



Spring of the Cursed Fae

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Description: Fae from across the land have come to the enchanting Spring Court in hopes of winning Lia's affection. But the future queen is not easily swayed. Trained to be a warrior, the needs of her people outweigh her own desires. Were she to give in to temptation, it would be with the two forbidden men who stole her heart long ago...

Twins Bayleon and Bastian were cursed with the powers of seduction before they were even born. One look in their eyes entralls their victims to a blissful death. Offered the opportunity to be Lia's protectors, their place in court comes with a steep price. They must shield their eyes and promise not to seduce any women. Failure to uphold this agreement will be punishable by death.

But not giving in to their powers takes its toll. If they don't succumb... they'll die. To save the men she loves, Lia gives in to her desires. How can she pick just one when her heart and soul belong to both?

Refusing to lose either of them, Lia embarks on a quest for a cure. Yet when the future queen is abducted by those who don't want the curse broken, it's up to Bayleon and Bastian to save their love. Can they find Lia before the curse kills them? Or will the trials they face tear the trio apart?

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Chapter1

Lia

I could sense them . . . both of them.

Bayleon and Bastian were close, but I couldn't see them. The wind blew through the wisteria trees, making the blue and purple petals dance in the air as they fell from their vines. It almost looked like snow billowing all around me.

Stopping in the middle of the grove, I held my breath and scanned my surroundings, squinting against the sun. It was bright overhead, and I could feel its rays beaming down on my skin, only it wasn't hot in the Spring Court, not like it was in the Summer Court. Every now and again we'd get a rainstorm, and it didn't matter where I was, I always made my way outside to enjoy every second of it. It was my own tradition, which I planned on upholding when I became queen of my court.

I breathed in quietly and stepped toward two interlocking wisteria trees; they were wide enough to allow Bayleon and Bastian to hide behind them and not be seen. Ever so slowly, I closed the distance and placed a hand on my sword hilt, ready to unsheathe it within a moment's notice. But when I stepped around the massive trunk, they weren't there. I had a feeling they wouldn't be; it was too easy.

Everything was quiet except for the wind and the melodic chirping of a group of yellow warblers above me. They were native to the mortal realm, but someone in my court loved them so much they brought them to the Land of the Fae.

Was it forbidden to bring over animals not native to our land? No, but there was always a risk they wouldn't survive.

I inherited an affinity for nature and animals from my mother, meaning I could understand creatures in ways no other fae could. The warblers were much happier here than in the mortal realm. Their chirps sounded like gleeful laughs as they bounced along the branches, making more wisteria petals fall on me. But soon, their song changed its tune.

It turned into a warning . . . someone was near, but I already knew that.

Bayleon and Bastian's presence felt like a warm blanket wrapping around me. I didn't have to worry about anything with them nearby. When they offered to be my protectors, I knew I didn't need them. My mother and father had trained me to fight and take care of myself since the day I could walk. It was more as if I wanted Bayleon and Bastian to be close. They were part of the Tyvar—a group of handsome fae men cursed with the power of seduction, able to enthrall any woman with just a simple glance into their captivating midnight-blue eyes. Most of the Tyvar didn't see it as a curse, but Bayleon and Bastian did.

When my mother met them many years ago, she helped them see there was more to life. The others enjoyed luring in women and pleasuring them until they died. That was why Bayleon and Bastian left their home in the Mystical Forest to live in the Spring Court, vowing never to enthrall any women in my court. The penalty was death if they did. They wanted to change, and my mother believed they could. Of all their years in the Spring Court, they haven't yet slipped up once.

Being a royal, I was immune to their powers, so it wasn't their magic that had gripped me; it was something else, something forbidden. I've kept the truth hidden deep within the confines of my soul for the past seven years, ever since they became my protectors. The only problem was it was becoming harder to live with that secret with

each passing day. I was in love with both men—made more complicated by the fact they were twin brothers. I couldn't have them both, and there was no way I could choose between them. And because of that, my heart would forever be doomed.

The ache in my chest grew, but I forced it away. I couldn't let anything distract me, not when this was my final test. I didn't need to prove to anyone that I could be queen and protect my people, but I did want to prove it to myself. I'd been able to thwart Bayleon and Bastian's attacks for the past year; it was the one goal I wanted to achieve before becoming queen of my court . . . the Blossom Court. It would still be a part of the Spring Court, but it would be my own. I had never been more ready for anything in my life.

Today I was just a princess, but tomorrow I would be a queen.

