

Alpha Damien & His Troublemaker

- Hope Is Not Optional — Manuel Flores 161

Hope Is Not Optional — Manuel Flores 161

[1,100 words]

Chapter 161

Chloe

71%

10 vouchers

“Terrifying.”

“What power.”

“And he is so young.”

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The voices swirled around me like distant echoes with awe and fear, but this was neither the time nor the situation to let them distract me. My body was suspended slightly above the ground, the Dragon Fang coiled tightly around my torso and one arm, its sharp

edges grazing my skin just enough to remind me how easily it could slice through me if my brother willed it.

I tried, at first, to pull my arm free from where the whip had pined it against my side, but no matter how much strength I put into it, the whip would not budge. Instead, it reacted as if it were alive, tightening incrementally the harder I struggled, pressing into my ribs until a sharp ache spread through my chest.

I forced myself to stop resisting.

There was no point.

Once my brother's whip wrapped around you, breaking free through brute strength alone was impossible. The more I fought it, the more it punished me. I had learned that lesson long ago. So instead of panicking, and of wasting what little air I could still draw into my lungs, I stilled my body and focused on steadying my breathing, even though his other hand had come up to grip my neck firmly enough to make each inhale thinner than the last.

I lifted my gaze to meet his.

I ignored the pressure around my throat. I ignored the sting of the metal edges biting into my clothes. I ignored the way black spots were beginning to gather at the corners of my vision.

"Weak."

The word was thrown at me again, this time not just from him but from somewhere in the crowd, and I felt nothing when I heard it. There was no anger, or humiliation in me. Why would I react to something I had heard my entire life?

Weak. Fragile. Useless. A burden. Even my own twin brother believed it without hesitation.

Caspian has always hated me.

He never tried to hide it either. But I could not blame him.

After all, I was the reason our parents were dead.

When I was a child, there were people who discovered that my magic levels were unusually high for my age. They wanted to use me, and control me, so they lured me away with sweet words and kindness. I was too young to understand their intentions. By the time I realized something was wrong, it was already too late. I was too weak to escape.

My uncle, the Alpha, had been away at the time. It was my parents who came searching for me. They found me. And they died because of it.

Since that day, the blame has never left my shoulders. The servants' whispers followed me through the halls. Some of them looked at me with pity, others with resentment.

No matter how much I wished we could return to the days before that tragedy, I knew we never would.

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Caspian hated me. And, for a long time, I hated myself too.

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The only ones who treated me with genuine kindness were my grandfather and my uncle, in their own quiet ways. And then there was Noah. He was the first person outside my family who treated me well without expecting anything in return, and looking at me as if I were either a burden or a tool.

That was why, when my brother approached me before this match and made his threat so calmly, I did not hesitate.

“If you lose,” he had said, “that strange boy and his friend will no leave this arena alive.”

He knew exactly which strings to pull.

If I lost. Noah and Miles would suffer for it.

I could not allow that to happen.

Even now, with the whip crushing against my ribs and my brother's hand firm around my throat, I did not look away from him. My vision blurred slightly, but my resolve did not.

I might be weak in his eyes, but I would not lose.

All this time, whenever Caspian demanded that I fight him seriously, I held back.

I told myself it was because I did not want to deepen the hatred He already felt toward me. If I lost easily, if I appeared harmless and nonthreatening, then perhaps he would not see me as someone challenging him. Perhaps he would not despise me more than he already did. So I dulled my edges, and softened my strikes. I played the role everyone expected of

Now, I had two people I needed to protect.

Caspian's grip around my neck tightened, and the little air I had left in my lungs thinned to almost nothing.

He was right.

They were all right.

I was weak.

If I died here, it would be because I was too weak to survive.

The thought did not even hurt anymore. It felt like a simple truth.

My fingers loosened slightly around my sword as I closed my eyes.

Maybe this was how it was supposed to end, but just before the darkness could swallow me whole, a voice brushed against my mind.

Just because you are weak does not mean you deserve to die. Even weak people are strong.'

I flinched.

My eyes snapped open.

That voice... it sounded so familiar.

I forced my blurred vision to focus, and when it did, it landed on Noah.

He was staring at me, and the look in his eyes was nothing like the calm indifference he usually wore. Beside him, Miles looked frantic, his usual smile gone.

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I blinked.

Impossible.

Did I just hear Noah's voice in my head?

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Only an Alpha and a Luna could communicate through mind-link. Noah was neither. So how was I hearing him so clearly? How was his voice echoing inside my mind as if he stood right beside my thoughts?

Noah did not look confused. He looked composed.

'Even a small mouse can bite when cornered. A tiny ant can lift ten times its weight. So who is he to decide what you are? Even if you are weak, you can be dangerous. Show him that. Show him how dangerous a calm wolf can be once it bares its fangs when he wants to.

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Chapter 162

Chloe

I froze.

I simply stared at him, unable to even blink.

There was unwavering confidence in his gaze. Not pity, or doubt

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Trust.

He trusted me.

He wanted me to trust myself.

A small, broken sound escaped my throat, half laugh, half sob, and I felt a tear slide down

my

cheek.

They were right.

Noah. My grandfather. My uncle.

If there were people who believed in me, why was I letting the words of those who belittled me carve me open from the inside? Holding onto their insults was like pressing knives against my own skin, pushing them deeper and deeper until I bled out from wounds no one else could see.

“Do you yield?” Caspian’s voice cut through my thoughts.

I turned my head toward him. My throat was still trapped in his grip, my air still scarce.

“F-”

His brow lifted slightly. “What?”

I met his blue eyes and smiled.

It hurt to force the words out with his hand crushing my throat, but I did it anyway.

“Fuck you, asshole.”

He froze.

For the first time since this match began, true surprise flickered across his face. I had always been polite, soft-spoken, and careful with my words.

Not anymore.

Before he could recover, I tightened my grip on my sword and poured everything I had into it. Every ounce of fear. Every ounce of doubt. Every ounce of anger I had swallowed for years.

“Light Blade,” I whispered hoarsely, “help me. Lend me your power!”

The weapon trembled in my hand, its surface glowing faintly.

“I am not doing this to prove them wrong anymore,” I muttered my gaze locking onto my brother’s. “I am doing this for myself.”

And this time, I did not feel weak.

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As soon as the words left my mouth, the Light Blade responded

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A brilliant glow burst from its edge, so bright it swallowed the arena lights and painted everything in white-gold. The energy surged through my art violently, like lightning forcing its way through fragile veins, and for a split second I thought it would tear the apart from the inside.

The Dragon Yang loosened.

Caspian’s whip recoiled from my body as if burned, the sharp edges peeling away from my ribs and arm, and I did not hesitate. I swung my blade at him with everything I had left.

This time, he was not lazy, and there was no indifference in his eyes.

He moved back immediately, his expression sharpening because he understood something very clearly, if that blade touched him, even he would not walk away unharmed.

The moment the strike left my body, my strength left with it. If the ground hard.

The impact knocked the air from my lungs, and blood spilled from my mouth, warm and metallic against my tongue. My fingers loosened around the hilt of my sword as my

vision swar The Light Blade dimmed, its glow fading as though it had taken the last of me with it.

My breathing slowed, shallow and uneven. My limbs felt heavy, distant, like they no longer belonged to me.

It was reckless to pour all my energy into a single strike. It could kill me, but I did not regret it. If I had to choose again, I would do the same, because the look on Caspian's face when he realized I had broken free, when he realized I was capable of that, was worth it.

The arena, which had been holding its breath, exploded into noise.

"Woah! She's the first one to escape the prince's whip!"

"That was insane!"

"She's actually powerful!"

Their excitement was wild. To them, this was entertainment, and spectacle.

