

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 211: The Awakening[1,266 words]

Chapter 211: The Awakening

Vivian's POV

A strange, echoing voice drifted gently through the thick haze of my mind, low and deep, brushing softly against the very corners of my fading awareness.

"Awaken, my child. I shall see you soon enough."

It felt remarkably like being slowly pulled up from the bottom of a calm, endless ocean. My entire body floated somewhere between a strange cold and a comforting warm, suspended completely in a quiet in-between. It was not an unpleasant feeling at all... just entirely unfamiliar.

I moved my fingers first, brushing them gently against the soft fabric of the sheets beneath me. My tongue felt heavy and extremely dry. I parted my lips with a great deal of effort, barely able to push out a single ragged breath.

Goodness, I was so thirsty.

There was a dull, heavy fog clouding my thoughts, making it hard to think straight. But oddly enough, it was wonderfully quiet now way too quiet, in fact. That constant, high-pitched hum in my brain that I had not even realized had been there all this time was suddenly gone. It was a massive relief, yet completely unsettling in its sudden absence.

I stretched my toes out and tried my best to think clearly. Where on earth was I?

Rain. It had been raining heavily. There was shouting and a loud argument. Then... a sudden, deafening sound. Sharp pain. My face tensed up automatically with the memory of it.

Physically, I did not feel injured at all. But deep down inside, I was utterly drained of energy.

I slowly pried my heavy eyelids open, only to wince instantly and shut them tight again. The bright room light stabbed straight through my skull like sharp knives. I blinked a few more times until my vision finally adjusted to the glare, then cautiously pushed myself up into a sitting position. The simple motion made my whole body feel far heavier than it should have.

The room around me was painted in a soft, earthy brown tone, and it was completely filled with large bouquets of flowers in every possible shade it looked like an entire garden had just exploded indoors.

I stretched my tired arms high above my head and stared blankly at my fingers, turning my hands over slowly in front of my face. I felt completely detached from myself, as though I were just waking up from a very long, hazy dream.

There was a strange medical machine sitting right beside the bed, with thin wires attached directly to my skin. I grimaced. Hospital equipment. That explained a whole lot.

Pulling the warm blanket off my legs, I sat up carefully and lowered my bare feet down to the cold floor. My balance was completely off I had to grab tightly onto the metal bed rail just to steady myself.

A soft, pretty glow seeped slowly through the pulled curtains. Pink and orange hues painting the sky. It was sunrise.

I did not want to be confined to a bed anymore, not after everything. My skin began to itch uncomfortably beneath the sticky medical wires. With a sudden, impatient tug, I yanked them all free from my arms. The heart monitor wailed instantly in loud protest, its shrill beeping slicing sharply through the quiet room.

"No!"

A voice raw, desperate, and filled with sheer panic ripped fiercely through the air. My heart slammed hard against my ribs.

Heavy footsteps pounded rapidly down the hallway, growing louder and faster by the second. A deep, primal growl echoed right behind the voice, sounding much closer now than before.

Then the heavy wooden door burst wide open.

He stood right there, framed perfectly by the bright hallway light like a powerful phantom come to life. His broad chest heaved heavily with labored breaths, and his wild blue eyes locked instantly onto mine. His entire body trembled violently as if he were barely holding back a full wolf shift.

The rugged lines of his handsome face twisted dramatically relief, shock, pure fear, and something much deeper flashed rapidly across his intense expression.

He looked down at the empty hospital bed for a second, and then his gaze crashed right back into mine.

Instant recognition exploded through my chest like a bolt of bright lightning.

I tilted my head to the side, staring hard at him. I knew him. Deep down in my soul, I knew him.

The ancient bond between us suddenly stirred to life, whispering mysterious things I did not quite understand yet, but felt all the way down to my marrow.

He stepped forward very slowly, as if he were genuinely afraid that I might vanish into thin air if he moved too fast.

And then he was right in front of me, lifting a trembling, large hand toward my face.

The exact moment his warm skin brushed gently against my cheek, I gasped out loud.

It felt like something ancient and long-buried had suddenly come roaring back to life inside my chest.

"Zahliver," I rasped out, my throat dry as dust, but my heart suddenly overflowing with warmth.

He moved before I could even process his actions, wrapping his strong arms tightly around me, burying his face fiercely in my neck, pressing against my cheek, and hiding in my hair everywhere at once. His touch was desperate, entirely reverent, like he desperately needed to reassure himself that I was truly real. I could feel his heart hammering wildly against mine, creating a thunderous rhythm.

Behind him, several figures had gathered nervously at the open door nurses and a few medical staff in pale scrubs, looking wide-eyed and terrified.

Zahliver must have noticed them too, though he stubbornly refused to let go of me. He shifted his stance slightly, keeping my body safely tucked behind him as he faced them with a low, threatening growl curled deep in his chest.

"Check her vitals," he barked orders like an alpha demanding compliance.

The medical staff jumped instantly into frantic action.

I let them fuss over me for a moment as I sat back down on the edge of the bed. Zahliver did not wander far away. He hovered protectively like a dark storm cloud watching every move, listening closely, and looking ready to strike if anything seemed even slightly off.

A man with neatly combed blond hair and a long white doctor's coat stepped forward carefully, looking calm and composed. His warm hazel eyes met mine with a gentleness that made me blink in sudden confusion.

"Hello, Luna," he said kindly. "I'm Dr. Leonard. Do you remember me?" He flipped quickly through a metal clipboard before giving me a small, reassuring smile. "Can you tell me your full name, please?"

Of course, I remembered my own name. At least, I thought I did.

But in that exact moment, the only thing my brain could focus on was his name.

Zahliver.

My true mate.

And everything wonderful and terrifying that came along with that name.

"Uh... uh..." The words tangled up helplessly in my throat like thick smoke. I clamped my mouth shut instantly and stared down at the floor, feeling like my thoughts were slipping away through tiny cracks I could not quite close.

Zahliver's warm hands smoothed gently up and down along my bare arms, grounding me completely with his steady touch. I leaned heavily into his side without even thinking twice about it.

"It's okay, love," he murmured softly, his deep voice quiet and incredibly soothing.

I swallowed hard past the dryness in my throat, then forced the simple words out. "V-Vivian... Grey?"

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 212: The Hidden Truth[1,046 words]

Chapter 212: The Hidden Truth

Vivian's POV

Even saying my own name out loud felt strange and foreign. It was like I was testing it to see if it still truly belonged to me. A cold shiver ran quickly down my spine, and my chest shook with the effort to breathe evenly through the thick fog clouding my mind.