I sensed a shift behind me and smiled. The guys were good at hiding, at being the predators. I've trained my entire life to be a warrior, never to be the prey, and today was no different. I knew today's test would be the hardest of all, and I was curious to see what Bayleon and Bastian had in store for me. I took cover behind one of the wisteria trees and peeked around the edge, knowing very well that the guys were gaining ground on me; I could hear the subtle swishes of the grass as they approached. But where were they? I could hear them, but I couldn't see them. It was then that I noticed the wisteria petals dancing in the wind through the small meadow between the trees, but there were two invisible outlines which the petals couldn't fall through.

"You guys are smart," I said, unsheathing my sword with my right hand and my dagger with my left, "but not smart enough."

I stepped away from the tree, and heard the guys pull out their swords. Still, I couldn't see them, but the grass flattened with their steps as they rushed toward me. Even though I couldn't see them, I concentrated on the sounds and attacked.

Fighting blind was a skill I'd practiced but never fully perfected. Today was going to be the day I mastered it. Swinging my sword, it connected with a blade, and I quickly used my dagger to swipe low, drawing it across my attacker's leg. I heard Bayleon's growl and rolled across the ground away from him, knowing that Bastian wasn't far from his right. Hurting them made my stomach clench, but I had no choice.

Strong arms encircled my waist, and I felt a familiar warmth. The manly smell of sandalwood reached my nose, and I knew it was Bastian. I headbutted him in the face, earning a snarl in return as I shifted out of his hold and swiped my sword across his back. The metal slicing through his skin was a sound I never wanted to hear again, not when it was with someone I cared about.

Blood dripped onto the green grass, and it shimmered in the sun on my blade. Hurting them was part of the test, and I didn't realize how hard it would be. I'd been told there might come a time when someone I loved would betray me, and I'd have to make a tough decision.

Would I be able to hurt them? The answer was simple . . . I'd do what I had to do. I drew blood from the two men I cared most about, and I never wanted to do it again.

"All right," I called out, "I'm done."

Bayleon and Bastian appeared within seconds right after they took off the magical necklaces that made them invisible. Both were dressed in their dark green warrior leathers of the Spring Court and their eyes hidden behind the silver masquerade masks they have to wear at all times. It was the only way they could be around the women in my court without condemning them to death by seduction. Sadly, it's been a long time since I've been able to look into their eyes. In their hands were the silver chain necklaces with a honey amber crystal attached to each one. After sheathing my sword and dagger, I stared down at the magical stones. The crystals belonged to my parents, a gift from my uncle Ryder who transferred some of his invisibility magic

into the stones; my parents were very protective of them. It would be disastrous if they fell into the wrong hands.

“Was it my parents’ idea or yours to use the stones?” I asked, glancing back and forth between the brothers.

They were over two hundred years old but didn’t look a day over twenty-five with their golden blonde hair, midnight-blue eyes, and angelic features. The only physical difference between them was their hair. Bayleon kept his silky and long while Bastian had his cut short like most of the young warriors in the courts; it was a trend that carried over from the mortal realm. One of the things I enjoyed most about them was how they spoke and carried themselves; it was very proper and gentlemanlike. Their voices were regal, almost as if they were brought up as royalty, and smooth like honey. I don’t know much about their father—he wasn’t something the guys ever wanted to talk about—but I knew their mother loved them and did her best to raise them right.

Bastian stepped forward and winced in pain as he held the necklace toward me. “It was both,” he confessed. “You did very well, princess.”

Instead of taking the stone, I grabbed his arm and sent my healing magic straight into him, healing the sword wound on his back. In addition to the affinity of nature and animals I’d inherited from my mother, I also had the power of healing, and the ability to control water inherited from my father. I couldn’t see Bastian’s eyes clearly through his mask, but I could still see them. I watched as his lips parted, and a sigh of relief escaped.

“Thank you,” he murmured.

I squeezed his arm. “I’m sorry.” He tried to hand me the necklace, but I shook my head. “I trust you with the stone. You can return it to my parents.”

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Then, quickly, I hurried over to Bayleon to heal the gash on his thigh. I could feel his heated gaze on me the entire time. Once the cut closed over, I focused on both men, my chest constricting at the injuries I'd inflicted.

"I didn't think I cut you so deep," I said to them.

Bayleon sheathed his sword, and Bastian did the same. "We're fine, princess," Bayleon assured me, nodding toward the palace. "We should probably head back. Your family will start arriving in a few hours."

Tonight, the Spring Court palace would be filled with my aunts, uncles, and cousins from the other courts. They were here for the Equinox Ball which was due to take place in a couple of days, but they were also here to watch my brother, Kale, and I claim our land. The Land of the Fae was about to gain two new courts and a new king and queen.

