

A Gift from the Goddess by Dawn Rosewood Chapter 101

Chapter One Hundred & One

...Dead?

No... that couldn't....

I could feel my heart racing at hearing her words.

Why would she have done that? Why do something before...

Unless... unless she expected me to rush into war regardless of whether she used him as bait. Because she knew I wouldn't have any way of knowing he was alive and would assume that I would come for him blindly anyway.

'It's just another move made to hurt me.

During our stay in the cabin, I'd always avoided the topic of Aleric marking me. I hadn't wanted to tie him to me knowing I might not be long for this world, and I didn't want to put him through feeling that pain upon my death. But I hadn't anticipated for the reverse to now become detrimental to me. If only I'd actually done it, I would have known the minute it had happened and saved everyone from rushing in to save him

So then, was he actually... dead?

And the most guttural, animalistic growl then escaped my lips, forcing several people nearby to flinch and shy away from the pressure.

This wasn't how it was meant to go.

He wasn't meant to die from my own failure to save him in time.

He wasn't meant to die before me.

I could feel Thea's eyes watching me closely, feel the smirk on her face.

...And suddenly I knew what I needed to do.

My legs started sprinting towards her, pushing myself to move faster and faster. Several people were fighting between us but I didn't let that distract me, manoeuvring around them with ease without breaking stride even once.

"Aria!" I heard someone yell.

But I wasn't stopping.

This was because of her. It was her fault. She needed to pay.

I kept on running to the treeline, towards the figure waiting for me there. Nothing would be able to stop m

...Not even the ten or so rogues I could now feel following me.

They were trailing behind just close enough that they would probably catch up soon, having the advantage of four paws over me. But just before I could make it to the trees, I sensed as one of them went to lunge at my legs, trying to pull me down.

Not that this would be nearly enough against me though. Not when I could see their next move.

I effortlessly dodged their attack, countering with a dagger into their side, and their body slowly rolled to a stop two feet away.

The others became frenzied at seeing me kill the rogue and began circling around me, snapping and

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growling towards me as they waited to strike. They were now taking their time to size me up as their pack mentality kicked in.

But I didn't have time for this.

I looked up towards the trees, now close enough to meet Thea's eyes, and a mixture of frustration and desperation consumed me. I needed to get to her in time. To catch her before....

And then my heart sank as she did exactly what I feared,

With a final smirk at my situation, she quickly turned around and began running into the woods, away from the battle.

Fuck.

"Get lost already!" I yelled at the rogues angrily. "I don't want to fight you."

Clearly, they took this the wrong way though as I watched them begin eagerly approaching closer. They stupidly ignored what I'd just done to their comrade and took my words to mean that I was afraid of fighting so many of them at once.

...Something they then acted upon, attacking me under that false belief.

Without any further hesitation, they all began to charge me, trying to overpower me with sheer numbers. Unfortunately for them though, I saw every one of their attacks,

'Left... dodge... Swipe....'

I moved around all the rogues fluently, swiftly taking them out one after another.

'Drop... side-kick... stab....'

And before even five minutes had passed, soon I was all that remained. Standing in a circle of dead rogues around me, covered in their blood as I looked down with distaste. They'd failed to land even a single scratch on me.

All they'd accomplished with their lives now lost was wasting my time. Time that could have been better spent going after Thea. What a meaningless death indeed.

Aster one final look at the bodies around me, I then resumed running towards the woods, tracking Thea's disgustingly sweet scent through the trees. I could feel as the branches scratched against my skin as I ran through the foliage, not caring to take the extra seconds needed to slow down and avoid them. My mind was set on one thing, and one thing only.

Thea

"Suddenly, another clearing came into sight, opening up into a large empty plain. I could see how the trees surrounded the area in a circular way, giving it the appearance of being almost like an arena. And yet. something about this place felt familiar. Something that was impossible given I'd never travelled anywhere near here before,

However, I didn't get the chance to think on it further as I finally caught sight of Thea, standing in the centre as is waiting for me. Expecting me to attack.

...So much confidence for a woman now isolated from her army

I approached her cautiously, gauging her carefully for any sudden movement, but she remained completely still. Her demeanour was telling me to face her, wanting me to close the distance. And I obliged her request willingly

"Aria," she greeted with a smile, sending a chill through me.

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How I hated that voice. Despised the way my name sounded on her lips.

But I didn't waste time with pleasantries though. No, I decided to immediately get to the point instead. We both knew there was only one question to be asked here, one that she would be expecting from me.

"Is he dead?"

And I held my breath as I waited for the answer, my heart beating deafeningly loud in my ears.

It was as if the seconds that ticked by were actually hours, dragging on so excruciatingly slow. I could feel the heavy weight of my impatience crushing me, needing to hear the confirmation more than anything

But Thea barely reacted, appearing in complete contrast to myself.

She merely tilted her head to the side slightly, her eyes watching me closely.

"...Yes," was all she said.

And, instantly, I exhaled as if the wind had been punched out of me.

She'd answered me so plainly. As though the question was as simple as the answer she'd provided. None of our lives mattered to her, I already knew this. But it felt like salt in the wound to hear her confirmation as if we were only discussing the weather.

"...I'm going to kill you," I whispered under my breath, staring at the ground in disbelief.

I could feel as tears stung at my eyes but I barely acknowledged it.

"What did you just say?" she asked.

"I said I'm going to kill you!"

I repeated the words loudly, looking straight up at her with a burning hatred in my eyes. All I saw was red, saw my own anger and the blood on her hands. The blood of every person she had ever killed.

Slowly, I then took a few steps closer and pointed my dagger up towards her, my hand shaking.

"Enough is enough," I said. "You have taken everything from me. Everything. I don't care what it costs anymore. I'm ending this. Now."

She immediately laughed at my words, finding it more amusing than anything, and it only acted in fuelling my fury inside.

Fuelling the bloodlust pulsing through my veins.

...And, without even taking another moment to think.., I charged at her.

I saw as her hand came up in defence, looking to deflect my arm by hitting it to the side, but I read her like a book. Using my other hand, I then unsheathed a second dagger and brought it up to strike at her side, aiming for her ribs.

Only she caught on at the last second, narrowly missing the attack to leave merely a small scratch behind. It was barely more than a surface wound.

I thought that was going to be it and tried to move back to begin my next attack, but somehow she moved faster than I expected. Before I could stop her, she caught me on my retreat and kicked the second dagger out of my hand, wielding it for herself instead,

“Interesting,” she noted, finally jumping backwards to create some distance. “This dagger seems familiar. Wasn’t this the same weapon I killed your friend with?”

And a low growl escaped my lips menacingly.

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“The only death you need to be concerned about right now is your own,” I warned. “After all, the last time we fought, you had to stab me in the shoulder first to make it even.”

Her eyes immediately narrowed at that, no longer finding the situation as humorous as before.

“Don’t mock me, child...”

There she is. The real Thea. The one who speaks how she really feels. As if we’re all beneath her.