Dr. Leandro offered a calm, reassuring smile and gave a slow nod, while Zahliver pressed a soft, lingering kiss to the side of my head. I clung tightly to the sound of my name in my mind, repeating it over and over like a vital lifeline. I did not want to lose it. I simply could not lose who I was.

"How old are you?" the doctor asked, breaking the quiet.

The answer came a little quicker this time around. "Eighteen."

"And your birthday?"

"In a few weeks. December eighth."

He nodded again, scribbling something down onto a white clipboard resting on his lap. Still, his eyes flicked briefly toward Zahliver, who had gone completely silent beside me.

"Do you remember why you are here? What is the very last thing you recall?" Dr. Leandro asked gently, setting the clipboard aside and folding his hands calmly in front of him.

I blinked slowly, trying hard to chase down the scattered fragments hiding in my head.

"I remember coming back from the party. It was raining... so dark outside. I heard something loud. Then something fell..." My voice grew faint as the scary image returned to me in small pieces.

I reached up to touch my scalp instinctively, searching for any swelling or a bandage of some kind. But there was nothing there at all. Had I actually been hit?

"He went into the forest when it was pouring rain," Dr. Leandro confirmed, watching my facial reaction closely.

A deep, gravelly voice from behind me added, "I found you lying unconscious under a fallen branch."

I turned my head slowly toward Zahliver. His strong arms wrapped even more tightly around my waist, drawing me closer against his broad chest.

"A heavy branch..." I whispered, the words stirring a faint, painful memory.

"When I pulled it off of you..." he did not finish his sentence, but I reached up nervously to touch my face, half-afraid I would find something scarred or disfigured. But my skin felt completely smooth. Normal.

"Your supernatural healing had already begun by the time the Alpha found you," Dr. Leandro added quickly to ease my worries. "So there is no permanent damage to your face or body. Physically, you are completely fine."

I narrowed my eyes slightly, sensing immediately that there was more to the story.

"But?" I asked, holding my breath.

He gave a small, careful sigh. "When Alpha Zahliver shifts into his wolf form, it happens in an instant. His powerful body just knows what it is doing. Yours... yours is very

different. You are carrying both a wolf and a beast inside you. When you begin to shift, your body releases a chemical reaction meant to speed up the transformation process."

I frowned deeply. "So it forced me to shift much faster?"

He nodded. "Yes. But it also meant both sides your wolf and your beast responded much more aggressively. It created a kind of internal conflict, with each side pulling hard for total control. After we scanned your brain and body, we realized that during the build-up to your shift, your mind enters a state of extreme vulnerability. All parts of you your human self, your wolf, and your beast are forced to the surface all at once. That leaves you completely unguarded, unable to protect yourself or even react to danger."

He leaned forward slightly across the desk.

"That is precisely when the lightning struck the tree above you. A heavy branch broke off and struck your head hard."

I sat there frozen in shock, the thick fog in my memory clearing with a terrifying clarity. That really happened to me?

"I... I cannot hear them," I whispered, panic rising in my chest. "My wolf. My beast. They are both completely silent. Why?"

It was a desperate, fearful question. I did not want to lose them. No matter how chaotic things had become, they were a core part of who I was.

Dr. Leandro hesitated for a second, clearly weighing his words carefully. "That falling branch weighed close to twenty pounds. You have been unconscious for just over a week "

My eyes flew open wide in disbelief. A whole week?!

" and seventy-three hours, to be exact," he added softly. "For your own safety while your brain healed..."

Zahliver's deep voice cut in smoothly, low and completely unyielding. "I had them chemically suppressed."

"What?" My head snapped sharply toward him. "Why on earth would you do that?"

He did not flinch under my gaze, but his eyes... there was something dark swirling in them now. Something fiercely possessive and unapologetic.

I turned back toward the doctor without pressing Zahliver further, my spine stiff with tension as Zahliver pressed his face back into the side of my neck.

"When will they come back to me?" I asked, my voice much quieter now.

Dr. Leandro glanced at the clear IV bag hanging near my bed. "Now that you are fully awake, your body is naturally metabolizing the suppressant. It should wear off in two, maybe three hours if we do not administer another dose."

A strange sense of relief fluttered warmly in my chest. I needed them. I genuinely missed them.

"When can I go home?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

So much time had passed while I was trapped in darkness. I felt like I had lost days of my life days where everything could have changed around me without me even knowing.

"You will need some proper rest and monitoring for a little longer, but soon enough," Dr. Leandro assured me gently.

I sat quietly on the bed, letting that answer settle heavily over me. A whole week gone. My mind was still heavy with lingering fog and unanswered questions. My name was barely clinging to my lips.

But I was still here.

And I would fight hard to hold on to every single part of myself.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 213: The Weight of Silence[1,149 words]

Chapter 213: The Weight of Silence

Vivian's POV

Something about the air inside the room felt completely wrong.

I could not quite explain it exactly. A strange prickling sensation crawled slowly down my spine, and a subtle tension clung heavily to every single breath I took. It felt like invisible shadows were pressing in close from every corner. My sudden unease must have been quite obvious, because Zahliver's strong arms tightened around my waist just slightly, as if he could sense the dark mood too.

Dr. Leonard was busy flipping through his metal clipboard, his expression completely unreadable until he finally looked up to meet our eyes.

"Well, physically, everything seems to be in good order," the doctor said. "Your heart rate is stable, your vital signs are strong, and your memory should start trickling back little by little. Under normal circumstances, I would suggest keeping you overnight for observation, but... with how fast you are healing now, that does not seem necessary anymore."

He hesitated for a moment, and in that brief pause, something shifted dramatically in his expression. A flicker of deep dread, maybe even true fear, crossed his face. He glanced quickly over my shoulder and turned completely pale.

Zahliver's arms around me instantly tensed up like coiled steel.

"What is it?" I asked quietly, trying hard to hold his gaze.

Dr. Leonard shuffled uneasily where he stood by the door, clearly debating internally how much information he should share. Finally, with a heavy, troubled sigh, he spoke up.

"I do have to warn you," he said, his voice dropping lower now, edged with something much heavier. "There is a risk that does not simply go away one tied directly to your unique shift. Every single time you transform, you enter a dangerous window of vulnerability. A moment when something else chooses which part of you wolf, beast, or human comes forward first. That moment is... extremely dangerous."

