

**Vengeance  
and  
Forgiveness**



**Tejah Brawley**

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## **Warning and Copyright**

Hello!

Welcome to the world of Vengeance and Forgiveness! Before we dive into this crazy story, let's get the warning and copyright out of the way. This series is rated M for Mature. There will be explicit language, blood, gore, and sexual themes. There will also be very touchy subjects touched upon throughout the story. In other words, your child shouldn't be reading this book right now. DO NOT give them this book for a birthday gift or Christmas gift. This series may be filled with magic and wonder, but the situations our friends and foes get themselves into are not for kids to see at their age. So, keep these books far away from them! This series may also cause some discomfort to those who are firm in their beliefs. If you feel like the way that this series portrays the spiritual world and the things within it challenges your view, then that's understandable and I hope that you'll find a story that makes you more comfortable.

Now let's get into the Copyright information!

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Okay, now we got that out of the way, we can get into the story! Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope that you will enjoy the story, and hang tight... It's going to be a bumpy ride.

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## **Intro**

*As my creations tussle around, doing what they want to, I watch and allow it to happen. Their actions are ripples made in the ocean. Practice the virtues, and those ripples become peaceful waves. Practice the sins, and those ripples become dangerous tsunamis. Either way, it is all beautiful. No matter what humans consider blessings or curses, I allow it to happen; I allow it to coexist with them. I allow the humans to decide whether to become one of the light, one of the dark, or one of both sides. They believe that I want them to choose a side when that's the complete opposite, for I gave them free will. I love all my creations no matter where they are in their journey. Whether they devote themselves to the light, to themselves, or to the darkness, I love them all. Whether they love me or despise me, I love them all. Whether they believe that I'm vengeful or forgiving, I love them all. These unique souls, my beautiful creations, are my pride and joy.*

*-Ideya, Creator of All*

## Prologue

June 2017

### Night

Light from the full moon paints the trees, grass, and animals silver. The warm breeze and trees dance together as the trees' leaves shake and shimmy to the sound of crickets and cicadas singing and fireflies putting on a lightshow. Deep in the forest, a couple of people sit around a campfire. A fair-skinned man sits criss cross while reading a book that is titled *The Reaper's Contract*. Meanwhile, another fair skinned man looks up at the stars while wrapping his arm around a dark brown-skinned woman whose purple eyes are lost in the orange and yellow flames. The fair-skinned man that's reading the book brushes his long, brown hair away from his face, and he continues reading.

"Where did you say you found this book, again, Alex?" the man asks in an intrigued tone.

Alexander snaps out of the stars' enchantment and responds, "Oh! I found it at our doorstep. Amy said we should have thrown it out, but I'm pretty sure there's a reason why it would pop up now." Amethyst's peaceful face goes away as she hears her boyfriend and his brother talk about the book. She stops looking at the fire and looks at Alexander with a stern face.

"I'm telling you, Alex, we should have abandoned that book. Come on, *The Reaper's Contract*? That doesn't scream 'trouble' to you?" Amethyst says in a serious tone.

Alexander responds back in a nonchalant manner, "Now babe, you know Thomas and I are Upindelaikis. If anything goes wrong, I'm sure we can fix it up asap."

"I thought you Upindelaikis aren't supposed to be messing with stuff like this?" Amethyst snaps back.

"Who said we would be messing with it? We're just looking into it!"

"Oh my god, Alexander, you can't just pick up everything and 'look into it'!! What if it turns out to be a trap!?"

“Amethyst, trust me, I’m sure it’s nothing. It’s just a book!”

“Ugh, I can’t ever get through to your head. Thomas, please talk some sense into your twin over here.”

Thomas tunes out the bickering couple as he scans the words on the worn-out pages. He flips through the buff-colored pages, passing through paragraphs and images. He notices that the images are of various animals and crops. Each image has a description underneath, but Thomas doesn’t take the time to read it. He says softly to himself, “This book isn’t written by the Reaper himself, that’s for sure...it’s too biased. This seems like something a supporter of Umu would write. Perhaps it’s from a dark cult?” Alexander and Amethyst watch Thomas in silence, seeing that he’s deeply analyzing the artifact. Thomas notices the abrupt quietness, hearing nothing but the crackling of the campfire. He looks at Amethyst and Alexander, and in a calm voice says, “Well, for you guys to find this book is quite...random. I’m starting to believe this book is from a cult. It goes on and on about Umu and ‘Lord Lucifer’, which is the devil, and why he should be praised. Then they have these rules and descriptions of the Seven Sins, and even took the time to draw what seems like representations of the sins.”

Alexander listens to his brother’s explanation and jumps in with saying, “So basically it’s a peoni guidebook for some followers. You think they were trying to invite us?”

Thomas answers, “I don’t believe a cult would do this for an invitation. And besides, I don’t think you would receive something like this until *after* you’ve joined.”

Before Thomas could continue his theory, Alexander’s stomach growls loudly and makes Alexander groan. He rubs his stomach and says, “Welp, time for a snack! This is getting interesting!” Alexander leans over to grab his backpack, and he pulls out a bag of hot chips. As he satisfies his appetite, Amethyst goes from looking at Alexander to looking back at the flames.



*This was supposed to be a fun camping trip where we would relax. I told Alex not to bring that damn book, yet here we are.* Amethyst goes back into her thoughts as she gets lost in the warm, dancing colors once again, and Thomas returns to the book.

Thomas flips through the pages, not really trying to read anything else, and gets to the end of the book. He notices that on the very last page of the book, there are no words, and the buff color is absent. Instead, the page is blood red. *What in the world?* Thomas ponders. *This is dried up blood. But why here of all places?* Before he could ask any more questions, a small piece of paper fell out of the book and landed on the soft forest ground. Thomas notices this and picks up the little slip.

As he scans the paper, Alexander breaks the silence, “I’m so glad we’re on our day-off! Aren’t you, Amy?” Amethyst hears her lover, but she doesn’t say anything in return. Alexander sighs, “I wish we didn’t have to work. You know what? We should take a whole vacation someday!”

Amethyst keeps looking at the fire, but crushes Alexander’s idea with, “Love, we don’t have that type of money to throw away for a vacation.”

However, Alexander fights back and says, “We’re working our way towards it, aren’t we? Or does buying our own house sound better?”

Amethyst responds, “You do realize that we can’t work our way towards *any* of that now, right? You know...since you ended up mixing up your priorities.”

“Oh my god, you’re on that, again? You mean since *we* ended up mixing up *our* priorities!?”

“Look, the point is that the house and the vacation are going to have to be on hold now since we’re dealing with this hiccup.”

“Wow, *that’s* what you wanna call it? A hiccup?”

“Yeah, because *I* didn’t plan for this!!”

“Well, surprise surprise, babe, neither did I!!”

“And to make matters worse, you just had to keep a hold of this stupid book that *clearly* has no connection to you!!”

Thomas’ face scrunches up out of frustration, and he looks at the couple. He raises his voice and says in a stern tone, “Guys! This isn’t the time to argue. Listen to what this paper says. *‘Hey. Upindelaikis are supposed to keep things clean and holy, right? Well, take care of this book and the cave it came from. Your pal, K.’* Alex...did you tell anyone of your identity?”

Alexander looks at his twin confused and says, “No...I know I can be stupid, but I can at least follow the rule of not telling humans who I am.”

Thomas gives him a skeptical look, “Then how come this person knows what you are?”

“Bro, I don’t know! I didn’t run into anyone asking me if I wanted to join a cult either if that’s what you’re going to ask next!”

“Then Alexander, either you have a stalker or you’re not telling me something because this is not adding up.”

“I’m telling you the truth! No one came to me about some cult. I didn’t go around with my halo and wings exposed screaming ‘HEY! I’M AN Upindelaiki!’”

“Shhhhh!!!!”

“I’m just saying! I didn’t do any of these things. It’s like you said earlier, this is random.”

“Well, it was random until I found this paper that happens to know your identity just about.”

“Ugh, okay, so what do you want to do, bro? Hm?”

“I don’t know just yet. Let me think about this.”

Thomas goes through the book and looks at the paper once more. Alexander ruffles the growing anxiety out of his medium, brown hair. Meanwhile, Amethyst fixes her extremely long, black hair and lets out a yawn as a purple glow surrounds her body. Her body shifts from a human silhouette to a cat one, and the purple glow disappears, leaving behind a black cat with purple eyes. Amethyst walks towards her tent and mumbles, "I'm going to sleep for the night." She enters her tent to finally end her night, and the Upindelaiki twins stay silent.

After a minute, Thomas closes the book and puts the paper in his pocket. He stands up to stretch his body and groans out, "Yeah, I think it's time we go ahead and rest for tonight, Alex. I know of a cave nearby. Perhaps tomorrow we can go over there and check out what this mysterious person is talking about? That's even if *that's* the cave the letter is referring to."

Alexander puts away his hot chips, and as he licks his fingers clean, he says "Yeah, sure. I'd like to see this cave." He holds his hand out, and a ball of water appears. He drops the dodgeball sized water drop onto the campfire, drowning out the fire. The brothers then walk to their separate tents and call it a night.

**Chapter 1**  
**June 2017**  
**Early Morning**

The sky slowly transitions to a lighter blue with the moon and stars still in sight. Alexander is the first to wake up as he sits up and stretches. He thinks back to last night when Thomas was talking about the book, and he remembers what the paper said: ‘Hey. Upindelaikis are supposed to keep things clean and holy, right? Well, take care of this book and the cave it came from. Your pal, K’. *What’s with the “K” at the end? Alexander ponders. Perhaps an initial? I don’t think I know anyone with a name that starts with “K”.* He steps out of his tent, feeling a pleasant morning breeze wake his body up and gently blow his messed-up hair. Alexander sees that, like always, Thomas and Amethyst are still asleep. He looks around the forest, taking in the view as he puts his shoes on and fixes up his shirt. Suddenly, *rustle rustle rustle.* Startled, Alexander frantically looks around, trying to figure out where the sound is coming from. The rustling stops, and Alexander calms down a bit. *Maybe it was just a rabbit or something.*

He takes another look around, fully taking in the view, but his stomach interrupts with its dastardly growls. He holds onto his stomach, groaning, “Come on, stomach, not now. You couldn’t just wait until Thomas woke up.” He goes to his tent to go through his backpack. He barely has any hot chips left and he’s eaten all the fried chicken he bought for the trip. His stomach gets angrier, and he keeps searching, unzipping every pocket until he finds the perfect fix. He sees that he still has a bottle of fresh water. Letting out a sigh of disappointment, he opens the bottle and chugs the entire bland substance.

After drinking the water, his stomach calms down, not growling as much as it did earlier. Alexander rubs his stomach and says, “It’s not much, but it’ll at least keep you down for a little longer.” Suddenly, *rustle rustle rustle.* Alexander jerks his head to the alarming sound. *There it is again! Okay, calm down, Alex. You’re in a forest, after all. It could be anything.* The sound of

shaking bushes interrupts Alexander's train of thought, and he is forced to look for the source. He walks away from his tent and tries to search for any nearby bushes. *Rustle rustle*. He jerks his head towards a dancing bush. *Aha! There you are!* Alexander puts some pep to his step as he walks towards the bush, about to expose the culprit behind his worries. He tip-toes quietly towards the bush, watching the bush shake and shimmy some more. He then frantically inserts his arms into the bush, grabbing for whatever he believes is making the noise. Instantly, he feels something warm and furry; he tries pulling it out, but the heaviness of this furry specimen makes it difficult. He keeps pulling until he starts to feel the unknown creature squealing and struggling. *What the hell? What kind of animal am I grabbing?* Alexander, though very confused, continues to fight with this animal. He starts losing his grip, feeling the animal's body wiggling its way to freedom, hearing its hooves hit the forest floor. *No no! Come on, I just want to see what you are!*

"Alex!? What are you doing?!" Alexander turns around to hear his brother's voice. Then, *thud!* The animal breaks free and runs away from Alexander, squealing out of distress. He takes a quick look at the animal and sees that it's a warthog.

"Huh!? What is a warthog doing here!?" Alexander says aloud in curiosity. Completely ignoring Thomas, Alexander runs for the warthog. He tries to keep an eye on the hog, but the warthog is too fast for Alexander to keep up. Alexander keeps running the same direction, not caring where he's about to end up.

Minutes pass, and Alexander loses a bit of stamina and loses clear sight of his target. He keeps jogging straight, breathing heavily, sweat trickles down his face and soaks into his clothes. To make matters worse for him, his stomach comes back for revenge as it growls again. Alexander whimpers as he clutches his stomach, "No, come on, not now..." He starts slowing down to a walk, still trying to find the warthog while holding his stomach for the rest of the

search. He notices where he is as the trees grow closer together, making it almost hard to see anything. He tries to stay quiet but alert in case any other wild animals want to try to attack, which seems less likely to happen seeing how a warthog ran from him. Alexander stops at his tracks, huffing and puffing, trying to catch his breath. *Amy is right*, he thinks to himself, *I have got to stop doing stuff like this. Why am I even chasing this thing to begin with? All because it made a sound? Because I know that warthogs are either back home or in a zoo somewhere? Whatever the reason is, I'm done with this fiasco. Hog, wherever you are, you win.*

Alexander convinces himself to walk back to camp, but sudden dread fills his head and heart as he turns around to see that the camp is out of sight. "Uh oh..." Alexander mutters to himself. Chills begin to run up and down his body, leaving goosebumps. His heart pounds against his chest while his brain attempts to pick up the thoughts that have scattered. *Okay. Okay. Calm down, Alex. Just look at this like the one time you got lost at the supermarket, except no one's around and you can't ask for directions. Ugh, this isn't helping! Just turn around and walk straight. And don't think about anything. You'll be fine.* Alexander keeps pushing himself to walk back to his friends. His feet begin moving quickly, wanting to run. Suddenly, *squeal squeal!* "Huh?" Alexander hears the warthog again and turns to the sound. There it is, the fuzzy, brown hog that started it all. It stands there, looking at Alexander as if it's waiting for him to make a move. Alexander stares at the warthog with excitement. "There you are," he exclaims, "I knew I could find you! What are you doing here?" Alexander takes a step forward to it, but the warthog doesn't move. He continues, "Well...you're not Thomas or Amethyst, but it's good to have *someone* out here with me." Alexander gets closer to the warthog, and the warthog doesn't see a reason to make some distance. He kneels and gently places his hand on top of the warthog's head, and the warthog quietly snorts. Alexander continues to rub the warthog's head, feeling the

relief rush through his body. “Well, even though this chase was pointless, it was kinda fun! Um...do you mind staying with me for a little bit? My brother should be here at any moment.”

“Now!” Another voice gives out a command, and then rapid steps approach Alexander.

Before Alexander can even see who this mysterious person was, *bonk!!*

...

**June 2017**

**Morning**

A couple hours pass, and Alexander slowly regains consciousness. As he is waking up, he feels this extreme coldness underneath him. *Okay... new feeling*, Alexander says to himself, *Don't know if that's good or not.*

Alexander slowly opens one of his eyes to see where he is, but is startled by an abrupt, raspy yell, “GRRRAAAH!! WHY!? WHY CAN'T I KILL HIM, YET?”

Another clearer voice responds, “You dumbass, we need him... for some reason. Though I gotta admit...this Upindelaiki has got to be *the* dumbest Upindelaiki we've ever seen.”

Alexander overhears the conversation as it echoes throughout the unknown area. *Wait a minute. Echoes? Are we in a cave? Are we still in the forest?! Alexander tries not to attract any attention towards him by not moving a muscle, but his heart begins pounding loudly against his chest and ears. He tries to keep his breath steady and his eyes closed as if he is still unconscious.*

Another voice chimes in, “Alright, Beta, Gamma, talk. What the hell happened? This *isn't* our target.” This voice is low but smooth.

Alexander keeps himself quiet, trying to listen to the conversation. *Huh? Target? What are they talking about? Who are they!?*

“Alpha, don't go biting *our* heads off! It's Alphonse's stupid pet that lured him to us!” Beta retorts back.

“YEAH! Alphonse claimed that he saw one of the targets at the sight!” Gamma joins his partner.

“Well, were your noses not working? You should have known that this was an Upindelaiki,” Alpha points out, trying to maintain his calm composure.

“By the time the Upindelaiki got to our location, we said ‘fuck it’. Hopefully, by keeping him hostage, the others will come here. And that’s probably what Alphonse was aiming for,” Beta reassures Alpha.

“*That’s if the others aren’t as dumb as him...*” mutters Gamma.

“No, trust me, they’re not dumb... neither of our targets are... which is why I have my doubts that *this* guy will be useful,” Alpha confirms. He walks towards Alexander, giving him a close look. Alpha begins thinking to himself, *Lord Aidoneus, out of everyone you could have appointed this task, why did you choose us again? You know that we’re not supposed to be in Gaia.*

Alexander can feel Alpha’s cold stare making him want to shiver. He tries to keep his breath steady, but it ends up stifling a bit. Alpha talks to himself, “Hm. This one is going to wake up soon.”

Gamma walks up to Alpha and says, “Hey! Where’s that Upindeoni that was sent with us, huh? I hope you gnaw on his head like you did with us, big bro!!”

Alpha answers his youngest brother, “Don’t worry, if he doesn’t bring back the target, I’ll get onto him, as well.”

Beta jumps in the conversation and says, “Hell, you should get onto Alphonse!! Tell him to stay out of this since he *clearly* is of no help.”



As much as Alpha wants to agree with his younger brother, he says, “You know exactly why we can’t disrespect Alphonse. Even though he doesn’t have to get involved, we can’t stop him from joining in... neither can Lord Aidoneus. As long as we get the job done, I don’t care who else gets involved.”

Gamma’s face turns tomato red in the subtle darkness and yells out, “FUCK!!! WHY DO *WE* HAVE TO GET INVOLVED?! *WE’RE* CERBERUS!! *WE’RE* SUPPOSED TO BE GUARDING Umu! *WE’RE* SUPPOSED TO BE MAKING SURE NO TORTURED SOULS ESCAPE! *WE’RE* SUPPOSED TO BE-”

“Wait a minute.” Alpha stops Gamma’s rant, and silence fills the hideout. The only sound that can be heard is water droplets dripping onto the ground. *Sniff sniff sniff*. Alpha’s nose twitches as he smells the area. He speaks quietly, “The Upindeoni is back... with another Upindelaiki...”

## Chapter 2

June 2017

Morning

“Dang it, Alex, why did you run off?” Thomas talks to himself as he walks through the lavish forest, its vivid green color being accentuated by the sunlight. As he speed walks, he closes his eyes feeling for his brother’s presence. *Okay, good, he thinks to himself, I’m getting a little closer to him. But wait... are peonis with him?!* He instantly opens his eyes widely, his pupils getting smaller, his ocean-blue eyes glow slightly. However, he shakes his head, taking deep breaths. *No no, I can’t do that. I just have to hurry.*

Just as soon as Thomas prepares to run, a mysterious voice says, “Hey there.” Thomas stops himself and turns to the right towards the voice. A medium-beige-skinned man about Thomas’ size walks up to him. His medium wine-red hair runs down to his mid-back, and he wears a dark pink button up with light blue jeans. He looks at Thomas with his calm, cotton-candy-pink eyes and gives him a calming smile. Thomas looks at the stranger, and his body tenses up. The stranger continues, “You know, I saw someone that looks just like you run by here. I have a good idea of where he went.”

Thomas stares the man down. *An Upindeoni.* Thomas speaks to himself. *Surely he knows that I’m an Upindelaiki. Those other peonis I sensed must be waiting for him. What are they up to? I better be ready in case some stuff happens.*

Thomas finally responds back with, “Show me where he is. Now.” The Upindeoni gives him a serene smile and begins to walk towards Thomas’ brother’s location, and Thomas follows him with some distance between them.

Minutes pass, and the awkwardness grows thicker and thicker every second. The Upindeoni starts the conversation with, “So, what are you guys doing out here?”

Thomas responds coldly, “None of your business.”

“Not much of a people-person, are ya?” the Upindeoni asks, amused.

“Just take me to my brother.”

“...Name’s Pierre.”

“Ugh, alright. Cut the crap. I know you and your lackeys have my brother. The sooner I get to him, the better.”

“Look, wise-ass, if you want me to be honest, we’re not even trying to grab you guys. If anything, you guys are in the way.”

“If we’re not your concern, then why grab my brother? What are you even talking about?”

“Heh, none of your business.”

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More minutes pass, and Pierre and Thomas manage to reach the location; the location is a medium sized cave. *The cave!* Thomas thinks to himself. *Is this the same cave that the cult was located in? This must be how these peonis managed to get here.* They walk into the cave, seeing nothing but darkness and only the light from the entrance giving them little to no help. Thomas, leaving Pierre behind, closes his eyes and runs towards the right where he senses Alexander. He places his hand on his brother’s cold shoulder and whispers, “*Alex! Alex, wake up!*”

Alexander whispers back, “*Thomas? Is that you?*”

“Alexander, get up! We need to leave now!”

Alexander bolts up and grabs Thomas before he could leave. “No, Thomas, we can’t go yet! Shouldn’t we cleanse this cave, first?”

“Ugh, forget that plan for now,” Thomas argues while shrugging Alexander off, “Right now, I need to take you back to the camp. What were you thinking, running on your own like that!? Amethyst is waiting for you!”

“Well, little brother, I think this is the perfect time to do that.”

“As much as I want to deal with these peonis right now, I’d rather get you out of here first. You clearly shouldn’t be here.”

“What’s that supposed to mean!?”

Pierre jumps into the conversation with, “He’s saying you’re a dumbass.” Thomas and Alexander turn to Pierre, and Pierre smirks at them. “And I have to say *we all* agree with him. I mean come on, seriously? You took all your time chasing an *Umu warthog*? Hell, how did you not even notice me or two of the Cerberus Brothers nearby while you were having your little ‘heart-to-heart’ talk with the *Umu warthog*? Ha! That is so amusing.”

Thomas looks back at Alexander with anger, “You what!? Alex, you’re supposed to be able to sense these things! What has happened to you!?” He feels Alexander turn his head away from embarrassment, then he reverts his frustrations back to Pierre, “And you said Cerberus is here!?”

“SURPRISE!!” Gamma, a light-brown skinned man, comes out of the shadows with a psychotic smile, showing off his shark-like teeth. Along with him, Alpha, a dark-brown skinned man, and Beta, a medium-brown skinned man, walk out calmly, not saying a word. Thomas and Alexander look at the trio: Alpha, the oldest brother, stands like a statue, firm and tall, and he wears a brown fur coat and a purple shirt underneath it and black slacks; Beta, residing by Alpha’s right side, stands a bit more relaxed, wearing a black jacket with an upturned collar and a blue shirt underneath and dark-gray slacks; and Gamma, the youngest brother and residing by Alpha’s left side, stands just as relaxed as Beta but his head tilts to his left, wearing a red tank top and gray cargo pants.

Alpha looks at the Upindelaiki twins and talks in a calm tone, “Look, we already know that you’re not going to help us, so let’s cut a deal: You get out of our hairs and we capture the

targets, and once we're done, we get out of your hairs and you can cleanse this cave. That way, we won't be able to come to Gaia through here."

Beta mutters, "*Even though there are thousands of other portals...*"

Alpha shushes Beta and continues, "So, do we have a deal?"

Alexander taps his chin while thinking about this deal, but Thomas instantly and firmly says, "No way! You really expect me to believe that you'll hold your end of the deal?!"

Alexander asks the Cerberus Brothers, "Who are your targets, anyway? How do you know if they're here?"

Then a mysterious, low voice surprises the brothers by saying, "This is getting nowhere..." and then *BLAM! BLAM!* The mystery person knocks Alexander and Thomas out.

...

"Seriously, why did you guys even come with me? I could have done this mission *by myself*," Pierre says as he paces around and scratches his scalp out of frustration. "But no, not only does Lord Aidoneus appoint Cerberus to be my partner, but he also allows one of Umu's Quphantos to tag along simply because he's BORED?"

Gamma gets closer to Pierre and summons this dark aura to surround his hand, forming it into a shape of a minigun and pushes it against Pierre's chest and says, "Well, Upindeoni, this is your *first* time being appointed to this type of task, and this makes it *our millionth*. We're used to capturing run-aways. If anything, *we* should be the ones questioning why *you* were appointed to the task."

Pierre slaps the gun away and snaps back, "In case you haven't noticed, *I'm* one of the many animal experts in Umu, and one of the targets happens to be an animal. Hell, I'm looking at an animal now!"

Beta walks up to his younger brother and Pierre to interrupt the argument by saying, “Look, Pierre, you can have your fun capturing the animal target. It’s the *other* target that Lord Aidoneus wanted *us* to worry about. I mean damn, you could thank us for *trying* to help you with *your* target.”

Pierre looks at him with shock, “Help? HELP? YOU BROUGHT BACK AN Upindelaiki!”

Beta yells back, “AND YOU BROUGHT HIS BROTHER!!!”

Pierre yells louder, “ONLY BECAUSE MASTER ALPHONSE TOLD ME TO, BITCH!!!”

“WHO ARE YOU CALLING A ‘BITCH’, BITCH?!?!”

“I’M CALLING YOU A ‘BITCH’, BITCH!!”

“Now now, no need to be so hostile towards each other.” An extremely tall creature finally speaks out as he stands beside the Upindelaikis. “After all, there’s a reason why I told you all to grab these two,” he says with a sinister smile. Beta and Gamma look at Alphonse: his head almost touches the top of the cave; his long, straight, and orange hair cover some of his pale face, but it’s still easy to see his large, yellow tinted bottom fangs protruding from his mouth; and his lower body is that of a pair of brown warthog legs. He kneels down to get a closer look at the two unconscious Upindelaikis and gives a sinister smile, showing the rest of his yellow teeth. “This will be much fun~.”

Alpha walks towards Alphonse and speaks up, “With all due respect, Master, having these two Upindelaikis is just a waste of time. How are *they* going to help us capture our targets?”

Alphonse stands up straight and looks at Alpha with his golden-orange eyes, and says, “Alpha, I thought out of the four of you, *you’d* be the one to catch on. This game of cat and mouse has been going on for over 700 years. It’s clear that whatever you three mutts are doing,

it's not working! However... it's not your fault... this is something your 'Lord' should be dealing with, not you."

Alpha responds, "To be honest, Alphonse, you didn't have to come with us..."

"Oh, I know. But a Quphanto gets tired of laying around their domain all eon long, ya' know? Besides, I believe that *my* plan is going to work. We will use these two Upindelaikis as bait~. This will take no time at all~."

"Are you saying that our targets got some sort of connection with them?"

"I'm saying *one* of them does. I'll have something else planned for our other pain-in-the-ass target."

"I doubt that this will work," Pierre jumps in, doubting the confident Quphanto.

"Oh, trust me, it will," Alphonse says as the warthog from earlier runs up to him, and he pets it and gives it a golden apple. "Just let me do a couple of things first before we really get started~." He then summons a wine glass and golden apple juice sparkles within it. He then opens a mini orange portal above the glass, and multiple black and dark purple maggots plop into the liquid. *Plop plop, plippity plop!* "Ohohoho, now," Alphonse snickers out as he looks at the maggots wiggle and squirm in the apple juice, "One of you, open up the short-haired one's mouth! I'm sure he's parched~ As for the long-haired one... Prosciutto, go back home and grab some chains for me. As soon as they wake up, the fun will really begin! Ohohohohoho~!"

## Chapter 3

June 2017

Afternoon

Amethyst wakes up from her sleep, and she looks around to see that neither Alexander nor Thomas is around. “Hm?” she mumbles out. She looks inside the tents. No luck. “Where could they have gone? Did they already go investigate the cave?” she ponders. Alexander and Thomas usually never do anything or go somewhere without telling Amethyst first. If anything, they would invite her to tag along. *Should I go find them?* She thinks to herself, *Or should I just wait for their return?* She walks around in her cat form, thinking about her choices.

In the middle of her contemplation, she hears someone from afar. “Amethyst!” Amethyst’s head turns towards the voice, her cat ears perk up and her tail sways in happiness.

*That’s Alex!* Amethyst says in excitement. She runs towards the sound of Alexander’s voice.

Then she hears him say, “Come here, Amethyst~! I’m over here~!” But his voice is strange. It doesn’t really sound like the Alexander that Amethyst knows for his voice is a bit too ditzy, as if he’s under the influence of alcohol. However, Amethyst keeps running towards the source, hoping that her lover is not harmed.

“Alexander? Are you okay?” Amethyst finally yells out. She’s pretty far from the camp at this point, seeing nothing but trees and bushes making everything dark.

“Oh, Amethyst, my darling~! Come to me~!” Alexander says again in that cheery tone. Now Amethyst knows something is wrong. Alexander would not be this excited to be out in the woods let alone be out in the woods *by himself*.

*Where’s Thomas?* Amethyst asks herself. She gets too nervous to ask Alexander, hearing how he’s talking. She finally sees him, but there’s something different about him. Even though his back is facing towards her, Amethyst can clearly see that his hair is not milk-chocolate brown anymore but is now a snow-white color. Just this sight alone stops Amethyst in her tracks.



“A-Alex?” Amethyst calls, making Alexander turn around a bit too quickly. Looking straight at Amethyst, she sees that Alexander’s eyes are not ocean-blue but are sun-yellow with slit pupils and his skin is much paler. He looks at Amethyst with a wide smile, and she looks at him in shock, slowly backing away. “Alex, what the hell-”

“Oh, Amethyst~! How I missed you~! Come here to me~.” Alexander says, interrupting Amethyst. He starts to approach her slowly with his arms out, trying to grab her. Mortified, Amethyst awakens her inner cat and runs away at high speed. As she is running away, she can hear Alexander in the distance saying, “Awww, Amethyst~!! Do you not love me anymore~!? Come back~!!” Not thinking, Amethyst just keeps running for the hills. *Pitter patter pitter patter pitter patter!* Her soft paws hit the soft, cold forest ground, leaving paw prints that could be seen if it were to be in direct sunlight.

She finally makes it back to the camp, looking around in a haste. *Ba-bump ba-bump ba-bump ba-bump!* Even her heart tries to escape her body, but she tries to take deep breaths. *That wasn't Alex!* Amethyst thinks. *Where is Thomas!?*

“Amy~!!” Alexander yells again, “Come back~!! Thomas wants to see you too, you know~!!” She was going to run away again until he said Thomas’ name.

*What did he do to Thomas!? What did he do to himself!?* Amethyst thinks, frozen in her tracks, trying to process everything.

But before she could even get started, Alexander pops out of the woods and sings out, “Iiiiiii foooooound yoooooou~!!!!” Like a predator about to catch their prey, Alexander jumps towards Amethyst about to grab her, but Amethyst’s instincts kick in on time as she moves away from his range.

Amethyst takes one last look at Alexander before he looks back at her with that frightening smile and starts crawling for her. “Mrroooww!!!” Amethyst yells startled, and she gets back to running, not knowing where she’s going. She feels the fur on her tail frizzle up as she gets away from the stranger that looks like her lover. *Pitter patter pitter patter pitter patter pitter patter!* *Ba-bump ba-bump ba-bump!* Her heart and feet continue their beat of fear as Amethyst gets closer to seeing the little parking lot. Amethyst would take Alexander’s white van, but the problems are she didn’t grab his keys and she doesn’t really know how to drive. She had always preferred walking or running, and if she had to catch a ride, she would look for a Dazzle driver. Not even trying to stand and wait for Alexander to show up again, Amethyst sprints away from the site and into the open road. Suddenly, *SKRRRRRRRT!!* A black mid-size car stops in front of Amethyst.

The driver comes out of the car and looks at her. The driver says, “Goddamn it, black cat, I almost hit you! Are you okay!?” Amethyst looks at the light-skinned woman with long, brown braids going down her back. She’s wearing sunglasses and a black tank top with black jeggings and black heels. Not thinking about the consequences, Amethyst walks up to the woman, hopping on her leg. “Huh? You want me to what now!?” the woman asks. *Mrrroooow!!* Amethyst cries for help while not trying to frighten her quickest way out of here. “Alright alright fine! Only because I always wanted a black cat,” Amethyst’s savior says as she picks her up and takes her back to her car, and she gets back in the driver seat to continue her drive, blasting her hip-hop music. Amethyst looks at the car wing mirror on her side, and she sees Alexander run out of the forest, looking around to find her. She sits back on the passenger seat and curls up in a ball shaking, trying to recover from the horrific event.

The woman looks at Amethyst and immediately turns down the music a little bit, and she rests her hand on the frightened cat. “What’s wrong, sweetie? Did I have the music up too loud?” she asks as she rubs Amethyst’s head, feeling her soft fur while driving. She then tries to scratch her back, hoping her long almond-shaped nails would ease Amethyst. “Oh my gosh, your fur is so soft~! Were you someone else’s pet?” As much as the woman would love to look at the cat, she keeps her eyes on the road. “Now, I know what you’re thinking. You prolly thinkin’ that I’m crazy for pickin’ you up. And you know what? You’re right. I usually don’t be doin’ this type of shit. If anything, this is something my friend Rose would do. But unlike her, who would prolly take you to some animal shelter or somethin’, *I’m* taking you back home with me~. That sounds good, right?” She keeps rubbing Amethyst’s head, and Amethyst slowly calms down, letting the woman’s soothing mid-pitched voice ease her nerves. “Ugh! Can’t wait to get back home. That trip to the store was a waste of my time. Ran into too many old classmates who tried to play catch-up, and the store didn’t even have what I was trying to find. Ugh!! Well, no junk food for me today...I’ve been doin’ pretty good actually~! Lost a couple pounds, waist is getting slim, aaand... you have no clue what I’m talking about do you?” She gets to a red light and finally gets the chance to look at the black cat. Amethyst looks at the woman, looking at her soft smile. The woman laughs a little bit and says, “Now I *know* I’m crazy.”

The green light comes back around, and the woman gets back to driving. Suddenly, a phone that rests in the cup holder rings, and an upbeat song plays as it’s ringing. The woman takes the phone to see who’s calling and answers. “Hello... Hey Jackie... I’m driving right now, what’s up?... Girl, nuh-uh, you gon’ have to ask someone else to go witchu, I’m tryna chill at home....You always tryna go to some dude’s party!...Hahahaha!!....Girl, I do not need a man....Okay, and? My toy and I are very good friends, thank you very much....Yeah, anyway,

ask someone else, and they can't be Rosie, MeeMee, or NeeNee... Because none of them need to be in that kind of environment... Next time, Jackie, I promise.... Nuh-uh, don't 'TeeTee' me, you knew I was about to say 'no'.....Hahahaha! Well, send videos and pics tonight and *please* be safe... Oh hey! Guess what?... I picked up a cat... I know I know, something that I, Tenacity Lionheart, would *not* do....No, I'm not high....I mean I dunno! The cat felt pretty clean when I picked it up, and then their fur is so soft!... I'll send pics in the group chat when I get home. Alright, love you, too. Alright. Buh-bye~."

Tenacity lets out a big sigh, "Jacqueline is such a mess. I'm sure if you ever meet my friends, I bet you'd try to stay away from her. She's not a bad person, but she's definitely a handful." She continues rubbing Amethyst's head; usually Amethyst hates when people pet her for too long, but for this one time, she's accepting this simply because of how comforting it is. "Don't worry, honey, we're almost home~ I know you're tired of hearing me talk."

*No, please don't stop talking,* Amethyst begs in her mind.

"Here, let's listen to some music together!" Tenacity says, as she turns her music up a little bit and starts rapping to the current song. She must listen to this song everyday on repeat because she doesn't mess up once.

*It's not necessarily her talking to me, but this will do,* Amethyst thinks, as she lays her head down, purring.

Few minutes pass, and Tenacity parks her car and turns it off. "We're home, cutie~," she exclaims as she picks up her small, black purse and puts it over her shoulder, and she carries Amethyst. They walk inside the apartment complex, and Tenacity walks up a flight of stairs. Amethyst enjoys the view, seeing the hallways in a pastel yellow color and a white carpet floor

to match. They make it to Tenacity's door, which is painted white. She unlocks the door and reveals a home that has a healthy balance of light and dark.

## Chapter 4

June 2017

Evening

Tenacity puts Amethyst down, letting her explore the place while she puts her stuff back in her room. Amethyst looks at the black walls, stunned by its smoothness. Her curious, purple eyes then wander towards the clean black, white, and gray furniture. She walks around, feeling the very soft and clean white carpet give her soft but dirty paws a warm welcome. *This place is rather lovely*, Amethyst thinks to herself, *But I can't stay here for long*.

Before Amethyst can think of a way to get out of here without attracting too much attention, Tenacity walks back into the living room in more comfortable clothes; she's wearing a black satin nightgown. She looks at Amethyst, smiling, and she picks her up and rubs her head. "Ugh, why do you have to be so cute," Tenacity says in a whiny tone, "I've never seen a black cat with purple eyes, though. So pretty~." As she carries Amethyst, Tenacity sits on the black couch and turns on the television. She yawns and starts undoing her braids, letting her new friend lay in her lap.

...

Night

After hours of watching television by Tenacity's side and having to listen to her talk to the only living souls in this room, Amethyst successfully wiggles herself out of sleeping Tenacity's arms. *Okay, let's make this quick*, Amethyst thinks to herself, *I really don't want to use the front door because I'm sure that'll alarm her. I could use the window, but which window should I use?* Amethyst walks around the apartment, trying to figure out the quietest way to exit Tenacity's home. She decides to walk into Tenacity's bedroom and sees that there is a window. *Tenacity, you'll have to forgive me*. She quickly transforms back into a human, and she quickly and quietly opens the window. Before she jumps out, she looks down to see that she's three stories high.

*Perfect!* She transforms back into a cat and leaps out of the window. She feels the night breeze brush against her fur as she falls, her heart beating rapidly. Like a gymnast, Amethyst lands gracefully on the concrete ground on her paws.

Amethyst sighs in relief and takes a look at her surroundings. From what she's seen from the car ride, she's only been around this part of town a few times before. It's much more peaceful than where she resides, which is one of the busiest parts of Forestopolis. She walks down the road, having only street lights and occasional car lights help shine her way. Amethyst contemplates on where she should go. She can go back to Alexander and her apartment, but she left her key at the camping site and surely Alexander has both hers and his at this point. She could also go to her friend, Usiku, but she's not sure if he would allow her in at this time. But as soon as Amethyst thinks of her choices, she hears a *squeak squeak squeak!* She looks around and looks up at the trees to see one bat staring at her, its bright red eyes glowing and slit pupils stabbing her soul.

Amethyst jumps from surprise, but immediately calms down when she notices that it's one of Usiku's bats. She climbs up the tree to get closer to the bat. "Hey," she talks in a low tone, "I need you to take me back to Usiku. I'm in a serious predicament." The bat stares at her, tilting its head, not making a sound. Amethyst sighs in frustration and says, "Come on, please? Thomas has been kidnapped, Alexander is a whole other person, and I just had to stay at some random human's house after being chased by him! I wouldn't mind sleeping on the porch until morning." The mysterious bat blinks at Amethyst, and then nods in agreement to take her to Usiku. Amethyst sighs in relief and says, "Thank you. I promise I won't be too much trouble."

...