Quickly, before she could do or think anything else, I then charged at her again, moving faster and faster as I tried to land multiple different blows on her body. Pushing myself to hit her even once. And, before too long had passed, soon only the sound of our daggers colliding filled the air as they matched perfectly. With every strike, it was as though she was somehow able to narrowly dodge or redirect the attack.

...As if she could sense my moves as I could hers.

...Oh.

I looked up to see her smiling at me once more, confirming the answer I’d just come to.

She was in my head.

So, this meant... this meant the fight was basically impossible for me to win.

We were both mirroring and anticipating the other person's moves. All she had to do was wait it out until I reached my absolute limit, something dangerously close already after ordering the rogues.

"You know, I'm a little surprised, Thea," I said, straightening back up to catch my breath. "I would have thought that you could defeat me easily without cheap tricks. After all, you should possess a wealth of knowledge with endless experience... or is it that you're becoming senile in your old age and need all the help you can get?"

I watched as her smile instantly contorted into a scowl, messing up those normally angelic features.

...And it ended up being the very last thing I saw before she lunged towards me again.

Clinnnk.

Our daggers collided once more, the sound of the metal kissing screeching into the air around us.

I'd brought my dagger up just in time to defend against hers, barely with a second to spare, and it marked the point of our fight resuming.

Each person was seeing the other's move before it could land in what felt like an endless dance, soon becoming more just a game of speed. The one to win this would be whoever could execute their attack on the other first. The loser would face death.

In a battle such as this, one moving so ridiculously quickly, faster than even my eyes could properly follow, even the smallest mistake here could end in a lethal blow. I was now completely reliant on my instincts as I moved, putting complete trust in my ability to sense her attacks. Despite already being so close to my limit, I needed to hold on for a little longer.

"Die already!" she finally screamed, jumping back to rest a moment. A drawback of her mortal body, I was sure.

I had watched her becoming more and more frustrated as our battle progressed, her movements becoming progressively more forceful as opposed to swift. It was only a matter of time before she got this angry.

"What's the matter, Thea?" I asked, now smiling in my chance to gloat. "Having some trouble?"

"Oh, shut up!" she barked back. "You would have been dead a thousand times over by now if it weren't for

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my ability that was stolen from me."

"And yet you're struggling this much," I noted. "Almost as if a mortal were of equal power to you. Really makes you think, doesn't it?"

She roared out in anger before launching herself at me again, her attack now focusing on her full strength rather than speed. It was something I'd anticipated... and yet was helpless to defend against. I knew it wouldn't be possible to keep this up forever... I'd finally reached my limit,

But the fact the battle had lasted this long meant something so incredibly important. Something worth fighting for. Something that gave me hope.

Thea then quickly sent a kick directly to my chest, sending me flying backwards until I hit the ground roughly. I'd tried to cushion the fall with my arms but still ended up rolling a few feet along the grass regardless.

Ouch. That had hurt far worse than I'd expected.

I turned onto my side to try and get up but winced from the pain instead.

...Get up. Make her pay.'

It sounded weaker than normal. Apparently, I wasn't the only one losing grasp on their ability. If anything, that alone would make all of this worth it.

"...What was that?" she then suddenly asked, walking over to me.

"You're going to regret doing that," I said, ignoring her comment. "A lucky shot isn't that impressive."

She frowned and closed the distance between us.

"That's not..." and she sent another kick to my chest, forcing me onto my back once more, "...what I was talking about."

I coughed and wheezed at the air, desperate for the oxygen that had been stolen so aggressively. My whole body had already been aching so much from just the initial fall.

“What are you...,” she started, a frown forming between her brows.

And then I felt it. The rummaging in my head.

“Kill her. End her. Get up and finish the job.”

–Protect him.’

‘Don’t let her in to

““There,” she said, straddling my waist to hold me down. “...What are you hiding?”

“I have nothing to hide,” | spat, squirming under her weight.

“Don’t lie to me!”

She quickly struck me across my face, blood starting to ooze from my nose once more, and I couldn’t help it anymore. I started to laugh.

She had me. I was out of strength, defenceless and pinned to the ground. There wasn’t much use in fighting her anymore. All I could do was just delay the inevitable.

“Stop that and show me!” she demanded furiously.

Her hand reached for my neck and my mind instantly started to burn up. It was as if I could feel her sifting around inside, now far more intense than before as she looked for her answers. But despite how much it hurt, despite how much I wanted the pain to stop. I held on.

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answers.

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I screamed against the agonising intrusion but resisted giving her what she wanted,

“Show me!” she yelled,

I needed to think of something else. Anything else. Anything other than that,

...For just a little bit longer.

And so I thought about my time in the cabin with Aleric... our small moments spent together savouring his warmth. About how much I craved the inner peace he brought me and how thankful I was for his acceptance despite my mistakes. That I was both capable of forgiveness and forgiving others

“Enough!”

..And I thought about Cai and how he'd helped me to lead the different life I'd led, to become stronger and more confident. To step out of my comfort zone and to see that I was capable of being more. To challenge the roles that were chosen for me.

I felt as Thea's hand then tightened against my throat, constricting my airways, but I still held on regardless

...And I thought about Myra. About how she opened my eyes to a world beyond the walls of my Luna quarters, helping me learn to trust others again. That it was okay to be vulnerable. And about how everything is not always so black and white, that there can be another side to every story told,

...I'm sorry, Cai... I can't...—

...And I felt myself finally buckle, unable to hold her off any longer. My mind was now burning to the point that I felt as though I would melt if I resisted any longer.

“There it is,” Thea sneered, moving closer.

She finally released her grip on me as she searched my head, allowing me to cough and wheeze at the air. I'd been so close to passing out but had somehow managed to hang in there. Just a few more seconds and I would have been done for.

“... What is this? I don't understand,” Thea said quietly to herself as she got the information she was after

And another weak smile formed on my lips despite my position, knowing too well what she was finally seeing inside. Knowing that she'd been playing *my game this entire fight.

...That I was actually the bait the whole time.

“Hang on, if that's the case then.... —.”

But Thea didn't get to finish her sentence though.

No, instead she was suddenly cut off by something biting into her shoulder and tackling her off me.

A something that was large and covered in midnight black fur.

“Aleric,” I cried out in relief.

He’d made it. He was safe. He was here.

The black wolf turned its green eyes towards me protectively for just a split second, confirming for me what I already knew. There was no mistaking the size and colour of his wolf. I would have known him anywhere.

Every ounce of my being wanted to immediately run and embrace him but I fought against it. It wasn’t safe to do so. The last thing we needed was to create a distraction for Thea to act on.

But this all meant that I was right. Everything went just as I’d expected. I’d had to give myself over entirely

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to the idea he was dead, to convince Thea I was playing into what she wanted, but... but deep down I knew. No, rather, I had to believe and trust in Cai. If Aleric really was already dead then I knew Cai would have come to meet up with me sooner. There wouldn’t have been any reason for the delay in his assistance. It was something I’d had to try so hard not to think about during my fight with her.

