



# Losing The Vampire King

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**Category:** Romance, Paranormal, Vampires

**Description:** What happens when forbidden love becomes forgotten love?

We fought hard for our love.

We traversed the path from enemies to lovers.

We overcame all the obstacles and became everything to each other.

Now, they have taken him from me again.

My vampire king.

My reason for living.

They have turned him against me somehow, and I fear he might never be able to find his way back to me, to us, to his family.

This small town has become my sanctuary, and I need to protect it from the skin walkers, just like I knew Edmund would.

He is my protector, and now I have to be theirs.

Otherwise, something terrible might happen.

The monsters of the past are back, threatening to destroy us all.

I need him back.

Will my love be enough to make him remember who he truly is?

**Total Pages (Source):** 39

## Chapter One

Bianca

It's not like Edmund to disappear without telling me.

I haven't seen him all day. Usually, if this is the case, he'd tell me beforehand that he'll be out of town for the day, or that he might be up in the mountain with Kano or someone else. It's not about controlling each other. On the contrary, it's being safe, because our lives aren't ordinary. They are anything but. We always need to be careful. One wrong move could cost us too much.

Of course, I understand his obligations towards the clan. I have them as well. Being the king and queen of vampires is a 24-hour job. It's a lot, even when you aren't taking everything into consideration. I knew that when I accepted to become his mate, when I made his destiny my own as well.

"He's probably by the lake," I hear my mother suggest, after I've been pretending this whole day that I'm not bothered at all by the fact that I haven't seen Edmund. She knows me too damn well sometimes. "Did you check there?" she asks, as she's holding my three-year-old in her arms.

Orien is sleeping so soundly, without a care in the world. That is what assures me that Eddie and I are doing the best job of being his parents. He is the vampire prince, after all. He has a lot of weight to carry on his shoulders, but we shall cross that bridge when we get to it. For now, we are making sure that he has a carefree childhood, like all children should.

“No,” I shake my head, walking over to the open window. The cool, evening air is descending, although it is still not that dark. I look out, gazing into the distance, wondering. My hairs stand on end, and I don’t know why. Perhaps I’m just being paranoid about all of this. “I was hoping he’d be back by now and I won’t have to show anyone that I’m worried,” I finally admit, knowing I can’t hide the way I feel from my loved ones, especially not from my mother.

She didn’t watch me grow up, and it is something that we both regret. However, life should not be led in regret, but rather, we should look to the future, and that is exactly what we are doing now, building a bond that should have already been here. I can’t say it is always easy, because we are both stubborn, and this doesn’t help. Still, the love we feel for each other is undeniable. It is palpable. It will always help us find our way back to each other, no matter what.

“Why would you be worried?” my mother asks, tilting her head a little.

Worry means unanswered questions. I have so many of those left to ask. I still want to ask so many questions about my dad, but I can see that it’s difficult for her to talk about that, so I’m not pushing it. But my curiosity still hasn’t been satisfied. I need to know more. I always need to know everything. It’s a blessing and a curse.

“Because this is unlike him,” I explain, pulling my gaze away from the murky darkness in the distance.

“You think he will always tell you everything he’s doing?” she wonders, and I’m not sure if it’s a serious question or not.

“I don’t need him to give me a report on everything he’s doing,” I shrug. “It’s not that I want to control him. I just want to know if he won’t be around all day. Orien is asking about him, too, and I don’t know what to say to him. Where’s dad? Oh... I don’t know,” I frown.

“No need to be snappy,” mom says, getting up from the sofa where she was seated, with Orien in her arms. “I’ll take him up to bed. You can go see if Edmund is by the lake. I’m sure he is. And I have no idea why you didn’t go to look for him there in the first place, if you’re that worried.”

“I’m not that worried,” I say, but I know better than to lie to the woman who gave birth to me. She knows it as well, but just smiles, and disappears up the stairs.

I sigh. I should probably stay home. He’ll be back. I’m not worried that he’s out there with someone else. The thought never even crossed my mind. I’m worried that there might have been another attack by the skin walkers, that he might have been ambushed by them and...

I dare not even think about that. So, I grab a light sweater and I head outside. The streets of our little town are quiet. Unusually so. But I’m guessing everyone’s inside, resting. It’s been a long week, with preparations for the upcoming fall festival, during which we celebrate the plentitude of nature. That is also why I’m so surprised he’s gone. He should be here, with me, overseeing the whole thing.

My mind is a mess of tangled thoughts as I head out of town and through the woods. Ever since I came here, I fell in love with this place. The woods are so deep and quiet. It is like a shelter from the rest of the world, when you feel like you need to hide away. Now, with Edmund and Orien, I never had that feeling. I finally feel like I belong here, like this is exactly where I need to be.

I make my way through branches that hang low, pushing them away from my face and my hair. I listen carefully, like Edmund has taught me. I don’t hear any suspicious sounds, but I’m still alert. Edmund always told me that we would know if the skin walkers found us, but sometimes, just one second of not paying attention is enough for you to make a grave mistake.

At that moment, I reach the familiar clearing. In the distance, I see the lake. There is a figure huddled over the water. I can't tell who it is, but my heart immediately starts pounding harder. Every fiber of my being wants to believe it's him. Has he been here all day?

I hasten my pace, almost running there. I want to shout his name, but something tells me not to. I don't know if it's the way I smell something in the air, something unfamiliar, something I can't quite put my finger on. I'm still on guard as I find my way to him.

I walk quickly, making more noise than I usually would. The moment a branch snaps underneath my shoe, I stop. At the same time, the crouching figure stands up. I would recognize those broad shoulders anywhere. I have caressed them so many times. I have lain on them, being lulled to sleep. Those are his shoulders. Everything I see is his, and yet, something is preventing me from running towards him and throwing myself into his arms.

"Eddie?" I call out to him, my voice trembling, and I have no idea why. I feel like I'm calling out to a stranger, and not the one who has my heart in the palm of his hand. "Did you spend the whole day here?" I ask, trying not to demand an answer out of him, but still with that desire to show him that this wasn't okay.

At first, he doesn't say anything. He is just standing there, motionless.

"Eddie?" I say his name again, taking another step. My hand flies out to reach out to him, but I pull it away.

Maybe it's a skin walker! My frantic mind warns me to be careful. I shouldn't have come alone. I should have taken someone with me, but it's too late now. I am here. He is here... whoever he is.

“Eddie, please talk to me...” I am pleading now. “You are freaking me out.”

It’s him. It has to be him. There are no skin walkers around here. We are safe.

I keep repeating this again in my mind, and every time I do, I believe it a little less.

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Suddenly and without any warning, he finally turns around. The moonlight falls over his face and I know it's him. His eyes are unmistakably his. Skin walkers can steal a person's body, even a person's mind, but never their eyes. Never.

This is Eddie. I know it.

His eyes are wide, staring at me, trying to pierce right through me. I take two hasty steps closer to him. I reach out to caress his cheek.

"Eddie, why—" I start, when he grabs my wrist and stops me from touching him.

He twists my arm behind my back and pins me against the nearest tree, breathing heavily into my neck. I can hear his soft growls. The vampire in him has gone mad. But... why? Edmund has always been able to control him.

"Eddie?" I keep repeating his name again, in hopes that he will hear me, but he doesn't seem to.

He snarls back in response, like a wildebeest and I know if we stay like this any longer, he will bite me. It won't harm me, because I'm a nymph. I am immune to a vampire's bite, but he doesn't seem to care about that. Or, better yet, does he even know that? Does he... remember? It is as if he's not himself at all.

That heavy scent permeates my nostrils once again, a heavy fragrance of some flower I've never sensed before. It makes me dizzy and nauseous at the same time. I can barely keep myself up on my knees. My head explodes into a blossom of pain that grips me on all sides.

“Edmund, listen to me!” I shout at him now, but it only makes it worse. His grip on my wrist tightens to a gut-wrenching pain. If he squeezes any harder, he might break my arm.

Unexpectedly, his mouth opens wide. I can see his protruding fangs. He will bite me. My beloved will dig his teeth into my flesh, in order to harm me.

I close my eyes. That smell is even stronger now, overpowering. The pain is intolerable. My body can't fight it any longer. It can only keep absorbing it until I fall unconscious.

Somewhere in the distance, a screech is heard, a bird I've never heard before, a bird I doubt even inhabits these woods. I've never heard that sound before. Not here, at least.

But something strange happens. The grip on my wrist loosens. Then, nothing. The heavy scent of those nauseous flowers is gone. The woods are silent again. The pain has subsided, as if someone had magically made it go away.

I open my eyes, breathing heavily, ready to slap some sense into Edmund, when I realize to my shock that he is gone.

I look around, but I see nothing. I see no one. He's left no tracks. I have no idea which direction he's headed to. All I know is that he is gone. He's attacked me, and now he is gone. The thought seems crazy, yet that is exactly what happened.

I lift my hand up, feeling that burning sensation as if I just stuck my hand in the fire. There is a bright red bracelet of pain around my wrist, left by the man I thought loved me more than life itself, a man who would rather harm himself again, than do that to me.



Rubbing the sore spot, I turn around and start running back to town. I don't know what's going on, but I have every intention of finding out.

## Chapter Two

Edmund

I open my eyes heavily, feeling as if someone had been pouring buckets of sand over them the entire night. They burn with an unknown sensation of pain and rubbing them only makes the feeling worse. Still, that is all I can do.

I try to prop myself up on the bed. It is difficult. My body somehow doesn't feel like it is my body at all, but rather someone else's and I'm just borrowing it for a couple of days, but before using it properly, I have to learn how to do it first. There is a strange tingling in my fingers. I lift them up and bring them to my eyes, for closer inspection, but this reveals nothing other than the fact that they really are my fingers.

I rub my eyes again, ignoring the sharp shards of pain that shoot from the back of my head, straight through my eyes. I focus on my breathing, hoping that this will diminish the painful sensation.

At that moment, I hear the door open. I instantly look up. A woman appears in the doorway, carrying a bowl in her hand. The light behind her breaks on the metal of the spoon she is holding in her other hand. She is unarmed, but that still doesn't mean that she isn't dangerous.

I immediately jump to my feet, putting my back against the wall. I'm not taking my eyes off of her.

"I take it that your memory still hasn't come back to you?" she asks in a way that assures me we are close. Too close perhaps, for someone I've never seen before in

my life.

“Who are you?” I demand.

She tilts her head a little to the side. “You know this would be the fifth time I tell you the same story again?”

“What story?” I ask. She doesn’t sound annoyed. She sounds saddened by something... maybe by the fact that I don’t know who she is?

I look at her, trying to pinpoint something striking about her, something that might jog my memory. Her fiery red hair is tied up in a loose bun, with a few strands falling around her face, contrasting her pale complexion with the fiery redness. Her eyes are wide, inquisitive. I can tell she isn’t afraid of me.

She proves this when she walks into the room and closes the door behind her. She walks over to the bed where I was just lying and sits down, with the bowl still in her hands. I see it is porridge, with some red fruits. She must be crazy if she thinks I’ll eat any of that. She might be trying to poison me.

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“I was hoping that you’d remember something by now,” she said, with a melancholy sigh, looking down at her lap. “Or that you’d at least know that I’m not your enemy, if you can’t remember who I am.”

“I don’t remember anything,” I admit, but still with my guard up.

“I know you don’t.” She lifts her gaze to meet mine. “It is difficult when the person you love more than anything in the world doesn’t remember you.”

I don’t say anything to that at first. So, we are lovers then. Mates. I try to recognize a scent, anything around her or in this room, but nothing is familiar. I feel like I’ve never been here before and this person in front of me is a stranger. She’s right. I can’t possibly grasp how that must feel.

“I am not your enemy, Eddie,” she says softly.

“Eddie?” I echo. The name doesn’t ring any bells, and something tells me it should. I can see the hope in her eyes. She wants me to remember her. She wants me to remember everything, but there is a blockage inside my mind, a big wall, entangled with thorns which threaten anyone who wishes to even come close, let alone try to climb over.

“That is your name,” she reveals, hope still echoing in her voice, as she stares at me, as if her very gaze might pull me out of the haze my mind is in. “Edmund. And I’m Gala.”

“Gala,” I repeat, but just like with mine, her name means nothing. It is just an empty

string of letters, with no emotional attachment.

“Yes,” she smiles, getting up and walking over to me. “You were attacked by a rival clan of skin walkers. The cowards caught you when you were all alone and unable to call for help. You’re lucky I stumbled onto you when I did. They left you for dead, by the river. When I saw you like that, I...”

She wasn’t able to finish her sentence. She turned away from me, burying her face in her hands. Silent sobs were the only sounds she made, as her body closed up on itself, her shoulders slumped forward. A part of me wanted to reach out, to console her, because that is what everyone’s first instinct should be. I almost did that. I almost wrapped my arms around her, but I didn’t.

She probably expected me to. She remained like that for a few moments, then she turned to me again. Her eyes were slightly reddened, but not that swollen. There were no more tears in them. She must have wiped them off, unwilling to allow me to see her cry.

“I know this shouldn’t get to me as much as it does,” she continues, with a voice that has regained some of its control and confidence. “I’m sorry.”

“There is nothing to apologize for,” I tell her, the words torn out of me by an invisible force that has decided in my name, that she is to be trusted, despite everything.

After all, if she wanted to kill me, she would have done it by now. Why prolong the inevitable? Unless there is some hidden agenda, but I can’t possibly see what that might be, when I don’t know a single thing about myself or about her. Cautiousness is something I shouldn’t lose sight of, but with each passing moment, I am more and more convinced that this woman, Gala, isn’t my enemy.

She smiles at my words and lifts her hand towards my face. My first instinct is to

flinch, but I fight this urge, remaining put. Her fingers tremble, nearing my skin. Something is telling me to pull away, but another little voice is telling me to stay put.

Her eyes are burning into mine, demanding so much of me, but I'm not certain if I have all that she needs from me. That look feels familiar. Somehow, I know that I have seen it before. A woman has looked at me like that before, I'm sure of it. What I'm not sure is whether that woman was Gala or someone else. It's killing me that I cannot remember.

Just as her fingers are about to graze my cheeks, I pull away. Actually, not so much pull away, but jump away, jerking my entire body backward, to make the distance between us as great as possible.

The disappointment in her eyes is palpable. My action hurt her. I didn't mean to, but I can't pretend that I have all these feelings and memories that she expects me to. It's impossible. I won't apologize for that.

I know that all this sounds harsh, so I bite my tongue, so as not to say any of this out loud. She's already hurt enough. I don't have to add insult to injury.

"It's not your fault," she says compassionately, her hand retracting quickly, as if she had been scorched by the heat of the cheek that she didn't even get to caress. "I know that it will take time for you to remember everything, to remember... me."

Again, she gives me that expectant look. A knot in my stomach tightens. I feel angry. I feel bad for her as well, but that feeling of anger is stronger. What has happened to me? I don't feel like I was almost beaten to death. My body does hurt, but I haven't noticed any bruises. Shouldn't there be bruises?

Perhaps it's been weeks, a small voice inside of me whispers. I guess it's possible. I haven't asked her when all this happened. I want to, but not now. I don't want to ask

too many questions. Besides, it seems that she keeps telling me the same story again, and I keep losing track of it. That also doesn't seem to be making much sense. I didn't only lose my memory. I keep losing it again, according to her story.

"I'm sure it will come back to me eventually," I tell her, still on guard. I pay attention to her facial expression. I want to see whether me remembering everything makes her fearful or hopeful, but all I see is the latter. If she is pretending, then she is one helluva a good actress.

I glance at the bowl in her hands. "Is that for me?"

She smiles. "I know how much you like vegetable soup."

"If you say so," I grin, trying out a joke. It feels natural.

Am I the joking type? Hopefully. That's the kind of guy I want to be.

"Why don't you sit down and eat a little?" she suggests.

I want to, because the smell hits my nostrils, and a rumbling inside my stomach reminds me that I haven't eaten in a while. But there is still that doubt. I think she can read me well enough, because she stirs the soup a little, then brings a spoonful to her mouth. She swallows it whole.

"Just right," she smiles, offering me the bowl.

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I accept it, wolfing it down in a matter of seconds. She chuckles.

“I didn’t know you were that hungry,” she points out. “If I had known, I would have told Erik to put some deer meat on the barbecue.”

“We could do that,” I nod, the thought of barbecue making my mouth water. “Erik will be glad to see you, but I want to take you back to town only when you’ve remembered everything.”

“Erik?” I wonder.

She smiles helplessly. “I keep forgetting. Erik is your best friend. He knows what happened, and we’ve agreed that I should keep you here, with me, until you start to get your memory back. We were hoping that it wouldn’t take this long, but I guess the mind has its own way of doing things.”

“So... you keep telling me what happened, and I keep forgetting it?” I want to clarify at this point.

“Yes,” she nods with a sigh. “You can go several days like this, and then one morning you wake up, and we have to go through it all over again.”

“So, I keep losing my memory again?”

“It would seem, so, yes,” she confirms.

“How long has this been going on?” I ask, dreading the answer.

“About three months,” she says sadly.

“Three months?” I exclaim.

“I’m afraid so. I’ve tried everything, but like I told you, just when I think that you’re doing better, you wake up the following morning, and we do this entire dance all over again.”

She sighs melancholically, taking the bowl into her hands again. “Come,” she instructs. “You should go out for a little while, to get some fresh air.”

She walks out of the room first, not seeing whether I’m following or not. A battle is raging on inside of me. I have no idea who I am, who she is or where I have ended up. It is a horrible thing to be lost in the fog of your own mind, devoid of any memories to show you the way or point you in the direction where you need to go.

But I know I can’t stay put. I have to keep moving, only this time, I must go backward in order to move forward.

### Chapter Three

Bianca

“He tried to attack you?” My mother gasps, with her hand pressed to her chest in shock. Her watery blue eyes are big and round. “Are you sure?”

I frown. “What kind of a question is that?”

I look up at the stairs, hoping that our conversation isn’t too loud to wake up Orien. The last thing I need right now is for him to hear that his daddy tried to attack mommy.



I inhale deeply, raking my fingers through my hair, pacing about the room. It would probably do me good to sit down, but I doubt I would be able to keep my body in one position for longer than a couple of seconds. Then, I would be up, walking again.

“I just can’t believe this,” my mother shakes her head at me incredulously.

“I know,” I nod. “I feel like this is a bad dream, but I don’t know how to wake up.”

“Eddie would never hurt you,” she reminds me of something I myself know. Yet, that same Eddie threatened me. Me, of all people. I know it didn’t get to the point where he actually harmed me, but I fear that it could have gotten to that easily.

“It’s like that wasn’t him at all,” I say, thinking aloud to myself.

My mother instantly grabs hold of those words. “Wasn’t him at all...” Her words echo all around us, in a desperate attempt to fill the gaps that would make some sense of this situation. But no matter how many times we would repeat them, nothing would change.

Then, she turns to me. “Didn’t you say that there was a heavy scent in the air?”

I stop, looking down at my feet, at the worn out rug, which no one had any desire of changing. It’s weird how we get used to some things, and even when they need to be changed, we refuse to do it. Why are we so afraid of change, when it can bring about something good as well? In this case, we are all subject to this change, whether we want to be or not, and I’m afraid that there are still many changes to happen, even worse than this one.

“Yes,” I finally reply, trying to bring forth that scent again, so I can describe it as best as I can. It’s difficult to focus only on that, when all I see is Eddie growling at me, as if I was his worst enemy. The memory of that is too painful, but I try to push past it.

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“Can you remember what it smelled like?” my mother urges on.

A few moments later, I feel her hand on my shoulder. Gentle, reassuring. She isn’t pushing me. She is allowing me to take my time with this, because she knows how much anguish all this is causing me, when I feel like I am the only one who can reach Eddie, and all I can do is sit here with my hands tied.

I swallow heavily, closing my eyes. I try not to think about Eddie, just the scent.

“It’s heavy,” I say, immediately frowning. “Overpowering. It almost feels like someone stuck a match inside both my nostrils and somehow managed to light them inside.”

I don’t open my eyes to see whether my mom is smiling at my joke. Not that it matters at a time like this.

“Is it sweet?” she asks, her soft voice guiding me through the darkness of my mind.

“Yes,” I nod. “But... it’s not only sweet. There is something else.”

I can’t quite describe it, but I know that I have to. My mother knows all the plants. All the nymphs should, but because I wasn’t brought up as a nymph, I lack that knowledge that all nymphs obtained during their childhood in the woods, surrounded by others like them.

My childhood was very different. I grew up with the skin walkers, always feeling like an outsider, always thinking that I was nothing but a mere, insignificant human. That

was, at least, what they wanted me to think. Then, Eddie came into my life, and he created the storm that destroyed all the misconceptions I ever had. It took me a while to trust him. I think it was like that for both of us. We needed each other to survive, and slowly, we got closer. The skin walkers thought I betrayed them, but in fact it was someone else who betrayed me.

I shudder at the thought. I hate to go back to that time in my life, but I guess I can't deny that it has helped shape me into the person that I am now, into the same woman that Eddie loves. I instantly remember why I'm doing all this. It's because of him. I can't lose him. He did everything to keep me safe from the skin walkers when I needed him. He was ready to die for me. That was how I found out that I am not just an ordinary human, but something much more special than that, a member of a dying breed. That was the only way I could help him. Now, I have to help him again. I have to help him find his way back to me.

