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Forever in the Past and Forever in the Future chapter 96

I wake up in the morning in my bed next to Kas, who has herself wrapped around me. Her light snores tell me she is comfortable, so I try not to interrupt her. The last thing I remember is Saint blocking me out after we shifted, so he could spend some alone time with Lex. I rub the sleep out of my eyes and realize I have sap stuck to the side of my face with pine needles embedded in the sap. My hands are filthy and I smell like I may have gotten sprayed by a wild animal. '

I carefully unwrap Kas from around me, so she doesn't wake up. She has fared no better. Her hair is full of dry, caked mud with little twigs and bits of leaves sticking out. There are streaks of dirt on her face and dried blood on her chin. Looks like Lex must have been hunting rabbits. Kas lets out a content sigh as I get out of bed and pull the covers over her.

I stop short when I realize she has bite marks all over the scarred part of her back. Saint knows Lex can't heal Kas's scars quickly. Why would he do that to her? I finish covering her up as much as I can when I realize the bedding has been destroyed.

"Saint, you wanna tell me what the Hell happened last night?" I ask as I look at the dirty, shredded sheets on the bed. Around the room, the chair was knocked over and broken and we scattered everything from the nightstand on the floor. There are deep gouges on the wall behind the bed and a spot where the drywall looks like someone got slammed into it.

"Adult stuff, dummy. Now go away," he huffs and rolls back over in my mind to finish sleeping. 7

"Well, I don't care what kind of freaky shit you and Lex are into, but you can't be biting Kas on her scars, Saint. Lex can't heal them as fast. Don't hurt our mate," I scold him.

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“Whatever. Our mate is strong, she can handle it. She’s been holding back for your benefit. We’re strong enough for her now,” he says defiantly, yawning and stretching before he curls up to ignore me. I take in his words. It never occurred to me that the silver embedded in my body could make Kas and Lex feel like they needed to go easy on me.

I get a shower and get myself ready for the day before I rouse Kas out of bed. I wipe the blood off her mouth before she sees it. Of all the things she still has trouble with, the sight of blood still makes her squeamish. Once she is out of the shower and has her business suit on, she looks like she’s in a much better mood.

aK

I take my seat in the front row of the makeshift courtroom we have created in the Blood River ballroom for Randall’s trial. With the number of pack members who need to give statements against Randall, it didn’t make sense to have the trial in Vienna where the Council headquarters is. Ashley and Carly have arranged for the room to be set up as close to the official courtroom as possible.

Kas sits next to me, listening intently as former members of Silver Moon step up to speak out against Randall. They unveil story after story of neglect and cruelty as the pack members give their testimonies. I can slightly sense her anger as the stories come to light, but I can tell she is doing her best to hold it in. Especially from the ones dealing

with children being pulled from school to work. When Kas was a Silver Moon pack member, the same thing happened to her. It is an inexcusable issue for her.

Kas also has a turn to speak about her experiences when she was there for a week, including our team finding the body of Alexandros DeCaul, who Randall allowed on pack territory without official reason. I watch as the fourteen Council members take notes and ask questions of each pack member and Kas. Nodding or shaking their heads as they write and whisper to each other.

I feel uneasy knowing Silver Moon was supposed to be under my jurisdiction, but the Council had taken over to help find a new Alpha. I was not responsible for them for the last two years, but I should have paid closer attention.

Little Hannah Fisher will go last. Her parents bring her in from a side door where she was being held for the rest of the trial, so she wouldn’t have to hear about all the horror stories

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told by the adults. When it's finally her turn, her mother helps her to the front of the crowd, and has her sit on a booster seat, placed on top of a chair, in front of the Council. That way, everyone can easily see and hear her. She gives her daughter a kiss on the cheek and whispers something in her ear before she takes a step back.

Hannah looks back at Kas and me with watery eyes. Her little face looks so scared. I give her a nod and try to smile reassuringly at her. Kas gives her a big smile and a thumbs up. She mouths 'be brave' to the little girl, who smiles with a renewed confidence and faces the Council again. I give Kas's hand a squeeze as we listen to Hannah tell her story about being pulled out of school to work in the packhouse kitchen.

She doesn't know if she was being paid or not. She talked about Randall letting a stranger take her down to the basement, and the promise of money so her parents could leave the pack. Then she tells them about the woman who looked like Kas appearing from a portal and the fight that ensued that resulted in the stranger's death before the woman disappeared.

She tells them the man's blood ruined her only pair of shoes. Her parents couldn't afford new ones. When she came to Blood River, we gave her two new pairs. One pair of trainers to wear to school and one pair of dress shoes. We even gave her a pink dress to wear for

parties and her parents were happy again. She finally asks the Council if she and her parents are allowed to stay at Blood River forever. She doesn't want to leave.