And if Aleric was already here then this also meant....

I instantly looked up to see Cai had arrived as well, running over to my side to check on me.

“Are you okay?” he asked, wasting no time to look over my injuries carefully.

Except the minute I saw him here... everything seemed to click. As if I was having an intense episode of déjà vu.

I stared up at him strangely, unable to find the words to reply. Something... something wasn’t right here.

Cai... an arena like plain... Aleric’s black wolf....

I’d seen this once before... No, more accurately was that I’d had a vision of this.

But when...?

And, with a jolt of shock freezing up my body... I finally realised.

I'd known about this very day for four years now. I'd seen the outcome but hadn't interpreted its meaning correctly.

Truthfully, I'd never stopped to wonder why a vision would show me my past, nor why it would allow me to be a participant when I was never there. But the answer had been there the entire time. It was because I would actually be there one day.

I should have stopped sooner to look at it more clearly, but it was so long ago. A time when I barely understood what was happening to me.

Because this had been one of the very first visions I'd ever had. The one I'd repressed believing it to just be a bad memory of the past.

... This was the vision I'd had of Cai.

The one where I watched him die.

And whilst Thea's lies were one thing... my visions always told the truth.

A/N: Thanks for reading! If you're enjoying the story, please consider voting, sharing or commenting! It all helps!

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Chapter One Hundred & TWO

"Aria?"

I could remember it so clearly now.

The way Cai had feebly tried to cover the wound on his neck, bleeding profusely as the ground simply absorbed it. I'd grabbed his hand and cried into it, stroking his hair as he died. As the light in his golden eyes slowly faded.

And then there was Aleric as his wolf, walking away from his body with blood around his mouth. It wasn't because he attacked him. No, it was because he was giving us privacy. A chance to say goodbye. Naturally, the blood would have been Thea's from when Aleric bit her.

So then, what even happened to her?

In this vision, does she finally perish for good? Or... or does she merely escape?

...Is there a way to avoid his death and still win?

Confliction swirled around me inside, making me want to throw up. In this vision, I'd seen a world where Thea was absent. A battlefield gone peaceful with her presence now silenced. Was it worth taking the chance that Cai's sacrifice might mean her death?

Had I seen this from the beginning as a warning? A warning that he would need to die in order for us to succeed? Perhaps this had been a way for the universe to show pity on me. Trying to tell me that I should not get too attached after watching us become friends.

Not that it mattered now. It was far too late for that.

How cruel that I should be asked to make this choice.

...And how stupid of fate to let me of all people decide.

I grabbed Cai's shirt weakly and pulled his face down, forcing him to meet my gaze. Staring into the familiar eyes of someone I loved.

I would not let him be sacrificed. Not ever. No matter the cost.

"... Run," I croaked out, my voice still sounding hoarse,

It burned from where Thea's hand had constricted me, making it a little difficult to speak. But some things were more important than the discomfort.

'Things like saving Cai's life.

"W-what?" he said, pulling back confused. "What do you mean? We're here to stop Thea. Your plan worked, Aria. I managed to sneak into the camp and get Aleric out. Now is our chance to finish her."

But I quickly shook my head, hoping he could tell from my expression just how serious I was.

"Cai... You need to get out of here. You're not safe. If you stay here, then you're going to get kil-."

Suddenly, a loud yelping noise filled the air, cutting me off, and I sharply turned to see Aleric limping away from Thea.

...His shoulder must have still been hurt from the human weapon. Something she would have known all too well. Judging from her position on the ground, it looked as though she'd just kicked him exactly where his wound was.

I watched as Thea then got back onto her feet, bleeding from the bite Aleric had given her earlier.

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However, if it hurt her in any way, she didn't show it. In fact, the only thing she was displaying was anger.

"Pathetic," she huffed, "You're all so pathetic. Forfeit now and save yourself the additional pain. Two of you are severely injured and the third is no match for me in combat. Don't drag this out any longer

A growl then came from Aleric as he took a step forward, but his eyes betrayed just how much it hurt for him to do so. Technically, we should have had the advantage here, now outnumbering her. This should have tipped in our favour to become an easy fight only

...Only our injuries potentially made us liabilities.

If we decided to fight, knowing we were vulnerable, we may end up only getting further hurt by trying to save one another

with Aleric's shoulder and my own weakness from fighting Thea, we were both badly impaired. Perhaps the safest thing to do here was retreat and wait to fight another day. If we left now, then at the very least I meant we could stop the vision from coming to fruition. Bide our time until –

*Clink

I immediately looked back towards Cai to see he had picked up my dagger, now fallen a foot or so away. and he slowly moved to stand back up. His face was completely serious as he looked at Thea, never taking his eyes off her. A coldness filling his gaze.

"Cai, no," I blurted out in shock. I tried to quickly sit upright to grab him but was too slow, my fingertips just missing him. "You can't fight her. You need to leave."

"Stop underestimating me, Aria," he argued. "Or are you forgetting who originally trained you? This is my fight too. You're not the only one she hurt."

"That's different. Your ability doesn't work on her, remember? And your fighting skills are not even why I'm objecting. You need to leave now or she's going to kill you."

But he simply ignored me and cautiously took a step towards Thea instead, watching her movement carefully. Clearly, he didn't realise that I was referring to a vision and not just an assumption

"Cai, listen to me, goddammit!" I yelled, causing my throat to burn up.

I instantly began coughing again, only making myself appear weaker, and frantically tried to clear my airways I needed to get the words out. To explain to him before he recklessly dove into battle

“Enough, Aria,” he said, taking another step. “...I’ve got this.”

He’s going to die.

“ . Cai, no!”

But I was helpless to stop him.

He lunged towards her, dagger poised, and began his attack. A fight between two skilled warriors, albeit one was a goddess

And, truthfully, he was even doing a great job.

It was no surprise that Cai was an impressive fighter I’d known it since the moment we first met and had even seen it for myself. Where Aleric was more strength-based, Cai did a much better job at unpredictable moves. And, for someone like Thea, it was a tremendous edge, especially since she couldn’t get into his head like she could mine, or even Aleric’s. She was now having to rely completely on just fighting skills alone, something that made for a far more balanced fight.

But this was a battle that fate had already decided.

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I crawled a foot forward along the ground, moving on all fours as I weakly tried to re-join the battle, but the pain just ached through me, acting as a reminder that my condition was still very fragile. Too delicate to be of any use to Cal in a head-on battle.

“Fuck!” I hissed in frustration, cursing my own body.

I should have realised sooner and adjusted the plan. Maybe if I’d just fought against Thea harder, been better, then there would have been no need for Cai to fight right now.

If I hadn’t been so weak.

A bark then came from the side and I looked over to see Aleric staring at me. He’d been holding off joining the fight, probably thinking that Cai was capable enough to finish her off. After all, I’d weakened her during our fight and Aleric had also bitten her.

Only I knew better.