"What else, sweetheart?" My mother's voice brings me back to the present moment. My mind objects. It doesn't want to go into the dark corners, because I don't want to see that rage in Eddie's eyes that have always looked at me with nothing but tenderness and love. It hurts too much. But I have to.

My jaw clenches tightly, and I bring back those painful images. My neck muscles stiffen. Suddenly, I feel like there is an invisible hand, trying to suffocate me. I cough violently, fighting the sensation. My mother notices something is wrong immediately.

"Breathe, Bianca, just breathe," she tells me calmly. "There is no danger here."

I feel her reassuring hand on my shoulder still. It is the only thing keeping me in place.

"The scent," she urges. "We have to find out what it is."

“Flowers,” I say vaguely. “Rotting flowers. Sickly sweet. Making me nauseous.”

“Can you smell burning cinnamon?” she asks through that haze.

Suddenly, my mind explodes into light. It was as if I’ve been wandering through a dark tunnel, and now, those words turned on the light. I open my eyes wide.

“How did you know?” I gasp.

“I was afraid of that,” she says, her voice down to a weak whisper. This wasn’t a good sign.

“Why?” I ask, fearing the answer, but at the same time, knowing that I must hear it. She can’t spare me from any of the details, no matter how painful they might be.

“Atropa belladonna,” I hear her say. I know she just told me the Latin name for something, only I don’t know what she is referring to. She takes a moment, then continues. “It’s deadly nightshade.”

I gasp. “Does that mean... Eddie will die?” The look on my mother’s face isn’t promising. “Tell me everything,” I demand. “Even the worst case scenario.”

“That burning cinnamon smell means that it is no ordinary nightshade. This one is homegrown by... those who know what they are doing,” she explains.

“Nymphs?” I ask, not counting myself among them in this instance, because I would barely recognize nightshade if I saw it. My knowledge in botany still lacks to a great extent, which is something I have been working hard on, but one can only cram a certain amount of information within the span of three years, while others would get their entire childhoods to learn the same things.

“Yes,” my mother confirms. “We would know how to grow it. But others could also have this information. Other vampires. Other werewolves. Other... skin walkers.”

I know what she is hinting at. The skin walkers might have found us, and they are using an unconventional way to attack. But... why like this? I don't understand. Why don't they just do things the way they have always been done? Why change anything now?

“This nightshade, if given in the right amounts, consistently, will make one forget everything,” my mother continues with her explanation tenderly, as if she would explain to a six year old child. Her patience is immeasurable. I only wish I possessed more of that.

“Everything?” I ask.

“Everything,” she assures me. “Little by little, the tea brewed from this nightshade will eat away at one's memories, leaving nothing but emptiness.”

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“But... isn’t it dangerous?” I remember. “Won’t it kill him if he drinks it consistently?”

She hesitates to tell me her reply.

“Mother?” My voice is on the verge of breaking.

“Yes, there is... a possibility of it killing him,” she confirms finally.

I drop down to my knees. She comes to me immediately, wrapping her arms around me.

“But... it could be a mistake, no?” I ask, desperate for even a little bit of hope.

“Of course,” she nods, kissing my forehead. “Of course.”

I suddenly pull away. “He wouldn’t eat it or drink it on his own. Someone must have forced him to. But... who?”

“We have to assume that whoever is doing this to him, has plans,” my mother reminds me.

My eyebrow immediately raises. “What do you mean?”

She tries a weak smile. It works. “If someone wanted him dead, then they’d kill him immediately. Why would they bother feeding him poison?”

I nod. “Unless they have a plan, which they need him for.”

“So, I think it’s safe to assume that Eddie will be kept alive for a while longer.”

“Until something happens,” I say, dreading what this something might be.

“That gives us some time,” she reminds me. “There is a nymph healer that you need to go and see. She knows more about these plants than anyone I know. She will tell you what you need to do when you find him, and you must heed her advice very carefully, because I fear that this might be a matter of life and death.”

“I think so, too,” I gaze into her eyes, looking for reassurance, but all I see is fear and doubt. She gave me the truth. I know I am better off now, but at the same time, the very knowledge that someone is poisoning Eddie is killing me.

“Who is doing this?” I ask, but I know that my mother doesn’t have that answer, just like I don’t. This is an answer that I need to go and find out... before it is too late.

## Chapter Four

### Edmund

I don’t know when she came to me during the night. There are thin, sparkly strips of moonlight flowing down from the window, and onto the slumbering figure next to me. I see her from the back. Her hair isn’t fiery, as I would expect. Her hair are spools of golden thread. She smells like the river, crisp and frozen.

I don’t know who she is, but the moment she turns to me, she smiles. It is a smile that illuminates the entire room. Although there is no light, save for those thin paths of moonlights, scattered about the room, I see her. I see her, and yet, I would not be able to say what her name is or who she is, but my heart knows her. There is a flicker of

something familiar about her, urging me not to be afraid.

“Kiss me,” she says, cupping my face and bringing it closer to hers. I can do nothing else but oblige.

My heart beats wildly inside my chest as I look at her face. I know I should have my eyes closed, like she, but I can’t stop looking at her. She tastes so sweet, her lips soft and luscious. I can’t get enough of them. The fact that I can’t remember who she is or how she got here is irrelevant at this moment.

“Where have you been?” she murmurs softly against my lips as soon as our kiss ends.

I wrap my arms around her, pulling her closer to me, realizing only now that she is naked underneath those covers. Then again, so am I. None of this is making any sense. I remember falling asleep with my clothes on. Did she undress me? I doubt that. Then how did it happen?

“I’m here now,” I tell her, banishing those suspicious thoughts, as her thigh rubs against my cock, which is growing harder by the minute. My mind must have forgotten almost everything, but it seems other parts of my body managed to retain some of their memory. They remember what they need to do.

She fits into my embrace perfectly. Her body feels so small, I’m afraid of crushing her with the weight of my desire, which I can barely control. Before I can say anything else, she swings one leg over my stomach, her calf brushing against my cock softly. I’m too hot by this point. Controlling my desire is becoming more and more difficult. I can sense that she wants me to dominate her. She is giving herself to me completely, this sweet, tender creature whose face sings a thousand songs I feel I have never heard, yet the melody is strangely familiar.

I want to ask who she is. I want her to tell me everything, but at the same time, the



only sounds I want her to make are soft moans of pleasure and nothing else. I know I can't have it both ways, so I allow her to make that choice for us.

My cock is straining against the covers, as she keeps rubbing her calf against it tantalizingly slowly. I know I could just pin her down to the bed and take her right now. She wouldn't say no. I can feel the heat and wetness oozing off of her and onto my thigh.

She lowers her face towards mine, licking my lips with the tip of her tongue. Her skin on mine feels scorching hot. Her hands are all over me, trailing invisible lines, as if she has also forgotten my body and now, by tracing it with her fingers, she wants to memorize it. I try to do the same.

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Her tongue tastes mine, as our bodies tingle on the verge of ecstasy, without me even taking her yet. I can't remember the last time I felt this turned on by any woman, especially not someone I can't recognize. Just as I try to open my eyes again and gaze at her, I feel a gentle tug of her teeth against my lower lip. My cock beads with precum, the sensation uncontrollable. I can feel that wetness against the cover, so I kick it off of us.

I look down at her body, bathed in glistening moonlight. She is stunning. All I want to do right now is taste her, feel her, be balls deep inside of her. She starts to grind against my thigh, and I groan in response.

"Do you like this?" I hear her ask.

I can't even say anything to that. That's how turned on I am right now. All I can do is grab her harder, feeling the full juiciness of her plump ass in the palm of my hand.

Suddenly, she grabs my cock with her fingers, squeezing it slowly at first, then picking up the pace. With her other hand, she rubs her pussy in the same rhythm. I can barely hold myself from cumming at the very sight. I keep watching her fingers, mesmerized. Her pussy becomes so wet that it glistens against her fingers. I listen to that wet sound as she slides a finger inside of herself.

"Fuck, that's hot..." I groan, holding myself from exploding right into her hand.

"Do you like it when I pleasure myself thinking of you?" she asks in a voice that seems to come from the angels and from demons at the same time. It is a devilish mixture of both, and no one would be able to resist it.

Her hand moves harder and harder, and at that moment, I hear a tiny, barely audible gasp, mixed with heavy breathing. I pull slightly away from her, so I could drink in the sight of her cumming. She bites her lower lip, closing her eyes. That moment is solely hers. I allow her to have it. Just watching her is enough.

“I want to taste you,” I tell her the moment she comes down from that cloud of ecstasy.

Without saying another word, she brings her wet fingers to my mouth, allowing me to suck on them. She tastes savory and sweet at the same time. I suck every drop of her juices from her fingers. I want to lick her pussy. I want to roll my tongue over her clit and make her cum again.

But before I can express any of this in words or actions, she rolls on top of me, adjusting herself. Her hands are pressed onto my chest for balance, as she slowly lowers her body down onto my raging cock. I feel her pussy juices coating every inch of my manhood. I want it covered in her, from top to bottom. I want to wear it like a badge of honor. I don't know who she is, but I know one thing. She is mine.

She rides me perfectly. The sensation is more than I can handle. I rest my hands on her hips, but she needs no guidance. She knows exactly what to do. All I can do is enjoy this moment. I can't stop looking at her. Her eyes are mesmerizing, the deepest shade of blue I have ever seen.

“I'm cum— “

Before I can finish that sentence, I spring up in bed. Several heavy blinks aren't enough for me to realize what just happened. I look down at the covers, still over my body. A small wet pool of liquid rests right on my lap. My heart is still beating wildly inside my chest.

I look around the room. It is empty. Except for me, there is no one else. It was all a dream.

“Fuck...” I say aloud, unable to hold it in.

I’m still breathing heavily, my whole body under the impression of what just happened. It was just a wet dream. But there was something important about it. Who was the girl? I know she can’t be just a figment of my imagination? And she surely isn’t Gala. She is someone different... but who?

Knowing that I won’t be able to sleep after this, I change my pants and head out of the room. I find the door leading out of the cabin easily and I stand on the porch, gazing into the distant woods. We are so close to it, I can smell the pinecones and the wet moss, early in the morning. The moon is still high up in the sky.

I try to make some sense of it all, but nothing comes to mind. Gala’s cabin is opposite mine. She warned me about not going out on my own and wandering about the woods, so I wouldn’t get lost. But if I grew up here, wouldn’t I remember the path?

Maybe not, that treacherous little voice reminds me. Better play it safe.

I stay on the porch, inhaling the crisp, night air. A minute later, I see the door to Gala’s cabin opening, and she’s walking outside. She approaches me, then stands next to me.

“Can’t sleep?” she asks.

“Mhm,” I nod.

I would rather not explain to her what made me get up. The sheets, I suddenly remember. I don’t want her to see them. I know wet dreams are normal, but I’m

already hurting her by not remembering her. Fucking a different girl in my dreams would be adding insult to injury, and that's the last thing I want to do to her.

"I could go and make us some tea, if you'd like," she suggests.

"I'm not a fan of tea," I admit.

"I know," she says, not turning to face me. I can only see the outline of her small, even nose and her slightly protruding chin. Her lips are thin, but sometimes, when she smiles, they look fuller than they actually are. "But tea is good for you. I know just the right blend of herbs to help you get back to sleep."

"I think I'll just stay here for a while, then I'll head back inside," I reply.

"As you wish."

I can't tell if I offended her somehow, by refusing her tea. I feel guilty.

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“On second thought, do make me some tea,” I correct myself, feeling like the worst guy in the world. “A hot beverage might do the trick.”

She immediately brightens up at me having changed my mind. “I’ll go make it immediately,” she says. “Then, we can drink it while sitting here and looking at the stars.”

“That sounds great,” I grin.

For a moment, I think she might lean closer and kiss me, but she seems to change her mind in the last minute. For some reason, I am relieved. She smiles instead, retiring to her cabin. I hear faint clanking of dishes, then silence again. I’m not that particularly thirsty for tea, but I feel like I am causing her more pain than I should be, even in this situation.

I want to tell her that I am trying to remember, but nothing is working. I sigh as I remember the dream again. What could it mean? Is it some symbolic shit that this loss of memory is preventing me from being intimate with the woman I love... or loved? Or is there more to this story that I need to unearth?

There are too many questions. They can’t all fit inside my head. Then again, I don’t want them to. I want to wake up and remember who I am. I want to look in the mirror and recognize the man looking back at me, but I can’t do any of those things.

Like Gala says, we need to be patient. Only, patience requires a pacified mind. Mine is anything but calm. Mine is a whirlwind of questions, of mysteries, of danger that is lurking behind every tree in this forest, where Gala is urging me not to go.

I feel like these shadows are beckoning me to come to them, almost as if they might hold the key to my memory.

“Here is the tea,” I hear Gala say, as she approaches, carrying a tray with two tea cups. She offers me the one to her right.

“Thanks,” I say, taking it into my hands.

Just as I’m about to bring it to my lips, a cool breeze hits me right in the face. I exhale loudly, scratching my nose with the upper part of my hand. She looks at me questioningly, waiting. I smile reassuringly, taking a sip.

It is a little sweet. I guess she put a little too much honey in it.

“Is it good?” she asks.

“I’m hoping it’ll send me into a deep sleep tonight,” I smile back, not even slightly aware of how right I will eventually be.

## Chapter Five

### Bianca

The healer’s hut is like something from that old fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel. Only, her hut isn’t made of candy and sweets, but mud and branches, extending over a deep hole in the ground. I stand in front of it, just staring.

“No wonder it took me ages to find you,” I murmur to myself.

I look at the door, which isn’t a door at all, but some sort of a curtain, made of leaves, branches and dry mud. I wonder if this is a good idea. Then, I remember what my

mother told me. This nymph is one of the oldest still living. Her knowledge of both the human world and the world beyond their grasp is immeasurable. If anyone knows the extent of nightshade poisoning and how to heal from it, it would be her. I inhale deeply, wondering what it is I am getting myself into.

Suddenly, somewhere in the distance, a crow caws at me, making that unique, fearsome sound. I jump with fright, feeling my heartbeat with the palm of my hand, half-expecting some monster to come out from the shadows and devour me. But nothing like that happens. I am alone here, in the woods, with my own treacherous thoughts, in front of a door I need to go through.

I can't remember the last time I felt this afraid. Maybe it was when the skin walkers thought I betrayed them, and they were out to get me. I had Eddie with me then. I could rely on him for help, although we were strangers to each other. Now, I am alone in this. There is no one I can count on, but myself.

I try to keep my fear under control, to make it work for me, instead of against me. I approach the entrance to the hut, inhaling deeply. I wonder if she already knows that I'm coming. Judging from what my mother told me, this old lady knows things beyond the grasp of the physical realm. Her eyes see more than a mere mortal's eyes and her ears hear more as well.

I touch the earthy curtain with my fingers, revealing a passageway. It feels wrong entering someone's home like this, without knocking, but there is nowhere to knock. I hesitate. I know I need to be here, but I would feel much more at ease if I would see the lady of the house. Then, I decide to call out, while I'm still here, on the threshold.

"Halia?" I say her name a little more silently than I planned to.

I look past the earthy curtain, at the small flickering light inside, that dances in shades of yellow, orange and red. I can only assume that this is fire.



“Who goes there?” I hear a deep, wise voice from inside.

“I... I’m Bianca,” I say, my voice trembling. “I am the daughter of – “

“I know who you are,” the disembodied voice interrupts me. “What I do not know is why you are standing there, without deciding whether you wish to come inside or return where you came from. Make your choice and stop wasting my time.”

I have to admit, I wasn’t expecting her to be so... direct.

In an effort to show her that I wasn’t afraid, well at least not that much afraid, I take a step inside. The moment I do that, I feel like I have stepped into a different world. There are dried herbs and garlic hanging on all the walls, including some flowers that I have never seen before. The shelves are stacked with old books, leather bound, that seemed to be well read. In the far end, there is a fireplace. Over it, there is a cauldron, with something bubbling inside.

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Still, Halia is nowhere to be seen. I respectfully remain put, not wanting to offend her by looking at the personal things with her not in the room.

“So, you decided to come in then?”

The voice comes from behind me, taking me completely by surprise, because I know that there is only the entrance to the hut behind me. Nothing else. That must mean that she was also outside, watching me from the darkness.

I immediately turn to face her, and I realize that my mother’s description did not do her justice. Her purple robe seems too big for her small stature, almost as if it wants to wrap her up entirely. Her long white hair is tied into a loose braid, that falls all the way down to the back of her thighs. Every single hair on her body is white. Her eyelashes, her eyebrows, everything. Her eyes are a striking mixture of blue and red, making it an almost purplish hue. She doesn’t look like a nymph at all. She looks like a being that is the descendant of every supernatural being that has ever walked the face of the Earth.

I am mesmerized by her, and I suppose she could tell I am. She passes right by me and heads towards the cauldron. She opens the lid, which I can only assume is scorching hot, but she touches it with her bare hands. She gazes into its contents for a moment, then shakes her head.

“Not done yet,” she says, more to herself than to me. Then, her attention is back on me again. “How is your mother?”

“She sends her regards,” I tell her.

“I would have preferred it for her to come and give them to me on her own,” she says, and at this moment, I realize that she isn’t trying to be rude. She is simply direct and honest. Everything about her is so different. It requires you to completely shift your perspective, so you could best understand her. “I suppose this will have to do. What is your reason for seeking me out?”

“I have a loved one who is being poisoned by deadly nightshade, and not the regular kind,” I explain in as few words as I can, because my mother has also warned me that Halia doesn’t like it when people drown her with explanations. Direct and succinct, that was her advice.

She lifts her eyebrow at me. I wonder if I managed to capture her interest.

“How do you know it’s not the usual kind?”

“I... I’m only assuming,” I say. “I mean, when I was talking to my mother, I told her what happened, and she said that– “

Halia lifts her hand, with the palm open towards me. It is a sign for me to stop talking. I don’t want to be disrespectful, so I turn silent.

“Your mother would know nightshade,” she says. “How long has this been going on?”

“Three days,” I tell her, quickly recapping what’s happened in my mind.

“They still have a miniscule chance of surviving,” she says, not sounding very optimistic. “If you reach them in time.”

“How much time do I have left?” I ask, dreading the answer.

She clicks her lips together, then looks up, her eyes quickly rolling back down.

“It is the full moon in four days. That is how much time you have left.”

“Fourdays?” I repeat aloud. “Four days isn’t a lot.”

“A lot can happen in four days,” she corrects me. “Make them count.”

“What do I do when I find him?”

She doesn’t say anything to this. Instead, she starts pacing about the room, gathering stuff from the shelves and hanging from the walls. Once she is finished, she brings me a small pile of branches, dried leaves, herbs and something else I can’t even decipher.

“You brew tea from this,” she tells me. “It won’t be enough to cure him at once, though. You will need to make it several more times, but don’t worry. You have enough ingredients there. But hurry. The longer you wait, the less the chances are of him fully recuperating from the poisoning.”

“He lost his memory,” I tell her.

“That doesn’t surprise me,” she says disinterestedly, approaching the cauldron again, for another look.

“Will he remember me again?” I ask. These questions are too difficult to even think about, let alone to find out the answer to, but I must know, whatever they may be. If there is anyone who should know, it is her.

“That depends,” she says, turning to me, those purple-hued eyes piercing right through me. “On how strong your love is.”

“The strongest,” I say, without the shadow of a doubt.

This time, she smirks. “Ah... young love. So foolish.”

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“We’re not foolish,” I shake my head at her. “We love each other more than life itself.”

This seems to amuse her even more. “In that case, this is the perfect chance to find out if that is really so. If he remembers you, then lucky you. Your love is one for the books. If not, well... it is better to have loved and lost, and all that.”

I wonder if she has ever loved and lost. I can’t see any other reason for closing herself off in the middle of nowhere and living all alone, then when someone does come to see her, she is doing everything in her power to push them away.

“What do I owe you?” I ask instead, not wanting to stay here a moment longer than necessary.

“Money?” she asks, laughing. Her teeth look slightly yellow, when contrasted to her white, porcelain skin and hair. “Oh, please. What on earth do I need money for?”

“Maybe I could do something in return for you,” I say.

She smiles. “Your mother has saved my life once. Tell her that this means we are even. She should no longer consider herself responsible for me.”

“She saved your life?”

Halia waves her hand dismissively at me, signaling that this isn’t something she wants to delve more deeply into.

“A long time ago. In fact, it was so long ago, that I feel like it belongs to a whole different lifetime,” she says cryptically. “But that is none of your concern. You go and take what I gave you. You don’t have a single moment to lose. Brew the tea and see if your beloved truly holds you so dear in his heart as you do him.”

“He does,” I say, unable to remain quiet to this. “I’m sure he does.”

She smiles. “I am not the one you need to convince of this, my dear.”

Something in the way she said this made me realize that our conversation was over. There was nothing else left to say. I got what I came here for.

“Thank you,” I tell her, then turn around and disappear from the hut, out into the fresh night air.