I stared hard at him, trying desperately to absorb what that actually meant for me. My hands curled tightly into fists against the hospital blanket.

"So you are saying..." My voice cracked slightly. I cleared my dry throat and tried again. "What does that mean for me, exactly?"

He met my eyes directly, his own gaze deeply haunted. "Luna, your body might not be capable of dying in the permanent way others do. But if you are attacked while you are shifting during that in-between phase... your mind could shut down completely as a defense mechanism. You would fall into a deep kind of coma. And the truth is... I do not know if you would ever wake up from it."

Before I could even begin to process or react to that terrifying statement, he glanced past me once more. Whatever he saw made him go deathly pale, and he quickly turned on his heel and left the room without uttering another word.

I just sat there on the edge of the bed, completely stunned. My thoughts felt like they were echoing in an empty void.

For the next two long days, I could not stop watching Zahliver. I tried my best to pretend that everything was fine, but the raw truth was that I was deeply worried about him.

He was quiet. Way too quiet. He hovered around me constantly, always attentive and soft-spoken, ready to give me anything I asked for... yet somehow, he felt miles away. Like I could reach out my hand and touch his skin, but never truly reach his soul. He would smile at me, but the smile never reached his tired eyes. He would skillfully distract me whenever I tried to bring up the doctor's grim warning, acting like he did not want to talk about it at all.

And honestly? I did not entirely blame him.

I was frustrated, though. Missing Thanksgiving was one thing I could easily forgive that. But having to call my parents and come up with a half-baked, ridiculous excuse for why we had not reached out to them? That was awful. I missed normal food. I missed a normal life.

When I finally brought it up to him, Zahliver whispered something reassuring about making a big, wonderful dinner together soon. That sweet promise should have made me daydream happily about mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce, but the way he said it so soft and distant made my heart ache instead.

We were physically together, yet emotionally apart. I could feel his presence, his strong hands, and his familiar warmth... but I could also feel how heavily guarded he had become. It was like he was deeply afraid that if he got too close to me again, I might just vanish into thin air.

Sometimes he looked at me like I was made of fragile glass like he was desperately trying to memorize every detail of my face. His eyes would go completely glassy, lost somewhere in his own dark thoughts, before snapping back into sharp focus and locking onto me with an intensity that left me breathless. It was deeply unnerving.

He had even closed off our mental bond. I could not feel a single thing coming from him through our link. Not anger, not fear, not even love. Nothing at all. If not for the quiet moments when he thought I was fast asleep those incredibly soft touches tracing my face, the way he would curl protectively around me at night and press his face deeply into the crook of my neck with a shaky, ragged breath I might have actually started believing the terrifying distance growing between us was permanent.

Still... I could understand why he was acting this way. We were both thoroughly shaken. That terrible night had changed everything between us.

Physically, I felt much stronger now. My mind was finally clearer. I remembered every single word the doctor had said, and I knew I had to be far more prepared the next time. That is, if Zahliver would ever even allow me to shift again. Which, given the way he was hovering over me like a shadow, I seriously doubted.

Both my wolf and my beast had finally come back to me during these past days, deeply guilt-ridden and apologetic beyond belief. Even they could not explain why everything had

spiraled out of control so violently that stormy night. The three of us were back in sync now, and together, we were watching Zahliver with the exact same quiet concern.

He looked... utterly exhausted. Not in the physical sense he was still as powerful and imposing as ever but there was a hollow, empty look in his eyes now. A heavy slump in the way he moved through the room.

Whatever happened out there in the dark forest that night had not just shaken me to my core.

It had broken something deep inside of him, too.

He looked completely wrecked.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 214: Breaking Point[1,128 words]

Chapter 214: Breaking Point

Vivian's POV

Dark circles clung beneath his eyes like deep bruises from endless sleepless nights. His usually neat hair was tousled and unruly, and a scruffy shadow of rough stubble darkened his jaw. If he did not look so completely worn down by the world, I might have found the rugged look quite appealing. But the heavy exhaustion weighed down on him so much that it made his entire presence feel heavy, like the air around him had turned too still to breathe.

I was not even sure he had been sleeping at all during these past few days. There were moments, hazy somewhere between dreams and wakefulness, when I felt like his watchful eyes were locked on me even while I slept deeply. Like he stood like a silent guard through the long night hours.

He roamed the hallways of the house like a restless ghost, always dressed in that same dark black t-shirt and matching sweatpants even in the early hours of the morning, even when the world outside was quiet and still. Sometimes, I would hear him yell downstairs at someone, barking out sharp, demanding orders. I would catch little fragments of his voice. "Handle it without me," or "I do not have time for this." Then he would come back upstairs as if nothing had happened at all, his face smooth and his voice gentle. But the sharp sound of something breaking would always follow right after him. The sound of

glass shattering, fabric tearing, and those low, dangerous growls slipping quietly through the silence.

It was getting harder and harder to ignore. I could not just pretend that everything was completely fine anymore.

He was in the kitchen right now, moving around quietly to make breakfast. That had become his new daily routine. He would always gently push me back down onto the bed if I tried to move around too much, brushing it off with soft insistence that my body still needed complete rest. And maybe I had needed it for a while. But not today.

The bedroom was still dim. Thick curtains kept the bright morning light out, but even through the heavy fabric, I could tell the sky outside was gray and churning with clouds. A bad storm was coming. I wrapped my arms around myself and quickly shook the dark thought off. A brand-new day had come, and I needed to be fully present in it.

I let my bare feet fall quietly to the floor, and before I could even take a single full step forward, he was already there.

Zahliver appeared right in front of me as if he had teleported, his eyes wild and his arms outstretched.

"What are you doing?" he asked, his voice sounding almost frantic. "You need to rest." He was already reaching out to grab my shoulders.

I caught both of his large hands in mine and stood up straight anyway. "Zahliver, I am okay. I have been lying down flat for two straight days. I really need to move my legs."

He tried stepping right in front of me, blocking every single direction I turned like a stubborn wall I could not possibly get around. I let out a long sigh of sheer frustration.

"No, no, no, no," he muttered under his breath, shaking his head rapidly. "You have to sit back down on the bed right now. Do you want water? Food? Anything at all? Just tell me, and I will get it for you immediately."

His voice grew desperate by the end of his sentence, trembling slightly as he hovered close to my side. I shook my head slowly from side to side and reached up, resting my warm palm flat against his rough cheek. My thumb brushed softly against the coarse stubble along his tired jawline.