“Aleric, please,” I cried desperately. “He’s going to die.”

And I didn’t need to say anything further.

Aleric immediately sprung into action, ignoring his pain, and went in to back up Cai. I hadn’t needed to specify why or how certain I was. Aleric just did it. He did it because he trusted me.

And yet I was sending him in there, at the risk of more injury to himself or even his life.

What a despicable mate I was.

I watched in mute horror as Cai and Aleric fought Thea, saw how she was still able to avoid their moves despite her condition. And as every second passed, she increasingly became more furious. Now it was a gamble as to whether that would work in our favour or whether she could harness it to her advantage. But this was a gamble that would have lethal consequences if miscalculated. I shuddered to think what she was capable of if she truly channelled that rage.

Aleric and Cai continued their relentless attack, dodging and striking at her as they worked together as a team. Cai was acting as the main fighting force whilst Aleric played it safer, hanging back and calculating the right moments to lunge in, knowing he was limited by his injury. Yet despite their hard efforts, I was still stuck on the sidelines. Merely watching as they risked their lives for, not only me, but thousands of others,

I was... useless.

And then another thought came to me. One I had been too frantic to consider earlier.

... What if Aleric’s involvement wasn’t enough? What if... what if the outcome wouldn’t even change?

And, suddenly, Aleric yelled out again as Thea caught him mid-lunge, sending him flying backwards to the ground. I could see as blood was starting to trickle from where the skin must have split, reopening the wound the silver had originally made. An injury bad enough to keep him from getting immediately back up again.

“Aleric,” Cai yelled, stepping in Thea’s path to protect him.

He quickly brought up his dagger and prevented her from being able to finish Aleric off, saving his life by just seconds.

And, with that, a horrific realisation came to me....

...Cai couldn’t do this alone.’

He was now protecting himself and Aleric, all the while keeping Thea's attention off me. This was exactly

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what I was afraid of. The reason for why we should have retreated instead.

'He's going to die. We all will.'

With Aleric now hurt, what if I'd now changed fate to include his death as well? What if Aleric was the one who was meant to finish her off originally, possibly after an opening Cai's death created?

.... This was my fault.'

My body started to shake with fear, feeling as a pulsing sensation ran through and paralysed me.

This was it. We'd failed. This was the end.

All this pain, all the heartache...all this loss and suffering... for nothing.

Unless....

Unless. I did my duty.

There was only one reason I'd been brought back and it wasn't for redemption or revenge. It wasn't for love or friendship, nor to finally live a life I'd been deprived of the first time.

My one and only true mission had been simple from the beginning.

...I was to kill Thea.

Not a Saintess, an alpha, a wolf, nor just a girl. None of those things mattered. There was only one title applicable to me in Selene's eyes... And that was soldier.

This was my purpose. My only reason for being allowed to live.

So, why was it that I was so scared of something I'd prepared myself for?

Surviving this day didn't mean anything. Not really. My life was inconsequential, bound to a Goddess who would eventually come to claim what was rightfully hers anyway.

Aleric... Cai... they were what truly mattered. To me, Thea's death was to just cement their safety, to ensure they had a future. With or without me, I was fighting for them to live.

I closed my eyes and focused on my breathing, feeling as a protrusion attached to my shin was then brought to my attention. A reminder that I still had one more chance.

One last dagger.

Something I'd specially made just for Thea.

And, as I thought of what I needed to do, it was as though time itself began to slow around me. This was the last strategy I'd ever come up with. The one to end things here and now.

One that almost certainly demanded the steepest cost.

My options were limited, already painfully aware of my weaknesses and capabilities. No longer strong enough for combat, no longer able to use my ability. There was only one conclusion to my plan, regardless of how hard I tried to think of a way around it.

I would be able to kill Thea, I was positive of that... but she would almost assuredly take me with her.

The ultimate sacrifice would most likely be demanded in exchange for this to work. Something that felt surreal as I came to terms with what that meant...

... That today would be the day I died.

I groaned from the pain as I slowly stood up, my shaky legs threatening to buckle under me, but I persisted

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A new energy was pushing me on now as I began to walk towards the battle Like an inner peace as I accepted this ending. I was sore, sure, but what was pulsing through me now was like a whole new type of adrenaline. A drug helping me to move forward and ignore the pain.

...Just a little bit further.'

Thea's back was turned to me as she persisted in trying to attack Aleric, Cai still having to work overtime to protect them both. I could tell he was getting tired, struggling with

the demand Thea's never-ending assaults were doing to him. Any second now might be his last.

'Would they remember me when I'm gone? Would Aleric move on and find someone else one day? Would Cai ever find his real mate?'

Neither Thea nor Cai noticed me as I moved slowly towards them. I walked with a clear mind, completely numb to what I was about to do; an advantage in itself against Thea. Stealth was of the utmost importance here.

'Just a few more feet. I was close enough to smell her scent.'

Cai's eyes then suddenly caught me, seeing me approach from behind, and panic consumed his features. He must have realised what I was planning to do, recognising the risk involved.

And I paused in my spot, returning his gaze with just a small smile.

"Everything is going to be okay," | mouthed silently, hoping he understood.

... It's time.'

I readied myself and tightened my grip on the dagger, knowing what I needed to do next.

"Ari—."

Cai instantly kicked into gear and tried to jump past Thea, but she caught him before he could, stopping him in his tracks immediately. With one swift movement, she had grabbed his head in her hands and cried out in rage.

"Enough!" she roared, pulling his face forward. "Stay down already!"

And whilst i'd already factored into my plan that Cai would try to stop me, I hadn't expected what happened next.

Screaming suddenly filled the air as Cai pushed himself away from Thea, a small light bursting from their direction. A light so bright it was almost blinding.

s knew that if it was this bad from where I stood behind Thea, I could only imagine what it was doing to Cai who she was directing it at. From just his reaction alone, the pain of his sight being stolen must have been extreme.

'So, this was what Thea was capable of. This was the result of her anger being channelled.'

Whatever this was, I knew she would have had to use immense energy to achieve this. Something she was already limited on after dealing with me.

...And it meant she already believed she'd won. It was her final, finishing move. The remaining scraps of all her energy combined in one last attempt to stop Cai.

As awful as it was, I was at least grateful her attention was still directed elsewhere. A fault of her own overconfidence, as usual.

Cai began rubbing at his eyes wildly as he staggered a few steps backwards, unable to now see what was happening. An opportunity Thea saw to take advantage of.

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Chapter One Hundred & Three

The ground came crashing towards me as I fell roughly down, unable to cushion the fall. All I could do was accept what had happened and feebly cover the wound at my gut; a futile dream of survival pushing me on.

A dream I knew would die as quickly as I did.

"Aria," I heard Aleric yell, apparently having shifted back.

My breathing was shallow as my body started to become numb to the pain; a coldness slowly spreading through me.

...It wouldn't be much longer.

"Hey, there," I said weakly.

A small smile crept to my lips as I looked up at the man I loved.