Still feeling as if I just crossed back to earth from some other, supernatural realm, I think about her words. I know I shouldn’t doubt my love for Eddie. And I’m not. I’m also not doubting his love for me. But what if the nightshade has poisoned him to such an extent that he might never be able to find his way back to me? What if I lost him forever?

Gripping at the ingredients she gave me, I rush back home. I feel lost, almost as if I’m unable to find my way back, trusting my instinct instead, and allowing moonlight to guide me.

Silently calling out Eddie’s name deep inside the recesses of my heart, I know I can’t give up. I will never give up. If he still doesn’t remember me, I will find another way. I will make him fall in love with me again. I will show him that we were meant to be, no matter how many times I need to do it.

Chapter Six

Edmund

When I open my eyes, it is morning. I turn to the side, noticing that there is already a cup of tea placed by my bedside. I'm guessing it's the same tea that I've been getting for the past three months, although every time I rewind the story I've been told, something doesn't feel right. Still, I can't quite figure out what.

I decide that I won't stay here a moment longer. I can't. If what she's told me is the whole truth, that means we've been here for three months already. I am as well as I'll ever be. At least, physically. I can go home, wherever that is.

I quickly get dressed, not even looking at the tea. I head out to the door, but as soon as I take one step outside, Gala emerges from the woods. I feel like I haven't spent a single moment alone here, not truly alone. I am able to close the door to my cabin, but I get the feeling that she is always here, always around. This proves it.

"How did you sleep?" she asks, eyeing my reaction, probably to see whether I've forgotten everything again or not.

"Alright," I nod. That much is enough to assure her that I'm still where I was last night in my mind.

"Did something come back to you?" she wonders, still eyeing me.

I notice here that there isn't hope in her voice. There is something else there as well. Doubt? Suspicion? I can't quite put my finger on it. But she's doing her best to sound calm, when in fact she is anything but. I may not know who I am or how I ended up here, but I can still recognize when someone feels uneasy about something.

"Nothing," I say, not even needing to pretend. This is the truth.



I, of course, didn't mention anything about the woman from my dream, whose nameless face is still haunting me. Somehow, I feel close to her. I'm sure that I know her from somewhere, but where? One thing is for sure. If I stay here, I will never find out.

"It will all come back to you," she echoes the same words again. "We just need to be patient."

"That is just the thing," I say, sounding a little impatient. "I can't just wait for that to happen. I need to go somewhere familiar, somewhere where the place and the people will help me remember. I can't remember anything here, where it's just you and me."

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From the look on her face, I can tell that she feels offended. She probably took it as her not being enough, not doing enough to help me, when that's not what I meant.

"It's not safe to go home," she suddenly tells me, sounding worried.

"What do you mean?" I ask, intrigued. We haven't spoken of home yet, wherever that is. Maybe now would be a good time to open that can of worms.

"Don't you think I would have taken you home already if it were safe to do so?" she asks, all incredulous. "Do you think I like being stuck here, in the middle of nowhere, with a man who can't remember me?"

She shakes her head at me, then turns away. She isn't crying. At least, I don't think so. She just refuses to look in my direction, which I can understand.

"Why isn't it safe to go home, Gala?" I ask again.

She remains silent for a few moments longer, then she continues, turning her face towards me. "When you were attacked, that was just a part of their plan."

"Whose plan?"

"The vampires," she explains. "They attacked us. They killed so many of our kind, leaving even more for dead. I knew I couldn't go back there with you. I couldn't let them finish what they started. That is why I brought you here, and I've been keeping us safe and hidden from the vampires all this time."

From the sound of her voice, I could tell that she expected me to be more grateful, more understanding, more sympathetic. I immediately feel a pang of guilt, but I don't let it show. It's true. She saved my life. She kept me safe. She healed me. And I'm suspicious about everything she does. No wonder she sounds upset.

"Maybe it's safe to go back now," I urge. "Maybe we could just go back and check the area, see if the vampires are still there."

"I've been in contact with a few skin walkers who remained in town, hiding," she reveals. "There are less vampires there now, but we can't just waltz back in there and reclaim our home. We need to make a plan, a good plan. I need you to be completely healed for that. I need you to remember everything, to remember how much they've hurt you, how much they've hurt us. I need you to utilize that pain and that anger, so we can get our home back. Only then can we go back."

She pauses, looking at me sadly. She approaches me, caressing my cheek. This time, I don't pull away, but her touch feels foreign. I still don't remember anything about her. If that love I felt for her is somewhere inside of me, shouldn't it have surfaced by now?

I gaze deeply into her eyes. I wrack my brain, trying to remember. Have we roamed these woods together? Do we have a special place that belongs solely to us?

A special place... The moment those words form inside my mind, I see a lake. I don't know where it is or what it's called, but I see it. I recognize it. I know it belongs to me and my memory. I know I've spent much time there. Have I spent that time there alone? Was I with someone?

Suddenly, her hand on my elbow brings me back to the present moment. I look at her, trying to see if her touch will evoke anything. I pray that it does. I want to remember something, anything, even if it's something that I won't like. At this point, I'm not

being picky. I just want to escape the fog of my own mind and find something familiar, something that will clarify even the smallest part of my life.

Only, none of this happens. When she touches me, I feel like a stranger has accidentally elbowed me on the street, then our eyes locked only for her to quickly say she's sorry, then disappear never to be seen again. This would evoke no emotion in me. That is how I feel now, with her hand on my elbow, gently trying to reassure me of something I am slowly losing all hope for.

"I know I am nothing but a stranger to you right now," she says, as if able to read my mind. "I know that it is difficult to trust me but believe me when I say that your safety is of the utmost concern for me. I will take you back home, you have my word, but only when it is safe for us to do so. In the meantime, please try to understand that we have to stay here. I can't risk losing you again. I just can't..."

This time, I pull her close to me and hug her. She hugs me back, burying her face into my chest. It is a quiet, intimate moment, which once again, I hoped would evoke something. But I feel like I'm hugging someone I'm meeting for the first time.

Suddenly, I feel a knot tightening inside my stomach. It quickly starts to make me nauseous. I feel dizzy, disoriented. I try to hold onto her, but the closer I pull her to me, the worse I feel.

Finally, I release her from my grip, and several moments later, that horrible feeling of nausea is gone.

"Are you alright?" she asks, looking concerned.

"Yeah," I nod, inhaling deeply, wondering what could have caused that sudden sensation. "It's probably just the result of being in that cabin for such a long time, and barely going out."

Unexpectedly, her brows furrow. She takes a step back from me, her face enraged. This only lasts for a moment, then she is back to her calm self. In fact, all this happened so quickly that I'm questioning whether I saw it for real, or if it was just a figment of my imagination, where my mind is creating scenarios that don't exist to justify my doubt in this woman who has so far, done nothing but be loving and caring with me. Once again, I feel horrible.

"I swear, you're like a little child sometimes," she says, with a heavy sigh. "It's difficult to talk to you."

"That's news to me," I smile, trying to make her feel better. It works, because she smiles back.

I want to get lost in that smile. I want to care about her the way she obviously cares about me, but all I can think about is the woman from my dreams. All I want is to gaze at her eyes and have her kiss me like she did. Guilt is eating me alive, but there is nothing I can do to control my own thoughts. It's like they have a life of their own.

Maybe you should listen to your mind, instead of trying to make sense of reality outside of yourself, that voice inside of me says something very clever this time. I have to admit that the voice is right. I keep trying to fit pieces together, but they are pieces given to me by someone else.

My memories are gone, but they haven't disappeared from my mind. They are merely buried deep down. I need to find a way to make them come to the surface. Every time my thoughts come to me with a strange idea, I dismiss it. I shouldn't do that. I should take everything into consideration, no matter how incredulous it might sound at first. That is the only way I might be able to find my own identity again and reclaim my life.

"I really appreciate everything you are doing for me," I say, trying to sound as

heartfelt as possible. “I’m just... impatient.”

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“That you are,” she confirms. “Waiting was never easy for you. You always want things immediately.”

“Sounds about right,” I grin.

Then, she seems to remember something. “Did you drink the tea I left you?”

“No,” I admit. “I don’t feel like drinking tea. You know I don’t like it.”

“You have to drink it,” she urges gravely. “It should help you remember. Trust me.”

“Tea to help me remember?” I wonder.

“Why else do you think I would be giving it to you?” she smiles reassuringly.

“To make me miserable?” I ask, once again making her laugh.

“I do that enough without the tea,” she points out. “Now, go back inside and drink it. I’ll come shortly and bring you some lunch.”

I want to ask her if she might join me for a walk, just around the cabins, without going too far away, but something tells me not to.

“Please, stay inside,” she urges. “It’s not safe to go anywhere. We have to remain here.”

It would be easier to tell her no, if she ordered me to stay here. But I can hear the

concern in her voice, the pleading. It is much more difficult to refuse her this way and she knows it. I'm sure she does.

I sigh, staring at her. "Alright," I finally tell her what she wants to hear. "I won't go anywhere."

I say these words, but I'm not sure I will keep that promise. It has nothing to do with her. It is stronger than me, this desire to go into the woods in search of myself. I must remember everything. Otherwise, I'm afraid something terrible might happen.

## Chapter Seven

Bianca

It was late during the night when I was standing in front of the stove, boiling water for the tea that is supposed to save us all. I don't even know how I will do this. None of this seems to make any sense. Life has been turned upside down, and I'm supposed to believe that something as simple as tea will make everything all right. The very thought makes me want to crumble down, but I know I have to stay strong.

Upon my return from the healer, I told my mother everything. Once again, she didn't seem to be surprised. Sometimes, I think she knows more than she's willing to let on. Maybe that sort of thing comes with age. Or maybe I'm just losing my mind, not knowing exactly what's going on, feeling helpless and—

"Mommy?" I suddenly hear a little voice that brings me back from the torment of my mind to the present moment.

I turn around and see Orien standing in the doorway. He is rubbing his little eyes sleepily. His pajamas are a size too big, so his bare feet are barely peeking out.



“What are you doing up, pumpkin?” I ask, walking over to him and picking him up in my arms.

“Couldn’t sleep,” I hear him say, although everything about him is telling me that if I were to put him back to bed, he would fall asleep in an instant. There must be something else troubling him, and I think I know exactly what that something is.

“Do you want me to go back to bed with you?” I ask him, pressing my lips on his forehead.

“Yes,” he nods, yawning, then leaning his head on my shoulder.

“Alright,” I agree. “Let me just finish up here, and I’ll take you upstairs.”

I walk over to the stove, with him in my arms, keeping him away from the fire, and using my other hand to pour all the ingredients into the boiling water.

“What are you making?” he wonders. I can’t possibly imagine why he would be interested in this. Maybe my mother mentioned something to him? I doubt she would.

“It is some special tea,” I explain. “For daddy.”

“Daddy?” At the mention of his father, he perks up immediately. He looks around, then a look of disappointment washes over his sweet, expectant face. “Where is daddy?”

I look at him, as if I only now realize how much alike the two of them are. When Orien was born, he looked like me, but the older he gets, he is becoming more and more like his father, something which is making Eddie especially proud. He always teases me about it.

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Orien has not only his striking physical features, but he is brave and fearless, something I'm not all that happy about. Eddie isn't afraid. That trait sometimes makes him rush into things without thinking of possible consequences. There were a few occasions where I saw that Orien seems to act exactly like that. He thinks that he will always be able to handle whatever he stumbles on, and he just does whatever he feels like doing.

I'm different. I'm worried. I'm afraid of what might happen. I'm afraid of what I might lose. I always think several times before acting. I guess that's not a good thing either. There should be a balance between the two, but that's the tricky part, finding balance. That's why it's good to have someone by your side, someone who is yin to your yang, someone who completes you in a way you cannot complete yourself.

"Daddy had to go away for a while, baby," I repeat something that I've already told him before. Luckily, it happened a few times already that Eddie had to travel, but it's never been this long and never so suddenly.

"He's coming back?" he asks, his little voice laden with hope and worry.

"Of course," I nod, smiling as reassuringly as I can, under the circumstances.

I lower the heat on the stove, allowing the tea to simmer a little longer. The smell is overpowering, so while still holding Orien, I step away from the stove.

"He didn't say bye, bye," he suddenly tells me, pouting.

"He didn't?" I repeat, to show my son that I am taking everything he says very

seriously. Orien silently shakes his head in confirmation. “Well, I’m sure that is because he was in a rush. Otherwise, he always says bye bye, doesn’t he?”

“Mhm,” he nods again.

“Don’t hold it against him, baby,” I whisper, finally switching off the stove. “Come, I’ll take you upstairs to bed.”

He’s getting too heavy for me to carry him, but I don’t want to let go of him. We slowly climb up the stairs and go to his room. I put him to bed, tucking him in gently. Then, I take his favorite book from a small shelf next to his bed.

“This one?” I ask, showing him the book with a little bunny on it. He nods, yawning again. I doubt I’ll get to half the book with him still awake. But it doesn’t matter.

I start reading. “Once upon a time, there was a little bunny, he thought the world around him, was joyful, safe and funny. What he didn’t know, but he would come to learn, that life was sometimes hard, filled with hardship and concern.”

I keep reading until the little bunny loses his path in the woods one evening, after he decided to disobey his parents and not come home when he was told to. Fortunately, the story has a happy end. Fireflies help the little bunny find his way back home, by lighting up his path, and all is well with the world as soon as the little bunny is home safe and sound.

Even though Orien is sleeping, I keep reading until I reach the very end of the story. This time, I read it for myself. I wanted to be convinced that everything will be alright in the end, that the bunny will return home safely, no matter what.

I close the book and put it in my lap. It is difficult not to think about Eddie. Not knowing where he is, or even if he’s alright is killing me. I feel so distraught, but I

have to remain calm, for Orien's sake. I can't let him see me worried. I know the effect it will have on him.

I wonder if all of this will work. What if the amounts of nightshade Eddie has been given is too much? What if his body is poisoned beyond any hope of healing?

I get up quickly, putting the book back on the shelf. I can't think like that. I have to stay positive. I have to stay –

Something light knocks on the window just once and I turn my attention towards it. My mind is in an alerted state. What if whoever did this to Eddie is now trying to do the same to us?

I walk over to the window, hiding behind the curtain. Remaining out of sight, I try to catch a glimpse of the street, spreading out in front of our house. But there is nothing suspicious happening. The street is empty, devoid of life, as it should be in the middle of the night.

Then, what was that noise? I'm sure I heard it. It was as if someone threw a little pebble at my window, at... Orien's window. A heavy talon grips at my heart, clutching at it desperately.

It's the skin walkers. They found us. They are toying with us.

I try to remind myself that if this were true, everyone would know it. Kano would know it. Ever since Eddie disappeared, Kano has taken over most of the obligations that were Eddie's. We told everyone that Eddie had to travel and should be back in a few days. It was easier than to tell everyone that the vampire king was missing, and we had no idea where he was. Worst of all, how would we be able to explain that he almost attacked me?

Kano was right. We shouldn't raise alarm, not until we know exactly what it is we are dealing with. So far, there has been no news. I will make this tea and go to the woods to try and find him again. I have no idea if I will have any luck. All I can do is hope that my instinct will lead me towards him, that despite whatever is being done to him, he wants to be found by me.

I inhale deeply, moving away from the window. The darkness around us is oppressive. It's not the night time. That's not the darkness I'm referring to. There is another darkness, nearing us. I can feel it. It is ominous and threatening, because it won't reveal itself to us. It is lurking behind every corner, behind every shadow. I can sense it.

I have to be careful. We all have to be careful. I know I have to save Eddie, but I need to keep Orien safe as well. I know my mother will guard him with her life in my absence, but I feel bad leaving him.

Still, I know that I am the only one who can find Eddie and bring him back. I am his only hope, and I won't let him down. I can't.

I go downstairs and finish the tea, putting it in a small thermos. It is one dose. The rest I need to brew fresh every time I give it to him. That is how the healer instructed me. But will he even want to drink it, or will I need to administer it to him somehow?

Administer. The very word sounds ridiculous. As if I'm not even talking about the love of my life, but someone else, someone who is a stranger to me or better yet, someone who thinks I am a stranger to him.

I sit on the couch and lift my knees up, wrapping my arms around them. The pose soothes me for some reason. I rest my chin on my knees, rocking gently.

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“I miss you, Eddie...” I murmur softly.

I know he can't hear me. It would be impossible to think so. But saying these words out loud makes me feel closer to him, wherever he is right now. I knew that life with the vampire king would not be easy. I knew that there would be difficult times, but I believed that we would go through them together, that he would always be by my side to protect me. I never suspected that he would be the very person who would growl at me and threaten to attack me.

I try to remind myself, this wasn't him. But another part of me is disappointed that his love for me isn't stronger than the poison.

You're being ridiculous, I hear these words echo inside my mind. I know they are right. I know I am asking too much. I am questioning everything, but that is all because I miss him too damn much.

I close my eyes, allowing a stray tear to roll down my face. It has managed to gather my fears, my hopes and my dreams. I don't know what will happen, but I know I can't allow my fear to take hold of me. I can't. I have to fight... for us all.

### Chapter Eight

Edmund

Please, stay inside.

Her words echo in my mind, reminding me of my promise. A part of me wants to

obey. A part of me has given my word, and what is my worth, if not the worth of my given word?

Yet, I cannot help but fight this. It is night time. I know she is sleeping in the other cabin. I also know she wants to sleep in mine. But she hasn't suggested it yet. The thought of her next to me, in bed, seems... wrong. There is no other word for it. It's just wrong. It shouldn't be.

In fact, everything about this seems wrong. I feel like I'm not in danger with her, but a small part of me keeps telling me to keep my guard up, not to relax, not to trust everything I hear and see.

Please, stay inside.

I hear her voice again. It managed to worm its way into my mind somehow. Did I allow it? Maybe. Maybe it managed to go past my defenses and nestle in my mind, despite me wanting to keep my own thoughts to myself. I guess that doesn't matter at this point. What matters is that I'm at the door, with my hand on the doorknob, ready to turn it.

If she catches me, she won't like it. It will prove to her that I'm not remembering anything, that I don't trust her. It's not that I don't trust her... well, actually, it is a little bit of that as well. Being in this situation, where I can't trust my own memories, which are at this point almost nonexistent, where I can't trust my present either, all I have to rely on is my instinct. Hopefully, that is the only thing that has remained truly mine through this ordeal.

I push the door open, and I enter into the night. The woods are quiet, beckoning me with their silence and darkness. The animal in me, whatever it is, wants to go out and explore. It wants to find out who I am, and where I belong. We've both had enough of this limbo, where we have no idea who to trust.

I glance at the cabin opposite my own. The lights are off. There is no movement by the window. I inhale deeply, with my eyes closed. There is a faint scent of something strangely familiar, yet I can't figure out what it is. I am desperately drawn to it. I can't fight it any longer.

I start running towards it, looking left and right, desperate not to lose it. As soon as the scent becomes fainter, I stop, looking about, trying to find out in which direction I should turn to now. I am impatient, more so than ever. I fight my way through bushes and branches, which dig into my flesh, but I pay no attention. Nothing will stop me.

I don't know how long I keep running. It feels like forever. I'm not even sure if I will be able to find my way back to the cabin, but I don't care about that right now. I'm not sure I even want to go back. There is nothing to go back to. I have no memories; I have no past.

But this scent is awakening something inside of me. I feel like there is a memory inside of me that can recognize this scent, if only I manage to find out where it's coming from. That is why I can't stop. So, I keep running until I can't feel my legs any longer and my breath feels like shards of glass inside my chest. I keep running despite all this, filled with hope that I am running towards something that might reveal the past to me.

Finally, I stop in front a small clearing, hiding behind some bushes. I look at my arms and legs. They are all bruised and bloodied, covered with mud and leaves. That's a good thing. They won't be able to catch my scent the way I've caught theirs.

They...

I keep looking at them. They are a small group of four men, huddled together in the clearing. They are talking, but I can only catch glimpses of what they're saying.



“...not here... lost... find him... vampire king... hopeless...”

The wind scatters their words about, but I’ve managed to hear enough. They’re looking for someone, someone important. The vampire king. Are they vampire as well?

If they are, I should feel the need to attack them, no? I’ve lost my memory, but I still know that vampires and skin walkers are mortal enemies. There are only four of them. I would be able to take them on easily. I immediately create a scenario in my mind. First, I would take out the one closest to me, by jumping behind him and snapping his neck, while the others won’t have enough time to react. That means one down, three to go. Next, the one to the right will attack me second. I see his entire body leaning slightly to the left, meaning that is his strong side. I need to attack his weak side. Kick him in the knee, make him drop down to the ground, twist his elbow up and snap it. One of the other two will attack me for sure while I’m doing this, so I have to be vigilant.

Then, one of them turns to me, seemingly staring right at me. My breathing intensifies. I know he can’t see me. I’m also pretty sure he can’t catch my scent either, but maybe I’m mistaken. I stare back at him, without him even being aware of it.

“What is it?” Another one asks, joining him in their effort.

“I thought I heard something,” the first one says.

They’re closer now, so I can hear them better. The wind has calmed down as well, as if it also wants to see what will happen here.

“Should we check it out?” the third one asks.

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Now they're all looking in my direction. I still have the upper hand. I could jump them, catch them off guard. If I lose that card, I might not be able to take them all out. I can't risk it. If I'm going to attack, I should attack now.