Elder Henri steps away from his seat and approaches the child. I see her body posture stiffen as he leans down, so he is eye to eye with her. "Mademoiselle Hannah Fisher," he says in his friendly, thick French accent, " You are a brave young lady for speaking to us today. You are a perfect example of the type of wolf your Alpha Regent Bronx and Luna Regent, Goddess Kas, want as a member of Blood River. I commend your courage and thank you for your honesty. You have a bright future ahead of you, Hannah."

I smile at my old friend as he holds his large hand out to the little girl, who looks at him shyly. She tentatively puts her hand in his and lets him shake it heartily. Her face turns beet red as she giggles at him. The rest of the Council and members of the crowd laugh politely at the interaction. Henri pulls Hannah down from her seat, and points her toward her mother near the back of the room. We watch as Hannah runs happily into her mom's arms and they leave the room.

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The Council announces everyone except for ranked members of Blood River should also leave the room. We sit patiently as everyone files out.

When the room has emptied, four armed Council warriors, flanked by four more in wolf form, enter the room. Randall is in silver wrist and ankle shackles in the middle of the group. He looks like he hasn't had a shower since he they arrested him. '

"Elder Randall Morris, we have heard the accusations. We have your heard your statement of the events, the statements of the former members of Silver Moon pack, and reviewed all the evidence against you in the matter of abuse of power during the temporary leadership of the Silver Moon," Elder Henri says, looking down at a piece of paper, "The Council will now vote guilty or not guilty. If we find you guilty, the charges against you will cause your titles of Elder, Regent, and Alpha being stripped. We will impose a sentence of life in prison in a remote location that will remain undisclosed for security reasons. Do you understand?"

Randall looks up at Henri and the other Elders, "I-I thought you we-were my friends. You ha-ave to understand, this... this isn't what it seems."

"Randall, I asked if you understand, not if WE understand. We understand perfectly," Henri growls and his eyes grow darker, "You had your chance to give a statement. To prove to this council that your acts were not criminal. To prove there was someway to justify what happened under your direction. Your excuses were weak at best and pure evil at worst. They elected you to this Council to protect werewolf kind, not mistreat them. So I ask again, Randall. Do you understand?" Randall looks to the ground, finally accepting his fate, and mumbles, "Yes. I understand."

Henri starts off with a guilty vote. The other thirteen members all take their turns while we sit by and watch the fate of the former council member become solidified by a unanimous guilty vote from all council members.

As they announced the last vote, Randall drops to his knees and starts blubbering like a coward. The guards bend down to pick him up by his armpits but get interrupted.

"Wait!" Kas stands up, approaching the guards.

"Kas what are you doing?" Lenora hisses at her. I take a step forward, but I don't want to undermine Kas's authority in front of everyone. I silently hold my hand up to Lenora to stand down and watch her intently. Saint is ready to shift at any second if something goes wrong.

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I watch Kas confidently walk over to Randall and bend down slightly so she is at eye level with him, "Randall?" ° "Goddess lokaste, please, please ask the Council to show me mercy. Please, I can't go to that prison. Do you have any idea how many werewolves I have sent there? Please help me. Goddess, please," he wails pathetically. He tries to reach out for Kas, but a guard stops him and smacks his hand down. I can feel my fangs elongate as Saint loses his temper. He feels so much stronger than he did yesterday, but so do I. I push against him and keep control.

Kas grabs Randall by the chin so he will look directly into her eyes, "Randall, there is no chance in the Goddess's name I would ever ask anyone to give you mercy after what you have done. You are a pathetic excuse for a werewolf."

Whoa. What? I don't know what I thought she was going to say, but it definitely wasn't that.

A flash of a glow comes from her hand as she squeezes his jaw slightly, "In fact, here's what I AM going to do. I'm going to wish you the best in your new, well deserved prison cell, Randall. I'm certain that you will have nothing bad to say about it...ever. Are you?"

She shakes her head while she speaks, reaffirming what she is saying. Her words make me uncomfortable, but I watch as Randall awkwardly shakes his head against her hand, sniffing. I can't tell if he is doing it on his own, or if she is manipulating the movement. "In fact, you're not going to say anything at all...ever. Are you Randall? You're going to keep quiet and accept the fate that you brought upon yourself. Isn't that right? No more crying or whimpering or anything else...not a peep out of you," Kas says in a calm, sweet manner that doesn't sit quite right. The surrounding guards are all

looking at each other uncomfortably, as if they are fighting the urge to step back from the interaction.

"What the fuck is she doing?" Milo leans toward me and whispers, "It's giving me creepy vibes, Bronx."

"Shh. We'll talk about it in private later, not in front of the Council," I whisper back as I watch her intently.

The look in Randall's distressed eyes changes. Softens and relaxes as he absorbs her words. His tears and sniffing seem to dry up almost instantly, and he nods at her, while she nods back at him.

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“Good boy,” Kas says, removing her hand from his chin and patting him on the head. She turns her attention to the guards, “You can take him now.”

When she turns around, I can see a glow in her eyes fading. By the time she crosses the room and gets back to me, she seems back to her normal self. ‘

We watch silently as the guards take the now cooperative, quiet Randall out of the room so they can transport him to prison.

