"Why do you think I was so willing to let you keep Eliza safe? That baby she carries is useful to me."

"If you do anything to—"

"How are you going to stop me? You're bound in place and, like a true fool, you came here on your own. I have all the advantages here."

Hestia reached out and grabbed my arm. Instantly, her dark energy seeped into me.

I felt weak, my energy draining quickly. Twisting, I tried to pull away from her, but her spell was too strong. It held me in place. My mind was starting to go numb.

"Jared!"

My heart soared.

"Eliza!" I called back, my mind clearing. Hearing her voice brought me back to my senses and I resisted Hestia's magic.

I completely forgot that she wasn't supposed to be at the Stone Circle. Knowing she was there for me, and didn't totally hate me, was enough.

"Get your hands off him!" Eliza growled.

She ran into the Stone Circle, a beautiful blur streaking by as I caught a glimpse of her from my peripheral vision.

By the time she reached Hestia, she was in wolf form, teeth bared and snarling as she pounced at Hestia, claws out.

Hestia sniffed and flicked her wrist.

Eliza's wolf flung to the side, hitting one of the large stones.

"ELIZA!"

Her wolf struggled to get up, whimpering.

"NO!"

Hestia laughed; her eyes wild with pleasure.

I clenched my fists! "I'm going to f*****g kill you!"

My wolf howled in my head, his anger blending with mine and completely taking over.

Eliza

"We're almost there," Archer informed me.

"Good, we should pick up the pace." I nodded.

"Eliza... we shouldn't push it. Not with the condition you're in."

I crossed my arm. "What condition? I'm perfectly fine."

Archer cleared his throat. "You're pregnant. Jared told me. You shouldn't push yourself like this."

"Archer, I appreciate your concern but right now, rescuing Jared is the only priority. Hestia needs Jared for her ritual and if we rescue him, it will stop her from killing a lot more people!"

"I understand what is at stake. But protecting you and Jared's baby are both high priorities of mine, too."

We got to the stone circle and Archer stopped me from going further, grabbing my arm.

"We need to assess the situation," he said.

I sighed and nodded.

Archer motioned to his men to stay in the shadows and scout around the circle. I stuck close to Archer as we moved up to one of the stones. He wouldn't let me out of his sight.

Torch light flickered inside the circle. I could see some of Hestia's servants were lying on the ground.

It took me a moment to realize they were dead.

Jared was sitting in the center of the stone circle. He wasn't moving. Why wasn't he moving? What was wrong with him?

Hestia lifted her hand, hovering over Jared.

"Archer, we need to do something. Jared's not moving... something is wrong!"

"Hang on, Eliza. She still has her servants."

"Then get your men to take care of them. Hestia is about to hurt Jared!"

I didn't wait for Archer to confirm that he was going to do what I asked. I needed to stop Hestia from hurting Jared.

Without thinking, I raced into the stone circle.

"Jared!" I called to him, letting him know I was coming.

"Eliza!"

His voice was surprised but happy. I didn't pause to look at him. Tearing my clothes off, I ran at Hestia, shifting in midair, my wolf launching at her.

My wolf snarled, ready to rip this crazy woman to shreds. I was going to tear her limb from limb.

I'd seen her try to suck the life out of Jared.

Hestia turned to me, her eyes wild with anger and hatred.

"You dare attack me!?" She flicked her wrist.

An invisible hook grabbed me and pulled me to the side, ripping me right out of the air. I slammed into a big stone. My wolf tried to stand again, our legs trembling. We collapsed onto the ground.

My body was weak and aching. I could tell nothing was broken, though, and I wanted to get back up.

Hestia might have been sick and weak, but she had magical power that I couldn't contend with.

At least I'd gotten her to stop focusing on Jared.

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He shifted and attacked Hestia. Pouncing on her, he tackled her to the ground and they rolled around. Hestia beat her fists against him.

Jared yelped and whined every time her fists hit him like her punches had electric shocks in them. They probably did with her magic.

But Jared was furious. His wolf was running purely on anger and hatred. He snarled and scratched at her, leaving bloody streaks on her arms.

They rolled around on the ground. It was impossible to see who was winning. Fur and blood flew everywhere. He had enough strength to keep her at bay, but I didn't think he'd be able to defeat her.

She'd been surprised when he broke out of the spell but once she regained her strength, she might have gotten the upper hand.

I had to help Jared.