His face was wrought with panic, his eyes holding so much fear in them. And yet it was his wound that drew my attention the most. There were signs of infection on the skin, surrounding where it had been split open again. Since Thea had no intention of Aleric living for long, it made sense she didn't have him properly treated. He needed to get to the hospital soon.

"You... You should really... get that looked at," I huffed out.

"Are you insane? You're the one you should be worried about right now," he yelled back. "What you did was so stupidly reckless, Aria. Why do something so senseless? Why..."

I knew it wasn't me he was actually angry at, despite his words. He was just scared because things were ending this way

I wheezed at the air, finding each breath slowly harder to take than the last, but managed to still speak.

"I did it... to save you," I whispered. "...I did it... because I love you." 1

His teeth gritted as he furiously wiped at his face, failing to completely hide the evidence of tears there. A sight I never thought I would ever see in my life. Seeing him so suddenly vulnerable only made the situation feel more real.

That this was it. This was goodbye.

Knowing there was nothing further I could do to stop my bleeding, I brought my hand up and cupped his 'cheek instead, feeling the warmth from his skin against mine.

"Hey... it's okay...", I soothed. "I always knew... this day would come and... I just want you to know... that I don't regret it. You shouldn't... either."

"Fuck, Aria," he growled and grabbed my hand tightly to lean into, covering his eyes. "I don't know what I'm going to do without you. I-I... I need you."

I would have laughed at that if I could have, knowing that he would be perfectly fine without me. Aleric would live on and become the Alpha destiny had chosen for him, I had no doubt about that. I was just happy to have finally met the man he was always meant to be. The man I was meant to have spent my life with.

Without him, none of this would have been possible. It was only because of Aleric that I was able to fight back against Thea. Only he believed in me when I'd lost my mind, and only he managed to help me see who I could still become despite my condition.

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Coapter One Hundred & Three

"You don't... need me...", I said, 'You've got it... backwards."

"Don't say that."

"Aria?" another voice then interjected, though further away.

I recognised it as Cai's immediately.

His face soon appeared next to me, trying to look down with a similar expression to Aleric's, but having trouble focusing. It seemed that Thea's attack on him was still giving him grief, the effects of the blinding still evident

"Aria... I'm sorry," he said. "I—I couldn't see. I didn't know what happened until it was too late."

But I just weakly shook my head, knowing there was nothing he could have done anyway. This had ended in the exact way I'd predicted. It was the most probable outcome.

xact

me.

"It's fine... you have nothing... to be sorry for."

He then started trying to shift me, hoping to maybe pick me up, but the jostles to my body only sent fresh waves of pain through me. Small whimpers left my lips at the movement, but I didn't have the strength to push him away.

"We need to get you to a hospital," he said desperately. "We need to get you help."

However, Aleric then quickly intervened and pushed him back.

"Stop..." he said sharply, still keeping Cai at bay with one hand to his shoulder. "It's done. We can't... she won't make it. You're only going to make her last moments worse."

"...But... but this is my fault. I-I didn't... I didn't do enough," Cai said, his face contorting with pain. "I can't let her die like this."

But Aleric's grip on Cai only tightened and instead pulled him closer, forcing him to concentrate. An attempt at getting him to calm down.

"It's our fault. Our burden to share," he clarified. "Or everyone's, if you want to be more accurate. Aria sacrificed herself for all of us to survive. She lived through two lifetimes of hell, fighting for that very thing. Let her final moments be peaceful. She more than deserves that at least."

So cold now.

I was feeling so goddamn cold.

The kind of feeling where you want to curl up next to a fireplace, wrapped up tightly in a fluffy blanket and just take a nap

I could... close my eyes for a bit, right?

Wouldn't that be okay?

Or maybe I should try to hold off for just a little longer..

Cai began shaking and grabbed onto Aleric in turn, the two needing each other for support. I was glad to see evidence of a bond forming, feeling relieved that maybe they would continue to get closer. There was no worse outcome than if my death were to start a war between them. To see them die at each other's hands would only make my death in vain.

A light then shone brightly to my left, stealing my attention from the two men I adored. A light heralding the appearance of someone I knew all too well.

She walked towards me slowly, her gaze watching me as I laid on the deathbed of her own devising.

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This blood was her blood. This new body only borrowed for her.

A cruel, merciless master.

"...Selene," I rasped out in greeting.

She stood over me without an ounce of expression or concern for her public attendance. An odd sight given her aversion for interference.

However, it was something quickly explained once Aleric and Cai began looking around, trying to see who I was speaking to.

It was confirmation of what I already knew about her natural laws; that she could not interfere with the living... only the dead.

"...Is... it... time?" | continued, struggling to speak.

In reply, she simply nodded her head, crouching down beside me. Even in my dying breath, I could feel the effect of her presence. Feel the weight of her aura around me. 1

"... Time to be at peace, child," she whispered soothingly.

And with that, she touched my forehead, a wave of tranquillity spreading through me as she did so. An invitation urging me to let go, to leave behind the pain and finally be free.

There was no compromise to be made here though. No time for questions or arguments. I simply could only oblige the request, greedily caving into the need for an escape.

...And everything went black.

I awoke with a long, satisfied stretch in bed, feeling more content than I had in years,

The last few days had all blended together so much that I could barely keep track of time anymore. Was it a Tuesday? Morning? Night? I didn't know. All I knew was that my last week had been spent with Aleric in the cabin, living and breathing every moment he could spare for me.

With one final yawn, I left my room, walking down the stairs to the only place I wanted to be right now.

"What are you reading?" I asked softly, standing in the doorway of the living area.

It was gently raining outside, the sound of the drops hitting the roof in a soothing way. The clouds outside were also darkening the sky enough that, once again, I couldn't be sure what time it was.

Aleric was sitting by the windowsill, book in hand, and only looked up after I spoke, a small smile warming on his face as I did so. His eyes reminded me of the moss and trees within the woods when he looked genuinely happy, almost as if he were a living personification of my little sanctuary outside.

"Nothing really," he answered. "Did you have a good sleep?"

"I don't know if I can call that 'sleep', since there wasn't much of that happening... but it was good. Some might even say... great." 1

"...Is that so?"

And I crept closer until I stood in front of him, intending to look at the book in his hands, but instead he reached out and pulled me into his lap, forcing a squeal of surprise out of me at the sudden movement. Not that I was complaining though.

And, as he positioned me to sit comfortably against his broad chest, I'd never felt so cosy an

'This isn't right.'

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Chapter One Hundred & Three

I paused for a second frowning, wondering why that thought suddenly popped into my head.

This was Aleric. Of course, this was right. I couldn't think of anywhere else I'd rather be.

I quickly cleared my throat and shook off the thought, concentrating back on the conversation instead.

"This... this looks like one of my books," I said, reading the words on the page. "Only a small portion of this is in—."

...'I've done this before.'

I could feel it now. That feeling of déjà vu, freezing me as I tried to chase down the memory it stemmed from inside.

Had we sat like this before?