“Kas, we’re gonna talk about whatever the fuck that was,” I growl] quietly at her while we exit the room.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I just put in my two cents before they took him away,” she says in an innocent tone, “I’m going to say goodbye to Katherine and Amari and make sure Tessa is settled into her new suite.”

She gives me a kiss and turns down the hallway as if what happened was completely normal.

“Uhh, Bronx, is Kas okay?” Ashley asks, looking down the hall after my seemingly happy mate.

“I’m not sure Ashley, but I think I need t o start keeping a closer eye on her,” I muse.

“Yeah. That’s probably a good idea, Alpha,” she nods in disbelief.

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Kas's POV

Marco catches up to me before I get to Katherine's suite.

"Kas, hey, stop," he orders, tugging on my arm.

"What's up, Marco?" I turn to him and smile. I can already guess what he is going to say.

"What did you do in there, Kas? What happened to Elder Randall?"

I look around him to make sure there isn't anyone down the hall, "Can you keep a secret?"

"Of course, you know you can. Now spill. Whatever it was, everyone could feel it. It felt real dark," he gives me a concerned look.

"Marco, I need you to trust me, okay. I haven't been only learning magic from Delilah. When I sleep or meditate, I'm able to go see my sister Leticia," I confide, "She has been teaching me the things Delilah can't."

"WHAT?!" he says loudly and catches himself. He leans toward me, whispering with wide eyes, "Are you fucking crazy, Kas? She's dangerous."

"She's not dangerous to me, Marco... well, mostly... I'll explain tomorrow on our way to Paris," I reassure him with a loud whisper, "Until then, I just need you to trust me. What happened

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with Randall, that was a one-time thing. I needed to test out my ability. Now that I know how strong it is, I don't need to use it again. I won't lie, it felt good, and that kinda scares me."

I watch as Marco rubs his hand over his mouth and paces in front of me, "Kas?" "Marco?"

"I don't care how bad shit gets, don't you ever, ever pull the shit you did to Randall in there to anyone ever again," he points in the ballroom's direction. His tone is full of warning.

"I don't know if I can promise that, Marco," I try not to let my voice get too loud, "When you hear what I have to say on the plane, I hope you will understand."

"Fine, but don't think I won't throw you over my shoulder and let your mate deal with you if you piss me off, Mason," he warns, but in a more playful tone. We usually only call each other by our last names when we are doing some sort of training activity. He and James said when we are training, they can't think of me as their Luna or as a friend. When they train with anyone else, they call them by their last names, so we do the same. '

"Don't think I won't tickle the Hell out of you if you throw me over your shoulder. I know your weak spots and don't think I won't tell your mate what they are, Sanchez," I smirk at him.

He raises his finger at me and inhales like he is going to say something else, but thinks better of it and puts his hand down.

We come to a silent truce and continue on to Katherine's suite. As we approach, several omegas are coming out with bellman's carts full of suitcases and duffel bags. They bow slightly to me as they take the carts toward the garage. "Katherine, are you still here?" I call into the room.

"Oh Kas, I'm so glad you could stop by! Lenora should be here any minute. She agreed to let me say goodbye to Codi. I also wanted to give you both some information that will hopefully be useful. Amari is joining us as well," she smiles with her practiced expression. "Useful? Alright, I am all for useful information," I'm interrupted by Codi's happy clapping.

"KAT! KAAAT!" she squeals, reaching for Katherine from Lenora's arms. Lenora reluctantly hands Codi to Katherine. The effect is instantaneous. Codi snuggles into Katherine's chest and Katherine looks more relaxed than she has her entire stay at Blood River. Amari comes in the room and coos at the sight.

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"Why don't we sit?" Katherine offers, motioning to the kitchenette table, " Amari and I have some information for you."

We all sit down while Amari pulls out a tablet and lays it flat on the table. She flips through pages of a digital book, "It doesn't happen often, that we meet our mates before we are both reincarnated and are of age, but it has happened." She pulls up an image of a page from an ancient book and shows it to us. "Amari, I don't know what language that is, but it doesn't look like one I have ever seen," Lenora says dryly, "I'm not sure how this is supposed to help."

"Oh, my apologies. What this says is that while, yes, Codi recognizes Katherine now, once Katherine passes on, Codi won't remember her anymore. She won't want to be with her until they find each other in Katherine's next life and they are both of age," Amari explains.

"We know several things from experience," Katherine adds, "None of the Manaes remember their previous lives until our wolf wakes up. Once our wolf wakes up, the memories trickle in over the course of a couple of years. The same is usually the case for our Guardian mates." '

Lenora's brows knit as she speaks, "So when you die, Codi won't remember you until you are reborn and you find each other as legally aged mates?"

"Correct," Amari confirms.

"If Codi doesn't have memories of her previous lives yet, how does she recognize Katherine? She was asking for her before Katherine was even here," Lask.