My wolf shook off and stood up. We ran right at Jared, tackling Hestia along with him.

She cried out as I joined the fight. Shoulder to shoulder, Jared and I rushed at Hestia.

His wolf and my wolf were in silent agreement that Hestia would never leave this Stone Circle....

"Awooo!"

Howls filled the circle as Archer and Jared's men ran in, attacking Hestia's servants and subduing the ones that were still alive.

Hestia glared at us. "You fools! You're killing us all!"

In unison, Jared and I jumped at Hestia, ready to take her down. Hestia snarled, flicking her wrist at Jared.

He was thrown back, but the blow wasn't nearly as strong as the one she hit me with. She was getting weaker. We'd be able to defeat her for sure.

I paused to check on Jared. He sprang up and shook himself off.

Hestia cackled and ran into the darkness.

Jared's wolf growled and took off after her without missing a beat. I lunged into the darkness after him.

My side twinged and I slowed down. A sharp pang shot through my side and stomach.

The baby....

Nervous, my wolf broke off the pursuit. We headed back to the Stone Circle and I shifted, gathering up my clothes and putting them on quickly.

Archer and some of Jared's men had gone after Jared and Hestia. If she was fleeing, then she knew her time was almost up.

I rubbed my belly, trying to ease the pain in my stomach. Archer was right. I should have been taking it easy. I'd pushed myself too hard to come after Jared and I'd endangered my baby in the process.

What was I thinking, attacking Hestia? She'd tossed me aside like I was nothing, and I'd hit that rock.

I glanced around the Stone Circle and saw an old decrepit skeleton, partially reassembled at the center of the circle.

What had Hestia been up to?

I went to the bones and poked them with the toe of my shoe. They were very, very old. I could tell from the coloration and bone density.

The pain in my side started to subside. I sighed with relief, still rubbing the place I'd felt the most pain.

Rolling my shoulders back, I stretched a little and checked on the servants to see if Jared's men had left any alive.

Crouching down, I checked the pulse of one of the servants. As I stood up, a strong tearing sensation shot through my stomach and down my leg.

"Oh... OWW!"

I cried out, my eyes blurring with pain and tears. Groaning, I clutched my stomach and doubled over.

Someone's arms came around me. "There, there, I've got you."

Mila's familiar voice broke through the pain and a strange sense of peace settled over me.

[Chapter 909](#)

Jared

Hestia was like a ghost in the darkness.

I lost sight of her in the shadows almost immediately. Her scent was still pungent and my wolf was locked onto her scent. I had eyes on her trail too. She wasn't trying too hard to cover her tracks.

As long as I had a trail and scent to follow, I wasn't slowing down. I would follow her to the edges of the Dark Realm if it meant destroying her once and for all.

Over and over again, the threats she'd made against my child rang in my head. She wanted to kill me and use that against my child to manipulate them.

She wanted to trick my child into finishing her ritual by using me against them. I would NEVER allow that to happen....

We ran and ran until my wolf's feet were sore. The pads on his paws started to rub off and he slowed down.

Sniffing furiously in the air and on the ground, I realized we'd lost Hestia's scent. I couldn't see her trail anymore, either. It was like she'd vanished.

She might have used her witchy tricks to escape this time, but now I knew how weak she really was.

My wolf whined and I consoled him. It was better if we got back to Eliza before he had another meltdown.

After sending her away like I had, he'd been upset, again, fighting me for control every step of the way. As soon as Hestia had thrown Eliza with magic, I'd given him that control. He deserved it after holding back while I'd said all those horrible things to her.

Now, I had to go back and make sure she knew I was only playing along.

My wolf and I took solace in knowing that the next time we crossed paths with Hestia, I wouldn't have to hesitate. She was weak and I could obliterate her. I would....

My wolf trotted steadily back to the stone circle where Eliza, Archer, and the rest of my men were gathered.

I had run after Hestia so fast that Archer and the others couldn't keep up with me. It was better that way. I didn't really want anyone to see me rip Hestia apart, especially Eliza.

I could see the Stone Circle getting closer, but I couldn't sense Eliza.

My wolf whined suddenly, and I was reminded that I couldn't feel her or hear her because the mate bond was still severed.

As soon as I was close enough, I shifted back and found some clothes to put on.

"Jared, it's good to see you alive and well," Archer said when he saw me.