The last few days had been a blur, but I couldn't recall doing anything quite like this yet.

Suddenly, I felt as my stomach then began to churn, a wave of anxiety setting in.

... This would be my choice... and mine alone,' a voice alike my own then spoke inside my head.

Was this Thea? Had she found me?

"Well, it's raining and there isn't much else to do for entertainment around here...," Aleric said, speaking like he hadn't just noticed me abruptly pause. Almost as though he'd already known what I was going to say despite me stopping mid-sentence

"Aleric... I think something is wrong...," I started, my hand now covering my gut as the pain increased.

'Today, I decided when and how I would die,' the voice continued.

I felt as Aleric then tilted his head down towards me, proceeding to nip at my ear. "Unless you had something else in mind."

"Aleric? Didn't you hear me? Something is.... —Oh, fuck."

And as I looked down at my stomach, I saw as blood began to seep out from a wound slowly forming there.

'Not Thea's decision or influence attempting to sway me...,' the voice said, 'but of my own volition.'

“Aleric, help... It hurts-,”

I cried out in pain but Aleric didn't move an inch to help me, almost as if he wasn't really aware of what was happening. He held me in his arms as if nothing was wrong... as if I weren't slowly bleeding out in 'excruciating pain.

“Aria,” he said in a low voice behind me. “Make up your mind.”

“W-what? Aleric, please!” I screamed. “Please.....”

...I would face the end as myself.'

SNAP.

Suddenly, everything became black as the Abyss showed it's true form, becoming that same black hole of cold empty surrounding me. A timeless world that deprived you of any true awareness.

'That's right... I remember now.'

...I was dead.

This meant that whatever I'd just experienced had only been a memory... A happy memory spent with

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Chapier One Hundred & Three

Aleric in the cabin from before it all came crashing down. 1

My chest ached with longing at recalling it so clearly.

...I wanted to go home.

“...Were you not satisfied with the memory of your heart's desire?”

Selene.

A light then sprouted in the darkness, revealing her person. Finally facing me after who knew how long. Since the Abyss was timeless, a century could have already passed by now without even realising it.

I hated how just her mere presence alone still made me want to give myself to her, despite everything she had put me through. Her light brought warmth... something sorely lacking inside this place. A true manipulator, just like her mother.

"I think you mean to ask, 'was I satisfied with the simulation I was trapped in; one that was showing me the life you robbed me of?'"

She pursed her lips slightly at my words, a sign of her irritation. "Your will must be strong if you were able to break free of the Abyss' vision. But I suppose that is to be expected, given your success in facing Thea. I am a little surprised though that you wished to free yourself so badly. Do you prefer the cold empty over the warm memory of your mate?"

"You should know by now, Selene, that anything involving you is usually a cause of grief for me," I said bitterly. "If given the choice, I will always choose to live with the knowledge of what you did to me, never forgetting the reality of your 'love'. Our oh—so 'Great Mother'. Because I did exactly what you asked of me. I saved you from Thea, just as you wished. And yet you still allowed me to die once more. A testament to your own selfish desires."

"I did not allow you to do anything, child," she replied harshly. "You were given free will. The choices you made, as well as this death, are all of your own making."

A humourless laugh quickly escaped me, unable to contain it. "Surely, you're joking, right? Surely, you're not actually implying that, for the majority of this life, I wasn't being controlled? That I wasn't being manipulated into actions I didn't choose? Where was my protection from divine interference when your mother was having me mercilessly slaughter and hurt people around me? Where was my free will? Mortality or not, she was of your* flesh and blood. *Your responsibility."

"You fought valiantly," she said, ignoring my accusation. "You should be proud of your achievement."

"But I'm not... I'm not proud of leaving so much behind. I yearn to go back."

Silence then spread between us. A moment as I reflected on everything I'd sacrificed. Everything I'd given up on so this deity could live, fixing her error from centuries prior.

...And something inside me suddenly snapped.

"... You... owe me, Selene," I whispered, a new fiery determination spreading through me. "You have a debt that has yet to be paid. Two lifetimes of needless suffering, to be exact. Lifetimes forced upon me because of your mistake."

"Child, I am unsure of what you expect, but you were already aware of your borrowed time," she said. "You consented to go back, just as we discussed the first time you were here. These were the terms of your revival."

But I disregarded her words, knowing that there was actually only one important factor worth mentioning here.

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Chapter One Hundred & Four

“What you seek... it may have greater repercussions than you realise,” Selene said. 1

The cold of the Abyss was stinging me, a reminder that I wanted to leave as soon as possible. Leave and hopefully not come back anytime soon.

“This is what I want,” I reaffirmed confidently.

Her lips tightened into a line, considering my request further. “Ariadne... What I do is not an exact science. There may be complications with what you seek, ones that even I have no control over. Just your revival alone could have issues without this added risk. Are you willing to accept that, despite what it may produce? That this may bring about a legacy that has waves far greater than you anticipate?”

But I simply nodded my head, certain in my decision.

I didn't care about the risk. If there was even a slight chance of this working, I had to take it. This would be my one and only opportunity I wanted to start my new life with minimal regrets.

“I'm sure,” I said. “If there are issues then I'll figure it out. Just like always.”

“... Very well, then,” she said.

And with that, she took a step forward, cupping my face in her hands to kiss my forehead, and sent an eruption of familiar tingles where our skin met. Instantly, I felt those same intense emotions rushing through me all at once. Something I'd almost forgotten from the last time we stood here.

Once done, she moved away and looked at me with distaste. A stark reminder of how our relationship had drastically changed over these last few years.

“Be warned, child, that this is it,” she said sternly. “There will be no third revival. The next time we meet, you will accept what has happened and begin your life anew inside the Abyss as all souls must.”

The thought of that alone filled me with dread but I knew returning here would be inevitable. Death was a normal part of life. However, I wouldn't fight back next time. No, I'd allow myself to give in and enjoy the happy memories of my life. Hopefully, by then, there would be several more to add to the collection.

Selene then began to fade before me, her eyes never faltering as they watched me carefully. Even up until the very last second, I could feel the resentment and bitterness

she held. Luckily for her though, now she was whole again, she would live out her eternal life where I would exist for only a blink of her eye. Something of immense reassurance for her, I was sure.

Before I could contemplate on her demeanour any further, a weightlessness then came over me, a dizziness consuming my head.

And before I knew what was really happening, I felt the familiarity of my body once more.

And everything felt... hazy.

As if I were underwater

I could start to feel my heartbeat... feel the warmth of my body.

But I wasn't quite... there yet.

It seemed different from the first time when I'd awoken in bed at fourteen. Something felt... off. Was this because I hadn't travelled back?

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Chapter One Hundred & Four

And with another moment, I realised something important; instantly explaining the sensations I was experiencing

Thea's death would have become a fixed point in time. I couldn't return to when she was still alive because I was using her dead body to revive. So, if this wasn't the past...

...It meant that this time, I was returning not to my prior self... but rather to my own corpse. What I was experiencing now was my body reanimating.