Bayleon and Bastian took their places beside me, and we started out of the grove of wisteria trees and up the cherry blossom trail to the back of the palace. Ever since the Winter Solstice Ball, things have been tense between all three of us. I've tried keeping my feelings to myself and not letting them show, but it proves more difficult each day. The last thing I wanted to do was come between their bond. They were brothers, and family came above all else. Unfortunately, I didn't feel like my emotions were the only thing causing the tension. I've sensed some apprehension from both men for weeks, almost as if they were intentionally keeping something from me.

When we arrived at the entrance at the back of the palace, two of my father's guards

stepped out of the way so we could enter. It was strange to think that tomorrow I would have my own palace and my own guards. So much was about to change.

Chapter 2

Lia

“You’re going to be a queen in a couple of hours.” Ember’s sparkling emerald eyes searched mine as she smiled and tilted her head to the side. “What I don’t get is how calm you are right now,” she said, taking a bite of her apricot tea cookie and spilling crumbs in the process. “I would be freaking out.”

I ran my fingertip over the rim of my rose-covered cup and smiled. It felt smooth and cool on my fingers. “I’m ready for it,” I said, staring back at my dearest and closest friend.

Her golden curls shimmered in the sun, only adding to the radiant glow of her skin. Pregnancy suited her. She was a couple of years younger than me which hasn’t helped my situation. The whispered conversations among the elders of the Spring Court have pointed out that I was over thirty, single, and nowhere close to providing an heir. Most of the fae in my land have modernized their thinking, but there were still some stuck in the traditional ways, those who would prefer to shut off all contact with the mortal realm altogether. I enjoyed the human world and so did Ember. It was why I wanted to bring her to our favorite café in France so she could get her beloved warm croissants with strawberry jam before her baby came. I was happy for her but couldn’t help but feel a little envious. She had the life I could only dream about: a perfect mate and a long life of happiness ahead of her.

The warmth I always felt when Bayleon and Bastian were near cascaded over my skin and it made me tremble.

Ember snickered under her breath and shook her head. “They’re here, aren’t they?”

It took all I had not to search around for them.

There were people everywhere walking the streets of Paris and taking pictures of the Eiffel Tower. Bayleon and Bastian could be anywhere.

Bringing my cup to my lips, I finished off the last sip of my chai tea. “It would appear so. But, even when I tell them I’ll be okay, they never let me go anywhere alone.”

Ember’s smile widened. “I understand how you feel. I’m pretty sure Ren is here watching us as well.”

That didn’t surprise me in the least. It didn’t matter if I had a hundred guards escorting us to Paris, Ren would want to ensure his mate and unborn child were safe.

“Oh, I have no doubt,” I teased.

Ember shrugged. “I think it’s sweet Bayleon and Bastian wanted to be your protectors. They’ve been with you now for seven years, right?”

“Yes,” I answered, remembering how excited I was to have them by my side.

For the longest time, they watched over my mother. She was captured by the Tyvar many years ago, but Bayleon and Bastian had released her. I still don’t know what happened, but they had said they were in her debt. That was why they ended up leaving their army and living in the Spring Court. There were so many secrets—secrets I wanted to uncover.

“Do they know how you feel about them?” Ember wondered. “Because it’s obvious they are both in love with you.”

I knew they were; it was what made everything so complicated.

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “It’s not like anything could come of it anyway. I would never be able to choose. And if I did, it’d cause a rift between them.”

Ember’s smile slowly dissipated. “I’m sorry, Lia. I don’t know what it’s like to love two men. Ren has my whole heart.”

And mine was divided.

Waving a hand in the air, I huffed out a breath. “Okay, enough about this. Let’s talk about something else.”

Ember smirked as she reached for the last croissant and spread the rest of the strawberry jam over the top. Flaky pieces fell onto her belly when she took a bite.

“I can do that. Let me start by saying how ecstatic I am to be moving to your court tomorrow. I trust you’ll make sure I have plenty of tulip magnolias in my yard?”

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A laugh escaped my lips and it felt good. “You’ll have a gazillion of them. I plan to have a ton as well.”

Ember’s head cocked to the side and her eyes grew teary. “Queen of the Blossom Court. I can only imagine how beautiful our new home will be.”

My heart fluttered just thinking about it. The Land of the Fae was growing and evolving. It was my turn to make a difference, only I didn’t know what that difference was yet.

Ember rubbed a hand over the cute green top covering her swollen belly, swiping at the croissant crumbs. “Has your brother decided what his court will be named?” she asked.