**Morning**

The golden sunlight enters through the windows, making everything in the living room bright and kissing Tenacity's face. Tenacity groans out of sleepiness as she slowly wakes up from her deep slumber. She sits up, stretching her body, feeling the sleepy spell slowly wear off. She looks around to see if her new cat friend is around, but she notices that the cat is not in the living room. "Hmm?" Tenacity mumbles, "Lil' friend? You here?" She gets up and checks the kitchen, the dining area, the bathroom, the guest room, and her bedroom, but unfortunately, the cat is nowhere to be found. What catches her eye, however, is that the window is open, and the cool morning breeze blows into her bedroom, making the window curtains dance. Tenacity's eyes widen and she speaks up, "What the fuck? I had this window closed. I know I did." She takes the time to look outside the window. "Did the cat fall from here? Did it open this?... Nah, it can't do that... Huh, well I sho' didn't have this open... I'm just becomin' crazier and crazier everyday."

Not wanting to try to figure out the mystery, she decides to close the window and grab some clothes. She grabs a black floral crop top and some white shorts. She goes into her bathroom to take her morning shower. As the hot water hits against her honey body, Tenacity hums a little tune. She then starts talking about her plans for today. "Well, here goes my last day off before I have to go to work again. Ugh. Well, I guess I could hang out with Melissa for a little bit if she's up yet. I'm pretty sure Jacqueline is already chilling at the cafe. Nermal is probably with her. Rose? Hmmm... probably still at the house." She gets her peppermint-scented soap and gets to work, using her black towel to spread the soapy substance all over her body. 20 minutes later, she finishes up, and gets out of the steamy shower. She then washes her face and brushes her teeth while letting her body dry off. She puts on her matching black bra and panties, her crop top, and her shorts.



She walks back to her bedroom to fix up her long chocolate-brown afro and grabs her Cyber that has a sparkly, black phone cover on it. She opens it up and goes straight to the group chat, seeing that Jacqueline, Melissa, and Nermal were sharing memes, last night. “Dang it, I missed the Meme-fest again. Now I gotta catch up.” She sees that Rose missed it as well. Before she checks out the memes, Tenacity sends a text.

**Tenacity:** *Mooooorning~* 💕

**Jacqueline:** *Good morning, thots~!!* 🤔 *Guess who had gotten some mean Vitamin D last night~!?* 😏

**Nermal:** *Jackiie, where are you? You never came back home last night!!* 🤔

**Jacqueline:** *Oh yeah, sorry~! I forgot to tell you that I slept at the dude’s house. Don’t worry, I told him to just drop me off at the creamery... and that’s y’all’s cue to say “Omg, we’ll see you there, Jackie~!”* 😏

**Tenacity:** *You slept at the dude’s house?* 😏 *Ain’t that a bit... dangerous?* 🤔

**Melissa:** *I’m just waking up!* 😏 *Jackiie, are you okaay?!* 🤔

**Jacqueline:** *Guys, don’t worry~. I knew the dude, okay? He was in our class~!! Anyway, yeah, get your sexy asses over here~!! The creamery got this new yummy flavor~!*

Jacqueline sends out a picture of her cup full of purple gelato with some whip cream on top. Letting the girls know she’s on the way, Tenacity puts on her black flats. Suddenly, *knock knock knock!* “Must be MeeMee~!” Tenacity says in excitement. She quickly grabs her black purse, making sure everything she needs is in it, grabs her keys, and opens the front door. She sees that it is indeed her best friend Melissa Guerrero, wearing a pink sleeveless dress that’s slightly above her knees, showing off her smooth, beige legs, and white, chunky platform heels showing off her pink-painted toe nails. Her long, wavy, light-brown hair flows down her back, framing her clear

face. The moment Melissa's jade-green eyes see Tenacity, a smile grows on her face, and she can't help but to hug her tightly.

The two best friends hug and squeal out of excitement as if they haven't seen each other in ages. "Okay, TeeTee, look at you, all cute and stuff~!" Melissa compliments Tenacity.

"Nah, *you're* the cute one~! I didn't even try," Tenacity playfully says back as she closes and locks her door.

"Hey, do you wanna ride with me today? I don't mind driving this time," Melissa asks.

"You sure?" Tenacity asks her.

"Yeah! Besides, I *have* to show you what I did to the car. It's so cute~!"

"Okay, sure why not!"

The two girls exit the apartment complex and walk to Melissa's pastel pink tessie. They open the butterfly doors, and the girls get in. The first thing that Tenacity notices is that Melissa's car on the inside looks extra clean this time; her car is always clean, but something must have motivated her friend to give her car the special treatment. Melissa's white seats were spotless and extra comfortable. She even has a sparkly flower hanging off of her rear-view mirror. "Wow!" Tenacity exclaims, "You really changed up the place!"

"Thanks!" Melissa responded, "I just really needed to give my baby a makeover. I just did the inside yesterday. Today, I'm taking her to the car wash to give her a little gloss~!"

"I wish I cared for my car that much," Tenacity mutters.

"You do take care of your car!"

"Yeah, but not *this* much!"

"Oh, Tee, your car is perfect! But if you want to, we can take her to the car wash either tomorrow or the next day! It'd be fun!"

“That sounds great and everything, but...”

“Work?”

“Exactly.”

“How has work been, anyway?”

Tenacity thinks back to her past week of working at the clothing store as a cashier. The job itself is not too bad; all she has to do is greet the customer, help them look for their size, compliment them to sell the product (even if the product doesn't look good on the customer), and then call it a day. However, after a while, the job has gotten stale. The pay is okay, but Tenacity knows she could be doing something much better and more fun. She answers Melissa's question with, “Exhausting. I'm about ready to get out of there, honestly...”

Melissa looks at her with surprise, “Huh!? What's wrong with being the cashier over there? Uh oh, did a bitch get on your nerves again?”

Tenacity laughs and says, “No no! Well.... Okay, maybe a few times, yes. But it's just the job, in general. I'm ready to do some other shit. I'm 'bout tired of seeing these folks and they mean-mug me and not say 'have a good day' or even a 'hello'. The co-workers ain't even all that, either. Folks are just... miserable. And they're making *me* miserable.”

“Ooh...” Melissa says, saddened to see her friend not so happy with the job she originally was excited for. They both wanted to have a job, and Tenacity went for cashier while Melissa went for waitress at a restaurant. “Well,” Melissa starts, “if it makes you feel better, sis, I had some weirdo try to hit on me while on my shift the other day.”

“What!? Who!?” Tenacity says, looking at Melissa, but Melissa's eyes stay on the road while she's driving.

“I dunno who it was, but he wasn’t cute. He wasn’t even ‘sugar daddy’ level cute,” Melissa says, cringing.

“Eewww, *and* it was an old man?”

“He was drunk, but luckily the manager came through and had him escorted out. Now *he’s* a hunk.”

“Huh, at least *you* have eye candy while at work.”

“Yeah, that’s great and everything, but trust me, eye candy can only keep your spirits up for so long until you realize that you’re too busy for them because you got your future to worry about, and then you have to worry about other shit like having them meet my strict ass parents and-”

“Damn, MeeMee, okay okay I get it. MeeMee comes first, dude comes second.”

“Exactly~! Just let me go to college, graduate with a bachelor’s degree, and then a couple years down the line might go for a master’s, *then* I’ll go lookin’ for a man!”

“Ugh, speaking of college, I know you’re about to start your Senior year, which I wish you luck, but have you looked into some Universities?”

“Yeah! That’s what I was doing last night. I’m hoping I’ll get accepted to the same college you’re going to. Are you excited!?”

“Yeah, kinda. As soon as school starts, I’m quitting my job so that I can focus on it.”

“Yeah, I don’t blame you.”

After minutes of talking to each other, they finally make it to the creamery, where they see their friends Jacqueline Brookes, Nermal Calista, and Rose Garcia sitting together through the creamery’s window. Melissa parks her car, and the two girls exit out. “So what flavor did they add,” Tenacity asks.

“I think Jackie says it’s Ube flavor,” Melissa answers.

“Hmmm, I’m not too sure about this one...” Tenacity hesitates.

“Don’t worry, we’ll try it together~!” Melissa added, trying to hide her hesitation, as well, but is a little more optimistic.

## Chapter 5

June 2017

Morning

Rose, in her red, flowy maxi dress and red thick heels and her black, curly hair in a loose-high bun, grabs her white floral purse and keys. She looks at herself in the mirror one last time, admiring her caramel skin and curvaceous body. “Okay, Rose, looking good!” she tells herself. She then leaves her bedroom and yells across the hallway, “Mom! Dad! I’m going to go hang out with my friends!” However, she doesn’t get a response. *They’re most likely doing it...again*, Rose thinks to herself. This isn’t anything new to Rose because she knows how affectionate her parents are no matter what time of day it is. As the years go by, this doesn’t seem to bother Rose all that much; if anything, she hopes to have that kind of experience with her special person soon (whomever that ‘special person’ will be).

She walks down the stairs carefully, and she sees her dad’s seven bats rest on the rails. She giggles and says, “I’ll see you guys later, okay? I won’t be gone for long~!” She continues walking down the stairs and reaches the front door. As she walks outside and locks the brown, wooden door, she notices a black cat waking up from her sleep. Rose looks at the cat and says, “Oh! Hello, there! Aren’t you a cutie~.” She continues to walk to her red convertible, gets in, turns the car on, and drives off.

Meanwhile, as Rose drives onto the road and disappears, Amethyst transforms into her human form and knocks on the door. *Knock knock knock knock knock!* She waits a couple of minutes for a response. *Come on, Usiku. You have to be up around this time. I know you are*, Amethyst thinks. Minutes pass, and there is no response. Amethyst knocks again. *Knock knock knock knock knock knock knock knock!* Amethyst softly groans out of frustration. “If Usiku isn’t up, then I know Delilah is...” Amethyst mutters. While she waits for another few minutes, she fixes up her long, silky, black hair and makes sure that her long-sleeved purple shirt and black jeggings are

fixed. A couple more minutes pass, yet there is still no one there to open the door. *That's. It.* Amethyst has reached her limit. She has an emergency and the only people that know her and can truly help her are too busy doing whatever they're doing. *KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!!*

“WOULD YOU HOLD ON!?! DAMN!” A female’s voice can be heard within the house. Amethyst is startled by the woman’s outrage and straightens up, ready to explain her situation. Seconds later, the door opens as the woman says, “I’m about tired of you Ideya witnesses coming to my house and- AMY~!!” The woman turns out to be Rose’s mom, Delilah, who’s curly, medium-brown hair is in a messy-low bun. Amethyst’s eyes widen and face heats up as she also notices that Delilah is wearing a see-through white robe, the sun's rays showing that she’s not wearing anything underneath to cover up her curvy, butterscotch body. “Oh my god, Amethyst, I’m so happy to see you~!” Delilah sings out as she hugs her friend tightly.

“D-Delilah, hello,” Amethyst stutters, hugging Delilah back, “Listen, I don’t have much time. Where’s Usiku?”

“Awww, you didn’t come here to play catch up~?” Delilah whines as she lets go of Amethyst and pouts, “It’s always serious business with you!”

“I’m sorry, dear, but as much as I would love to talk over a cup of tea, I’m in quite the predicament right now,” Amethyst explains.

“Oh yeah? Well, what’s going on? Oh! But first, come in!” Delilah lets Amethyst into the house, and Amethyst is welcomed by the chilliness from the air conditioner. Delilah says, “You can sit on the couch. I’ll go ahead and grab Usi~.” While she walks back up the stairs, Amethyst sits on the long, brown couch, gazing at the living room. She takes off her black tennis shoes and socks and sets them beside her, and she feels her feet sink into the soft, thick, red carpet. She

looks at the family pictures hanging around the room on the orange walls. She notices how Delilah changed the flowers that would sit on top of the tan-colored fireplace; it was snowdrops and violas during the past winter, daffodils and primroses during the past spring, and now dahlias and peonies for this summer. Delilah has her own garden in the backyard, which is how she is able to have so many of these flowers. Amethyst smiles as she thinks about what flowers Delilah will display for the autumn.

Minutes pass, and the seven bats fly onto the light brown wooden table that stands in front of Amethyst, and they stare at her. Amethyst sighs and says, “And good morning to you, ladies.” Seconds later, Usiku, an extremely tall and dark-chocolate man, walks down the stairs slowly, wearing his raggedy black cloak, having his hood over his head. Amethyst sees Usiku and immediately stands up and says, “Usiku, I know you don’t want me here right now, but it’s about Alex and Thomas.”

Usiku looks at Amethyst with disinterest and says in a low voice, “You interrupted my time with Delilah... to tell me something about Alex and Thomas...”

“Yes. This is serious,” Amethyst answers.

“...What did Alex do this time...?” Usiku asks, not really trying to hear it but doesn’t want to be any ruder than he already is.

“We were on that camping trip we said we would take a couple days ago, and, well, Alex had brought this book with him. Thomas looked at it, said that it was connected to some cave we were nearby and that Alex and he should go there to check it out.”

“And what’s this book?”



“I-I don’t know, it was some book that belonged to a dark cult. It was called *The Reaper’s Contract* or something. It was at our front door. I didn’t want anything to do with the book, but you know Alex, too curious for his own good.”

“Hmm...”

“So I guess they went to check on the cave without me because I was still asleep. And the moment I saw Alex, he... was different.” Amethyst’s body is covered in chills as she thinks back to her lover having white hair, pale skin, and piercing-yellow eyes. “He was a whole other person, Usiku...” Amethyst says in a shaky voice, “He kept begging me to come back to the cave, which led to him chasing me. I managed to get away when this human came to pick me up.”

“Is he following you now?”

“I-I don’t think so. If he is, he’s doing a terrible job keeping up.”

“Of course, this is Alex we’re talking about.”

“Usiku!”

“Amethyst, I don’t know what you see in that idiot.”

“He’s an idiot, but he’s *my* idiot. Besides, aren’t you even a *little* concerned?”

Usiku walks to the other brown couch and takes a seat. He sighs and says, “As irritating as Alex can be, that is peculiar. Besides his attitude change, what else was different about him?”

Amethyst sits back down, takes a deep breath while holding her hands to stop them from shaking and says, “He had white hair. His skin was much paler than before. A-And his eyes... they were yellow...”

“Yellow?” Usiku asks, confused.

“Yes, with slit pupils,” Amethyst finishes.

Usiku scratches his goatee and closes his eyes, really analyzing what he has been told. Amethyst continues with, “And don’t ask me how he got like this because I have no idea. I don’t even know what happened to Thomas, but I’m afraid he might have met the same fate.”

“Knowing Thomas, I doubt it,” Usiku muttered.

“So then where is he!?” Amethyst asks, getting anxious.

“Amethyst, calm down,” Usiku says in a stoic tone, “You having a panic attack on me isn’t going to help. Now listen... from what you’ve just told me, it’s clear that peonis are involved and whoever gave you guys that book clearly wanted this to happen.”

Amethyst’s eyes widen as the word ‘peonis’ escape from Usiku’s mouth. “P-peonis?” she stutters.

“Mhm,” Usiku says bluntly, “Alex and Thomas clearly ran into the peonis that had some sort of connection to this cult you mentioned earlier and are holding one of them hostage and using the other one as their search dog. Why are they wanting you to join them, I have no idea.”

“But it doesn’t make sense! Aren’t peonis supposed to be summoned? Thomas and Alex would never do that!” Amethysts asks, puzzled.

“As long as a portal between this realm and Umu is open, peonis can roam through here with no hassle. Whatever cult resided in the cave never closed the portal properly which is most likely why Thomas and Alex went there in the first place. Upindelaikis and malaikis are supposed to cleanse places like these, but what’s not making sense is that those two lost to the peonis.”

“Yes! See!?! You would think that Thomas could fight them off easily or at least put up a fight long enough for Alex to get away! What do you think went wrong?”

“...The only probability I can think of is that they were ambushed. And then with Alex...”

“...And then with Alex....?”

“Well, Amethyst, he’s possessed, I assume.”

“...!!!”

“The peonis probably couldn’t possess Thomas since he’s dug deep into his Upindelaiki roots, but Alex, who we all know hasn’t been studying or meditating or training, was an easier target.”

“Oh my god...” Amethyst gets up from her seat, holding her hand to her chest, trying to calm her aching heart down. Her sweetheart. Possessed. She never thought she’d see the day that Alexander would become a victim to the people who are supposed to be his sworn enemies. “Oh, Usiku, *please* tell me there’s a way to get him back. He won’t stay like that for long, will he?”

“Well, I’ve never heard of a malaiki or Upindelaiki being possessed, but I’m pretty sure the peonis have evolved and found many ways to get the job done. So if there is a way to return him to his normal state, Thomas would only know how,” Usiku answers with no hesitation.

“*Sighs* I should have gone with them! I don’t know why I was asleep for so long! If I were to have gone with them, I would have seen it all! I could have prevented this from happening!” Amethyst begins talking loudly, trying to hold back her tears.

“Amy, no offense, but you’re just a mere cat... with a human body.”

“Did you forget that I have powers as well!?”

“But compared to the strength and powers of a peoni, you’re just a housefly. If you happen to cause some sort of damage to them, it would have had to have taken you to wear them out first, which I assume would take a long while. Only malaikis can put up a true fight against them.”

“Uuuugh!! You’re not making this any better, Usiku!” Amethyst looks at him out of frustration, her slit pupils becoming smaller, showing more of her purple irises. She rubs her temples, feeling her head pounding. But before they can continue their conversation about the issue, *knock knock knock knock!*

“Uuuusikuuuuuu~!!! Is Amy in theeeere~!?”

## Chapter 6

June 2017

Morning

Rose makes it to the creamery and parks her car. She gets out and immediately sees Jacqueline and Nermal through the creamery's front window. She walks in, and the doorbell rings, *dingaling dingaling!* Jacqueline, the vanilla-skinned woman wearing a blue and white corset top and white jeggings along with clear, high heeled platforms and her long, moon-white hair in two pigtailed, sees Rose and squeals, "There she is~!!"

Nermal, the brown sugar-skinned girl wearing a yellow tank top along with dark-blue jean shorts and yellow flip flops, her straight ocean blue hair with lime green highlights at the ends, looks up from her phone to see Rose, as well. She smiles and says, "Hey, Rosie~!"

Rose returns the greeting, "Hey guys! Are y'all doing okay, today?" She sits at the round, red table with her friends.

Jacqueline takes a bite of her ube gelato then says, "We're doing awesome~! Where's TeeTee and MeeMee though?"

Rose shrugs, not having the slightest idea of where their other friends could be. Nermal speaks up after taking a bite of her mango gelato with a mango chunk, "They're probably on their way now. You know Tenacity tends to take a while."

Jacqueline groans and says, "It's because she never wants to get out of that house unless she's working. She should have come to the party I went to last night. Rosie, either you or MeeMee should have gone with me!"

Rose jumps in saying, "Jackie, it's like I told you last night, I was already pooped from work, and Melissa's only 17 right now and is still in school. Plus, even if she *wanted* to go, she's under the watchful eye of her parents."

Nermal adds, "I'm surprised her parents are even letting her come hang out with us. You remember that time when Tee had to convince Meemee's parents to let her take her to your senior prom?"

Rose answers, "Oh yeeah. Oh gosh, I remember Tenacity saying something like they thought they were dating or something. Like dang, a friend just can't take a friend out as *friends*?"

Nermal nods her head in agreement, "Exactly! The only reason it was easy for Jackie to take me to the prom was because we live together, so no hassle for us. But I do kinda feel bad."

"Well hey, we all had fun that night! I think it was a great idea to have you two come with us."

"Yeah! It was super fun! I'll never forget the time that Tenacity accidentally backed up against some dude!"

"Yeah, what was his name? He had a little thing for her."

Suddenly, "AHT AHT AHT! We don't talk about that!" The three girls turn to see Tenacity and Melissa at the front door, and they laugh at Tenacity's outburst.

Jacqueline says, "Nah, we're gonna talk about it! What was that dude's name, Tee? I know *you* remember."

"Oh! Are you guys talking about Issei?" Melissa says, giggling a little bit.

Jacqueline jumps out of her seat and says, "Yes! That's his name! I knew one of us remembered~!"

Before the girls continue their conversation, Rose, Tenacity, and Melissa make their gelato. Rose gets the cookies n' cream gelato with chocolate chips, cookie dough, and whip cream; Tenacity gets the vanilla gelato with chocolate candy, cookie dough, and whip cream; and Melissa gets the strawberry gelato with strawberries, sprinkles, and whip cream. Jacqueline pouts

when she sees what all the girls have gotten all but the new flavor she's trying, which is the ube-flavored gelato. "Guuuys," she whines, "You don't want to try the new flavor they got?"

Tenacity scrunches up her face from her friend's whiny fit, the valley-girl accent not helping, and she answers bluntly, "And waste my money on some stuff that I don't even like!?"

Melissa jumps in, "Haha! We got ours just in case things go south."

Rose looks at Jacqueline's gelato and tilts her head, asking, "What flavor is it?"

Jacqueline holds her gelato cup proudly and says, "Behold, the sweet purple dream~! Every bite is filled with, like, uber sweetness because of the sweet, purple ube~!" She then places her cup in the middle of the table, inviting everyone to try it. Tenacity, Melissa, Rose, and Nermal take their spoons and take a sample of the purple gelato. They take a bite at the same time, really taking in the flavors. The new and light sweetness actually appeases the girls. Jacqueline looks at all of them and puffs her chest out. "See~? I told y'all that you'd love it~!"

"I mean it's aight. I wouldn't get it every time, though," Tenacity says.

"Yeah, I'll stick to my strawberries~!" Melissa adds.

"I actually like it~! I bet it'll taste good with cookie dough~" Rose says cheerfully.

"Ooouu, that sounds like a good combo~! Look at Rose bringing her baker side out~" Nermal says, complimenting the master baker of the group.

"Oh stop~" Rose says, blushing.

"Okay, so, anyway, since Tenacity doesn't want to talk about her little man-crush," Jacqueline says, giving Tenacity a smirk and a wink, she continues, "let's just talk about what we're going to do before school comes through and grabs us by the pussies."

"Damn, it couldn't be our asses? Why it gotta be our kitties," Tenacity says, looking at Jacqueline with a more surprised stank face.

“Because school is *that* terrible, duh!” Jacqueline responds, “Now~! Back to our plans~! Tenacity, as the oldest, you go first~!”

“What you mean ‘plans’? I’m not really trying to do anything except chill at the house, go to work, and mentally prepare for college. I’ll go to some parties witchu, but I ain’t gonna stay for that long,” Tenacity explains.

“Uuuugh, you truly are the mama bear of the group, and you’re not even a mama, yet!” Jacqueline wines, “I *will* make you do more stuff than just sit in your little apartment all day, playing video games and working on those paintings you rarely touch. Okay, Rosie, you’re next~!”

Rose clears her throat and says, “Well, I’m hoping to come up with a new product to sell at the bakery. Everyone loved the strawberry profiterole so much, we thought it’d just be for Valentine’s day! I might also do some charity work, might help out at my church if I have the time. Oh! And I might start an UsTube channel.”

“Basically boss moves,” Tenacity says, summing up Rose’s goals.

“Yeah! Hopefully, college will be a good experience,” Rose says, softly smiling.

“Uuugh, so we have a mom that wants to stay home and chill, and then we have a saint who wants to do good!” Jacqueline whines again.

“Hm? What’s wrong with *my* plans??” Rose asks, confused.

“Don’t listen to her, Rose. She’s just jealous that you actually take shit seriously and give a shit about this shitty world,” Tenacity answers, “Keep being the cute goodie-two-shoes you are, unlike *this* girl over here...”



Jacqueline stares at Rose and pouts, saying “You have a naughty thottie side to you, and I *will* bring her out. But now it’s *my* turn~! Okay, so the only reason I’m going to college is because my parents are forcing me. Hell, they even forced me to pick a specific major.”

“Really?” Melissa asks, surprised.

“Yeah! It’s, like, so stupid! I was just going to go for general studies, but dad was like,” and Jacqueline says in a lower tone trying to imitate her father, “ ‘Jacqueline Ambrosia Brookes, as heir to the family’s wealth, you need to have a better status. You can’t just be known as the harlot who loves to party every night. Those days are over!’ ”

“Wow, ‘harlot’? That’s harsh,” Tenacity says, a bit sympathetic to hear her friend being scolded by her own dad.

“I hate when he talks to her like that, too,” Nermal says, fidgeting out of anger, “I just want to punch him in the face sometimes!”

“Guys, it’s totally fine,” Jacqueline interrupts, not wanting the mood to be ruined, “Dad is old as hell. He’ll be gone soon. Luckily, mom was like,” and Jaqueline makes her voice a bit higher pitched, “ ‘Now, sweetie, you know your father is just wanting what’s best for you, so just go for something that peaks your interest like cosmetology! You always loved makeup! Or even modeling! You’d make a beautiful Veronica’s Surprise model.’ ”

“Awww, well your mom’s nice~!” Rose adds, trying to keep the positivity up.

“Didn’t really call out the dad for spewing out the disrespectful shit, but yeah... she’s nice,” Tenacity says, not liking how Jacqueline’s dad pretty much got away scot-free.

“Yeah, so I’m going to go for either cosmetology or creative arts. Prolly the creative arts. But until then, I’m partying almost every night, babes~! And if I’m not partying, I’m out here

somewhere, so that means y'all have *got* to come to my location and at least say 'hey' since I'm alone most of the time."

"Don't worry, guys, she won't be alone," Nermal jumps in, "I'll most likely be with her!"

"Oh yeah, most definitely!" Jacqueline agrees, "But enough about me! MeeMee~!! Your turn~!!"

"O-Oh!" Melissa says, startled, "O-Okay, well, I'm mostly just looking into colleges right now and scholarships. I'm just wanting to get this over with so that when Senior year starts, I'll already know what I'm going for. Meanwhile, of course, I'm still working at Applebuzz, earning some income."

"And the parties?" Jacqueline asks, desperate for one of the girls to tag along with her.

"Jackie, I'm still living with my parents, and they'd *never* want me to go out at night. Not even for school activities, unless they're there. Maybe once college starts," Melissa explains, giggling softly.

"Aaagghh! This is horrible! % of the group doesn't have partying as a priority!! NeeNee, please say you'll come along!" Jacqueline begs as she looks at Nermal with big, lime-green puppy eyes.

"U-Uuuuhh, Jackie, you know I'm 16, right?" Nermal says with a smile, nervous at her sister's response, "MeeMee and I literally can't go anywhere near parties right now."

"Melissa's got SAP's! S.trict A.ss P.arents! *You*, however, NeeNee, was adopted into a family that's a bit more loose, so you got LAP's! L.oose A.ss P.arents! Meaning, I can pay our way to parties *and* we won't have to hear it from our parents! Pluuuus you can show off them singing skills you got~!"

“I don’t know, singing in front of the school is already a lot of pressure,” Nermal says, her face blushing cherry red, “To sing at a *party*? I just can’t. B-But for the remainder of the summer break, I am brushing up on my singing skills. I’m also wanting to learn how to play guitar and piano. With the college thing, I’ll focus on that a little later.”

“Oh my gosh, guys, that does it!” Jacqueline exclaims, a little red in the face, “This calls for sleepovers! If you guys won’t go to the parties and catch some D with me, then at least have fun with me the *safest* way I can think of. Slumber parties at my house, every Saturday, okay? MeeMee, if I have to have my parents talk to your parents, I can have it arranged. Rosie, you too. I know how your dad can be.”

“Don’t worry, Jackie,” Rose groans out, “Daddy is actually fine with me hanging out with you guys.”

“Then it’s settled! By the end of the week, I will have all you over for our first summer slumber party~!” Jacqueline says, and she raises her gelato cup, “Cheers~!”

Tenacity, Melissa, Rose, and Nermal all look at each other, having a mixture of feelings of excitement and uncertainty, but they all raised their cups along with Jacqueline and said together, “Cheers!”

## Chapter 7

June 2017

Morning

“Usikuuuuuu~!! C’mon, buddy~! I know you’re here~!!” The cheery yet unorthodox voice of Alexander rings in Amethyst’s and Usiku’s ears. Amethyst looks at the door in horror while Usiku stands up. His seven bats stare at the door, their red eyes glowing and baring their fangs, hissing. Usiku whispers in Swahili to the seven bats, and they calm down while scattering and hiding in different spots of the living room.

Usiku looks at Amethyst with narrowed, deep-red eyes and whispers, “*Go hide upstairs. I’ll try to get him away from here.*” Amethyst nods her head as she puts her socks and shoes back on, transforms back into a cat, and runs upstairs quietly. Usiku looks at the door as Alexander knocks again. *Knock knock knock knock!* He sighs, unlocks the door, and opens it to see a smiling Alexander. Usiku’s eyes slightly widen when he notices that Alexander matches Amethyst’s description. However, what also catches his eye is that another person stands beside him. This stranger is a tad bit shorter than Alexander, dark-red hair in a ponytail with a bang to the side, and pink eyes with round pupils. His ears are long just like Alexander’s, and they are both wearing clean, business-casual clothes. The stranger gives Usiku a sinister smile, not really doing the best job at hiding his true intentions.

“Hey, Usiku~!” exclaims Alexander, “How are you doing on this marvelous day~?”

Usiku, trying not to seem abnormal, says in a low tone, “What do you want now, Alex? And where’s Amethyst?”

“Oh~! You see, that’s the thing~!” Alexander says, tilting his head while still smiling, “We’re actually looking for her, and we thought that she’d be here~!”

“We?” Usiku asks, raising a brow.

“Ah yes~! Meet my new friend, Pierre~!”

“Hello there, sir,” Pierre says in a calm voice. However, Usiku just gives him a blank stare, exchanging no words. This silence gives Pierre chills; he’s playing off like he’s a confident guy, when in reality, Usiku’s presence alone is making him nervous. *This isn’t going to work*, Pierre thinks to himself, *He can already see through our bullshit, but this idiot needs me with him if we’re going to catch that cat.*

“May we come in~?” Alexander asks, leaning closer to Usiku.

“*You* can come in. Your little friend will have to wait outside,” Usiku answers bluntly.

“Aww c’mon, Usiku~! I promise he’s good~!” Alexander insisted.

Usiku looks at you, the reader, with a face of disbelief. However, having a plan up his sleeve, Usiku forces a smile and says in a sarcastic manner, “Oh, why not, Alex. After all, you’ve always had yourself around *good* company.”

“Yaay~! I knew you’d be nice, today~!”

Usiku steps aside and lets the two men inside his house. They take a look around, Pierre trying to find any traces of Amethyst. Alexander says, “Oh man~! It’s been foreeeever since I’ve been in this lovely house~!”

“Why don’t you two take a seat?” Usiku suggests.

“Oh~! Good idea~! Let’s sit, Pierre~! Their couches are so comfyyy~!” Alexander says, smiling at Pierre, and Pierre nervously smiles back. They take a seat at the couch Amethyst sat in, letting the couch comfort them. Usiku, still standing, simply stares at them, not saying a word.

*What is he up to?* Pierre asks himself.

However, Alexander breaks the silence and says, “Oh, Usiku~. There you go again with your silence~. Pierre, you should have seen Usiku when he was a child~! He was so quiet even then~!” Usiku cringes a little at the mention of his childhood. Alexander continues, “Yep~!”

Usiku always loved his silence, but I would always come around with some sort of nonsense to say~. He'll make it seem like he hates it, but deep down inside, I know he enjoys having me around, isn't that right, Usiku~!?" He looks at Usiku with a wider smile, hoping Usiku will agree, but Usiku stays a stone cold statue.

Meanwhile, upstairs, Delilah is holding Amethyst in her arms while sitting on the emperor-size bed. Delilah rubs Amethyst's head while Amethyst shakes and shivers in cold fear. Delilah quietly says, "*It's okay, Amy. Usiku will make them go away soon enough, okay...?*" Amethyst, though hearing Delilah's comforting words, stays silent, not wanting to make her presence known in any way.

Alexander laughs a little at Usiku's silence, but Pierre looks at both Usiku and Alexander with a bead of sweat rolling down on the side of his face. Alexander continues, "Oh~! Usiku~! You know how Amethyst, Thomas, and I went on that camping trip~?"

Usiku still doesn't say anything.

"Well, it was pretty wild~! Like earlier this morning, I found this warthog~!"

"..."

"And then I chased it deep into the woods all by myself~! And then these *veery* nice people took me to this cave~!"

"..."

"Oh~! Oh~! And guess what~? Pierre led my brother to the cave so that he could join the fun~! The other guys are pretty cool as well, I'm sure you'd love them~!"

"YEAH! Yeah, I bet he would, HA! HA! HA!" Pierre interrupts, "Oooh Alex, old buddy, you're *so* good at *story-telling*!!" He forces a smile towards Alexander, showing his pearly white teeth.

“Oh~! Wait~! I haven’t gotten to the good part~!” Alexander continues, “Okay, so first, the guys I’m talking about are Alpha, Beta, and Gamma, but they *love* calling themselves Cer-”

“HEEEY, so is uh what’s-her-name here, or not?” Pierre says through his teeth, not liking how this is going. *What the fuck is this dumbass doing!?*

“Oh yeah~!” Alexander says, “We were looking for my sweetheart~! Sorry, Pierre, it’s just that I haven’t seen Usiku in ages, I just *had* to give him just a little rundown~! But yes, is my sweetheart here, Usiku~?”

“No,” Usiku finally speaks, “She had already come by today. She’s actually looking for *you*.”

Alexander gasps, “Really~!? Well, I tried to catch her so that I could take her to the cave where we could reunite with Thomas and our new friends~” and Alexander’s smile disappears and his slit pupils dilate as he says, “But she ran away from me~....”

“Ever thought it could be because of your new look?” Usiku asks.

“Oh~ All of this~?” Alexander asks, running his pale hands through his silver-white hair, “It must be because of some drink that Alphonse-”

“ALRIGHT!” Pierre exclaims, making Alexander jump, “Well... if you say that Amethyst came here earlier, then we will just go ahead and be on our way.”

But as soon as Pierre is getting up, he’s stopped by Usiku’s voice, “But why rush out of here when you can just wait for Amethyst’s return?” Pierre and Alexander look at Usiku, who’s giving a much smoother smile than before.

*This fucker knew this would happen!* Pierre thinks as he’s paralyzed by Usiku’s lukewarm smile and blistering cold stare. *If this idiot keeps going, then it’s all over for me! Hell, I’m the fucking fool who thought this was a good idea! I gotta think of something fast.* “Yes, well, we’d hate to be of a nuisance to you,” Pierre says with a broken smile.

“Oh...but Alexander was just trying to tell me about his new friends and this new look he’s sporting,” Usiku says, looking at Alexander now, and Alexander’s smile grows back, his yellow eyes sparkling.

“Yeah~!” Alexander says, looking at Pierre, “Let me at least finish the story first~! I haven’t told him about Thomas yet~!”

“We can talk about it later!! Perhaps after we find Amethyst!!” Pierre says in a louder tone, breaking character. *I don’t care if I know that she’s here.* Pierre’s head begins to hurt as he processes his plan’s downfall. *It’s pissing me off that I can sense her presence in this house. This man is hiding her so well while easily distracting the dumbass. I can’t go snooping around the place with him here! I can’t even make it seem like I’m going to the restroom because the dumbass will just spill everything while waiting for my return!*

“Where is Thomas, anyway, Alex?” Usiku asks with the same artificial smile.

“Oh~! He’s back in the cave~!” Alexander says gleefully, “I haven’t gotten to see him, but the Cerberu-”

“OOP! Would you look at the time!!” Pierre says, finally breaking himself from the paralysis and getting up. “Look, some other things have come up. *We* need to go back to the camping site and check on Thomas, right?” Pierre asks Alexander, gripping his wrist tightly.

“O-Oh~! I guess you’re right~! Like I said, I haven’t got to see him, yet~!” Alexander says, still smiling.

“Yeah, exactly,” Pierre says, gritting his teeth, and he yanks Alexander off the couch. “Let’s go.”



Usiku, not moving a muscle, lets Pierre and Alexander escort themselves out. But as Pierre opens the door, Usiku says, “Well, Alexander, I hope you come back soon. You *have* to tell me what was in that drink.”

Alexander looks at Usiku one last time and says, “Oh~! It was nothing much~! It was just some golden apple juice that had mag-”

*Yank!!* “Let’s. Go.” Pierre says yanking Alexander outside the house and slamming the door. *WHAM!* As the sound echoes through the living room, Usiku’s bats come out of hiding and land back on the table, and they all begin to laugh in synchronized squeaks.

Usiku looks at the bats and smiles softly, saying in a whispered tone, “*That imbecile thought he could pull one on me. That was kind of fun.*” He walks up the stairs and into Delilah and his large bedroom, seeing the two ladies cuddled up. He speaks in a clear tone, “It’s okay, he’s gone.” Delilah stops holding Amethyst, and places her on the bed, seeing the traumatized cat tremble uncontrollably. She gets up and walks to her soulmate, looking at Amethyst with worry covering her vivid purple eyes.

“Oh darling, she can’t go back out there,” Delilah says with concern.

Usiku’s face becomes emotionless, once again, and he says, “Amethyst will be fine, my love. She’s gotten this far.”

“So you’re just going to throw her out there!?” Delilah says with shock in her face.

“Look, the only reason I kept those buffoons here for so long was just so I could give Amethyst some more context on what’s going on. Surely, with that information, Amethyst can have a better footing and know what to do,” Usiku retorts.

“Okay, but can’t she do that *here*? Where it’s *safer*?” Delilah says with more force.

“It won’t be so safe when Alex brings more of his new friends here. This is my only time taking a risk like this only because he brought *one* of them *and* our daughter wasn’t here. What if she’s here next time this bullshit happens and Alex brings a more antsy pal?”

“But you convinced them that she wasn’t here, right? And from how you’re wording it, it sounds like they’re not going to try to come back here, again!”

“Delilah, you’re not listening to me. That *Upindeoni* that Alexander was with couldn’t do much simply because he had to hide his identity from me and not seem suspicious. Alexander had mentioned Cerberus and a guy named Alphonse being here-”

“Cerberus? Alphonse??”

“And I don’t want them anywhere near here. I will assume that this Alphonse person is another peoni, but we all know that Cerberus is a spirit hound that lives in Umu. What are they doing here instead of residing in Umu, I have no clue.”

Amethyst perks up at the new information that Usiku had just shared. She says in a tired and raspy voice, “A-And what of Alexander’s condition?”

“Apparently, it was some drink this Alphonse character gave him. Alex said it was made from a golden apple,” Usiku answers.

“S-So what will we have to do?” Amethyst asks.

“Hmm... I wonder what exactly was put into the drink.”

“What do you mean? I thought you said that peonis have many ways to possess someone now?”

“Yes, but it can’t be just mere food or drink. No matter what, a peoni themselves has to enter their victim’s body, mind, and spirit. If Alphonse gave Alexander a drink, he had to have slipped

either a piece of himself or some other umuic creature.”

Delilah’s face scrunches up in disgust, “Ew.”

Usiku continues, “To put this in simple terms, we need to find something in the same form to cancel out the possession. However, whatever we use, it has to be made from a malaiki or Upindelaiki, or else it won’t work.”