Now.

Now.

My mind keeps repeating these two words again, reminding me that the clock is ticking. Act now. Now.

But my body doesn't want to listen. I stare at the first man, whose face I can't see clearly in the darkness, but there is something about it that isn't allowing me to act upon this impulse to attack. My instinct won't let me. It is telling me to stay put, that now isn't the time to act. I should remain hidden.

My heartbeat is now in my throat. I feel like I've swallowed a rock and it's stuck in my windpipe, making it increasingly harder to breathe. I try to remain calm, as much as that is possible under the circumstances.

Suddenly, one of the other men puts a hand on the first man's shoulder.

"We need to keep going," he says.

The first man seems to agree, but he can't stop staring in the bushes where I'm hiding. I know only one second is separating us from attack, where one of us will die. I don't want to die. But somehow, I don't want him to die either. Otherwise, I would

have attacked him already. I would have attacked them all, because it wasn't a question of fear.

It isn't fear I'm feeling right now, it's something far more complex, and more difficult to make sense of. That is why I am rendered unable to act, still hiding in the bushes, waiting to see what the four men will do.

Finally, after what seems to be a small eternity, all four of them turn around and they head in the opposite direction. My breathing calms down. My entire body relaxes. I don't feel like the string on a violin any longer. I am safe... as much as I can be in this situation. I know I can stumble onto them again, so I have to be careful.

A part of me wants to go back to the cabin, but another part of me wants to keep going. Tonight is a night for discovery. I don't know where I might end up, but I know now that I'm on this path, I don't want to go back. I want to keep going. I want to see if I will find out anything about myself.

I wait for a few moments, then I stand on my feet. My knees seem to have fallen asleep in that unnatural position, so I shake them a little. Above me, an owl hoots and it gives me a quick start. My breathing intensifies for a few moments, then I calm myself down.

"It's nothing," I whisper. "Just keep going."

That is, however, easier said than done. I gaze in the direction where the men went. Should I follow?

No, that voice inside of me surfaces again. We followed enough. It's time to listen to yourself.

Again, easier said than done. I try to do that, but my own voice isn't making any

sense now. I feel like this place is new to me, although I'm sure that I've been here before, a long time ago. And I'm also sure that—

Water.

Suddenly, there is the sound of running water in my mind. I turn to my left. There is a small path through the clearing, and back into the woods. I don't know where it leads. I can't know, but it is drawing me, pulling me into itself more than anything else before.

Water.

Again, that sound. I try to remember something about water. A river? A lake? A waterfall? No, a waterfall would be much louder than that.

Once again, I keep fighting my way through the thick shrubbery of the lush woods, holding an invisible thread which I know I can't lose. Otherwise, I will never find this path again and it will be forever lost to me.

As if in an effort to help me, the moon starts to shine even brighter, illuminating the path. It almost feels like daylight. I keep running, my hands flailing about me, pushing away the thorny branches, until finally, I see a lake. Its surface is smooth and polished, like a mirror, with the moon bathing in its reflection. I am in awe of the sight before me, as if my presence would do nothing but disturb it. I have to remain quiet.

I walk slowly, one foot at a time, trying to make as little noise as possible. I know this place. I'm sure I know it. My heart recognizes it, but my mind is still rebelling against the idea that it belongs to my past. I feel like I have two parts of me right now, both fighting for dominion over my mind. One is telling me to go back, that this place will do nothing but confuse me even further. The other part is telling me to stay,

that I might find out more about myself, even the things that I never dreamed of.

My head explodes sharply, bringing horrible pain. I grab the sides of my temples, closing my eyes, in an effort to soothe the pain, but it's difficult, almost impossible to do so. I drop down to my knees, pressing heavily on my temples, but it's not working.

Suddenly, I hear footsteps behind me. I jump back on my feet, thinking it's the four men, who heard me and followed me here. I rush back into the darkened part of the woods, and hide myself among the trees, while still having a clear view of the lake. To my surprise, it's not the four men. It's someone else.

## Chapter Nine

Bianca

Kano asked me to join them, but I know we'll cover more ground like this. Besides, if Eddie tried to attack me, he'll probably want to attack them as well. I can't risk them hurting him in any way. I have to find him first, before they do, and I have to make him drink this tea, before it's too late.

Those are the thoughts that keep plaguing me as I roam through the woods alone. I've never been afraid of coming here alone, not when I was with the skin walkers, and especially not now that I'm with Eddie, now that I'm the vampire queen. I still feel like there is so much in here left to be discovered, and as a nymph, this should be the place where I feel most comfortable.

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But I don't feel like that. The darkness is oppressive. Something is looming over us all, like a dagger hanging on a thin piece of thread, and someone is about to cut it. I shudder at the very thought, looking around.

I've reached the lake. This is where I saw him last time. This is where he almost attacked me. The memory is almost too painful to even think about, but I have to stay strong. I press at the small satchel around my waist, where the tea is. I have no idea how I will do this. He almost attacked me last time. How on earth will I make him drink something? I almost laugh loudly at the ridiculousness of the situation.

I walk over to the lake, lowering myself to the water. I touch it with the tips of my fingers, feeling the scorching chilliness almost paralyze me instantly.

Then, I hear a rustling noise in the bushes. I jump back up, looking around. My entire body is tight, ready to attack if necessary. I know there are wild animals in these woods as well, but they rarely come down to the lake. They prefer to stay in the higher areas.

"Kano, is that you?" I call out, thinking that perhaps Kano changed his mind about going to the other side with the rest of his group.

I listen intently to any possible reply, but there is nothing other than the heavy sound of my own breathing. My eyes have grown accustomed to the darkness already, although the moon is bright. I see the paths clearly. I see the trees, the bushes. But the shadows are something that cannot be seen. That is where monsters lurk. I've learned this before.

Monsters always lurk in the darkness. However, the worst monsters lurk where you least expect them to be. They hide behind the faces of those you thought would love you and protect you. That is what I thought the skin walkers were once, a long time ago. I thought they were my family. I thought they took me in, to take care of me and protect me. But I was wrong. They thought I betrayed them, and without even clearing up that horrible misunderstanding, they were all too eager to do away with me.

For some reason, I think of Gala. I haven't thought of her in a long time. She is partly responsible for what happened, and even now, a part of me regrets that I didn't teach her a lesson, which she so desperately needed. I let her go easy. Maybe I shouldn't have done that.

My mother tried to remind me that we always need to show mercy, even and maybe especially towards our enemies. Sometimes, that is true. But sometimes, mercy is just another way of allowing your enemies to get another chance to attack you. Most of the time, your enemies see mercy as a weakness. They think you are weak, and they use this against you.

Eddie has taught me that mercy isn't a weakness, although throughout my entire life with the skin walkers, I believed that I had to be tough and brave, to be feared and respected in order to deserve my place among them. It was difficult to live up to such expectations, because they were not my own. I never thought mercy was weakness.

I shake my head quickly, trying to banish such thoughts. Gala doesn't deserve a single thought inside my mind, after what she's done to us. I don't want to think about her ever again. Right now, I have to focus on finding Eddie and bringing him back home safely.

I look around the lake, which seems peaceful, undisturbed. I wonder if it will beckon him to come here, to find me. If he does come here, will he try to attack me again?

I'm almost overcome by tears. The feeling is so powerful, I drop down to my knees and press my hands to my chest. I've never known such pain before. I never knew that your heart could ache to such an extent that you want to rip it out of your chest and throw it away, because you can't handle the pain and the anguish.

I remind myself that I need to remain strong. Orien is counting on me to bring Eddie home. I have to find him, and I have to do whatever it takes.

At that moment, I hear a noise behind me. I stumble back on my feet, my hope rising all the way to the heavens themselves, but the moment my eyes lock with Kano's, those same hopes are dashed against the shores of crushing reality.

"Nothing?" I ask.

"Nothing," he shakes his head. "There's still one part of the woods we haven't covered," he adds. "We'll go there now. But, if he's not there, then..."

He doesn't need to continue for me to know what he means. Then, our options have all been exhausted. We won't know where to look for him. The worst thing is that he could be anywhere. He could have been taken anywhere in the world and we might never be able to find him again.

I try not to think about that. There is still hope. There is always hope, as long as you want to believe, and there is nothing more I want than having him back home.

"Do you want to come with us?" Kano asks, his voice tender.

I know this must be as difficult to him as it is to me. They are best friends, after all. Almost like brothers. Kano has saved Eddie's life. He was willing to die for him. Eddie always said how fortunate he considered himself to be with such loyal and loving people around him.



“I think I’ll stay here a little while longer,” I tell him, looking away from him and at the lake. “This is his favorite place. I keep hoping that he might come here, that he might remember me despite everything.” My voice trails off. It’s becoming more and more difficult to stay positive.

Kano approaches me and takes me by the hand. He squeezes it.

“Don’t lose hope,” he smiles at me. “Never lose hope.”

“I won’t,” I smile back. “Thank you. I needed that reassurance.”

“If there is even the slightest chance of him finding his way back to our clan, back to you, Edmund will find it. You know he will. Nothing will stop him.”

I let those words sink in. I know he means it from the bottom of his heart, and that makes me appreciate them even more.

He smiles at me once again, then turns to the other guys who came with him. “We need to cover the western part still,” he instructs them. “It should take us probably until the morning.” Then, as if he’s not certain whether he should leave me alone here, he turns to me again. “Are you sure you don’t want to come with us? You shouldn’t be alone.”

“I feel overpowered by memories here,” I admit. “But in a good way. This place makes me hopeful that we shall eventually find him. I need to keep that hope alive.”

“Don’t stay too long,” he advises. “Go home. Let us find him and bring him back, OK?”

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I smile. “OK. Thank you.”

He nods appreciatively, then a few moments later, all four of them disappear in the woods, leaving me alone. A cold breeze tries to move me, but I stay put, wrapping my arms around myself, like an invisible hug.

“Just a little longer,” I tell myself aloud, staring at the lake.

Memories flood me. Painful, sweet memories of the times when we were the happiest. I can see Eddie here, with the eye of my mind, with Orien as a baby in his arms, walking into the lake, both of them shivering with cold, although it was a hot August day. Then, I remember our skinny dipping for the first time, how he held me in his arms, how his lips kissed mine, trembling. I melted in his arms, wanting to remain like that forever, despite the cold.

A million memories keep playing inside my mind, one happier than the other. I know I can't leave this place. Not yet. Not until I've played them all out, until I've seen them all, until I've had my fill of them. I hear Eddie's laughter. I see the warmth of his smile. I can drown in the heat of his eyes. I can drink in the smell of his skin. I can do all of that here and nowhere else. That is why I can't leave yet.

I close my eyes, allowing the memories to flood me completely. My heart is full of hope. I can see—

Suddenly, a branch snaps somewhere behind me. I turn around, thinking Kano must have forgotten to ask me something. But to my shock, I realize it's not Kano. My entire body starts to tremble. Flashes of hot and cold start to substitute and I can

barely think. My mind becomes a haze. My eyes can't get accustomed to the darkness any longer, to the sight in front of me that they need to behold.

I want to extend my hands and touch him, bring him close to me, pull him into an embrace, but I can't do any of those things. I am paralyzed. All I can do is look at him, as if this might be the last time we ever see each other.

"Eddie?" I finally manage to muster, as he slowly starts to approach me.

## Chapter Ten

Edmund

"Eddie?" she calls out to me again.

I can hear the desperation in her voice. There is fear as well, and so many other things which I can't quite make out. But something is telling me that she should remain where she is, and not get close to me.

"Eddie, do you recognize me?" she asks me, taking a step closer to me, but as she does that, I take a step back. Her voice is tense, hopeful.

I don't trust myself. I feel my jaw tightening. I don't want to growl. I don't want to make a sound, but my body seems to want to do it on its own. My breathing is intensifying. My field of vision is becoming foggy, focused solely on the prey in front of me. I don't want to see her as prey, but I can't help it.

"Stay back."

This is the only thing I manage to muster, through a cloudy haze that is threatening to take over my mind. Something inside of me is urging me to attack. Something inside

of me has targeted her as the enemy, but so far, I'm managing to keep myself under control. I know what will happen if I attack. I dare not even think about it.

"Just listen to my voice and try to remember," she keeps talking.

The more I listen to her, the more familiar her voice sounds, but I can't recognize her. I feel like there is a wall around, preventing me from seeing anything beyond it. I can't find what I'm looking for, because there is something inside of me trying to regain control of what I do and think, almost as if my own thoughts aren't my own any longer.

"You have to come back with me," she continues.

This time, she manages to approach me so closely that she grabs me by the elbow. The action startles me, and without even thinking, I yank my arm away from her, pushing her unintentionally. This is when she realizes that I might not be who she thinks I am. I can see that disappointment in her eyes, the very moment when her dreams were almost destroyed.

However, she keeps going. She doesn't give up. She keeps talking to me, calling my name, but keeping her distance.

The sound of her voice awakens different emotions inside of me. Almost as if there is something that needs to be dragged out from the deepest recesses of my heart, out into the open, but another part of me won't let this happen. I see her as both an enemy and a friend, as both a devil and an angel, and no matter how hard I try, I can't make up my mind on either one of those two.

"Can't you see, Eddie?" Despite everything, her determination shines through. I have to admire that. I keep listening to her, her voice beckoning me, but I feel like there are shackles around my hands and feet, keeping me in place. If I get closer to her, I fear I

might hurt her, and I don't want that.

I take another step back. She sounds too tantalizing. Her voice is too soft. Her words are too alluring. I have to leave before I am so close to her that I can touch her. Because if I touch her, I fear the animal inside me might take control of my actions and I won't be able to protect this woman from it.

"You came here because you were looking for me, just like I was looking for you," she explains, although nothing she says makes much sense.

Her words try to pierce through the wall around my mind and they almost manage to do it. But a tangle of thorns immediately sprouts up and her words are lost, dissolved in the darkness, which is leaving only anger and poison in its place.

That same pain erupts at the back of my head, making it impossible to think. A million little stars explode in front of my eyes, blinding me to the point of darkness. I press my hands to my temples again, in an effort to soothe the pain, but it's impossible. The pain is coming from deep inside, where her words can't reach.

I drop down to my knees, overcome by the pain.

"Eddie?" Her words are laden with love, with concern, with profound tenderness. I want them to be for me. I want to reciprocate them, but instead of returning the same tenderness, I push her away when she places her hands on my shoulders. She falls down to the ground next to me.

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The animal inside of me is going mad. Stark raving mad. I can't control it any longer.

"Get... away..." I manage to muster through clenched teeth, feeling my entire body crack under the pressure of the change that was about to happen. I know it is just a matter of seconds.

"You won't push me away," I hear her say boldly.

I want to scream at her that I'm not trying to push her away. I'm trying to protect her, although every part of my conscious mind wants to attack her. It sees her as the enemy.

But no matter how many times I tell her to go away, she keeps coming back. Her hands are again on me, and although I try to regain control of my inner animal, it is getting stronger with each passing second.

I try to release myself from her grip, to run back into the forest, as far away from her as possible, but she won't let me. Instead, she pushes me against a tree, as if she herself is trying to control me. It is laughable that she would be able to do that, when I myself am barely holding on.

"I don't... want to hurt you," I muster through clenched teeth, as my fingers are already curled into fists.

Her hands are on my shoulders. I could easily push her away. I could dig my teeth into her. Wait... dig my teeth into her? But... I thought I was with the skin walkers. Why do I have the instinct to sink my teeth into someone? It doesn't make sense.

Only vampires do that.

Once again, that onslaught of pain hits me, only it's much stronger this time.

"Aaargh!" I shout loudly, unable to hold it in. I need to release this pent up anger, this rage that is threatening to tear me apart from the inside.

"Stay with me!" I keep hearing her voice. "Stay with me! Remember!"

I want to do what she tells me, but there is nothing to remember. My mind is a blank. All I see is rage, this dire need to tear her apart, and I'm afraid that this is exactly what I will do, if I stay here much longer.

I finally manage to free myself from her grip, and I look towards the lake. Maybe if I jump into it, it will cool me down. It might clarify my mind, even for one brief moment, so I can escape from this situation without hurting either of us.

I know it makes little sense, but this is what I do. I start running towards the lake, and I throw myself into its icy embrace. The water washes over me, enveloping me in layers of cold. Shards of pain immediately prick at my mind, but the animal has pulled back. The pain is keeping it at bay. As long as I keep causing myself pain, I will be able to control it, at least partly.

Breathing heavily, I lift myself up from the water.

"Stay there," I growl at the girl, who obviously wanted to come into the water to jump in with me. "Keep away."

"Eddie..." Her voice breaks my heart. The fact that this sorrow, this desperation awakens nothing in me almost destroys me completely.

If she were someone important in my life, shouldn't I remember her? Shouldn't all this make me remember something... anything?

I wade out of the water, shivering, my teeth chattering. I need to go back where I came from. I am a danger not only to myself, but to others like this. I can't allow myself to roam the woods freely, like this. Not before I find out who I am and where I came from. Maybe then I would be able to come back to this woman and give her the answers she is looking for. Or perhaps, she is looking for them in a completely wrong place. I don't know. I don't know anything right now.

"I just want to hug you," she says, quivering. "One last time."

I shake my head at her. "You don't know what you're asking."

"You're here, because you remember me, don't you?"

I shake my head at her again. "I don't know why I'm here."

"This place called out to you," she says, spreading her arms wide around her. "You are fighting your own self, your own memory. Just... let it come back to you."

I take a step back. She doesn't know what she's asking of me. If I let go, if I stop controlling the animal, it will completely take over. I won't be in charge anymore. Who knows what it will do to her. I dare not even think.

No. I can't let go. I have to stay in control, at least until I am at a safe distance from this place and from her.

At that moment, she uses the fact that my mind is distracted, and she lunges at me. I see something in her hand, like a small container. I have no idea what she's planning on doing with it. She uses all of her strength to push me back into the water, and I fall



down, sprawled. She jumps onto my chest, with her knees on my arms, keeping me pinned with the entire weight of her body.

I watch her tower over me, grabbing my chin with her fingers forcefully.

“Open!” I hear her shout, not understanding what she means by it.

The moment she squeezes my chin harder, I realize she wants me to open my mouth. I clench my teeth as tight as I can, shocked at what’s going on. The animal inside of me is kicking and screaming in protest, and I know it is just a matter of time before it will rise to the surface. If it does, I won’t be able to control anything anymore.

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I keep my teeth clenched like that for as long as I can, but her fingers dig into my cheeks at this point, and I am forced to do as she orders me. My mouth flies open wide, and to my complete and utter shock, she takes the little container from her hand and pours something bitter into my mouth, making sure to clasp it closed with both her hands, so I could swallow it.

I fight hard to do the opposite, but it's impossible. Some of the liquid comes out through my nose, as I push it with the power of my breath. The pain sears through my sinuses.

A moment later, I manage to regain my composure and I use both my hands to push her off of me, breathing heavily and coughing out the little of the liquid that I had left in my mouth. Unfortunately, she forced me to swallow most of it.

“What... kind of poison... did you give me?” I hiss at her angrily, bent forward as if carrying a heavy load on my back, but unwilling to take my eyes off of her for even a single moment.

“It's not poison,” she says, shaking her head.

The animal inside of me is ready. It will attack... now.

I watch the woman take steps away from me, her eyes big and frightful. I don't understand what just happened. I thought she didn't want to hurt me.

What did she give me?

Suddenly, the world around me starts to spin around. I feel dizzy, nauseous. My stomach protests what I've just been given by pushing the contents back up. I almost vomit everything, but nothing comes out.

I drop to my knees into the shallow part of the lake. My entire body is convulsing from the cold, from whatever poison she gave me.

"Eddie?" she calls out to me again.

I want her close, but at the same time, I don't. She should stay away from me, at a safe distance. I can't see her clearly any longer. My field of vision is diminishing, becoming darker and more foggy, until finally, I can't see anything any longer.

I hear her voice as if through a haze of long forgotten memories, but I don't see her. My mind is a blank. I am blind. I am deaf. I no longer exist.

Everything is darkness.

## Chapter Eleven

Bianca

"What a spectacle! Bravo! Bravo!"

The words are followed by a roaring thunder of applause that echoes all around us, almost as if this is a macabre theatre, set up deep in the woods, just for the three of us. I hear a voice that has haunted me through my darkest nightmares, the same voice I hoped I would never have to hear again.

My conscious mind refuses to believe in the identity of the person the voice belongs to, but I know it can't be anyone else. I'm sure of it.

My mind tries to hide in a corner, just like I used to do before. For a moment, fear takes complete hold of me, and I am unable to fight it off. I should be able to, because I'm not the frightened little girl from before. I've grown. Eddie proved to me that I am not a poor excuse of a creature, but rather someone who deserves to be loved and cherished. That is something I couldn't believe for a long time, but with his love, I finally accepted that truth. I accepted him.

"Gala?" I say her name incredulously, disbelieving that it could actually be her.

But it is. She appears from the deepest, darkest part of the woods, clapping her hands together in rhythm, refusing to stop until she has made her point, like a wicked forest creature who had risen from the depths of hell to wreak havoc on unsuspecting passersby. I unfortunately, happen to be one of those, only she thinks I deserve what is coming to me.