I laughed. “Not yet. You know how Kale is. He’s a spur-of-the-moment kind of guy. He plans on deciding when he sees his land.”

Since my twin brother and I had been connected since birth, we decided to take this next step together before the Equinox Ball. In my mind, I had an idea of what I wanted my kingdom to look like. But in the end, it was up to the Land of the Fae; it knew what was in my heart.

Reaching for Ember’s hand, I clasped it and smiled. “What excites me more than anything is knowing your daughter will be the first fae born into my court. So, I’m officially appointing myself her faerie godmother.”

A tear slipped out the corner of Ember’s eye and she gasped. “Oh, Lia. I’d be

honored to have you as Korra's godmother. I would've asked you sooner, but I know you have a lot going on."

I waved her off. "You're practically my family, Ember. I've always considered you a sister."

Her mother, Naida, was my mom's servant and also a close friend. We were born on the same day, just two years apart. After that, we were inseparable.

Ember swiped her tears away and smiled. "I love you, Lia. I honestly don't know what I'd do without you." She sucked in a breath and peered over at the Eiffel Tower. "I wouldn't be this happy if it wasn't for you. My family isn't royal, but you included me in everything, and gave me opportunities I wouldn't have ever had."

"Hey," I said, squeezing her hand so she'd look at me. When she did, I peered into her beautiful green eyes. "You're my best friend. I would do anything and everything for you."

Our waitress, who had bright red glasses and cropped brown hair, came over and beamed at us. "Puis-je vous apporter autre chose?"

I smiled back. "Non, merci. Je pense que nous sommes sur le point de partir." She nodded and grinned again before moving to one of her other tables. "All right, Ember, we need to get home," I pressed, letting her hand go so I could reach into my pocket and set some euros down on the table. "I have to get ready for this afternoon."

Taking her hand again, I helped her up and she groaned as she stood. "Hopefully, I'll still fit in my dress. I think I gained ten pounds eating all those croissants and cookies."

We laughed as we headed away from the café to the bustling sidewalk. All I had to do

was summon a portal to the Land of the Fae, but I couldn't do that with so many people around. I had to find a quiet, hidden place where no one would see us.

Arm in arm, we strolled down the walkway toward the Eiffel Tower. The warmth across my skin was still there, which meant Bayleon and Bastian were still around. I glanced over my shoulder to see if I could see them, but they were nowhere to be found.

Ember sighed and clutched me tighter. "It's sad to think I won't be coming back here for a while. We'll have to take Korra to the café when she gets older. Maybe when you have a daughter, they'll be best friends like we are."

I snorted. "It's not looking like I'll be having kids anytime soon."

Ember bumped me with her shoulder. "You never know."

I wanted to enjoy a few more minutes of our time in Paris, but that swiftly stopped when my skin broke out in chills. Quickly, I pulled Ember behind me so I could see where the magic was coming from.

Ember gasped and held onto my arm. "Lia, what's going on?" I could feel magic all around me, but it couldn't touch me. It was strange, something I'd never felt. "Lia?"

I looked up and down the street, but nothing seemed unusual. "I don't know what it is. I feel magic, but it's not our kind."

"Could it be shifters?"

I shook my head. "No. This is different."

As I scanned our surroundings, I saw him: a young man around his late twenties with

a blank stare, walking unsteadily down the middle of the busy road. Horns honked and people yelled, but the man kept walking toward the river. The magic swirled around him, but I knew no one else could see it, not even Ember.

“He’s going to get hurt walking between the cars,” Ember cried. “What if he gets hit?”

A few seconds later, that was precisely what happened. We watched him fly in the air and land on the concrete with a sickening thud. Ember slapped a hand over her mouth and screamed just as Ren appeared around the corner, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, not his warrior gear.

“What happened?” he demanded, wrapping Ember in his arms.

I didn’t have time to explain. “Take her home,” I shouted as I ran into the street toward the injured man.

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Before I could get to him, I caught two figures in an alleyway between two buildings. Bayleon and Bastian. They stayed hidden in the shadows while I knelt beside the man. Blood oozed out of his nose and ears, and I could tell he had several broken bones. He was breathing, but only barely.

“Oh my God,” a woman cried, rushing to join me.

Other people were milling about and getting on their phones. I didn’t have much time.

“Call 9-1-1,” I snapped at the lady. Her fingers shook as she stood and pulled out her phone. Placing a hand on the guy’s shoulder, I took a deep breath and watched his eyes open. He tried to speak, but I shook my head. “Shh, it’s okay. This isn’t the end for you.”