Amethyst meows in disappointment, knowing that the only Upindelaiki that could possibly come up with a cure is Thomas, but he’s being held hostage. Delilah looks at Amethyst in dismay, and looks back at Usiku and says, “Honey, are you *sure* we can’t let her stay here? Let her at least rest for tonight.”

Usiku looks at Delilah with a fatigued look, not really trying to debate with her again. He then looks at Amethyst, who’s clearly worn out from today’s events. He lets out a big sigh and says, “Fine... she can stay for *one* night, but after that, she has to leave.”

“That is fine by me,” Amethyst says, agreeing to the terms, “Thank you, Usiku.”

“...Yeah,” Usiku responds back as he goes through his library, giving Delilah a chance to lay back on their black and purple emperor-size bed, and she lets Amethyst rest next to her.

Delilah looks at Usiku while he searches for a book to read. After a couple seconds of silence, Delilah asks him, “Usi, how’d you know about all that... umuic stuff?”

Usiku finally picks a book to read, and he looks at his lover and says, “Let’s just say I’ve ran into a few peonis before.”

Before Delilah could ask further questions, a voice rings out, “Mom? Dad? I’m home!”

## Chapter 8

June 2017

Afternoon

*Slap!!* Alexander feels Pierre's rough hand fly smooth across his face, making Alexander's cheek turn red. The sound of the slap echoes throughout the forest.

“You fucking idiot! She was there!!” Pierre yells at him, his face and ears bright red.

“But Pierre, *Usiku* wouldn't let us go upstairs no matter what I did~!” Alexander says, smiling.

“Grrrrrrrrr...” Pierre bares his teeth as he begins pulling his own hair.

“Don't worry, Pierre~! As long as she stays there, my darling will be easy to grab~!” Alexander says while dancing around the forest like he was a ballerina.

“Yeah, but as long as that *Usiku* fellow is there, there's going to be *no* progress made,” Pierre says as they make it to the entrance to the deep, dark cave. The two men see Alphonse resting on the dirt ground next to an imprisoned Thomas. Thomas' hands are behind his back, wrapped in bronze chains along with his bare feet. He lays on his side, looking up to Alexander through his rough brown hair strands.

“Alex...” Thomas groans out, his voice dry from dehydration.

“Oh, little brother~!” Alexander says cheerfully, “Did you miss me~?” He gets down on the ground and hugs his brother tightly. He looks and sees that Thomas is chained up. “What's up with the new jewelry~?” Alexander asks.

“Alexander, you *need* to wake up!! These guys are trying to take Amethyst away from us, away from *you*!!!” Thomas exclaims, his face showing despair.

“What do you mean~? Our new friends are just trying to hold a party for us~! And we need Amethyst and the other special guest to get it started~!” Alexander replies, looking at Thomas with bright eyes.

Alphonse laughs at the sight of two brothers not being on the same wavelength and says to Pierre, “That drink is really doing its job, isn't it?” However, Pierre looks at him with boiling frustration, and Alphonse looks at him with confusion and continues, “What's wrong? Besides the part where you haven't gotten that stupid cat, yet.”

Pierre looks to see Alexander cuddling Thomas, Thomas still trying to talk some sense into his brother. He then looks back at Alphonse and whispers, “*How many of those Umu maggots did you put in that drink!?*”

Alphonse answers, “Enough to do the job. He's helping you, is he not?”

“*Well, his fucking appearance AND his running faucet for a mouth isn't helping!*” Pierre hisses out.

“He's an Upindelaiki, and you know they react to possession a little differently.”

“*That fucker almost ratted us out!*”

“Well, of course, I'm sure the cat can clearly see that her friend isn't who he usually is.”

“*No, one of his friends knows of this shit now!!*”

“Oh...okay?”

“*They know of the cave. They know of Cerberus. They know of you. They know enough to stop all of this!!*”

“...Ohohohoho~! I'll care if that person isn't human. So...are they or are they not human?”

“*Well, he's...part human...*”

“And the other part?”

“...*Quphanto...*”

“.....”

All expression from Alphonse's face goes away and his furry brown warthog ears twitch as soon as the word 'Quphanto' escapes Pierre's lips. He gets up and scratches his chin while walking around, his two hooves echoing throughout the hideout, and mutters, “*So he really did go out his way to-...*” He says this in a low whisper, hoping that no one in the cave heard him. He then snorts and says out loud, “Well, he's not as powerful as I am, of course, but that's still... concerning.” He looks at Alexander and continues, “And this Upindelaiki told him just about everything, huh?” He looks back at Pierre and asks, “Did this guy seem to care?”

Pierre answers, “Not really, but are we really gonna take that risk!”

Alexander overhears the conversation and says with a smile, “Oh~! You won't have to worry about Usiku~! Ever since he started a family, he rarely leaves the house~! He doesn't try to get involved in anything any of us do~!”

Alphonse's nerves settle after hearing the good news and looks at Pierre with a crooked smile, “See? Nothing to worry about. Besides, that cat isn't really all that important to capture. It's that *brat* that we need for Aidoneus to shut up. Speaking of which, I hope Cerberus is having better luck than you two.”

“As do I, sir,” Pierre says while side-eyeing Alexander. Then, he looks back at Alphonse, and begs, “Would you *please* do something about *him*, though?”

Alphonse tilts his head, “How do you mean? Our little pet seems perfectly fine.”

Pierre continues, “No, like get rid of his personality entirely! Hell, get rid of his memories if you have to!!”

“...OHOHOHOHOHOHO~!! Pierre, I'm the Quphanto of Gluttony! I can't simply take away his memories, that's not my specialty. To change his personality, now... I could have him

eat buffets until he's a big slob and then feels like a piece of shit. But I'm sure he won't be much help then. I'm sorry, Pierre, but the maggots can only do so much. At least he's willing to help."

"So you're telling me that I have to deal with this lousy bitch for the remainder of this mission!?"

"I mean you *could* always look for the cat by yourself if he's *that* much of a nuisance, but then I might as well have not forced him to drink my concoction and have him trapped with his brother. On top of that, I doubt she'd let you anywhere close to her or even let you bat an eyelash towards her. You heard the Upindelaiki, he almost had her."

"..."

"Besides, whether you decide to take him with you or not, my plan will still work because that cat is going to want to save her friends one way or another. So it's either you're capturing her or she's just going to bring herself to us~. It's a win-win situation, is what I'm basically saying."

"..."

"So don't fret, Pierre~! We'll get her soon enough. It's the other person we need to stress about catching..."

...

### **Evening**

The Cerberus Brothers walk through the forest in their hound forms: their black and tan fur flowing with the forest breeze, their pointy ears changing directions to hear any peculiar sounds, and their shiny, black noses twitch as they sniff the air for their other target. Alpha walks a bit further than Beta and Gamma so that he would be the one leading the way. *Sniff sniff sniff sniff.*

“Alpha, are you sure we’re going the right way?” Beta asks impatiently, “We've been going this way for about an hour now. And we all know that this boy loves to be where socialization is.”

“Yeah,” Gamma joins, agreeing with Beta, “Anti loves to play with us!! For all we know, he probably ran around the forest long enough for his scent to be super strong to throw us off!”

“And you both know Anti loves changing up his pattern,” Alpha responds, not changing directions or stopping.

“So what, we’re just going to go this same way, anyway, just because he wasn’t in the middle of nowhere last time!?” Beta complains.

“We’ve been sniffing around here for HOURS!!” Gamma yells, baring his sharp teeth.

“I’m telling you two, he’s here. He’s not that far,” Alpha says with more bass to his voice.

“Alpha, it’s not that I’m doubting you, but... fuck it, I’m doubting you,” Beta says tilting his head with a worried face.

“I say we split up!” Gamma says, wagging his tail and letting his tongue hang out like a dog ready to play fetch.

“I agree! We’ll cover more ground this way!” Beta joins in, wagging his tail along with his younger brother.

“And then what are you two going to do once you spot him? He’d outrun you if you’re by yourself,” Alpha retorts, crushing their idea.

“BUT AT LEAST WE’D HAVE HIM IN OUR SIGHT!!” Beta and Gamma yell, trying to keep their idea alive.

“What’s the point of having him in your sight if you can’t even catch him? Anti isn’t like the Fallen back home. The Fallen are mere punished souls weakened by Umu’s lava pits. Anti is



much more than that. He's proved many times that he can outrun us. End of discussion," Alpha says, shutting down the entire debate. Beta and Gamma look at their older brother, snarling under their breaths. They love and respect Alpha, but there are times they wish that he would just consider their plans more often. They continue their search, not saying another word to each other. *Sniff sniff sniff sniff.*

"Cerberus~! Yoohoo~! C'mere boy~!" The brothers perk up as soon as they hear a familiar voice call out to them. The smooth, tenor voice is playful, stopping the brothers in their tracks. However, they didn't stop to play because their bodies are still and their heads are tilted towards the person that dares to taunt them. "Come on, boy, you know you missed me~! Come here and give me a big hug~!" The brothers simultaneously growl at him, their target, who dares to stand to their left side a couple feet away in a bunny form. The playful, gray bunny scratches his left ear and twitches his small, pink nose and bats its big, sparkly red-orange eyes, smiling at the brothers innocently. "C'mon, Cerberus~! I missed you so so much~!"

Beta and Gamma stand next to Alpha, the three brothers' eyes glaring at the bunny. Alpha speaks softly, "On the count of three, we grab that little bastard... one..."

Beta says through his teeth, "*Two...*"

Gamma growls out, "***Three...***"

They lean back and pounce towards the bunny, but Anti the bunny swiftly dodges them and starts running. The Cerberus brothers quickly run after him, growling and barking like crazy. Anti's small paws softly hit the ground as he runs away while the brothers' rough paws kick dust, digging into the soft forest floor trying to catch up. "C'mon, Cerberus~!" Anti teases, looking back at them. "Don't you miss me~!? I know you do, you big hunk of love~!!" The brothers don't say anything, knowing that Anti is just trying to piss them off, and they continue to bark

and snarl. Anti starts laughing hysterically as he runs with little to no effort, keeping a good distance. “Oh man, you bitches can never catch me~! You do know the only reason you guys ever succeed is because you would catch me off guard, right, you fucking assholes?” he says with a snarky smile. He makes a quick turn to the right, and the brothers drift their bodies the same direction.

“I’ll admit though,” Anti continues, “These chase scenes can be fun~! But it’s getting a little boring now, don’t ya think~? I mean, you guys aren’t running into shit or running humans over or running across tables~! We need more of that~! So you know what, I’ll see you guys in town... if you’re willing to show yourselves to the Gaia public~!” And as soon as he says this, his bunny body glows bright red-orange and shifts to a bird shape. The glow disappears and reveals that Anti has transformed into a huge raven as he flaps his wings and flies upward. The Cerberus Brothers try to jump for him, but while Beta and Gamma grab nothing, Alpha is only able to grab a few feathers from Anti’s backside. “Yowch!!!” Anti echoes in the sky. “I bet you wanted to bite there, you pervert!! Ahahahahahahahaha~!!” he echoes before losing sight of them.

The Cerberus Brothers watch their target disappear above the trees, the trees blocking the clear sky view with their dark green leaves. Alpha spits out the feathers, Anti’s scent taking over his mouth and nose. The brothers growl out of frustration.

They had finally found him, much quicker than last time; it was pretty clear that Anti wanted to spice things up, yet again. They were so close, yet so far. As a way to release all the stress, all the frustration, and all the false hope they were given, the Cerberus Brothers simultaneously howl, their cries echoing throughout the forest. *AWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!*

## Chapter 9

June 2017

Night

Usiku, Delilah, and Rose eat collard greens, macaroni and cheese, brown rice, and cornbread for dinner with the soft yellow-orange light coming from the sputnik chandelier setting the peaceful mood within the entire dining area. Soft jazz plays on their Perplexa, and the family lets the soothing piano and drums massage their ears. They continue eating their warm dinner, not saying a word to each other. Amethyst, still in her cat form, walks into the comforting dining area and rests next to Delilah. Delilah looks down at Amethyst and says, “Oh, honey~ You want to eat something?” Amethyst perks up, her ears twitching and tail swaying in excitement.

*Meow~!* Delilah giggles and gets up and says, “Okay, let me get you a plate~! Now, let’s see...”

As Delilah searches for the perfect plate to give Amethyst, Rose looks at her and asks her mom, “So are we keeping her?” She keeps looking at the silky, black cat, remembering how she greeted her while she was going to hang out with her friends. She softly smiles and says, “She’s so beautiful~.”

Delilah finally grabs a glass plate and grabs a small serving of each food available and says, “Oh... she’s only going to stay here for tonight, and then she’s leaving us.”

Rose’s smile goes away after hearing her mom’s answer. *I’d hate to see her go back out there. She wouldn’t have a safe home,* Rose thought to herself, *Now that I think about it, didn’t Tenacity have a black cat?* Delilah comes back to the round, dark-brown, wooden table and places the plate full of food in front of Amethyst, and Amethyst begins to eat.

“Don’t worry, honey,” Delilah says as she sits back down, “She’ll be fine~! Believe it or not, this cat is a pretty tough cookie~!” She looks at Amethyst while complimenting her, but the hungry feline is too focused on her meal.

“Besides,” Usiku says, finally speaking after being silent for so long, “She prefers not being someone’s house cat.”

“Really?” Rose asks, tilting her head, “Because when I was visiting my friends, Tenacity told us how she took a certain black cat home.” Amethyst’s ear twitches, and Usiku and Delilah look at their daughter. Rose continues, “Yeah, Tenacity was driving yesterday and saw the cat and took her back to her apartment! But for some reason, the cat wasn’t there anymore. She swears up and down that she didn’t have the door or anything open to where the cat could walk out, buuut knowing TeeTee, she probably did.” Rose takes another bite of her fluffy cornbread before continuing her story.

Before Rose could say anything, Usiku jumps in and says, “She was probably talking about another black cat, dear.” However, Rose shakes her head. She looks at Amethyst once more, then looks back at her dad.

“I *know* that this cat is Tenacity’s because she said the cat had purple eyes,” Rose says with confidence.

“But there are plenty of black cats with purple eyes,” Usiku says before taking a spoon full of the cheesy and creamy macaroni.

“Daddy...” Rose says before giggling, “You do know that the chance of black cats having purple eyes is pretty rare, right? Like... *very* rare.” Usiku doesn’t say anything as he chews up his food. Rose continues, “Plus, we see animals around here all of the time. I’m pretty sure I would have remembered seeing this one many times before, but this is my first day seeing her.”

“So what you’re saying, darling, is that you want to take her back to Tenacity?” Delilah asks, smiling softly. Rose, with food in her mouth, nods her head in approval. Delilah’s smile grows, and she looks at Amethyst, who looks up and tilts her head. *Meow*. She’s just glad that Amethyst

will have someplace safer to stay until this fiasco is over. Usiku sits to think about everything his daughter just explained to him, and then a light bulb lights up in his head. Keeping the idea unannounced, for now, he continues eating with his soulmate and daughter.

...

After dinner, the small family, along with Amethyst, go to the living room to watch a soap opera on T.V. Time passes by, and Delilah falls asleep in Usiku's arms. Rose looks at the clock, and it's 10:30pm. She gets up, and says, "I'm gonna go make some chocolate chip cookies. Y'all want any?"

Usiku looks at Rose, softly smiling, and says, "Of course, dear. Is there a chance that you could make those heart-shaped sugar cookies, too?"

Rose giggles and says, "Sure, daddy." She walks into the kitchen and gets started. Meanwhile, Usiku looks at Amethyst, who's sleeping on the other couch. He carefully lays Delilah on her side, kisses her cheek without waking her up and walks to Amethyst. He gently shakes her, waking her up, and Amethyst looks at him with sleepy eyes.

Usiku whispers, "*You know that hill that I'm always stargazing at? Let's go there.*" After he says that, he walks to the front door, putting the hood of his cloak over his head. He says to Rose, "Pumpkin, I'm going out for a little bit. The cat's coming with me."

"Okie dokie~! Don't be long!" Rose responds in the kitchen, and Usiku exits the house, holding the door for Amethyst to walk out, as well. They walk down the steps, and Usiku grabs Amethyst, holding her close. *Meoow.*

"*Just hold on tight.*" After saying this to Amethyst, Usiku looks up at the sky and notices his seven bats flying towards them. *Squeak squeak squeak!* Usiku continues whispering, "*Oh, and close your eyes.*" Not understanding why she would need her eyes closed, she does so anyway, not knowing what Usiku is going to do. The seven bats suddenly fly in circles around the two,

and they glow a bright red. They keep circling Usiku and Amethyst at a blinding speed, red sparkles surrounding them, and a couple seconds later, they disappear.

After a couple more seconds, the bats reappear, along with Usiku and Amethyst, at a grassy hill right outside of Forestopolis; five of the bats fly around in the sky, playing together, while the other two bats stay with Usiku, one sitting on each shoulder. Amethyst opens her eyes to the spacious view; the sight of them being on a hill tall enough to see all of the grassy meadow makes her heart jump. The shining full moon and sparkling stars makes the view much more beautiful. Amethyst can't help but to gasp at the sight, and Usiku puts her down, letting her paws sink into the cold, mushy ground. "Oh my god," she finally says, "Usiku, this is beautiful." She can't even walk because of the mesmerizing view, so she decides to sit down.

Usiku decides to keep standing, looking up at the sky and says, "Yeah... I had found this place after getting Delilah out of malaiki City. Luckily, this place is only 20 minutes away from the house, but... well that's driving distance. But I didn't take us here to talk about the scenery." He looks back at Amethyst with a serious face. He continues, "I'm here to talk about what you need to do. Rose is taking you back to her friend. What you're going to do is become buddy-buddy with her, and perhaps after a few days, you will go ahead and explain to her what is happening."

Amethyst's eyes widen, and she looks at him and says, "Are you serious? You're wanting me to get *her friend* involved?"

"Trust me, her friends have nothing better to do. They're all out of school, probably doing who knows what that's not productive at all. However, taking baby steps, you'll let Tenacity know the truth about you, why you two met in the first place, and explain to her why she should help you," Usiku further explains.

“But Usiku, all of this would end much more quickly if *you* would just help me,” Amethyst implies.

“If *I* get involved, I’ll attract too much attention.”

“If I get *humans* involved, *they* are going to get hurt.”

“People are going to get hurt no matter what. However, I’m pretty sure your mission is to just save Alex and Thomas... you’re not planning for me to catch a few bodies.”

“...Fair point.”

“Glad we’re on the same page. Look, if you need me to, I can get the bats to grab a few things for you that might help convince Tenacity to help you, though I believe showing her your human form will be enough persuasion. Once she gets her other friends involved, you will prepare them as much as you can. And when you feel like they are ready, you’ll take them to the cave to *at least* wear out Cerberus and the other peonis enough for them to give up Alex and Thomas. Boom. Problem solved.”

“Isn’t Cerberus strong...?”

“Once they see that they’re only dealing with some humans and a cat that has gotten some sort of special training, they’ll go easy on you guys. It’s *me* they would go all out for.”

“All because you’re a Quphanto?”

“*Partly*, but even that is enough excuse for them to attempt to rip my head off. Look, just trust me on this. Assuming that they have some sort of boundaries, they’ll still want to fight, but not to the point it would cause a rift between our realm and theirs. And hey, who knows, they probably don’t want to fight you at all, but... this is all just in case things go further south.”

“...”

“It’s all on how you want to approach this. You’re either going to not do anything and run away from Alexander forever, totally ignoring the fact that he and Thomas are being held against their own will; get people involved to help you get them back, knowing that it’ll be your responsibility to make sure that those people are ready to give it their all to help you; or cut the series short and give yourself to the peonies, freeing Alex and Thomas, and force our Creator to figure out another plotline.”

“H-Huh? I didn’t understand the last part.”

“Never mind that. You’re either running forever, turning yourself in, or fighting back with some helping hands. What are you going to do, Amethyst?”

Amethyst thinks long and hard about this while she looks at the view. From her first impressions of Tenacity, she can tell that the young lady is a decent human. However, Usiku is right; not once did she see Tenacity do anything she’d consider ‘productive’ despite only being with her for half a day. It seems that the only time Tenacity is being diligent is when she’s at her job, and when she’s home, she’ll just lounge around all day. Perhaps introducing her to this reality of Gaia could perk her up. She hasn’t gotten a chance to meet Tenacity’s other friends, but hopefully they hold some sort of potential as well. Before making her final decision, she looks at Usiku and asks, “Usiku... are you sure they’re capable?”

Usiku looks at Amethyst then looks at the moon and says, “Trust me, they’re what you’re looking for. If my Rose has been friends with them for so long... they must have some sort of heart...”

Amethyst nods and says, “Alright...I think I know what I need to do. Well, let’s go back home. I’m sure your daughter is ready for us to come back.”



**Chapter 10**  
**July 2017(several days later)**  
**Morning**

Amethyst and Tenacity have gotten along pretty well for the week. Amethyst didn't expect Tenacity to give her so much freedom as a cat such as letting her roam outside the house as much as she wants. She's nothing like Alexander who would want her to stay inside and be in his sight at all times. Although that may sound toxic, Alexander wasn't controlling or possessive; he just loves having Amethyst around, and he would hope she'd feel the same. Tenacity, however, though making it clear that she loves having Amethyst around, understands the concept of 'needing space' and doesn't complain when the independent cat wants to be alone.

Alexander has never been in this part of the city, so Amethyst hasn't seen him for a while and hopes that she never does. For all she knows, he's probably constantly checking back at Usiku's place. Amethyst doesn't like the idea of letting him go around the way he is, but she really doesn't have any other choice unless she wants to give herself to some umuic strangers. *I think it's about that time*, Amethyst thinks to herself, *I believe Tenacity and I are on good and comfortable terms. Here's hoping that this revelation will go smoothly.* As she lays next to Tenacity in bed, she watches the sun rise, noticing that Tenacity's body is facing away from the light, trying to continue her sleep. Amethyst softly smiles, and she hops over the sleeping lady, looking at her sleeping face. She nuzzles Tenacity's face, purring, and Tenacity flinches from the fuzzy touch as she wakes up. *Meow~!*

Tenacity groans out, "Morning, kitty..." as she rubs Amethyst's head. She sits up, rubbing the sleepy-seeds out of her eyes, and stretches her body, feeling her bones pop. "Whew! This week was crazy, wasn't it girl?" Tenacity asks Amethyst, thinking about her week at work. "I'm just glad it's over, for now." While Tenacity gets up to freshen up for her day off, Amethyst ponders how she will reveal everything. Does she just go ahead and start talking? Perhaps she can

transform into her human form first? Either way, she knows that the human girl is going to freak out.

Minutes pass, and Tenacity goes to the kitchen to grab herself a chocolate pop tart. Amethyst walks out of the bedroom and stands on the table in the living room. While Tenacity eats the chocolatey goodness, she looks at Amethyst and says, “You know... it’s crazy how I’ve let you back in my house, and we’ve been chilling and everything! And yet.... I still haven’t given you a name.” She sits down on the couch, facing Amethyst. She takes another bite of her pop tart, moaning out of pleasure from the bite, “Mmm~!! Yo, I wish you could taste this. This is so good~! But back to what I was sayin’... Should I even name you? I mean I’d hate to call you a ‘pet’, but... you pretty much live here...” She takes another bite of her pop tart, closing her eyes to enjoy her chocolatey foodgasm.

“My name is Amethyst.”

Silence. Only the birds singing ‘good morning’ to the world can be heard. Tenacity opens her eyes and looks at Amethyst with a confused look. “What the fuck was that?” she asks, looking around. She looks back at Amethyst and says, “No way that was you... was it?” She continues eating her pop tart, still looking around, chills running up and down her spine.

“Oh no, dear, it was me.”

Tenacity instantly snaps her neck back at Amethyst, eyes wider than gates of a gated community. “... Say something else,” she commands, unsure of what’s really going on. With no hesitation, Amethyst looks right into Tenacity’s terrified face and does exactly what she requested.

“Something else.”

They look at each other for a couple of seconds. Then, not saying a word, Tenacity gets up from the couch and goes to her bedroom. Amethyst watches her, a little confused as to what she's doing. Tenacity comes back with her phone and her holy manuscripts, and as she tries to call her friends, she uses her other hand to hold the holy book in front of Amethyst.

"What the!?" Amethyst exclaims.

"Lord, if this is You, or one of your spirit helpers, I'm so sorry!! I don't know what I've done, but I ain't ready yet!! I promise I'll do better!! I'll stop complainin' about life! I'll stop procrastinating on my paintings! Just please don't take me away from here!!" Tenacity yells out.

"Child, what are you doing? I'm not a spirit *or* this Lord you speak of," Amethyst says, a little perplexed.

"Nah, quit playin' wit' me!! You gotta be something besides a cat!! You a toy!?" Tenacity says.

"Tenacity, I must be an advanced toy to be able to eat and walk like a regular cat."

Before they can continue this conversation, her phone stops ringing, and the person to talk is Jacqueline. "WHAT'S UP, BESTIES~!!" Jacqueline sings.

"JACQUELINE, I HAVE A FUCKING TALKING BLACK CAT!!" Tenacity yells out.

"...What?" Jacqueline asks, confused.

"Hey guys~!" Melissa joins the call.

"MEEMEE, MY CAT FUCKING TALKS!!" Tenacity yells again.

"...What?" Melissa asks, also confused.

Jacqueline laughs hysterically in the background. Then Nermal and Rose jump into the call.

"I'm sorry, did I hear TeeTee saying her cat is talking?" Nermal asks, giggling a little bit.

"YEAH? IS ROSE IN HERE!?" Tenacity asks.

“Y-Yeah, I’m here, but why are you yelling...?” Rose asked, a bit nervous about Tenacity’s behavior.

“GIRL!! YOU COULD HAVE TOLD ME THAT THIS WAS A PRANK?” Tenacity screams.

“H-Huh? B-But it’s not a prank, what are you talking about?” Rose questions.

“You had to have known that this cat could talk!!!” Tenacity proclaims.

“Child, I told you my name is Amethyst,” Amethyst says, a little annoyed by Tenacity repeatedly calling her ‘that cat’. Tenacity winces at Amethyst and holds her phone closer to her so that her friends could hear. “And no, this isn’t a prank. Rose didn’t know that I could talk.”

“Yo, who the fuck is that?” Jacqueline asks, putting a halt to her laughter.

“That’s the ca- I mean Amethyst!! I told you I wasn’t trippin’!!” Tenacity says.

“Whooooa,” Nermal says. “She sounds old.”

“I wouldn’t say old!” Melissa interrupts, not wanting to offend Amethyst. “I’d say she sounds... like in her late 20’s or mid 30’s.”

“You think *that’s* going to make her feel better!?” Rose exclaims.

“She sounds like she could be my middle school teacher,” Jacqueline adds.

“Can we stop talking about what I sound like, please?” Amethyst interrupts, putting more volume to her voice. “There’s a reason why I’ve been living with you, Tenacity. I am in some deep trouble, and I need you and possibly your friends’ help. However, I will not explain what’s going on until your friends come here... that is if they want to know what’s going on. Just understand that once you hear what I have to say, you *cannot* go babbling about this to *anyone* else. This stays between us... understood?”

...

**Afternoon**

After explaining to Tenacity, Melissa, Jacqueline, Nermal, and Rose what's going on, Amethyst looks at the girls with a stern look. This is a lot to take in. Amethyst just poured out how her lover and his brother have been kidnapped by peonis, and now her lover is trying to catch her because he's under possession; because of Amethyst not having anyone to help her get Alexander and Thomas back, she's seeking help from these girls who Usiku recommended. "Any questions?" Amethyst asks, before continuing with explaining what she plans to do.

"Uh, yeah, why the fuck you want *us* to help you!?" Tenacity asks.

"I honestly don't believe it! There's peonis!?" Jacqueline jumps in.

"Your friends are malaikis!?" Melissa adds.

As Tenacity, Jacqueline, and Melissa ask their questions, Nermal and Rose stay silent. This doesn't sound too 'out of the ordinary' for them the more they hear Amethyst's story, and it's because they're 'out of the ordinary' themselves. Jacqueline knows about Nermal's truth, but they promised to never tell anyone, including their friends; meanwhile, all of them have no idea of Rose's secret. As much as they want to admit their true identities to their friends, especially now that they're seeing Amethyst, they're still not comfortable to admit it for it is still fresh and they feel like their human friends would only freak out even more.

Amethyst sighs, "Look, I know that you humans have never seen stuff like this, but it is true. Everyday, you associate with people without even knowing their true identities. You've probably talked to a Uyama, Ludamu, malaiki, peoni, or whatever else lives on this Earth along with you. What makes me so different is that I'm willing to show you that I'm clearly not one of you. And this was quite the risky move on my part, but I made sure that you were decent enough for me to reveal this. Yes, my friends are Upindelaikis; yes, they have been kidnapped by peonis; and yes, I'm asking for you girls' help..."

“Okay, but my thing is how would *we* help? It’s like you said, we’re just *humans*,” Tenacity points out.

“Oh, I have some things that can fix that,” Amethyst says with a soft smile. “From what I have seen from you alone, Tenacity, I can tell you have potential. And I’m sure all of you have some sort of potential, as well.”

All the girls sit there in silence. Their hearts are pounding like bass drums. This is something they never expected to happen in their lives. How can someone instantly say ‘yes’ to practically becoming a hero? Will their lives stay the same after accepting this mission? Most likely not. However, will it be a fun experience? Most likely will.

“So... will you girls help me?” Amethyst asks.

## Chapter 11

July 2017

Afternoon

A tall man sits outside of a cafe, enjoying his iced tea while looking at the scenery. The soft summer breeze blows against his milk chocolate face, his dark-brown, poofy hair in a low ponytail getting ruffled up a little. He takes a deep breath and releases it slowly and says to himself, “Today’s a pretty good day.” He finishes up his iced tea, letting the cool substance comfort his soul.

Before he leaves, he notices that a black and white cat walks up to him. Its black and white fur glistens against the bright, yellow sunlight, and its jasper-orange eyes look into his sunset-orange ones. *Mrrroow*. “Oh! Aww, a cat,” the man says, watching it sit there. He looks at his watch to see that it’s 2:30pm, and he gets up and grabs his katana. He puts his katana behind his back, and he gets up from his seat to stretch.

“You’re Issei Jackson, yeah?”

A tenor-pitched male voice makes Issei look around, confused. He says, “Who’s asking?”

“I am~.”

He looks down at the cat to see him have a smile on his face and his tail swaying from side to side. Issei tilts his head in surprise, and then he looks around to see if anyone else is noticing this. Luckily, not many people are around him, but he knows anyone can see this at any second. He looks back at the cat and says, “Who, or what, are you, and how do you know my name?”

“Haha, don’t get your curls knotted up. If you gotta know, can we talk somewhere that won’t make you look like the crazy one?” the mysterious cat says.

“*Me* the crazy one?” Issei says, “*You’re* a cat... *talking*.”

“... Touche~. C’mon, follow me,” the cat says, and before Issei could question the cat any more, the cat starts walking towards Issei's home, and Issei walks beside him. They don’t share

any words with each other, but Issei took the time to understand the cat's aura. Tapping into his spiritual abilities, Issei can sense that the cat is not from this realm; the vibes that he's giving are umuic. Nonetheless, Issei has nothing better to do, so he might as well see what this cat wants.

...

Issei and the cat make it to his apartment. He opens the white door to reveal walls of pure white, couches of maroon, and soft carpet of tan. He lets out a sigh of relaxation and closes the door, and the cat walks to the dark, wooden table and sits on it, tail swaying. Issei leans his katana against the wall and sits on the long couch, facing the cat. "So what do you want, cat?" he asks, resting his head on his hands.

The cat gives a sinister smile and looks at his right, white paw and says, "Word on the street you can kick some peoni ass."

Issei flinches at the accurate assumption and confirms, "Yeah... I guess you could say that."

The cat continues, "I'll cut to the chase~. I got some Umuites on my ass, and I need somebody to help lil' ol' me. I tried to get some other guys to take care of them, buuuut... let's just say they didn't do their job....soooo, liiiiike, can you help me out~?"

"So *you* need *me* to beat up these Umuites, your own kind, to the point they'd stop chasing you," Issei asks.

"Aah, I knew you'd see that I'm umuic myself~. As unorthodox as this situation is, yes, that's exactly what I need you to do," the cat says with a smile, showing off his pearly white fangs.

"Why would some peonis be chasing you, though?"

"Oh, it's becaaaauuse... mind your business."

"Pffft, how you gon' tell me to mind my business when this is pretty much my business now. I'm not about to accept this job unless I get some more context. What the hell am I even getting from all of this, anyway?"



“Uggh, goddammit, why you gotta be so fuckin’ nosey? The other malaikis didn’t ask this many questions.”

“Well, I’m not ‘the other malaikis’. Look, never mind about the context, then. How much am I getting paid?”

“Can we worry about payments *after* you’ve done the job?”

“Hah! No! The fuck I look like!?”

“Alright alright fine, hold up... hey, you into dick?”

“NO, WHAT THE FUCK?”

“Relax, it was just a question!.... Oh! Okay! \$200!”

“Hmmmm...” Getting this far into the conversation, Issei is not too comfortable with this job. Usually, if it’s a regular peoni, he wouldn’t charge so much if at all. However, for a customer to be from Umu himself and is requesting to get some Umuites off his back? Clearly there’s more to the story. Issei says, “I’ll take the \$200 if you tell me who exactly I’m fighting.”

“...” The cat stays silent for a second, then lets out a frustrated sigh and rolls his eyes.

“Look, either cat got your tongue *or* you can put your tongue back in your mouth and tell me who I’m fighting,” Issei says, holding his hands up.

“...Cerberus,” the cat reveals. “It’s Cerberus that’s chasing me.”

“... \$600,” Issei says.

“W-What?” the cat asks, his tail frizzing up.

“\$600. \$200 up front, and \$400 after the job is done. Sounds pretty good, right?”

“Dude, are you kidding me!?”

“But I mean, hey, I *could* just decline this deal altogether and you just go find someone else to do the job... which good luck with that if you do.”

“...Fine... I’ll have the \$200 ready by tomorrow...”

“Great! Glad we understand each other. Now one more thing. Take a gun-”

“I don’t need a gun, bud.”

“Dude, take a fucking gun. You clearly need it.”

“I’m a *cat*. How am I supposed to carry that shit!?”

“I’m not stupid, dude! I know you got a human form! That’s how us mythical creatures work!

Now, just take a gun.”

“...Whatever.”

Ending the conversation, Issei reaches for a remote and presses a certain button that transforms the couch he isn’t sitting on into a tray full of weapons. The cat looks at the tray full of shiny weapons of all kinds, and he looks back at Issei with an annoyed face and says, “*Which* gun do I choose?”

“Whatever gun you want,” Issei says, laying back, “They’re all pretty special in their own way.”

The cat walks on the tray and grabs a handgun adorned with sapphire jewels with his mouth. Issei looks at him and says, “Cool choice~! That’s Elizabeth. She’s an icy girl and will give you the harshest frostbite.”

“Ice...Hm, this is actually perfect~,” the cat muffles. “Welp, I’ll be going now. Would you mind opening the door for me? Or a window?”

Issei gets up and walks to the door, and the cat follows him, carrying the gun in his mouth. Issei places his hand on the doorknob and twists it, giving the cat an opening. Before the cat could walk out, however, Issei says, “Hey, it’s unfair that you know my name but I don’t know yours.”

“Seriously?” the cat muffles again. He sighs and says, “Kendo. My name’s Kendo.”

## Chapter 12

July 2017

Night

Alexander drives to a fast-food restaurant called McDonald's. He parks the white van and says, "Here we are~!" as he looks at Pierre and smiles. Meanwhile, Pierre looks at him with annoyance covering up his face. Alexander looks at him with sad puppy eyes and says, "What's wrong, Pierre~? You don't like this place~?"

"I've never *been* to this place!" Pierre exclaims, "In fact, I could *care less* about this place!! We're here to look for your cat!!"

"Oh~! Well, see the thing is I can't focus with an empty stomach~!" Alexander replies.

Pierre gives him a suspicious look. *Is he stalling?* Pierre asks himself, *I swear, I feel like this Upindelaiki still has a sliver of sense within him. He's been doing nothing but prolong my stay in this realm. I could have found this cat by now and went back home.*

"Come on, Pierre~!" Alexander pleads, "Let us just eat first, and I promise that we'll go back to looking for Amethyst~!"

*Then again these are umuic maggots controlling him, Pierre considers, And just like anyone else, they can only do so much with a vessel. I wish we could have gotten them a better vessel, in that case. His damn brother would have immediately rejected them.* "Ugh, fine," Pierre groans out, "We'll eat for a bit, but then it's back to work."

...

The two partners sit at a yellow booth, next to a window to look at a clear view of cars passing by and driving into the parking lot. Alexander eats a tray full of two large fries, 10 chicken nuggets, and a double cheeseburger with a Prof. Spice to drink. Pierre, however, just gets a soft serve vanilla ice cream. As Alexander eats a few of his fries, he talks to Pierre. "So Pierre," he begins, "Why exactly do we need Amethyst~? It is for a party, right~?"

“I can’t tell you why,” Pierre responds, “But I can say that I can’t wait to get the search done and over with.”

“Yeah, sorry that my Amy is being stubborn~. After I talk to her, I’m sure she’ll be understandable~,” Alexander assures.

“*Yeah, I doubt it,*” Pierre mutters, eating his cold ice cream.

“Well, if you didn’t really want to do this job, then why accept it?” Alexander asks.

“I didn’t say anything about not wanting to do this job,” Pierre retorts.

“It’s just that you’re not happy. You haven’t really been having some sort of fun since we started our search party,” Alexander says.

“Am I supposed to have fun doing this shit?”

“Well, probably not, but at least be a little more optimistic~!”

“Look, if you want me to be honest with you, I was forced to do this.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah... the only reason I’m here is because I’m an animal caretaker back home, and a few of us are usually sent here to either-... ahem, anyways,” Pierre stops himself and takes a bite of the ice cream. *Great, now he’s making me talk too much,* Pierre complains to himself.

“Hm? Why would your home need my Amy?” Alexander asks while tilting his head.

“...Overall, I just want to go home,” Pierre says, “I’d rather be at my place, taking care of my pets and talking to them instead of you.”

“Aww, what’s your pets like~?”

“Are you serious?”

“Mhm!”

“... If you must know, I have six pets. A dog, a cat, a horse, a snake, a bird, and a centipede.”

“Oh! That’s an interesting set of pets~! I bet they’re adorable~.”

“Hehe, they’re nothing like Gaia’s animals, but... yeah... I guess they are adorable in their own hellish way.”

They continue to eat their food, letting the sports channel playing on televisions across the restaurant fill up the silence. A couple minutes pass, and Alexander starts another conversation with Pierre and asks, “Do you have a family back in Umu?”

“Hm?” Pierre looks at him. “A family?”

“Yeah, like are your parents back home? Perhaps even some siblings,” Alexander adds.

“Oh... no. I... actually don’t remember my family,” Pierre answers.

“Oh...really?” Alexander asks in a sorrowful tone.