"Kill her!"

"Finish it!"

"She didn't yield!"

The chants grew louder. They wanted blood now, and a conclusion. I forced my blurry gaze upward and found Caspian staring down at me.

His eyes were different.

The contempt and anger was gone. In its place was something assessing.

He tilted his head slowly and raised the Dragon Fang again, the Blade-edged whip glinting under the arena lights. He did not speak, and neither did I. There was nothing left to say.

I knew my body was at its limit. I was either going to lose consciousness... or die.

I tried to turn my head, to look at Noah one last time, but my muscles refused to obey. My vision doubled and blurred.

I just hoped he was safe.

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I hoped Caspian would keep his promise

Please don't touch them. I prayed faithfully. Don't hurt Noah, and please

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The whistle of the whip slicing through the air reached my ears and I closed my eyes and braced for pain, but it never came. Instead, the crowd gaped louder than before, all with all

Confused, I forced my eyes open and froze

Standing in front of me was Noah

His posture was relaxed, and lazy, as if he had simply stepped into block the sunlight rather than a lethal strike. He looked the same as always at first glance, but he was not the same. A suffocating aura rolled off him, pressing against the arena. The air felt heavier. The hairs on my arms stood on end. Even the bravest warriors instinctively stepped back

To make it worse between two of his fingers, he was holding the Dragon Ring

Caspian's when the legendary weapon said to be unblockable, he trapped effortlessly between Noah's fingers as though it were nothing more than a ribbon

Caspian stared at him, genuine shock breaking through his composure.

His grip tightened on the handle. "You-who are you?"

Noah tilted his head slightly, his expression calm but his eyes cold in a way I had never seen before

"That is enough

"Touch her again," he continued, his gaze locking onto my brother's "and I will kill you."

I blinked.

Noah was different.

He did not look calm anymore. Beneath that lazy exterior was something terrifying and ancient.

He was angry. And somehow, that frightened me more than the hip ever could

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[1,862 words]

Chapter 163

Selene

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For a person to keep growing until they reach their full potential they have to push themselves beyond the limits others try to place on them. That had always been the ideology I lived by. lent alone meant nothing if it was not sharpened through pain, discipline, and relentless effort.

If I wanted to reach the peak of my power, then I had to carve my way there with my own hands.

In my past lives, I endured training that would have broken ordinary warriors. I fought opponents who were stronger, older, and far more experienced than I was at the time. Many of them looked at me and saw nothing but weakness. They did not respect my name, nor the blood that ran through my veins. To them, I was something fragile, something easy to crush, and test their blades against for amusement.

They searched for ways to humiliate me, to injure me, to prove that I did not belong among them.

But I never gave up.

No matter how many times I was knocked to the ground, I picked my sword back up. No matter how many cuts covered my body, no matter how much blood soaked into my clothes, I ignored the pain and kept fighting. To those people, I was like a pig waiting to be slaughtered. No one believed in me. They whispered that I was weak, that I would never amount to anything beyond a decorative figure.

And for a time, in all of those lives, I believed them.

That is the dangerous thing about the human mind. It desperately wants something to hold on to, and believe in.

If you do not believe in yourself, it will start believing in whatever voices surround you the most. If enough people call you weak, your mind begins to accept it as truth. You begin to shrink yourself to fit their expectations.

You begin to see yourself as small.

When I looked at Chloe, I saw pieces of who I used to be. She was like the purest version of my former self. A girl who only wanted to be acknowledged. A girl who wanted someone to tell her that she was enough. A girl who tried her best, even when the world treated her efforts as insignificant.

Maybe that was why I grew attached to her so quickly.

There were many things I could tolerate in this world. I could tolerate Sienna's shrill voice and her endless schemes. I could tolerate my brothers acting foolish and reckless. I could even tolerate Adrian's presence, because none of them truly mattered to me.

But there was one thing I would never tolerate.

I would never allow anyone to harm the people I considered mine.

Harming them was the same as harming me. And those who dared to lay a hand on what belonged to me in this lifetime would not walk away unscathed. I would make sure

their regret followed them like a shadow. It would become the worst mistake of their lives.

My gaze shifted to Prince Caspian.

Outwardly, my expression remained calm, but beneath the surface, I could feel something simmering in every vein of my body. The crowd around us had fallen into stunned silence as they stared at the scene before them.

I had stopped his whip with my bare hand.

The whip itself was no ordinary weapon, and neither was the man who wielded it. It carried force, precision, and killing

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intent. To most warriors, blocking it empty-handed would have meant shredded flesh and broken bones.

But I was Selene Bloodrose.

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I had lived ten lives and died ten deaths. Compared to the trials had endured, this whip was not an impossible obstacle. It was merely another test.

Caspian's usual bored and lazy expression had vanished. The indifference he wore like a crown was gone, replaced by surprise and suspicion. His eyes studied me carefully, as though trying to peel back layers I had not intended to reveal.

For a brief moment, he said nothing, then his lips curled upward but there was no warmth in that smile, or even amusement. It was the kind of smile a predator gives when it realizes the prey might have teeth.

He slowly dragged the whip back from my grasp and tilted his head at me, examining me with open curiosity now.

From the stands, someone gasped loudly.

“Impossible,” a voice muttered in disbelief. “Did that boy just block Prince Caspian’s whip with his bare hands, or am I seeing things?”

“You are not seeing wrong,” someone else in the crowd whispered hoarsely, and I could hear the fear laced through his voice even from the center of the arena. “gods... that weak boy who hid behind a protective spell on the first day just blocked something like that as if it were nothing. Who the hell is he? How is he that strong?”

The murmurs spread through the crowd, but I did not take

my eyes off him.

If he wanted a real fight, then I would give him one.

Behind me, movement caught my attention. Miles had rushed into the arena, followed by the same men who had bullied Chloe at the entrance the other day. His expression was no longer playful or childish. It was sharp, and commanding.

“Quick,” he ordered, his voice cold and steady. “Take her to the pack doctor.”

The men immediately bowed their heads.

Boss.

boss.”

Interesting.

They moved carefully, lifting Chloe as though she were something fragile and precious, and carried her out of the arena with surprising gentleness. My jaw tightened slightly as I watched her unconscious form disappear beyond the crowd.

Caspian’s gaze shifted in their direction, but I stepped to the side deliberately blocking his line of sight.

“That is enough,” I said calmly.

The prince looked down at me and raised one elegant brow, as though mildly entertained by my audacity.

“You interrupted my battle,” he replied. “She has not yielded.”

My dark gaze locked onto his without hesitation. "Does it matter You clearly won. Or is your ego so large that you need to kill an innocent girl to feel satisfied?"

He did not flinch at my accusation.

"I believe that is not your concern," he said coolly, "Especially when it is a family matter. Do not interfere when I am disciplining my sister."

Sister.

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So that was it.

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I thought back to Chloe's strange behavior around him, the way her eyes followed him, the tension in her posture. It all made sense now. Yet instead of easing my anger, the revelation only made it burn hotter.

"You are right," I said softly, though there was nothing gentle in my tone. "It is none of my business if it were anyone else. But if you dare to lay your hands on Chloe again, I do not care if you are a prince. I will take your life."

Caspian studied me carefully, his eyes narrowing just slightly.

"I would like to see you try," he replied.

He snapped his wrist, and the whip lashed through the air again with terrifying speed.

The crowd collectively held its breath, convinced that this time would not escape. But before the whip could reach me, I glanced toward the edge of the arena where Chloe's sword lay abandoned on the ground. I stretched out my hand toward it and fixed my gaze forward.

“Obey me.”

Caspian looked at me as if I had lost my mind, clearly expecting nothing to happen.