I summoned my healing magic and jolted it through his body in one quick surge. His body twitched, and he gasped as everything healed inside of him. More people began to run over, and I jumped to my feet. I met the man’s eyes one last time before disappearing through the crowd and to the alley where I knew Bayleon and Bastian were waiting for me. Of course, I knew I’d see their disapproval once I faced them. My people didn’t go out of their way to save a human.

Bastian grabbed my arm and pulled me further into the alley, with Bayleon following close behind. They were in their warrior gear, and I was thankful no one had seen them.

“We have to get out of here,” Bastian warned.

We turned the corner to another alley, and no one was around.

Bayleon stopped in front of me, concern etched on his face. “Did you feel the magic?” There was an urgency to his tone I’d never heard from him before.

“Yes. Do you know what it was?”

Bayleon and Bastian glanced at each other, and I knew I wouldn’t like what they had to say. I wished I could see into their eyes. Bastian ran a hand through his hair while Bayleon released a heavy sigh and moved closer to me.

“I don’t know what it means, but we do know the magic is familiar.”

“How?” I asked, darting my eyes back and forth between them both.

Bastian’s jaw tensed. “It’s sourmagic, Lia.” He fisted a hand over his heart. “That power felt like Tyvar magic, only different somehow. Ours doesn’t affect men.”

“So, what are you saying?”

He shook his head and Bayleon was the one who answered. “We don’t know,” he said, turning his back on me.

His long, blond hair hung down his back with intricate braids on either side. He slowly turned to face me, and even though I couldn’t see his eyes through the mask covering his face, they seemed to be locked on mine. His words were low and serious.

“This is something we’ve never seen before, Lia. Whoever or whatever it is using that magic, is very powerful. I don’t know what we’re dealing with.”

A chill ran down my spine as I nodded in agreement. All I knew was that it couldn't be good.

Chapter 3

Bayleon

I felt trapped inside my body, the unbearable pain and torment becoming almost too much to bear. I tried to distract myself in any way I could, but the pain and agony remained relentless no matter how hard I tried. Every day it seemed to grow more and more unbearable, and I had no idea how much longer I could keep ignoring it. I'd fought against my desires and cravings for so long that my body was starved. I was born to live off pleasure and I'd been without it for seven years. Focusing on Lia and keeping her safe was the only thing that kept me sane, but even I knew my limits.

The mask I wore over my eyes kept Lia and my brother from seeing my anguish, but soon, I would have to make a choice. Either stay and risk condemning innocent lives, ultimately resulting in my death, or leave and betray everything I held dear. Those were my choices.

As Bastian and I walked behind the royals, I felt sweat pouring down my back. Lia was up front with her parents—the king and queen of the Spring Court—and on her other side was her twin brother, Kale. Lia's long red hair cascaded down her back like a fiery waterfall and contrasted sharply with the midnight blue of her ball gown. She stood tall and proud, her straight posture befitting a warrior, a queen. But even though her appearance was almost angelic, Lia was anything but. She was the exact replica of her mother.

I could feel magic all around us; it was potent in the air. The royal fae were the most powerful people I'd ever met, and there were over twenty of them in attendance, all of whom were Lia's aunts, uncles, and cousins. The rest of the people gathered

around were close family friends and all the hundreds of fae who planned on following Lia and Kale to their new kingdoms.

Today Lia was going to become queen of her court and her brother, the king of his; their family wanted to witness it. Out of my two hundred years of existence, I'd never imagined I'd be here. I was an outsider, surrounded by royals and loved by them, but I wasn't one of them.

We were almost at the border of the Spring Court and the unclaimed land beyond that. The sun was never hot in the Spring Court, but it felt like an inferno today. I looked over at my brother to see if I could find any clues that he felt the same, but his face was an unreadable mask. He wouldn't say anything if he were suffering, just like I haven't.

Lia and her family all gathered by the border, laughing and smiling with each other. "She's lovely," Bastian murmured more to himself than to me.

There was an affection to his voice that I'd heard often over the past couple of years. Clearly, he loved Lia, but just like me, he'd chosen to keep it silent. Nothing would ever happen between her and us and he knew it.

I'd often wondered who she would choose, but that was another torment I tried not to think of. Bastian and I were different. He was more open to change, whereas I preferred tradition.

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“We haven’t spoken much, brother,” I said, looking over at him.

He focused on Lia, his jaw tight and his hand clenched on the hilt of his sword. “Things are about to change,” he replied. He peered over at me with his silver mask hiding his eyes and shrugged. “I can’t say that I’m looking forward to it.”