"You are the one who desperately needs rest," I said quietly to him. "And a long, hot shower. When is the last time you actually slept, or even ate a proper meal?" I frowned deeply at him. He always made sure that I had my meals brought up on time, but he never once sat down to eat with me. He always used the excuse that he had already eaten earlier, or that he simply was not hungry. Just empty excuses.

"I am not important," he said, his voice dropping low and steady. "You are."

"No," I snapped back, sharper and louder than I had originally meant to. "You are important, Zahliver. You cannot keep pouring all your energy into me while running completely on empty yourself. Let me take care of you this time around. Please. I am totally okay now see?"

I turned my body slightly to the side, showing him clearly that I could stand tall, walk on my own, and move freely but his dark expression only grew darker.

"Go lie back down, Vivian," he said softly, but there was no mistaking the absolute command hidden deep within his voice.

I frowned, my arms folding tightly across my chest in defiance. "Zali "

"Go."

"No."

His jaw clenched so tight the muscles jumped. He stepped forward aggressively, tension vibrating fiercely through every single inch of his powerful frame. I backed away a step, lifting my hands up in a silent warning.

"Zahliver, I am fine. It is really okay "

"Stop saying that!" he suddenly snapped, his voice cracking loudly like a bolt of thunder in the quiet room.

I froze in my tracks. His hands clenched into tight fists at his sides, his knuckles turning stark white. And then I felt it just the faint edge of something breaking through our blocked bond. A sudden flare of raw, blistering emotion. Something burning hot, angry, and deeply scared.

"What is actually happening to you?" I asked softly, taking a step closer to him despite the danger. "You are not acting like yourself, Zahliver... and not in a good way. Please. Let me in."

He started shaking visibly.

His eyes squeezed shut tightly, his jaw locked like he was holding back much more than just simple words. He inhaled sharply through his nose, then grimaced as if the very air itself burned going down his throat.

"It is fine, Vivian," he whispered, his voice trembling. "Everything is fine. Just... go back to bed, sweetheart."

"No, it is not fine at all," I said, my voice rising right along with my racing heartbeat.
"That is complete bullshit!"

"ENOUGH!" he roared, his voice dropping deep and guttural, shaking the walls around us.

"NO!" I shouted right back at him, my voice breaking under the strain. "Let me in! What is wrong with you? Whatever it is we are facing, we will deal with it together, as a team!"

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 215: The Breaking Heart[1,085 words]

Chapter 215: The Breaking Heart

Vivian's POV

He broke right in front of me.

He took one step toward me, and then another step away. His movements became completely erratic as he started pacing frantically back and forth across the floor, his large body trembling with a wave of raw emotion. A low, menacing growl vibrated heavily through the room, deep and frightening, followed instantly by a harsh snarl as his canines elongated his inner wolf fighting to surface beneath his completely unraveling composure.

"Work on it?" he snapped, his voice fraying badly at the edges. "Work on it?! There is nothing left to fix! You do not get it, Vivian. You do not know. You do not know... and she does not even know!" he roared suddenly, spinning around to face me directly, his eyes wild with terror, his voice falling into a string of broken muttering.

I reached my hand out for him instinctively, needing to calm him down.

But he recoiled.

He actually flinched hard away from my touch.

My hand froze completely midair. A sudden chill seeped straight into my bones, feeling so sharp and instantaneous that my entire chest felt hollowed out. Zahliver had never pulled away from me before. Not even in his darkest moments, not even when things were at their absolute worst. But now... now his pain lashed out like it had a mind and will of its own, and I could feel every single ounce of it crashing heavily through our shared bond like a violent hurricane. It was suffocating, making it feel like an invisible iron chain was wrapped tightly around my throat and chest, dragging me down into the dark abyss right along with him.

"Z-Zaliv..." My voice cracked under the pressure.

"I could not save you." His voice thundered through the small room, completely filled with agonizing despair. "I did not save you! I failed you entirely. I failed as your mate!"

He halted abruptly just a single breath away from me, his wild eyes locked downward onto his own hands, as if they were stained with something invisible something he could not scrub off no matter how hard he tried.

"All the medical tests... the careful safeguards... the stupid magical protections I put all around you they meant absolutely nothing. They could not stop it from happening. I could not stop it. It is all my fault. I let it happen to you."

A heavy sob caught tightly in my throat, ripping silently through my lips as my chest tightened painfully. My heart completely shattered at the sight of him my powerful mate, the mighty Lupus Deus, reduced to this trembling, broken shell of a man. Heavy guilt had him by the throat, and it refused to let go.

"No," I breathed out, my voice barely audible above the quiet hum of the room. "No, Zahliver... please do not do this to yourself. It was not your fault at all "

His head snapped violently upward. His eyes were almost completely black now, a dark void swallowing up any remaining light. His fierce wolf was right there on the surface, scratching to get out.

"Yes, it was," he whispered harshly.

"I was just standing out under a tree... and it was raining heavily," I tried desperately to explain, needing to pull him back from the edge.

"I let you walk away alone," he said hoarsely, each agonizing word punching the air right out of between us. "I should have gone with you. I knew the weather outside was bad, but I stayed behind."

"It was just a terrible coincidence," I whispered, tears welling in my eyes. "A horrible one, yes, but you cannot blame yourself for nature "

I moved forward toward him once more.

He stepped back again.

"You are not supposed to be attached to my hip every second of the day," I said, trying my absolute best to steady my trembling voice.

But it was not cold logic that he needed right now. It was undeniable proof. Proof that he had not failed me, proof that I was truly standing right here.

So I dropped straight down to my knees in front of him on the floor.

My hands found his strong shoulders and gripped them firmly, anchoring him to me so he could not run away again.

"You did save me," I said fiercely, looking straight into his tormented eyes. "I am right here. Look at me, Zahriver. I am alive."

His gaze lifted slowly, meeting mine.

And good grief, his face...

It was utterly shattered.

Hot tears tracked steadily down his cheeks like silent confessions of a broken heart. I had never seen him cry like this before in my entire life. I was not even sure I would ever feel anything more painful than watching him fall apart right before my eyes.

"You died, Vivian," he said softly, his voice trembling so much that it sounded like the words themselves broke something vital inside of him.

The breath caught completely in my lungs, stopping dead.

"W-What?" I managed to whisper out, terrified of the answer.

His broad shoulders sagged heavily as his hands slid down from his hair, shaking uncontrollably. Then he reached out and gently took my hands away from his shoulders, cradling them carefully in his own large palms. He brought them slowly up to his lips, closed his eyes tightly, and kissed them over and over again like they were his very last tether to sanity.