"Alive... I'm not sure about 'well' yet," I grumbled. I sighed heavily and shook my head.

"Still, after you rushed off, I was pretty worried. I caught up with Eliza and she filled me in... I think."

I chuckled humorlessly. "There's a lot of damage control to do, still."

"Yes..." Archer stepped back, revealing what was at the center of the circle.

Eliza was lying on the ground with Mila hovering over her.

"What happened!?" I snapped.

Mila turned her head over her shoulder. She put a finger to her lips and turned back to Eliza.

I clamped my mouth shut and looked at Archer.

"She collapsed. Mila says she's fine."

I knew I could trust Mila to look after Eliza, but I still wanted to know what happened. If I went over to Mila; I knew she wouldn't answer my questions. Her focus was needed to make sure Eliza was treated properly.

"Alright, Archer, get the others together and have them rebury the witch's bones. Bury them in new places and fill in the old holes," I ordered.

"Yes, of course."

"I don't want these bones ever found again!"

Archer nodded and got the other men together. They quickly gathered the bones and started burying them again.

I took a deep, steadying breath and went over to Mila. I crouched down beside her.

Eliza had her eyes closed. She looked incredibly pale and winced a few times.

"What happened?" I asked, gritting my teeth. "Why are you always getting here too late!?"

"Late?" Mila scoffed.

"You could have helped us against Hestia."

"I did help you. It isn't my fault that neither of you listened." She tossed her eyes around the stone circle.

"You mean that vague message you had Ciana give me to not let Eliza come here?" I threw back.

Mila nodded. "Yes. I told you to come alone and keep Eliza away... not my problem that the two of you didn't listen."

"But you knew it would happen," I pointed out. "You could have been here to stop it. You could have—"

"Jared, it is not my place to stop everything bad from happening. Besides, I learned a long time ago that it is never a witch's place to play with fate or to try and change the future."

"Then what is the point of getting visions?" I snarled.

"Visions are just that... a vision of a possible future. It isn't set in stone. If I had intervened any more than I had or stopped this completely, then I could have made things a lot worse... I still might have...."

She trailed off as she lifted Eliza's hand.

"She's not wearing the moonstone."

"You're right," I said, wondering if she hadn't seen where I left it.

"My vision of what happened here definitely involved Eliza and that ring... so my warning did some good."

"Oh... I'm sorry. Maybe I'm just mad that my message to her wasn't clear enough... I told her to go back to the village and stay far away."

Mila chuckled lightly. "Well, you should know not to tell a headstrong female shifter what to do."

"I keep forgetting...."

"She'll be just fine, you know."

Mila placed her hand over Eliza's forehead. Eliza winced and then breathed easier.

"What happened?" I chewed the inside of my cheek nervously.

"She broke a few ribs in the fight. Nothing major."

"The baby!?" My heart hammered in my chest.

"The baby is just fine," Mila assured. "I sedated her in order to keep her more comfortable, but I've used my magic to help with the pain. I can wake her up if you'd like."

"Yes, please." I nodded.

Mila leaned in close to Eliza and whispered something in another language. Eliza's eyes fluttered opened and she smiled up at me.

"Jared. Please tell me you killed that b***h!"

I smiled lightly and took her hand, squeezing gently. "I wish I could, my love. But she escaped again. Fortunately, she is weak and the next time I see her, my wolf and I won't hold back."

Eliza smiled and nodded. "Good."

"How are you feeling, Eliza?"

"My ribs are a little sore but I'll be okay. Mila already told me that the baby is fine." She sighed and winced.

"Can we move her? I'd like to get her home to rest and recover."

"She needs a little more rest before she can be moved. But you have something you need to do, too," Mila said.

She stood up and brushed her pants off.

"What do you need me to do?"

"The first witch's bones need to properly be laid to rest. There's a ritual that needs to be performed. I will tell you and your men what to do."

"Thank you, Mila."

"Do you forgive me for not being here to stop this?" She winked at me and headed off into the darkness.

I looked back down at Eliza. "You shouldn't have come here. Why didn't you listen to me?"

"Because I knew that you needed my help. I knew that everything you said was to protect me." she lifted her left hand to me.

Eliza had her eyes closed. She looked incredibly pale and winced a few times.

"What happened?" I asked, gritting my teeth. "Why are you always getting here too late!?"

"Late?" Mila scoffed.

"You could heve helped us egeinst Hestie."