He spun around and disappeared in the mottled mosaic of the crowd just as Lia’s mother, Queen Meliantha, strode closer. Her amethyst eyes bore into me, shining with the same intensity as her daughter’s, although Lia’s had wisps of silver and gold that sparkled in the light. I first met Meliantha many years ago when she was captured by myself and the rest of the Tyvar while in the Mystical Forest, searching for her prince. I didn’t know who she was then, at least not until she looked into my eyes. When my powers of seduction didn’t work on her, I knew she was special. Before I let her go, I had asked her for one favor. It was a gift that has stayed with me until this very day.

Meliantha drew closer and smiled. “Why aren’t you up there with my daughter?” she asked, giving me a skeptical stare. She came up beside me and turned back toward the crowd, grinning at all the guests.

“Your Highness, Lia doesn’t need me by her side,” I said. “She has proved that on numerous occasions.”

Meliantha tilted her head back and laughed. “Lia may be able to take care of herself, but you and I both know she needs you. You and Bastian.” She tentatively cleared her throat and gave me a sidelong glance. “And speaking of your brother,” she paused, “he seems a little distant lately. Is there something going on?”

I shook my head as I felt the tension well up in my chest. “If there were, he hasn’t spoken to me about it.”

Meliantha stepped in front of me, her gaze narrowed with curiosity. “Well, whatever’s going on, I hope it gets worked out. So much change is happening in the Land of the Fae right now.”

I scanned the royals and my attention landed on Lia with her cousin, Aidan, from the Summer Court. He was a dragon shifter, a fierce warrior like his father, with raven-colored hair and burning green eyes. He stood confidently in his tall boots and laughed at one of Lia’s jokes.

“It seems there’s a new king in the Summer Court,” I pointed out.

Meliantha let out a chortle and beamed at her nephew across the meadow. “We have two dragon kings now. Aidan claimed his court last week without telling anyone and wanted to see if they’d notice. He may have his mother’s looks, but he inherited my brother’s slyness!” The rest of Lia’s cousins gathered around her and Aidan. “He calls it the Court of Fire and Water,” Meliantha said, smiling.

That certainly was fitting, considering his love for the sea and his dragon fire. Meliantha sighed wistfully, watching Lia and Kale banter back and forth with their cousins.

“I just wish all of them would claim their courts already. I hate that Lia and Kale have taken as long as they have. The land is ready for them.”

I felt the earth tremble beneath my feet and the magic surge all around us.

“That is true,” I agreed. “But your daughter is stubborn, just like you were at her age. Lia was determined to make sure she was strong enough to protect her court.”

A proud smile curved her lips. “That is my daughter.” Then she met my gaze and she placed a hand on my arm. “Have you not gone back to visit the rest of the Tyvar?”

I shook my head. “I left that life behind a long time ago.”

My bond with Meliantha was strong and comforting, and I enjoyed my life in the Spring Court. Lia had become a part of that life, and I desperately wanted to stay and be with her.

The warmth of Meliantha’s healing magic radiated through me, though it wasn’t enough to quell the cravings that stirred in my chest. Meliantha gave me a sad smile before she removed her hand, then sighed and said, “If only we knew how the curse began. We could start there and find a way to break it.”

“If only,” I murmured back.

The curse was never going to be broken. My mother talked about it when I was a little boy, but that was long ago.

I glanced at Lia, who stood just a few yards away from me, and the yearning that filled my body was overwhelming. My throat tightened as I considered the fact that Lia would never be mine. One day she would find a king to be with, and I dreaded the kind of pain that would bring me.

Chapter4

Lia

“Congratulations, Aidan!” I beamed, admiring the new king of the Court of Fire and Water’s outfit.

A fire-red cape with a golden embroidery marked with the Court's insignia was draped over his shoulder, giving him a regal demeanor. Aidan winked and offered me some words of encouragement, "Now it's your turn. Good luck, Lia." He turned to my brother and slapped him on the shoulder. "You too, cousin."

Kale scoffed and gave him a sly smile. "You always had to beat me at everything, didn't you?"

Aidan's hearty chuckle bounced off the trees as he walked away. "Hey, I can't help that you waited so long, old man."

As his laughter faded away, I cast my gaze toward our family and friends and the hundreds of fae who were going to cross the border and live in my court. It warmed my heart to see so many. Looking at them all, I focused on my cousin Ella, now the Frost Court queen. Her milky white hair was swept back in a loose braid with icy blue gems twinkling in her locks. She practically glowed with joy as she clasped hands with her Shadow fae king Kai, his arm tenderly intertwined around her expanding waist. They were happy, their court was flourishing, and they'd be welcoming a new family member in a few months.