Then he pulled in one sharp, ragged breath and exhaled it shakily.

I did not move an inch. I did not dare speak. My body simply would not let me.

His eyes opened again, and there was something ancient and devastated looking back at me.

"I felt you die, Vivian."

My heartbeat stuttered wildly in my chest.

"But " I could not even finish the simple sentence. My lungs refused to work properly. The very idea was too horrific to comprehend.

"You died," he said again, his voice cracked, rough, and raw with pain. He pressed my hands firmly against his own chest, right over the steady, heavy thrum of his beating heart beneath his skin. "Right here. I felt your heartbeat completely vanish from our bond."

His throat worked hard as he tried desperately to hold back more tears, but they spilled over his eyelashes anyway. "I felt the exact moment it stopped beating," he whispered, leaning his forehead against mine. "And it... it completely destroyed me."

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 216: The Healing Bond[1,120 words]

Chapter 216: The Healing Bond

Zahliver's POV

His grip tightened around my hands like he was terrified I would vanish into thin air all over again.

I closed my eyes tightly and rested my hands fully against his broad chest, tuning out the rest of the noisy world so I could listen only to the steady rhythm of his beating heart, and to the ancient bond that connected our souls together.

Through that shared bond, I saw it.

The terrifying darkness that had swallowed him whole.

It was thick, ancient, and endless. And he had been walking through it all alone for so long that he no longer even feared it. It was his only constant companion, the only thing that had not left him until the exact moment I did.

Until my heart finally stopped beating.

And now... he simply could not unfeel that horrific moment of loss.

But I was right here. Alive and breathing. And I would remind him of that vital truth for as long as it took to heal his broken soul.

He did not know if the light meant something good anymore... or if it was just a blank, hollow void waiting to swallow him.

Maybe the light was not true salvation after all. Maybe it was just emptiness disguised as temporary peace.

And the darkness was it really pure evil, or simply a state of blindness?

But right now, he did not care about any of that.

A choked sob tore violently from my throat as my body trembled uncontrollably, completely overcome by the heavy weight of what I was feeling from him. I could sense every bit of it how deeply he was hurting inside, and how brutally he was punishing himself for something he could not control.

Fear. Anger. Regret. Pain. Grief. Disgust. Total helplessness. All of it slammed into his mind like a raging tide, and he did not even try to fight it. He welcomed the torment.

He honestly thought he deserved every bit of the suffering.

My eyes fluttered open slowly, blurry with hot tears. The aching pain in my chest only grew worse when I looked up and saw the devastated expression on his face.

Utterly haunted.

"Oh, Zahliver..." I whispered, my voice cracking under the emotional strain.

But he did not even flinch at my words. He did not lift his heavy head, nor did he reach out to hold me closer.

This was not the Zahliver I knew. This was not my strong, feral brute who always moved through the dangerous world with unshakable certainty the man who would gladly burn the entire world down just to keep me safe from harm.

No. This version of him was completely shattered.

And I was not about to stand by and let him stay trapped like this forever.

A sudden, fierce flame lit up deep inside me. Strong and steady.

I pulled my hands free from his grip and quickly wiped the remaining tears off my cheeks with my palms.

"What good am I," he muttered, his voice sounding hollow and empty, "if I cannot even protect the one person I love most in this world?"

I drew in a long, steadying breath, then leaned forward and gently cradled his handsome face in both of my hands, forcing him to look directly at me. His piercing blue eyes met mine, but they looked completely vacant, as if he could not even see me standing right in front of him.

"Hey," I said firmly, my voice leaving no room for argument. "Do not you dare think like that. Do you hear me? None of this is your fault. Not a single thing."

He blinked slowly at me, but his intense stare remained distant.

"There was no possible way we could have seen any of it coming. And I know you, Zahliver, I truly know you. There is nothing you would not have done to stop it if you had even the slightest warning. That is simply who you are. You protect. You love. You fight like absolute hell to keep the people you care about breathing."

His lips parted slightly in surprise. He remained silent. But I saw the tiniest shift in his guarded expression, like he was finally beginning to register the sound of my voice.

"And I am sorry," I whispered softly. "I am sorry for not being more careful out there. For putting you through something so terrifying. I should have paid much more attention to my surroundings. I should have " I caught my breath, shaking my head firmly. "But you did not lose me, Zahliver. I am right here. I came back to you. I am immortal, remember? You cannot get rid of me that easily."

His eyes finally began to focus on me. Really focus on me.

"You are never alone," I said softly, pressing my forehead gently against his. "You were never truly alone. You pulled me back from the dark. You saved me, Zahliver. You really did."

He exhaled a breath that was ragged and unsteady, and I felt his large hands lift hesitant and trembling as they finally settled warmly at my waist. The simple contact nearly undid my resolve.

"Please do not carry this heavy guilt anymore," I murmured against his skin. "It does not belong to you."

His intense gaze searched mine as if he were desperately trying to believe my words, but simply did not know how.

"Bad things happen in this world. Sometimes without any reason at all. But you " I smiled gently through my tears, " you are the absolute best mate anyone could ever ask for. You are always telling me how lucky you are to have me in your life, but I do not think I have ever told you just how lucky I am to have you."

The heavy, dark weight in his eyes began to lift, bit by little bit.

"I may complain about your impossible rules or your stubbornness at times, but I would not trade a single second of our time together. Not one. You are protective, loyal, brilliant, charming when you want to be, and underneath all that growl and dominance... you are so full of love."

His grip on my waist tightened slightly, grounding himself firmly in my presence.

"I am the lucky one, Zahliver. And I will spend forever being grateful that the Fates gave me you."

I cupped his rough cheeks gently in my hands. "So stop punishing yourself like this. Let me in. Let me love you, completely and fully, the way I always do. Because I do love you."

My voice cracked slightly with emotion. "I love you, Zahliver. Always and forever."

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 217: The Return Home[1,119 words]

Chapter 217: The Return Home

Vivian's POV

I pressed my forehead softly against his and let my eyes drift closed, needing just a quiet moment to breathe and to simply feel him near me. His nose brushed gently against mine, and his strong hands slid around my waist, drawing me tightly into his chest. The heavy pressure in his grip told me everything words never could he had fought fiercely through the dark storm raging within him and had finally come back home to me.

When I opened my eyes again, his bright blue ones were waiting clear, intense, and full of an emotion that made my heart lurch.

Love.