"I did help you. It isn't my feult thet neither of you listened." She tossed her eyes around the stone circle.

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"She needs a little more rest before she can be moved. But you have something you need to do, too," Mile said.

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I took her hand, squeezing tightly. Lifting it, I pressed my lips to the back of her hand.

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"I'm sorry I said those things. I didn't mean any of it. You're not a burden."

"Jared, you don't have to say it. I know why you did it."

"Then you should have listened."

"I wasn't going to let you face Hestia alone," she argued.

I shook my head. "Silly, silly girl. It wasn't Hestia I was trying to protect you from." Chuckling, I played with her wild curls.

"Then what?" she creased her brow.

"Mila warned Ciana to tell me that you couldn't come to the Stone Circle. There was concern that you'd get hurt."

"You should have told me...." she muttered. "I could have...." She bit her lower lip and then winced again.

"Okay, that's enough talking," I said, hedging away from the argument she was ready to have knowing that I kept something from her. "You should lie still and conserve your energy as much as possible. Focus on healing so I can bring you home."

Eliza glared at me, not liking being shut down. But she nodded and closed her eyes, letting the pain subside.

I didn't want to leave her side, but I saw Mila return with an armload of natural artifacts. She had several plants and small sticks.

"We need to make protective talismans to bury with each of the witch's bones. It will help keep them safe and hidden and help bind the magic soaked into the bones."

Mila passed the sticks out to Archer and all my men. She handed a fistful to me last.

She was very patient as she showed us how to make the talismans out of sticks, like little dream catchers.

"Lay the talismans into the holes with the bones," she instructed. Mila handed each of us a small bundle of fresh herbs. "Put the herbs in there too. It isn't as strong of a binding spell as I'd like, but we need to get Eliza back to safety."

I didn't care if the spell wasn't strong. As long as the witch's bones were bound for the time being. Hestia couldn't double back and steal the bones.

Once Eliza was fully recovered, I could send a team back to check on the bones. Maybe Mila would even stick around long enough to help with a stronger binding spell.

"Do you think we can move her now?" I asked. It had only been an hour or so.

"I'm going to sedate her again. I can't prevent all her pain, but at least it will keep her from injuring herself more while we move her."

I grimaced. The idea of moving Eliza and causing her pain didn't sit well with me. I'd definitely caused her too much pain over the past few weeks.

Mila knelt over Eliza and whispered something again. Eliza's eyes dropped closed quickly and she breathed deeply, evenly.

"She's sedated and can be moved. But you need to watch her ribs. Any twisting or pressure on that side of her body could lead to further damage. It isn't life-threatening now, but if any fragments break off her ribs, they could puncture her lungs or heart, and that would be very bad."

"We'll be careful with her," Archer assured.

I looped my arms under Eliza's shoulders and Archer took her ankles. We lifted her carefully, in unison, and held Eliza as flat and straight as we could.

"This is going to be slow going...." Archer grumbled.

"I'll stay with you, and Eliza, until she is fully healed. I can continue to heal her throughout the journey. You won't have to carry her like that the whole way," Mila offered.

I nodded and looked at Eliza's sleeping face. She was right in my arms, but she still felt so far away because I couldn't sense the mate bond.

I still had a lot to make up for with Eliza....

[Chapter 910](#)

Eliza

I was going absolutely crazy. Mila kept me on bed rest while she treated my ribs.

I'd been stuck in the same room since we got back to the village. Mila wouldn't let me do anything for myself.

"Eliza, you need to lie still. If you keep twisting around, you're going to break your ribs again," Mila warned, grabbing my arm so I couldn't reach across the bed.

"I can reach for my own glass of water!"

Mila grinned and shook her head. "You remind me a lot of Ciana and how feisty and independent she was growing up."

"I've been on bed rest for days. Shouldn't my ribs be healed by now?"

Mila frowned slightly. "Under normal circumstances, yes, but it wasn't the rock that caused your ribs to break. It was the spell that Hestia cast. Magical breaks take longer to heal."

I sighed and nodded.

"Knock, knock. Can we come in for a visit?"

Giselle knocked on the door frame and came in, holding a fresh bouquet of flowers. Scarlett was right behind her with a box of chocolates.

Mila bowed her head and backed off slightly, allowing my friends to see me.

They each came up on either side of my bed and sat down. Giselle set the flowers on my nightstand and Scarlett handed me the chocolates.