Ella had changed the Land of the Fae by allowing members of the Shadow fae—who were once our enemies, along with half-fae and half-mortals—to reside in her court. It opened up a new world of magic and possibilities that had flourished because of it, sparking something inside of me that I wanted to bring to my own court.

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Kale turned to me, his voice serious. “Are you ready?”

After taking a deep breath, I nodded. “I am,” I replied with a smile, admiring my brother in his Spring Court warrior uniform.

Soon the symbol on his chest will change to the crest of his new court, just like mine will when we have them designed. Kale had our father’s broad shoulders and strong jawline. Though Kale resembled our dad in almost every way, he had the same amethyst eyes as my mother and me. His hair was always something of a mystery. It was a vivid red upon birth, but as we grew older, it faded to jet black, like our father’s. However, you could still make out the faintest hints of red in the sunlight.

I glanced back at our family and friends gathered behind us; they stood silently, watching as we made our way to the border of the Spring Court. I could feel their anticipation as if it was an electric current running through me.

As we reached the edge of the unclaimed land, I felt an excited flutter in my stomach. The meadow stretched out into a lush, green expanse that seemed to have no end. In just a few minutes, everything was going to change.

I sank to my knees in the soft grass, taking a moment to feel the sun’s rays on my skin and breathe in the sweet scent of lilac and hemlock. Memories of my childhood rushed back, of running in the meadows with Kale and Ember, exploring and dreaming of greatness. My heart raced, and I could feel my hands trembling with anticipation. I wanted to prove that even without the benefit of birthright, I was worthy of ruling over a kingdom.

Looking up, I observed the crowd that had come to witness this special moment, and two distinct figures stood out: Bayleon and Bastian, who met my gaze with their own, even though their eyes were hidden behind their masks. Our connection had grown stronger in the past seven years, but even more so the past year. Lately, however, something seemed different. The tension was almost unbearable sometimes, and it'd been that way for the past few months. They seemed to be hiding something from me, and a part of me questioned their desire to remain in my court or if they were considering returning to the Tyvar.

Nonetheless, I was happy to have them here with me today and looked forward to being alone with them tonight in my castle. Maybe with us being separated from my family, they'll be more willing to open up to me.

A soft smile touched my lips as I focused on my two protectors. Bastian's demeanor was alight with mischief, his mouth tilted up in a smirk while Bayleon stood stoic like a statue. He had always been the serious of the two.

I tore my gaze away from them and focused back on my land. I sifted through the grass, and as soon as I felt the earth beneath my fingers, the land seemed to come alive before my eyes.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see a glimmering haze of magic surrounding my brother. It was an incredible sight to behold. I felt a surge of power coursing through my veins and radiating from the ground into my hands, making me feel more powerful than I had ever been before and robbing me of breath for a split second.

"I'm here," I whispered, knowing the land could hear me. "I know it took a while, but I needed to feel worthy, to know that I deserve this great honor. I vow to be a good queen, and I will protect the realm with my life."

A gust of wind lifted my hair and it billowed softly around me, temporarily blocking

my view of the brilliant landscape which had started to take shape in the meadow. I was entranced as I brushed my hair away from my face and looked upon the rolling hills of different colored flowers. Tulip and saucer magnolia trees painted the border between Kale's court and mine. I felt a wave of energy surround me like a blanket of warm power. I could feel the magic of the Blossom Court pulse through me.

When I reached up to touch my head, I felt the crown, made of vines and delicate blossoms with sparkling gems in the center. Across from me, Kale's court was coming to life, shimmering with a winding river that wove its way throughout his Court of Rivers. I heard a gentle, hushed gasp of admiration from behind me and turned to see my aunt Calista and her daughter, Carys. They were mirror images of each other, their blond hair cascading down to their shoulders and green eyes that sparkled with the same intensity. Calista was the only one in my family endowed with the magical ability to manipulate all four elements—earth, air, fire, and water. She could create a city simply by conjuring the elements. Calista had passed the same powers to not only Carys, but to her son, Merrick, as well; he was the eldest of my cousins. My aunt named him after her guardian who had died trying to protect her from the dark sorcerer.

Carys cracked her knuckles and winked at me. "Are we ready to do this?"

"You're really going to build my new home?" I asked.

Carys quirked an eyebrow. "Do you trust me?" She gestured grandly toward her brother, who strode confidently beside Kale. "We can always get Merrick to do it. I doubt his idea will be what you have in mind!"