It was raw, completely unguarded, and it was entirely for me.

A trembling smile curved my lips as deep emotion swelled in my chest. I did not try to hold back the single tear that slipped down my cheek, and he did not miss it. His large

hand rose gently, brushing the moisture away with a tenderness that only made me want to cry harder.

"Shhh, baby... it is alright now," he murmured, his deep voice low and steady.

I nodded, swallowing hard past the lump in my throat. I was about to pull back slightly to give us both some room to breathe, but he cupped the back of my head and held me firmly against him.

Then his lips touched mine.

The kiss was not rushed in the slightest. It started slow and deliberate. But the very second our lips met, something deep inside of me cracked wide open. His kiss was soft yet consuming, strong yet careful fear and love tangled together in every single movement. I clung to his face, needing more of him, needing to anchor myself fully in this exact moment in time.

And he gave in to it, just as much as I did.

His lips moved against mine with a hunger that mirrored my own, desperate and deep. I shifted slightly, pressing my palm flat against his chest, needing to feel the heavy thrum of his heartbeat against mine, needing the physical proof that he was really here.

When we finally broke apart, gasping for breath, the sound of our heavy breathing filled the quiet room. My chest rose and fell rapidly, and I leaned forward to rest my head comfortably over his heart.

"I want you," I whispered, the words slipping out of my mouth before I could stop them. I meant every single syllable.

He did not respond with words. He did not need to.

In a single, fluid motion, he stood up with me in his arms, cradling me effortlessly against his chest like I weighed nothing at all. Then he laid me gently down onto the mattress, lowering his large frame beside me with careful restraint. One of his strong arms propped him up, while the other traced softly along my face his warm fingertips gliding gently from my temple down to my lips. His intense gaze burned into me with so much feeling that I almost looked away.

I reached up and wrapped both of my arms around his neck, pulling him down closer to me. He leaned in and kissed me again.

There were no explanations needed between us. No apologies were spoken. None of that mattered anymore.

We were not just making love. This was not about simple lust, blind possession, or even raw passion.

This was a quiet surrender two wounded souls reaching out for each other across a vast chasm of pain and finally finding home again. In every gentle brush of skin, in every shiver of breath, we found our way back to one another. We did not need to speak a single word, because everything we felt was clearly said in the peaceful silence.

We were not just two separate people anymore.

We were completely whole.

Afterward, I curled up comfortably against Zahliver's warm chest, my cheek pressed firmly over his steady heart as if that simple act might keep the harsh world away just a little longer. His arms wrapped securely around me like protective armor, and he pressed a soft kiss to the top of my head with a heavy sigh that rumbled deep through his chest.

"You do know that I am going to be ridiculously overprotective of you from now on, right?" he said, his voice rough with lingering emotion and a faint hint of playful teasing.

"Yeah, I figured," I whispered with a small, knowing smile.

"And I will probably drag you with me everywhere I go," he added, sounding like he was testing just how far he could push his luck.

"Figured as much." I placed a soft kiss right over his sternum. He huffed out a warm breath of air, clearly expecting a lot more resistance from me than he was actually getting.

"You are surprisingly calm about all of this," he muttered, sounding deeply suspicious now.

I rolled my eyes playfully and looked up at him. He was already watching me with narrowed, amused eyes.

"Because eventually, you will chill out. Maybe not in a few days... but in a couple of weeks or a few months, you will finally ease up a bit."

His blue eyes darkened slightly, and the pad of his thumb began moving in slow, deliberate circles along my waist.

"I honestly do not think I ever will," he said quietly.

The heavy weight of his words lingered in the warm silence between us.

I hesitated for a second before finally asking, "Zahliver... what did it actually feel like?"

I did not need to clarify my question. He understood precisely what I meant.

He did not answer right away, but when he finally spoke, his voice was quiet and cracked at the edges like something fragile.

"It felt like someone had ripped half of my heart right out of my chest... like my insides were burning from the inside out. I was just standing there, and suddenly, the whole world felt ten times bigger, and I felt so small. Empty. Like I had no reason to move, no reason to speak, no reason to even breathe. I was just... there. An empty shell. And I honestly did not know if I would ever feel whole again."

His voice trembled slightly as he finished, and I felt a sharp echo of his pain ripple through our bond.

I tightened my arms around him, my heart aching deeply. I hated that he had been forced to feel that kind of agony. I hated that I had been the cause of his suffering.

But more than anything else in the world, I was endlessly grateful that we had survived the storm.

Together.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 218: The Promise[1,044 words]

Chapter 218: The Promise

Vivian's POV

I gently rubbed my hand across his warm abdomen, offering a small, reassuring gesture to remind him that I was still right here still breathing, still completely with him. He glanced down at me and offered a grateful smile, one that tugged at something tender deep inside my chest.

"You started healing the physical wounds the exact moment the heavy branch hit you," he began quietly, his voice laced with something that sounded like lingering disbelief and old pain. "But it was not right... not fully. Not until I finally got to you and pulled the heavy wood off your body. You were " he stopped abruptly, swallowing hard against a thick throat. "You were bleeding so much."

The stark words made me flinch away slightly. I did not need to see the memory to imagine what he had witnessed out there. That tree... if it had really been as massive as the doctors described, it must have crushed my skull completely. My stomach turned sickly at the thought, and I could not stop the cold shiver that raced through my frame.

Zahliver had seen all of that. He had witnessed the blood, the brokenness, the helplessness. No wonder his blue eyes had looked so haunted like pieces of his soul had been left behind in the mud during that terrifying moment.

"When I finally got you rushed to the hospital, you were already starting to heal on the outside. But I did not know what kind of damage had been done on the inside," he continued, staring straight ahead at the wall. "Then the doctor said... he said you might never wake up from the coma."

He paused for a long second, his jaw tightening into a hard line. "You were technically alive, but you were not really living."

Those heavy words hit me much harder than I expected them to.

"Alive, but not living," I echoed softly in a whisper, the full weight of the phrase pressing heavily against my chest. It was terrifying to imagine myself locked away inside a dark, unconscious prison for all eternity, completely unaware of the world, unaware of him... while he remained on the outside of it all, completely alone and aching.

"And then seconds turned into minutes. Minutes into hours. Hours stretched endlessly into days. I did not know what to do anymore. I was... lost. So damn lost," Zahliver admitted, his deep voice breaking with raw, unfiltered honesty. "I was scared to death. Completely exhausted. And I started thinking... wondering how an immortal man could ever escape a world that felt so painfully empty without you in it."