For half a moment, the sword lay still, then it trembled.

A sharp metallic vibration rang through the arena as the blade lifted off the ground and shot through the air waiting hand. I caught it firmly by the hilt just as the whip came crashing down.

Steel met leather with a resounding crack.

The force traveled up my arm, but I did not budge. The whip called and strained against the blade, trying to push and reach me, but I channeled the weapon's latent power and held my ground before sharply twisting my wrist and the whip away.

The recoil forced Caspian to step back.

For the first time, genuine shock flashed across his face as he stared at the sword in my hand, as though he could not comprehend what he had just witnessed.

This time, no one in the crowd dared to speak.

The silence was heavy, and suffocating.

I lifted the sword slightly and looked at him, my voice dropping

“When a child does something wrong, you discipline them properly. Do not worry.”

I pointed the blade toward him.

“This elder will discipline you right now.”

I took a step forward, fully prepared to move, when suddenly two figures appeared beside me in a blur of motion.

I paused, the tip of the sword still angled toward Caspian's throat and slowly turned my head to the side.

Yara stood there with a calm, almost pleasant smile on her face, as though we were not in the middle of a battlefield but at some quiet gathering. Her dagger was steady, the edge hovering close enough to my skin. There was no hostility in her expression, yet there was no hesitation either. She would strike if necessary.

On my other side, Kauis looked entirely different. His eyes gleamed with unconcealed excitement, his lips curled upward as

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32%.

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though he had just discovered a new toy. The energy gathering around his raised fist pulsed faintly, restrained but eager. It was obvious he wanted to fight me. Not out of loyalty to Caspian not out of anger, but out of curiosity. He wanted to measure me, to test how far my strength truly went, but he was holding himself back.

For a brief moment, the four of us stood in a stalemate, the tension thick enough to suffocate the air, then a familiar female voice drifted across the arena.

“Oh, that is enough for today.”

I lifted my gaze toward the stands.

The host stood there, her posture elegant, her expression carrying a mixture of disappointment and amusement, as though she had just watched a performance that ended too soon. Her eyes lingered on me.

“Contestant Noah,” she said smoothly, her voice carrying effortlessly across the silent arena, “you have broken an important rule of the battle.”

The crowd stirred at her words.

“No other contestant is permitted to interfere in someone else’s fight,” she continued, tilting her head slightly. “But you not only entered the arena uninvited, you interrupted an ongoing match between two participants.”

Her lips curved into a small smile.

“For your interference in the battle, you are henceforth disqualified from the Crimson Warrior Rite.”

The words echoed.

Disqualified.

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Selene

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My eyes were closed as I leaned back against the wooden chair, ting my head rest lightly against the wall behind me. The room was not silent, but I treated it as if it were. I could sense the presence of several people stationed around the space, their attention subtly fixed on me as though I were some unpredictable beast that might lunge at any second. I ignored them

all.

My breathing remained slow and steady, my posture loose and unguarded. To anyone watching, I probably looked like I had fallen asleep. In truth, my mind was far away from that room.

“Yara,” a voice muttered somewhere to my right. “Is he really sleeping? Should he be sleeping? Shouldn’t he be more concerned that he was disqualified?”

There was a brief pause before Yara responded. I could feel her gaze on me.

“I have no idea,” she finally said. “Sometimes, I don’t know what goes on inside her head.”

Kauis snorted quietly. “Her? He is obviously a boy.”

Yara let out a slow sigh. “Never mind. If I explained it to you, it would only overload your already limited brain.”

I almost smiled at that.

A moment later, I felt her step closer. “Should you really be this relaxed?” she asked me directly. “Shouldn’t you be think of a way to reenter the Rite instead of sleeping like this?”

I opened my eyes.

They were both standing in front of me, watching as if I were some rare species that had wandered into the wrong habitat. I studied them without expression.

After being disqualified, the organizers had placed me under quarantine, convinced that I would lose control and lash out in anger. They were afraid that I would attack someone out of wounded pride.

How amusing.

I did not even have the energy to waste on such pointless displays. Anger-driven rampages were for those who lacked discipline. Besides, I was far too lazy to attack anyone without a reason.

Still, I understood their caution. They had seen enough to realize I was not ordinary. People always feared what they could not measure, and what they could not neatly categorize. Strength that appeared out of nowhere, power that did not fit within their understanding of rules, that kind of thing unsettled them.

What I did not understand was why these two were still here.

They had followed me to this room after the disqualification and had not left since. There were plenty of guards who could have monitored me. Yara and Kauis had no need to remain. Shouldn’t they be back in the arena, fulfilling their actual duties?

Why waste their time watching me?

I exhaled softly and shifted my gaze to Yara. I had known from the beginning that she had figured me out. She was sharp, and far sharper than she let on. She had likely

pieced everything together and was now quietly enjoying the chaos unfolding around me. For someone like her, I was probably the most entertaining development this Rite had seen in years.

“Since I broke the rules,” I said calmly, “it is only natural that the removed me from the Rite.”

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Yara raised one brow. “So you are just going to leave it at that? You are giving up? Don’t you want the weapon anymore?”

Our eyes met.

“Leave?” I repeated softly. “Where is the fun in that? How could walk away now, when things are only starting to become interesting?”

I straightened slightly in the chair and crossed my arms over my chest. “And it stopped being about the weapon a while ago, I have already lost interest in that prize.”

Yara’s gaze sharpened. “Then what is it about?”

“Now, it is personal.”

The air in the room seemed to shift.

“I will return to the challenge, no matter the cost.”

Yara and Kauis stared at me for a long moment before exchanging a look. Kauis crossed his arms over his chest and tilted his head. He finally let out a slow breath and said, “And how exactly are you planning to do that? There is absolutely no way you can reenter the Rite. Even if you are an interesting young man and I personally would not mind seeing more of your strength, we cannot help you. We are not allowed to interfere in the fights, and neither is anyone else. The Alpha himself made that rule, and no one dares to go against it.”

I lifted my eyes to meet his and allowed a small smile to form on my lips.

“Someone can help me, and that someone is a very big fish.”

Kauis blinked in confusion, clearly not following my train of thought, and he let out a short scoff as he shook his head. “Someone? Who exactly are you referring to? If you are thinking about the host or one of the organizers, then forget about it because they do not have the authority to overturn a direct rule set by the Alpha.”

I shook my head slowly. “No, I am not talking about them. I am talking about a much bigger fish than that.”

Kauis narrowed his eyes at me, curiosity beginning to outweigh his amusement, but before he could speak again I noticed the faint curve of a smile playing on Yara’s lips. Unlike him, she had already figured out what I meant, and the glint in her eyes told me she was entertained by how boldly I was about to say it.

“Who?” Kauis pressed again, his tone more serious now.

“Your Alpha, that dangerous demon you all fear so much. If he is the one who made the rule, then I will simply make him break it.”

The entire room fell into silence the moment those words left my mouth. Even the two guards stationed near the door stiffened and stared at me as if I had just declared I would overthrow the heavens. For a second, no one moved, and then Kauis burst into loud laughter that echoed against the walls.

He bent slightly as he laughed and said, “That is hilarious. You truly are an amusing boy. You mean the Alpha? The only man in this world that I am genuinely afraid of? You think he is your Big fish, and you think he will help you?”

The two guards joined in, also amused.

“Boy,” he continued once he had composed himself, “you clearly do not understand the man you are speaking about. Our Alpha is not kind, and he is not generous. He does not help people out of pity, and he certainly does not bend his own rules for anyone. Even if one of us begged him on our knees, he would not interfere, so why would he help you?”

The guards nodded in agreement.

I studied their faces calmly before speaking again. “Is that so?”