“Yeah... I woke up in the Spirit Realm with no memory of my Past Life except my name, like every other soul awakening from Death, and I walked to the place I felt like I needed to be... Umu. Once I got there, a bunch of Upindeonis at the gate basically said I was accepted, and I just watched myself slowly change into an Upindeoni. I didn’t know I had a family. The only ‘family’ I really have is just my pets.”

“Oh...it’s different for me.”

“Yeah, I know. You’re an Upindelaiki. I heard you guys are all lovey-dovey and shit over there.”

“Well, yeah, but my brother and I were *born* in Maza. Our parents are back home right now, probably doing charity work or something.”

“Oh... huh. So you didn’t have to go through transformation.”

“Exactly~!”

“Hey, uuh, I know we’ve been talking about stuff like this for 5 minutes now, but we should stop here or some humans get suspicious.”

“Hm? There’s barely any humans here, though.”

“Yeah, but still.”

“Oh who cares~! Besides, our ears are out~.”

After he says that, Alexander twitches his long, pale ears, and Pierre notices and does the same thing with his long, beige ones. They do that for a couple seconds, and they share a laugh. As they laugh, Pierre feels a weird sensation go through his body. His stomach feels like spiders are crawling all over it, and his chest begins to pound. He feels the same wave of serenity he gets from his pets back home. He feels his face get warm, and he starts thinking to himself again. *Wait, what’s happening? I’m not befriending an Upindelaiki, am I? No, of course not. That’d be absurd.*

“Hey, I’m getting stuffed. How about we go back to my place?” Alexander suggests.

“Huh? Your place?” Pierre asks.

“Mhm~! It’s too dark for us to try to go back to the cave,” Alexander says, making a fair point.

“Huh... yeah, sure. Whatever,” Pierre says, accepting the offer.

They get up from the booth, and Pierre throws away his ice cream cone while Alexander grabs a plastic bag to put his left overs. They walk back to the van, and Alexander starts it up and drives down the road, playing groovy 80’s music. He hums and bops his head to the upbeat song, but Pierre stays still, looking outside his window. He’s been to Gaia many times, but he’s never visited this part of it. The many trees that surround this city amazes him; it’s as if this city is literally in the middle of a forest. *Perhaps when I’m not working, I can come back here,* he thinks

to himself, *I'm sure there's lots of animals straying around here*. He looks back at Alexander, who's lost in the groove, and he interrupts him by saying in a loud volume, "So you *live* here now? I thought you said you were born in Maza?"

Alexander turns down his music, and he says, "Yeah~! I was born in Maza, but I live here in Gaia~!"

"Why," Pierre asks, one side of his face scrunching up.

Alexander answers, "I just love it here so much. The music, the people, the food, everything about it is just awe-inspiring~!"

"Huh, so that's the interpretation you got..." Pierre says.

"Mhm~! What? What's wrong with Earth?" Alexander asks, a bit confused by Pierre's response.

"Uh, it's shitty for starters," Pierre retorts, "What the hell do you see in these humans that'd make *you*, an Upindelaiki, want to live *here*? They kill and hate each other for no goddamn reason, they're never happy, and they always seem to rather wallow in or run away from their problems rather than fix them."

"Isn't that what you peonis love though?" Alexander ponders.

"That's what *some* peonis love. There's some peonis, such as myself, who find the behavior pretty pathetic. Sure, we benefit from the negative energy they give off, and we pretty much do the same shit back at home, but that's in our nature. We can't help but to be negative. That's our version of peace, love, and fun. At least *we* know that and accept it. These humans? Hah! They'll try to do everything they can to make their actions seem like they're for the 'greater good'."

"Yeah, I guess that's true. But I think that's what makes them unique from us!"

"That's a very nice way of saying that these humans are below basic."



“I’m telling you, if you get to know some of these humans, you can see that some of them are really trying their best in their lives while they still have it. They try to be positive, and they try to do what’s best for themselves and others around them. Yeah, there are humans that are just terrible, but... there are also some good ones, I promise~!”

“Hmm...”

“Anyway, we’re almost there~!”

*What kind of conversation am I having right now? Pierre asks himself, Is this Upindelaiki even still possessed at this point? If I were to ever talk to an Upindelaiki, I’d assume they’d sound exactly like this: happy, positive, optimistic, yuck, yuck, and yuck. I want to gag just listening to him talk about humans so empathetically. Maybe Alphonse is right. I honestly could leave this idiot behind. But he makes it seem like I just **have** to have this Upindelaiki with me wherever I go. However, now that I’m thinking about it, Amethyst hasn’t seen me. She has no idea what I look like or who I am. She can’t really detect my true identity; she’s just as blind as these other Gaians and her stupid pet owner, apparently. I’ll find a way to catch her myself. Yes. First thing in the morning, I’m ditching Alexander and starting this mission on a new slate. He ends his thought with a sinister smile, his pink eyes brightening up with excitement as he plots how he’s going to catch his prey.*

## Chapter 13

July 2017

Morning

Alphonse and Thomas sit in the cold, damp cave; Alphonse reads through *The Reaper's Contract* while holding onto the chains that tie down Thomas, and Thomas lays on the ground, looking at the lifeless dirt. *Gurgle gurgle gurgle!* Thomas' stomach growls and groans in pain after not having food or water for a week. Alphonse's hairy ear twitches at the sound of Thomas' starvation and smiles. He says, "Are you going to stop being stubborn and eat something? I'm trying to keep you alive here."

Thomas looks at him with sternness, not having any warmth in his stare, and says, "I'm not accepting any food or drink from an Umu Quphanto."

"Look, I know that we can survive much longer than a Gaian, but it doesn't sit well with me that my prisoner is practically malnourished," the considerable Quphanto says.

"Since when did your kind care?" Thomas says, nothing but venom coming out of his mouth.

"Oh Upindelaiki, can't you see I'm the Gluttony Quphanto!? To have you starve is against my nature! C'mon! Tell me what you want, and I'll make it appear right in front of you~!"

"And have you feed me to the point I'm addicted and can't think about anything but food? Yeah, no thanks."

"Ugh, I can't stand restricting souls like you. That's what's wrong with you Mazans. You're no fun."

"Your idea of fun is much different from ours."

"Clearly. However, I will say, if there's one thing that's keeping us from tearing at each other's necks it is this understanding of balance. I love how we know that we just can't mix. It's the mutual 'respect' we have for each other."

“Look, I don’t understand why you guys need Amethyst and whoever this other person is, but I’ll tell you right now that it’s pointless to have me here, trapped.”

“Ohohohoho~! Nice try, Upindelaiki, but I’m not stupid. You’re trying to convince yourself out of these chains just so you can be able to use your itty-bitty powers against me and save your precious brother and friend. Well it’s not going to happen.”

“You heard Pierre! And I agree with him! Alex isn’t going to help you much! I could see if Pierre or even *you* were to possess him. You would have a better chance. But you’re using a bunch of Umu maggots!? Alex may be more of Gaia, but his good soul isn’t going to let you control him so easily.”

“First of all, I could never possess anyone. That’s something I’d leave for a peoni to do, but sadly, Pierre dislikes possessing people as well. Second off, my plan seems a little sloppy now, but I can assure you that this will work. Your friend is probably figuring out a way to rescue you and your brother now. She can’t just leave you two like this~.”

“Amethyst knows better not to try to get me or Alex, especially when she knows she’s being targeted. You’re just going to be playing this game of Cat and Mouse, and you’re never going to catch her. Sooner or later, you’re going to have to release us, and I hope that Amethyst makes Pierre and Alex go through a thousand circles trying to get her.”

Alphonse stays silent, letting Thomas express his inner thoughts. If there’s one thing that Thomas is right about is that it’s taking a long while to catch a simple cat. He continues to look at the cult book that Alexander gave to him after recovering everything from the camping site. His amusement grows as he reads all of the information that the devil-worshipping humans left behind. “This is so cute~!” Alphonse says with a sheepish smile, “To see these humans believe that Aidoneus is someone they can sympathize with is just adorable~!”

“You keep mentioning Aidoneus,” Thomas points out, “Are you talking about Lucifer? Or, as what these humans call him, ‘the devil’?”

Alphonse looks at Thomas with a content smile and says, “He doesn’t go by ‘Lucifer’ anymore. I will say, though, he loves that nickname humans have given him. It’s thanks to the hype that everyone is calling him Lord Aidoneus back home, and it’s irritating.”

“Oh...”

“Yes. Ugh, and now we have to deal with catching his son- ACK! ACK! *COUGH!* Wow! I’m parched~!”

Alphonse makes a glass of wine appear in his hand, and he drinks it while Thomas turns his head towards him in surprise. Thomas figures out what the Quphanto was going to reveal and then says, “Hold up. Lucifer has a son!?”

“I didn’t say that!” Alphonse retorts before taking another sip. He finishes his sip of the silky smooth, red wine, looks at Thomas and says, “And you better be glad Aidoneus isn’t here to listen to you dead-naming him. He would have done something disastrous to you before you can even get the first syllable out.” He looks back at the book he was reading and continues, “Now that I say this, I’m pretty sure these humans are probably suffering right now. That word ‘Lucifer’ is literally everywhere on here. Hah! Can you see it happening~? These worshippers coming up to Aidoneus calling him ‘Lord Lucifer’? Hah~!! I bet it has happened more often than I imagine~.”

“Huh...” That’s all Thomas can say at this point as he tries to piece everything together. *He can try to avoid it, but he knows he messed up, Thomas thinks to himself, Now I know the devil has a child. Is his child here? Is this why they’re here in the first place? Better question is if that’s the case, why would his son be here in Gaia?*

“Anyways, I can sense your brother and Pierre coming back here, so be a good boy, and don’t try to wake up your brother from the possession... it’s not going to work~,” Alphonse says, swishing the wine around his glass, watching the red liquid create an ominous whirlpool.

...

Amethyst lays on Tenacity’s bed in her cat form, looking at the cloudy morning sky. Because of the big news that she spilled yesterday to the girls, the sleepover was cancelled so that the girls could go home and think about everything. Today’s the day that they give their answer. Amethyst walks up to sleeping Tenacity, and speaks softly, “Tenacity, dear. Wake up.”

Instantly, Tenacity opens her eyes and stretches her body, groaning out, “Why are you waking me up, Amethyst?” Amethyst hops off the bed and lets Tenacity sit up and wipe away the sleep from her eyes. *If she’s going to keep doing this, then we’re going to have to talk*, Tenacity says to herself, *She’s going to understand that I would love to get my beauty-sleep on my days off.*

“It’s time to get ready for the day, dear. You can’t sleep it away,” Amethyst says.

“Um, yeah, I can,” Tenacity says with a feisty attitude, “This ain’t the first time I’ve slept in.”

“We’re going to be doing things a little differently for today,” Amethyst responds, “Do you remember? Today’s the day that you and your friends decide if you want to help me get my friends back.”

“I understand, but can it wait?” Tenacity mumbles through her sleepiness, and she lays back down. She pulls her fuzzy covers closer to her and cuddles them, letting its softness and warmth soothe her. As she slowly goes back to her slumber, she feels her covers being pulled away from her. Then suddenly, *SLAP!* She feels a soft hand slide across her face, leaving her cheek ablaze. Her heart jumps from the impact, and her body immediately gets back up, and she yells, “YO, WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU-”

She holds her cheek and immediately looks at Amethyst, but instead of a cat, she sees a tall, dark-brown woman, her daggers for eyes pierce through her soul. The woman's thin, chocolate lips create a furious frown, and her eyelids squeeze together to form creases on top of her small nose. "You are pathetic," Amethyst growls out, revealing her human form to Tenacity, "Here you are, complaining about your life every day, yet you're doing nothing but lounge around, playing video games and watching tv? Here's a moment where you can actually do something with yourself and help someone in need, but you're *pushing it aside!*? Get up, NOW!"

Tenacity gets out of bed wide-eyed, looking up at the woman that shares Amethyst's voice. "You're not the first person I've done that to, and I'll do it again if I must," Amethyst says in a low, serious tone. "I was giving you a choice to help me, but now I'm *forcing* you. If this shit was flipped around and *you* needed help with getting *your* friends back, I would have lended a hand in a heartbeat, and my schedule can get pretty hectic. I have NO ONE ELSE, Tenacity!! NO. ONE. ELSE. To help ME! And if I go out there, there's a chance *I* will be in trouble, and I will have NO ONE to *rescue* ME."

Tenacity can't say anything to fight back Amethyst. Her thundering voice makes her heart quiver and her eyes water from fear. She knows if she says anything, it won't help ease the tension, so she chooses to stay quiet, hoping that the thunderclouds will dissipate. Or perhaps she's staying quiet because she knows that what Amethyst is saying is true. For the past week, Tenacity has shown signs of wanting to relax and not have anything to do with the world, just wanting to be in her own bubble; however, her reasons aren't very apparent to Amethyst, at least not at the moment. While Tenacity may see this as herself achieving the 'chill life', what she fails to see is that going on for days not doing something fruitful outside of work can do more harm than good. Now, she's finally getting something to do, and it's a good deed. What kind of

person is she to push aside someone else's problems like this? She'd be livid if someone did that to her. However, none of these thoughts will come to Tenacity until later on as her mind draws a blank, letting Amethyst write on it for her.

“As a matter of fact, I'm forcing some of your friends to join you, as well, so that you won't be alone,” Amethyst continues, “Now, get ready. Get cleaned up and dressed. I'll make breakfast for us, and we can meet up with your friends today. Understand?”

“Yes ma'am,” Tenacity says with no hesitation. Without saying another word, Tenacity grabs some clothes to wear for today and goes to the bathroom while Amethyst walks to the kitchen to prepare breakfast.

## Chapter 14

July 2017

Afternoon

Delilah places four strips of turkey bacon onto the pan. *Sizzle sizzle sizzle!* She then pours pancake mix into a bigger pan, making four circles. She gets a bowl from one of the wooden cupboards and four brown eggs from the shiny, bronze refrigerator. As she cracks the four eggs into the bowl, she feels someone's hands wrap around her, and she lets out a little gasp. She then feels a pair of soft lips kiss her cheek and her neck, making her softly giggle and moan. "I see you're awake now, darling~" she says to her warm soulmate.

Usiku nuzzles Delilah, and he softly says, "Indeed I am~ Rose isn't cooking this time?"

"I told her I'd do it today for her," Delilah says with a smile as she stirs the egg yolks with a fork. *Tap tap tap tap tap tap tap!* The sound of the fork hitting against the bowl echoes across the kitchen. Usiku continues to plant kisses on Delilah, making her giggle even more, and she presses her butt against Usiku, feeling his hard lower region. He holds Delilah more tightly as he starts licking her neck, and Delilah turns her head so that she can kiss him.

As they share their affection towards one another, Rose walks down the stairs in her long, silky, pink robe, and she says, "Mom! Dad! I'm coming down the stairs!" She has to announce when she's coming anywhere close to them so that they don't go any further than cuddles and kisses. She can hear her mom giggle, and she sees her dad walk to the dining table. *Yeah, they were about to do something,* Rose says to herself while having a soft smile on her face. She walks up to her mom and hugs her from behind, and they both nuzzle each other.

"Hello again, darling~!" Delilah greets her daughter.

"Hey, mom," Rose greets in return. "Do you need help with anything?"

"No, thank you, honey~. I got it~."



“Okie dokie~!” Rose then walks to her dad who looks outside the window to look at the forest view, and he looks at his daughter with a warm smile. She hugs her father tightly and says, “Hey, daddy!”

Usiku hugs her back and says, “Hello, pumpkin~.” Rose then kisses his forehead and takes a seat next to him. She goes through her sparkly, red phone and goes to the group chat with her friends.

**Rose:** *Good morning, guys!* 💕

**Tenacity:** *Y'all. I fucking can't with Amethyst...*

**Rose:** *What do you mean? What's wrong?*

**Jacqueline:** *Hey sluts~!* 😡 *What's the plan for today?*

**Tenacity:** *She just yelled at me. And she's not just a talking cat. She's a fucking human.*

**Jacqueline:** *Wait WHA?* 😬

**Rose:** *Wait a minute, why did she yell at you!? Are you okay?* 😬

**Melissa:** *What did I just walk into?* 😬 *Do we gotta fight Amethyst!?*

**Jacqueline:** *Right!! I'll fight that hoe!! What she yelling at you for?!* 😡

**Tenacity:** *I guess I came off a bit dismissive about the situation. She was over here waking me up and telling me to get ready, but I told her I wanted to get a few more hours of sleep. Then out of nowhere, she slaps the shit out of me and scolds me for I guess not taking her situation as seriously as she wanted me to. She's practically become my second mother.*

**Jacqueline:** *What the fuck is her problem!? I wouldn't be wanting to fight her if she didn't slap you!!* 😬

**Melissa:** *SHE SLAPPED YOU!? Oh yeah, nah, I'm on my way.* 😈

**Rose:** *Wait a minute, guys, let's calm down* 😬 *Tee, did she apologize?*

**Tenacity:** *Yeah, she apologized after making me breakfast. I apologized to her for making her feel like I didn't care about her situation.*

**Rose:** *See? We don't have to fight anyone 😏 We can't blame her for being so stressed. I mean her friends are in danger and she's trying her best to get them back ASAP. She really needs us.*

**Jacqueline:** *Nah, if you want me to help you, you don't bitch slap me 😊*

**Rose:** *I mean you're right, but let's be understanding here. If you're at your wits end, and you literally can't go to anyone else for help, you only have a selected few of people that can possibly help you, you'd feel like you'd have to be a little more serious and let the people that you have by your side know that you mean business and that there's no time to waste. It's obvious that Amethyst has been wanting to do something about this situation for some time now. It's been a week now!*

**Nermal:** 🙄

**Melissa:** *Hey, NeeNee! 😂*

**Tenacity:** *To be honest with y'all, I think I've pissed her off through this entire week of having her in my apartment. She made it super clear that she's noticed that I've done nothing but complain about something whether it was work or life in general.*

**Jacqueline:** *See!?! And this is why I be telling y'all to go out more often! Now you got a mean ass mother for a roommate! 😡*

**Melissa:** *Yeah, not gonna lie, but that was harsh of Amethyst, but as long as she apologized, then I guess... notforgettingaboutthis 🙄*

**Nermal:** *Hey! Let's just link up at the park today! 😊 We'll talk about everything there!*

**Rose:** *Good idea! Although it looks like it's going to rain today, we should meet there in about an hour 😊*

“How are your friends, Rose?” Usiku asks, interrupting Rose’s concentration from talking in the group chat.

“Oh! They’re doing alright!” Rose responds. She hasn’t told her father about what’s happened with Amethyst, however. She doesn’t know if she should tell him about who Amethyst really is, even though Usiku already knows. Not trying to hide anything from her beloved father, she says, “Actually, uuh, daddy?”

“Yes, dear?” Usiku says, smiling.

“Ummm, so remember that black cat that I gave back to Tenacity?” Rose begins.

“Why yes I do. What about her?” Usiku asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Well, apparently she’s a cat that can talk and transform into a human. At least that’s what Tee is telling me,” Rose explains.

“Oh!... Interesting,” Usiku responds, trying to not show that he already knows who Amethyst is.

“Mhm, and well, she told us about how a couple of friends of hers have been kidnapped, and she wants us to help her.”

“Wait, she asked *you guys* for help? Did you say ‘no’,” Delilah asks, finishing up with making brunch.

“Oh mama, you know I could never say no to any- Wait a minute...” Rose stops to think about all that’s happened so far, and just like her father, she’s able to figure everything out in a second. Amethyst resting on the porch and staying inside the house for dinner the other night alrighty were signs to Rose of irregular activity. Amethyst wouldn’t have been able to enter the house if not for Delilah and Usiku allowing her to. In fact, they never give stray cats such leverage. Just like that it all... *clicked*. “You guys know this cat, don’t you?” Rose says with a

suspicious face. That's when both of the soulmates' hearts jump and their eyes widen. There's no way to lie to her about this one. "Wow, so you guys *already* knew about this situation *and* Amethyst. If this was some other stranger, you wouldn't have batted an eyelash. You wouldn't even let them in our house!"

Delilah lets out a sigh and says, "It's true, Rose. Amethyst is our long-time friend. Although we care about her and really want to help her, there's only so much we can do..."

"And you're not getting involved, either, Rose," Usiku finally says.

"What?!" Rose says, turning to her father in shock, "Daddy, she's *your* friend, but you're going to have *my* friends help her? And then expect *me* to just sit on the sidelines!?"

"Watch your tone, Rose," Usiku says in a firmer voice, "By having your friends get involved, this will be much easier for you to tell them who *you* really are. Aren't you tired of having to hide the other side of you around them? Don't you want to feel a little more comfortable around them?"

"Dad, I appreciate you trying to have my friends see our view of the world, but this isn't the way to do it! I was going to talk to them about it sooner or later!" Rose says, her voice shaking a little. For all her life, she's been hiding the fact that her family is not fully human, and they're not the only ones having to hide the fact that they're special. She's been wanting to tell her friends who she really is, but she was never given the opportunity to do so.

"Pumpkin..." Usiku says, but cannot find the words.

"What, dad? What are you going to say? Let my friends just go help Amethyst while I do nothing? And watch my friends possibly get hurt!? In all honesty, *you* could be helping Amethyst! *You* should be the one helping!" Rose starts yelling, getting out of her seat. Not saying

another word, she walks back upstairs, leaving Usiku and Delilah silent, only the sound of the bacon popping and eggs sizzling can be heard throughout the room.

“Darling...” Delilah finally says.

“Yes...?” Usiku asks.

“Did you really have Amethyst go ask Rose’s friends for help?” Delilah says, looking at Usiku with a face of dismay as she realizes what just transpired. All Delilah wants is for Amethyst to get help to save Alexander and Thomas so the announcement of Rose’s friends accepting the task, although throwing her in for a loop, also elated her. However, as her daughter explained the situation, she slowly realized the possible dangers that Rose’s friends could possibly get into since mythic beings are involved, Umuites at that. And the fact that it was her soulmate, Usiku, who even suggested Amethyst to recruit such inexperienced people is what grinds her gears.

“Better than asking me for help,” Usiku says. “If I get involved, I would be starting a war.”

“But to have those innocent kids do it instead!?” Delilah yells, “And the fact that Amethyst agreed to do this is even more jarring! What is wrong with you!?”

Without even noticing, *slam!!* Rose slams the front door, walking to her car, going to see her friends in a hurry. Delilah watches her baby drive off, hearing the engine roar through the highway. She looks back at Usiku with a disapproving face and says, “You’re going to apologize to her and her friends, and you better find someone else to take their place, Usiku! Our relationship with Rose was just getting better, and now you’re fucking it up again!!”

“I’m fucking it up? *I’m* fucking it up!?” Usiku looks at her appalled, his body automatically getting out of the chair while he watches his lover storm back upstairs. “Delilah, you know *damn* well that what happened 3 years ago was not my fault! I’m just trying to protect Rose!”

“By throwing her friends in the fire!?” Delilah yells through the house, “Seriously, Usiku, she’s an adult now!! *You* threw *her* friends in danger, and you’re practically telling her to not do anything about it!! Hell, you were trying to be hush hush about it!”

“I only *suggested* to Amethyst to go to them!! I didn’t say that was the *only* way for her to get Alex and Thomas back! If anything, you should be yelling at *her*!” Usiku yells back at her.

“BUT OUT OF EVERYONE TO SUGGEST, YOU SUGGESTED *THEM*!?! NOT EVEN YOUR FUCKING BROTHER!?”

“Uuugh, hii ina tatiza sana!!”

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT THE HELL YOU’RE SAYING, BUT IT’S HOT! STOP IT!! I’M BEING MAD AT YOU!”

Usiku rubs his head and groans out of frustration, cursing under his breath in more Swahili. His seven bats then start talking to him. *Squeak squeak squeak squeak squeak squeak squeak!* He looks at the bats with a defeated face, and asks, “Utawaangalia?” The bats respond with quieter squeaks and nodding their heads. He lets out a sigh and says softly, “What would I do without you...? I’m sure Rose would rather see you seven than me right now...” After he says that, the bats teleport away, leaving Usiku looking at the stairs. “Now to deal with her...” he mutters to himself.

## Chapter 15

July 2017

Afternoon

Issei chills at the wooden park table, typing on his laptop while Kendo, in his cat form, sits on top of the table looking around the pleasant Daisy Park. The park gets its name from the fact that a lot of daisies tend to grow around here during the summer time. Kids laugh and play around while parents either sit at the metal benches or play with their children. The ice cream woman gives her customers discounted ice cream, and kids lick their ice cream and popsicles with joy.

“Such a heart-warming sight,” Kendo finally says, “Kinda makes me queasy.” Issei ignores the cynical Umuite as he goes through his emails, answering his customers’ questions and requests for an art commission. As much as he enjoys peoni hunting, it’s only a side-hustle; his true passion is digital art and drawing various works of art for people. “Like, don’t get me wrong,” Kendo continues, “I can clearly see how serene and pure this whole thing is, but wouldn’t it be *exhilarating* for something drastic to happen~? Like maybe a car driving through here and running almost everyone over~!”

Issei looks at Kendo in repulsion and says, “You know, the more I listen to you, the more I understand why you’re being hunted.”

“Oh come on~! I can’t think outside of the box~? Besides, I paid you \$200 earlier, so you can’t back out of the job now,” Kendo says with a smug tone. Before the two could continue their conversation, Issei’s eyes lock onto a familiar face. He sees a slim-thick, caramel woman with a big, brown afro and a long, black maxi dress with flats walk around the park with four other girls and a black cat. He has a hard time getting his eyes off the woman, seeing how her assets somewhat jiggle in her dress. Kendo notices who he’s looking at and smirks, and he says, “Oh~. She looks like a snack, doesn’t she~?” Issei looks back at Kendo, seeing the cat’s tail sway as he purrs loudly.

*Slam!* Issei closes his laptop and puts it inside his bag. He gets up and walks up to the group of girls, and Kendo follows behind him snickering to himself. Without hesitation, Issei calls out, “Hey, Tenacity~!” Out of surprise, Tenacity and her friends look to see him approaching them, and Tenacity immediately starts walking faster while her friends start laughing. “And wassup Jackie, Meli, Rosie, and NeeNee~!”

“Hey, Issei~!” Jacqueline greets back while grabbing Tenacity to slow her down.

“Hey hey!” Melissa says, “Wow, we didn’t know you were still in town!”

“Haha! Yeeah, I actually live in an apartment nearby,” Issei says smiling while scratching the back of his head. “What are you guys doing out here?”

“O-Oh! Y-Ya know, girl stuff!” Rose stammers, the other girls playing along.

“And I assume ‘girl stuff’ involves walking around the park?” Issei asks, tilting his head.

“Yeah! Totally!” Nermal answers.

“Hey, Tee! Why are you trying to run away from me?” Issei looks at Tenacity with a genuine smile.

“I’m not tryna talk to you!!” Tenacity says, blushing.

“So why you blushin’!?” Issei teases her.

“Ain’t nobody blushin’!!”

While the two go back and forth, Kendo walks into the middle of the group. *Meeoow~!* The girls look at Kendo and simultaneously say, “AAAAWWWW~!!”

“Awww, Issei, you didn’t tell us you had a cat~!” Rose says.

“Hey, y’all didn’t tell me *you* had a cat, either!” Issei points out, looking at Amethyst.

“O-Oh! Yeah... about her,” Tenacity mumbles. Amethyst walks up to Kendo, examining him. Kendo looks at her up and down, giving her a smirk.



“Oouu, look look!” Nermal softly squeals, “I think they like each other~!”

“Yeah, well, he’s only going to last a minute with her,” Tenacity says with a smug look.

Kendo gets closer to Amethyst, but Amethyst backs away, trying to keep enough distance away from him. “Oh yeah, nah,” Issei adds, “I mean even though he’s not necessarily my cat, I don’t think I should allow him to mess with other felines.”

“Oh. He’s not even yours?” Melissa asks.

“Hell no. I can’t stand cats. I’m just babysitting this one for extra pay,” Issei replies, making Kendo look at him with annoyance. “But hey, back to my original question because knowing you five, you always got something crazy going on.”

“Hah! Please. If anyone is always having something going on it’s either Jacqueline or Rose,” Tenacity says, trying to avoid the question. *Meow!!* Everyone looks at Amethyst after she interrupts. The girls feel like they know what Amethyst is wanting them to do, but is it really a good time to reveal what’s going on? Perhaps she’s just wanting to get out of here while it hasn’t gotten too awkward. Whatever she wants, she can’t say since she has no idea if Issei is human or not. “Ugh, fuck it,” Tenacity says, making the girls jerk their heads back to her with a shocked face. “Issei, you got the time to hear about this *bizarre* adventure we’re about to go on?!” she says with a wide, phoney smile, making Issei laugh.

“Whatever it is,” Issei starts, “I bet I’ve heard worse.”

...

After taking the time to explain to Issei their predicament, Issei scratches his chin and nods his head. He says, “Uuuh-huuh... I see, I see... I will admit, that is actually pretty interesting and very serious.”

“I know right!?” Tenacity interrupts. “Almost as if it’s all bullshit, right!?”

“Oof, see, that’s the thing. I *would* say it’s bullshit... if I didn’t know about peonis in the first place,” Issei explains.

“...Excuse me?” Tenacity asks, the same phony smile painted on her face.

“Alright, the cat’s outta the bag!” Issei says, raising his arms. “I’m sure you know this already, but both Amethyst *and* Kendo are not ordinary cats.”

“Well yeah, we knew th- HUH?” Tenacity yells.

“That handsome kitty is just like Amy!?” Nermal asks.

“Yep! Kendo is umuic *and* my client!” Issei says.

“Your *client!*?” Jacqueline jumps in.

“Which is something that Rose would know!” Issei says, his smile growing.

“WHAT!?” The girls interrupt, looking at Rose, making her blush madly.

“Okay, wait a second, slow down!” Melissa finally speaks up, not wanting Issei to continue to reveal anything else. “Let’s start over! Okay, we all know Amethyst is... a shapeshifter, I guess we can say. Now we know Kendo is an Umuite, and he’s your client? Why?”

“Well, ya see,” Issei starts. “Remember back in highschool how I said I’d start my little freelancing art thing? Well, for a side hustle, I also started something else!”

“...Okay, what was it?” Jacqueline asks.

“Peoni hunting~!” Issei says with much excitement. However, the girls look at him with blank faces.

“...Okay, so why the hell is *someone from Umu* your client?” Tenacity asks in a confused tone, “And how in the fuck would you fight these Umuities anyway!?”

“Oh!” The young man exclaims, “Well ya see, *this* client is paying me big bucks for a very special reason. And to answer your second question... we’d have to go to my apartment~!”

“Umm, it’s pretty much too late for that, mah dude,” Jacqueline says, “Ya already done revealed *this* much info to us here. Ya might as well continue.”

“Yeah, don’t tell us you’re some malaiki or something,” Nermal jokes.

“HmMMM, funny you should say that!” Issei says, pointing at Nermal.

“You’re kidding...” Tenacity groans out.

“I’m actually *half* malaiki! The other half being Ludamu!” Issei announces, making the girls go silent again, only hearing the kids play in the background. “If y’all really don’t believe me, check this out!” He opens his mouth wide to show off his pearly-white, sharp fangs, making the girls jump and gasp.

“Okay... those look pretty sharp,” Melissa says with wide eyes.

“Ouuuu, Tenacity~ You got you a Ludamu boyfriend to leave you a hickey~?” Jacqueline says, nudging Tenacity.

“No the fuck I don’t!! And he’s not my boyfriend!!” Tenacity says, her face heating up.

“Anyways, since my identity is now out in the open, I might as well expose the rest of you... except Tenacity... and Melissa... and Jackie,” Issei adds.

“Yeah, well, that leaves you to expose only- wait a sec,” Tenacity stops, and simultaneously Melissa, Jacqueline, and her look at Nermal and Rose. “Nermal? Rose?” she says, with a concerned expression.

“Okay, hol’ up. I already knew Nermal was a Samaka,” Jacqueline says, making everyone look at her.

“WHAT?!” Tenacity and Melissa say simultaneously.

“JACKIE, YOU WEREN’T SUPPOSED TO TELL THEM, YET!” Nermal says, her face the color of a beetroot. She covers her face in embarrassment.

“Oh shit!! I’m so sorry, NeeNee!” Jacqueline says, trying to hug the trembling Nermal.

“Whoa...” Melissa says. Tenacity can’t even say anything at this point. They both just found out that Nermal is a Samaka and Jacqueline knew about it this entire time. Why would they hold such a secret from the group?

“Well, damn,” Issei interrupts the moment, and before the girls can ask Nermal anything, he says, “Alright then! Rose, your turn!” After he says this, the four girls look at Rose in dismay. It’s clear now that Rose isn’t fully human either, but they are still curious as to what specifically she really is. “So, are you going to go ahead and tell them or am I gonna have to do it?” Issei asks, giving her a chance to reveal herself.

Rose looks at her friends, then she specifically looks at Nermal; she sees the Samaka-human hybrid look at her with teary eyes and a puffy, red face. *I can’t let her be the only one to suffer from this.* She lets out a sigh, and says, “Nermal... even though you never told us who you really were... I always knew... and it’s because I’m a Quphanto-Tansi hybrid...” This makes Nermal uncover her face to show a surprised expression along with the other girls.

*Meeooooow~!* Kendo meows at Issei, signaling him that they should leave. Issei nods his head, seeing that he’s already caused enough damage, and gets out of the table. Kendo jumps off and walks ahead of Issei, and as Issei starts walking, he says, “Alright ladies~! Well, I think I’ve said enough! Hit me up whenever y’all want to take care of these Umu guys together since it seems we’re going against similar groups here. And Tenacity, hit me up some time, baby girl~!”

“Goddammit, I’m not your baby girl!!” Tenacity yells at him, blushing bright red.

“Alright~! See you later~!” Issei waves at them, ignoring what Tenacity just said.

“Guys...” Rose says softly, noticing how her friends don’t really know how to process all of this. This is their second day of having new realities dunked on them. First, they have to find out

that Amethyst is a cat that can for some reason transform into a human and talk; now they have to sink in the fact that two of their friends, even Issei, are not even completely human. “How about we... go back to my place? That’s if you guys are okay with that.” Without hesitation, the girls accept the offer.

As much as Amethyst doesn’t want to take the risk of running into Alexander again, she clearly sees that the girls need this moment together. *I can tell Rose has more to say* Amethyst thinks to herself, *And if taking us back to her place is where she’s most comfortable, then I guess we can stop by for a little while. Besides, I know Usiku will just drive off Alexander again if he does come by today.*

## Chapter 16

July 2017

Evening

Nermal sits in the backseat of a Dazzle with Jacqueline, not saying a word. Jacqueline looks at her best friend and adopted sister with worry covering her face. After minutes of silence, Jacqueline says, “Hey, NeeNee, you're not too mad that I revealed the secret to our friends, are you?”

However, Nermal still doesn't say anything. She continues watching the trees, buildings, and people go by as the driver gets closer to the highway.

“Oh c'mon, Nermal!” Jacqueline whines, “I said I was sorry, like, ten times already! Why are you not speaking to me?” She gives Nermal a face that looks like she was a sad and lonely kitten who has been abandoned by its mother.

Nermal lets out a sigh and finally speaks, “That was *my* secret to reveal, Jackie...and for you to just blurt it out like that without even talking to me about it beforehand...it just rubs me the wrong way.”

“That's why I'm sorry!” Jacqueline responds, still sounding like a little girl, “I got caught up in the moment and didn't realize what was coming out of my mouth!”

“Let's just stop talking about it, Jackie, okay?” Nermal interrupts, finally looking at her but with a stoic expression. “For now, let's just all hang out at Rose's house.”

...

They make it to their destination, the sunset painting the trees and grass shades of yellow and orange and streaks of orange, pink, and purple in the sky to match. Jacqueline and Nermal exit the Dazzle after paying, and walk up to the two story brown wooden house. *Knock knock knock!* Nermal knocks on the door while Jacqueline looks at the trees that surround Rose's home. *How*

*is Rose able to live in the forest*, Jacqueline says to herself, *It's so secluded and way too many bugs*. The door opens, revealing Rose, stopping Jacqueline's train of thought.

"I'm glad you guys made it," Rose says with a calming voice, "C'mon, we're in my bedroom." She lets the two girls come in and locks the door. Jacqueline and Nermal follow Rose upstairs, and as they walk down the hallway, they can hear Delilah's giggles coming from one of the rooms.

"Ouuu, is Ms. Garcia gettin' some~?" Jacqueline says, trying to change the awkward atmosphere.

"Most likely..." Rose says, a little annoyed, "I don't wanna talk about my parents right now." They make it to her bedroom where Tenacity, Melissa, and Amethyst await. They take a moment to take in the view of Rose's bedroom since they haven't seen it in a while. The bedroom is filled with shades of red and pink. The walls are a solid color of light red, the carpet a light beige. Rose's king-sized bed is covered in pink satin sheets, a red fuzzy cover that has flowers for a design, and many satin red and pink pillows. There's a couch that is white, a reading chair that is dark red, and a black television on the wall. Everything else, Rose's drawer, bathroom door, dressing table, and window curtains are a pastel pink.

"Wooooow, Rosie," Nermal says in awe, "You really changed up the place!"

Rose softly giggles and says, "Yeah... I had to do something about this place after graduating. But anyways, guys, we really gotta talk."

"Yeah, because at this point, my head is pounding," Tenacity groans, rubbing her temples.

"This is the world that you humans have been living in since the beginning of time," Amethyst finally speaks, standing next to Tenacity. She waits until the girls sit at a comfortable spot to continue. Then, she says, "For many years, mythical creatures have been living with you

humans in hiding. Uyamas, Ludamus, Samini, Samaka, Umrhas, Malaikis, Peonis, Tansis, Upemis, Ichukis, and even Quphantos. They all have the ability to have a human appearance, and because of their relationship with humans and the things that have happened to them, they will never want to show their true forms. They've been in hiding for so long that most humans believe that they don't exist anymore..”

“Okay, so what about the humans that make babies with these guys?” Tenacity asks.

“Yeah, what happens then?” Melissa adds.

Amethyst answers, “In most cases, mythic beings don't even bother saying anything to their human partner.”

“Whoa, you're sayin' they don't even *tell* them who exactly they're sleeping with!?”

Jacqueline exclaims.

“I'm afraid so...” Amethyst says, hanging her head low. “Remember, they are usually afraid of revealing their identity. However, to lighten things up, there are some families who have full knowledge of their partner and their secret, and they deal with the sticky situation with a better solution. The children they make are simply called Hybrids. Take Nermal, for example.”

They all look at Nermal, and Nermal looks at all of them back, feeling her face burn.

Amethyst walks up to her, nuzzling her, and Nermal softly smiles. “Don't be afraid, dear...”

Amethyst says to her softly.

Nermal takes a deep breath, holding back some tears, and she says, “My mom was pure Samaka while my dad was Human. Because they lived in two completely different parts of the world, and they knew that I would have more aspects of my mom, they agreed that I'd grow up with her in the ocean. Something happened to my mom, and... I still needed someone to take care of me, so...”