"...Wanted to s... goodb...", a voice then said, piercing through the fog.

Someone was here. Next to me. Could they see me coming back?

Their words were too unclear to understand what they were saying, too muddled as it cut in and out.

"...I'm sorry... I didn't...", it continued. "...I thought... It's been a whil..."

It was slowly becoming more distinguishable but not quick enough for my own impatience. I wanted to hear what was being said right now, see whoever was talking with my own eyes.

I'm right here,' I screamed inside. I'm alive.'

But if anyone noticed, I couldn't tell.

"...I love you," they then said, a tone of finality in their voice.

And I realised they were leaving

But I was here. They just needed to just wait a minute. Wait until I could find the strength to break through this veil. Just a little bit longer.

However, before I could worry any further, something else then came to my attention. A new intense feeling, one I never would have expected.

Sparks.

As if tiny, pleasurable firecrackers were being thrown all over my body, I could feel as sparks erupted from skin contact, all stemming from where a hand was now laid on top of mine. A warm hand that made me feel alight with its presence. A familiarity to it that I craved.

I recognised this reaction. In fact, I remembered it well from a time long ago.

It meant....

—And with that, I abruptly woke up with a long heave at the air.

«My lungs greedily took in their first breaths, desperate for the oxygen, and I quickly felt my body begin to

function once more; feeling as my heart started rapidly pumping blood inside.

I was back. I was really back.

Had I been asked to return just a year earlier, I would have firmly rejected it, telling myself I was crazy for wanting this. And yet now I'd never wanted anything more. Something so impossible yet—

“—What the fuck?!”

I swiftly turned my head to the side, already knowing what I would see, but finding myself taken by surprise, nonetheless,

Because time suddenly... stopped.

Almost as if the entire world vanished around me and left behind only one thing.

Only one thing that mattered in that very moment.

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Chapter One Hundred & four

Or, more accurately, one person.

...Aleric.

With his green eyes meeting mine, his crisp scent of the forest enveloping me... an overwhelming assault of sensations hit me all at once. Of a new yet familiar experience beckoning me forward and drawing me in to him. A gravitational pull that promised only good things should I submit to it.

...And something else deep inside me then awoke too.

Amidst my delirium, I also felt the company of something that had been sorely absent for too long. Once a staple within my life, it had gone missing amongst my trauma, regressing to the furthest part of my mind. Now thinking back, I wondered if that were partly due to Thea's occupancy inside. But I could feel it now emerging once more, threatening to control me, demanding to make its presence known.

...And, as a result, just one word was forced from my lips.

"Mine," I heard myself growl.

My wolf had returned.

Aleric had naturally jumped away the moment I'd come back, somehow managing to not have a heart attack at seeing his dead mate return. The sheer fear at the situation had caused his face to pale and almost make him fall to the ground. I could only imagine what went through his head.

But the moment our eyes met, he became frozen in place for a different reason.

Assumedly, he was experiencing exactly what I was; the mate bond forming within my new life... Only this time, we could both feel it. A first in our very long history together.

He took a hesitant step forward... then another, and then slowly reached a shaky hand down to touch my cheek, sending more sparks throughout my body. Enough to make me close my eyes for just a moment as the feeling submerged me; wanting only more of what his touch had to offer.

No memories could ever compare to this; to the real thing. Everything I'd felt in the Abyss felt like a cold, lifeless imitation in comparison to what I was currently experiencing.

Slowly, I then looked back up to meet his gaze. Saw how he was just as consumed as I was, and I immediately lost myself in his eyes, forgetting all else.

This was why I was here. This is what mattered.

He brought his face down, inches from my own, and spoke the only words I wanted to hear.

The words that made all the pain and sacrifice worth it.

"Mine," he repeated.

...And with that, his lips met mine, a fire instantly burning within. A hunger driving me on that I couldn't resist, nor did I even try to. I was completely helpless to the overwhelming need for my mate. A craving I'd been deprived of for too long.

Thastily wound my fingers through his hair dark hair and pulled him closer towards me, needing more of his touch, needing more of him.

But before we could get much further, Aleric then pulled away, apparently having more self control than I.

He stared down at me with a frown, confusion crossing his features. Looking at me as if questioning whether I was really there.

"...Hey...", I said brightly, a smile spreading on my face.

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Chapter One Hundred & Four

My heart ached with happiness from just being able to see him again, a giddiness kicking me inside.

"...Is that actually you?" he asked. "...Am I dreaming?"

I moved my hand to his cheek, relishing in the little sparks I felt there.

"Does it feel like you're dreaming?" I replied, tracing his skin lightly.

His eyes closed under my touch. "I hope not. I'd rather not wake up from this. But I'm also at a loss for how you managed to do this."

"I have my ways," I said with a laugh. "I just did what I'm best at... blackmail and negotiation. It comes in handy sometimes."

He slowly met my gaze again, a humour in his eyes that I adored.

"I should have realised you'd be too stubborn to stay dead for long. Apparently, not even a Goddess can handle your antics."

"What can I say? I just..." I started, intending to make another joke, but then my smile instantly faltered instead. There wasn't anything funny about how badly I'd wanted to come back. "I just... I really missed you, Aleric. I wasn't ready to say goodbye yet. Not before we'd even been given a chance to try."

He helped me up into a sitting position and quickly wrapped his arms around me, sending waves of his warmth through me. Making me feel so cosy and safe in his embrace.

...But it also acted as another reminder of my current situation.

One where I realised how I was seated on a cold, metal table with only a thin blanket to cover me. The place I would have remained until buried.

"How long have I been gone...?" I asked.

Inside the Abyss, there was no way for me to tell how long had passed. Because of this, I wasn't sure exactly what date I'd been brought back to.

"Not too long," he replied. "Maybe three days? Everyone is still recovering from the battle so not many people know what happened to you yet. Though your parents will be arriving in a few days for the... the funeral. I sent word to them once we returned with your body."

My parents. It'd been so long since I'd seen them. I was happy to hear they were safe and would be coming home finally after all this time. So many things had gone wrong after their staged death... things hoped to make amends for, to the best of my ability

"How are you feeling?" Aleric asked. "Is Thea's...?"

'Is Thea's presence gone?' I knew he was trying to ask. The reason for my parents' forced departure was so their lives couldn't be used as hostages against me. Or worse... so I couldn't be used to hurt them under Thea's manipulation.

I searched deep inside myself, looking for that presence that used to lurk behind the surface. Once a constant voice of pressure, pushing me ever closer to the cliff edge, hoping to make me jump off.

Yet... it was gone.

Inside, I now only felt completely at peace. In fact, I felt better than I ever had. The only new addition in my head was my wolf, one I wasn't concerned by. Her presence was one of only reassurance. It meant that things were just as they should be. That things were healthy.

"I feel... amazing." I said honestly. "I can't remember the last time I felt so free. My thoughts are finally mine again. It's... hell, I can't even begin to describe how incredible this feels. How badly I needed this."