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“Yes,” Kausis replied firmly. “I can promise you with my life that the Alpha will not help you.”

“Then tell me, what will I get if I manage to make him help me?”

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Kausis smirked confidently, clearly convinced that my attempt would end in humiliation. “If you can get the Alpha to break his own rule and allow you back into the Rite,” he said boldly, “I will call you ‘older brother’ in front of everyone.”

I nodded in agreement. “Alright,”

Kausis shook his head at me as though I were a stubborn child who refused to accept reality. “I am serious,” he insisted, his tone firm and almost lecturing. “The Alpha would never help you. It is simply not possible. A man like that would not even care if you were on fire and screaming for your life. If he happened to have water with him, he would not pour it on you himself. He would toss it aside and expect you to crawl toward it and save yourself. He would—”

The door behind him creaked open before he could finish.

A deep, lazy voice drifted into the room, smooth and unhurried “That is a very interesting view you have of me.”

The air froze.

Every single person in the room stiffened as if death itself had just stepped across the threshold. Even the guards by the wall straightened so abruptly that the sound of their armor shifting seemed deafening in the silence.

I lifted my gaze past Kausis’ shoulder.

Damien stood at the entrance, one hand still resting lightly on the door as though he had all the time in the world. His crimson eyes were not on Kausis. They were on me.

For a reason I refused to examine too closely, warmth bloomed in my chest the moment I saw his face.

Kauis' expression drained of color, and I watched the blood leave his face in real time. His throat bobbed as he swallowed.

"He is behind me, isn't he?" he asked faintly.

Yara smiled brightly and nodded.

Damien stepped fully into the room. "Jason,"

His beta who was behind him bowed his head. "Yes, Alpha."

"Put Kauis on fire and bring me a glass of water. I would like to test his theory and see whether I will make the effort to give

it to him."

Jason glanced at Kauis before a slow smirk spread across his face "Yes, Alpha."

Kauis, on the other hand, looked as though his soul had already left his body. His lips parted, but no sound came out. He looked like a man who had just realized he had casually insulted demon to its face.

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[1,834 words]

Chapter 165

Selene

Alpha Damien stood in front of me, tall and unmoving, his crimson eyes so emotionless that they almost looked empty, as if nothing in this world could stir even the slightest ripple within them.

Despite that cold vacancy, his face alone was enough to put every other man in this territory to shame, and I almost pitied them for having to exist in the same era as him. It felt as though the Moon Goddess had taken her time crafting him, carefully selecting every trait other men would kill for and placing them all into one single being. He was not only devastatingly handsome in a way that bordered on godly, but he also carried himself with the quiet, suffocating authority of a true Alpha, the kind who could make warriors lower their heads and strong women drop to their knees with nothing more than a glance.

To put it simply, Alpha Damien was perfect.

So perfect that I found it difficult to look away from him.

If he had not been an Alpha, if he had not been this untouchable demon of the West, I might have already dragged him into my own bed and made him serve at my bedside just for my personal satisfaction. I had always had a weakness for beautiful men, especially those who looked like they belonged in temples rather than battlefields, even if I never openly admitted it.

Perhaps after I settled everything with the Mooncrest Pack and reclaimed what was mine, I would build myself a small harem of stunning men who could keep me entertained on dull nights. The thought amused me more than it should have, and a smirk curved onto my lips before I could stop it.

However, the moment I lifted my gaze, I found Damien already looking at me with one dark eyebrow slightly raised, as though he could see straight through my skull and read every inappropriate thought passing through my mind.

My throat suddenly tightened, and I coughed lightly to cover the strange rush of heat creeping up my neck.

gods, what was wrong with me?

Why was I reacting like some foolish girl caught thinking about something indecent?

He continued to stare at me without blinking, and I forced a small, composed smile onto my face, though it felt stiff and unconvincing. Before I could think of something clever to say or do, Kauis suddenly stepped forward, turned, and dropped to his knees with a loud thud.

“Alpha, forgive me,” he said quickly, lowering his head.

Damien’s attention finally shifted away from me and down to Kauis, and he tilted his head slightly, his expression remaining calm and unreadable as he spoke in that deep, lazy voice of his. “Forgive you? You have done nothing that requires my forgiveness. You made a proposition, and I merely came to test it. Is that not what you wanted? To be proven right?”

I blinked.

His words were brutal in their simplicity, yet he delivered them with such expression that one might almost start believing they were reasonable. After all, who would not want to be proven right?

Kauis swallowed visibly and forced a strained smile onto his face as he shook his head. “Of course not, my lord. I absolutely do not wish to be right. I was only speaking carelessly because that boy over there claimed that you were his big fish and that you would help him. I was merely trying to explain to him that such a thing was impossible.”

The room grew quiet again.

Damien’s crimson gaze slowly lifted from Kauis and shifted toward me, and with it, everyone else’s eyes followed.

Every single one of them looked at me.

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15:43 Fri, Mar 6 A

Chapter 165

72%2

EX 55 vouchers

I turned my head toward Kauis and rolled my eyes at him without the slightest bit of gratitude, silently cursing him for so shamelessly throwing me under the bus the moment the Alpha appeared.

Damien's crimson gaze remained on me as he spoke in that low, unhurried voice of his. "I see. Then I am curious. How exactly do you intend to accomplish that?"

I held his gaze for a moment, and then a slow, cunning smile spread across my lips.

If he wanted to test me, then I would give him something worth watching.

I rose from the chair and began walking toward him, fully aware that every single pair of eyes in the room was following my movement as if they were witnessing someone calmly strolling toward execution. The guards stiffened, Kauis looked like he wanted to grab me and drag me back, and even Yara's eyes sharpened with interest. I ignored them all and walked with confident steps until I stood directly in front of Alpha Damien.

He looked down at me, his expression unreadable, as though he were waiting to see what kind of foolishness I would dare attempt next.

I smiled, then I reached out and held onto his arm as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Baby," I said sweetly, leaning slightly into him, "you're finally back. Do you know how much I missed you, my Alpha?"

The entire room froze.

For a full second, there was absolute silence, as if the air itself had stopped moving. Even Damien stiffened ever so slightly, clearly not expecting that.

Behind me, someone muttered in disbelief, "Is he trying to commit suicide and chose this method?"

Another whispered, "I have no idea, but he is insane. He is definitely courting death."

I ignored them.

Maybe they were right. Maybe I was courting death. But death and I were old acquaintances. It had tried to claim me ten times, and ten times I had clawed my way back to life. I no longer feared it, and I certainly did not fear the demon standing in front of me.

I focused only on Damien. His crimson eyes were locked onto mine, and I could have sworn something flickered in their depths, something sharp and dangerous and almost amused.

Encouraged, I pressed myself closer to him and softened my expression, forcing my voice into something almost pitiful.

“Damien,” I continued, “do you have any idea how many people bullied me today? They even want to kick me out of the Rite. It is not fair. You promised to protect me. You even gave me your hairpin as proof of your love.”

A collective gasp rippled through the room.

Every single person’s gaze shot up to my hair.

Kauis’s eyes widened so much I thought they might fall out of his skull. “Oh gods... Alpha Damien, that is your dragon hairpin. There is only one like it in the entire world. Why is it in his hair?” He paused, his expression turning horrified. “Wait. Is it true? Is this boy your lover? You are... you are gay?!”

The guards and the other warriors stared at Damien in shock, their faces pale and confused, but he made no move to correct them. He did not look offended or angry. If anything, he looked faintly entertained.

Kauis rubbed his forehead as if trying to process this revelation. I knew you never liked women getting close to you, but I did not

expect the rumors to be true. You really prefer men.” His gaze shifted to me, and a crooked smirk appeared on his

face. “And you like them pretty.”