Her tears get stronger, and they push their way out of Nermal's eyelids; she quickly wipes them away. Jacqueline jumps in and says, "That's when my parents took her in and adopted her." That's when the girls look at the vanilla party girl. However, Jacqueline doesn't have the cheery smile she's always having. She then says, "I know that I told y'all that we adopted her from an orphanage, but... that was only to protect NeeNee..."

"Wow..." Melissa says, really letting the information sink in along with Tenacity, Rose, and Amethyst.

"So then what about you, Rose...?" Tenacity says, placing the pressure that was on Nermal now onto the quiet sweetheart.

"Well..." Rose starts, "Both mom and dad are Hybrids. Mom is Tansi and human, and dad is Quphanto and human." The girls' eyes widen again, still not used to the word 'Quphanto' coming out of Rose's mouth. "I know, it sounds so bizarre, but... yeah. And because both of my parents are Hybrids, I am also a hybrid.."

"Well, since we're playing into genetics and all that, isn't there a chance that the child will be fully human if there's two hybrids sleeping together?" Tenacity asks, tilting her head.

"Of course, but there's a very slim chance of it happening," Rose answers, "And even if they come out as Human, they may experience some characteristics of a mythical being. And plus, who's to say that the Hybrid has to be part Human?"

"There are *other* types of Hybrids?" Jacqueline whines, "Oh come on, I didn't want this meet up to become Science class!"

"I know, Jackie, but you *have* to understand all of this if you're going to continue hanging around us... 'us' being me and Nermal." Rose says. "Back to what I was saying, there is another

type of Hybrid. Issei is a good example since he's a Malaiki and Ludamu hybrid. No humans in his family tree that we know of."

"Okay, so if Hybrids are... pretty much a mixture of a whole bunch of species, then how can you tell the difference?" Tenacity poses the question.

"I don't know how other people do it, but I do it like this," Rose sits up a bit, ready to make things a little easier to understand for the girls, especially the ditzy Jacqueline. "Okay, so we have Humans and Mythic Beings, right? The letter 'H' stands for human and 'M' stands for mythic. A human plus a mythic equals H-Hybrid. A mythic plus a mythic, who are of different species, equals M-Hybrid."

"Aand a hybrid plus a hybrid??" Melissa asks, a little afraid to hear the confusing answer.

Rose nervously laughs and says, "Well, that's where I stopped. I think at that point, it's just a roll of the die."

"That is true, but since you got both Tansi and Quphanto running in your veins, and both of your parents are H-Hybrids, I would think that they would just stack on top of each other no matter what, like they're the dominant trait and human is recessive," Tenacity says with a focused tone. "So in other words, you're considered an M-Hybrid that has a very slim chance of her child being full human or half of that."

"Yeah, that is true," Rose agrees.

"Waaaaah, okay enough!" Jacqueline whines again, "I'm just going to call all of you Hybrids, if that's fine! My head is hurting from all this genius talking!!"

"...It's just genetics," Tenacity says in a monotone voice, looking at Jacqueline with a face of annoyance.

“Yeah, just wait until we get into the phenotypes, or physical traits,” Rose says rather excitingly.

“Nuuuuuuuuuu! Please don’t go any further!” Jacqueline squeals, squirming in her seat.

“Haha, yeeah, let me digest all of this first,” Melissa says, scratching the side of her head with a sheepish smile. “If we keep going, I might start having flashbacks.”

All the girls laugh simultaneously, and Amethyst watches everything with a gentle smile. This is actually going better than she thought it would. She didn’t think that Tenacity, Melissa, and Jacqueline, the only pure Humans in the room, would be so open-minded and willing to listen and understand everything that Rose and Nermal know. *If only more humans were like you three,* Amethyst thinks, *Then perhaps Gaia would be in a much better state.*

“So wait... what about you, Amy?” Nermal asks Amethyst, everyone calming down to look at her as well.

“Yeah, you’re just a simple cat... and yet you can talk...” Rose says right after.

“And can transform into a human to slap folks,” Tenacity says.

Amethyst sighs and says, “Again, I do apologize for that. Well, sit back and relax, children. I’ll try to keep the story short and sweet, but knowing myself, I doubt I’m going to be able to do so.” Amethyst walks up to Rose’s dressing table and sits on the plush stool. “I have been alive for about 100 years now. You are all right... I was supposed to live my life as a simple cat. But, it was because I met... Alexander... that I wanted to be much more than that.”

“Is he a hybrid??” Nermal asks.

“Oh no no, dear,” Amethyst says, softly giggles. “He’s a *pure* Upindelaiki, a higher level malaiki. I didn’t know why he was here on Earth, but I didn’t mind it. He took care of me, let me live in his home, and just showed me so much love. I was a stray, so it was all new to me. I didn’t

want to be with anyone else, and I didn't mind living the rest of my 'nine lives' with him. However, I would always get jealous once he started bringing different women into the house. They usually didn't last long, but the times that they were together made me sick. I wanted Alex all to myself, but I knew that I could only do so much as a cat. And so.... I went to an Umrha that I visited ever so often. Only she could understand me... so I asked her to make me human... and well... she did."

"Did she have to use some special potion or a magic spell?" Rose says, intrigued in Amethyst's love story.

"It was a magical spell..." Amethyst says. "Humans would be quick to say that whatever Umrhas do is a curse or 'the devil's work'... because they're afraid to comprehend what's not a part of their reality and exceeds their knowledge. To me... what the Umrha did for me... was a blessing. The spell she put on me gave me the lifespan of an Upindelaiki, the ability to transform into a human, and to conduct pyrokinesis, hydrokinesis, and aerokinesis."

Amethyst stops to make sure the girls understand what she said. However, Jacqueline says, "...What's a kinesis?"

Tenacity scoffs and says, "The word '-kinesis' comes from 'kinetic' which is basically to control something. Pyrokinesis is control of fire, hydrokinesis is control of water, and aerokinesis is control of air."

"Ooooh~! Okay, I get it!" Jacqueline says. "See, why can't y'all keep it this simple for that genetic convo??"

"Because- uughh, anyway, continue, Amy," Tenacity says, not wanting to explain anything else to Jacqueline.

Amethyst begins again, “Every spell and every potion has some sort of limit whether it be a time limit or a condition that has to be met. The Umrha that gave me this spell told me that as long as my lover, Alex, stays alive, I will forever have these abilities... but...once Alex dies...then my abilities will go away, and depending on when Alex died...my life will go away as well...” Silence. Nothing but silence filled the room. The girls replay what Amethyst just told them about the spell she’s under. She’s been given the ability to turn into a human, have magical powers, and can live as long as Alexander can. But the moment that he dies, all of it disappears.

“Hey, how long does a cat live?” Melissa asks everyone. “Isn’t it like about 13 years?”

“Yeah!” Rose answers. “It’s usually between 13-17 years, although there are cats who have lived in their 20s. I think the oldest cat lived to see 38.”

“So if Amethyst was around that age range, if Alexander died, she’d still be alive, right?”Melissa says, putting the pieces of information together.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Nermal says.

“But since she’s more than 100 years old now... if Alexander dies, then...” Tenacity jumps in, and when she mentions that, everyone but Amethyst makes a shocked face.

“If he dies, then... so will she...” Jacqueline finally says, her smile nonexistent.

Amethyst’s ears droop and her calm expression turns gloomy. “This is why I need your help, girls...” she says, tears slowly forming and making her purple eyes glossy. “My Alex is only possessed right now, ordered to find me and bring me back to the peonis that started all of this... I’m stuck because I clearly don’t want to be captured, but... I don’t want to know what happens if he fails them....”

Suddenly *knock knock knock! Squeak squeak squeak squeak!* Rose gasps, “The bats!”

“The bats?” the other girls ask as Rose gets up to open the door to see the seven bats flying and carrying a brown bag. “Huh? What did you guys bring?” Rose grabs the bag which turns out to be heavy. As she carries it, *clink clank clickity clank!* Glass can be heard hitting against each other in the bag.

“Oh be careful with it, dear,” Amethyst says gently. Rose gently places the bag in the middle of the floor, and everyone huddles up around her as she slowly opens up the bag. Everyone’s eyes widen as they gaze upon the glowing substances within many oddly shaped bottles.

## Chapter 17

July 2017

Night

Rose takes out the medium sized bottles out of the bag. The girls help her organize the potions based on color, and they manage to make three groups of 10 bottles. The liquid within the bottles are orange-yellow, blue, and white.. They all gasp at the sight.

“Holy shit...” Tenacity says.

“Are these potions!?” Melissa exclaims.

“I bet they are! I have never seen some shit that, like, glows!” Jacqueline says, eyes are sparkling at the sight.

“Better question is what do they do!?” Nermal brings up.

Rose searches through the bag to check if anything else was inside, and she pulls out a piece of yellow paper. She looks at the paper and reads out loud, “Dear customer, thank you for choosing to do business with Lady Cassandra! We hope that we get to see you again. The rest of this letter contains the potions’ descriptions, the effects of them, and how to use them properly.”

Amethyst’s ears twitch after hearing what Rose read. Then she looks at the potions and says, “So this is what Usiku was referring to.”

“Huh? What do you mean by that?” Rose says, having a more serious tone now.

“Oh, uh... Well, before I came to you all about this, I went to your father, Usiku. When he and I discussed how we were going to approach this issue, he mentioned how he would get some stuff to help you all out, but,” Amethyst responds. Rose’s heart becomes a ton of weight. The fact that her father knew about this situation before she did and tried to get her friends involved without her knowing still leaves her soul bleak. Just from examining Rose’s demeanor, she can sense that something is wrong, but she chooses not to press the issue. She says, “But anyway, continue reading the instructions, dear.”

“You aight, Rose?” Tenacity asks, tilting her head.

“Yeah... I’m fine,” Rose says stoically. Not wanting to talk about her dad, she continues reading, “You ordered 10 Umlilo potions, 10 Amanzi potions, and 10 Umoya potions.”

“...I have no idea what those words even mean,” Jacqueline speaks out.

“It’s Xhosa,” Amethyst answers, “My goodness, he had his bats go *that* far to get these things?” She lets out a sigh then continues, “Umlilo means fire; Amanzi means water; and Umoya means air.”

The girls take in the new information, and Jacqueline says, “Okay, so the fire one would be orange, right? Then water is blue and air is the white one?”

“Yep, I would assume so,” Amethyst agrees with Jacqueline.

Nermal picks one of the bottles up and looks at the bottom and says, “Yeah, look! Their names are on the bottom! But...why?”

“I guess to avoid suspicion?” Melissa ponders.

“Well, it just raises more suspicion that the names ain’t where you can notice them while also not showing the ingredients,” Tenacity jumps in, skeptical of the entire potion situation.

“Well, it is against the Umrha’s Vows to share their knowledge,” Amethyst explains, “They can only share their recipes with fellow Umrhas and their apprentices.”

Without giving the girls a chance to continue talking about Umrhas, Rose continues reading the letter, “The Umlilo potions will grant you fire magic. The Amanzi potions will grant you water magic. Finally, the Umoya potions will grant you air magic. Simply drink one bottle, and the effects will last for a month. Please understand that after drinking the potion, there’s a chance that you may experience some side effects such as nausea, fatigue, or dizziness. If you experience these side effects, it is advised that you rest until they fully disappear. DO NOT



consume multiple potions at one time or you will poison yourself and no one will be able to help you except an Umrha. Please only consume another bottle when the effects of the last dose have fully worn out.”

“Well damn, alright,” Tenacity says, chuckling a little bit.

“I mean who’d be dumb enough to drink a lot of them at once?” Melissa giggles out.

“You’d be surprised, dear...” Amethyst groans out.

“Having these abilities takes great responsibility,” Rose continues, “These effects work best when you put your mind, body, and soul into it. Focus your energy, train daily, and meditate. Do this, and you will have remarkable results.” Rose finishes the letter, folds it up, and looks at the bottles laying on the floor. “So who’s taking what?” she asks while looking at her friends. “And let’s make it clear that only Tenacity, Jacqueline, and Melissa can take these.”

Tenacity, Melissa, and Jacqueline all put on a face of surprise. Their hearts pound and their insides flutter as the pressure is placed upon them. They just got introduced to the potions, and they are already expected to make a decision on which potion to take? They take a minute to look at the potions once more, letting the glow hold their eyes hostage. Jacqueline speaks up and says, “I call the blue one~!”

“Alright, then I call fire,” Tenacity jumps in.

“Then that leaves the white one for me,” Melissa concludes, “But wait... what about you guys?” she asks while looking at Nermal and Rose. “What will you guys be doing?”

“Oh! Well,” Nermal starts, “Since I’m half a Samaka, maybe I can lure the peonis to wherever you guys want me to?”

“Your singing can affect anyone, even peonis?” Tenacity asks.

“Mhm! Of course there’s a chance that it won’t work. It all depends on the person’s soul and how strong it is. That’s why it’s so easy to lure humans,” Nermal explains. “Oh! No offense to you guys!” she squeals, waving her hands after realizing what she just said.

“Hmhmhm, it’s fine, NeeNee!” Jacqueline says, reassuring her, “But what about you, Rose? I know you’re, like, a Tansi *and* Quphanto, but you don’t seem the type to flirt with the peonis.”

“Oh! Well, that’s fine, I can be your medic! I’ll be able to heal you guys if you get hurt... which I hope you don’t,” Rose says. She hasn’t smiled since the potions came into her room. At this point, she just wants to get Amethyst’s lover and his brother and call it a quits.

“Alrighty then, sounds good to me,” Tenacity says as she grabs for one of the Umlilo potions.

“Hey, hold up! Let’s take it at the same time!” Melissa says as she immediately grabs an Umoya bottle.

“Oouuu~! It’s going to be like taking shots~!” Jacqueline says thrillfully and grabs an Amanzi bottle.

They carefully pull the cork top off, eager to gain their powers. *Pop!* Making the girls jump and gasp, the corks come off, making the liquid fizz a little and smoke to escape. “Go on, girls,” Amethyst says, encouraging them. “Drink up. Potions are meant to be consumed right after opening them.” Anxiety messing with their nerves, they take a second to sniff their beverages. The smell is nothing like the girls have smelt before, but it is faint and pleasant. Finally building back the courage they lost for a second, they place the bottles on their lips and lean back, feeling the smooth and somewhat thick liquid enter their bodies. Tenacity cringes at the taste of tart cranberry, sweet but subtle honey, and sweet but overwhelmingly hot chili pepper. Jacqueline shudders from the taste of sea salt, bitter cucumber, and sweet watermelon. Melissa doesn’t hide

her disgusted confusion as she takes in the interesting combination of tart passionfruit, sugary dragon fruit, and bitter spinach.

They finish drinking their potion, and they simultaneously gag. Tenacity coughs uncontrollably, Jacqueline whimpers while flailing her hands and shaking her head, and Melissa shakes her head along with her and scrunching up her face. “Are y’all okay!?” Rose asks in a loud volume.

“Yo,” Tenacity strains out while still coughing, “What did they put up in this shit!?”

“That shit tastes like medicine!!” Jacqueline whimpers out.

“I’m scared to know the ingredients now...” Melissa groans out, trying not to gag. “I feel like if we find out what they put in this stuff, I will most definitely vomit and die...”

“Here, I’ll get you some water!” Rose says as she leaves the room.

“Can you make sure they’re cold please!?” Tenacity says while still coughing. Nermal sits next to Tenacity to raise her friend’s arm and pats her back. “Thank you...” Tenacity says to Nermal, trying to stop herself from coughing anymore and taking deep breaths.

“Tee, it sounds like yours was the worst one,” Jacqueline says while smacking her lips, trying to get the strange taste out of her mouth.

“It sounds like?!” Tenacity yelps out, “That shit is burnin’ my throat!! And then all this other shit comes hittin’ my mouth, confusin’ me!”

“Well, girls, these aren’t supposed to be like your everyday drinks,” Amethyst jumps in. “Umrhas make it to where you wouldn’t drink this stuff often for a reason.” Right after saying that, Rose comes back with three bottles of ice cold water. She gives each one to Tenacity, Melissa, and Jacqueline, and the three girls immediately chug the chilling and refreshing liquid.

“Sooo how are y’all feeling?” Nermal asks, worried about her friends’ current condition.

“Well, I’m fine, I guess,” Melissa says.

“AHH!! BRAIN FREEZE!” Jacqueline squeals. “Other than that, I’m okay,” she manages to whisper out.

“Shiiit, I’m feeling much better now that I got *this*,” Tenacity says and kisses the water bottle.

“Well, ladies, this has been an eventful day,” Amethyst says softly. She looks out the window to see that the sun is gone and the yellow moon slowly rises up, the stars twinkling. “But it seems to be late now. Rose, if you don’t mind, could you let us all rest here for tonight?”

“Of course!” Rose says with a warm smile. “It’d be great to hang out with y’all for the rest of the night. I’ll even make cookies~!” The girls cheer and laugh as they all huddle up and hug together. Tenacity grabs Amethyst and includes her in the group hug, making Amethyst smile and purr out of joy.

## Chapter 18

July 2017

Morning

Pierre looks at the pile of papers that say ‘MISSING’ at the top in bold letters and has a colorized picture of Amethyst in her cat form, and on the bottom of the paper has Alexander’s phone number. The motivated Upindeoni snickers to himself as he looks at the papers with glee. Alexander comes up to him with another stack of ‘MISSING’ papers and places them next to the other stack and says, “This was a good idea, Pierre~! If we can’t find her, then surely the rest of the city can~!”

“Exactly~,” Pierre responds, “We’ll have her cornered. She’ll have nowhere else to go~.”

“But we’ll still try to look for her together, right~?” Alexander asks with a wide smile.

“...Suuuuure,” Pierre says with a fake smile, “But we need to split up.”

“Huh? But whyyyy~?”

“Because, *friend*, we’ll cover more ground that way. You’ll go on one side of the city while I go to another. We’ll place all these posters all over the place, and once we’re finished, we’ll go around town and continue our own searching.”

“Ooooh... But what if someone finds Amy before us??”

“Then that’s when they’ll call you and you’ll tell them to meet you back here at your apartment.”

“Ooooooh...and if we find her before the public?”

“Okay, I know you’re not *that* much of a dumbass.”

“.....Sorry, I kinda am~!”

“....” Pierre starts talking through his gritted teeth, his smile no longer present, “If either you *or* I find Amethyst before the public does, then we will take her back to the *cave*.”

“Cave~! Right~! I knew that~!” Alexander says with the same smile that has been stuck on his face.

“Alright, fess up, Upindelaiki.” Pierre looks at him seriously, and he folds his arms. *I’m tired of this bullshit*, Pierre says to himself, *If he’s not even possessed, then I might as well deal with him first.*

The cheerful Alexander becomes confused and asks, “Fess up what~? I have no idea what you’re talking about~!”

Pierre gives him a sneer and says, “Yeah? Well for a person that’s supposed to be possessed, you sure got a serious case of diarrhea of the mouth and dumbass-itis. You were way too comfortable and distracted at the Quphanto’s house the other day; you were being *way* too nice to your brother, cuddling him and shit; and don’t think that I didn’t notice how you were talking about humans the other night. What you said about them was *way* too pure. If those peoni maggots were doing anything to you, the *least* they could do was make you a little more ruthless.”

Alexander doesn’t say anything to debunk Pierre’s claims. He continues to listen to Pierre. Pierre continues, “I bet when you first found Amethyst, you *purposefully* let her get away, didn’t you? You tried to tell your Quphanto friend all of that’s been going on as a cry for help. You’re supposed to be helping me capture your cat, but you’ve been stalling instead!” The Upindelaiki still doesn’t say anything, and it makes Pierre’s last nerve snap. He takes a few steps back, raises his hand, and a ball of dark magic appears, swirling around his hand. Then in a flash, the dark energy takes the shape of a spear, the sharp blade a few inches away from Alexander’s chest.

“I knew that kidnapping you pathetic Upindelaikis was going to be a waste of time!” Pierre snaps, “If this bullshit is an entertainment section that Alphonse created for himself, I’m fucking

ending it here and now! Admit that you're not completely possessed and I might make your death less painful!" Pierre exclaims, his pupils becoming slits. Alexander looks at Pierre's spear, seeing how the entire weapon is pitch-black. "I seriously don't know how the hell you were able to accept the maggots and not be under their possession, but I don't care at this point."

"C'mon, Pierre~! Quit being silly~! I don't know this possession you speak of~! I'm perfectly fine~!" Alexander says, putting on a smile with ease. "Put that thing away, friend~. We're wasting time~! We gotta go find my one and only~! My poor baby could be anywhere~!" After saying those words, he doesn't move a muscle. Pierre thinks about what Alexander just said. If the Upindelaiki is under possession, then he wouldn't even know. Alexander is acting exactly how a possessed person should act, as if nothing strange is going on with them.

Pierre makes his spear disappear, allowing Alexander to grab one stack of 'MISSING' posters. "Let's go~!" Alexander says and he stands at the front door, ready to move out.

Pierre keeps his glare on the Upindelaiki as he grabs the other stack of posters, and he walks up to him. "Let's find your *poor baby*, friend..." he says in a low tone, "And if I catch you pulling another one of your sly tricks...*you're fucking dead*," he growls out. Alexander opens the front door, and Pierre shoves him out of the way and walks down the hallway to the stairs. Alexander closes the door and locks it, and he looks at Pierre creating distance between them. He looks at the poster again, looking at the picture of Amethyst, her sleek and shiny black fur and sparkling purple eyes making his eyes somewhat water.

*Oh Amy... please be okay...*

...

### **Afternoon**

Kendo, still in the form of a black and white cat, walks around the plaza, passing by humans left and right. His red-orange eyes light up as he notices Pierre taping up a poster on a street light

pole. He walks up to him with a devious smile and says, “Wow, they had *you* get involved, animal lover~? How’s Diablo~?”

“Oh fuck off, Kendo,” Pierre says, already annoyed, “I already have to deal with one annoying pers-” he stops himself. His eyes widen as he looks down to see the playful cat right next to him. He doesn’t say another word as he finishes taping up the last poster he had and he immediately walks off.

*Mrororororow~!* Kendo laughs and he walks beside Pierre. He notices that there’s not any humans around, so he says, “What’s wrong, Pierre~? Don’t want to speak to an old friend~?”

“Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t just grab you, right now,” Pierre says, not making any eye contact.

“Because I got a chase scene with Cerberus in about a few minutes, and I don’t want to miss it~!” Kendo says cheerfully.

“Well, get lost so that they don’t see me with you. I’ve got my own shit to deal with.”

“Ooouuu, so you’re *not* here for lil’ ol’ me~?”

“No, I’m on the lookout for someone else.”

“Is that why you’ve been putting all of these posters around the city~? You’re looking for that interesting looking cat~?”

“Yes, Kendo, now scam. I need to focus.”

“Alrighty~! I guess I won’t tell you where and whom I last saw her with~!”

“C’mon, Kendo, I don’t have ti- WAIT HUH?”

“Oops~! Chase scene is about to start~! See you in another chapter~!”

“Kendo, wait a sec-”



*WOOF WOOF WOOF WOOF!!!* Before Pierre could finish his sentence, Kendo runs forward, and Pierre looks back to see the barking coming from the Cerberus Brothers. They zoom past him, and Pierre loses his balance for a second. “Dammit...!” Pierre curses to himself.

Kendo runs into the middle of the street, making a car stop. *SCREEEECH!* He keeps running while the Cerberus Brothers run right behind him, Alpha and Beta running past the car while Gamma hops over it. Kendo keeps running at high speed and starts passing by more humans. *GRRR ARF ARF ARF ARF ARF!!!!* The snarling hound dogs ram through the humans, and the humans scream and shout while jumping out of the way. Alpha looks at Beta and Gamma, and he howls. *AWOOOOOO!*

After he does that, Beta and Gamma split up taking different paths. Kendo keeps running straight, looking back to see only Alpha running. They pass through more humans. Kendo hops on cafe tables while Alpha only knocks them over. Kendo keeps running, and he notices that they’re leaving the plaza and about to run past some train tracks. *Perfect~!* Kendo thinks to himself. He turns to the right, running down the tracks where it is more isolated and only the tracks and trees are around them. He slows down to a stop and tries to catch his breath.

He looks back and sees that Alpha is nowhere to be found. *Huff. Huff. Huff.* “Awwww, come on! Ending so early?” Kendo asks, whimpering from disappointment. “That ended *way* too early!” However, as he tries to look for Alpha, he feels something cold behind him. Making him flinch, Kendo immediately turns around to see Gamma in his human form kneeling down and holding his pitch-black machine gun towards him.

“Hi, there, kitty~ *Hehehehehehehe*... Going somewhere?” Gamma asks in a raspy voice.

“Chill out, Gamma...” Beta speaks out, making Kendo flinch and look at him. Beta, in his human form, stands next to Gamma and says, “Boss says we need to bring him back *alive*, remember?”

“Nowhere to run now, Anti,” Alpha says, walking out of the forest towards the frozen cat transforming into his human form. Kendo looks at the brothers as they circle around him. “Your father will be happy to hear that you’re finally able to comply.” But before Alpha could grab Kendo, a strange scent hits his nose. “Hm?” he asks. *Sniff sniff sniff.*

“Ewww, what the hell is that smell?” Beta asks as his face twists up in disgust.

“It’s a malaiki, but it’s something else along with it!!” Gamma exclaims while standing up, looking around to find the source of the treacherous smell.

“Hehe, try Ludamu.” As soon as a familiar voice speaks out, the brothers and Kendo look up to see a white bat flying towards them and transforming back into a human, revealing it to be the person that Kendo paid for protection in the first place.

“Oh, there you are, my handsome knight in shining armor~!” Kendo says in a playful tone.

## Chapter 19

July 2017

Evening

Issei stands near the Cerberus Brothers, ready to pull out his katana. He looks at Kendo and says, “Where’s the gun I gave you?”

“I still have it, handsome~” Kendo responds, purring a little.

“Well Imma need for you to stop trying to flirt with me and use it!” Issei says with force.

“Awww, but I was having so much fun with my pets~” the playful peoni teases, making the Cerberus Brothers growl.

“Look, if you’re not going to use the weapon I’ve given you for *free*, then you might as well give it back to me,” Issei retorts.

“GRRRRRAAAAHAH!!! SHUT THE FUCK UP, BOTH OF YOU!!” Gamma interrupts, shaking his head, making his locs dance in fury. To stop him from doing anything irrational, Alpha holds his hand up to silence his youngest brother, and then he looks at Issei.

“Look, as much as we’d let you two bicker about whatever weapon you’re talking about, I’m afraid we’re on a clock. We need.... Ahem....*Kendo* here to come back to Umu with us. Now, about your weapon, you’ll have to wait for a while since this runaway here is stubborn when it comes to confiscating things. But once we take him back, we’ll be sure to bring back the weapon to you tomorrow,” Alpha says in a calm tone.

“Hmmm,” Issei mumbles. He thinks about Alpha’s explanation. He really cherishes his weapons as if they were his babies, and if Kendo doesn’t return his weapon, he might actually consider what Alpha is telling him. “Okay, how much would you pay me to give him to y’all? If you pay more than he is, then I might have a change of heart.”

“What!? Hey!! I paid *you* to protect *me*!!” Kendo whines.

“Oh...” Alpha says, “Well, I’m afraid our currency is in blood rubies, but I’m sure there’s a Black Market nearby that will allow you to transform it into whatever you Gaians use,” he offers.

“Are you kidding me, bro!?” Beta interrupts, “Why do *we* have to pay this stranger!? We got Anti right here in our grasp!”

“Yeah!! Just grab the fucker, and let’s get out of here!! No point in this bullshit negotiation!!” Gamma agrees.

“Well, clearly, this guy here is being paid to protect our target, so we need to come up with a better offer,” Alpha explains, keeping his same stoic face, showing that none of what his younger brothers are saying is changing his mind.

“Ugh, fine... this is so bullshit...” Beta mutters.

“Kitty, don’t you *fucking* move. You move, and it’s one of your nine lives...” Gamma growls at Kendo.

“Aww, silly~ You should save that line for the cat, the *other* target~,” Kendo speaks. After he says that, the Cerberus Brothers’ eyes widen, and they look at him.

“How do you know about the other target?” Alpha asks.

“Aht aht aht! You’re talking to Issei about a better deal, remember~? Finish that up, and maybe I’ll tell you what I know~!” Kendo offers.

“Kendo, you’re talking about that black cat that was with Tenacity and the others, right?” Issei asks, tilting his head. This makes the spirit hounds and cat look at him in surprise, Kendo the only one smiling.

“Why yes it is~!” Kendo giggles.

“...Big brother...” Beta starts, “*He* knows about *both* targets...”

“Yes....it seems so...” Alpha says softly.

“AAAHH WHAT ARE WE DOING!?” Gamma yells, pointing his gun towards Issei.  
“START TALKING, YOU HEAVEN PARASITE! WHERE’S THE OTHER TARGET!?  
SPEAK BEFORE MY FINGER *ACCIDENTALLY* PULLS THE TRIGGER!”

“Gamma, what are you doing!?” Beta yells.

“I’M GETTING IMPATIENT! WE DIDN’T COME HERE TO PAY FOR OUR TARGET,  
AND WE SURE AS HELL NOT ABOUT TO PAY FOR THE OTHER ONE! I SAY WE GET  
THE INFORMATION, NAB THIS FUCKER HERE, KILL OFF THIS FUCKER IN FRONT  
OF US SO THAT HE DOESN’T BE ON OUR TAILS, AND THEN NAB THE OTHER  
FUCKER WHEN WE FIND HER! BOOM! BAM! JOB IS DONE!” Gamma roars out.

“Gamma, chill out,” Alpha groans out of frustration. “We can afford spending some blood  
rubies just this one time. Now put that shit down, so that we can-”

“You guys are letting your target get away,” Issei says, pointing at the spot Kendo originally  
was, and the Cerberus Brothers look down to see that Kendo is no longer where he was standing.

“I’ll see you guys laaaaateeeerrr~!!!” Kendo yells, making the boys look up to see that Kendo  
is now a crow, flying high in the sky, cawing in victory. *Caaaww!! Caw-Caaaw!!*

“Ugh, great. Let’s go boys! Keep an eye on him!” Alpha orders, and the trio turn their backs  
on Issei and prepare to take off again until Issei hops in front of them, holding his katana out.

“Oh no, you don’t,” Issei starts, “I can’t let you go unless you’re willing to pay me more than  
him. And leave the cat alone, for now.”

“Well, it depends on how much Kendo is paying you,” Alpha answers, “But I’m afraid we  
can’t just simply ignore the cat. We need her just as much as we need Kendo.”

“After the shit that just happened, and seeing how it’s Cerberus that’s chasing him, I was  
going to charge Kendo \$3k, so how about we do this. If you give me \$30k then you have a deal

on giving Kendo to you. To make the deal sweeter, if I give you a weapon to make it easier to track him and possibly catch him... would you leave the cat alone for now?" Issei offers.

"Geez, 30k huh...?" Alpha ponders.

"I don't like how he's making it seem as if we *need* a weapon," Beta says, letting a low growl out.

"TICK! TOCK! TICK! TOCK! TIME'S UP! GET OUT OF THE WAY, PARASITE!"

Gamma points his dark gun at Issei and starts shooting. *BRATATATATATATATATATATA!!!* Bullets fly, making Alpha and Beta cover their heads and crouch down, but Issei swiftly slices through every bullet that is about to hit him with his katana.

Issei's face becomes stern, showing no sign of positivity or playfulness. He speaks in a low tone, "Strike 2.... You have one more chance to take my offer."

Alpha stands up straight and barks, "Gamma!! Put that thing down, now!!"

Gamma growls loudly and yells, "BIG BROTHER! WE ARE WASTING OUR TIME WITH THIS malaiki-LUDAMU THING!! I COULD HAVE SHOT THAT DAMN BRAT OUT OF THE SKY BY NOW!"

"I'm sorry, Alpha," Beta jumps in while standing up, "But Gamma's right. We really don't have that much time anymore. Plus, I don't like how he's offering a handicap as if we're weak or something."

Alpha sighs out of frustration. Issei shakes his head and chuckles, putting on a devilish smirk. He sneers, "Pride over support, huh? Okay..." Right after saying this, Issei runs straight to the brothers, and he swings his katana, but the brothers dodge the swing. Issei's eyes stay locked on Alpha, and he runs towards him to swing at him again, but Alpha summons a dark machete, its

pitch-black blade hitting against Issei's platinum blade. *Clang!* Sparks begin flying, and the two men stare at each other ferociously, keeping their weapons locked onto each other.

Gamma takes this second to aim his weapon, making sure he doesn't hurt his eldest brother, but Beta makes it more difficult for him as he prepares to punch Issei with his dark gauntlet, its spikes would glisten in the sunlight if not for it being made of dark magic. Issei senses Beta, and he pushes himself away from Alpha with great force to dodge Beta's punch, making Beta punch nothing but the air. Gamma tries to aim his weapon at Issei, smiling as he now has a clear shot, but Alpha takes another swing at Issei, making their weapons collide again and ruining Gamma's chance. *Clang!* Getting frustrated, they keep swinging their weapons, colliding repeatedly, making more sparks fly everywhere. *Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!*

"Goddamn it, Alpha, would you stop getting in my way!?" Gamma screams.

Beta watches his older brother and Issei fight, getting irritated. *There's no way I can help, Beta thinks to himself, Gamma can't do shit because he knows there's a chance of hitting Alpha. And our target is just getting further and further away from us. We should get going while his scent is still at a detectable level.*

Beta looks at Gamma, and he yells out, "Gamma! Let's leave Alpha with this Gaian and go catch Anti!"

"Can I get one shot in!?" Gamma yells back.

Before Beta can give Gamma an answer, Issei frees one hand from his katana to grab a gun out of his pocket and says, "Now hold up. The party's just getting started," before shooting rounds at them. *Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!* Beta and Gamma avoid the shots, and Alpha swings Issei's katana away, summoning his dark revolver and shoots once close to Issei's face, leaving a scratch on Issei's cheek.

Issei looks back at Alpha, and Alpha says, “This is such a waste of time...” He shoots again, aiming at Issei’s face, but Issei uses his speedy reflex to avoid the bullet. Alpha hops away from Issei, allowing Gamma to finally take his shot. *BRATATATATATATATATATATATATATA!!!!*

Gamma cackles as he shoots at Issei, but Issei runs to the right to avoid some bullets while using his katana to swing away the other ones. Issei takes shots at Gamma in return. *Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!* Gamma avoids the shots as he runs to the right as well, and two opponents run in a circle. Issei runs straight towards the trigger-happy hound, preparing to swing his katana, but Gamma stops himself and ducks in time. Gamma takes this chance to swing his machine gun, but Issei backs himself up from the impact.

Beta ponders on whether to jump in now or not, but before he could think of a better way to get rid of this stranger, a horn is heard from the distance. *CHOOOOOOO!!! CHOO CHOOOOOOO!!! Chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga!!* Everyone stands still, and they look at the train approaching them at a fast speed. They can feel the vibrations of the train through the ground, though they do nothing for a minute. Instead, Gamma and Issei glare at one another. Right before the train flies by them, Alpha and Beta get on one side of the train tracks, and Gamma continuously shoots at Issei while joining his brothers. *BRATATATATATA!!!* Issei uses his katana again, and Gamma manages to reunite with his brothers and stops shooting. With just a few seconds, Issei uses his gun to aim at the brothers and takes a shot. *BAM!* Wanting to see if he hit one of them, he waits until the train passes by. *CHOOOOOOOOO!!! CHOOOOOOOOOOO!! Chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga chugga!*

A few minutes pass, and Issei holds his gun out again, but he sees that the Cerberus Brothers are gone. He walks to the other side of the train tracks, and the smell of blood immediately hits



his nose. He looks down to see a trail of dark red blood that goes to the patch of forest. He chuckles and says to himself with a smirk, “Booyah, bitches.” He puts his weapons away, and he transforms back into a bat and flies away from the battlefield and into the sunset sky. *Now to find that son of a bitch and get my baby back*, Issei thinks to himself.

## Chapter 20

July 2017

Evening

Melissa stares at herself in the restroom, and she takes a deep breath. She fixes her high ponytail and straightens up her work clothes(which is a pink long-sleeved button-up and medium black skirt), making sure her name tag is not crooked. Thinking about the intense wave of dizziness she experienced earlier this morning, Melissa looks at her hands. *So do I have the powers now?* She thinks to herself, *I'm afraid I might accidentally use them here.* She takes out her phone, and texts in the group chat.

**Melissa:** *Hey, Tee, Jackie, how are y'all feeling right now??*

**Tenacity:** *Work was aight for me... but I almost wanted to flame a bitch today. 🔥*

**Melissa:** *Oh! Well how'd you stop yourself? 😬*

**Tenacity:** *I had to calm myself down and ignore the idea of flaming her ass... That letter wasn't kidding when it said it takes a lot of control. I managed to singe one of the clothes I was folding... with no one looking, thank god.*

**Melissa:** *Gosh.. 😬 I'm afraid I might accidentally do something like cause a tornado in here or make food fly in the air and plop onto some person's head!*

**Rose:** *You'll be fine, MeeMee! Just as long as you don't entertain the thought, you'll be fine.*

**Nermal:** *I think Jackie is having too much fun with hers... 😄*

**Tenacity:** *I'm scared to ask... 😬*

**Nermal:** *She's over here freezing up her drinks ❄️*

**Melissa:** *Huh... freeze??? I thought the potion was supposed to give her water powers???*

**Nermal:** *It's like it did, but once she tries to make water appear or touches any other liquid, it immediately freezes up!*

**Jacqueline:** *Hey, smarty pants #1 and #2! How do I make a slushie!?*

**Tenacity:** *How the fuck am I supposed to know?* 🙄

**Rose:** *All you'll need is water, sugar, and some flavoring. Mix it all together while freezing it, and the sugar will give you the consistency of a slushie since it won't freeze up like water does.*

**Jacqueline:** *Thank you!! Bout to make my bathtub into a slushie!! I'll take a picture of it~!*

**Melissa:** *Oh gosh 😊 Can't wait to see it! But guys, I better go before the boss lady comes in here 😞 Wish me luck!*

After typing her goodbye, she puts her phone on silent and places it in her skirt pocket. She exits out the restroom, and walks to the entrance of the restaurant to see if there's any customers that need to be seated. She walks through various customers who are eating their meals, giving them a smile as she passes by, and she makes it to the entrance to see two guys standing there and looking around. Both guys are tall, but one guy has pale skin, yellow eyes, and white hair, while the other guy has beige skin, pink eyes, and red hair. Melissa says, "Hey! Welcome to Applebuzz! Is it just you two?" The two guys look at her, and the guy with the red hair makes her heart jump.

"Yep! Just us two~!" the guy with white hair says.

"Okay! Right this way!" Melissa says in a cheerful tone, trying not to show any sign of anxiety from seeing the other man. She grabs two menus and takes them to a booth that is near a window. The two guys sit down, and Melissa places the menus in front of them. "My name's Melissa, and I'll be your waitress this evening," Melissa says cheerfully, "If you ever need anything, just let me know! Can I start you guys off with a drink?"

"I'll take a Static!" the cheerful white-haired man says.

"Just water will be fine for me," the other man with red-hair adds.

"Alright! I'll be right back with your drinks!" Melissa says, and she walks off.