"We're not sure. Instinct?" Amari shrugs, "We're still trying to figure out how a Guardian was born into a family that already has a Guardian, not to mention the uncanny resemblance of Lenora and Tessa."

"If you don't mind me asking, when is Codi's birthday?" Katherine asks. She is rocking Codi and rubbing her back in slow circles, and Codi is perfectly content to let her continue.

"Well, she was born May fourteenth, but she was almost born April twenty-second. Kas healed us and saved our lives after there was a problem with the umbilical cord," Lenora looks at me, still grateful for what she considers a miracle.

"A-April twenty-second?" Katherine turns pale. "Yeah, is that date important?" Lenora asks.

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"That's the day Leticia..." she looks at the pup in her arms and holds her a little tighter, "Well, that was the day we lost Cordell."

Lenora closes her eyes and rubs her hands over her face the way Bronx does, "Kas, do you think it's possible that when you healed us, that somehow allowed Cordell's spirit to be embedded into Codi?"

"I-I don't know. I mean, that's the Moon Goddesses decision, right? Amari, do you know when the Moon Goddess gives a pup its human and wolf spirits?"

"Hmm, we don't know for sure, but we think it's usually shortly before a pup is born. So, Lenora could be correct.

Especially if the healing was complex and generated a lot of energy. Mother may have seen it as an opportunity to place Cordell's spirit with Codi," Amari taps her finger over her lips as she thinks.

"Well, fortunately, you're not in the habit of going around, healing pregnant women," Katherine laughs, triggering a fit of giggles from Codi, "So I think we're safe from it happening again. Right?"

"Heh heh, about that," I cringe, "I uh, I actually do it all the time. We currently have three pregnant women in the pack who I am close friends with. I give them healing energy all the time so they won't be exhausted. Our Gamma female had a blood disease caused by her baby. I had too, otherwise, she and her pup would have died." °

Katherine's lips turn into a thin line. If she wasn't holding Codi, I think she would swear at me. I look at the table, feeling my face flush. I'm not sure why I'm suddenly so self-conscious. "I-I didn't know," I stammer, feeling all eyes on me.

"It's alright, Kas. We didn't know either," Amari pats my arm forgivingly.

"Well, now that you know. Stop," Katherine commands, "We monitor the children until their wolves wake up."

I assume it's her Luna voice. It has powerful energy and booms through the room. Lenora and Amari both bow their heads and expose their necks to her. But only a small inkling in the back of my mind feels it. It's like a mosquito, annoying in your ear but harmless. I don't

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feel compelled to submit to her, rather; I want to challenge her. Lex goads me on as] feel her natural sense of defiance surge.

“Katherine, you will absolutely NOT ‘monitor’ children from Blood River. Our pack members are not experiments and we will NOT have you interfering with the lives of our pack members,” I stand up, feeling my temper rise. I reserve my Luna voice and just let my emotions show my intent.

“Kas, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it like that,” she tries to backtrack.

“How did you mean it, Katherine? You’ve already admitted to spying on me. Do you plan to do that to our pups? Because I will do everything in my power to stop it if you do,” I feel my aura glowing and that damn storm cloud that has been following me grows bigger, the thunder from within gets louder.

Lenora pulls slightly on my hand, “It’s alright, Kas. Bronx won’t let that happen. Our pack is safe. Come on, just say goodbye and let’s go. You said you wanted to check on Tessa. Codi and I will go with you.”

“Ladies, we will see you for the charity event in two weeks,” I bow my head respectfully, even though I have anything but respect for Katherine, and walk out without waiting for them to respond.

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Lenora chases after me with Codi in her arms, “Kas, wait. Wait up.”

“What is it, Lenora?” I stop and cross my arms over my chest with a sigh.

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“What is up with you lately, Little Sister? You haven’t been yourself for weeks. I’m worried about you,” she looks at me with half a smile.

“Lub you, Au Ka,” Codi says sweetly from Lenora’s arms.

I smile at Codi and reach my fingers out for her to grab, “I love you too, Codi.” “Milo has been teaching her that to surprise you,” Lenora laughs with tears in the corner of her eyes, “But seriously, Kas. Obviously, things are not okay with you. I know a lot of times you want to deal with things on your own, but please, I am here for you. All of us are. Whatever it is, we can help you. It isn’t just Codi. Bronx, Milo, Reggie, and Ashley, let’s not forget Marco and Musu, James and Delilah, not to mention this entire damn pack. We all love you Kas. And we’re worried about you.”

“Lenora, it’s just stress. I’m fine. Delilah and I are going to Paris a few days early to get away from things. Decompress, you know? Things are just crazy right now. That’s all,” I shake my head and put my hands up defensively.

“If there were anything I could do, you would tell me, right?”

I feel her words cut through all my protective layers. I almost breakdown, but I can’t. Now’s not the time for emotions.