"What are you doing here?" I demand to know, although pieces of the puzzle have already started to come together in my mind. It is all slowly starting to make sense.

"I thought you had it figured out by now," Gala mocks me. "Don't disappoint me now."

"You did this to Edmund!" I shout at her, hoping that the sound of my voice might be enough to wake him up, but when I glance over at him, I see he's still unconscious.

"And it was ever so much fun to try and convince him that I was his long lost love, waiting for him to remember me!" she explains, laughing with all her might as she did so. "Can you imagine the ridiculousness of the whole situation? And he actually bought it! That's the most idiotic thing of all!"

He bought it? Her words ring inside my mind, stinging with the might of a thousand bees. I can't believe that. I refuse to believe that.

“Why would you do this? Why not just kill him when you had the chance?” I demand, wanting to show her that I’m not afraid of her anymore.

She tortured me for such a long time, when I was still with the skin walkers. She and her gang would find me in the woods. They would belittle me. They would hit me. They would tell me all sorts of horrible things, probably in hopes that I would run away on my own, but I never did that. The last time they accosted me in the woods was when Eddie scared them away, saving me. That was when our love story started. In a way, she is responsible for us having fallen in love. I have her to thank for that, her malice and her evil nature. Because if she didn’t almost kill me in the woods that night, Eddie would have had no one to save.

“Oh, but where’s the fun in just killing someone like that?” Gala shrugs, walking around me and over to Eddie, who is lying on his back in the shallow waters of the lake. “No!”

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She circles me like a vulture, hiding her hands from plain sight. I suspect she has a weapon, at least some kind of a stone or something, so I keep my distance from her. I won't leave Eddie, not now that I've found him.

"You owe us your life," I remind her that we took pity on her and didn't kill her when we had the chance.

"Pfft!" she scorns me with her gaze. "I suppose I should thank you for ruining my life as well, shouldn't I?"

"I didn't ruin your life," I correct her angrily. "You did."

"I did!?" she screams at me venomously. "We took you in. Our elders could have left you by the side of the road when they found you, but instead, they felt sorry for you and took you in as one of our own. And what did you do? You turn to our worst enemies and stab us in the back! You ruined our clan! You took everything from me, and now I will take everything from you, everything and everyone you hold dear, starting with this vampire here!" She points at Eddie's unconscious body.

"I won't let you hurt him anymore!" I warn her.

That is the moment when something dreadful happens. She looks at me in a way that makes my blood turn cold. Then, she bursts out into a joyful chuckle, as if she's just heard the funniest joke ever. She keeps laughing like a maniac for a while, then finally, when the onslaught of laughter dies down, she gives me one of the wickedest looks ever.

“Oh, I won’t hurt him, you don’t have to worry about that,” she tells me, her lips widening into a smile that assures me I can’t even possibly begin to fathom what she’s thinking of. Then, she says it. “You will hurt him.”

“What?” I frown, shaking my head. “You must be out of your goddamn mind!”

She laughs again, in such a way as to try and prove that she is the one in control of the entire situation. From a certain perspective, that might appear to be so. But I won’t let her win. I can’t.

“You really have no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into, do you Bianca?” Gala mocks me again, just like she did before. “You poor, stupid thing. You might be a nymph, but you are a poor excuse for one!”

It takes all of my conscious effort not to lunge at her right then and there for saying those things and for doing this to Eddie, but I know I have to bide my time. I have to make her think that she is winning, that she does have all the strings in her hands and with them, all the control. Then, once she is most secure in her victory, I will come and swoop down on her with all my might. Now is not the right moment, no matter how much I want to punch her teeth in.

“You know, sometimes I wonder if this is all just way over your head,” Gala suddenly seems to ponder, but I know it’s just another try at mocking me. “Maybe this whole plan was too sophisticated for you, and you won’t even understand all the subtle nuances that I’m trying to— “

This is where I can’t control myself any longer and I take a swing at her, but she manages to jump to the side at the last minute. Once again, she starts laughing at me and my failed attempt to avenge myself.

“Do you really think you could do anything?” she asks. “Really?”

I decide not to dignify that with an answer. I would rather remain silent, than bury myself a little deeper. This wasn't my moment and I still decided to act. Of course, it was a flop. Maybe it's a good thing. It only strengthened her belief that she is in total control of the situation.

I glance at Eddie, wondering what I did to him. Did that tea help him at all, or did I make things even worse? Why isn't he coming round? If only he would wake up and remember me...

"Oh, I have seriously had enough of all this pretending," she suddenly shudders, looking back at Eddie. "I can't wait to see you both standing face to face, realizing what needs to be done."

I keep shaking my head at her, hoping that whatever she has planned in her mind will never come to fruition. This is all just an act of revenge. She's confessed to it. But it goes far beyond that as well. If it were mere revenge, she would have simply killed Eddie. She had the chance. She could have done it easily. Instead, she chose the long path, the path that would make everyone involved, me included, suffer even more. That shows me how much she has always hated me, how much she still hates me, although I have never actually done anything to her to deserve so much hatred.

"Why do you hate me so?" I finally dare to ask her the question that simply doesn't seem to make any sense, no matter from what perspective I choose to look at it.

She frowns at me, looking almost insulted. "You have wronged me just by existing, you worthless piece of shit. You think the world owes you something just because you appear before us, and we all have to bow down before you."

I am shocked at her words, which don't seem to make any sense. "When have I asked anything of you?" I demand to know. "I was a baby! It was the choice of the elders whether to take me in or leave me. I didn't ask for any of this!"



“Exactly!” she points out. “You are always the one who needs to be taken care of, always the one who should be cherished and guarded. What about the rest of us? We were forced to take care of ourselves!”

“But that was your own clan,” I remind her. “I never belonged.”

“That’s why they did everything to make you feel like you did, at the expense of the rest of us!”

Then, it slowly started to all make sense. She’s always been jealous. There is no other explanation. All of her hatred stems from that feeling of inadequacy and low self-esteem. I know that no matter what I say, her opinion won’t change. If I try to contradict her, it will only make things worse. Staying silent here is the smartest option.

“Do you think this will give you the happily ever after you’re desperate for?” I ask, unable to keep my mouth shut, despite my initial plan.

“Maybe,” she says. “Maybe not. But it’s a start.”

On those words, she rushes over to me and tries to attack me. I react quickly, thinking on my feet, but I’m not fast enough. She manages to push me down to the ground and jumps on me, trying to claw my eyes out. I grab her wrists with my hands, keeping them away from my face, but it’s hard.

Using all my leftover strength, I manage to roll us both to the side, but before I can do anything, I see her grab something with her hand and aim straight for my head.

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A strange warmth immediately takes hold of my entire body. I lose control of my limbs first, then the rest of my body. My mind is the last thing to go. I can still see her, as she leans over me, her wicked eyes staring into mine, promising something horrific to come.

“Sleep, now,” she tells me, as her voice echoes in my mind, her eyes digging into mine ominously. “Because when you wake up, you will need to make the decision of a lifetime.”

I lose the image of her face in fog and then, I am plunged into darkness.

### Chapter Twelve

Edmund

When I open my eyes, I’m not sure if all of that was a dream or if it really happened. I look around, realizing that I’m back in the cabin, in the bed I’ve slept in for the past three months, as I’ve been told.

I sigh heavily, burying my face in my hands, trying to make sense of it all. I was by the lake last night, wasn’t I? And that girl was there as well. She knew me. She spoke to me as if she knew me well, as if we were once close. But who is she?

I get up, determined to get some answers. I can’t stay here like this anymore, doing nothing and just waiting for my memory to come back to me. I have to do something about it. I have to make it come back.

I rush out of my cabin and head straight for Gala's. I barge in through the door, looking for her. Luckily, she's there, standing by the stove. As soon as she notices me, she switches it off and turns to me.

"I didn't know you were up already," she smiles.

"You need to tell me what the hell is going on, and you need to tell me now," I demand, walking over to her and standing right in front of her. "Don't even try to tell me that what happened last night was just a dream, because I know it wasn't. Tell me who is that woman."

She sighs heavily, looking concerned. I'm not sure if I should take it as a good sign or as a bad sign. Still, I'm glad to hear that she is not denying me the truth. She is not trying to convince me that I dreamt it all, because I know better than to believe that. I know that I left my cabin. I distinctly remember what happened last night. I just can't figure out the identity of that woman.

At the same time, I want to understand why I felt this need to both attack her and protect her at the same time. I shouldn't feel both things. If she is my enemy, then I would understand the desire to hurt her in some way. But it didn't seem that we were enemies. At least, she didn't act like that towards me, and this is what is making everything even more confusing.

"Why don't you sit down?" she suggests. "I'll finish making us some tea, and I promise I will answer all your questions. You must be so confused by what happened last night." Her voice is calming, almost eerily so. But she manages to comfort me with it.

I go to the sofa and take a seat. I'm feeling impatient, watching her finish brewing the same tea that she's been making me all this time. When she finally brings it to me, I shake my head at it.

“I don’t want any right now,” I tell her. I can see she wants to insist, but the expression on my face tells her not to insist now. At least, not until we’ve had this important conversation and she’s clarified some things.

“You don’t think I’m doing something to you by giving you the tea?” she asks, sounding offended. She takes her own cup and brings it to her lips. “See? I’m drinking the same thing. I wouldn’t serve you poison, unless I were to poison myself as well.” She takes a sip and swallows it. Then, she places the cup down on a small coffee table.

“I didn’t say anything,” I remind her. “I’m just saying that I don’t want anything to drink right now. I just want answers.”

“You sound angry,” she points out. “With me.”

“I’m not angry,” I try to clarify without insulting her, but the truth is, I’m on the edge. When you don’t know what’s going on, you tend to see everyone as the potential culprit of whatever crime has happened around you. “I’m just trying to make sense of the world around me, and with it, of my own memories.”

“I was hoping that you would remember by now,” she sighs. “It’s been three months already.”

“That’s what you’ve told me,” I nod. “Although it doesn’t feel like that. I mean, it doesn’t feel like it’s been that long. I feel it’s only been a few days of this mess.”

She nods. “That’s just your mind, playing tricks on you.

“Tell me about the woman,” I demand.

She hesitates for a moment, as if she doesn’t know exactly how to start this story.

This makes me even more impatient, but I allow her to take her time. I watch her, unable to take my eyes off of her. She looks away, then our eyes lock once again.

“Did she tell you something?” she wonders, tilting her head as she’s looking at me. “I have to know, so I can address everything, so that there isn’t a single thing left to confuse you.”

“She didn’t tell me anything,” I reply. “She called out my name several times. She told me I needed to remember her, that my own memories brought me there to that lake.”

“That part is true,” Gala nods.

“Which one?”

“That your own memories brought you there,” she repeats. “That lake is a special place for you. I mean, for both of us.”

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“Did something happen there?” I wonder. “I do feel like that place has a special meaning, but I can’t for the life of me remember why.”

“I was hoping that you would remember on your own,” she continues, sounding saddened. “I didn’t want to paint your own memories.”

“I’m asking you to,” I remind her. “I don’t want to wait any longer.”

“She is your enemy,” she finally tells me. “And that place, the lake... that is where she attacked us, and almost killed me.”

“She almost killed you?” I echo her words.

She nods instead of a reply. She seems at a loss for words, so I give her a few moments to gather her thoughts. Eventually, she continues.

“She is a vampire,” she explains. “Well, technically, she is much more than a mere vampire. She is a hybrid of a vampire and a nymph, and those cross-breeds are usually very dangerous. You know that skin walkers and vampires are mortal enemies, and they already attacked us once, a long time ago. They killed a lot of our own kin. I guess that wasn’t enough, to reduce our clan to these small numbers, but they want to wipe us out completely. I think that is why they have come here again, trying to find us. That is why they attacked you while you were alone, trying to kill you, because they know that without you, we lose all hope. Without you, there is no point in continuing any longer, for any of us. But they didn’t manage to kill you, because I found you in time, and I kept you hidden here. I don’t know how I didn’t see it, but somehow, she managed to pierce through your consciousness and make

you go to the lake, where she was waiting for you.”

“She can do that?” I frown.

“She is a powerful creature,” Gala tells me ominously. “Do not make the mistake of underestimating her. Her powers are beyond anything you could ever imagine. She can make you believe that it is nighttime while you are staring at the sun itself. She can bend your mind to her will in such a way, and you wouldn’t even be aware of it.”

“So, is that what she did?” I ask, incredulous that I am such an easy target, that I am so easy to manipulate by whoever wants to do something to me or with me. “She made me go there to the lake, so she could finish what she started?”

“I assume that is her agenda,” Gala nods, inhaling deeply. “I told you, killing you is almost equal to killing our entire clan. We won’t fight without you. It is easier to kill just one person than to kill the few that are left.”

I try to focus on what happened the previous night. I try to look at that woman in light of the new information that I’ve just been given, but something still doesn’t seem to make sense.

“She could kill me easily,” I remember. “But she kept telling me to remember. I... I don’t think she wanted to hurt me.”

“She just wanted to make you lower your guard,” Gala warns me. “She probably knew that you didn’t know whether to trust her or not, because of your memory being completely erased. I’m guessing she tried to trick you first, so she could kill you more easily, the coward. She tried to convince you that she is there to help you, and from what I can see, she almost managed to do that.”

“She made me drink something,” I suddenly remember.

Gala's eyes widened with shock. "Drink?" she echoes my own words. "What did she give you?"

"I don't know," I admit. "I just know that she poured it into my mouth, and I did try to spit most of it out, but I ingested some of it."

Her eyes dart from me to the tea that is on the coffee table. "Drink the tea. It will undo whatever poison she's given you. You should have told me this immediately."

"It's all coming back to me slowly," I admit. "Last night is a haze, just like my mind."

"Don't worry," she smiles, leaning over to me and taking my hands into hers. "Together, we'll remember everything. But you must drink your tea. It's crucial that you do so, before her poison starts to affect your mind."

I hesitate for a moment, then I do as she tells me. I take the tea and slowly start drinking it, one sip at a time. She watches me do it, until I place down the empty cup. She looks content.

"It's a good thing I came when I did," she says. "I thought she put some kind of a spell on you when I saw you lying in the lake. I should have assumed that she would make a potion first. Well, you'll be happy to know she won't be making any potions. In fact, she won't be doing anything, because she is our prisoner now and we have to decide what to do with her."

"She's here?" I look around, as if she might appear by my side this very instant.

"There is a cave nearby, where I closed in," she explains. "She is safely caged in there, until we figure out what the right punishment for her should be."



The thought of that woman being so close to me makes my skin tingle. Everything inside of me is dying to go and see her, but I know Gala won't like that. Maybe I shouldn't even mention it.

"You know we can't just let her go," she reminds me. "Not after everything that's happened. She has to die."

"Die?" I repeat, sounding shocked.

"Of course," she replies, matter-of-factly. "What else did you think was going to happen to her?"

I don't know what to reply to that. I guess she's right. If her plan was to kill me or any one of our clan, then the right decision is to kill her as well. It is simply how these things go. Yet, the thought of harming that woman stands opposed in my mind.

"You need to rest now," Gala stands up and takes both cups with her. "You've had quite an adventure last night. Besides, we need to come up with a plan ourselves, and hopefully, join the rest of our clan soon."

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I want to suggest to go and see this woman together, but something tells me she wouldn't like that idea either. Maybe I could take a peek by myself? Just to see...

### Chapter Thirteen

Bianca

The moment I open my eyes, I feel a horrible pain on my right temple. I bring my fingers to it, pressing softly on the sore spot, and I instantly remember what happened. It was all Gala's doing. She knocked me out and brought me here.

But... where is here?

I look around, but all I see is darkness, except for the small source of light that seems to come from somewhere to my right. However, my access to that light is forbidden. There is a door, locking me in place, keeping me like a caged animal. The floor underneath me is cold and wet. The whole place smells moist. I'm probably still in the woods, a cave of some sorts. But this knowledge helps me very little, because I see that the door they've added to the cave is man-made. That means the lock is man-made as well, and I probably won't be able to open it without a key.

I get up, but it's difficult to keep my balance and remain on my feet. The pain in my temple is making it difficult for me to think. A million little stars explode in front of my mind's eye, and I need a moment or two to calm them down. Once the pain has subsided, I am able to look around my cage a little more closely.

I walk over to the bars and try to move them with the sheer force of my hands, but as

I thought, they refuse to budge. I try to reach the lock on the outer side of them, but I can't make my hand pass through the bars and reach it.

I look around for another way out, but of course, there isn't anything here. It's a cave. The only way in is also the only way out. That's usually how these things work. Now, I have to be patient and wait to see what Gala has planned for me.

Obviously, it is something convoluted. Otherwise, why keep both me and Eddie alive? She knows that he will eventually remember me. She can't keep stuffing that tea down his throat for the rest of his life.

Well, not for the rest of his life. Just until the point his body can't take any more of that poison, and it simply shuts down.

The very thought makes me shake my head. It makes me furious and depressed, and I know that I can't give in to either of those two emotions, because if I start wallowing in either rage or sadness, I will lose track of what needs to be done. I have to remain focused, because that is the only way I can help both Eddie and myself.

I remember that I managed to make him drink the tea I brewed. I don't know how much of it he actually managed to ingest, but at least it's something. It's better than nothing. Hopefully, when I see him again, the little tea that he has in his system will have cleared some of the nightshade poison that he's probably been ingesting for days, if not longer. Maybe, it will make a difference in whatever it is that both of us will need to do.

I remember Gala's threatening words. She must have a plan of some sort, a plan that will amuse her and probably serve a sick purpose in her mind. Revenge is something everyone wants to plan out slowly. I'm sure that her revenge is like that, deadly and it will probably take longer than if she were simply to kill both me and Eddie.

I can't just sit here and do nothing. It's just not like me.

Once again, I look around, but there is still nothing that could even remotely serve as a weapon, or some means of escaping this place. I walk over to the cage, and I realize that I could perhaps start digging underneath it, but the soil is too hard to dig with my hands. It would be useless. My nails would get torn off before I manage to do anything.

Finally, I slump back down onto the ground, burying my face in my hands. I try not to get discouraged. This isn't the end. I mustn't think like that. This is just a setback. Not a minor one, but still, it's something I can get out of eventually. Gala will have to release me from here, for whatever it is she needs me. Then, I will attack her by surprise, when she least expects it, just like she attacked me last night.

I try to think of all the things that give me courage, like Orien and Eddie. They are the most important people in my life. They are the ones I'm doing all of this for. There is also my mom. I only found her a few years ago. We still have so much to make up for. We still have to make so many new memories, to make up for the ones we never got to make during my childhood.

There are still so many things left undone. I know this can't be the end.

Then, something pops to mind. Gala must be around here somewhere. I doubt she would let me out of her sight, now that she has me as a prisoner. The same could be said of Eddie. If she is around, then he is somewhere around as well. There is a reason that she kept him hidden in the woods. If she took him back to the skin walkers, they would kill him on sight. They wouldn't endure this revenge plan of hers, with poisoning and whatever else that she has planned for us. This is a selfish endeavor, and that is why she is here on her own, doing all this.

Meaning, it's just the three of us here. We are interconnected by the ground around

us. The ground feeds all living things, the plants, the flowers, the trees, and out of all of them, trees have the deepest, longest roots. They spread energy throughout the entire forest. They share this life energy with every living thing around them.

This can mean only one thing. I could try to use my nymph powers, the ones I never had to use until now and somehow try to contact Eddie. I have no idea if it will work. I have no idea if he will understand what is happening to him, but maybe, if I manage to get him to come to me, I would be able to reach him. After all, I almost managed to do it last night by the lake. Maybe if he saw me instead of Gala when he woke up this morning, all would be different. Now, she is probably feeding him more lies and he believes her. Why wouldn't he? He doesn't know me. He doesn't trust me.

The very thought of him thinking that she is anything to him other than his worst enemy makes my blood boil. I try to calm myself down, because I know that I can use my powers only if I am completely at peace with myself. Otherwise, it won't work.

"Alright," I say silently to myself, pacing about the small chamber and shaking my hands. I flutter my fingers, making them move, so that the blood would start flowing through them more freely. I have no idea if that has any effect or not, but it's worth a shot.

I inhale deeply. I wish my mom had shown me how to do this at least once. But this was one of those things that we didn't get to try yet. Just one thing on a list of many. I guess now I'll have to try it on my own and then tell her about it. If I get the chance to do so, that is.

"Focus," I tell myself more loudly this time.

I have to focus all my conscious effort on this. I must have a clear mind. I need to be fully concentrated on what I'm doing and the person I want to summon. I only know

the basics of this. Hopefully, that will be enough.

I take a seat on the ground. I'm not sure if this will even work, but I try not to let these doubtful thoughts prevent me from even trying. I am in a cave. It would have a higher chance of working if I were somewhere outside, in the middle of the woods, underneath the clear, blue sky. Being inside a cave means that the flow of my energy might not have a clear path. Still, I have to try. This is my only choice.

I close my eyes, placing my open palms to the sides of my body, pressed against the ground underneath me. It feels cold. Much colder than I expected it to be. If I were doing this outside, the earth would be warm. It would be open to receiving my beckoning.