"How are you feeling?" she asked, pulling the lid of the box off.

I smiled and popped a chocolate in my mouth. The smooth, delicious candy melted in my mouth so satisfyingly.

"I'm bored out of my mind! Please, spring me for a few hours," I groaned, glancing at Mila.

"Don't encourage her, girls. She needs her rest," Mila ordered.

"Sorry, Eliza. A powerful Luna Witch is more intimidating than you." Giselle smiled sheepishly.

I rolled my eyes. "Fine, whatever...."

"You, have we met before?" Mila stepped forward.

I noticed how she studied Scarlett like she'd seen her somewhere before.

Scarlett pointed to herself. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yes."

"I don't think we've met before. But I know of you by reputation, Mila. I've heard nothing but good things."

Mila nodded absently, accepting the compliment. "What's your name, dear?"

"Scarlett."

Mila blinked. I saw the surprise in her eyes as she nodded again.

"I'll give the three of you some space. But do not allow Eliza to get up and move around. She needs to recover," Mila insisted.

"Was that weird?" Scarlett asked, turning to me the moment Mila was gone.

I shrugged. "I don't know. She's traveled a lot. She probably met your great-grandmother or something."

Giselle and Scarlett chuckled.

"Well, we've got you for a few hours. How can we entertain you?"

A few days later, Mila finally gave me a clean bill of health. She checked my vitals and poked around at my ribs.

I winced.

"That's still tender?" Mila asked.

"Yeah..." I hissed.

"The bones are healed but the area is still sore. That's to be expected. Eliza, I know this is difficult, but you need to take it easy for the rest of your pregnancy."

"Why, is something wrong?" Panic flooded through me and my pulse quickened.

"Nothing is wrong right now. However, that was a serious injury. Your bones are healed but the magic did some internal damage. Don't push yourself or you could end up worse off than these past few days."

"Okay. I'll try...."

"Please do."

She relayed her instructions to Jared before leaving so that he would know to keep me from over doing it.

As soon as Mila was gone, I got up and got dressed.

"What do you think you're doing?" Jared watched me from the doorway, a playful smirk on his lips.

"I'm not restricted to bedrest anymore. I want to get up and move around."

"Eliza, I'd prefer it if you did follow Mila's advice and take it easy." Jared sighed.

"I am taking it easy. But I'm also a Luna, and there are things I need to do."

Jared pursed his lips and nodded.

I walked over to him and I took his hands. "Before I got hurt, I was in the middle of doing all kinds of village renovation plans. I can do that without over-exerting myself."

"Are you sure?"

I bit my lower lip. "Well, if you want to keep an eye on me, you can always tag along."

Jared pulled away from me. "Eliza...."

I creased my brow. My stomach twisted uncomfortably. Was I that bad at reading the mood between us without the mate bond?

Apparently, Jared wasn't interested in being flirty with me.

I clasped my hands behind my back and stepped away from him. Clearing my throat, I shifted my weight from one foot to the other.

"I'll be fine, Jared. It isn't that hard to oversee construction."

"Eliza... we have something else to talk about." His tone became serious.

Sighing, I sat on the foot of the bed and rubbed my thighs.

"What's up?"

"We haven't had a chance to talk about everything I said at Aries's mansion...."

"Yes, we did. I told you I understood why you said those things. You already rejected me for real and that was...."

I trailed off and bit the inside of my cheek. The look on Jared's face told me that I shouldn't bring the rejection up.

"I'm sorry...."

"No, Eliza, I'm sorry." Jared took several steps into the room. He held a hand out to me and sighed, dropping his arm.

"It's okay. I just want to move on from all of this and start focusing on our future and our baby." I smiled, putting my hands on my stomach.

"I'd like that as well, which is why I want to go after the flower and restore the mate bond between us."

"Jared... you know I don't think that's necessary." I twisted my hands in my lap and looked down.

"I know. But Aries and Hestia are both in far-off, distant places right now. I can go to the valley and get the Lunality. We'd be able to feel each other again in no time."

"I'm worried about you going off alone after a rare flower. I'd rather have you safe, here with me, until we know Hestia and Aries are no longer threats anymore."

"It would only take a few days, Eliza. I'm doing this for you, me, and the baby."

Jared's eyes were hopeful as he looked at me. I knew how much restoring the mate bond meant to him. Yes, I absolutely wanted to have the mate bond restored, but I was so worried about his safety after everything that had happened.