“Of course, Lenora. I would tell you if there was anything you could do,” I try not to let my smile turn down to a frown. “We have already moved Tessa to the fourth floor across from Milo and me. That way, we can help her if she’s having a hard time adjusting. Plus, Milo meets with the trainers and heads of pack security three times a week. You know how Milo is. If she can provide any insights into security, he wants her there for some of those meetings.”

We make our way to the fourth floor and knock on the door to Tessa’s new, larger studio apartment style suite. She opens it slowly and peeks out at us before opening the door fully.

“Are you here to hit me with angry energy again?” her voice cracks as she speaks.

Her words catch me off guard. She sounds so fragile, so broken, “N-no, Tessa. I just wanted to see if you were happy with your new room and see how you are feeling. I’m not here to

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fight.” She stands aside to let us in and guides us to the loveseat and chair in the living area of the suite. She takes my hands and pulls me onto the loveseat with her, “I’m doing okay. I guess. I feel like I have a lot to apologize for, but I’m not sure where to start.”

“Well, it sounds like that’s a good start. Don’t feel as if you need to say anything now. I know you are setting up appointments with the therapists starting tomorrow. They can help you with all that, not sure where to start, stuff. Trust me, they have helped me through tons of problems.”

“Me too,” Lenora chimes in, “It may surprise you to hear that I can be a little high-strung. I go once a month.”

Tessa looks at Lenora curiously, “Let me guess, your wolf is cryptically pushy until she pushes you over the edge.” Lenora looks taken aback, “Ho-how did you know that?”

“Me too. Except after millennia of that bullshit, my wolf finally went over the edge herself,” Tessa says glumly.

“Don’t worry, darling. You’re in the right place now. Everyone here wants to see you get better,” I rub her arm while I reassure her. I try to smile and gauge her mood.

“Even though I am going to die soon?” A tear slips down her face at the question.

“It doesn’t matter when you’re going to die, Tessa. Don’t think about that. You have so many more lifetimes ahead of you. Focus on getting better so you have a fresh start in your next life. If you and your wolf are both in a better state of mind, maybe you can help Alexandros work through his demons. Get him back on a better path in life. Help him be a better wolf. You can help him bring honor back to his name. I’m sure of it,” I look down and realize my aura is mixing with hers, creating an indigo colored glow between us.

“Thank you, Kas,” she holds a hand to her heart.

“No, thanks needed. You are family, Tessa. We are just doing what family should do for each other,” I nod resolutely, “I want to hear an excellent report about you when I get back from my trip, okay?”

“You’re going somewhere?” she looks startled to hear that I won’t be here.

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"I'm going to Paris for a few days with my witch friend, Delilah. I believe you met her. She's also my business partner

at the bakery. We're just going to get away from all the silliness around here for along weekend. I just need some time to meditate and experiment with new recipes, maybe even eat at a fancy restaurant without the attention Bronx and I together usually draw," I sigh at the thought of being able to go into a store or restaurant without being bothered by photographers. The laws in France make it much easier to have privacy, "Bronx is going to join us later in the week, then we are going to Greece for Katherine's charity event. I'll be back in a week and a half, but Lenora and Milo aren't going anywhere. They will help you with anything you need. Just give the word."

"You're going to Greece?" Tessa's eyes widen with what I can only describe as fear. It looks very foreign and uncomfortable for her.

"Yes, to some sort of casino charity night," I explain. Surely she had to have heard about it before.

"Please be careful, Kas. I wish you would change your mind. If there's anything I can do to talk you out of it, tell me what it is. I won't speak against our sisters, but you need to protect yourself. Please," she begs as she grabs my hand tighter.

Her words are almost identical to Cora's, 'I won't speak against our sisters'. I wonder what they both know and what they are not telling me. Are they worried that the Mavri Magea is dangerous, even to me? Or are they trying to warn me about someone else in our family?

"Don't worry, Tessa. Bronx will be with me, so will my two guards and a powerful white witch," I explain, trying to calm her down, "And don't forget, I have some abilities of my own. I'm not a pushover."

"Okay. Just keep your guard up, please," she continues to urge. Her green eyes are turning watery again, "Lenora, can you change her mind? Can you make her stay?"

"Tessa, if I knew how to get Kas to change her mind about anything, Bronx would make me a queen," Lenora screws up her face and sticks her tongue out at me playfully. Codi giggles at her mother's funny face.

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"I will be careful. I promise," I place my hand on the side of Tessa's cheek, "Thank you for your concern."

I watch Tessa's lip tremble again. She pulls me toward her and hugs me while she sobs.

I open a mind link to Lenora while I hold my sister, "Let the guys know we're gonna need extra security in Greece, please."

"Yeah, as soon as we leave this room," her confident tone has returned, making me already feel better about the upcoming trip.

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Delilah and I meet with the bakery managers in the afternoon and make sure they understand all of their responsibilities, give them back up contact information, and reassure them we trust them completely. It's the first time we are both going to be gone at the same time, so we do our best to hide our nerves and give them as much encouragement as possible. We help prep dry ingredients for a couple hours so there will be less work for them to do without us there.