He looked up at me then, his eyes hollow and searching. "I felt like I was just existing, but not truly alive."

The heavy ache in his voice shattered something delicate inside my chest. I sat up suddenly, my heart thudding wildly with urgency, and cupped his handsome face with both hands, forcing his gaze to meet mine directly.

"Do not you ever, ever think like that again," I said firmly, letting no room for argument. "I do not care how dark things get around us. There is always a way through it if you want there to be."

I shifted and straddled his lap, needing him to hear me really hear me.

"Even when everything feels completely hopeless, when it feels like no one is there to care or catch you when you fall, when the weight feels too heavy and the world stops making sense... even then, there is still light. Even a blind man knows what light feels like, Zahliver."

I felt my throat tighten up with emotion, but I pushed bravely on.

"You can only drown under the water for so long before your body desperately craves the surface craves oxygen. And the surface will always be there, waiting for you. You just have to want it enough. You had so much hope for me... so let me have hope for you, too. I have always believed in you. So how about we believe together?"

I searched his face closely, looking for something anything to tell me I was finally getting through to his dark thoughts.

He stared back at me like I was something sacred, his blue eyes growing warm and utterly awestruck. Then he reached up and gently tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear with all the tenderness in the world.

"I will love you for all eternity, Vivian Grey," he murmured, his voice rich with deep emotion. "And I will spend forever proving that I am the lucky one for being given the chance to love you the way I do."

His sweet words melted straight into my soul. I leaned down, brushing my nose playfully against his with a soft laugh.

"And I love you, Zahliver Azrala. I will try not to completely take over your personal space... but no promises," I teased, smiling brightly.

He laughed a real, genuine laugh and pulled me close against him, rolling us over until I was safely beneath him on the mattress. I could not stop my own bubbling laughter as we landed, the happy sound filling the quiet room like warm sunlight.

"Your scruffy beard tickles my skin," I said between giggles. "Seriously, you need to shave that thing off."

He pulled back slightly, arching one dark brow in mock offense.

"Really?" he asked, pretending to be deeply hurt by my words.

I gave him an unrepentant, bright grin. "Obviously. Did my laughter not give it away? And I am not apologizing if I wake you up in the middle of the night laughing because of it. Go shave, mountain man."

His eyes narrowed playfully, that familiar, dangerous spark flashing behind them the one that always made my stomach flutter with warmth.

"Maybe later tonight," he said, his voice dropping down into something low and husky, "but right now..."

He let the unfinished words hang in the warm air between us, full of quiet promise.

And in that exact moment, I felt it again the unbreakable bond connecting our hearts together. The pain, the fear, the sudden loss... none of it mattered anymore. Because we were here. Together. Alive and well.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 219: The Door[1,070 words]

Chapter 219: The Door

Vivian's POV

"Oh my goddess, Hannah, what is it now? The ninety-what?" I tilted my head toward Zahliver, who did not even glance up from the massive sea of paperwork spread neatly across his desk.

"Ninety-sixth," he replied calmly, flipping a page over like he had not just admitted to counting my friend's ridiculous phone calls.

"For the ninety-sixth time," I groaned into the mobile phone, "I am totally fine. Just like I was yesterday. And the day before that. And the day before that... all the way back to when I actually was not fine. Girl, I adore you, but if you ask me how I am feeling one more time, I am going to start letting Mark know how you really feel about his beloved sci-fi drama."

I could practically hear her dramatic eye-roll right through the line before she huffed loudly into the microphone.

"Fine, fine. But if you faint again, do not expect me to show up at your front door like some worried nursemaid. I warned you," she said, before suddenly yelling away from the phone, "Johnson! Back away with that thing! MARK! HE HAS GOT THE BACK SCRATCHER AGAIN! Dammit, I said I am not itchy anymore! Viv, I have to call you back."

Somewhere on the other end of the connection, heavy feet thudded across a hardwood floor, and someone let out the kind of high-pitched scream that made me snort with laughter.

"Tell Johnson I said hi," I managed to get out between chuckles.

"They are... definitely unique," Zahliver muttered, finally starting to stack the loose papers together, signaling that he was almost done working for the day.

"Yeah," I said fondly. "Hannah is an absolute gem, Mark is the most patient man I have ever met, and Johnson... well, he is basically walking chaos in a hoodie."

Zahliver smirked slightly at that. "And then there is his mate what is her name again, Mila? Still pretending he does not exist just because he never returned her favorite teddy bear from high school."

I blinked in surprise and sat up straighter against the couch cushions.

"Wait, that is the actual reason they are not together? Because of a silly teddy bear?"

He gave a small nod, looking completely unbothered by the absurdity of it. "Apparently, their pre-mate bond dynamic involved years of stealing random items from each other. They decided they would not formally acknowledge the mating bond until every single stolen item was returned. It is... a rather strange sort of tradition."

I squinted my eyes at him. "And how on earth do you know this?"

He finally met my gaze, one dark brow arched playfully. "Vivian. What is there that I do not know?"

I rolled my eyes playfully, even though I could not help the warm smile tugging at the corners of my lips.

Ever since our last long talk that heart-to-heart talk Zahliver had hardly let me out of his sight. He took me with him nearly everywhere he went around the territory. When he truly could not bring me along, he left behind trusted guards with strict instructions and made me swear on my life to call him immediately if anything happened. He also maintained a very strict no-shifting order. He was still being thoroughly overprotective, but he had mellowed out just a little bit. I supposed we were taking baby steps.

It had been a full week since I woke up, and we were finally finding our comfortable rhythm again. The days possessed a strange, quiet softness to them spent working in his office, sharing idle conversation, and catching those tender looks we passed each other when we thought the other person was not watching.

I was still curled up comfortably on the couch with one leg tucked under me, silently regretting the awkward position, when a sudden knock echoed loudly through the room. Zahliver stood up immediately, tugging me gently to my feet before lacing his strong fingers with mine as we headed toward the front door.

When he pulled the heavy door open, Algebra was standing on the other side.

Seeing his familiar face made a sudden wave of warmth rise in my chest. He had been one of the very first people I saw when I finally woke up after my body collapsed in the forest. I had been unconscious for three whole days, and he had shown up with a bouquet of flowers and a tiny plush toy shaped like a complicated math figure. He had joked that he brought it so I could "hug the thing that almost killed me." Honestly, his quirky humor had made me laugh harder than I ever expected in a hospital room.