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Chapter 165

I smiled brightly and nodded without shame. “Yes. Alpha Damien and I like each other very much.”

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From the side, I heard Jason mutter under his breath, "What about the Moonborn? Is he no longer interested in her?"

For a split second, my smile faltered.

I turned my head slowly toward him.

Kauis and Jason had no idea that I was the Moonborn they were peaking of. He did not know that the "boy" clinging to their Alpha was the same woman he was talking about. And I had absolutely no intention of correcting them.

Instead, I simply tilted my head, while my mind calculated my next move carefully.

If I was going to gamble, then I would gamble boldly.

I stepped forward and wrapped my arms around Damien's waist pressing my cheek lightly against his stomach before tilting my head up to look at him through my lashes. "Can we be alone, my love?" I asked softly. "I am really shy when other people are watching us."

A strangled sound left Kauis's throat as if he had just witnessed a crime against nature. "No, absolutely not," he blurted out. "You cannot be left alone with the Alpha. We do not even know your identity. You could be—"

"Leave."

Damien did not raise his voice. The single word cut through the room like a blade.

Everyone froze.

Kauis stared at him as though he no longer recognized the man he had sworn loyalty to. "Alpha, I—"

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"All right, that is enough," Yara interrupted smoothly, though her eyes were gleaming with interest. She grabbed Kauis by the arm before he could protest further. "You heard him. Let's go."

Reluctantly, the others followed. The guards stepped out, Jason hesitated for half a second before bowing, and then the door closed with a soft but final click.

Silence settled in the room. I exhaled slowly in relief and loosened my hold on Damien before stepping back to look at him properly.

That was when I noticed it, his crimson eyes were no longer dull or empty.

They burned.

The air around us felt heavier. My instincts screamed at me to step back, and I was about to. But his hand shot out and wrapped around my waist, pulling me back against him before I could create even an inch of distance.

He held me there effortlessly.

His gaze dropped slowly, tracing from my eyes to my lips and then lower before rising again, and I noticed the subtle way he bit his lower lip as if restraining something.

“Running away already, little wolf?” he murmured, his voice lower than before. “That is disappointing.”

My pulse quickened.

“If you dare to claim me in front of everyone,” he continued, his grip tightening slightly, “then be good and you learn exactly what that claim costs.”

I opened my mouth to retort, to say it was all a misunderstanding and that I only wanted them to leave so we could talk

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15:44 Fri, Mar 6 A M

Chapter 165

about business, but I never got the chance.

His hand moved to the back of my neck, and in one smooth i

It was not gentle, nor hesitant.

His lips claimed mine with a depth that stole the breath from outside that closed door ceased to exist.

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Hope Is Not Optional — Manuel Flores 166

[1,476 words]

Chapter 166

Damien

This was the second time I was kissing her during the Rite.

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EX \$5 vouchers

The first time had been last night, in the shadows where no one could see us, and yet here I was again, unable to wait even a full day before claiming her lips for myself.

I asked myself what was wrong with me, why my restraint seemed to crumble so easily whenever she was near, but no matter how many times I examined the question, I never found in answer that satisfied me. Then again, why did I need an answer when the very cause of my unrest was already in my arm?

I kissed her before she could finish whatever words she was about to spin.

My hand tightened around her waist while the other slid to the back of her head, angling her perfectly as I cut off her words with my mouth. Her hands lifted awkwardly between us, as if she had not expected me to kiss her again so suddenly, but I did not give her time to think, nor did I give her the chance to retreat. I wrapped one arm firmly around her thigh and, with an almost lazy motion, lifted her as though she weighed nothing at all. She gasped against my lips in surprise, but I only deepened the kiss, tasting the softness of her pink mouth as if I had been starved for it.

I moved forward without breaking contact and placed her on the desk behind us, stepping between her legs as though that position belonged to me.

When I finally leaned back, she was breathing slightly harder, her usual calm and indifferent mask cracked just enough to reveal something warmer underneath. A faint flush colored her cheeks, and that sight alone stirred something possessive and dark inside me. She met my eyes as if she wanted to speak, perhaps to argue or to deny

what was happening, but I placed both hands on her waist and dragged her closer to the edge of the desk until she was seated directly in front of me.

She flinched at the sudden pull.

I looked at her from beneath my lashes, my gaze heavier now, the restraint I prided myself on thinning with every second. The sight of her like this, perched on the edge of my desk, lips swollen from my kiss and eyes slightly unfocused, did something dangerous to my control.

“Is this what you wanted, Moonborn?” I asked quietly, my lips curving faintly as I leaned closer. “After all, you just declared yourself my lover.”

She swallowed, and I watched the delicate movement of her throat with shameless focus.

“Alpha Damien, you are misunderstanding,” she began. “I did not mean it that way. I only wanted to leave quickly, so I acted that way-oh-”

Her explanation dissolved into a soft sound when I lowered my mouth to her neck.

I kissed the sensitive skin just below her ear before gently grazing it with my teeth, not enough to hurt, but enough to remind her how easily I could undo her composure. Her fingers clenched into the fabric of my clothes, trembling slightly, and I felt the reaction ripple through her body. Her neck was her weakness; I had learned that the first time, and she reacted just as intensely now.

A low hum left my throat at her response,

Every time she reacted like this, it felt like a silent challenge. I was not the one being touched, not the one losing control, and yet the way her body responded to me was deeply satisfying, as though her pleasure fed something primal inside me.

My hands slid down to her thighs, resting there for a moment before I slowly eased them apart just enough to step closer. She shivered under my touch, and I lifted my head, studying her face carefully. Hooking a finger beneath her chin, I tilted her face upward so she had no choice but to look at me.

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Chapter 166

Her blue eyes met mine.

255 vouchers

Those rare, beautiful eyes stared back at me, bright even now, filled with confusion, defiance, and something else she probably did not want me to see.

And in that moment, I realized I was far more intrigued than I had ever intended to be.

“Look at me, little wolf,” I said, my voice rough and steady. “Don’t look away when I’m about to ruin you.”

Selene’s

eyes widened slightly at my words, but she did not pull away from me. She held my gaze as if she refused to give me the satisfaction of seeing her flinch. Without breaking eye contact, I reached for the fastening of her pants and tugged it open before sliding the fabric down her legs and tossing it aside. I could hear the change in her breathing immediately. It grew quicker, and uneven, yet her expression remained composed.

I had been with women before, and I knew how they usually reacted in moments like this. Most of them grew shy or nervous when I touched them. They would look away, blush, or remble under my gaze. But Selene was different. Just like the last time, she did not seem embarrassed or afraid. Instead, she watched me with a strange curiosity, as if she were trying to understand me rather than fear me.

However, her body told a different story. Every small touch I gave her made her inhale sharply. Every brush of my fingers caused the slightest tremor to run through her. She wanted me. could feel it clearly in the way she responded to me, even though she tried to maintain that calm exterior.

Selene tilted her head slightly as she looked down at me, her expression unreadable. Then she spoke in a steady voice.

“Alpha Damien, go on your knees for me.”

I raised my eyebrow at her request, taken aback by the boldness in her tone. She looked completely nonchalant while asking something that no one had ever dared to demand of me. If anyone else had spoken those words, they would have been risking their life. I had never gone on my knees for anyone before. I had not bowed to enemies, allies, or even to the Moon Goddess.

Submission was not in my nature.

Yet Selene was not afraid. She had never truly been afraid of me since the day we met. She had been surprised by my sudden appearances, yes, but never frightened.

I found myself wondering who she truly was and what made her believe I would kneel for her. Perhaps she did not expect me to obey. Perhaps she thought I would walk away. Or perhaps she simply wanted to see whether a man who had never submitted to anyone would lower himself for her.