Marco holds the back door open for us when we are ready to leave. Bronx's midnight blue Aston Martin Superleggera is idling in the alley. Bronx tinted the windows dark enough that I can't see him inside, but I can't imagine him letting anyone else drive it. I look down the alley and don't see any of the sedan's the guards usually drive, except the one Marco drove us to the bakery in. Bronx's car only has two seats. He had to have it specially made because he is so tall. There's definitely no room for guards.

"He said it's a surprise and no guards tonight," Marco shrugs, feigning innocence.

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"You knew? Delilah? Are you in on this too?" I put my hands on my hips.

"Je ne sais pas de quoi vous parlez [I don't know what you are talking about,]" she shrugs as well, but doesn't feign innocence nearly as well as Marco. Probably because of the light blue color in her eyes.

I look down and realize I'm wearing leggings, a black zip-up hoodie with flour streaks where the apron didn't completely cover me, and a purple t-shirt with the bakery logo on it. I feel my face flush, knowing I'm about to get in a car that costs more than most people's homes, looking like this. Delilah licks her thumb and wipes some sugar off the side of my face, and helps me fix my ponytail.

"You two are traitors," I growl a little at them when Bronx steps out of the car looking drop dead gorgeous in a dark gray suit with a white shirt. He walks over to the back door of the bakery and takes my hand, giving it a little kiss. The little sparks from his lips touching my hand make my face feel hot. I breathe out a deep breath, feeling self-conscious with Bronx giving me this type of attention in front of Marco and Delilah.

"Don't worry, boss, I'll have her home by midnight," he winks at Marco before leading me to the passenger side of his car and opening the door for me.

He gets in the driver side and leans over, putting my seatbelt on for me, "Bronx, where are we going? I'm dressed for work, not to go anywhere I need to be dressed up." °

He takes my hand and kisses it again and gives me a sexy smile, "Don't worry, Baby. You don't need to be dressed up. I just have a little surprise for you, not to mention, I wanted to spend some time with you."

He revs the engine and slowly makes his way out of the alley, "If you're worried about what I thought about your outfit, you haven't seen how many photographers are out front today. They caught wind I was on my way here." "Oh, crap," I take a second to decide. If I try to hide my face, stories will come out that there is some reason for me to hide. If I accept my fate and let them take my picture with no mind, they might say that I'm not feeling well, but they may just say I'm too comfortable around my husband and I need to try harder if I don't want to lose him. Right? I choose to accept my fate. I wiggle out of the dirty hoodie and shove it onto the floor. As Bronx pulls out of the alley, dozens of flashes go off in front of us. I realize as I squint at the lights that most of them are being directed toward Bronx, not me.

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"Bronx, is this the first time you've been in the human world without an eyepatch on?" I ask through my teeth, giving a big grin for the cameras as the car crawls forward. Bronx goes as slowly as possible, trying to avoid hitting anyone who's leaning over the car to take pictures.

"Yeah, why do you- oh. Right. We, uh, we need to come up with some sort of alibi," he looks at me with a smirk, "Miracle recovery?"

"Experimental surgery?" I raise my eyebrows.

"How about a prosthetic eye?" He sticks his bottom lip out at the idea.

"Yeah, that's probably more believable. Otherwise they are going to post stories about you stealing one of Lenora's eyeballs or something as equally ridiculous," I nod in agreement. "Agreed. You wanna talk to them real quick? It's the only way they're going to let us through. Besides, they all like you," he blinks hard at the flashes still going off.

I resist rolling my eyes at him and roll down the window partway.

"Hi guys! Can you let us through, please?" I ask in a pleading voice, giving them my best smile.

"Kas, where you two love birds headed?" "Where are your guards?" "Is it date night?" "Do you have an appointment?" They all speak at once.

"Yeah, a surprise date night," I look at Bronx with a smile. He squeezes my hand and smiles back at me.

"Mister Mason, where's your eye patch?" One photographer finally asks. Bronx points below his fresh eye, "Prosthetic eye. Looks real, doesn't it?" "Yes, sir. It sure does." "Who is your doctor?" "What company made it for you?" "Kas, do you like his new look?" The photographers all start speaking at the same time again.

"Okay guys, please let us through. You can get pics of us on the red carpetina couple of weeks in Greece. We are going to the Santoro Enterprises charity event," I ignore their questions and give a little wave before closing the window. Satisfied with the prospect of getting pictures of us at a formal event, the sea of photographers parts and we can drive away.

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"You're so good at that," he says, kissing my hand again.

"Thank you. Good enough to be told where the heck we are going?"

"Oh, you're not that good, Mrs. Mason," he winks at me as he gets on the highway and slams on the accelerator so no one can follow us.

I watch the passing landscape as he drives, the beautiful mountains painted with tree leaves turning the distinctive colors of autumn. My mind wanders as I think about the trees at the end of this cycle of their life, getting ready for a long winter's sleep before they are reborn in the spring.