“Just focus, Bianca,” I tell myself loudly, with as much tenderness as I can muster.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 9:04 am*

I keep repeating Eddie's name inside my mind again, like a chant. I don't even notice that my body starts to sway slowly at first, then faster, as if it is following a rhythm that can't be heard outside of my own body. I keep all my efforts focused on this endeavor, because I know that I can only try it once. If I lose the power and the flow of my energy, it will be very difficult, almost impossible to try and do it in the next couple of days.

"That is why contacting Mother Nature should only be done if you don't have any other option left at your disposal," I still hear my mother's voice, almost as if it has come here to guide me.

I smile through my chanting and the motions. I need all the help I can get.

I need to keep this going for as long as possible. I know there is no way of knowing whether Eddie will even hear me, if the flow of my energy will eventually find its way to him. However, that doesn't matter. This is the only thing I can do right now, and I will keep doing it for as long as I can.

I keep imagining him with the eye of my mind. I keep remembering all the things I love about him, of which there are so many. It is hard to pick just one. So, I allow my mind to get flooded by all the things that made me fall in love with him.

Suddenly, a strange warmth emanates from the palms of my hands. I don't feel the cold ground any longer. All I feel is a pleasant warmth, which seems to envelop my entire body.

I'm not sure if I should keep my eyes closed or not. My mother wasn't all that

specific on how you should go about this. She didn't even tell me whether I should be seated or not. I decided that on my own. Led by this instinct, I open my eyes and look down by the sides of my body. I notice that there is a faint light coming out of my hands and piercing through the very ground underneath.

I can't help but smile. Is it possible that this is working?

I can't stop. I have to remain focused on what I'm doing.

Fearing that looking at the light might distract me, I close my eyes and remain focused on Eddie's face inside my mind. I banish all thoughts of what happened in the previous couple of days, choosing instead to remember only the good times, reminding myself that there are still more good times to come in the future. We just need to survive this, together.

My body feels electrified, filled with a strange power I've never felt before. I fear that it might become difficult to control, but I decide to trust my inner feeling. I am strong enough to be able to do this. My love is strong enough to beckon him to come to me and recognize me.

Suddenly, something grips at my insides, and for a moment, I feel like I can't breathe. Then, just a brief moment later, that grip loosens. The light disappears, as if all of it has somehow flowed out of me and into the ground underneath. Darkness envelops me and all is silent once more.

I look around, breathing heavily, as if I've just ran a marathon. There is no sign of what I've just done. The world around me has not changed, and yet, I feel like I've done it. He will come to me. I'm sure of it.

I just have to be patient.



With those thoughts in mind, I keep staring at the light oozing into the cave, counting the minutes.

## Chapter Fourteen

Edmund

She needs to die. What else did you think was going to happen to her?

Gala's words keep coming back to me. I honestly didn't know what was going to happen. Maybe I was simply pretending that I didn't know. I can't tell any longer. Everything inside my mind is a tangled mess of thorns, and I can't make any sense of it.

To make things even worse, I have no idea what is going to happen now. I am no smarter than I was days ago, or weeks ago. My memory is still as blurry as it was then, and because of it, I feel completely lost. I don't know who to run to. If I try to run to myself, I fear that I am as much my own enemy as everyone else is.

Even though my memory is gone, somehow the basic rules of life have stuck with me. One never turns one's back on one's clan. Never. And an enemy is always the enemy. No matter what.

I tried asking her about this woman again, but I can tell that Gala isn't all that keen on discussing it in more detail. She told me what she feels I need to know and that's enough. Only, I don't agree. It isn't enough, because my own mind is telling me that something isn't right.

The following night something very strange happens. My body starts to feel strange, as if something is happening to it, but I can't quite figure out what. I hear my name being called out, but at the same time, I don't know who is doing the calling.

The animal inside of me instantly becomes restless, almost furious that all of this is happening, and I don't know how to react. What is the right reaction when you feel like someone has stolen your past and with it, your present and any possible future you might have had?

I hear my name being called out again. Maybe if I just let go and stop thinking. I've been wracking my brain all this time, trying to remember. Maybe I should have simply let it all go. Like shadows. You can never catch them, they always keep running away from you, but if you turn your back on them and walk in the opposite direction, they will follow you until the end of the world. Maybe I should have just stopped trying so damn hard.

Suddenly, an unexpected bout of nausea catches up to me. Something from the very pits of my stomach rushes back upward and I immediately jump up from the bed, lowering my head down to the ground, expecting something to come back out. Breathing heavily, I realize it's a false alarm. Spit accumulates in my mouth, but I swallow it up.

I still feel disoriented and nauseous. I try to get up. I feel like a caged animal, pacing about between the bars, inside its confinement, unable to find a way out. Then, I realize something. I look at the door. I need to go out. I can't stay inside any longer.

I head to the door, driven by some inner guide. I go outside, into the night. I expect Gala to step in front of me and order me to go back inside. I wouldn't do it. Fortunately, she is nowhere to be seen. I am alone. I start walking, although I have no idea where I'm headed. I am listening to that inner voice and the way it's calling out my name, beckoning me to come. I have managed to put all my conscious thoughts to sleep. They haven't managed to help me all this time. All I can do now is listen to something that is inside of me, yet it seems to come from outside, from someone else, someone who has been looking for me all this time.

I keep walking straight, into the woods. At first, I think that I am being led back to the lake. It seems that is where all this has started, and it would be only suitable that it all ends there. But I notice I'm not going in that direction. I am nearing a cave.

I stop in front of the entrance, lingering there. Suddenly, it all becomes clear. The woman is being held a prisoner here. The woman by the lake. The woman who attacked me there, almost killed me and fed me poison.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 9:04 am*

Initially, I want to just turn around and go back the way I came from. I didn't know I would end up here. I don't belong here, with her. Yet, something is preventing me from leaving.

I stay by the entrance, not daring to go inside. I don't know what I would do. After everything that Gala has told me, it would be natural of me to want to attack her. But again, I feel like I don't know the whole story. I feel like I'm missing an integral part of not only the story, but of my life. And without it, I can't act. I dare not act, because I might make a terrible mistake.

"Eddie?" I hear her call out to me. Her voice is real this time, not only in my mind.

I swallow heavily. I know she wants me to come closer, but I stay put. I choose to stay in the darkness, where she can't see me, although she obviously knows that I have come here.

"Please, talk to me," she says again, in a pleading tone of voice.

I don't know what we would talk about. Yet, suddenly, my lips part. There is a desire to speak to her. There is curiosity about her, about myself, about who we are to each other.

Enemies. That is Gala's word. I have no reason to distrust her. She has saved me and took good care of me. She wants what's best for me... doesn't she?

"We are all waiting for you to come back," her voice reaches me once more. "All of us."

Us. That word does something to me, it pops open a part of my mind that has been closed until now. Yet, I don't know what it is I am seeing. A little boy, with the sweetest smile, he is outstretching his arms, wanting to be picked up. Is it me as a little boy? Is it someone close to me?

Trying to remember has actually started to cause me physical pain. The emergence of this little boy inside my mind has made my headache even worse, and the pain in my temples twice as hard.

I close my eyes and try to make the pain go away, but it's impossible. I turn around, forcing myself to tear away from her beckoning voice. Staying here is not good for me. It's not good for either of us. It is difficult to leave, when my body refuses to listen. It wants to stay. My lips want to talk to her. My body wants to approach her even closer.

It takes all my conscious effort to pull myself away from her voice, which is like a siren song, calling out to me so lovingly. Just when I'm finally able to do that, I turn around and stumble onto Gala. I stare at her, trying to figure out if she is angry that I have come here, but her face is expressionless. She is waiting for me to say something, but there is nothing to say. So, she starts talking first.

"I knew it was just a matter of time before she tries to reach out to you," Gala tells me. "Enough time has passed already, anyway. We need to bring this to an end, finally."

"Bring what to an end?" I ask.

"You'll see," she tells me, walking past me and approaching the locked door to the cage. Before she does anything to it, she stares at me one more time. "This will be your chance to prove your loyalty, Eddie."

I frown, not understanding what she is referring to. “You know where my loyalty stands, Gala. It is with my clan.”

She smiles mysteriously. “Ah, yes. Your clan. That is the million dollar question, isn’t it? Who is your clan? Who do you vow allegiance to?”

She slowly proceeds to walk over to me, taking me by the hand, then she unlocks the door. I look at the two women. They are both silent now, expectant, although I have no idea what either of them is expecting of me. One has been telling me things, the other has been whispering to me silently.

Somehow, I have been in touch with both of them, and I still can’t be completely sure which one of the two is my enemy and which one is my lover. I should know this. My mind may not, but my heart should know this, without any room for error. Then, I remember that I have been poisoned, maybe by both of them. Or maybe, one poisoned me, and the other tried to heal me... but which one?

Pain shot through my temples again, horrible and unapologetic. I grab my head aggressively, pressing at it, but no amount of pressure can diminish the pain.

Gala leads me inside, and now, the three of us are standing face to face. I expect the other woman to say something, to come clean, to accuse Gala of something, but the woman is silent. She isn’t saying anything. Just like me, she is waiting.

“I know you still don’t remember much,” Gala continues, looking at both of us, standing in the middle, at a safe distance from us both. “But I can’t wait any longer. We need to go back to town. We need to help our clan, the ones that are left, anyway. However, in order for me to take you back, I need to know that you are truly loyal to us, despite the fact that she has tried to poison you against us, your own clan.”

“That isn’t true!” the woman finally speaks up, loudly and determinedly.

“Shut up!” Gala shrieks at her aggressively. Something inside of me roars. I want to protect her, but Gala’s order is loud and clear. “You will prove your loyalty to me, Eddie, by killing her. It is as simple as that. If you do not kill her, I will take it as your betrayal, and I will kill both of you myself.”

Her words are too harsh. I can’t believe she actually means it. Would she really kill us both?

The look in her eyes assures me she really means every single word of it.

I look at the woman. She has taken a step back, but there is nowhere to go. Behind her, there is only the cave wall. The only way out is behind Gala, and I know she won’t let either of us leave, until she gets what she wants.

Gala looks at us intently, waiting. She seems impatient. There is a wicked gleam in her eyes. She wants to see bloodshed. She wants to see someone die.

I turn to the woman. She is trembling. I know she feels like she is outnumbered here. She thinks I will attack her. That is my first instinct, but there is something else. The voice of a little boy inside of my head is urging me not to, it is telling me to stop and look at her, to truly look at her and recognize her for who she is.

“I’m waiting.” Gala shouts and her voice echoes all around us. She is growing more and more impatient with each passing moment.

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I could attack her. I could attack the woman. The choice is mine.

Whatever I decide, it will change my life forever.

### Chapter Fifteen

Bianca

My magic didn't work. It managed to bring him here, but it didn't make him remember anything. I feel like all is lost. I failed him. I tried my best and I feel like it still wasn't enough.

He is too much under Gala's influence. Too much time has passed. She has been feeding him nightshade for too long, and I can see that he is slowly starting to lose grip with reality. His mind is erasing his memory little by little, and I'm afraid that he might not be able to find his way back, even if we do manage to reach him in time.

He is in pain, which means that his body is slowly shutting down. The poison is too strong, too deadly. I knew this. The healer explained that this is one of the deadliest poisons known. Whoever resorts to it, wants quick and painful results. Even if he does manage to remember everything, I wonder if the tea I brewed will be enough to heal him from all the poison that he has already ingested.

I try not to allow these depressing thoughts to take over me. There is always a chance, even when we least expect it. It is always darkest before dawn. I have to believe that there is still a shred of himself left inside. He hasn't been completely poisoned. She could have made him forget everything, even me, but she could never make him



forget about his own child. That is my last resort, but I have to wait for the perfect moment.

“What are you waiting for?” Gala shouts, and the aggressiveness of her voice makes the whole cave implode with noise. “Kill her!”

I listen to her words, and they fill me with dread. I look at Eddie. He is standing in between. I can see that he’s not sure which way to turn. That means I still have a chance to remind him of everything. As for healing him of the poison, I will think of that later. Right now, I need him to remember.

I have a plan. I don’t know if it will work, but it’s my only chance. And I have to do it in exactly the right moment, when he is closest to me, almost ready to attack.

“You know who your enemy is, Eddie,” I tell him, although I’m sure that my words at this point mean nothing to him. They can’t penetrate the veil of lies and deceit Gala has built up inside of him. “If you think that is me, then come and get me.”

I take another step back, feeling the back of the cave behind me. There is nowhere to run. If he really attacks me, I will try to defend myself, but I know I stand no chance against the vampire king. He can tear me with one swing of his hand.

“You are a vampire,” I tell him. “Show yourself to me!”

His eyes widen at my words. He turns to Gala. She shakes her head.

“She’s lying!” she tells him. “You are not a vampire! You are a skin walker! But you’ve been poisoned, and you can’t shift. Don’t listen to her! She is just trying to confuse you! Focus on what needs to be done! Kill her! Kill her now!”

His eyes are on me again, confused and infuriated. What lies has she been feeding

him?

I realize that she doesn't care about any of us, other than herself. This has been her plan all along, to have him kill me, and then she would probably kill him herself, which would be easy, because he has already been weakened by the poison.

"Come and kill me then!" I echo her words.

I'm deadly afraid of having him close to me, of having his hot breath on my neck, because he could kill me easily. I know he could. But I'm hoping I would manage to reach him by the time he tried.

He slowly approaches me, his every step calculated. I dare not move. I dare not take my eyes off of him. He is so close to me now that I can feel his hot breath on me.

"What are you waiting for?" Gala screams. She has lost the little patience that she had. I suppose she didn't really imagine it like this. She probably thought that by the time this final chapter played out, Eddie would be too weak to resist the poison and the lies she's been feeding him. She expected him to attack me on sight. But he isn't. He is fighting this order. I can see it in his eyes. He doesn't want to attack me.

At that moment, he lunges into me, his hands grabbing at my wrists, his thigh between my legs, pushing me against the wall. I am rendered motionless. I can hear his heavy breathing. I can see the look in his eyes, staring me down. A part of him wants to do as he is told. It is the part controlled by her, the part that has poisoned who he truly is.

But another part of himself, the real Edmund, is still in there, fighting to come to the surface. I can see that he wants to come back to me.

I don't know if this is the perfect moment that I've been waiting for, but I guess it's

as perfect as any other. I try to lean closer to him, but it's difficult because he is controlling my entire body.

"I am here, Eddie," I whisper to him as softly as I can. "I see you. I hear you. I can tell that you want to come back to me, but you can't. I know it's hard, but you have to fight."

He listens to me. I try to see whether there is any sign of a recollection in his eyes. Still nothing. He is still deciding what to do.

He is slowly starting to bare his teeth. I have to tell him now.

"Orien is waiting for you," I finally say our son's name. "He's been asking me about you every single day and I keep telling him you will come back."

Suddenly, he stops. His grip on my wrists loosens but only a little. His canine teeth withdraw back into his jaw. His head tilts. He pulls away from me, but only a little. However, it is enough for me to see that something is happening. Something is changing.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 9:04 am*

“Your son, Eddie,” I keep talking, completely sure now that the only thing that could bring him back is his son. “He must be in there with you somewhere. You just lost him. Now, you need to find him again. And when you do, you will find me right there next to him.”

Eddie shakes his head, as if he’s fighting something, something that is threatening to overpower him. He completely lets go of my wrists. That wild animal is completely gone from his eyes. In its place, now I see the man I love, the man who loves me back. He doesn’t have to say anything. I can see it all.

Now, he turns to Gala, with me behind his back. He is defending me with his body, although he doesn’t need to. I will gladly join him in this fight.

It takes Gala only a moment to realize that she lost control in a flicker of a single moment. I place my hand softly on Eddie’s shoulder. I expect him to shudder, to react in some way, but he doesn’t. He absorbs my touch, as I take my place by his side. We’re facing her now, together. She knows she doesn’t stand a chance.

“You were so close, weren’t you?” I ask her, enjoying the look of incredulity in her eyes.

I see her clenching her teeth close together. Her fingers have rolled into fists.

I want to kick her ass so badly, and with this intention in mind, I take a step towards her, but Eddie prevents me by extending his arm.

“No,” he says.

Both Gala and I look at him, not only surprised but shocked.

He shakes his head, not taking his eyes off of her.

“What she has done is below any of us,” he explains. “Vampires would never stoop so low as to do what she has done, and I know that skin walkers also have more honor than to try and kill someone in such a vile, despicable manner.”

I expect Gala to say something, but she doesn't. She knows she's lost. She is merely waiting it out to see if we will let her go, and from the looks of it, Eddie plans on doing exactly that.

“You can't possibly mean we should let her go,” I ask, incredulous.

“That is exactly what I mean,” he confirms. “We will make sure that the skin walkers find out what she has done. Better yet, what she has tried to do, and I'm sure that they won't take kindly to this.”

I realize he's right. There is a reason why she has been doing all this on her own, without involving anyone else. The war that has been raging on between vampires and skin walkers is an unending one, but both sides always played fair. At least, they tried to. This is the first time I've ever heard of something so despicable as to try and kidnap the vampire king only to poison him into utter forgetfulness, so he could kill his own queen. It's so disgraceful it's almost laughable. I know that the skin walkers in her clan will think the same way.

“You have shamed your clan and yourself with your actions,” Eddie says. “I would allow Bianca to attack you, so you could fight for your honor, but you don't deserve that.”

“I— “ Gala wants to say something, but Eddie doesn't let her.

“Silence!” he shouts angrily at her. “Your time for speaking has come to an end. In fact, I don’t want to see you here. Go and don’t look back. I don’t care where you end up, but if I ever see you again, I will kill you with my own bare hands.”

I instantly remember that this is something we have already told her. She didn’t learn her lesson then. She probably didn’t learn it now. But I know why he doesn’t want us to attack her. It is two of us against her. It isn’t fair. Eddie has always been about fairness, and I’ve always respected that about him. He wants to be remembered as a just ruler, not someone who killed skin walkers and whatever other creature stepped in his way.

“This isn’t over,” Gala hisses as she slowly retracts.

“No, you’re wrong,” I tell her. “It is over for you. As for us, we will go back to our beautiful lives and live happily, while you’ll go and crawl under some rock, where no one will ever find you.”

She has nothing to say to that. I suppose there isn’t anything to say to that. She gives us one last mean look, then turns around and runs out of the cave. Both Eddie and I listen to the sound of her footsteps, until we can hear them no longer.

Then, we turn to each other and fall into a loving embrace.

## Chapter Sixteen

Edmund

I don’t know how, but it all comes back to me. It’s like I’ve been in the dark for the last couple of days, and the moment Bianca mentioned Orien’s name, light appeared, clearing away all the doubts and suspicions. Finally, everything is clear now. I know who I am.

We remain like that, embracing, for a long time. When we let go, I look at her as if I'm looking at her for the first time ever. I notice every little thing about her, from the incredible blueness of her eyes and the soft little freckles on her nose, to the way she's smiling when she sees me. I just can't stop drinking in the sight of her.

"I can't believe I allowed myself to get sidetracked," I tell her, feeling incredibly sorry for what I've almost done.

She shakes her head at me. "None of this is your fault," she says.

"How is it not?" I ask.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 9:05 am*

“Gala caught you when you were alone,” she explains. “She knew exactly what she needed to do to make her wicked plan work.”

“But I can’t believe I forgot who I was,” I repeat, still incredulous that someone’s mind can be erased just like that, so easily. “I am so sorry for everything that I’ve done and caused. Can you ever forgive me?”

I take her into my arms again and pull her close to myself, inhaling her sweet scent. At that moment, an intense pain takes hold of me. It almost breaks me in half. I immediately let go of her and fall down to the ground, twitching uncontrollably.

“It’s the nightshade that Gala has been giving you,” Bianca tells me, lowering herself down to her knees, next to me.

I feel her hands on my body, trying to soothe me, and I’m grateful for her presence. The pain is excruciating, but at least it comes and goes in tidal waves. When the onslaught stops, I can breathe more easily.

“The tea,” I tell her, trying to inhale deeply through the pain. “She’s been giving me tea all this time, and I... I don’t know why I kept drinking it.”

“Because you trusted her,” she says softly, taking my hand into her own. “Don’t beat yourself over it. Now, we must get you back home and I must make you my own tea. The healer I went to see told me that I needed to give it to you several times, before you’ll notice some improvement.”

“Take me home,” I tell her, pressing my free hand to my stomach.



“Come,” she says, getting up. She allows me to lean against her, by putting my arm around her shoulder. “Can you walk?”

“Barely,” I admit, sensing that another onslaught of pain is about to hit me at any moment. “I’ll try to walk through it.”

“You won’t be able to,” she shakes her head at me, sounding increasingly worried. “I’ve seen the pain you’re in. I’m afraid that it might only get worse from here on. That’s why we need to get you back home as soon as possible and pour copious amounts of that tea into your system, to flush out the poison as soon as possible.”

“That is easier said than done,” I tell her, trying to remain in a good mood, even through the pain.

We try walking out of the cave slowly. She is doing her best, but I realize that the more I move, the more painful my entire body feels. I will be able to get to a certain point, but I doubt I’ll be able to walk all the way there. The last thing I want is to be a burden to Bianca and force her to drag me all the way there.