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Chapter One Hundred & Four

I had assumed that I'd be dealing with Thea's induced trauma for years, suffering from the scars she left behind. And whilst I definitely felt the pain of the things she did, my head at least didn't feel the weight of the damage she'd done internally. I didn't feel the exhausted, fried sensation her constant occupancy left. Now having something to compare it to, it was a wonder I didn't notice the effects of her presence earlier.

Perhaps dying and being brought back had done more than I'd hoped for, healing even the wounds that I hadn't expected to part with so soon. A bonus on top of what I'd already bargained for.

... More than what I'd bargained for.

"Oh, shit," I said, realising I'd been so caught up in the moment that I'd forgotten the most important thing.

How had that slipped my mind? I was going to be late.

"Aria?"

I started shuffling with the bedsheet and jumped off the table, taking a moment to steady my legs, before walking to where a change of clothes had been left. Though, more arcuately, I walked to where the clothes I was meant to be buried in had been left. The severity of just how morbid that actually was, wasn't lost on me.

"We've got to hurry," I said, throwing on the dress.

"...Where?"

"That's uhh... It'll be easier if I just show you. Where's your car? I'll drive."

I could only imagine what he was going to say when we got there. Truthfully, though I wouldn't have ever reconsidered, I'd be lying if I said I didn't have at least some reservations about this decision I'd made. Especially after Selene's warning.

"You're joking, right? You've only just come back."

"I didn't forget how to drive when I was dead," I pointed out, taking the keys from his hand. "Come on."

He conceded, letting me have them, but we didn't get far before he paused again.

"What is that for?" he asked, pointing to the blanket in my hands.

"We're going to need it," I simply answered.

And that was the last thing he asked before we eventually arrived.

A destination I knew too well yet hadn't stepped foot in for such a long time.

"Why are we...," Aleric started, but I was already rushing out the car door before he could finish his sentence. "Hang on, Aria. Wait up."

"We already took too long," I shouted back over my shoulder, now trying to run. Though perhaps a fast walk would be more accurate.

"Aria!"

I was much slower than I would have liked but that didn't surprise me. My body had been stone-cold only half an hour ago so even this level of mobility was miraculous. My natural healing ability may have been quick, but it wasn't as if I were recovering from a simple affliction. Death wasn't a cold.

Aleric kept up easily, for obvious reasons, but it was as we came closer to our destination that he realised what was happening, saw what was ahead, and immediately stopped dead in his tracks. It may have been nighttime, but it was hard to miss the obvious.

"Aria... what did you do?"

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Chapter One Hundred & Four

"...What I needed to," I said, though barely able to focus on anything other than what was in front of us.

I stood at a small distance as the mound of brown wolf fur then shifted back, leaving behind only the body of a small girl in its wake. There was no mistaking the situation now as her tiny figure became the only notable thing in the area.

Well, the only notable thing apart from her gravestone, that is.

I ran towards her, my heart racing, feeling almost as if I were going to forget how to breathe. I couldn't believe this had worked, that this was real. I'd dreamed about this for so long.

...Finally, after more than two years, I was getting my best friend back.

"Myra," I cried, quickly pulling the girl into my arms. "Myra, I'm so sorry."

I could feel her shaking against me, weakly trying to push me away, but I held on.

"I-I don't... ..," she whimpered in a panic.

"It's okay, I've got you," I said, tears beginning to fall. "I'm here now. I'm not going to let anyone hurt you ever again."

"...A-Aria?" she asked, slowly beginning to recognise her surroundings. "Why are you... I... Oh, Goddess, oh ... I-I think I died. I think I'm meant to be dead, Aria. Why am I here?"

I held her tighter and began stroking her hair, attempting to soothe her. "Everything is fine. You're fine. Everything is going to be okay."

"But that girl... she found me in the park... S-she..."

I felt her then tense up in my arms and knew what was going to happen next.

She quickly pulled away and turned to her side, trying to throw up, but not having anything in her stomach to do so. Instead, she only dry retched as her last moments came to haunt her.

...But it was then, as I tried to comfort her, that I saw her back. Saw the mark of my interference. Or, more precisely, saw the mark of a double crescent moon by her shoulder blade... one matching my own.

It meant only one thing. Something that had only ever happened once before in modern history.

...From today onwards, she would no longer just be 'Myra'. The simple rankless girl, working to help her parents run the orphanage.

No, from now on, she would be known as something far more important. Today, she was 'Myra the Saintess'.

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Chapter One Hundred & Five

This should have been expected, I knew that.

Selene had touched Myra, thereby reembodying her with the power of a Goddess. Exactly as it had been when our species was first created. Only, I'd be lying if I said it didn't raise some questions regarding her rebirth now

At the very least, I knew her body had aged in accordance with how old she was meant to be. We'd walked up as she was shifting back, meaning she had aged past eighteen. Hopefully, this meant that the only thing found to be out of place would be her memories missing from the time she wasn't here.

Though, despite having the gift of foresight, things rarely went as I expected.

I shook the thoughts from my head, knowing there were more important issues to worry about. And, right now, the only thing that mattered was making sure she was alright.

"Hey, you're okay..." I continued to soothe, patting her back gently. "You're fine. You don't have anything! o worry about."

After a few more seconds had passed, she finally looked back up to meet my eyes, her gaze only filled with fear and confusion... and my heart ached for her, knowing I did this to her. Knowing this might be a bigger adjustment than I realised.

"Aria, you look... different," she pointed out.

And I bit my lip, unsure how to answer that right now. Perhaps omitting some things would be for the best until she had time to adapt.

"I, um... I'm a bit older than when we last saw each other. But it's still me. I'm still Aria."

Thadn't had a chance to look in the mirror yet, but I knew from the last time I saw my reflection that I looked much older. War, stress, pain, and Thea has that effect on a person.

"And... and where are we? The... cemetery? What is this..."

She moved to look behind her, turning in the direction of her gravestone, but I immediately moved forward and grabbed her face, stopping her from looking. There would be a day and a time for that soon, but right now was neither of those.

“Hey, hey, look at me,” I said gently, wrapping the blanket I brought around her. “Don’t worry about that. We’re just going to get you to the hospital now and have you looked over. Is that okay?”

“We‘?” she asked, confused by who else I was referring to.

It was then that Aleric took another few steps forward, making his presence known, but clearly still in shock over the whole situation. My resurrection alone had probably been difficult enough without bringing Myra into the equation.

“Aleric came with me,” I said to her.

“I’m ah... I’m happy to see you, Myra,” he said, trying to sound as normal as possible. He must have realised what I was trying to do.

“A—Alpha heir?!” she squeaked out, immediately trying to bow her head in respect.

Oh, right. I’d forgotten that Myra barely knew Aleric, having only met a few times. His presence was probably just overwhelming her further due to Myra’s beliefs on rank.

“You don’t need to do that,” I said to her, implying she didn’t need to bow. “Aleric is going to carry you to.