The thoughts lead to my sisters in a similar phase. Preparing for the end of this life to be born anew. Preparing to end their reign as powerful leaders caring for others, only to become vulnerable children who need protection themselves. I consider my role among these women and how my actions have affected their lives in the past and will continue in the future. I now understand the reasons for my past actions, but were they my decisions to make? The implications have lasted and will continue to last for centuries.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Bronx quietly pulls my attention, giving me a quick look, then turning his eyes back to the road. I realize my cheeks are wet with tears and quickly wipe them away. "Bronx, you think I'm a good person, right? Like, you know I would never hurt anybody on purpose, regardless of my abilities or not. Right?" I lace my fingers together and watch my hands. My breath gets heavier as I try to compose myself, but my voice wavers when I speak, "I-I want to be a good mom to Cora. I mean, I know I'm not her actual mother, but I kind of am. It's important to me to just be a good example for her. I don't want her to grow up thinking that...I-I don't know..."

I look up and realize Bronx has pulled over on the side of the highway. I can't read his expression. He taps the steering wheel with his fingers a few times, then gets out of the car and comes over to my side. He opens my door and squats on the ground next to me. I lift my arms slightly when he leans in to unbuckle my seatbelt. He puts his hands on my hips and gently turns me to face him.

"Kas, I have never met a more caring, compassionate werewolf in my life. I don't care about the name of your faction or what it has represented in the past. All I care about is who you are now and you are perfect. I'm not just saying that because I'm your mate. I'm saying that

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because I don't think you realize the effect you have on the people around you. You are such a good person, that you make the people around you better people too."

"You mean because of my abilities?" I sniffle, wiping the tears from my eyes.

"Actually, I think it's the oatmeal chocolate chip cookies," he smirks.

Bronx cracks jokes so rarely that I can't help but laugh. Unfortunately, letting myself laugh lets other emotions go, too. Tears stream down my face while I confess how I really feel, "Bronx, I know I have no control over it, but I'm scared of the future. What if I can't be there for Cora? Like, the way she needs me until she's old enough to be on her own. All my lives have been so short. W-what if I die before-I mean-

"Kas, it's all going to be okay. You just need to have faith. In the Moon Goddess, yourself, and even the people around you. We are all supporting you and nothing will change. Especially after Cora is reborn. She will be a welcome part of our pack until she is ready to find Dante and go out on her own," he leans forward and wraps his arms around my waist, bringing his face much closer to mine. I look at how beautiful his eyes are as he admires me and how his olive skin tone creates shadows in the perfect places around his face to make him look so handsome.

"If there is anything that prevents you from being there, just know that she won't be on her own. I promise. There will always be wolves in our pack who are there for her. Regardless of what the future holds for us," he caresses my face, letting our mate bond comfort me along with his words, "I don't care how many premonitions you have. We don't truly know what the future holds for us. We just have to live our lives to the fullest and enjoy the time we have left."

He always knows just what to say. I throw my arms around his neck and hug him tightly, "Thank you, Bronx. I love you."

"I love you too, Kas. Forever," he murmurs in my ear. He pulls me tightly against him and rubs my back until I kiss his cheek and let him go, "Ready to go now?"

"Are you going to tell me where we're going?"

"Nice try, but nope," he puts my seatbelt on, then goes around to the driver's side, and pulls back out onto the highway.

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Forever in the Past and Forever in the Future chapter 100

Half an hour later, we exit the highway and drive another twenty minutes down a country road. Eventually, we pull up to a little restaurant that has a handmade sign that says "Jimmy's BBQ" with a silhouette of a hog under it.

There are a few other cars in the parking lot, but it doesn't look like a place that ever gets too busy.

"You got dressed like that to eat barbeque?" I ask waving at his suit.

He just smiles as he gets out of the car and jogs over to my side to open the door for me, "You're going to love this place. I promise."

A short, plump woman in jeans and an oversized blue sweater greets us, "Bronx! Long time no see, darlin'. This must be that adorable wife we see in the papers."

"Hi Shelly. Yeah, this is Kas. I thought it was about time to bring her to my secret spot," he smiles and gives the woman a big hug. I take a deep breath and stop myself from growling at the interaction. There is a hint of a werewolf's scent in the air, but she is definitely human.

"It's nice to meet you, Kas," Shelly reaches her hand out and I shake it, "You must be a pretty special young lady to win this grump's heart."

"It's nice to meet you too, Shelly." I say cordially. She is so friendly, it's difficult not to like her. I look at Bronx, "He can be a grump, can't he? You're right. I must be pretty special to put up with him."

"Ha! She's got a sense of humor, too. Come on you two, your usual table is right where you left it, Bronx," she smiles as she leads us to a booth at the back of the restaurant. Once we

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have seated, she lets us know she is going to get us some fresh iced tea and Bronx's usual order, then walks away.

"Your 'secret spot'?" I look at Bronx with genuine curiosity.