Pero the smile I had been wearing faded fast when I saw the grim look etched onto his face.

Zahliver's posture straightened instantly beside me, every single muscle in his body going tense as stone. "What is it?"

"We found it," Algebra said without any ceremony. "The door. It is now or never, man. The men are ready to move out. It is your call, Alpha."

I did not even need to ask what door he meant.

It was the door the one that opened the hidden way up to the heavens. The sacred place where it all began. The very place where the gods had broken him, cursed him, and changed him into the powerful, dangerous being I stood beside every single day. The place where he had lost his beloved brother.

Zahliver's grip tightened painfully around my hand, and I could already feel the familiar dark storm rising fiercely behind his blue eyes.

And somehow, deep down inside, I knew that whatever happened next would change everything between us forever.

I was not going to pretend that I was not terrified.

I was terrified of what Zahliver was about to do. I was terrified of what might happen once he left our safe walls. But more than that, I knew this was not something I could or should try to stop.

This was not about me. It was something he needed to do for his own soul... for us. No matter how much I wanted to cling tightly to his jacket and beg him to stay behind, I could not hold him back from his destiny. Even through my deep fear, I trusted him with everything I had.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 220: The Return[1,173 words]

Chapter 220: The Return

Vivian's POV

Zahliver knew full well what he was truly capable of achieving. He would never throw himself blindly into such a dangerous fight if he thought for even a single second that he

would not make it back home to me. I tightened my grip around his hand, gently dragging his attention back to me when I saw his fierce focus start to slip away. He turned back, locking his bright blue eyes directly with mine, and I saw the heavy war of raw emotions playing out behind them fear, fierce determination, and deep longing.

He was finally ready to leave.

But deep down inside, I was not yet ready to say goodbye to him.

I shook my head slowly from side to side, keeping my voice soft yet completely firm. "I will be completely okay here. Go. This is what you have been preparing for all this time. Go end it, Zahliver."

He stared down at me for a heartbeat longer, searching my face like he desperately needed to memorize every single feature. Then, very slowly, he looked past me toward Algebra waiting in the shadows. With a sharp nod of his head, he silently gave the final order. Algebra did not say a single word back he just disappeared into the dark to get the men ready for the march.

And then Zahliver pulled me tightly into his strong arms.

I melted completely into his embrace, wrapping myself around him like I could somehow keep him safe from harm just by holding on tight enough. I breathed in his familiar scent like it was the very last time I would ever get the chance to do so. His heart pounded wildly against my chest beating fast, full of rising adrenaline and unspoken emotions. Mine was doing the exact same thing.

When he finally pulled back slightly, he brought his lips down to mine, and I did not hold anything back. I kissed him like I was pouring all my love into him, all my lingering fears, and all the desperate hope I dared to feel in that dark hour. It was frantic, and it was entirely real. When we finally broke apart, it was only because our lungs forced us to.

"I will be back soon, my love," he said, his voice rough with emotion but full of absolute certainty.

"You better be," I said, trying hard to sound tough even though my throat burned with hot tears. "Or I will hunt you down myself."

His mouth quirked upward into a half-smile, and he pressed a gentle kiss to my forehead before stepping slowly away. I held onto his hand until the very last second until our fingertips finally slid apart.

I leaned heavily against the wooden doorframe, gripping the edge like it was the only thing keeping me upright, and watched him walk away into the shadows. Just before he vanished completely into the dark night, he turned back one last time.

"I love you!" he called out loudly over the wind.

My heart twisted painfully. "I love you too! Come back to me in one piece!"

And then he was finally gone.

I stood there alone for a long time, staring out at the empty pathway, my heart aching with a hollow emptiness. And then I did something I had not done in what felt like an eternity.

I prayed.

For hours. Days. Maybe even weeks. Time seemed to lose all meaning.

Time blurred together as I cried, shouted, and pleaded with the gods, the moon, or anyone who might be listening up above. I poured every ounce of strength I had into holding onto hope, even as cold fear tried to steal it all away from me. You never truly realize how deeply you love someone until you are faced with the terrifying possibility of losing them forever. Until you feel like your own soul might not survive if they do not walk back through your door.

I thought about every single thing that could possibly go wrong out there. I imagined the absolute worst-case scenario over and over again in my mind. But I kept forcing those dark thoughts away for Zahliver's sake. For the sake of our future.

Then, just as the pale light of dawn started to creep slowly into the gray sky, I heard the heavy front door creak open.

I did not stop to think. I just moved.

I launched myself off the living room couch and ran straight for the hallway. And there he finally stood.

Zahliver stood in the doorway, bloodied, battered, and bruised, his clothes torn to shreds, his powerful body still actively healing from the battle, but completely alive. Whole. My breath caught in my throat as I threw myself directly into his arms, not caring in the least about the drying blood soaking into my own clothes or how ragged and messy I must have looked.

I clung to him like a desperate lifeline, burying my face deep into the crook of his neck. He wrapped his arms around me just as tightly, and I let out a shaky, ragged breath that sounded much more like a loud sob.

"You are back," I whispered, my voice breaking entirely.

"I promised I would be," he said, a tired, genuine smile warming his voice.

I pulled back slightly from his embrace, opening my mouth to say something more, when a sudden movement behind his shoulder caught my eye. My triumphant smile faltered instantly.

Someone else stood quietly in the doorway.

Tall, with a quiet yet commanding presence that demanded respect, the strange figure had his hands clasped neatly behind his back. His clothing was completely unusual the kind of ancient attire you would only expect to see in a historical film about forgotten kingdoms or eras beyond time. I blinked hard at him, trying desperately to make sense of what my eyes were seeing.

He was entirely unfamiliar to me... and yet, somehow, he felt strangely familiar.

His sharp facial features tugged strongly at something hidden deep inside my memory. That strong, squared jaw, the high cheekbones, and the soft curl of his lips as he offered a polite, gentle smile. His dark hair was as black as night, matching Zahriver's perfectly, but it was his striking eyes that really held me still. They were a hypnotic blend of pale green and deep blue, looking just like swirling sea glass.

He did not look like anyone I personally knew in this life... but he felt like someone I damn well should have known.

Then the realization finally hit me like a physical blow.

I turned my head slowly toward Zahriver, who was now standing there grinning like a proud wolf holding a massive secret.

"Vivian," he said softly, stepping aside so the mysterious stranger could come fully into view of the light. "Meet my brother..."

I looked back at the man taking in those familiar, unmistakable features and my breath caught entirely in my chest.

"Joshula."