His eyes told me that he wouldn't be happy until he'd restored the bond.

"Okay." I nodded. "Just... take extra security and be careful."

"I'll be careful." Jared lifted my hands and kissed my palms. "I promise."

He massaged the place of my missing engagement ring.

I squeezed his hands. "I meant to tell you. I sent it to the palace."

He scrunched his face. "Why?"

"To keep it away from Hestia and as proof of my identity in case my parents were still there."

"I don't understand," he said.

"I needed to get a warning to my cousin about Hestia's plans."

"Do you really think I might have gone through with it?"

"No, of course not. But she had already dispatched Aries to take over an army of rogue wolves. I thought they should at least get a heads-up."

"Good thinking." He tugged playfully on a wayward curl. "Has the messenger returned?"

"No, not yet."

He nodded slowly but seemed worried. I watched his face as he seemed to consider his next words.

"Alright, we will follow up on that once I get back."

I smiled my understanding then asked, "I suppose I can't go with you, can I?"

Jared smirked and shook his head. "Mila said you need to take it easy for the rest of your pregnancy. No travel."

"Alright, I will stay here and finish the renovations. The whole village will be transformed by the time you get home."

"I'm looking forward to it." Jared kissed my forehead and left.

I met up with Giselle and Scarlett. They wanted to show me all the progress they'd made on the village since I'd been kidnapped and while I was recovering. I was grateful that the two of them had taken over my plans.

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They were hard at work putting in new flower beds outside a grocery store.

"I feel like there's so much new life in the village now," I said.

"Who knew that some fresh paint and some new flowers could brighten up the place so much?" Gisella asked, giggling.

"Well, it definitely helps. How about plans for the school?" I glanced at Scarlett.

"We've been working on it. I've talked to a few architectures and they have some ideas. I'll get you the basic plans this afternoon and you can check it out."

"That would be great!"

I really wanted to see the village move forward, not just with the facelift it was getting but also with the plans to add more access to electricity, indoor plumbing, and a better education system.

Giselle and Scarlett kept walking with me, showing me various improvements here and there. I noticed some houses that had been recently repainted with moving vans out front and families moving in furniture and boxes.

"Are there new shifters moving in?" I asked, nodding to the houses.

"Yeah, we've had several new families coming in."

I frowned and crossed the street. What was bringing so many new shifters to our small village? I doubted it was the new flowers and the fresh paint.

Not that Jared and I had anything against new shifters, but no one had moved in since I arrived and now a bunch of them were moving in all at once.

There was another shifter I recognized talking to the new families.

"Oh, and this is Luna Eliza. She's been monumental in fixing up our little village," the shifter I recognized said the moment she saw me.

The newly arrived shifters smiled brightly and waved at me.

I waved back a little awkwardly. I hadn't expected to be thrown into the middle of it.

Quickly, I regained my composure.

"Welcome to our little village. If you're looking to take a step back and settle down in a quiet place, this is the place for you."

"Thank you, Luna, you are too kind," one of the new females said, bowing her head to me.

"We're so glad that you're kind and welcoming. It is refreshing to meet such humble people with a simple lifestyle."

"My husband, Jared, he's the Alpha here, is away for a few days," I explained. "However, we are both always pleased to welcome new families. What brings you out here?"

"Oh, we heard that some other families settled down here and really liked it."

I creased my brow. "Is there a reason so many shifters are moving around?"

The female's face darkened and she lowered her eyes slightly. "Well, honestly, we were fleeing the capital."

"Escape?" I gasped.

"There are constant rebellious attacks on the capital and for growing families... it just isn't safe anymore."

"Rebellion?" I looked at Giselle and Scarlett.

They both shrugged.

I remembered Hestia telling Aries that she'd gathered an army of rogues for him. Had he made his attack on the capital already?

"That's awful. What about the king and queen?"

"Before I left, I heard that the king and queen are well protected in their palace. They've sent a lot of aid and resources to the citizens, so we know they are still looking after us. But it is too dangerous for them to come out. Rogues are launching daily attacks. It seemed endless, so some of us decided to leave...."

I nodded absently. This wasn't good. I was certain we needed to prepare for a larger influx of shifters leaving the capital and I was extremely worried about the palace. How were Lena and Xander holding up?

I rested my hand on my belly. And what about the kids?