The guys look at the menu, not sharing words to each other for a few seconds, and the guy with white hair says, “Doesn’t this place look great, Pierre~?”

Pierre looks at the guy a little irritated and says, “Alexander, how was your search today...?”

Alexander’s eyes bounce out of surprise and answer, “Oh. Well, I got all of the posters up, but no one has said anything. I haven’t run into her, either. What about you?”

“No luck on my side, either....” Pierre answers, “... I need to find him again...”

“Find whom again?” Alexander asks.

“Don’t worry about it. After we get done eating, you’re going back to your place, and I’ll go back to the cave.”

“Huh? We’re splitting up again?”

“Yes. I need to meet up with Cerberus and Alphonse and find out what the hell is going on with them. You’re going to be at your apartment in case that cat shows up.”

“Oh... Okay.”

“...I’m also going to convince Alphonse to release your brother.”

Alexander’s eyes glimmer for a second, but he looks at the menu to hide the excitement. Luckily, Pierre didn’t catch his reaction; Pierre looks at Melissa, seeing that she’s getting their drinks. “I just don’t see the point in having you *or* your brother at this point... it’s pointless.” Before he continues, Melissa comes back with two red glass cups in her hands, one has clear, sparkling soda and the other has water.

“Okay, here’s your Static and your water! Did you want a lemon with your water, sir?”

Melissa asks Pierre with a soft smile.

“No, thank you,” Pierre responds calmly, smiling back, letting his pink eyes connect to her emerald green ones to keep up the facade.

“Alright, are you guys ready to order?” Melissa asks.

“Hmmm, give me a couple more minutes...” Pierre answers.

“I’m ready~!” Alexander says gleefully.

“Okie dokie~!” Melissa says, getting her notepad ready, but she drops her pen and it lands next to Pierre’s foot. “O-Oops! Hold on.” Melissa bends over to get her pen, but Pierre grabs it before her.

“Here, I got it,” Pierre says as he sits up with the pen in his hand. Melissa straightens herself up and smiles.

“Th-Thank you,” Melissa says, gently grabbing her pen from Pierre. In that split second, Melissa’s soft hand and Pierre’s rough hand brush against each other. Pierre tries to say something, but a sudden lump appears in his throat, making it difficult for him to speak.

“Anyway, what would you like, sir?” Melissa continues, looking back at Alexander.

While Alexander orders his food and Melissa writes it down, Pierre keeps his eyes glued on Melissa. He takes in her appearance: her brown wavy hair, her green eyes, and her light-tan skin. Suddenly, an image of a girl pops in his head for a second, but he doesn’t get a good glimpse of who she could be. “U-Um sir, are you okay?” Melissa says, looking at Pierre, slightly blushing.

Pierre shakes himself back into reality, clears his throat, and says, “Y-Yes! Sorry, just come back to me.”

“Okay! And I’ll be back with your food, sir,” Melissa says to Alexander.

“Thank you so much, Melissa~!” Alexander says with a big smile.

“You’re very welcome~!” Melissa responds back, and she walks off.

*Ba-bump... Ba-bump....Ba-bump.* Pierre feels a weird sensation take over his chest area. He tries to drink some water to calm himself down. He looks through the menu again, but then looks up to see Alexander giving him a sinister smile. “Ugh, what now?” Pierre asks annoyingly.

“You’re warming up to humans, I see~” Alexander says in a goofy tone.

“Nobody is warming up to anything,” Pierre retorts back.

“She was very nice, wasn’t she,” Alexander teases.

“She’s... alright...”

“See, you agreed~!”

“She’s human.”

“So?”

“You know how I feel about humans.”

“She’s an example that not all humans are bad, Pierre!”

“You know, I haven’t forgotten about our conversation, today...”

Alexander takes Pierre’s last remark as a warning, and he stops entertaining the current conversation. Pierre takes another drink from his cup. *I don’t have time to be distracted, Pierre says to himself, I need to find that cat and hope that Cerberus catches Kendo. I’m so close to finishing this damn job. But... something weird did happen when I looked at her... who was that girl?*

...

### **Night**

The two men finish up their meals, and they wait for Melissa to come back with their bill. Alexander rubs his stomach, feeling the food settle nicely, while Pierre looks out the window, anxious to get back on the road and resume his search. Melissa walks back to Alexander and

Pierre with the bill, and she says, “Alright guys, here’s your bill. We take paper and plastic.” She gives Alexander the bill, and he laughs at the price.

“\$125!? Haha, oops~!” Alexander says, making Melissa giggle along with him.

“Yeah, you ordered quite a lot!” Melissa says.

“Oh man. Guess I’ll use my card this time. Here you go~!” Alexander hands Melissa his debit card.

“Alright! I’ll be right back!” Melissa says while she walks to one of the computers to complete the payment process. She pulls up the ticket and puts in the information, but what makes her heart skip a beat is that she looks at the name on the card. ‘ALEXANDER’. *Is this the same Alexander that’s chasing Amy?* Melissa ponders to herself. Keeping her cool, she finishes up the payment, prints out the receipt, and walks back to Alexander and Pierre. “Okie dokie, here you go, and I hope that y’all will have a lovely night~!” Melissa says cheerfully while giving Alexander back his card along with the receipt.

“Thank you so much! You have a wonderful night, as well, Melissa~!” Alexander says while putting his card back in his wallet and standing up. Before Melissa could walk away, however, Pierre stands up.

“Excuse me, Melissa. I have a question for you,” Pierre says, making Melissa look back at him.

“Sure, what’s up?” Melissa asks.

“Have you seen a black cat around here?” Pierre asks her with a concerning voice.

“H-Huh? A cat?” she says tilting her head.

“Yeah!” Alexander replies, “We’ve been looking for a cat all day, but we’ve had no luck... she’s got pretty black fur and purple eyes. If you ever see her, could you let us know somehow?”

*Ba-ba-bump!!* Melissa's heart skips a beat as soon as she hears Alexander describe the cat. *Okay, that right there just settles it. This IS the Alexander that Amethyst is talking about,* Melissa tells herself. "Y-Yeah! Don't worry, I'm sure you'll find her soon!" Melissa says. After that, they say their goodbyes, Alexander and Pierre walk out of the restaurant, and Melissa swiftly goes to the bathroom. She goes into a stall and immediately pulls out her phone and texts in the group chat.

**Melissa:** *GUYS, I FOUND ALEX ! ! ! ! AND HE WASN'T ALONE!!* 🤪



## Chapter 21

July 2017

Night

**Tenacity:** *WHAT YOU MEAN YOU FOUND ALEX!?* 😨

**Rose:** *Do you know if it's the Alex that Amethyst is talking about??* 😬

**Melissa:** *Yes!! He came here with some other guy(he was pretty cute 😊), and I just assumed they were any other customer until he gave me his card to pay for his food. And it had Alexander's name on it! Sounds like nothing until they asked me if I saw a cat with purple eyes and to let them know when I found her!!*

Tenacity reads out what Melissa just typed to Amethyst as they sit on her bed. Amethyst's eyes widen and says, "That's him... That's Alex!"

"Do you know who the other guy was??" Tenacity asks.

"He's probably one of the peonis that Usiku talked about," Amethyst answers. In her cat form, she walks around the bed, thinking of a plan while Tenacity continues texting her friends.

**Tenacity:** *Yeah, Ames just confirmed that you indeed saw her man.*

**Nermal:** *Hey, so while Jackie and I were walking around town, we saw a whole lot of "missing" posters, and it had Amethyst on them!* 😬

**Rose:** *Yeah, now that you mentioned it, I think I saw some posters just like that while driving to work.*

**Jacqueline:** *So are we gonna kick some ass!? What are we gonna do!? Oh! Here's the picture of that bathtub slushie I made earlier~!!*

**Nermal:** *It took forever cleaning it up...* 😬

While Jacqueline shows off pictures of her experiment, Tenacity puts the phone down to look at her hands. A picture of Jacqueline in a bathing suit playing in the white bathtub full of blue slush pops up in the group chat, but *fwoosh!* Tenacity is too focused on the flames she just made

appear in her hands. She gets lost in the dancing yellow and orange flames, feeling the warmth in her hands and the light kissing her face. She starts moving her hands a little bit, watching the flames follow her hands like they were waltzing. Suddenly, Amethyst snaps Tenacity out of the mesmerization and says, “Tenacity?”

“Yeah?” Tenacity asks, tilting her head.

“Tell the girls that tomorrow, we’re going to my apartment...” Amethyst says in a calm tone.

“Huh? Um, alright, but... why?” Tenacity questions.

“Because there’s a chance that Alexander will be there... and I want us to go to him.”

“I dunno... Alex is still possessed. *Plus*, he’s an Upindelaiki... don’t tell me you expect us to be able to fight him back after a day of having these powers!”

“What choice do we have, dear? He hasn’t found me for a long time now. It’s getting to where the town is starting to get involved, and I’m becoming more afraid for his safety.”

“Then why not just be human for the time being then?”

“And hide for an even longer time?”

“At least until we get the hang of these powers!”

“From what I’ve seen, you girls are doing perfectly fine with them.”

“... I don’t know about this, Amethyst. Just ‘cuz I haven’t burned a building, yet, that don’t mean anything.”

“Trust me, on this. We go to my apartment. There’s a high chance that Alexander will be there so we’ll convince him to take us to the people that started all of this. When we get there, we’ll rescue Thomas, Thomas will help us get out of there along with Alex, and then we’re all safe and can fight back the peonis if they’re still persistent.”

Tenacity thinks about the plan Amethyst just explained. She's pretty much turning herself in. What other choice do they really have, though? They have no idea where Thomas is located, and they have no other way to get closer to Alexander except the apartment. Until Tenacity could come up with a better plan, she texts her friends what they are going to do.

...

"And so, Master, I'm just requesting that you let this Upindelaiki go. It's clear that the cat isn't going to come here willingly," Pierre explains to Alphonse. Although they are standing in the dark cave, they can still see each other as if the area is well lit. Thomas stays silent as he listens to the two Umuites' conversation. After hearing Pierre explain Alexander's behavior and how they haven't found Amethyst, yet, Thomas' heart leaps with joy. Pierre looks at Thomas and says, "It seems that your friend could care less about you."

"No," Thomas retorts with a smirk, "She's just smart enough not to come near here."

Alphonse ponders on Pierre's suggestion, understanding that all he has said is quite true. Nothing has happened for over a week! Pierre and Cerberus are taking so long to capture these targets that Alphonse finished reading the entirety of *The Reaper's Contract*. Before Alphonse can say anything, the Cerberus Brothers run inside the cave in their hound forms. They transform back into humans, out of breath. "This... *huff huff*... is getting tiring..." Beta complains.

"Come on, are you kidding me!?" Pierre exclaims while walking up to the exhausted brothers. "You haven't caught him yet!?"

"HEY, DON'T GO BITCHING AT US!" Gamma barks out. "WE SEE THAT YOUR STUPID ASS DIDN'T CATCH SHIT, EITHER!"

"I *will* soon enough," Pierre says through his gritted teeth. Meanwhile, Alpha grips on his own left arm, taking a deep breath. Pierre catches a glimpse of him and says, "Oh don't tell me the brat actually got you..."

“More like the ‘brat’ has gotten some help this time....” Alpha groans out.

“He hired a peoni hunter on us,” Beta explains, “We need to go back to Umu, *now*.”

“I’m fine. Until we catch Anti, we’re not going back home,” Alpha says with more affirmation.

“No, brother, you need medical attention!” Beta begs, “That bullet was no ordinary one!”

“I said I’m fine!” Alpha growls back. Beta can’t help but look at his older brother in worry, and Gamma looks down in sorrow.

“It’s my fault...” Gamma whimpers out, “I’m sorry, Alpha. I should have listened.”

“Oh shut up, Gamma,” Alpha growls out, “Your ‘sorry’ will come in the form of Anti in our custody. NEXT TIME, FUCKING LISTEN TO ME!”

“*Yes, sir...*” Gamma whispers out.

Alpha says no more and walks towards Pierre growling out, “And you need to worry about your own fucking mission, you animal loving *dust muncher*,” Alpha growls towards Pierre, “We are trying to catch the devil’s son. *You’re* trying to catch a simple animal that only sits around and shits all day. So shut up complaining about *our* work like you’re doing any better than us.”

“Ohohohohohohoho~!” Alphonse laughs at the quarrel that’s taking place in front of him. Meanwhile, Thomas is whispering chants in a mazing language, trying to get out of the chains, but the Quphanto yanks the chains and looks at Thomas. “Come on, now, Upindelaiki~! Isn’t this entertaining~?” However, Thomas looks away, going back to his chants, making Alphonse sigh. “How many times do I have to tell you that only *I* can free you from those chains? I enchanted them for a reason, you know.”

“Do you not hear your followers?” Thomas asks, “Pierre doesn’t see the point in keeping me hostage anymore.”

“Pierre may not see the point... but I do,” Alphonse says, giggling. Pierre overhears the conversation, and he jerks his head towards them.

“What do you mean *I* don’t see the point!?” Pierre yells.

“It’s understandable~ You’re frustrated right now~” Alphonse teases.

“THESE UpindelaikiS AREN’T FUCKING HELPING US!! THAT Upindelaiki YOU SO CALLED ‘POSSESSED’? THAT FUCKER HAS THE SAME AMOUNT OF SENSE AS A SQUIRREL!” Pierre says in outrage.

“Hm... Yeeah, I kind of figured~” Alphonse says cheerfully.

“YOU WHAT!?”

“Ohohohohohohoho~! Alexander is the *first* Upindelaiki to experience ‘possession’~! And I must say, the results are interesting~! Though his physical appearance changed, his psyche is untouched~”

“Wait... so he’s not possessed,” Thomas chimes in, “He’s... You only *tainted* him!”

“YOU’RE TELLING ME YOU FUCKING LIED!?” Pierre roars at the Quphanto, “YOU TALKED AS IF UpindelaikiS HAVE BEEN POSSESSED BEFORE!!!”

“Ding ding ding ding~! Ohohohohoho~!!” Alphonse begins to laugh hysterically, “And the fact that the Upindelaiki played along just to make all of you believe that he was actually possessed makes it much better and funnier~!! OHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHO~!! He’s such an actor, isn’t he~!? OHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHO~!! *SNORT SNORT!!* OHOHOHOHOHOHOHO~!!” The entertained Quphanto falls to the floor laughing, sounds of a warthog now escaping his lips. However, while Alphonse is enjoying the reveal, Pierre balls up his fists tightly and grinds his teeth, feeling his face heat up from rage; Thomas’ eyes tear up

from relief, knowing that this entire time Alexander was only buying Amethyst time and getting help.

“I knew that allowing you to come along was going to be a waste of time...” Alpha finally speaks, but Alphonse continues to laugh.

“Goddammit, Alphonse!! If you were so bored, you could have helped us with Anti!!” Beta jumps in, trying to talk over Alphonse’s continued laughter.

“AS A MATTER OF FACT, **YOU** KNEW WHERE THE FELINE WAS IN THE FIRST PLACE! **YOU** COULD HAVE CAPTURED HER EASILY!” Gamma reveals, and Alphonse finally calms down, wiping away tears of glee.

*Sighs.* “Yes...” Alphonse finally admits, “I *could* have gotten the precious ‘Amethyst’, but where’s the fun in that~? If I were to have gotten her, then headstrong Pierre over here wouldn’t have had a purpose to be here~.”

“ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?” Pierre starts taking steps towards Alphonse, and Thomas and the Cerberus Brothers watch him release his rage. “I COULD HAVE BEEN BACK HOME BY NOW!! I DIDN’T ASK FOR THIS SHIT!! I’VE BEEN OVER HERE DEALING WITH AN Upindelaiki WHO’S JUST BEEN MAKING MY WORK MORE DIFFICULT, AND YOU FIND THIS SHIT FUNNY!?” After finishing his rant, he’s only a few inches away from Alphonse’s face.

“.... Yes~!” Alphonse says, trying to hold his laughter.

“.....***That’s it...***” Pierre turns around and stomps away, exiting the cave, not saying another word. No one tries stopping the furious Upindeoni, seeing how there’s no way of convincing him to do otherwise.

“... Come on guys. We need to get back to work,” Alpha says, breaking the silence.

“What about Pierre?” Beta asks.

“Yeah, he looks like he’s going to do something drastic,” Gamma joins in.

“We’ll leave him be for now. If we try to get involved now, he’ll just take it as an insult,” Alpha explains. Not saying another word, Beta and Gamma nod their heads, and the brothers transform back into hounds and run out of the cave. Alphonse claps his hands as if an act has finished.

“Now *that* was an interesting performance~!” Alphonse says while laughing again. However, Thomas doesn’t say anything to encourage the behavior. Alphonse snaps his fingers, and a golden apple appears in his hand. *Chomp! Chomp! Chomp!* He chews up the entirety of the apple, and he says with a full mouth, “Well... it seems that the ‘Dinner Show’ is about to end, soon~ *Sighs* Well... might as well do this then~” He squeezes the chains, and the chains glow up, but it’s not hurting Thomas. Instead, after a few seconds, the chains disappear, finally freeing the Upindelaiki. Thomas feels the cold wind embrace the places that the chains covered up, and his eyes widen.

“You’re freeing me?” Thomas questions Alphonse. “Why?”

“Because I’m sure you want to get to your brother before Pierre does~. It’s clear that they’re not going to come back to this cave any time soon. I’d have died of boredom~! Now go on~. Clock is ticking~!” Alphonse says, cheering Thomas to go rescue Alexander. Not questioning it, Thomas immediately gets up, stumbling a little bit. He wobbles to the exit, trying to wake up his legs.

Before he walks out, Thomas turns to look at Alphonse one last time and says, “That was heartless, Alphonse... Why would you go for a plan so convoluted? Pierre is on the same side as you, and you played him like a fool... you even wasted a little of Cerberus’ time as well...”

“Wow... I never thought a *Mazan* of all people would sympathize with *Umuites*~ Ohohohohohohohoho~!! That’s so adorable~!!” Alphonse says, not really showing any remorse for what he has done. Seeing that it’s pointless to lecture the Quphanto, Thomas runs off, ready to see his older twin. Alphonse then summons the same Umu warthog that helped him initiate this entire fiasco and pets it. The warthog snorts at its owner’s touch, and Alphonse says, “Be a good boy and be my eyes this one last time, won’t you~? I need to see how this all will fall apart~!” Alphonse says as he stands up on his two hairy warthog legs and stretches. “I need to go back home... and give everyone the bad news~. Or maybe I shouldn’t say anything~? Oh my, what to do~? What to do~? Ohohohohohohohoho~!” And his laughs echo throughout the cave as he disappears from Gaia, leaving behind the book that caused it all. The warthog prances out of the cave, taking its time walking to the finale.



## Chapter 22

July 2017

### Early Morning

Alexander looks at himself in the bathroom mirror. He touches his cloud-white hair and looks into his topaz-yellow eyes, feeling a hand grip at his heart. His face becomes one of grimace as he wonders if his malaiki wings and halo have changed at all. His heart begins to thump, and chills begin covering up his entire body. He sighs from despair as he turns off the bathroom light, and he walks to the living room to sit on the light-brown couch.

He clasps his hands together and closes his eyes tightly, and he speaks softly, “Oh, Ideya... I know I haven’t spoken to You in forever, but... I really messed up this time. I’m pretty sure You saw what happened... but I didn’t have a choice! It was either to drink the juice and swallow the maggots or piss them off to the point they’d kill my brother. I thank You for giving me the strength to fight against the evil influence. However, I fear that my change of appearance is permanent, and I’m not too happy about it. I just pray that there is a way to reverse the effects. I pray that You are keeping Thomas and Amethyst safe. You and I both know that I can’t keep this facade up for any longer, so please give me the strength to fight these peonis off and protect the ones I love. Amen.”

After saying his prayer, his heart beats at a more steady beat, and his nerves begin to settle. “*Sighs* Okay,” Alexander says with a more serious face, “I gotta get Thomas back. Sure, I’m going against a Quphanto, an Upindeoni, and Cerberus himself, but what other choice do I have? I don’t know what Amethyst is doing, and I’m not sure if Usiku is going to really help. All of this is my fault anyway... I need to take responsibility.”

“Alright, alright, cool it, little dove~.” Alexander jumps at the new male voice, not knowing who it belongs to. He looks around trying to find the owner of the voice, and the mysterious

person giggles. “Over here, you cute vanilla bean~.” Alexander looks and sees a black-and-white cat standing on the dinner table, smiling and tilting his head.

Alexander tilts his head the same way as the cat and asks, “Who are you?”

“Who I am is not important... not right now, anyway,” the suspicious cat says, “Look, this whole thing isn’t necessarily your fault. Although, I must say that this is a very bold move you’re about to make...and I love it~.”

“W-Well if this isn’t my fault, then whose is it?!” Alexander says, getting closer to him. “*I’m* the one that brought the book to the camp. And on top of that, *I* went into the forest on my own trying to chase a warthog! None of this would be happening if *I* were to have waited on my brother.”

“Yeeeah, but remember *how* you got the book in the first place?” the cat asks, “It had a little note in it telling you that you needed to cleanse the cave in order to stop all of this from happening, right?”

“Yeah, it did have a little lett-.... Wait, how would *you* know about it?... Are *you* the one that left that letter!?”

“Ding ding! Bingo, my knight in shining armor~!”

“B-But wait, so... so... uugh, so many questions. Just, just give me a second,” Alexander groans out of confusion. He sits at the table, rubbing his temples. “So let me get this straight: *You’re* the one that left the book for me to see and to cleanse the cave. *You* wanted me to cleanse the cave so that these peonis wouldn’t be able to come to Gaia. But I guess what I’m curious about is 1.) How did you get your hands on the book in the first place, 2.) Why are Cerberus *and* a Quphanto here, and 3.) How would you know that they would be arriving here of all places?”

“Hmmmmm, so many questions~,” the cat purrs out, and he starts pressing his fuzzy head against Alexander’s forehead and says, “Tell you what, after we take care of those Hell Realmers and save your friends, I’ll explain everything. Right now isn’t the time. After all, you’ve got some uninvited guests coming your way.~”

“Huh?” Alexander asks, looking into the tomcat’s red-orange eyes. “What do you mean ‘uninvited guests’? Well, besides you, of course-”

*BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!* Series of powerful knocks echo throughout the apartment. “ALEXANDER, OL’ BUDDY!!! CARE LETTING AN OLD FRIEND INSIDE!?”

“P-Pierre!?” Alexander says as his heart stops beating for a second.

“YEAH, IT’S YOUR BEST PAL!” Pierre screams out loud. *BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!*

“Hey, uuuh, isn’t it a *little* too early for him to be bangin’ at your door like this?” the cat snickers, “At this rate, he’s going to have the neighbors get involved~.”

Without saying another word, Alexander immediately gets up to open the door to see a rough-haired Pierre with a wide smile and scrunched up eyes as if they were flaming. Pierre’s face makes Alexander jump, seeing that he’s not the calm, cool, and collected Pierre that he knows. “H-Hey Pierre! Come on in!” Alexander says, trying to control his voice from trembling nervously.

“No....We need to talk...*outside*....” Pierre says in a low tone. “C’mon... let’s go for a ride...”

“Pierre...” Alexander begins, “What’s the rush? Are we needed back at the cave?” Waiting for a response, Alexander gives Pierre a soft smile. Seconds later, Pierre walks into the

apartment, snickering and not saying anything to Alexander. “Are you okay, Pierre?” the secretive Upindelaiki asks as he closes and locks the door.

“You know, Alex....” the angered Upindeoni says, turning to face his mazic companion with no smile, “I gave you a chance to tell me the *truth*... but instead, you take me for a dumbass.”

“Pierre, wait a second-”

“And *apparently*, Alphonse knew about this as well...”

“I was *going* to tell you after-”

“If I’m going to be forced into some bullshit like this, the last thing that needs to happen is for me to be *tricked BY MY OWN PARTNER!*”

“Now wait a minute, don’t try to act like you see me as someone of value now!!” Alexander raises his voice and strengthens his stance, balling his fists. “Don’t think I didn’t hear you talk to Alphonse that one day! You *wanted* to get rid of me after our visit to Usiku’s, remember!? Oh yeah, speaking of which, what about my brother!? Did you get Thomas out of the cave!? Or are you lying as well!?”

Pierre looks at the dining table, his long ears twitching, but he doesn’t see anything peculiar. He then looks back at Alexander with a sinister smirk forming, and he says, “Oh... don’t worry... you’ll see your brother *very soon*... as a matter of fact, you’ll see Amethyst, too...”

“Oh! Really? Y-You found her!?” Alexander asks, letting his guard down.

“Yeah yeah! In fact, that’s why I said we needed to go take a ride, so that I could take you to them!” Pierre says, matching Alexander’s cheerful tone. “But eh... here is fine, I guess... ***you three will be meeting up in the same place, either way.***” After saying this, his right hand is surrounded by dark magic, and the black aura forms into a tar-black spear. Pierre looks at Alexander with a wide, crooked smile, and he yells out, “HAVE FUN IN THE ***AFTERLIFE ! !***”

Without giving the Upindelaiki a chance to say anything, Pierre swings his spear horizontally, and Alexander ducks from the dark blade. Immediately, Pierre swings vertically, and Alexander moves to his right, avoiding the attack once again. Alexander keeps dodging as Pierre swings his weapon. *BAM! SMASH! CRASH!* Pierre breaks the living room table, the television, and various pictures on the wall. His blade cuts open the couches it makes contact with, making the couches' stuffing fly everywhere. Alexander trips and falls on his side in the dining area, groaning out of pain, trying to catch his breath. Pierre quickly stomps towards the exhausted Upindelaiki and says, "***Stand still and your blood won't splatter everywhere...***"

"Hey, Pierre~!!" Kendo says before Pierre could pierce Alexander's face. Pierre looks at the mischievous cat swaying his tail in the destroyed living room, and Kendo continues, "Goddamn, you ain't had to mess up the man's furniture like this~! You really wanna kill him because *you* couldn't tell that he was faking his possession~?"

"Oh shut up, pest!!" Pierre exclaims turning away from Alexander and pointing his spear towards Kendo. "Don't act like *you* know how possession works!! This Upindelaiki has Umu maggots inside him that will permanently stay in his body unless someone of Maza or an Umrha comes through to cure him!! Because of the maggots' dark presence, we all assumed that Alphonse succeeded in making this Upindelaiki our tool! *You* wouldn't know any of this shit!! YOU WOULDN'T KNOW OF ANYTHING WE'VE DONE FOR THE PAST WEEK BECAUSE YOUR CHILDISH ASS IS TOO BUSY REBELLING YOUR FATHER!!"

"His... Father?????" Alexander says softly.

"Oh, c'mon, Pierre~!" Kendo says, chuckling, "You and I both know that I've been doing this for the past what... 700 years now~?"

"And you were caught every time, Kendo!!" Pierre yells out.

“Kendo...??” Alexander questions quietly.

“Hey, what can I say~? Guess it’s the *half-human* in me to keep doing this~” Kendo smirks while purring.

“Yeah, well I need your *half-Upindeoni* side to kick some sense into you and come back home so that this madness can stop!!” Pierre says.

While the two Umuites argue, someone starts banging at the door. *BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG!* “ALEX!! ARE YOU IN THERE!?”

...

### **Morning**

Thomas keeps banging at Alexander's door, panting. He feels his feet throbbing from running down the highway, through the neighborhood, up the flight of stairs, and down the hallway; his drooping large, white feathery wings disappear after helping the Upindelaiki get to his destination more quickly. *Thank the Heavens that no one is around*, Thomas thinks to himself.

A neighbor opens their door, and it’s a cranky elderly woman. “What the hell is going on in there?” the old lady croaks, “There’s been nothing but yelling and stuff breaking for the last 30 minutes.”

“I’m so sorry, ma’am,” Thomas says calmly, “Whatever is going on in here, I’ll be sure to put an end to it.” Not saying anything else, the old woman goes back into her apartment, and Thomas looks at Alexander’s door, hoping for his older twin to open it. As he waits, he not only senses his brother’s presence, but also a dark presence. He also notices how quiet it has gotten as soon as he starts knocking on the door. *I can’t be out here for any longer!* He looks around the hallway, checking if any more angered neighbors come out to question what’s going on. Seeing how he’s the only one in the hallway, he closes his eyes and says a mazing chant. The chant makes a white light surround his entire body. Then, the light disappears and so does Thomas’ body;

however, even though no one can see the Upindelaiki now, he is still here in the hallway since all that Thomas did was take himself to the Spirit Realm. He lets out a sigh, and finally speaks, “Hello, Spirit Realm... been a while since I’ve done this.”

Without needing to open the door, Thomas simply walks through it, and he immediately sees the living room trashed and a cat standing in the middle of it all. The cat looks straight at Thomas and says, “Aaah, there you are~! Ooh, you’re just as cute as your brother~.” Ignoring Kendo, Thomas continues walking in the Spirit Realm, and he stands in front of the dining area where Pierre and Alexander are and looks at them.

Pierre glares at Thomas, as well, but Alexander is on the ground confused. Alexander asks, “Thomas? Is that you? *Where* are you?”

*Of course,* Thomas says to himself, *Alex isn’t going to be able to see or hear me. When all of this is over, I’m forcing him to train, again. He’s been in Gaia for too long.* Not wasting time, Thomas walks towards Alexander, but Pierre wastes no time and says a umuic chant, making darkness surround his body, and just like Thomas, the darkness disappears along with him.

Pierre, now in the Spirit Realm along with Thomas, smirks at the Upindelaiki and says, “Here to save your dumbass brother, huh?”

“Listen, Pierre,” Thomas interrupts, “Ever since you, Cerberus, and Alphonse have been here, you have made it very clear that you *do not* want to do this.” Pierre doesn’t utter a word, but his body stays tensed up. Thomas continues, “I don’t understand why you were sent here to grab Amethyst, but I’m afraid to tell you that it is against Spiritual Law for us spiritual beings to bring a Gaian into our realms. So whoever hired you to do this job is going to have to be disappointed. If they want Amethyst so badly, they are going to have to wait until her life ends here and she has reawakened in the Spirit Realm.”

Pierre finally says, “I don’t know why Amethyst is needed... however, my client was serious about me grabbing her one way or another along with *that bitch* over there.” Pierre points at Kendo, and Thomas looks at him and tilts his head.

“Wait...*that’s* the devil’s son?” Thomas asks, making Pierre’s eyes widen.

“H-How’d you know!?” Pierre exclaims.

“Alphonse ran his mouth too much...” Thomas explains.

“... Yet he couldn’t tell anybody that your brother wasn’t possessed...”

“He had us all fooled, which is why I believe you need to focus your anger towards *him* and not Alexander.”

“AND HAVE MY ASS THROWN INTO THE ETERNAL FLAMES WITH THE FALLEN? No... No, I can’t do that. Plus, *all* of this could have been avoided if your brother was honest with me the *first time* I asked him about it! Would I have been upset? Yes, but at the same time I’d have been in a much calmer mood about it. If anything, he’d have given me more reason to just abandon him. I could care less what Alex would have done afterwards, just as long as he didn’t get in my way.”

“THE PERSON THAT YOU’RE TRYING TO CAPTURE IS HIS *GIRLFRIEND!!* Do you really think he’s just going to let you continue your mission no matter how the situation could have played out!?!”

“.....He’s *dating* the *cat*?”

Before they can continue their conversation, Alexander interrupts by saying, “Hey uuuh, are you guys okay? I don’t know if you’re fighting or not, but uuuh it’s been like 3 minutes now, and I’ve just been sitting here in complete silence... with this Kendo guy. Oh yeah! Thomas! It turns out that Kendo is the one that sent that book to us! He’s here to help! But hurry and finish up



with Pierre so that we can end all of this once and for all!”

Thomas’ heart jumps after hearing what his brother just told him, and he looks straight at Kendo and asks, “What are *you* doing giving *my brother* an evil book, son of the devil?”

“Ugh~ Seriously? You mean you can’t figure it out by now~? I’m not planning on going back to Umu for a long time now~. Just cleanse that cave like I requested, and then I promise I won’t be a handful~!” Kendo answers.

“Yeah, right, like *you’re* going to keep your word. If you’re anything like your father, you’re most likely lying,” Thomas says firmly.

“Hey, Kendo, what is Thomas saying?” Alexander asks, “It’s clear that you can hear him!”

“Oh nothing~!” Kendo says with a smile, “Your brother is just doing the same thing everyone else has been doing: asking questions that have already been answered~! And seriously... I’m liking how frustrating it is~!”

“Enough!!” Pierre yells out, “I don’t give a shit about you trying to start your *vacation*, Kendo. Lord Aidoneus has ordered for your return, and you will come back home with me, Cerberus, and Alphonse whether you like it or not. I’ll just go for Amethyst after I take you back to Cerberus. So come on. Let’s go.” But before Pierre could grab for Kendo, the Upindeoni-human hybrid runs to Alexander as a red-orange glow surrounds his cat-body. Alexander sits up and starts scooting away from the light as it grows larger. The glow goes from a cat shape to a human shape, leaving behind a sight that makes Alexander’s, Pierre’s, and Thomas’ eyes widen.

“Come on, cute vanilla bean,” Kendo says smoothly, smirking, “Let’s blow this popsicle stand~.”

## Chapter 23

July 2017

Morning

The Cerberus Brothers stand near an apartment complex, their target's strong scent irritating their noses. They post up near the trees so that no one can spot them. Alpha smokes a blunt, Beta fixes his hair, and Gamma stares at the building with his crazed smile. "So he's in there, huh?" Gamma asks in a low raspy voice, and he starts snickering.

"So what's the plan, brother?" Beta asks, looking at Alpha, "Are we bustin' up in there, or are we waiting for him to come out?"

"We'll wait..." Alpha says calmly.

"...This is pointless," Beta says in a quiet tone.

"Something wrong, Beta?" Alpha asks, blowing out smoke.

"It's just... and I can't believe I'm saying this, *again*, but Gamma is right," Beta says, making Gamma look at him in shock. Beta continues, "We're Cerberus! We're supposed to be making sure that the Fallen doesn't escape, not babysitting Aidoneus' son!"

"I understand your frustration, brother," Alpha says, "But Lord Aidoneus' orders are absolute, and we cannot go against him. We've been chasing this little bastard for centuries. No point in fighting against it now."

"Alpha, you know damn well you don't want to do this either! We've been in Umu since the beginning of creation! I get that it's because of Aidoneus that our home has flourished, but there's gotta be some point where we have to tell Aidoneus that his orders are ridiculous!"

"...There's a reason why he wants Anti back..."

"Okay, and that reason is?!"

Not answering Beta's question, Alpha takes another puff, letting the Devil Lettuce calm his nerves. Beta begins growling, and Gamma says, "We've grown tired of this bullshit, Alpha! Anti escapes, we capture him, Anti escapes, we capture him, Anti escapes, we capture him!"

"It's bullshit!!" Beta exclaims, kicking some leaves.

"...Oh! Oh! I got an idea!" Gamma says.

"This better be good..." Beta mutters.

"No, we're not killing Anti..." Alpha finally speaks.

"OH COME ON! WHY NOT!?! No one has to know that *we* did it! We kill the fucker, bring him back, say that we found him dead, and then boom! We won't have to worry about it anymore!" Gamma says excitedly.

"Heh...hey, that's not too bad, Gamma," Beta says, smirking. Then, he looks at Alpha and says, "Come on, big bro, let's just end this shit once and for all. It's clear that Anti is just going to keep doing this. There's going to be no end to this fiasco..."

Alpha lets out a sigh of frustration, and he takes a much longer puff. He thinks about his brothers' crazy proposal, understanding their frustration. *Surely there's a better solution*, Alpha says to himself, *If we come back to the boss with his son's dead body, he'll surely do something drastic. I'm surprised he hasn't done anything crazy, yet.*

Before Alpha could give his brothers an answer, Gamma points and yells out, "There goes the fucker!!" Alpha and Beta look at who Gamma is pointing at and see that it's their target running out of the complex with another person.

Alexander hasn't said anything ever since Kendo transformed into a human. He is lost in the Upindeoni-human hybrid's long, wavy, black sea of hair as it flows in the wind. "Hey, where's your car!?" Kendo asks as he still holds Alexander's hand while running.

Alexander snaps out of the trance and says, “Oh! Uh, we’re actually not far from it! It’s over there!” He points at his white van, and Kendo increases his speed and runs towards the vehicle. They get to the vehicle, and Kendo goes through his pocket and grabs Alexander’s keys. They slow down to a stop, giving Alexander a chance to really look at Kendo. The sun makes Kendo’s caramel skin glow and his red-orange eyes shine, and the wind makes his baggy, low-cut, yellow shirt dance. Kendo hands the keys to Alexander and runs to the passenger side of the van.

“Come on!” Kendo says, making Alexander jump back into reality again and unlock the doors. They enter the van, Alexander starts the car and drives off, and Kendo looks out the window smiling. Kendo rolls down the window and takes in the crisp air. He then looks at Alexander with a soft smile and says, “Let’s go to the cave. Surely, you know how to cleanse something by yourself, right?”

“No... not really,” Alexander admits, still feeling out of place. His heart beats at an unsteady rhythm while his brain tries to process what is really going on.

“Well, that’s okay,” Kendo says in a cheerful tone, “This isn’t my first time having Upindelaikis cleanse a portal. I’ll tell you what to do.”

“You... really don’t want to go back home, huh?” Alexander asks.

“Yep~! Umu is just not it, ya know...” Kendo responds.

“But you’re an Upindeoni...well, *half*-Upindeoni anyways...”

“So? You’re an Upindelaiki, and I don’t hear you talking about going back to Maza...”

“True, but I would love to visit someday... The devil must not be a good father, then, for you to not even consider visiting...”

Kendo’s eyes widen after what Alexander says. “... I never told you that the devil was my father... Only Pierre and Thomas knew about that...”

“Oops, well... I actually heard everything they said in the Spirit Realm...” Alexander reveals, “Besides, for Cerberus and an Umu Quphanto to come just for *you*? You’re a big deal. And who else is a big deal? The devil!”

“...Why do you do that?” Kendo asks.

“Do what?” Alexander says, tilting his head.

“You act as if you’re this dummy that has no idea what’s going on or how anything works, and yet... you’re ahead of the game...”

“...”

“...You knew that warthog was from Umu, too, didn’t you...? And before you ask, yes... I was there when Cerberus knocked you out...”

“Mhm... wait you were?”

“Haha, I had some Umrha stuff to cover my scent, but I ran out of it...”

“Oh... *sighs* I don’t think Thomas sees it now, but if it weren’t for me, we wouldn’t know where the cave was. I knew the warthog would help somehow... I knew Cerberus was around, and I took the risk...”

“Wow... Vanilla bean, you are interesting, you know~? I like you~...”

“U-Uh....thanks??”

“An Upindelaiki, meant to bring positivity wherever he goes while keeping his distance and supposed to damn the Umuites that dare harm his potential heavenly neighbors, is actually *helping* an Umuite out and has no fear in getting close to humans as corrupted as they are. I usually don’t fall for Mazans, but... you’re different~.”

“I-I’m taken!”

“Yes, I’ve seen your significant other~... as a cat, anyway. I’m sure she’s just as attractive in her human form.”