When I did not immediately move, a faint smile formed on her lips. She looked as though she was about to change the conversation. But before she could speak, I made my decision.

I slowly lowered myself onto my knees between her legs, my movements deliberate. The shift in her expression was instant. Her eyes widened, and for the first time since this began, she looked genuinely surprised. She had not expected me to actually kneel.

I lifted my gaze to meet hers, holding it firmly. Even on my knees, I did not feel diminished. I had chosen to kneel because it was her,

I tightened my hands around her thighs, feeling her shiver violetly under my touch. Her body trembled, and it made something deep inside me darken, my gaze burning as I leaned closer.

“Don’t be surprised,” I murmured, letting each word sink into her. “This is just the beginning.”

My finger slid along the edge of her panties, already slick and damp beneath my touch, and I felt her hips press instinctively closer, begging for more without saying a word. Her soft moans lit me like fire, and I could feel her burning all over.

She tried to pull away, and I caught her waist, holding her firmly in place. Slowly, I parted her panties, exposing her warmth,

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III

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Chapter 166

and my chest tightened at the sight.

72%

\$5 vouchers

“After all,” I whispered against her skin, “even a monster can kneel, when he finds something worth surrendering to.”

I leaned down, letting my tongue glide over her fully, tasting her devouring her. Her moan broke, ragged, needy.

I savored every tremble, and reaction. Her body was mine, every inch of her, and I intended to make sure she never forgot

3/3

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Hope Is Not Optional — Manuel Flores 167

[1,220 words]

Chapter 167

Selene

Flashback

“Child, are you the one going after Alpha Damien?”

55 vouchers

The voice had been soft, aged, yet steady, carrying the weight of someone who had seen far too much of the world. One of my warriors immediately frowned and stepped forward, placing himself slightly in front of me as if to shield me.

“Show your respect, Elder,” he snapped. “This is our Luna and our General. Do not be rude.”

The elderly woman instinctively took a small step back at his tone, her wrinkled hands tightening around the wooden staff she carried. I sighed at the unnecessary hostility and pushed my warrior aside.

“Do not be disrespectful,” I told him calmly. “She is an elder.”

He stiffened at my words and bowed his head before retreating this place.

I turned back to the elderly woman and inclined my head politely. “Yes, Elder, I am the one going after the Demon of the West.”

The woman studied my face for a long moment before slowly shaking her head. “Do not go,” she said quietly. “You will die.”

At her words, my warriors immediately went on alert, their hands drifting toward their weapons as suspicion filled their eyes. They did not like prophecies of death directed at me.

“At ease,” I ordered.

Reluctantly, they obeyed, though none of them fully relaxed. I looked back at the woman, curiosity flickering in my gaze. “What do you mean I will die?”

“The Demon of the West is more dangerous than the rumors say she replied, her voice unwavering. “Do not underestimate him. You will surely die if you do.”

Ares, my right-hand man, stepped forward then, confidence written all over his face. “Our General is very strong,” he said proudly. “There is no one stronger than her in our pack or the neighboring packs.”

The woman glanced at him, then back at me. “Strength does not mean you are stronger than him. He is a man who does not hesitate. He does not bend to anyone. He does not obey anyone, not even the Moon Goddess herself. He kneels for no one.”

I listened to every word carefully. Instead of fear, however, I felt something else entirely.

A slow, cunning smile had spread across my lips.

My warriors noticed immediately.

“Oh,

you have got to be kidding me,” someone muttered under their breath.

The elderly woman raised an eyebrow. "What is wrong?"

Ares let out a helpless chuckle, "You just gave our General an ide.."

"What idea?" the woman asked, clearly confused.

Ares shook his head and let out an amused sigh. "Our General always smiles like that when she has an idea, and it is usually a dangerous one. I wonder what it is this time."

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Chapter 167

72%

55 vouchers

I crossed my arms over my chest, allowing the smile on my lips to deepen into something far more calculating. The soldiers around us might have mistaken it for confidence, but Ares knew better. He had seen that expression before. It always meant trouble for someone.

"I will make the Demon of the West kneel," I said.

Ares blinked at me as if he had misheard. "Huh?"

"I do not care what I have to do," I continued calmly, my gaze fixed on the horizon as though I could already see him standing there. "I do not care how I do it. But I will make Alpha Damien kneel for me."

The air seemed to still around us after my declaration. Even the wind felt quieter, as if it too understood the weight of my words. Alpha Damien was not a man who bowed. He was feared across territories, a name whispered with caution and respect. Men trembled at the mere mention of him. No one commanded him.

Which was exactly why I would.

Ares stared at me for a long moment before running a hand down his face. "You do realize he is called the Demon of the West for a reason, right?" he asked carefully. "Men like him do not kneel. They make others kneel."

"That is precisely why I chose him," I replied without hesitation. "If I can make him kneel, then I can make anyone kneel."

End of flashback

"Mnghph..."

I tried to bite back the moan that clawed its way up my throat, but it slipped anyway. My heart was pounding like it wanted to escape my chest, burning as if someone had lit a fire inside me. But it wasn't just my heart, it was my whole body.

I pressed one hand against the table for support, the other tangled in the soft strands of hair falling in front of me. My legs shook violently on the table, my breaths coming short and ragged.

My body betrayed me, reacting before my mind could even think, and I didn't care. How could I? Not with him there, kneeling before me, his hands gripping my thighs as if he owned every inch of me, his tongue pressing into me like he hadn't eaten in days, and I was his only meal.

His skillful tongue swirled slowly inside me, tracing every sensitive curve, tasting me until my knees threatened to buckle.

"Oh gods... nnhg..." this time, I couldn't stop it, my moans slipped freely, and he didn't seem to mind. In fact, the soft hum vibrating against me told me he liked it, liked how I shivered, liked how helpless I was beneath him. And when he tightened his hands around my thighs, and my body screamed in response

I had meant it when I said I was going to get him on his knees, but not like this.

I had never imagined it would feel like this, being on the edge of control, feeling so dangerous, and yet so utterly delicious. Even Adrian had never gone on his knees like this for me. What was I saying? Adrian had never even eaten me out before. He was a royal; to him, sex was supposed to be routine, quick, and efficient. Yet here was the most important alpha in the world, taking his time, eating me out slowly, utterly unconcerned with the minutes slipping away.

And yet, I couldn't deny it. I wanted him. Every moan, every shiver, every desperate gasp was proof that I did.

"Damn it," I whispered, breathless, my voice trembling. "I—"

He didn't let me finish. His hands gripped my thighs tighter, holling me in place as his tongue flicked over the most sensitive spots. I gasped, arching, pressing myself into him, and moan tore from my throat despite my best efforts to stay quiet.

I was trembling, when I felt his long finger pressing against me. My breath caught in my throat instantly. My thighs shook under his grip, and heat pooled between my legs, spreading through every nerve in my body.

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15:44 Fri, Mar 6 A MO

Chapter 167

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55 vouchers

“Hmm, still so tight...” he rasped, almost to himself, the roughness in his voice making something coil in my stomach, and my chest ache with need.

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Hope Is Not Optional — Manuel Flores 168

[1,039 words]

Chapter 168

Selene

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255 vouchers

He didn't rush for a single moment. Just one finger, sliding slowly, teasingly over me, and I felt my body betray me once again, pressing down as though I were trying to feel him even more. My hand gripped Damien's hair even tighter, holding myself together while I wanted to fall apart completely.

"A-ahh" I moaned again, louder this time, and I realized my mind had already surrendered. All I could think about was how good it felt, how completely his touch consumed me.