“Wait,” I tell her, bending down and breathing heavily. “I don’t think this will work. You have to go ahead without me.”

“What?” she sounds shocked. “No! I’m not leaving you here! No way!”

I smile at her. I know that the thought must be unimaginable to her. After everything that just happened, asking her to leave me behind is unthinkable. But that’s how this must go. I see no other way. I can barely move my legs. I feel like they’re slowly becoming unresponsive.

“Just hear me out, OK?” I tell her, trying to sound as calm as possible. “I also don’t want you to leave without me. We’ve been apart for long enough. But it’s becoming

harder and harder for me to walk.”

“Then, we’ll walk while you’re capable, and when you can’t, then– “

“No,” I cut her off. “I will wait for you here. You run back to town and get Kano. Get everyone you can, then come back for me. I won’t go anywhere.”

She stares into my eyes, and I know exactly what she’s afraid of.

“What if Gala comes back?” she asks. “What if she brings back more skin walkers? You won’t be able to fight them off, not in this condition. I’m telling you, I don’t think it’s a good idea to leave you. We have to stay together.”

In a way, she’s right. If Gala does come back and decides to attack me in this condition, I won’t be a good match for her. I’ll be weakened by the poison that’s coursing through my veins.

“I doubt that will happen,” I tell her. “And besides, we’re wasting time discussing this. Just go. I’ll be fine.”

As soon as I say that, the most painful onslaught takes place, shearing my mind in two. I can barely function through it. I hear Bianca calling out my name. I feel her hand clasping mine, and it’s somewhat of a solace, but there is nothing that can ease the pain that is inside of me, burning like hot coal. I feel like ripping my own insides out. That’s how much pain I’m in.

I lower myself completely to the ground, wrapping myself up into a fetal position. Bianca lies down next to me. My entire body is shivering. Her hands are on me. I hear her voice trying to soothe me.

“It’ll be fine, Eddie,” she murmurs softly. “Just stay with me. Don’t fall asleep.”

She seems to know exactly what is happening to me. Through the pain, my body seems to be giving up. My mind is becoming sleepy and it's becoming more and more difficult to stay awake.

“Eddie?... Eddie?...”

I hear my name, and then suddenly, everything goes dark. I don't know how long I was unconscious, but when I manage to open my eyes again, I am resting on the back of a horse, which is moving slowly. I try to lift my head, but everything hurts.

“Relax,” I hear Kano say. “You're in good hands, Eddie.”

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 9:05 am*

The sound of his voice is more than I can take. I am swept over by a sudden sense of peace.

“Bianca?” I murmur through the pain, allowing my body to slump down onto the horse.

“She ran all the way back to get us,” Kano explains, stopping the horse.

“I didn’t want to, but I had to,” I hear her voice as well. She’s here. Of course, she is. She wouldn’t leave me, especially not now. “We have to take you back quickly now. I’m afraid you’ll keep losing consciousness until one last time, you won’t be coming round.”

“Don’t think like that,” Kano tells her.

It is difficult to keep my eyes open. I try to tell them that, but then, Kano pats me on the shoulder.

“Save your strength,” he instructs me. “You still have a long battle ahead of you. You’ll need all the strength you have left in you.”

I try to nod, but even that is difficult. Just as I’m about to say something, I black out again, and the world is gone.

What happens afterwards is something I can’t explain. I open my eyes and I am no longer in any familiar place. In fact, this is a place I’ve never seen before. A dark and ominous place, darker than anything I’ve ever visited.

It is a deep, dark woods and I can't find my way out. I try calling out Bianca's name, then Kano's, but there seems to be no one else here but me. Occasionally, ghosts fly past me, releasing strange sounds that make me shiver and jump with fright. They are nameless and faceless, disembodied and frightful. I have no idea what they are trying to do as they fly past me, making these strange noises.

I keep looking around, trying to find a way out of these woods. Everything is dark. At least I am not in pain any longer. But that serves little purpose because I seem to be stuck in this place, which I don't even know what it is.

I look up, expecting to see the skies and the sun. Maybe they will guide me out of this limbo. But above me is the same darkness as the one that surrounds me. I am lost.

Suddenly, I hear a strange woman chanting. Her voice is making melodious sounds, along with words which don't seem to make much sense. I look around, but I can't figure out where the voice is coming from. Almost as if it's coming from all sides, attacking me, not letting me be.

"He needs to find a way out," I hear the voice say.

I look around, half-expecting to see a witch of some sorts by my side, but I am alone in this dark limbo. There is no one here but me.

"What if he can't?" This time, the voice belongs to Bianca.

I open my mouth in an effort to call out to her, but I have no voice. I press my hand to my lips, in shock. What kind of sorcery is this? Have I lost power of speech?

"Then... all is lost..."

Those are the last words I hear. They belong to the other woman, the one who was

chanting. I listen, in an effort to hear them speak again, but I am alone. I get this instinctual urge to run, and that is what I do. I keep running in one direction, fighting my way through the dark undergrowth, using my hands to keep branches away from my face. I feel like I've been running for hours, when I finally stop, and to my complete and utter shock, I realize I've run a full circle. I'm in the exact same place where I started from.

I shake my head, unable to believe this. Suddenly, everything starts to spin around me, the woods, the ground beneath my feet, the sky above my head. It all blends into one dark image, and I have no idea what it is I am looking at any longer.

Everything feels bleak. I feel hopeless. I expect that onslaught of pain again, but it doesn't come.

I try to think of Orien and Bianca. They are the only two people more important than anything and anyone else. They are more important than me. Even if I have to stay lost in this dark hellhole for the rest of my life, trying to figure out how to get back to them, I will never stop trying. I will never forget them again.

I am furious with myself for allowing something like that to happen. If only I didn't drink that tea. If only I didn't believe every single lie that Gala was feeding me... But I did. This is all my fault, and I know I have to be the one who makes it right.

Just... how? I can't make it right from here. I have to find my way out and go back to my family, to the ones I love. I have to return and make things right.

Make things right. Make things right.

These words keep repeating inside my mind again. My eyes are closed. I am lying down.

“He’s coming round!” I hear Bianca say. I feel the soft warmth of her hand on mine.

I try to open my eyes. It is difficult, but I finally manage to do it. The light is too bright. It is coming from a fire in the corner of the room, which I don’t recognize. I don’t know where I am. But Bianca is here. Kano is behind her.

She smiles at me, her eyes filled with tears.

“You’re back,” her voice is laden with love and tenderness. “You found your way back to us.”

### Chapter Seventeen

Bianca

“Don’t try to get up,” I tell him, putting my hand gently on his chest and keeping him in a lying position.

He looks at me, then around. He doesn’t recognize the place. Of course, he wouldn’t. I smile reassuringly.

“We had to take you to the healer,” I explain. I’m guessing that all these dried plants and herbs hanging from the walls might make more sense now, in light of that information.

“The healer?” he echoes.

I’m not sure how much he remembers. Hopefully, everything, but the healer has already told us that it’s possible that the poison might have... eaten up his memories, and some might not even return to him. To be quite honest, I wouldn’t mind if Eddie forgot everything that has happened in the last couple of days. We would both be better off forgetting all that. But I doubt we’ll be that lucky.

“You have to drink this,” I offer him a cup. I have to admit, it smells much worse than the tea I made him. “It will help you.”

He props himself up a little, then I bring the cup to his lips. He takes small sips, grimacing at the taste. When he’s done, he lies back down. He looks exhausted. His



body has taken quite a toll and I know it will take a long time for the poison to be completely cleared away. We have to be patient and take good care of him. That is what we plan on doing. All of us.

“It tastes like crap,” he tells me.

I chuckle. “I can imagine just from smelling it. But you’ll be drinking it, no ifs, ands, or buts.”

“Yes, darling,” he replies, chuckling as well. He leans upward to me, looking around with distaste. “Say, how long do I have to stay here?”

“You’ve been here two days already,” I tell him, much to his shock. “I should think that’s enough.”

“Two days?” he repeats. “I was out for two days?”

At that moment, the healer appears from behind bead curtains, which make a strange rattling noise. We all look in her direction.

“You were lucky it was only two days,” she tells him, her voice low and almost a whisper, as if she’s talking about something no one else but us should hear. “Some get lost in the memory limbo and never find their way back. In fact, I know someone who is still lost in there.”

“Still lost?” I ask. “But... how?”

She shrugs. “His loved ones take care of his earthly body, but his mind isn’t here. It is... somewhere else. In the memory limbo. And no one can help him return from that place, but himself.”

“You mean, like a coma?” I wonder, shuddering at the thought that this same thing could have happened to Edmund as well.

“Yes, I think that describes it perfectly,” she nods, her face calm just like her voice, but I can hear deep hurt in those words. Whoever she is talking about was someone dear to her. That much is obvious. Then, she quickly changes the topic. “Well, I think two days was enough having you here. Perhaps you’d want to go home.”

Before I can say anything to that, Eddie answers. “You are reading my mind.”

He tries getting up, but he’s still weak.

“Don’t worry, we’ll help you,” Kano says, approaching the bed. “I’ve got my horse here. We’ll take him back to town easily.”

“Just remember,” the healer says. “He’s not out of the woods yet. You have to be by his side the whole time. He needs to rest a lot. No strenuous activity. No exertion. Keep him away from too much excitement as well. Both his body and his mind need to rest, so he can fully heal.”

“I understand,” I nod. “I will take good care of him, I promise.”

I smile at him, taking him by the hand.

“I’m sure you will,” the healer nods, giving us a sympathetic look. “If you need my help, you know where to find me. Oh, and do send my regards to your mother. Tell her she can come and visit me without needing something, you know?” She doesn’t seem to say it with any ill will in mind, so I smile.

“I’ll tell her that.”

Eddie props himself up in bed, inhaling deeply. Kano offers him his hand, for support. Together, they get Eddie out of bed slowly.

“Can you stand?” I ask him.

“I’m dizzy,” he admits. “But I feel better than before.”

“That’s good,” I reply. “You’ll recover in no time. We just have to get you home.” I turn to the healer, thinking that she is still standing behind me, but she is nowhere to be seen, as if she’s disappeared into thin air. I look around, but she’s gone. She couldn’t have vanished, could she?

“She’s gone,” I say, incredulous.

“Seems so,” Eddie agrees.

“I wanted to thank her,” I say, still shocked.

“I’m sure she knows you’re grateful for what she’s done,” Eddie reminds me.

“Yes, but...” I keep looking around, half-expecting her to appear from a corner, but it’s just the three of us there. I sigh, realizing that she probably left not wanting to deal with us anymore. I have to respect that.

Kano and I help Eddie out of the hut. It’s a bright sunny day, almost a little too bright.

We help Eddie onto the horse, and I’m happy to see that he can actually sit on it this time, instead of lying sprawled on it, half-unconscious. Kano takes the reign, and we slowly head back to town. From what I can remember, it should take us around two hours.

During this time, I mostly listen to Kano update Eddie on what's been going on in his absence.

"You did good, both of you," Eddie tells us. "Not telling the rest of the clan that I'm missing. It would only breed panic."

"That's what Bianca suggested," Kano replies. "She arranged everything perfectly and kept control of everyone."

Eddie gives me a mischievous look, one of those I missed more than anything else.

"I knew I chose the right vampire queen for myself," he says, winking at me, and I can't help but chuckle.

Kano continues talking, just reminiscing about the good old days. I know why he's doing it. He wants to help Eddie remember everything. I also have a plan of helping him remember, but I'll keep that for when it's just the two of us.

The two hours pass quickly enough, and we finally see the outlines of our home town. We stop for a moment. Eddie gazes at it, as if it's the most beautiful sight he's ever beheld.

"Feels good to be home, guys," he says, not taking his eyes off of the houses in the distance.

"I know someone who will be very happy to see you," I tell him.

Our eyes lock. For a moment, I can see a single tear glistening in there. Eddie usually isn't the kind to show his emotions, especially not in such a way. But we've survived so much. We went to hell and back. It's impossible not to become emotional after such an ordeal.

We continue down the path, and within the next fifteen minutes, we stop in front of our house. Kano helps him down from the horse.

“If you feel well enough to go in on your own, I’ll leave you two here,” Kano tells us respectfully.

“Are you sure?” I ask.

He smiles, nodding. “This is a family moment.”

“But you are family as well,” I remind him. “We couldn’t have done it without you.”

“I know, but still,” he assures me, patting Eddie’s shoulder cordially. “It’s good to have you back, brother. Don’t you ever scare us like that again, you hear?”

Eddie chuckles, returning the friendly squeeze. “I’ll try.”

Kano turns around and takes his horse back home, leaving us in front of ours. I take Eddie by the hand, interlocking our fingers. I want to keep touching him all the time, just to keep convincing myself that he is really here, that he didn’t get lost in that memory limbo the healer warned me about.

“He is a strong one,” she told me, making sure that these words are meant for my ears alone. “And he loves you more than anything. He came back for you. Never forget that.”

I made a promise right then and there to never forget that. Not that I would need a reminder for that.

“Are you ready?” I ask him.

“Yes,” he nods. “I can’t wait.”

But before we can take even one step, the front door suddenly bursts open, and I see my mother running after Orien, who bolts out through the door, heading straight for Eddie, with his arms outstretched at him.

“Daddy!” we hear him shout.

Eddie drops down to his knees, his arms equally outstretched, ready to welcome his son into his embrace. Orien jumps into his arms, burying his little face into Eddie’s neck.

My mom shrugs helplessly at me, probably hinting at the fact that she tried to keep him inside, to give us a moment, but it was impossible to do so. I know Orien. I know that he probably sensed that his father returned, and it is only natural that he wanted to rush outside to greet him. I smile at my mother reassuringly, as we both watch the two of them embrace each other.

When Orien finally pulls away, he gives Eddie a jokingly scornful look.

“You were gone a long time, daddy,” Orien says. “That’s not nice.” He proceeds to shake his little index finger in front of him.

We all can’t help but chuckle at the sight. He is just so adorable. Even Eddie is unable to stay serious, and can’t stop laughing, although he wants to show Orien that he understands where these words came from.

“It wasn’t nice, was it?” Eddie asks, raking his fingers through Orien’s blonde curls, unable to stop looking at him.

I know that feeling. I can’t stop looking at Eddie in that manner, that fear of never seeing him again still at the back of my mind. It will probably remain there for a while longer, reminding me of what happened, of what we could have lost. Maybe it’s a good thing. It will remind us to cherish one another more this way, because we were so close to losing each other.

“You shouldn’t do it, daddy,” Orien continues.

“I promise, buddy,” Eddie finally gives him his word. “I will never disappear like that, alright?”

“Pinky promise?” Orien asks as gravely as he could, offering Eddie his pinkie as the most solemn of promises.

This time, Eddie didn’t laugh. He was just smiling, his heart full. He offers his pinkie to Orien, and they shake on it.

“Now, we can go inside and play,” Orien finally announces.

“Strange, that is exactly what I was thinking as well!” Eddie pretends to be shocked, picking up Orien and taking him into the house.

As he passes my mother, he leans his forehead to hers, and she kisses him on the cheek tenderly. I follow them inside, closing the door behind me. The feeling is beyond description.

I listen to the sound of Orien’s laughter, as Eddie is tickling him. My mom approaches me and wraps her arm around my waist, pulling me closer to herself. I



lean my head onto her shoulder.

“It’s not over yet, is it?” she asks, knowledgeably.

I shake my head. “Not yet. He’s still not out of the woods. The healer said we should be vigilant.”

“And we shall be,” my mother nods. “But you know, we should be vigilant always. There is danger everywhere around us. And this proved it.”

I sigh. “I know,” I reply.

“Edmund is the vampire king, and you are his queen,” my mother reminds me of something I already know. “You will always be in more danger than the rest of us. You, and Orien as well.”

I don’t like to think about that, but she’s right. I remain quiet, just listening to the sound of their voices. It is enough to remind me how lucky we’ve been this time. Next time, we need to be more vigilant. We need to go about with our guard on.

“But that doesn’t mean one should live in fear,” my mother adds, smiling. “It is good to be careful, but a life is not to be led in fear.”

“So, where is the balance?” I wonder.

“It is wherever you decide it is,” she tells me cryptically. “As long as you are happy. That is all that matters.”

“That sounds so easy when you say it,” I chuckle. “It’s a bit trickier in practice.”

“You have all the ingredients of a happy life,” my mother assures me. “Just be a little

more cautious.”

“I will,” I smile, turning to her and wrapping my arms around her.

Finally, we are all home, where we belong.

### Chapter Eighteen

Edmund

It's very late at night when we finally manage to put Orien to sleep. He's been so excited to have me home, we just didn't have the heart to put him to sleep at his usual bedtime. This was, after all, a special moment. We needed to make it count.

We watch his little sleepy face for a while, then tiptoe out of his room and head towards our bedroom, closing the door behind us softly.

She watches me take off my clothes, letting them drop on the ground. Usually, she minds a mess. But not today. Today, I don't think any of us minds anything. "I think I need a shower," I tell her, smelling my armpits and making a face.

She can't help but burst into a chuckle. "Sure," she nods. "I'm too tired to keep my eyes open a moment longer."

She takes off her clothes and slides into a nightgown, allowing herself to flop onto the bed. She closes her eyes and instantly, sleep takes over. I go to the bathroom and take a quick shower. I feel like I haven't bathed in ages. I stand under the running water for a while, feeling refreshed, feeling as if the water is washing everything off of me, leaving me cleansed. The feeling is wonderful.

Several minutes later, I climb into the bed next to her and wrap my arms around her,

pulling her close to me.

“You smell nice,” she murmurs sleepily, her eyes still closed.

My hands start to caress her body. There is only one thing on my mind. I missed her so. I want to show her just how much.

“Aren’t you tired?” she asks, as I nuzzle her nose.

I brush my lips against hers softly. My body reacts immediately to her smell, to the softness of her skin. My cock springs into action, begging for release. But I don’t want to fuck her. I want to make love to her. I want to show her how much she means to me, that without her, life wouldn’t be worth living.

“Never too tired to make love to you,” I whisper, my lips finding hers.

We start kissing softly, neither of us willing to rush. She cups my face, bringing me closer, adjusting her body as well, so that we’re pressed against each other. She wants to be as close to me as possible. I know that feeling. I want to touch her at all times, just to assure myself that she is here, by my side, that she hasn’t disappeared somewhere.

The room is dark. There is only faint moonlight falling on us from the window. I open my eyes for a moment, while we’re kissing. Her skin looks pale, like fresh milk. I caress her cheeks with the tips of my fingers. She throws one of her legs over my thighs carelessly, grinding her bare pussy against me. My cock rages at the thought of entering her warm wetness, but I want to take my time. I want to savor this moment.

I uncover us both and with one swoop of my arms, I take off her nightgown, leaving her completely naked. She looks glorious, biting her lower lip as she looks at me so devilishly.

“Do you want me to kiss it?” I ask, teasing.

“Always,” she murmurs back.

“Get on top of me,” I order, lying down and she adjusts herself on top of my face.

I look up at her, as her hair pools over one shoulder. Her small breasts are full, her nipples perky. I reach my hands to caress them. She places her own hands over mine, closing her eyes, lowering her soft pussy lips on my mouth.

I spread her with my tongue, tasting her. Her juices are so sweet, so delicious. I can't get enough of her. I never could and I know that I never will. She slowly starts to rock her hips back and forth, becoming more and more wet. I hear her soft moans as I slip a finger inside of her.

“I've been wanting this for so long,” she moans again, telling me how she feels, although I know already. I am burning up, just like she is.

“I want to make you cum again,” I tell her, moving my finger inside of her slowly, as my tongue flicks over her clit. I feel my cock beading. It is begging for release. It wants to feel her wet softness as well, but I want to satisfy her like this first. I want her to cum on my mouth, so I can soak up all of her juices into me.

I add another finger, and she starts grinding harder. I look up. She has grabbed her breasts with her hands, squeezing them. Her nipples peak between her fingers, a pale pink. I want them in my mouth as well, but first things first.

She grinds against my mouth harder. I slide my whole tongue inside of her, sucking on her clit harder and harder. She groans, leaning forward, her body tightening, only to cum right on my lips. Her pussy juices leak all over my mouth and chin, and I lap all of it hungrily.

I watch her bring the tips of her fingers to her own mouth, licking them.

“Don’t stop,” she tells me. “I want more.”

She knows I can’t tell her no. I bury my face between her legs once again, sucking her pussy lips harder and harder, feeling her wet fingers around my cock, jerking it off. She knows it won’t take me long like this.

“Oh, Eddie... I love your tongue,” she murmurs, and the sound of her voice almost sends me over the edge. I keep sucking her off, enjoying the grip of her hand on my cock.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 9:05 am*

She is just as swollen and needy as me. She suddenly gets up on her knees, her pussy just above my eyes. She spreads it for me, all wet and glistening.

“I want you to fuck me,” she orders. “Look how wet I am for you...”

I grit my teeth at her voice. I wanted to take it slowly. I wanted to make love to her, but it seems she has other plans. Well, I aim to please my woman, any way she wants to be pleased.

“Sit on me, baby,” I instruct, unable to take my eyes off of her beautiful, tantalizing pussy.