“*Sighs* She is...” Alexander’s heart beats rapidly as an image of his lover pops up in his head. He thinks about her cold stares and warm smiles, her firm walk and gentle mannerisms. Black cats are often seen as bad luck; however, to Alexander, Amethyst is everything but bad luck. “Amethyst,” Alexander says softly, “Is one of the main reasons I enjoy being in Gaia... wait a minute... Kendo, we can’t cleanse the cave just yet! If we do so now, then Cerberus, Pierre, and Alphonse will be stuck here! And I highly doubt that they feel like traveling to find another portal to use to get back home.”

“Awww, *and* you care about your own enemies’ troubles~!?” Kendo says, showing more admiration in his face.

“Oh, and if they’re still here, they’re still going to try to catch you and Amy!” Alexander points out. “We have to take care of them first before we do anything! Thomas has Pierre, what about Cerberus?”

Kendo looks away from Alexander and looks at the passenger side mirror, and he puts on an excited smile and says, “You ask, the Creator shall deliver~! Just keep driving to the camping place, Vanilla Bean~!”

“Huh?” Alexander asks, and he instantly looks at his rear view mirror and sees three black and brown hounds running right behind them. He looks straight at the road and speeds up a little bit out of the anxiety that is increasing his heart rate along with making sweat appear on his pale head. Alexander hisses out, “Shit...”

As the Cerberus Brothers follow the white van, Alpha notices that Kendo and Alexander look at their mirrors. His ears twitch as he overhears Kendo’s request to go to the place where

everything started, and he looks at his brothers and nods his head to the side of the road. They slow down and start walking on the grassy sidewalk. When the van takes a right, disappearing from the brothers' sight, Alpha says calmly, "We'll meet them back at the cave. If that's where Anti wants to end this, then that's where we're going."

"Okay, but what will we do once we get there?" Beta asks.

"You'll see...Gamma, I'll need your weapon to be silenced for this," Alpha says, making Gamma put on a psychotic smile and wheeze out a dry laugh.

## Chapter 24

July 2017

Morning

A black car followed by a pink car makes it to an apartment complex that is 15 minutes away from Tenacity's place. They park in the parking lot next to each other, and Tenacity and Amethyst exit the black car while Melissa, Nermal, Jacqueline, and Rose exit the pink car. They gather together and start walking towards the complex, and Amethyst walks in front of them in her cat form. "Alright, ladies," Amethyst starts, "I know that you're not necessarily ready to use your powers, but I believe you won't have to."

"What if yo' man tries to fight us?" Tenacity asks.

"Don't worry... I'll be sure that he doesn't touch any of you," Amethyst says, as she transforms into her human form, making the girls stop in their tracks. They notice her dark-chocolate skin glistening in the sunlight and her extremely long, straight black hair flowing down to her ankles. The girls' eyes widen and jaws drop to the concrete ground as they look at their friend. Amethyst looks at them with a calm, straight face and says, "Well, let's not waste time. Follow me."

...

"Ugh... Of course, he runs off... again," Pierre mutters as he grips his weapon tightly. He begins gritting his teeth knowing that one of the targets escaped with the guy he wanted to wrongfully punish. Thomas looks at the door then looks at Pierre. "Well... I guess I better go after them," Pierre says while looking at Thomas, chuckling softly. But before he can even take a step towards the exit, Thomas' right hand glows brightly, and the bright-yellow light takes the form of a spear. The Upindelaiki takes his spear and places it in front of Pierre, stopping the Upindeoni in his tracks.



“Pierre, let’s make a deal,” Thomas says, and Pierre’s face heats up from more frustration. They lock onto each other’s eyes, and the anticipation of battle grows much stronger. “If you defeat me in battle, then I will have no choice but to allow you to capture Aidoneus’ son and fight my brother. However, if *I* defeat you in battle, then you will need to return to Umu without Amethyst *and* Kendo.” Pierre’s slit pupils become smaller after hearing Thomas’ deal.

“I’d accept the deal,” Pierre responds, “But I have a problem with that last part.”

“There’s a reason why Kendo can’t return to Umu with you,” Thomas says firmly.

“And there’s a reason why Kendo has no choice but to return with me.”

“Pierre, I was able to identify what Kendo is while he was here...he's half-human. *No* humans are supposed to be in our Realms. He’s *supposed* to be in Gaia.”

“Aidoneus needs him.”

“For what?”

“I don’t know exactly.”

“Surely you know something.”

“Look, I just stay in my own lane back at home, alright? Whatever Lord Aidoneus has going on, only those closest to him have any idea.”

“So then who would know how and why in the world is Kendo there in Umu when he was supposed to be living life here?”

“That’s something you’d have to ask Cerberus, alright? If anybody knows what’s going on, it’s them.”

Before they can continue their conversation and seal the deal, *knock knock knock!* They look at the door startled. “Alex? Are you in there?”

“Amethyst!” Thomas says quietly, then he looks at Pierre once more. “We’ll discuss this later,” he says, as he makes his weapon disappear, closes his eyes, and exits Spirit Realm. Pierre hears his target’s name, and he immediately exits the Spirit Realm along with him. Thomas walks up to the door to open it, and he is greeted with a familiar face. His smile brightens, and he instantly hugs Amethyst tightly, making Amethyst jump from surprise and hug him back. “Oh, Amethyst, I’m so glad to see you,” he says with a relieved tone.

“T-Thomas?!” Amethyst asks. “But I thought you were kidnapped? W-What are you doing here? Where’s Alex?”

But before Thomas could give her an answer, Pierre walks up to them calmly without his weapon, and he asks, “Wait, *that’s* the cat?” Immediately, the girls turn their attention to the red-head, and Melissa’s heart jumps.

“Hey, *you’re* the guy from the restaurant,” Melissa points out, snatching everyone’s attention. Pierre looks at Melissa, and he loses all concentration and a lump forms in his throat as the image of the mystery girl flashes once again. Melissa speaks again, “Yeah, you asked me if I knew where Amethyst was because Alex was looking for her.”

“But we all know what you was really tryna do,” Tenacity jumps in as she starts popping her knuckles, making a few sparks fly.

“Alright, ladies, what are we gonna do with him?” Jacqueline asks, giggling out of excitement.

“Well, *he* doesn’t look like he’s going to do anything,” Nermal says while tilting her head. “Should *we* even do anything, really?”

“Wait a sec,” Rose says, “If Alex isn’t with Pierre, then where exactly is he?”

Thomas releases Amethyst from their hug and looks at the girls. He makes a face of confusion and says, "Wait... *they* are who you chose to help you, Amethyst?" Amethyst nods, but Thomas only shakes his head. "No... No no, why humans?" he asks, "They could get easily hurt dealing with these guys."

"Wow, doubting us already?" Melissa says while putting her hands on her hips.

"Maybe we should whoop yo' ass to 'prove ourselves'," Tenacity says with a smirk.

"Yeah! Beat his ass! Beat his ass!" Jacqueline chants.

"Hey, red-head is staring hard at MeeMee," Nermal points out, making Pierre wince.

"Why are we shifting the attention to me!?" Pierre asks frantically.

"I dunno, but I'll tell you now she's only 17," Tenacity says.

"But she turnin' 18 next month!!" Jacqueline immediately adds, making Melissa blush a little.

"Can we *not* talk about me right now!?" Melissa squeals.

"Guys!! Less talking, more searching!!" Rose bursts out, rubbing her forehead and sighing.

"She's right," Amethyst says, adjusting her hair, "Was Alexander here before we arrived?"

"He was, but then Kendo came and snatched him up," Thomas explains.

"Who's Kendo?" Amethyst asks.

"The devil's son," Thomas answers, making Amethyst's eyes widen.

"What!? What the hell is he doing with-"

"We'll discuss it later! If I'm assuming correctly, I'm sure they're going back to the cave. So we need to get there as soon as we can."

"Alright. Sounds like a plan."

"Aight, cool," Tenacity jumps in, "Amethyst, Thomas, and Pierre are riding with me. Melissa, Jacqueline, Rose, and Nermal will just follow."

“Hold up, why do *you* get to take the peoni with you?” Jacqueline asks.

“Better question is why am I even in this equation? I don’t need a ride,” Thomas adds.

“Neither do I,” Pierre jumps in, annoyed.

“Yeah, well *you’re* still riding with one of us so that we know that you’re not trying to do anything,” Melissa says, crossing her arms and walking towards him.

“Hah! What can a human like you do to me if I refuse?” Pierre says while smirking, “You know I don’t have a problem using my weapon on you here and now.”

“Do that, and you can say bye-bye to your hands and face,” Tenacity interrupts, stepping up to the Upindeoni.

“No no, show that weapon~!” Jacqueline adds playfully.

“Eeewww, Jackieeee,” Nermal groans out of embarrassment.

“W-What?? What the hell is the pale one talking about!?” Pierre stutters, his face red like a ruby.

“N-Never mind her!” Melissa stammers, blushing pinker than a spring rose from humiliation. “*Sighs...* Anyways,” she continues as she creates a ball of wind in her right hand, “Pierre, as Wind Commander of the Special Six, I, Melissa Guerrero, order you to ride with us, or have the taste knocked out of your mouth.”

Pierre’s eye twitches from hearing Melissa’s command. *What the hell?* Pierre thinks to himself. *This human really thinks that her threatening me is going to change my mind?*

“And this is where you say ‘Yes, ma’am’~” Jacqueline whispers and winks. “Also, I love the team name~! The Special Six~!”

“Oh fuck off, you scrawny popsicle,” Pierre snarls, making Jacqueline laugh hysterically.

“Hey! Don’t talk to her like that, fruit rollup!” Melissa snaps back, making Pierre flinch.

“T-The *fuck* is a fruit rollup!?” Pierre exclaims.

“Welp, you didn’t roast back, meaning you lost, meaning you have to do what Melissa says,” Tenacity says, smirking.

While the group bickers about what Pierre will do, Thomas looks at them in disappointment. *This is Amethyst’s group of “heroes”?* He thinks to himself, *They’re just a bunch of children! But if she sees something in them, I guess I can give them a chance.* “We gotta get going, Amy,” he says to Amethyst, “The sooner we get to the cave, the sooner we can get to Alex, and the sooner we can end all of this.”

As soon as the determined Upindelaiki opens the door, he jumps at the sight of a face he’s never seen before. But suddenly, he calms down and instantly makes an uninterested expression after analyzing the stranger’s face and says, “Oh... hello, Issei...”

“Oh!” Issei says, eyes pop a bit, “You know about me, Lackey?”

Tenacity overhears Issei and Thomas and turns her head towards them with questions running through her head. She approaches them and asks, “Issei? What are you- You know what? Don’t answer that. Thomas, how do you know about Issei?”

“Almost every malaiki knows about what Issei does on the side...so, who’s your target today, peoni hunter?” Thomas asks, crossing his arms, “And if it’s the devil’s son or the Cerberus Brothers, then you can go home.”

“Well, Lackey,” Issei starts as he lets himself into the room, “It was Cerberus, but something didn’t feel right about the situation. The son of the devil has one of my personal favorite guns so now I *have* to get involved, and I’m doing some investigating behind the matter that’s at hand.” Issei looks at Thomas with a calm expression while Thomas doesn’t lighten up. He continues, “Though you might not like my work, I have nothing against you, but I will admit that having

you Upindelaikis in this is enough to convince me that something incredibly insane is going to happen.”

Thomas rolls his eyes and says, “There won’t be anything ‘insane’ going on just because my brother and I got involved. *Sighs* I’ll just see you all at the cave. I’m sure Alex and Kendo are there already.” Not saying anything else, he makes his exit, walking out of the apartment complex with a focused mindset. He goes back into the Spirit Realm and summons his malaiki wings to fly to his destination.

Tenacity tilts her head and scrunches up her face as she says, “What was his problem? Y’all got beef?”

Issei shrugs and says, “Even though many malaikis like my work of being a bounty hunter for peonis and other creatures, there are many malaikis that are not a fan of my work due to the fact that I usually take the target’s life unless I am paid to do otherwise.”

Tenacity then says, “And I guess Thomas is the malaiki that is not a fan.”

Amethyst jumps in with, “Thomas is not a big fan of killing in general...But enough chat. We all need to go ahead and get a move on before it’s too late. Pierre and Issei, you are coming with, no if’s, and’s, or but’s. We go to the cave, get to Alex, and we’ll see where we’ll go from there.”

Everyone nods their heads except Pierre who rolls his eyes instead. *Alex, please be okay...*

Amethyst thinks to herself. As everyone walks down the hallway, Amethyst places her hand on her stomach, softly sighing. *Hang on, little one... it’s almost over...*

## Chapter 25

July 2017

Afternoon

Alexander and Kendo get to the camping site, and they walk through the deep, dark forest, not saying a word to each other. Only the sounds of birds tweeting and the trees dancing with the wind fills the silence. The two men continue walking through the forest, getting closer to the cave. Alexander looks at Kendo, and he sees that the hybrid is looking upwards, gazing upon the green leaves that shake and shimmy. “*None of this is back home,*” Kendo whispers. The Upindelaiki wants to start a conversation with him, but instead he decides to stay quiet and let the Umuite take in the view.

“Back home, there’s nothing but sand... and the sky is always dark,” Kendo says, a little louder for Alexander to hear clearly. Kendo continues and a smile grows on his face, “I remember my first time seeing a tree... I was in Africa at the time. Man, you should have seen me, I acted like a child. I was 100 years old at the time. I ran around meeting new people, going to new places! It was after that full day of exploration, I decided to stay here... or at least try to...”

“...But Cerberus came and found you, didn’t he?” Alexander asks, and Kendo’s smile goes away instantly.

“Yeah...pops allowed me to come visit Earth, but apparently I overstayed my welcome... said he only let me go so that I could see what he and I will be-....” Kendo stops himself.

Alexander tilts his head. He tries to help Kendo continue his sentence and says, “....What he and you will be...?”

“...Before I say this, please understand, vanilla bean, that I have no desire in doing this. It’s the main reason why I’m rebelling in the first place,” Kendo says, looking at Alexander now with a serious face.

Alexander, sharing the same seriousness, nods his head and says, “Okay... I believe you.”

“...sighs... Pops wants to take Gaia...”

“H-Huh!?”

“He wants to engulf this entire planet, this entire universe, in darkness and become its leader. And he wants me... to rule beside him...”

“So he’s trying to play god.”

“Basically... hell, he’s playing god back at home as we speak..”

“But I don’t understand... you’re half-*human*... you’re not even supposed to be in Umu until after you have died.”

“Yeah.....um.....well....hahaha~! I mean we’re talking about the devil here~. We’re talking about the same guy that betrayed you guys millions and millions of years ago.”

“You know, I had always wondered how he has been able to live throughout these centuries. He’s supposed to have ‘died’ a *very* long time ago.”

“Eh, I don’t know myself, and I really don’t care.”

They take a second to not say anything else as they continue walking. They stop when they finally see the cave, and Kendo says, “Aaah~ The place that started the fun~!”

“So all you did was sightsee and meet a lot of people?” Alexander asks, still stuck on their previous conversation.

“Oh no, I did much more than that~” Kendo answers, chuckling a little, “But I’ll tell you after we deal with this~! I found that cult book inside this cave. Usually, I wouldn’t have anything be done to the portals because my lil’ careless self actually enjoyed the overbearing feeling of my father sending Cerberus and Cerberus being somewhere sniffing me out~ It’s just thrilling and so... chaotic~ Oh, and you should see the Gaians that try to protect me in the process~ They be



so kind to me... will do anything to protect me... only to get their hearts broken soon after because I'm taken straight home without saying goodbye~ And when I reunite with them, they either cry to me, curse me out, try to fight me, or a mixture of all of the above~! It be so crazy~!!”

“H-Huh?” Alexander says, confused. He analyzes the way Kendo explains his past attempts of escaping Umu. The way that Kendo laughs at everything makes Alexander’s hair frizz up and his heart beat unsteadily. *He says he doesn’t want to go back home, Alexander thinks to himself, But for him to talk as if he could care less about the people he affects along the way is concerning. He finds fun in all of this!*

“But now,” Kendo continues, not really hearing Alexander, “After escaping home for the umteenth time, I finally decide to say that I’m done with the chases. I want to be around these humans in peace~ I want to wallow in Earth’s problematic state~! I want to be right here when this chaotic world burns and people are deciding to either be a good soul or a bad one~! I want to watch humans be the chaotic beings they are first hand~!”

“Kendo, what the hell are you saying?” Alexander asks, taking a few steps back, sweat rolling down his face and back.

“I’m saying... I’m in love with humans~!! Their good sides~!! Their bad sides~!! Their unexplainable sides~!! I love it all~!! You can’t have good without bad~!! You can’t have bad without good~!! These unbalanced humans are precious to me, and I’m finally choosing to *stay* here *permanently*~!” Kendo yells to the forest, making the birds stop chirping, the trees to stop dancing, and Alexander’s trust dissipating. “I want to stay here~! I want to live here as my new home~! Is that so wr-” *Poof!!* Suddenly, a sharp pain goes through Kendo’s right shoulder, and

the chaos-obsessed hybrid screams out of pain and loses his footing while gripping on his wounded shoulder.

Alexander's heart skips a beat as he sees Kendo groan out of pain. He looks and sees someone walk from the shadows of the forest and starts cackling. His eyes widen as he notices that it's Gamma holding a pitch-black silenced pistol. "*H e h e h e h e h e h e h e h e ... Oops~*" Seconds after, two other men walk out of the cave, and Alexander turns to see that it's Beta and Alpha.

"Goddammit, Gamma!!" Beta says, "You were supposed to wait *after* we came out!!"

"THE ANTICIPATION WAS KILLING ME!!" Gamma yells out, "PLUS, I WAS NOT ABOUT TO LISTEN TO THIS FUCKER TALKIN' 'BOUT LOVING HUMANS AND SHIT!!"

"Beta, it doesn't matter now... we got him..." Alpha jumps in, calmly walking towards Kendo and Alexander. "You know, Anti, if you wanted to have a better chance at getting away, you should have chosen to pair up with the smarter Upindelaiki...though I must say, Alexander, you did fool us for a second... pretending to be possessed...nice job."

Kendo with his left hand immediately pulls out a silver gun that has been tucked in his pants underneath his shirt, and he points it towards Gamma. *POW!* A bullet flies and grazes the crazy hound's arm, leaving an intense chill that makes him yelp out of pain. Alexander instantly gets down on the ground and covers his head with his arms, not wanting to get hurt from Kendo's attacks. Then Kendo points the gun towards Alpha and Beta's direction and shoots a few more freezing bullets. *POW! POW! POW!* The two brothers manage to dodge every bullet, taking cover behind the cave's walls. *POW! POW! POW! POW! POW!* He keeps sending bullets towards Alpha and Beta's way, and the two brothers are forced to not move. Gamma holds onto

his grazed arm as he tries to summon another weapon, but Kendo stops him by reverting his attention back to him. *POW! POW! POW!* Gamma notices the attack and hides behind the tree, panting heavily. “HAHAHA~! WHAT’S WRONG, BOY?” Kendo screams out, not shooting for a second, “TOO AFRAID TO FIGHT BACK!? WELL, I’M NOT RUNNING AWAY! NOT THIS TIME!”

A surge of pain goes through Kendo’s shoulder again, making him groan loudly in pain, and blood gushes out of the wound, painting most of his yellow shirt cherry red. Alexander regains himself and stands up firmly. Gamma immediately comes out of his hiding spot, and he aims his dark semi-auto rifle towards Kendo. However, Alexander instantly grabs Kendo, holds him close, and summons his feathery wings to use his Light Barrier. His wings shield their bodies and create a yellow force field around them. Then suddenly *BRATATATATATATATATATATATATA!* Gamma starts unloading his fiery bullets, hoping that he can finally put an end to this. But instead, the force field created by Alexander protects him and Kendo, turning the bullets into sparkles of bright light on impact.

Kendo groans and whimpers from the immense pain that courses through his body. He tries to take deep breaths, hissing through his teeth. Alexander hears Kendo’s cries through the gunfire, and he says softly, “Hey, hang in there! Knowing Thomas, I’m sure he’ll be here soon to heal you, okay?” *BRATATATATATATATATATATATA!!* Kendo doesn’t say anything, and he instead looks to see that Alexander’s wings are charcoal black. Alexander notices Kendo’s stare and chuckles lightly. He gives a smile and says, “Hehe, yeeah, I was afraid my wings would look like this....it’s okay, though...”

Gamma continues unloading his weapon, but Beta yells, “WOULD YOU STOP!! THEY GOT THE LIGHT BARRIER UP, DUMBASS!”

“HE'LL HAVE TO LET UP SOONER OR LATER!” Gamma yells back.

*BRATATATATATATATATATATATATATATATATATATA!!*

“AAAAALEEEEEEEEX!!” A familiar voice stops Gamma from shooting at the two, and everyone turns their attention towards the direction the voice came from. Seconds later, a light blinds the group, and it disappears to reveal Thomas, wearing his pearl-white malaiki wings and a platinum halo, his eyes a light blue. He summons his spear made of light and points it at the Cerberus Brothers as he walks towards his brother and Aidoneus’ son.

Alexander looks at his brother with a gleeful smile and says, “Lil’ brother!! I knew you’d come!!”

Thomas looks at his brother’s wings, despair splattering his face. “Alex! Your...” Alexander knows what Thomas is talking about and the glee in his smile is replaced with sadness. Gamma manages to regroup with his brothers, keeping his disgusted gaze locked on Thomas. Thomas looks straight at Alpha, and he speaks in a deep, serious voice, “Cerberus, this is your final warning. Leave this human hybrid here and return to Umu. If you don’t follow this simple order, then I’m afraid that we will have to fight it out.”

“*Order?*” Beta says, about to walk towards Thomas, but Alpha holds him back.

Alpha speaks with a serious tone, “Thomas, although you are right that *Anti* is supposed to reside in Gaia, I’m afraid that under the orders of Lord Aidoneus, we will have to break those rules.”

“Why!?” Thomas asks, gritting his teeth and eyes widening.

“You’re a smart kid... you figure it out. Why do *you* think Aidoneus needs his son so badly? Consider our master’s history, and perhaps you’ll find your answer,” Alpha answers, frowning his brow.

“*OR YOU CAN JUST FUCKIN’ TELL THE MAN!!*” Everyone instantly turns their heads to the feminine voice and sees it belongs to a light-skinned woman. Six women and two men walk towards the Mazans and Umuites. They all stare at each other, taking in the situation.

## Chapter 26

July 2017

Late Afternoon

“...What the fuck are humans doing here!?” Beta exclaims.

“Probably some more of Anti’s so-called saviors,” Alpha calmly says.

“Nah, more like we’re *Amethyst’s* saviors,” the honey-skinned woman says. She then creates twin guns out of fire, their blazing orange and yellow colors dance against the sunlight, and points them at the Cerberus Brothers, and she says, “Now, as Fire Commander of the Special Six, I, Tenacity Queen Lionheart, order you guys to either give Thomas the answers that he’s asking for and let everyone go, or get ya’ ass burnt to a crisp.”

“...PFFFFFF!! HAHAHAAAAAAAAAAAAHA!! YOU? BURN US TO A CRISP?” Gamma laughs out.

“You do realize that we’re *used* to the heat, right?” Beta jumps in, chuckling.

As soon as he says that, a french vanilla-skinned woman stands next to Tenacity and makes a staff out of ice, it’s baby-blue and white color glistening against the sun, and she says, “Then as Ice Thottie of the Special Six, I, Jacqueline Ambrosia Brookes, will, like, recommend that you *will* want that blazing heat after you’ve dealt with my blistering cool~!”

Then, the third and cream-skinned woman stands next to Jacqueline and makes a clear bladed-fan out of air and says, “And as Wind Commander of the Special Six, I, Melissa Guerrero, will blow all of you away just before you can feel the burning relief~!” Seconds later, she whispers to Jacqueline and Tenacity, “*Hey, that sounded pretty good, right?*”

“*Yeah, I liked it~!*” Jacqueline whispers back.

“*Yeah, it tied everything up beautifully!*” Tenacity responds quietly.

“What is up with these corny ass intros!?” Beta yells, startling the trio.

“I don’t know, but it’s pissing me off!!!” Gamma screams.

“UM, HELLO, BLEEDING VICTIM OVER HERE!!!” Kendo screeches, and then groans out of pain, snatching the attention.

The three other women walk up to get a better view, and Alexander’s eyes widen. His heart skips a beat as soon as his yellow eyes meet with the woman that has a pair of purple ones, and his wings stop shielding him and Kendo, making the Light Barrier disappear. He says softly, “Amethyst...”

Amethyst aims to look at Kendo’s wound, but is instead terrified by Alexander’s appearance and begins taking a couple steps back. She whimpers out, “A-Alex...”

“Amethyst, it’s okay,” Thomas reassures his friend, “Alex isn’t really possessed... he’s just tainted right now.” However, his quick explanation doesn’t stop Amethyst’s instincts from telling her to run again; she tries to plant her feet into the soft ground, and she tries to convince herself not to move. Alexander sees the fear that clouds her senses, and his heart weeps at the sight. Thomas walks up to Amethyst to hold her hands tightly. He looks into her eyes, giving a face of reassurance. Amethyst tries to keep her breath steady, trying to convince herself that Thomas is telling the truth.

Meanwhile, Rose and Nermal walk towards Alexander and Kendo. Alexander immediately recognizes one of them and says, “Rose? What are you doing here?”

Rose looks at him with surprise and says, “H-How do you know... who I am?”

“Oh!” Alexander says, and then chuckles, “I see your dad hasn’t told you about me, huh...?”

Before she can answer his question, she holds her hand out, allowing glowing green dragonflies to float around it. She brings her hand closer, and the dragonflies land on Kendo’s wound. “He hasn’t told me about a lot of stuff lately...” Rose finally answers softly. She looks at Kendo with a soft smile and says, “They’ll sting, but your wound will heal in no time, okay?”

Kendo looks at her with strain still present, but he appears to be calming down. He gives her a smirk and mutters out, “Thanks... cherry lips~” Rose shows no response as she focuses on healing him.

Nermal watches Rose heal up Kendo, and she says softly to him, “If you want, we can get away from here!”

“Hmm?? Me and you?” Kendo says in a higher tone, but is then hissing from the dragonflies’ sting.

“Yeah!” Nermal says with an innocent smile, “My friends can take care of the rest. Plus, I could never really fight.” She looks at her focused best friend. “Rose, will you come with us?”

“I can’t, Nermal... not right now,” Rose answers, no hint of her sweetness anywhere. “I have to be here in case things go south and I have to heal our friends.”

“Awww, okay...” Nermal pouts.

Alexander notices Nermal’s disappointment, and jumps in, “If you want, m’lady, I could come along with you two! It’s just to make sure you are safe.”

“Awwwww, afraid that I would hurt her, vanilla bean~?” Kendo giggles, “She’s too adorable for me to do any harm~!”

“...Yeah, sure.” Alexander says, dismissing Kendo’s claims.

“Yeah, that would be a great idea!” Nermal says cheerfully.

Meanwhile, the Cerberus Brothers stare at Pierre, and Gamma snickers. Alpha speaks up and says, “So, are you switching sides, animal lover?”

“Who the hell said I was?” Pierre snaps back as he walks across the open area and stands next to the brothers. “These brats just offered a ride, and I decided to take it.”

Tenacity, Melissa, Jacqueline, Rose, and Nermal hear Pierre and say together, “BRATS!?”



“ENOUGH TALK!!” Gamma echoes throughout the entire forest. “Who’s trying to live? And who’s trying to die?” he asks, rubbing his rifle. As soon as he says this, the other man, Issei, walks up with his katana ready. Alpha’s eyes lock onto Issei, and he begins feeling his gun wound pulsating. His pupils become slits and a fire is lit within his eyes. However, even though the anticipation of fighting the malaiki-Ludamu hybrid increases, he keeps his composure and his face blank.

Rose looks at the Cerberus Brothers and Pierre, and she analyzes them. Her staring at them sends chills up and down their spines. Her ruby-red eyes drill down their pupils while dragging a dagger across their hearts. Alpha takes one sniff and immediately recognizes who she is. *She’s his daughter*, Alpha tells Beta and Gamma telepathically.

Beta side-eyes his brother and responds without making a sudden move, *Wait, are you serious!?* ***That man*** went to have a kid!?

Gamma jumps in, ***BUT HOW? WHO WOULD EVER WANT TO LAY WITH HIM?***  
*I don’t know, but judging her aura, what her father’s done to us, and who started her family tree in the **first place**, she could easily end us if she wants to*, Alpha informs his brothers.

Pierre looks at Rose and thinks to himself, *Now that I’m looking at her, she kinda does resemble that half-Quphanto from a while back. But she doesn’t give off the murderous vibes he does. Has she been just bullshitting?* His heart beats more rapidly as he debates with himself whether or not she could win if she does battle them.

Meanwhile, as Rose looks at the opponents, her mind becomes clearer and clearer. *I need to decide who will fight whom*, Rose motivates herself, *I can’t be distracted by anything else. My dad is going to need to explain a lot of things, but I can’t let my anger and confusion get in the way. Focus, Rose, focus. These guys are very powerful, Cerberus especially. Pierre will be less of*

*a hassle, but it's still safe to have two people fight him. Just fighting **one** of the Cerberus Brothers would take two or three people. She looks at the peoni and spirit hounds, and then she looks at her friends. Tenacity's fire won't do much to the Cerberus Brothers, but it'll be more useful against Pierre. Jacqueline will be perfect for Cerberus, but her best shot is Beta since he's more on the melee side of things. Melissa could ricochet the bullets, and she'll be safer fighting against Alpha since he rarely uses his gun. For Gamma... he's so dangerous, too dangerous for those three... even for me. Our best shot with him is Issei. And then we have Thomas, Alexander, Amethyst, and me. But who should I pair us up with? Uugh, if Nermal and this guy over here were to join us, we'd have a better shot at this.*

“Aye, so what we doing, Rose!? You’ve been staring at these fuckers for a while now!”

Tenacity yells out, walking towards her.

“Oh~! Oh~! Make sure you make your introduction like we did~!” Jacqueline adds in, skipping towards Rose.

“Give her a second, guys!” Nermal jumps in, “She might be strategizing!”

“Well then, Rose,” Alpha interrupts, “Allow me to inform you that unless you all are willing to walk a couple miles to another open space in the forest, the only locations we’re fighting at are here and in the Spirit Realm.”

“Hehe, unless a few of you are willing to fight inside the cave~” Gamma adds.

*Great, well that changes some things...* Rose says, frustration slowly growing. However, she keeps her cool composure and asks, “What exactly are you trying to do by wanting to fight in the Spirit Realm?”

*She's going to try to have more than one person go against us individually,* Alpha says to himself, *She knows that her friends are helpless in a 1v1 battle. I would be just fine with a 2v1 or*

*3v1 if she wasn't here. I'm not about to take a risk fighting these humans when they have Upindelaikis and his daughter by their side.* “Rose, you’re not fooling me” Alpha responds, making Rose’s heart jump. “I may not know exactly what your abilities are, but I know for sure you’re powerful. We fought your father before... and let’s just say we were hoping to never see him again.” That statement makes Rose’s heart and stomach drop. “I won’t share the story now, but... yeah, just know that he kicked our asses. And now we’re going against his daughter and her friends, and I’m afraid that I don’t have time to see my team here getting jumped by a bunch of kids that are getting help from forces they can’t fully comprehend as humans.”

*Wait a second,* Alexander thinks to himself, *Usiku has fought these guys before!? When!?*

Rose’s vision gets blurry. Everything that Alpha is saying fades into white noise... all because of the mentioning of her father. More questions form in her mind, and all of her strategizing burns away. Just as her eyes are about to push away the burning tears that are forming, Tenacity steps up and says, “So basically, you’re *scared* is what you’re saying,” Tenacity says, smirking, but Rose doesn’t snap back into reality.

“And it’s all because of Rose,” Melissa adds in, “Wooooow, I thought you guys were supposed to be a bunch of badass spirit hounds that could handle anything!”

Tenacity and Melissa’s taunts make Beta’s face scrunch up and Gamma growl and grind his teeth. Alpha, on the other hand, stays calm and replies, “All I’m asking is that we do a 5v2 or 3v2. *Clearly*, Anti isn’t trying to join this fight and neither is your Samaka-Human friend over there. Rose is obviously your medic... but she can join in the fight if she wants to. That leaves 8 of you against the 4 of us. So... Gamma and I will be in the Spirit Realm, and Beta and Pierre will be here.”

*I know what he's trying to do, Thomas thinks to himself, He's trying to drag Alex, Issei, and I away from the girls so that they would only have Rose left to protect them. That means Beta and Pierre will only be fighting the three humans, Amethyst, and Rose if she joins the combat. He's trying to balance it out by having Gamma come with him to the Spirit Realm since Gamma can be a serious hazard to deal with, and he knows that having Gamma go against the girls will just be immoral and asking for more complications.*

“My thing is I managed to whoop on *two* of you the last time we saw each other,” Issei finally says, “And if Beta would have jumped in, it would have been three.”

“What you tryna say?” Tenacity says, scrunching up her face in disgust.

“I’m saying I can handle the Cerberus Brothers all by myself... if necessary,” Issei responds.

“Well, guess what, show off, we’re here now, so you gon’ have to share the fun,” Tenacity snaps.

“Alright, whatever,” Issei says, rolling his eyes as he approaches Kendo, “But before we begin, Kendo, hand me back my gun.”

Kendo lets out a soft giggle, and tosses Issei’s gun back to him, and Issei manages to catch it. Issei walks back to Thomas and touches his shoulder. He says quietly, “When we get to the Spirit Realm, let me take care of Alpha. You and Alex can just take care of Gamma.”

Thomas turns his body to face him and says back, “Fine, but if things go south, I’m jumping in to help you.”

Issei says, “I think you should do that for the girls... no offense to them, of course. But let’s be real.... We’ve been fighting guys like Cerberus for years. *They* are just now getting into the game.”

Thomas looks at the girls, and immediately remembers the first time seeing them. *He's right*, Thomas thinks to himself, *These girls don't stand a chance. It's only because of Amethyst and Rose helping them that I'm allowing them to still be here.* He looks at Issei and nods his head in agreement.

"Fine..." Rose finally speaks, but her voice cracks a little. *You want to hide more secrets from me, daddy...* She thinks to herself. Tenacity, Melissa, Jacqueline, and Nermal notice her tone, and their hearts start feeling like a ton. *When did you meet these people?* Rose's voice even frees Amethyst of her fear of her lover as she and Alexander look at Rose in worry. *Why did you never tell me this? Does momma know?* Thomas and Issei catch onto what's happening as well, feeling Rose's steady positive and focused energy now depleting. *I tell you everything even when I don't want to... but I can't even get a story about how you fought Cerberus?... Or why our family tree is shrouded in so much mystery...?* Kendo watches her, and for some reason, his heart begins to ache for her; perhaps it is because he understands what it's like to have a father-child relationship slowly become something questionable and then into nothingness. *Is this why you tried to throw my friends into this bullshit... without telling me? Just so that one of your secrets would be kept under wraps?* The Cerberus Brothers and Pierre see her, and they begin feeling a more familiar aura.

This isn't the powerful yet light aura they were feeling earlier. No, this aura is different. No serenity. No peace. No passion. It's just pure rage. Pure sadness. Pure bewilderment.

The Cerberus Brothers begin looking around, but whoever they are expecting is not showing up. *No*, Alpha telepathically says to his brothers. **He's not here... so that means... this aura... this dangerous power spike... it's coming from her...!!**

Through burning tears warming up her face, Rose, in a low tone, says, “As Medic of the Special Six, I, Rose Nruku Garcia, will send you back to the hellhole you came out of with the help of my friends. You will not take Kendo or Amethyst back with you. You will not be getting your way. ***You. Will. Not. Win.***”

## Chapter 27

July 2017

Late Afternoon

Usiku's eyes slowly lift open as the sweat on his forehead drips to the side of his face. "*Not again,*" he grumbles out, "*Why that vision again?*" He turns his head to see Delilah sleeping soundly, the covers snuggling against her naked body as she snores quietly. He sighs and lifts his body up, letting the cool air circulating around the room ease him from the terror he was experiencing in his midday nap.

Suddenly, one of the bats faze through the wall and starts squeaking away as she flies in front of the awakened man. *Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

"*What do you want now,*" Usiku mumbles out.

*Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

"*....What do you mean Rose is out in the middle of the forest facing Cerberus and the Upindeoni,*" Usiku growls out.

*Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

Usiku abruptly gets up from the bed, and he glares at the bat who keeps her distance from him. "You know I-" he exclaims, but he stops himself as he turns to look at Delilah twisting and turning in the bed, not waking up. He lowers his voice and says through his teeth, "*You know I can't get involved. The reason why I stopped fighting in the first place is because no matter who I went up against, I always win, and my opponent most likely didn't get to see the light of day again... or must I remind you of who my victims were?*"

*Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

"*I gave it all up just so I could be Delilah's soulmate.... Just so I could be a father to Rose... I don't want to break the promise I made...*"

*Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

*“If that’s how you feel, then you shouldn’t have told me anything. You keep suggesting I leave Rose alone, but I **can’t**. Yes, she’s powerful... but she’s too much like Delilah to do the disastrous things I could do... and that’s why I know she’ll get hurt if she tries and helps her friends. That’s why I had you seven get the potions in the first place, so that Rose wouldn’t have to get involved.”*

Usiku stops talking to his bat ‘friend’, and he walks to the dresser to grab out a pair of shorts, a black and gold dashiki, and a pair of black dress pants. He puts his clothes on, and he grabs his cloak from the closet. He puts on his black dress shoes and marches to the bedroom door, but then as soon as his hand rests on the door knob, he turns to look at Delilah one last time. He gazes at her still sleeping, and he realizes that his panic almost made him forget to do the one thing that he knows his soulmate would appreciate once she wakes up. He goes to his nightstand and grabs his notebook and pen. He opens to a new page and begins writing carefully so that his penmanship is legible. He writes...

*My beautiful orchid,*

*I hope that you are sleeping well. When you wake up, I hope that this letter will bring you ease. I’m out to get our daughter and bring her back here. She’s gotten herself in some trouble, and yes, it involves the situation with Amethyst and Alex. I can already hear you wanting to scold me and trust me... I know. I should have gone on ahead and took care of this myself, but I didn’t. I’m fixing this right now. I’ll be back soon. I love you, baby.*

*See you soon,*

*Your Usi*

He rests the notebook on his pillow, and he plants a gentle kiss on Delilah’s forehead, and he leaves the bedroom quietly, his feet not making a sound as he goes down the stairs. He then exits



the house, and he exclaims, “Nruku!!” After saying that, the seven bats fly around him, and he says, “I need you to take me to Rose, now.”

*Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

“...I need you to take me to Rose, **please**,” he strains out.

*Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

“What do you mean you’re not gonna teleport me!?”

*Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

**“And last time I checked, she’s my daughter, and she could be getting hurt right now.”**

*Squeak squeak squeak squeak!*

“You’re not about to insult me, you are going to-”

The bats instantly fly away from him, squeaking away, one of them sounding like she’s laughing. Usiku grinds his teeth and feels a vein pop on the side of his head. He then lets out a frustrated sigh and massages his temple. He looks at Delilah’s silver minivan. *No, I can’t take her car*; he thinks to himself, *She might need it for whatever*. He then plants his feet as he closes his eyes and takes deep breaths. *Okay*, he continues thinking, *They had to have gone back to the camping site Alexander mentioned before. I just have to figure out **where** that is*. He wastes no more time, and he dashes off into the wilderness, breezing through the trees and bushes, letting nothing stop him. *Here’s hoping that I’ll be able to sense their souls soon. And Rose... when we see each other, I don’t want to hear it. You can say whatever you want, but soon you’ll realize that this is too much for you to handle, and when it comes to arguing with me...*

...

**“You. Will. Not. Win.”**

Those words echo through everyone's ears, sending everyone chills. Alexander's eyes almost water and he thinks to himself, *That phrase... Usiku used to say that... her **grandfather** used to say that!! How the hell does **she** know about that phrase!? I-I thought Usiku didn't share **any** info about his childhood!?*

*Ah shit... Alpha thinks to himself, **If she's able to defeat one of those two, I'm going to have to come back to help. But I hope that Beta can at least wear her out.***

Rose doesn't say anything else after making her introduction, leaving the atmosphere dense. Nermal feels like she should lighten up the mood somehow, so she stutters, "A-And as the Sh-Shining Star of the Special Six, I, N-Nermal Calista, shall spectate the fights that go on here outside of S-Spirit Realm!"

"I'll spectate as well~!" Kendo joins, giving a soft smirk.

"....Alright then. It's settled," Alpha says, stepping up, "We can finally get started."

"No wait," Alexander says, waving his hands around, "If we have two people spectating here, who's going to spectate us *in* the Spirit Realm?" As soon as he asks this question, *squeal!!* Everyone turns their heads the same direction to see that a warthog is sitting down, snorting.

"A... warthog??" Melissa asks.

"Wait....that's the same warthog from the start of this!" Alexander announces. The warthog prances towards the middle of the two teams.

***"Ohohohohohohoho~!! Why hello~!"*** Everyone's eyes widen as a voice escapes the wild animal, but its mouth is not moving. ***"If you have no idea who this is speaking to you, I am Alphonse, the Quphanto of Gluttony, and I reside here in Umu in my district on my couch, eating away my humongous leftovers~. Do not be alarmed, for I am simply here to watch this amazing show~! I see that you need someone to watch over the Spirit Realm side of things,***

*and I can help you with that~! Well, enough chatter~! LET THE BRAWLING BEGIN~!*

*OHOHOHOHOHOHOHO~!!*” Alphonse stops talking through his pet, and his pet glows a bright orange and disappears.

Jacqueline gasps and squeals, “Ooh my gosh!! It talked and then it disappeared!!”

“To you all, he disappeared,” Thomas answers in a serious tone, “But to the rest of us, he’s still present, just in the Spirit Realm now.” He then looks at Alpha and Gamma and says, “Let’s get this over with...” Not saying anything else, Thomas grabs onto Alexander, and Issei stands beside them. They glow together and go into the Spirit Realm.

Alpha and Gamma stand together, and before they follow the three malaikis, Alpha looks back at Beta and says, “Give them hell...” Beta nods, and Alpha and his youngest brother glow together and disappear into the Spirit Realm.

While they are in a whole other dimension, the girls see that it’s just them against Beta and Pierre. The spirit hound and peoni stares down the opposite team, and Beta summons two dark spiked gauntlets on his hands while Pierre summons his dark spear. Nermal asks, “Soooo do we just get started??”

Amethyst shakes her head to become more focused. *These girls need me*, Amethyst convinces herself. And she finally stands next to Tenacity. She looks at them and says, “Are you girls ready? This is your first battle. This is the perfect time to not only hone your skills... but to also prove Thomas and everyone that doubts you wrong. No backing out now.”

“Heh, who said we were backing out?” Tenacity asks, giving Amethyst a smirk.

“Yeah! We didn’t come all this way in heels and platforms for nothing~!” Jacqueline jumps in, raising her frozen staff.

“Yeah it’s time to put these assholes in their place!” Melissa adds.

“If we stick together, we’ll finish them off in no time...” Rose says, still no sweetness present in her voice.

Nermal clasps her hands together and exclaims, “You guys can do it! I know you can!”

“*We should get out the way,*” Kendo whispers to Nermal.

“Oh, right!” Nermal agrees, and they walk to a tree to sit down, making sure they can see both teams and far from the danger.

Amethyst cups her hands together and blows on them, and she creates a dove-white rapier out of frozen carbon dioxide. She points her weapon forward and says, “Then as Manager of the Special Six, I, Amethyst, shall help us claim our first victory.” Amethyst then looks at Rose, and she asks, “Alright, my dear, how exactly do you want us to go on about this?”

Rose eases up as Amethyst gives a firm smile, and she says, “Tenacity and Melissa will take on Pierre. Jacqueline, you, and I will go for Beta. If Tenacity and Melissa need my help, I’ll try to jump in, but I’m confident that they can handle it.”

“Hell yeah we can handle it!” Tenacity responds, adjusting her low afro-puff.

“Would you girls stop gossiping or whatever the fuck you’re doing, or are you forfeiting!?” Beta yells, becoming a bit impatient with his opponents.

Rose looks at him with a scrunched up face, showing off her fangs and says, “***You will wait...***”, and just like that, Beta and Pierre’s confidence goes down a bit. “***I’m already frustrated with someone else who’s not here. Unless you want to just go ahead and go home, you can shut the fuck up.***”

Goddamn, Tenacity thinks to herself, *What’s gotten into our sweetheart? I haven’t seen her get this mad since Freshman year... and that was over something totally different.* Not saying another word, Rose clasps her hands together and closes her eyes, and glowing blue beetles fly

towards Nermal and Kendo; they crawl all over the two hybrids, rest on their shoulders and arms, and a blue shield surrounds them. “Guys, don’t move,” Rose says to her other friends as 4 glowing red wasps surround the girls; although they want to move away, they know it’s Rose that’s summoning these dangerous insects, so they listen, stay still and let her do the work. Each wasp lands and stings them, making them hiss or squeal in pain.

“Don’t worry,” Rose reassures them, “It’s thanks to the wasps that now your attacks will pack more of a punch, and you might be able to do a little more with your magic powers.”

“Ooouuuuu~! Me likey~!” Jacqueline cheers.

“Wow! This’ll be a breeze, now~!” Melissa adds.

“Yeah, and lemme guess, you’re going to weaken us, aren’t you?” Pierre asks with a smug look.

“Although that sounds like a great idea, I don’t think that’s necessary,” Rose answers, squinting her eyes.

“Well, then,” Pierre chuckles, positioning himself, “Let’s end this.”

## Chapter 28

July 2017

Evening

Strong winds blow against the forest's trees, and the sound of a loud applause fills in the silence. The sky is painted a dim cerulean blue with hints of pink, purple, and orange. The ladies feel the wasp stings pulsate through their entire bodies, and determination fills their hearts and eyes. Tenacity and Melissa stare down Pierre, and they look at each other and nod. Amethyst, Jacqueline, and Rose look at Beta, and Amethyst speaks softly, "I'll go first...", to which Rose and Jacqueline nod in agreement.

Melissa and Pierre sprint towards each other, and Pierre swings his spear vertically downwards, which Melissa is able to block with her closed fan. They disconnect their weapons, and Pierre starts trying to stab her. He thrusts his weapon towards her, but Melissa gracefully avoids the dark blade as she moves her body and opens and closes her fan to push it away. Pierre takes a second to look at her, trying to catch his breath. However, Melissa cuts his break short as she closes in on him and attempts to land a slice with her opened fan. Pierre's heart skips a beat as he jumps backwards, but Melissa manages to slice his chest, his shirt now torn from her blades. "Oops~!" Melissa says, fanning herself, "I hope you weren't planning on asking someone out in that! Hmhmhmhm~!" Trying not to disturb the beetles on her arms, Nermal softly claps and smiles cheerfully as she watches her friend, and Kendo softly smiles at the performance.

*Oh, so she's taunting me now~?* Pierre talks to himself as he looks at Melissa, giving a crooked smirk.

Meanwhile, Amethyst continuously swings her dry ice sword towards Beta, and Beta guards himself from the blade. *CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!* He then takes the chance to punch Amethyst, but she blocks the hits. Amethyst catches her breath, and she starts swinging her sword again, and she finally lands a hit and slices Beta's left cheek. He yelps from the torturous

burn and takes a few steps back. However, he growls and immediately jumps towards her and starts swinging again. Amethyst tries to keep up with him, but his punches become a blur to her. His punches also become more powerful as he forces her to take a couple steps back. Suddenly, *crack!* Beta manages to break Amethyst's sword, and it turns into mist. The irritated hound immediately swings again after getting rid of his obstacle, and Amethyst tries dodging his swings; however, he manages to leave a cut near her lips and her right cheek. Amethyst tries to summon another weapon, but Beta kicks her stomach, knocking the breath out of her and forcing her to fall onto the ground. She coughs and gasps, holding her stomach as her heart beats faster than sound, and Beta stands over her, about to give a finishing blow with a punch; he smiles widely as he prepares his attack, imagining the spikes going straight through Amethyst's skull. *I honestly don't care if you're one of our targets at this point*, Beta thinks to himself.

Jacqueline's and Rose's eyes widen and they yell together, "AMY!!!" Nermal gasps and tries to get up, but Kendo grips onto Nermal to stop her. Nermal looks at Kendo with worry watering her eyes, but Kendo shakes his head. She sits closer to him as he holds her hand.

Kendo speaks softly, "Don't worry, they got this. Your friends on the other side are kicking ass, too~"

Tenacity watches Pierre and Melissa fight it out, and she smiles as she watches her friend put the peoni in his place. However, Pierre starts twirling around his spear while spinning his body, and stops to say, "Let's dance, then~"

Before Beta can punch Amethyst, *BOW!* Beta grunts from the intense chill of Jacqueline's staff, the freezing sensation travels all over his left shoulder and little of his left arm. He backs away, holding his injured arm, and Jacqueline stands in front of Amethyst while Rose helps her up. *You dumbass*, Alpha barks at Beta telepathically, *You kill her and we're **definitely** screwed.*

“Amethyst, are you okay?” Rose asks.

“I’m... I’m fine,” Amethyst groans out. Rose tries to check on Amethyst’s wounds, trying not to panic.

“Okay... I can heal these wounds, no problem,” Rose says, assuring Amethyst. She then checks Amethyst's stomach, and her eyes widen. *Wait a second...* Rose thinks to herself, *I know my ability to sense other souls isn't as good as dad's, but... if I'm not making a mistake, then...*

Pierre begins to increase his speed and begins spinning his spear around, trying to land a couple hits on Melissa. Melissa tightens up and makes sure that she dodges and blocks the spear. Pierre is so fast that she can't land a single hit now; however, Melissa tries to find an opening. As soon as Pierre brings back his spear, ready to thrust it forward, Melissa prepares to throw her fan at him. He thrusts the sharp spear towards Melissa, and Melissa closes her fan and prepares to throw it; the spear slices Melissa's waist, and luckily she twists her body enough that it's just a cut and not a stab. Because of the injury, the pain messes up Melissa's target, and she throws her fan only for it to graze Pierre's shoulder; although it grazes his shoulder, the fan sends mini-sharp air waves, making the cut deep and Pierre grunt.

Beta growls at Jacqueline as she readies her staff, and she says, “Bad boy! Now you're gonna become a popsicle!” Jacqueline runs towards him and swings her staff, but Beta moves away from the swing. Jacqueline keeps swinging her staff, but Beta keeps dodging her attacks.

Melissa and Pierre take a step back, Pierre looking at his bloodied shoulder and Melissa holding onto her side, groaning softly. Tenacity flinches from the sight, and without thinking, she yells, “Move out the way, MeeMee!!”, and Melissa immediately makes distance between her and Pierre. Tenacity jumps high in the air, slightly above Pierre, which throws him off, and she aims her duo guns at him. *BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!* Pierre spins his spear, blocking



most of her fiery bullets, but some of the bullets manage to hit his arms and sides. Pierre takes a step back as his wounds begin to send a hot stinging sensation all over. Tenacity lands on her feet, and slams her guns together. The flames change into a fiery sword, and she swings the weapon at Pierre, which he blocks using his spear. They keep swinging, dodging, and blocking each other, and they manage to land some hits. *BONK BONK BONK BONK BONK! SLASH! SLASH! SLASH!*

“Come on, guys...” Nermal whimpers out, “Please win...”

Beta keeps evading Jacqueline’s attacks, and he starts cackling, “Are you actually aiming with that toy!? Or are you just goofing around, little girl?” Getting frustrated, Jacqueline stands still, and she changes her staff into a chainsaw. *VRRR!! VRRRRRR!!!* Beta’s, Nermal’s, and Kendo’s eyes widen as they see her new crystal blue weapon with frost surrounding it.

“I *reeaally* didn’t want to pull this out, *buuuut liiiiiike* now I have to~!” Jacqueline says, singing out of tune. She revs up her chainsaw and starts running towards the hound, swinging away.

Tenacity and Pierre take a step back from each other, catching their breath as their minor cuts sting. Melissa looks at the two, and thinks to herself, *He’s not bad, but... I thought he’d give us more trouble.* Ignoring her wound, Melissa immediately runs past Tenacity, and surprises Pierre with a kick to the face. *BOOM!* The kick picks up Pierre off his feet, and he lands onto the dense ground on his butt. Agony takes over his backside and the side of his face. Melissa lands on her feet, and Tenacity looks at what she just did in shock.

“Goddamn, girl!!” Tenacity exclaims, laughing out of excitement, “Knock the bitch out then!!”

“I-I didn’t know I was *that* strong!” Melissa exclaims back. “Probably that wasp sting enhanced it!” They look to see Pierre still on the ground. They walk over to him, but he doesn’t move; instead, he holds his hand over the area Melissa kicked him while looking at the grass. He curses under his breath, and he tries to get back on his feet; however, *BOW!* Tenacity knocks him out with a fiery kick. Pierre groans loudly out of torment. Melissa grabs Tenacity and pulls her away. “Hey, he’s already down!! Damn!!” Melissa yells.

“Sorry, had to let that one out,” Tenacity says, trying to hold in her laughter, but Melissa looks at her with seriousness. The fired up Tenacity waves her hands up and says, “Aight aight, I’m backing away.”

“Hmm, anyways, I wonder how your *boo thang* is doing,” Melissa teases.

“Hmmmmm, I have *no* idea what you’re talking about,” Tenacity says, turning away to hide her flushed face, and she starts scratching her head. As soon as Melissa wants to continue teasing Tenacity, *VRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!!* They look to see their best friend, Jacqueline, attacking Beta.

“AAAAAAAAAHHHH!!!” Beta screams as Jacqueline’s chainsaw slices through his right shoulder, making a lot of dark-red blood spray everywhere. Some of the blood gets on Jacqueline’s clothes, and she squeals and pulls away from Beta, her chainsaw now bloody.

“HOLY SHIT!!” Tenacity and Melissa yell together as they run to their friends.

“EEWWWW!! EW EW EW EW EW! MY CLOTHES! THEY’RE RUINED!! WAAAAH!!” Jacqueline squeals out loud as she makes her chainsaw disappear, and she looks at her ruined shirt.

“BITCH, QUIT YOUR WHINING!!” Beta screams, holding his bloody shoulder while on the ground. “YOUR CRAZY ASS ALMOST CUT OFF MY WHOLE ARM!!” He looks at his

shoulder, panting and whimpering. He whimpers, “C-C-Cold...s-s-so cold...” he then growls out, “*You better hope I don’t get back up, because once I do, you’re DEAD!! DO YOU HEAR ME!? YOU’RE FUCKING DEAD, YOU SL-!!*” *BOOM!!!* Before Beta completes his insult, Tenacity gives him a fiery kick to the face and knocks him back, and he groans loudly.

“Okay, he deserved that one,” Melissa says.

“He just didn’t know when to shut up,” Tenacity says, laughing a little.

“Is... Is Tenacity laughing?” Jacqueline asks, tilting her head.

“I’m sorry! This is the most fun I’ve had in a while, alright?” Tenacity admits.

“...You sadist,” Jacqueline taunts her.

“Hey, at least it was folks that were asking for it and not some innocent bystander,” Tenacity retorts.

“You did great, girls,” Amethyst finally speaks, making the team turn towards her. They walk up to her as she rests her head on Rose’s lap, glowing green dragonflies surrounding her wounds. The girls sit on the ground in a circle, and Rose makes more dragonflies appear as they land on the girls’ wounds, stinging them to make the bleeding stop and the wound completely disappear.

Nermal and Kendo walk towards them, and the blue beetles fly off of their arms to make the shield disappear. “You guys were awesome!” Nermal cheers, “Oh man, my heart was beating so fast!”

Kendo says, “Yeah, that was quite the show~! Hmhmhmhm~! It took you guys 10 minutes to finally end it~.”

“10?” Tenacity asks, “It felt longer...”

“My thing is why was Pierre so easy to beat?” Melissa wonders.

“Oh~! He *barely* fights! Hahahahahaha~! If anything, his pets do the dirty work~!” Kendo adds.

“Oh... well, that explains it... what about Beta?” Tenacity asks.

“Just be glad that you girls got your powers before doing this, because if you didn’t, *and* didn’t have a caring half-Quphanto as your friend, you’d all be dead, honestly,” Kendo answers. *Should also tell them that Usiku knocked these guys down a peg or ten, buuuut I’ll keep my mouth shut~* he thinks to himself.

Nermal then looks at the dragonflies and asks, “Hey Rose, how are you able to have all of these insects come to you? I know you have Quphanto DNA in you, but... I was curious about how exactly that works.”

“Oh! It’s thanks to light magic and my imagination,” Rose says, softly smiling, “All I have to do is have a clear image of what I want to summon, what power I want to associate with that insect, and then boom! The light magic I produce takes the shape and color I have in mind and does what it’s commanded to. My green dragonflies heal wounds no matter how big or small; my red wasps increase your strength, magic, and agility; my blue beetles place a shield around the person they’re on, and the more there are, the stronger the shield; my orange scorpions does the exact opposite of what my wasps do; my yellow wolf spiders paralyze you; and my purple butterflies revive you.”

“I’m sorry, revive?” Jacqueline asks.

“Mhm... I’m able to bring people back to life... but I’m limited to revive a person three times...” Rose explains.

“Well damn,” Tenacity comments, “Why it gotta be bugs, though?”

“Well what’s wrong with bugs?” Rose whines then giggles softly.

“What’s wrong with bugs!?” Melissa and Jacqueline ask together.

While the girls talk to each other and laugh, Kendo looks at Pierre and Beta as they lay on the ground, still recovering, then he looks at you, the reader, and says softly, “You should see how the malaikis did~ But warning, it wasn’t as interesting, in my opinion~.”

**Chapter 29**  
**July 2017(10 minutes ago)**  
**Evening**

Issei, Thomas, Alexander, Alpha, and Gamma transport themselves into the Spirit Realm, and they do not pay attention to what's going on with the girls and the two Umuites in Gaia. Without saying a word, Gamma immediately summons his machine gun and aims it towards Thomas and Alexander, and he snarls out, "***I can't STAND malaikis... ESPECIALLY Upindelaikis. Just the sight of you makes me want to gag, so I'll get rid of you first!!***"

"I think he wanted to kill us from the beginning," Alexander whispers to Thomas. Before Thomas could reply to his brother, *BRATATATATATATATATATATATATA!!!* The twins immediately move out of the line of fire, and they begin summoning their weapons of light, Thomas his spear and Alexander his nunchucks. Gamma cackles as he continues firing his weapon. They split up by going two different directions to confuse Gamma; Alexander goes to Gamma's left while Thomas goes to Gamma's right. The crazed hound stops shooting as he contemplates which Upindelaiki he should focus on. The warthog prances around as it watches the two Upindelaikis confusing the hound, and it snorts from the comedy.

Meanwhile, Alpha and Issei stare at each other intensely. Issei immediately pulls out Elizabeth and starts shooting at the spirit hound, but Alpha summons his machete just in time to slice away the bullets. Issei starts walking up to Alpha, not stopping the flow of bone-chilling bullets. *SCHLANG SCHLANG SCHLANG SCHLANG!* The sound of Alpha's machete slicing through the bullets echoes throughout the battlefield. The malaiki-Ludamu hybrid finally gets close enough to put his gun away and swings his katana. Their blades meet and sparks fly. Alpha growls quietly, and he says in a low tone, "I'm assuming it's too late to come to an agreement... we could have been great business partners..."

Issei smirks and says, “Perhaps...if we were the same species and your brother didn’t try to kill me before. Besides, our ideations are completely different. Don’t worry, I wasn’t hired to kill you.” Issei applies pressure and brings the blades closer to Alpha. He continues, “BUT that doesn’t mean I’m going to make this easy.”

Alpha scrunches up his face and doesn’t say another word. With all his force, he pushes Issei away and starts swinging his machete again, and Issei’s katana meets with the dark blade every swing. *CLANG CLANG CLANG CLANG CLANG CLANG CLANG CLANG!* The power behind the swings slowly wear out the fighters’ arms, but they don’t slow down. The endless sparks that fly from the blades makes the warthog squeal and snort in excitement, and Alphonse’s laughter can be heard. “***OHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHO~! Yes~! This is exactly the kind of show I’ve been wanting to see~!!***” Issei and Alpha continue slashing, but Alpha pushes Issei’s katana away just to headbutt him. *BAM!* The attack forces Issei to fumble backwards, and his vision is blurred as he tries to recover. Alpha then kicks Issei down to the ground, and he looks to check on Gamma.

Gamma chooses to replace his machine gun with two handheld submachine guns as Thomas and Alexander get a few feet closer to him. Just as soon as the brothers are about to attack they hear, “AMY!!!”, which makes them look to see that Amethyst is hurt.

*No!!* Alexander yells in his head as his heart leaps out of his chest and his brain goes blank. Gamma takes this chance to start blasting; Thomas’ reflexes save him as he immediately dodges the bullets, but Alexander snaps back into the fight and starts hitting away the bullets a little too late with his nunchucks, letting a few bullets graze him. The warthog snorts at Alexander’s performance.

Alpha sees what's going on and sees Beta about to kill their second target, which makes him almost leave the Spirit Realm. Luckily, Jacqueline stops Beta by hitting him with her frozen staff, and Alpha holds himself back from leaving the realm just to slap his brother silly. *That fucking idiot!* Alpha thinks to himself, then he starts communicating to Beta telepathically, *You dumbass. You kill her and we're **definitely** screwed.* Suddenly, **BOOM!** A freezing bullet passes by Alpha, and he ducks to avoid the shot. He looks to see that Issei, whose eyes went from orange to gold, is aiming his special gun towards him with a serious face. Alpha says softly, "This is getting out of hand..." He stands up straight and says to Issei, "Look, peoni hunter, we'll go. This is becoming more and more pointless the further we continue this battle." *If they want to keep Anti and Amethyst here, then fine,* Alpha thinks to himself, *We'll just have to go back home and tell the Boss about this new group of brats that his son has brought along with him.*

The warthog observes Alpha's cry for uncle, and Alphonse says, "**WHAT'S THIS~?! Alpha accepting defeat~!? What say ye, peoni hunter~? Are you letting your target run away so soon~? Ohohohohohoho~!**"

Meanwhile, Thomas gets close enough to Gamma to swing his spear. **FWOOSH!** As soon as he swings, however, Gamma leans away and aims his SMG towards Thomas' face. Right before Gamma releases the trigger, Thomas moves away from the bullets. **BRATATATATATA!!** They keep changing their positions, bullets flying and the spear's blade not even touching Gamma's clothes. Their attacks and dodges begin to look like a synchronized dance of death, and Gamma cackles from the excitement. "HAHAHAHAHAHAHA! YES!! THIS IS WHAT I'VE BEEN CRAVING FOR!!" Gamma exclaims. Alexander interrupts this dance by sneaking up behind Gamma. The homicidal hound senses Alexander's presence, and he tries to aim his other SMG towards him. However, Alexander knocks the weapon out of his hand with his nunchucks,



making the weapon disappear in dark mist, and Gamma flinches out of surprise. Thomas backs away to let Alexander take care of Gamma as he catches his breath, and Gamma notices him exiting the fight. His finger attempts to pull the trigger, but Alexander stops him by whacking his head. *WHAM!!* Gamma yelps and turns his whole body towards Alexander, growling loudly.

“Hey, pay attention to me, asshole,” Alexander says, sternly, which makes Gamma crack a wide smile, showing his shark-like teeth. *My baby is hurt*, Alexander thinks to himself, *Someone is going to have to pay...*

Issei thinks over what Alpha is requesting, and he sighs out of frustration and answers, “...It’s always when I’m about to get serious...” He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath in and out, and his eyes return to orange. He turns to the Upindelaiki twins and says, “Thomas! Alexander! Seems like the dogs are wanting to back out. Should we let them?” Although he asks what they should do, Issei keeps his weapon pointing at Alpha in case it’s all a trap, and Alpha tries not to move, raising his hands slightly up.

Thomas, Alexander, and Gamma stop what they’re doing to turn towards Issei. Gamma yells, “WHAT DO YOU MEAN ‘*BACK OUT*’!? ALPHA, WHAT THE FUCK IS HE TALKING ABOUT!?”

Alpha speaks up and says, “We can’t continue. Beta was just fighting one of the targets and almost killed her.”

Gamma looks to see the girls battling Pierre and Beta, seeing Amethyst resting on Rose’s lap, and he looks back at Alpha and says, “Well, from the looks of it, she’s out of the game now!!”

“But what if she gets *back* into the game? I’m not taking that risk,” Alpha argues back.

“Seriously!? What in the fuck happened with that ‘we’re going to give these guys hell’ attitude!?”

“It went away as soon as Beta took it too far!!”

“GRRRRRRRRRRRAAAAAHH!! THEN TELL *BETA* TO BACK OFF!! YOU’RE NOT GOING TO RUIN MY FUN JUST ‘CAUSE THE MIDDLE SIBLING WANTS TO SHOW OFF!!”

***“GOD-FUCKING-DAMMIT, GAMMA! WHY IS IT WHEN I ORDER YOU TO DO SOMETHING, YOU WANT TO FUCKING QUESTION ME!! WHEN I TELL YOU TO DO SOMETHING, JUST. FUCKING. DO IT!?”***

***“YOU KNOW WHAT? FUCK YOU, ALPHA!! I’VE HAD A HARD-ON FOR WEEKS, AND MY GIRLS HAVE BEEN WANTING TO SATISFY ME! BUT THE MOMENT THEY’RE ABOUT TO, YOU SAY ‘LeT’S NoT dO THiS’ or ‘LeT’s NOt dO ThAT!’”***

***“YOUR WEAPONS SATISFY YOU ENOUGH BACK HOME!! THERE ARE PLENTY OF TARGETS THERE!! I’M JUST ASKING THIS ONE TIME TO CALM DOWN YOUR MURDER BONER!”***

While the brothers argue, Alexander looks at his lover then at Thomas and speaks softly, “If there’s ever a time that our enemy backs down willingly and we get to do what we need to do, *this* is it.”

Thomas responds, “I don’t know... Alpha seems to be the kind of guy that would have made this decision much earlier.”

“He thought they had the chance! Now he sees that they don’t!” Alexander retorts.

“Well, it’s more like his brother is close to messing things up for them, so he’s taking them back home while nothing too controversial has happened, yet.” Then Thomas thinks, *I thought that Cerberus was much stronger than this... did Usiku make them reset by any chance when he fought them...?*

“Look, either way, I’m saying let’s let them go back home! Look at Amy! She’s hurt! We shouldn’t continue this if we don’t have to!”

“Alexander, you’re really going to believe that Alpha’s brothers are going to listen to him the first time around? I’ll tell you right now that the answer is no. Alpha has already released his frustrations towards Gamma before because of what happened with them and Issei, and it’s happening again right now!”

“Okay, fine! We’ll just keep an eye on Gamma then!”

Issei interrupts the twins with yelling, “I’m still waiting for an answer! What are we doing!?”

Before Thomas and Alexander could give Issei their final decision, *VRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!!* The sound of a chainsaw echoes throughout the forest which makes all the guys turn to see that it’s Jacqueline tearing through Beta’s shoulder, Beta’s scream pierces everyone’s ears. Alpha and Gamma see their brother in pain and together say, “BETA!!” Thomas, Alexander, and Issei see what happens, which makes them lower their weapons in surprise, and they are left speechless.

“That fucking bitch!!!” Gamma yells. Jacqueline pulls the chainsaw out of Beta’s shoulder and takes a few steps back, squealing from what she just did. The two spirit hounds don’t take their eyes off of their wounded brother. Alpha looks at Beta in dismay, but then he turns his head towards Gamma, the dismay turning back into frustration. Gamma feels his eldest brother’s daggers for eyes, and he hangs his head low. In a raspy voice, Gamma says, “Fine... Alright... We’ll go back home...”

“And it took for one of us to get hurt *again* for you to finally obey. This pattern is getting tiresome, Gamma,” Alpha nags.

“...Let’s just get out of here,” Gamma responds, not wanting to argue with Alpha anymore.

Alpha looks at the two Upindelaikis and the malaiki-Ludamu hybrid and says, “You guys win... it seems your friends are stronger than what we’ve originally thought.”

Issei asks, “So are you guys truly leaving us for good? Or are you just going to catch a breather and come back for another ass-whooping?”

“It’ll all depend on what our boss says,” Alpha answers.

“Well, seeing how you’re leaving now, I’m assuming you’re leaving Kendo and Amethyst here with us?” Thomas jumps in.

“Well... that was part of the deal, right?” Alpha says, “Though I will admit, this is our *first* time letting Anti run away free, I can assure you that our boss will find some way to drag Anti back to Umu.”

“You still gotta tell Thomas why Aidoneus needs Kendo,” Alexander says, remembering how Thomas still doesn’t know the purpose behind the Cerberus Brothers needing Kendo. “And while we’re at it, you can go ahead and explain why Amethyst is needed, as well,” he continues.

“That’s none of your concern, dipshits,” Gamma growls.

“That’s confidential information, I’m afraid,” Alpha quickly says.

Thomas lets out his irritation through a sigh and says, “Alright, fine. We’ll go ahead and let you guys go, then...”

Alexander rests his hand on his brother’s shoulder to lean close to him, and he whispers, “*Don’t worry, Kendo explained to me what’s going on. I’ll tell you later.*” Thomas doesn’t show any expression on his face to avoid suspicion, and he slightly nods his head to let Alexander know that he’s okay with that.

Issei puts his weapon away, and he scratches his head. He talks to himself, *Well, I guess my work here is done even though this was lackluster. Kendo better be ready to pay up.* He walks up

to the twins and stands next to them. Alphonse's warthog doesn't make any sound as it runs past everyone and into the cave.

The five men look to see that Pierre and Beta are on the ground, accepting their defeat, and the six girls sitting in their circle talking and giggling away while Kendo stands a few feet away from them. Alpha and Gamma walk up to Beta while Alexander, Thomas, and Issei walk up to the girls. Thomas grabs onto Alexander, and they all close their eyes to leave the Spirit Realm.

## Chapter 30

July 2017

Night

The forest is now only being lit by the light-indigo sky covered in stars in the sky and the full moon, fireflies dance around as they give their own light show. The girls and Kendo notice a flash of light, and they turn to see that it's Thomas, Alexander, and Issei. "There they are~!" Kendo announces as the trio walks up to them, Alexander kneels down to see Amethyst.

"Are you okay!?" Alexander asks her, his heart pounding.

Amethyst hears her lover's voice and looks at him, his white hair and yellow eyes still present. She stares at him with a face of disbelief and says, "Wow... you're... really not possessed..."

"N-No, I faked it all, Amy," Alexander says.

"You asshole... you terrified me... you couldn't have just let me in on what's going on instead of giving me a heart attack?" Amethyst asks, scrunching up her face, frowning.

"... *sighs* Amy..."

"You could have gotten yourself killed. You could have gotten *us* killed."

"I'm sorry, babe... I really am... I was just trying to get you away from the forest in any way I could, and at the time, scaring you seemed like the only option."

"Ugh.... So what about Usiku, then, did *he* know you were fooling all of us, too?"

"Hm....I don't know, actually. D-Does it matter now, though? It's all over."

"...Yeah.... I guess it doesn't matter now..."

They don't share any other words to each other and just stare at each other. The girls take this as a hint to give them some privacy, and they get up and walk a couple feet away. Rose helps Amethyst up before joining her friends, and Amethyst and Alexander hug tightly. The girls look

at the couple hug, and they say, “Awwww!” simultaneously. The girls look at each other and then do a tight group hug together, giggling.

“Oh my gosh! I can’t believe we did it!” Nermal exclaims.

“We kicked ass *and* brought a couple back together,” Tenacity says, smiling.

“I honestly wanna do it again!” Melissa giggles out.

“Hell yeah~! We should totally have Amethyst look for baddies for us whoop on~!”

Jacqueline adds.

“You guys did great, *buuuuut* let’s take a break before going to battle again, please?” Rose asks, nervously laughing.

“Eh, I’d say you guys were alright,” Issei jumps in, interrupting the girls’ celebration.

“What you mean ‘alright’?” Tenacity asks, breaking the hug to look at Issei, putting her hands on her hips and sneering a sneer.

“I mean you guys were good... but you can do better! I saw a little of your fight, and I think with a little sparring, you guys will be kicking ass with a lot more style in no time,” Issei offers, smiling.

“Oh yeah? Well last time I checked, *our* opponents were on the ground while yours was still *walking*,” Tenacity snaps back.

“That’s because Alpha stopped the fight and pretty much gave up. But trust me, if it were to have played differently, he’d be on the ground *begging* me to let them go.”

“Riiiiight.”

“Do you want to go now!?”

“Now that I have these powers, hell yeah! Wassup!?”

“Wassup!?”

“...They’re just going to keep going like this, huh?” Nermal giggles.

“Yep... like good ol’ times,” Rose answers, softly smiling.

Beta sits up, feeling the agonizing torture taking place in his messed up shoulder, and a glow reveals Alpha and Gamma leaving the Spirit Realm to help him. Beta looks at Alpha and says weakly, “Brother.... Did you win? Please tell me that either you or Gamma put these Gaians and Mazans in their place.”

Alpha gives him a sorrowful look and shakes his head. “We’re going back home, Beta,” he says softly but firmly, “Anti and Amethyst are not coming with us... we’ve failed...” Beta’s eyes widen in despair, and he looks at Gamma to see him look at the ground, softly whimpering. Alpha looks at the ground and continues, “You two were right....we should have gone back home from the very beginning... this... is all my fault...”

“Brother...” Beta says softly, wanting to cheer Alpha up. Alpha’s heart beats unsteadily and his mind fogs up as he realizes how far his brothers and he have gotten only to return to their realm with bad news. Even though they knew that it was unnatural for them to leave Umu, they knew they had to follow their leader’s orders no matter what. For hundreds of years, they have been successful in bringing their boss’s son back, so for them to willingly allow him to stay in Gaia is new to them. Alpha then looks at Amethyst and Alexander as they hug and talk to each other, and the hound’s face is covered with more sorrow.

Beta and Gamma notice their brother’s stare, and Gamma whispers, “*Bro... are you sure you want to let **her** go...? We may let Anti get away, but who said we couldn’t bring her back with us?*”



Alpha keeps looking at Amethyst, not giving an answer. Beta then whispers, “*I know at the time I was about to kill her, and I deeply apologize... but we know how you feel about her, Alpha...*”

Gamma jumps in, speaking softly, “We know you never forgot about her....”

“This is probably the first and last time that we’ll ever get to have her as a target,” Beta says through his pain.

Alpha then closes his eyes tightly, trying to hold back his emotions, feeling his eyes burn and his heart ache.. He then sighs and says, “We have to let her go.... After all, she’s *Pierre’s* target... not ours...” However, Beta and Gamma could tell that Alpha wished Amethyst was their priority.

The mentioning of Pierre’s name makes the red-haired peoni sit up while holding his head. His head pounds, making him groan, and he looks around to see what’s going on. He gets up, and as soon as he takes a breath in, he feels a sharp pain on his chest. He looks down to see a big cut and his shirt torn. “Ugh... oh yeah...” Pierre mumbles as soon as he remembers that he was fighting against Melissa and Tenacity. He dusts himself off and sees the Cerberus Brothers huddled up, trying to hold Beta.

Alpha notices Pierre and says, “Hey. You’re coming back with us?”

Pierre looks at him with a tired yet irritated face and says snarkily, “No... I’m not.” He then looks at the girls, then looks at Amethyst and says, “I still gotta catch my target... and I’m not going back just to get bitched at and not get paid...”

“Hm... very well... your choice,” Alpha says while shrugging and says, “Let’s go boys...” The Cerberus Brothers walk into the dark cave and close their eyes to go into the Spirit Realm once more. They open their eyes to see the dark portal on the ground, the colors of the rainbow

being dark and scattered around. Without speaking another word, they simultaneously jump into the portal, leaving only *The Reaper's Contract* left within the cave.

Pierre looks at his enemies, irritation sending chills up and down his spine, and he quietly walks away from everyone. *I gotta get out of here and come up with another plan*, he thinks to himself, *I don't know how I'm going to get that cat now, but no matter what it takes, I will finish this off as much as I hate it...* He finishes his thought and goes to the Spirit Realm to spread his black leather peoni wings and flies off.

While everyone is talking about the events of what happened, Thomas walks up to Amethyst and Alexander. Alexander notices his little brother and turns to him and says, "Thanks for helping me, lil' bro. Don't know what I would do if you weren't here."

Thomas gently smiles and says, "It's no problem, but we're still not done. We now have to cleanse the cave and then reverse the effects the Umu maggots have on you."

"Oh yeah! Right!" Alexander says cheerfully. Thomas walks to the cave, and Alexander plants a kiss on Amethyst's cheek before following his brother.

Kendo watches everyone chatter while leaning against a tree, and he talks to himself, "Ah~ Yes~ Finally free~. I must say this mini-adventure had its ups and downs, but at the end of the day, the heroes triumph~ Just like they always do... right~? However, I must say, this group of heroes is not like any other I would find in a fairy tale or a tv show. No, these cuties are all unique~ They clearly have their flaws~ They clearly have some issues to work out~ They're not walking Mary Sues~! And yet... they are my heroes~!" He giggles then sighs, and he looks at the sky shimmering. He continues, "Well, I guess I better get out of here~ I'm sure there's a party going on somewhere in the city~ But why do I feel like something *else* is supposed to happen right now?"

Suddenly, “Rose Nruku Garcia!!” Everyone turns their heads to see a tall figure in a dark cloak walk up to them, a small red glow shining bright in the middle of his pupils. Seven bats with the same red eyes fly around, making Jacqueline, Nermal, and Melissa squeal and Tenacity get tensed up and curse under her breath. Rose sees the person that called for her and her internal organs immediately drop.

Kendo makes an “o” shape with his mouth as his eyes widen at the sight. He then looks at you, the reader, and whispers, “*Uh oh... I might have jinxed it~!*”

To be continued...