When he pressed the second finger inside me, I couldn't help it, my body clenched instinctively around him, gripping him tighter than I meant to. A sharp gasp escaped me, my thighs trembling under his hands.

"Relax." His voice was low. He met my eyes, and I froze. His lips listened with my essence, and my heart skipped a beat at the sight of him. He leaned back slightly, and slowly, and licked his lips, crimson eyes darker, hair messy and falling over his forehead.

"My fingers can't enter fully if you grip it too tightly," he murmured, bluntly, his gaze locked on mine.

I bit my lips hard, trying to contain the moan threatening to escape.

This man... why was he so blunt? I wanted to ask, and make sense of the way he made me weak with just a look, but he was already focusing on me again.

He pressed a second finger in, and I gasped, my knees trembling violently as my body adjusted to the new fullness. Every inch sent sparks of pleasure shooting through me. My hips tilted instinctively, pressing down into him, arching against his hands.

“Oh gods, Damien...” I whispered helplessly. He moved deliberately, curling his fingers inside me, stretching me in ways that made me arch, my body begging for more even as my mind tried to keep control.

Every movement of his fingers was precise, teasing me perfectly stroking just the right spots, hitting the places that made me shiver uncontrollably.

I knew I shouldn't be doing this. This man in front of me was the most dangerous person I've ever met. My brain screamed at me to stop, pull back, and think, but my body refused.

Screw it. I wanted him. I was so close.

I pressed him harder against me, shoving his mouth to me, and he didn't resist. He let me. My legs wrapped tight around his head, locking him under me as I ground down, rolling my hips, fucking his mouth with my body. My wet clit coated his lips and tongue, and I couldn't stop the moan that ripped from my throat.

“Oh fuck!” I gasped, throwing my head back, clutching at the table, digging my fingers into it for support while my hair tumbled over my shoulders. My thighs quaked violently, pressing him closer, my hips rolling on instinct.

His tongue flicked, pressed, circled me, and my body arched insinctively, shivering with each stroke. I pressed down harder, fucking his face like he was mine to use, like I could feel everything through him.

I bit my lip, gasping, grinding harder, letting my hips move without thought. My body tightened around him, clenching as

pressure inside me built,

the

“Oh, yes!” I cried out, throwing my head back again, moaning loudly. At this point, I was gripping him, grinding on him, and shaking against him.

I wrapped my legs tighter around his head, locking him in place and my body moved over him with a mind of its own. I pressed down, felt him curl his fingers inside me, teasing me mercilessly while his tongue worked me over completely.

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15:44 Fri, Mar 6 A MO

Chapter 168

It was so addictive.

12%

55 vouchers

And the worst part? I didn't care. I didn't care about danger, about the people that were probably outside, and who he was. I just wanted him. I wanted him inside me, under me, devouring me completely, and I wasn't stopping until he made me come apart completely.

And that didn't last long because I felt something inside me snap. My body seized, my hips jerking violently as a wave of pleasure ripped through me.

I gasped, moaning uncontrollably.

"Ahhh!" I moaned, pressing down harder on him, grinding like my body couldn't get enough. My thighs quaked violently, squeezing him tight, and I could feel my walls clench around his fingers and tongue, drawing him deeper, needing him to take me all the way over the edge.

And once I did, my body finally began to calm, though my breathing was still fast.

I looked down at him. I expected him to pull back, but he didn't. He stayed, his mouth gliding over me again, licking every drop of me as if he were trying to clean me with his tongue.

My body stiffened instantly. Heat pooled between my legs again and I felt myself grow wet all over again. gods... I wanted to move, and press myself down, but I forced myself to stay still. One wrong twitch, or one careless grind, and I knew I would come again.

He hummed low, teasing me with every lick. I clenched my thighs, trying to hold myself steady, biting my lip as my body throbbed in need. When he finally pulled back, his eyes met mine lazily, lips glistening from my essence as he slowly licked them. My clit throbbed violently at the sight once again, and I shivered, desperate for more.

I watched him stand tall, moving closer. My body reacted instantly, and I leaned back instinctively, falling onto the table.

He placed both hands on either side of me, caging me in completely. My breath hitched at the closeness.

"Don't be too relaxed yet, Selene," he growled, low and rough, and my stomach twisted at his words. "I've barely even started."

I swallowed hard, feeling the hard press of him against me.

Fuck, maybe I should have thought twice before letting a hungry man this close.

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Hope Is Not Optional — Manuel Flores 169

[1,290 words]

Chapter 169

Selene

Alpha Damien leaned closer.

10%.

#66 vouchers

One of his hands had already moved to hold my thigh, lifting slightly as if I weighed nothing at all, while his other hand. gripped my waist firmly enough to remind me just

how easily I could keep me exactly where he wanted. The movement was smooth and natural, as though he had done it a thousand times before. My breath caught in my throat the moment the distance between us disappeared.

My heart tingled strangely inside my chest.

It was not fear.

It was the warmth of his closeness, the intimate way he held me and the way his crimson eyes seemed to burn brighter as they looked down at me. Those eyes were no longer empty like they usually were. They were alive now, and entirely fixed on

I knew.

I absolutely knew that if he kissed me again, things would not stop there. And right now was not the time for that.

In my mind, Mira's smug voice echoed immediately.

'Not the time?' she said with obvious amusement. 'So there will be a time.'

I resisted the urge to groan.

'Shut up, Mira,' I thought, trying to keep my expression steady while Damien's face remained dangerously close to mine. 'Your voice sounds far too smug. I can tell you are enjoying this.'

Mira chuckled softly, completely unbothered. 'Of course I am. Why wouldn't I enjoy it? It's not every day you have a man like that standing between your legs, especially a dangerous man like him, who kneels to no one but you. You're very lucky, do you even realize how many women would kill to be in your place right now?'

A sly expression slipped across my face at her words.

A lot.

'Exactly, Mira continued, clearly pleased with herself. 'So why n just give yourself to him and-''

'It's the same for him, I cut her off without hesitation. 'I can replace him with any man just as easily. I'm not some desperate woman who needs him. I don't feel lucky just because I'm with man. But, maybe I am lucky for how many opportunities, and how much money I can get from being with him.'

Mira laughed again, the sound echoing inside my head.

'You are still the same after all these lifetimes,' she said. "The cray general who never cared who wanted her or how powerful they were. You do whatever you want regardless. It is a hame you wasted so much of that stubborn heart being obsessed with that foolish prince!

I shrugged slightly within my mind.

That ship had sunk long ago. There was no point staring at wreckage that had already been swallowed by the sea. Instead, I returned my focus to the man still holding me,

Damien had stopped himself before our lips met, but he had no moved away, His face was still close enough that I could

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feel the warmth of his breath, and his hand remained firm around my waist as he watched me with curiosity.

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The only reason I was not climbing him like a tree had nothing to do with fear or hesitation. If I truly wanted him, I would take him without shame. But there were more important matter right now.

No matter how good the last few minutes had felt, I could not fo get why I was here.

I was a very petty person when I was angry. And once someone crossed me, there was nothing in this world that could calm me down until I had my revenge.

Damien stared at me quietly, his crimson eyes fixed on my faces if he were carefully examining every thought passing through my mind. A faint flash crossed his gaze, and before I could react, his hand lifted and gently held my chin between his fingers. His grip was firm yet controlled as he tilted my head upward so that I was forced to meet his eyes directly.

“That is new,” he said slowly, his voice deep and thoughtful. “I have never seen someone think about something else or become distracted when I am standing in front of them.”

He stepped closer as he spoke, and the distance between us disappeared almost entirely. I could feel the heat of his body in the way he stood over me. His crimson gaze darkened slightly as he continued studying me.