She does exactly as she is told. Her pussy lips open is an invitation and I can’t wait any longer. Cum beads on my tip and I can barely control myself. I feel like my own heartbeat is all the way down, instead of inside my chest. If I wait several moments longer, my cock will burst with how full it feels.

She lowers herself down, dragging her pussy across my chest, leaving a wet trail, until she finally allows the head of my cock to go inside, just an inch. Her heat envelops me instantly. She slowly lowers herself more, taking in more of me, pulling me into herself, making us one.

I groan, feeling overwhelmed by the sensation. I grab at her hips, and she starts rocking faster and faster. Her pussy feels so tight as I dig into her fully, as she squeezes me with each thrust. My cock swells up even more inside of her. My balls feel so tight. I have to cum now.

“Cum for me,” I hear her say, as if she’s able to read my mind.

“Gladly,” I grin, unable to take my eyes off of her.

She leans closer to me, locking her lips over mine, allowing me to thrust into her from underneath. My fingers dig even deeper into her sides, pulling her down onto my cock again and again, squirting deep inside of her and filling her with my cum.

She doesn’t stop moving. She wants me to cum again. She wants us to cum together, like we always do.

“I want more,” she whispers into my ear, licking my earlobe.

I grin, without looking at her. My insatiable queen. I will give her everything she wants, and more.

We keep fucking each other this time, our bodies picking up a unified rhythm. The sensation is too intense. I can’t remember the last time we fucked this good, the last time we felt so connected on a whole other level. But I can’t think about that right now. I just want to be inside of her.

Another tidal wave hits me shortly after the first one, and moments later, her own body tenses, her pussy clenching around the base of my cock, pulsating around it. I close my eyes, seeing a million little stars explode. I can hardly breathe. My entire body feels spent. She grinds against me slowly, gently, a few more times, then leans down to kiss the tip of my nose.

Both of us still breathing heavily, she slides down off of me. In the silence of the room, I can hear her breath. I can see her beautiful chest rising and falling. Her skin is so tantalizing. I can’t stop touching her. I can’t stop caressing her.



She turns to me, and smiles. Those eyes...the way she is looking at me. It always does something to me.

“I love you so much,” I tell her, unable to look away, as if she enchanted me.

“I love you, too,” she says back immediately, as always.

She moves closer to me, the heat of her body enveloping me. I wrap my arms around her. This is where she belongs.

She inhales deeply, almost sadly. I bend down to kiss her forehead.

“Are you alright?” I ask softly.

“Mhm,” she nods in the darkness. “Just... I could have lost you.”

“No,” I shake my head at her. “I would have found my way back to you. Always believe that. No matter what happens, I will always come back to you.” I lift her chin to make her look at me. “Always.”

She smiles again. She is reassured. That is what I always want her to be.

I pull her closer to me again and listen to the soft beating of her heart. She falls asleep first. That is how it always goes. I stay awake a little after her, just listening to the sound of this house. The silence. The soft breathing. The very knowledge that everyone I love and care for is under this roof, safely looked after by me, and that is how it will always be.

Only once I'm assured of that, night in, night out, do I fall asleep. Only this time, I don't fall asleep. And Bianca's hand on my cock assures me she isn't asleep either.

“In the mood for more, baby?” I ask her, my cock immediately springing into action. I feel like I could go all night, if she wants me to.

“You have no idea how much I’ve missed you,” she says, brushing her nose against mine again. She adjusts herself in such a way that her nipples are pressing against my hand, tempting it to caress her. It doesn’t take me long to do exactly what she wants me to.

I put her on her back, spreading her legs, looming over her.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 9:05 am*

“I want to look at you this time,” I tell her. “I want to look at you all the time. You are so beautiful, and you are all mine.” My hand caresses her cheek.

“All yours,” she nods, taking my finger and sucking on it gently.

“Fuck, Bianca...” I groan, as the tip of my cock finds her hot, wet entrance again, and I slam into her desperately, promising her everything she could ever want.

### Chapter Nineteen

Bianca

“Do you think everything will be alright?” I wonder, gazing out the window.

“It’s Edmund,” my mother reminds me. “Of course, it will be alright.”

I sigh. I have to admit, I didn’t like the idea of him taking Kano and a few others to go and scout a nearby skin walker compound that seemed to have popped up unexpectedly. I know why he did it. He wanted to make sure that it doesn’t have something to do with Gala. He doesn’t want to risk having her around. Neither do I. But I’m still worried. So many things could go wrong.

Suddenly, I have a desire to ask my mother about something, something that we haven’t really been talking about a lot, because I saw that it brings her much pain. But I want to know. I deserve to know.

“Mother?” I call out to her. She seems to know immediately that I have something

important on my mind.

“What is it, darling?” she asks me, taking a seat on the couch.

“Do you hate them?” I wonder. “The skin walkers, I mean.”

She tilts her head a little as she looks at me. She obviously wasn’t expecting this question, or at least, she wasn’t expecting it formulated like that. I guess the very formulation of the question isn’t that important. It’s the essence that counts.

“It would be easy to hate them,” she surprises me with her answer. It is still difficult for her to talk about this, but I appreciate her willingness to do so. “It would be like making it into an obligation of sorts, like vampires hate skin walkers. Theirs is a fight that has been going on for centuries, and it will probably continue to be like that indefinitely. Nymphs were never in such a war with anyone.”

“If you were, it would have been easier to hate them, no?” I ask.

“Hatred is a normal reaction when someone does something horrible to you,” she explains. “In my case, they stole my loved ones from me. They murdered one and kept the other one, leaving me for dead.”

Her story is so painful. I can’t even imagine what that must feel like. Curiosity is eating me up alive, but I can’t ask of her to revisit that day. Then, she surprises me by continuing the story on her own, without even being asked to.

“I know you wish to find out what happened to us,” she tells me. “I know I told you about it before. I told you little snippets of what happened, those parts which were not the most painful to retell. But I knew that I would have to tell you the entire story one day, and I guess today is as good as any other day.”

“You don’t have to,” I urge, taking a seat next to her. I gaze deeply into her eyes, the same color as my own. I see so much pain in them. Hopefully, I can take some of it away and make her a little happier than she’s been in the past.

“You are a sweet child, darling,” she tells me with a smile. “But I want you to know your father. I want you to know that he was a brave man, who died protecting us.”

Something inside of me clenches. It is hard to keep myself from crying, but so far, I can manage. I’m not sure I will be able to once she finishes the story, though.

“We were passing through their land,” she tells me, her voice trailing off, as if we were traveling back into the past this very moment. “That is how it all started. No one told us not to travel there. We thought we would be alright if we meant no one any harm. We were wrong.” She pauses a little, mustering the strength to continue. I give her all the time she needs. After all, this is not a story one retells every day.

She glances out of the window, into the sunny day. I wonder if that day was like today. But I don’t ask. Then, she continues.

“We stopped to rest,” she recounts the events of that day as truthfully as she can. “It was a small rest stop, with carved wooden benches, under the shade of the nearby trees. Your father thought it would be a good idea and not giving it a second thought, I agreed. You know, sometimes I wonder if I just told him to keep driving, if we would have just driven through their territory without being noticed.”

I know what she’s considering. It is the wishful thinking scenario, where one wishes to have changed a single, seemingly unimportant decision, that now, in retrospect, could have changed everything.

“I kept wondering that for so long,” she explains. “I just should have told him no, let’s keep going, and your father would have said alright. But I didn’t. Instead, I

agreed with him.”

“You shouldn’t blame yourself,” I feel like this is important for her to hear. “And it’s not dad’s fault, either. You did what anyone would do in your situation. You couldn’t have foreseen what would happen.”

“I know,” she smiles, looking grateful for my words. “But it is in our nature, to always question what could have happened. That’s not a good thing. It tortures you too much.” She pauses a little again. I wonder if she is thinking about my father. She probably is. After all, this is his story. His origin story, and also the story of his demise. In her mind, she has to choose the words carefully.

“We can take a break,” I remind her. “If this is too difficult for you.”

“No,” she immediately shakes her head. “I want to do this. Otherwise, I’m afraid that I might not have the strength to start it again.”

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“I understand,” I nod, taking her hand into mine and squeezing it gently. “I’m here for you, mom.”

She smiles gratefully. “He would have been so proud of you, you know. Just like I am. Ever since you came into our lives, he couldn’t stop talking about you. You became his entire life.”

Her words warmed my heart. I listened intently.

“Even during that trip, he kept looking in the rear-view mirror, to see what you were doing with me in the backseat,” she says, reminiscing melancholically. “He would sing to you, he would make funny faces just so you would giggle. To him, your smile was the most wonderful thing in the world. Then, we stopped there to rest. At first, we didn’t see anything suspicious. We sat on those benches, planning on having a quick bite to eat and then continue. Again, I wonder, if we didn’t stay so long... Ah, I guess there is no point in thinking about the what ifs. I am here to tell you what happened, not what could have happened. They came from the woods. Slithered out, so to speak. We thought it was their spot, so we offered to move. But it became clear that they knew who we were. That is, what you and I were. They knew that a baby nymph carried great strength within itself.”

“But... they never used my strength,” I remember.

“Yes, because you forgot who you were,” she reminds me. “That was actually a blessing in disguise. I’m sure you hated not remembering, but if you knew who you were, if you were aware of your own power, they would have exploited it immediately. This way, they had to wait until you grew up and became aware of it on

your own.”

“Aha,” I nod. “Those things didn’t make sense back then.”

“They knew I would never use my powers to help them,” she continues her story. “And I wouldn’t give you up. Not without a fight. Then, that fight happened. They...” she cleared her throat as she spoke. “They killed your father first, in front of us.”

I gasp, pressing my hand to my lips. I don’t want to say this aloud, but I’m grateful that there are certain things in my past that I don’t remember, such as this one.

“Then, they tried to kill me,” she whispers. “Luckily, they didn’t realize that they threw my almost lifeless body underneath an oak tree, with open roots. I guess their own stupidity cost them that time.”

“Why?” I wonder.

She smiles. “Oak trees have a regenerating capability, especially for us nymphs, who know how to utilize it. I had a little strength left in me, which I used to soak up the oak tree’s energy with my hands. It was difficult, but I somehow mustered the strength for it. Another wandering nymph found me, and I immediately told her what happened. I wanted to come after you, but she told me that it would be a suicide mission. Even if you were alive, they wouldn’t give you back just like that. I had to agree with her. But I want you to know that I never stopped hoping. I never stopped thinking about you, wanting to go back, but on my own, I stood very little chances of finding you and bringing you back.”

“I know,” I assure her tenderly. “I don’t blame you for anything. There was a reason I needed to stay there as long as I did, because otherwise, Eddie wouldn’t have found me. I had to be there.”



“You’re right,” she nods. “There is a reason for everything, even if we don’t understand that reason or don’t like it.”

“I have started to believe that as well,” I confirm. I get close to her and embrace her. “Thank you for telling me that story, mom. I know it wasn’t easy.”

“I just wish there was a way for you to remember him, to see him and his smile, because yours is the same,” she gushes, tears streaming down her face. “In fact, I see him in Orien’s smile sometimes.”

“I am very happy to hear that,” I tell her. “And I hope that my dad’s smile might live through your other grandchild as well.” With these words, I press my hands to my belly.

Her eyes widen with shock. She looks at my stomach, then back up at me.

“You mean to tell me...” she starts, but she is too excited to finish her sentence.

Instead, I nod, smiling. “Yes. I’m pregnant.”

“That is such wonderful news!” she exclaims loudly. “Does Eddie know?”

“Not yet,” I shake my head. “I’ve been meaning to tell him these days, but there seems to be constantly something preoccupying him. Now it’s this business with these skin walkers who have popped up.”

“Don’t worry,” she assures me. “He will sort that out. He always does. As for you, you focus on your good news and tell him as soon as he comes home. He will be ecstatic.”

“I know he will,” I gush. “I can’t wait to tell him.” I look down at my belly, which is

still as flat as ever. It will probably be a little while longer, before it shows. That is my favorite period of pregnancy, when I get to caress my belly and think about the baby that I am yet to meet. “Do you think it will be a girl this time?” I wonder.

“Do you want a girl?” my mom wonders.

“It doesn’t matter,” I smile. “But I know Eddie would like one. He always said he’d like a boy and a girl.”

“Then, you send all your hopes and prayers to the heavens,” my mom advises me. “And you will get exactly what you need.”

“I think right now, I have everything I could ever hope for to be truly happy,” I admit, feeling emotions completely take over me. I let the tears flow. It doesn’t matter. I don’t have to pretend to be strong any longer. I had to do it before, before I met Eddie and before I was surrounded with so much love and protection. I can finally be myself, without any holding back, and it feels wonderful.

My mom embraces me once again, but this time, I feel like there was someone else in that embrace. Perhaps I could feel the energy of my father, joining in. With his story finally being told, maybe he can rest at peace now, knowing that he died for those he loved. That is all any of us could ever hope for.

As for Eddie, I know he will make our town a safe place again. He is our king after all. My king.

### Chapter Twenty

Edmund

Bianca looks at me incredulously. I know this is hard to believe, especially since we did not see it for ourselves. This is information that has come to us from someone else, and as such should be taken with a grain of salt. But it has come from a credible source. And now, we don't know what to think about it.

"She's dead?" Bianca asks, repeating what I've already told her.

She is pacing through the room, unable to sit down. I know how she feels. I also can't remain in one place, although I'm not sure why. We didn't kill her. We didn't send anyone after her, although we could have. She deserved it. She fucking deserved it for what she did.

"Kano told me his source is to be trusted," I repeat.

Bianca shakes her head. She can't believe it. I know that. I can't either.

"All these years, I kept thinking that we shouldn't have let her get away with it so easily," she tells me. "And all these years, she's been like a shadow over our lives."

It's been five years since the last time we've seen Gala, since the time she tried to poison me and make me fight Bianca. During those five years. Bianca and I have discussed what happened many times. I know she's been afraid of Gala coming back for revenge again, as she's proven that she doesn't let go of the past. I know this has

made Bianca fearful of our future, but I kept assuring her that they won't be able to attack us like that ever again. We took all the necessary precautions.

However, the idea of war with the skin walkers is always an option. She knows this, just like I know it. We can't stop a centuries old feud, just because we've had enough of it. It doesn't work like that. All we can do is live our lives, and hope that others will do the same. Sometimes they will. Sometimes they won't.

"I could send someone out to check this information," I tell her. "If that will put your mind at ease."

She thinks about it for a moment. Then, she shakes her head. "No."

"Are you sure?" I ask. "It's not a problem. Kano says it's a friend of his. He could guide him through the territory, without any troubles so Kano could find out if it is really true."

"No," Bianca repeats what she's already said. "I should have let it go years back. But I couldn't."

"I told you I would protect you, no matter what," I remind her, walking up behind her, and wrapping my arms around her back, pulling her close to me.

"I know you will," she confirms. "I just shouldn't have allowed her to have so much power over me, even without being actually here."

"It's OK," I remind her. "She was terrorizing you for years. It is difficult to tear away from someone's malicious influence."

"Luckily, I had you all this time," she says, lifting her head towards me.

“And you will have me for the rest of your days,” I tell her. “You are stuck with me, doll face.”

“Doll face?” she chuckles. “You never call me that.”

“Why not?” I shrug, laughing. “I figured, I should experiment a little with my pet names. Doll face sounds like something I could go for.”

She chuckles again. “Why not?” Then, she sighs. “I guess that’s a good thing.”

“New pet names?” I wonder.

“No, the fact that Gala is dead,” she goes back to the previous topic, which I thought we finished. But obviously, she still wants to talk about it.

“She gave us two good reasons to kill her,” I remind her. “We left her alive both times, which isn’t something many others would do. I’m guessing, she stumbled onto someone who wasn’t as forgiving as we are, and... well...” I shrug, not wanting to finish my thought, but it is obvious where I was going with this.

“Do you think we should have been the ones to do it?” she wonders aloud.

I frown. “Why? Did you want to?”

“No,” she shakes her head quickly, assuring me that wasn’t what she meant.

“Then, why does it matter?” I ask her.

“It doesn’t,” she says softly.

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“Think about it like this,” I try to put things in perspective for her. “That is one less skin walker we have to think about. One very devious one. We should consider ourselves lucky if she is really dead, because someone did us a huge favor. We still have to watch out for the other skin walkers, though. The war is still raging on. Just because there is a quiet moment, it doesn’t mean that shit won’t hit the fan very soon. You know this.”

“Mhm,” she nods.

“So, remember to be grateful for the little things in life, Bianca,” I try to remind her lovingly. “Thinking about Gala, what she did and whether she is really dead or not is not something we should be talking about right now. She is irrelevant. By talking about her, we are making her more important than she is.”

“You’re right,” she sighs. “She doesn’t matter. She never mattered.”

“She was always jealous of you,” I remind her. “She never knew how to love herself or to live her own life, free from the judgment of others. If anything, she should be pitied.”

“Well now, pitied,” she frowns. “She almost killed us both. I will not pity her.”

“You don’t have to,” I smile. “You can feel however you want to feel. You are entitled to.”

“Yes, and I will– “

Only, she isn't allowed to finish her sentence, because a storm of little feet comes barging in through the door. Orien is dressed like a little cowboy, with his fingers in the shape of a gun, and behind him, there is a little princess in a pink, sequin covered dress. Together, they look adorable, although their costumes seem to make very little sense together.

"Stick 'em up!" Orien shouts at Eddie, who immediately does as he's told.

"I surrender!" Eddie says, his hands in the air, laughing.

Bianca turns her attention to the princess, who walks solemnly and importantly amongst them, holding the sides of her dress as she does so.

"Are you late for the ball, madam?" Bianca asks, with a smile.

"Yes," the little girl, with a million little blonde locks and eyes the color of summer sky nods. "I am looking for my fairy godmother. Are you perhaps her?"

"Well," Bianca wonders, looking at her own clothes, a pair of pants and a short-sleeved t-shirt. "Do I need to be dressed in a funny way as well?"

"No," the little girl shakes her head. "Fairy godmothers dress as they want to."

"In that case, I so am your fairy godmother," she replies, wrapping her arms around the little girl and lifting her up in the air.

Then, all four of us run outside and continue playing. This is my favorite thing to do, when I don't have to be the vampire king, but just a loving husband and father to my two children. To be quite honest, I want more, but I could wait a little while longer. After all, it depended on what Bianca said. Her wishes and desires counted the most, always.

We all play until the sun went down, and then we play some more. Those were my favorite days, when I didn't have any other concerns in the world. Everything was perfect. Even if it was not, it would find a way to rectify itself on its own. I didn't need to do anything but love my family and be the best vampire king for my clan.

That night, after making love to my wife, I was awake for a long time. I didn't know why. Nothing was bothering me. Nothing was clenching at my heart, urging me to be concerned. Nothing was wrong.

Maybe it was simply my desire to enjoy a solitary moment of silence and contemplation, knowing that everything was as it should be. Things are rarely ordered like that in life. But I truly felt that everything was perfect. I didn't want anything to change, although I knew that this was an impossible wish.

My son would grow up. He was already showing signs of courage and curiosity, something that made a great vampire king. I was both thrilled and frightened of this moment, which was to come in the future. I had yet to teach Orien so many things about being a good king. I could only hope that me and Bianca would do a good job. Then, the rest was Orien's responsibility. He had to make choices for himself and live with those same choices.

The same could be said of Rose. My sweet little daughter Rose. I wanted to keep her by my side forever. How I wished that such a thing was possible, to keep her safe and sheltered for the rest of her life. However, that was also something that could never be.

I shift in bed a little, adjusting myself.

"Can't sleep?" I hear Bianca murmur, turning to face me. Half of her face was buried into the pillow, only one of her eyes open. She obviously didn't seem to have the same problems. If I could call them problems. They were merely... observations.



Hopes. Wishes. Not problems.

“One of those nights, I guess,” I smile, planting a soft kiss on her forehead. “When you think about life.”

“And what do you think about life, Eddie?” she wonders, murmuring gently.

“Oh, I think it’s grand,” I can’t resist chuckling. “How could it not be? With you and the kids, I have everything I could ever wish for.”

“Do you really mean it?” she asks, lifting her head up from the pillow, to take a closer look at me.

“Of course,” I nod, without a shadow of a doubt in my voice. “Sometimes, I think it’s unfair for someone to be this happy.”

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“You think you are unfairly happy?” she wonders.

“Well, compared to others,” I explain.

“I think you deserve every bit of happiness that comes your way,” she tells me.

“Because you are a good man, a kind man, and you love not only us, your family, but your entire clan and you would do anything for us. If that is not enough for you to deserve being truly happy, then I don’t know what is.”

The pure honesty of her words fills me with awe.

“I don’t know how, but you always manage to surprise me, even after all these years,” I admit, my heart is about to burst with tenderness for this woman.

“That is a good thing, isn’t it?” she chuckles.

“A very good thing, yes,” I nod, pressing my lips lovingly to hers for a moment.

We nestle together in bed, embracing each other. I may not be able to fall asleep for a while longer, but there is nowhere else I would rather spend a sleepless night, than in the arms of my beloved wife, listening to the rhythmical sound of her breathing and the soft beating of her heart, that belongs solely to me.

I don’t know what the future will bring. But I know that we will wait for it together.

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THE END