"Yeah, when things were really bad for Saint and I, he would go for runs with no destination in mind and we would end up all over the place. We ended up here one day. Shelly is human, but her husband is a hybrid. Werebear, werewolf. His werebear side is more dominant, so he tends to be a loner, but he makes a mean smoked trout. How they ended up as mates, I don't know, but they are madly in love. More importantly, they didn't know or give a shit who I was. They let me borrow some clothes and fed me until I was stuffed. They treated me so well, even though I was a stranger to them," he stops and looks around at the rustic decorations on the wall. I look around too. There are taxidermied animal heads, old photographs, and vintage tin signs screwed into the walls. It is very comfortable and quaint. The smell of smoked meat is like a delicious perfume.

"Shelly told me they help wandering werebears and the occasional errant wolf all the time. I told them I had just shifted, so I didn't have any money. They didn't care. They let me bus tables to pay for whatever I ate. Coming here was one of the first times I was treated just like a regular person. They just wanted to make sure I was okay. I came back a week later and paid them back every penny and more. They keep my table open in gratitude. I've brought Milo here once. I've never even brought Reggie."

He looks at his fingernails for a moment then gives me a guilty look, "I would even come here on Sundays sometimes when I was supposed to be in the apartment with you. I wasn't always out in the woods drinking and smoking. I mean, a lot of the times I was, but sometimes when I wanted to be alone, I would come here."

"How come you've never told me about any of this?" I place my chin in my hand and give him time to answer.

"I-I guess I wasn't ready. We were talking about it during my last therapy session and realized I want to share more places like this with you. I mean, most of them are just spots in the woods or at the tops of mountains, but you know, I figured start with one that will at least get us a dinner worthy of your culinary expertise," he confesses. Shelly comes back with a giant tray filled with plates of various barbecued meats. She piles the plates on the table and even pulls up the table beside the booth for the platters that don't fit. It all smells so good. I can feel my mouth watering.

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"I hope you're hungry, Kas," Shelly quips with a giggle.

"Shelly, I'm never not hungry," I respond, eyeing a plate full of delicious looking rack of ribs.

"Well, just one more reason you're a perfect match for this guy. Ha ha!

Bronx, let me know if you need anything else, hon. I'll leave you two to it," Shelly says as she walks away, to greet a group that walked in the front door.

"Before you dig in," Bronx puts his hand up, "I have something for you."

I sit back against the bench seat. He knows I hate when he buys things for me 'Just because', "Bronx-

"This isn't just a gift, Kas," he pulls out a jewelry box and hands it to me, "It's not what it looks like."

I glare at him as I open the box to see a white gold necklace with a beautiful pendant that looks like a cluster of diamonds. I snap the lid closed and hand the box back to him, "Bronx, no. Take it back. No. I don't want it."

"Hear me out, please," he puts his hand up and presses the box toward me, "The tech guys at MasonCo have been working on a new technology. After you disappeared, I had them speed up development. Once James took on his new role, he helped them refine the requirements, and they created this for you."

I look at the necklace again and hold up the box, "So you're telling me there aren't thousands of dollars' worth of diamonds on this necklace?"

"Oh, no, I didn't say that. There is," he smirks while I roll my eyes and place the box on the table, "but there are also two very important safety features. The pendant has a microscopic tracker that's undetectable to anyone's equipment. It won't set off any alarms or scanners. If something happens and we need to find you, the pendant will lead us right to you. Anywhere in the world." I look at the necklace again. It just looks like a necklace. I could probably wear it all the time and not draw too much attention, "What's the other safety feature?"

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“There is a silent alarm in the clasp. If you take it off, Marco, James, and I all get a text notification. If you’re in trouble, we can check the tracker location and come find you,” Bronx explains.

“So, like a luxury MasonCo ankle monitor?” I say dryly, holding the box away from me. The idea of being perpetually tracked is not appealing in any way, especially if I decide I want to spend time with any the Mavri Magea. “Kas, please. You know it’s not like that. I don’t know how else to keep you safe. You literally disappeared out of my arms during a grappling match,” he looks at me desperately while he explains, “I have my best guys following you at all times, people monitoring threats against both of us, and now we’ve added a bunch of disgruntled goddesses in the mix. It is just a precaution, Baby. I can’t lose you again. I just...I can’t. We won’t track you unless you’re unexpectedly missing or the alarm on the clasp goes off letting us know you need help.”

I open the box one more time and look at the necklace. If I argue about it too much, he is going to get suspicious. I sigh and take it out of the box, putting it around my neck, “It’s not too over the top to wear everyday?”

“Maybe for someone else, but not for Bronx Mason’s wife,” he gives me a lopsided smile as he watches me latch the clasp on the back of my neck, “It’s perfect. Now here, start with some brisket, it’s the best.”

I purse my lips in displeasure at the thought of wearing a glorified dog collar, but the smell of the brisket he places in front of me pushes the thought to the side long enough for me to enjoy dinner. I can figure out how to slip out of it some other time.

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