“Just what must I do,” he asked in a low voice, “to have your full attention, little wolf?”

I met his eyes for a moment before a slow smile appeared on my lips. Instead of answering his question, I said something completely unexpected.

“Alpha Damien, let us become business partners.”

Damien paused for the first time since entering the room, and one of his brows lifted slightly as he looked down at me.

“Business partners?” he repeated calmly.

I nodded without hesitation. “Yes, business partners. There is something that both of us can benefit from.”

Damien did not respond immediately. He simply stared at me with that unreadable expression of his, and once again I was reminded that he was the only person in this world whose thoughts I could not decipher. Most people revealed something through their expressions, their breathing, or the small movements in their eyes. Damien, however, revealed nothing. His gaze felt like a storm filled with secrets and knowledge powerful enough to destroy a mind if one stared too long, yet he hid everything perfectly behind his calm composure.

After a moment of silence, he finally spoke. “I see. If we are to become business partners, that means you have something that may interest me. Tell me then, what exactly is that?”

My eyes sparkled slightly at his question.

Before he could react, I grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him closer to me. However, I did not pull him close for a kiss. Instead, I guided him to lean slightly to the side while I moved closer to him. My pink lips moved near his ear, and the sudden intimacy of the gesture clearly surprised him.

For the briefest moment, he flinched. The reaction was small and almost invisible, but I noticed it immediately.

I pulled back just enough to look at his face, and my gaze filled with amusement. This was the first time I had ever seen Alpha Damien react like that. Every other time I had encountered him, he had always appeared untouchable and fearless. Even in the moments he had killed me in my previous lives, he carried that same dangerous calm that made him seem invincible,

Yet just now, he had flinched because I leaned too close to him.

Without thinking, I slowly licked my lower lip,

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I could not deny it.

I liked that reaction.

I liked seeing the demon of the West react to me.

I leaned closer again until my lips were beside his ear, and I spoke softly so that only he could hear me.

“Alpha Damien, I know something that you do not know.”

His eyes shifted slightly toward me. “And what would that be?”

A smile spread slowly across my lips as I answered him.

“The future.”

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Damien went still, then he leaned back slightly so he could look at my face properly. His brow lifted again as he studied my expression carefully.

“I know the future, Alpha Damien,” I said calmly.

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Selene

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Damien looked at me without saying anything after I finished speaking. His expression remained completely blank, and there was not a single hint in his face that revealed what he was thinking. His crimson eyes stayed fixed on mine, as if he were examining every small movement I made. I looked back at him just as steadily, refusing to break the eye contact first.

For a long moment, neither of us spoke.

We simply stared at each other.

The silence stretched so long that it almost felt as if time itself had frozen around us.

Honestly, I had expected a completely different reaction from him. I thought he might look at me like I had gone insane. After all, if someone walked up to me and calmly told

me they knew the future, I would probably think that person had lost their mind or was trying to scam me with some ridiculous story. But I was not lying.

I truly did know the future, and the reason was simple.

I had lived through it.

Ten times.

In my past lives, the first nine followed almost the same path every single time. There were small differences here and there, tiny details that shifted slightly, but the overall pattern never truly changed. Certain events would happen, certain people would make certain choices, and no matter what I did, everything eventually led to the same ending.

My death.

No matter how much I struggled or how desperately I tried to change things, the end of those nine lives remained exactly the same.

However, this life was different. This was my tenth life, and this time I remembered everything. Because of that, the future had already begun to change. Some major events had shifted entirely, and the pattern that once seemed unbreakable was slowly starting to crack. My actions alone were already altering the course of many things that were supposed to happen. But the future was not something that changed so easily.

When one event in the future changes, everything connected to that event begins to move as well. It is like a web. If you pull on one thread, every other thread attached to it will tremble.

For example, if something was meant to happen to me and I changed it, then the people connected to that event would also be affected. Their futures would shift along with mine. That was imply the natural law of how things worked.

Even so, the future was stubborn.

From what I had learned in my past lives, even if something changed temporarily, fate would still find another way to make a similar event happen later. It would twist and bend the path until it reached the same kind of outcome.

The real difference was how you used that moment when it finally arrived.

If you understood the pattern of the future, you could prepare for it. You could manipulate the situation and turn it into something that benefited you.

That was why knowing the future was so dangerous. Knowing the future was almost the same as holding other people's fates in your hands. But I had no interest in controlling everyone else destiny.

The only fate I cared about was my own. And I would do absolutly anything to change it.

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I looked at Damien again, already thinking of different ways to make him believe that I was telling the truth. But, after the long silence between us, he finally spoke.

"I see."

I blinked, surprised by how simple his response was.

"You... see?" I repeated slowly. "Wait. Does that mean you believe me?"

He looked at me calmly, as if my confusion was mildly amusing to him.

"Did you not want me to believe you?" he asked.

"I do," I admitted quickly. "I just did not expect you to actually believe me. What if I am lying?"

Damien gave me a slow, thoughtful look.

"Lie?" he repeated quietly.

I studied him carefully.

The way Damien reacted made it seem like he was a man who had never been lied to in his life. His calm acceptance almost felt unnatural. It made me wonder if he possessed some strange ability that allowed him to detect lies, just like I could read people's minds. Or perhaps he simply believed it was foolish for anyone to lie to him in the first place.

The last possibility actually made the most sense.

After all, only an idiot would look the demon of the West in the eye and lie with a straight face.

I waved that thought away and focused on the important matter. Fortunately, he had not asked how I knew the future, because I had absolutely no intention of explaining that I had died ten times and that he had personally been my grim reaper in every single one of those lives.

I smiled lightly.

“Good,” I said. “Now that we have gotten that out of the way, let’s talk about our deal. I will tell you an important fact about the future, and in return you will grant me a small favor.”

Damien nodded.

Maybe I was overthinking it, but it felt like he did not actually care about what I was about to say. His attention seemed more focused on the position we were standing in and how close we were to each other. Then again, I might simply be imagining things.

Any Alpha would naturally care more about information about the future than about standing close to a woman.

I convinced myself of that and continued.

“If I tell you,” I said calmly, “I want to reenter the Rite and continue the fight.”

I watched his face carefully, but his expression did not change.

“And when I return,” I added, “I will look for every opportunity to fight your nephew in a fair match. I will not promise to hold back or be careful. And when that happens, I do not want anyone interrupting the fight or stopping me.”

I paused before finishing.

“That includes you.”

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My gaze burned as I looked directly into his eyes.

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For a moment, it seemed like I had finally crossed the line. Any normal person would have been furious after hearing such a bold demand. He could have rejected me immediately or crushed my proposal without hesitation.

Instead, Damien simply said, "Alright."

I blinked.

"Huh?"

"You can do whatever you want," he said calmly.

For the first time since this conversation began, I felt genuinely surprised.

I had expected to convince him eventually, one way or another, but I had not expected him to agree so easily. Just as Kaius said, Damien did not seem like the type of man who changed his mind once he made a decision. Yet here he was, agreeing without resistance.

It was strange. Still, that did not matter. In the end, I had gotten exactly what I wanted. I smiled.

"Then I will keep my end of the deal, Alpha Damien."

I paused briefly before revealing the information.

"In the next one month, famine and drought will begin spreading across the lands," I said. "The crops will fail, the rivers will shrink, and many packs will begin collapsing under the pressure."

Damien remained silent as he listened.

"Unlike most packs, the Crimson Pack will survive the crisis better than the others. You have stronger defenses, better organization, and more resources than most territories. Even so it will not be enough to avoid losses completely."

I looked straight into his crimson eyes. "Your pack will lose fewer people than the others, but there will still be casualties. But if you prepare for it properly, your pack will be able to survive the coming disaster."

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