Merrick waved a hand in the air, and in an instant, a majestic palace sprang up in the distance. It was constructed of polished gray stones, each window framed by ornate stone archways. The castle was surrounded by a lush forest, with a winding river snaking through it. It was magnificent. Kale and his warriors, accompanied by the fae

who had decided to join his royal court, marched forward with a purpose. They were going to their new home.

I couldn't help the anticipation bubbling up in my chest as I looked at Carys.

Her eyes twinkled with promise. "Ready?"

I glanced around at my people, who were as eager as I was to see where we would be living. Ember had tears in her eyes, one hand resting lovingly on her pregnant belly while Ren beamed beside her. Bayleon and Bastian stood together, their faces filled with awe.

Taking a deep breath, I replied, "I'm ready."

Carys nodded and raised her arms. Then, the ground began to tremble beneath our feet, and a mere few seconds later, an exquisite palace appeared before us. I had never seen anything more beautiful. The stones were the color of old ivory, covered in thick vines with colorful flowers.

As I looked around the Blossom Court, I could feel my heart swelling with emotion. Hot tears stung my eyes. I sensed Bayleon and Bastian behind me, their presence heavy as they watched me intently. The others huddled around me, ready to venture into their new home. I met their expectant gazes and smiled through my tears.

"It's time," I whispered, my voice full of hope. "Let's go home."

* * *

Carys had outdone herself. My castle was everything I could've ever dreamed of, with its tall towers, large ornate doors, and stained-glass windows that shone in the sunlight.

Ren and Ember's cottage stood at one end of the palace grounds, a cozy little structure with a thatched roof and a rose garden. Carys had even built several other dwellings around the palace grounds, each decorated according to their inhabitants' desires. Tiny villages had begun to form, and everywhere I looked, I could see the beginnings of a beautiful kingdom.

The sun had finally begun to dip below the horizon, and the palace was filled with the hustle and bustle of people settling in for the night. The smell of warm lemon bread wafted through the air, creating a peaceful atmosphere.

Ella and I made our way through the Great Room, the sound of our footsteps echoing off the cold marble floor added a sense of grandeur to the space.

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Ella glanced back at me, worry evident in her gaze. “I hope Bayleon and Bastian will be all right with Kai shadowing them. He’s done an amazing job leading our warriors, but I know he’s still trying to get used to our way of life here.”

I gave her arm a gentle squeeze, offering a reassuring smile. “It’ll be fine.”

Kai had been an adversary of our kingdom before becoming a king. Since then, the Frost Court had experienced incredible growth and now welcomed an assortment of Shadow fae and half-fae from the mortal realm. The Land of the Fae was no longer a place only for purebloods; half-mortal individuals were now allowed to exist here, and our realm had never been more powerful.

As we neared the two thrones, I beamed at Ella, loving how beautiful she was with her baby bump.

“How many people have you brought to the Land of the Fae?” I asked her, carefully leading her to one of the royal thrones.

Ella sat down and grinned as I took my seat next to her. “Honestly, I have no idea,” she admitted, “but I know it’s been thousands. It’s all so amazing. Our kingdom is changing every day.”

It certainly was. I could only imagine what the Land of the Fae would be like in another five hundred years. Our magic was constantly evolving. Ella quirked a bemused smile at me, and a spark of mischievousness lit up her dark brown eyes.

“What is it?” I asked, intrigued by the expression on her face.

She shrugged and turned her gaze to the Great Room entrance where Bayleon, Bastian and Kai were walking through the door.

“It’s something I wanted to discuss with you earlier,” she said in a hushed voice, moving closer to me. “But with everything going on, we never had a chance.” I couldn’t help but think I knew what was coming. I raised my eyebrows, inviting her to go on. She widened her grin, taking a quick glance over at Bayleon and Bastian before refocusing on me. “Have you told them you love them yet?”

My pulse raced and I grabbed her hand, clasping it firmly. “Shh . . . not so loud!” I cast a nervous glance toward the men, but luckily, they were still deep in conversation. “And no, I haven’t told them anything,” I muttered, keeping my voice low. “What would be the point? There’s already so much tension between them and me.”

Ella shook her head. “That’s because they’re in love with you, too.”

The air grew heavy in my lungs, and I felt my body freeze. Though I was aware Bayleon and Bastian held immense loyalty to me as their princess, and now their queen, they’d never once said they loved me like that. Even if I could sometimes feel their emotions toward me, which I was sure I had, they were noble men; they would never blur the line between duty and feelings. Moreover, there was the issue of loving them both. There was no way I could ever choose one over the other.

My gaze shifted to Ella’s face. “How do you know they’re in love with me? They’ve never admitted it to me.”

Her smile softened a bit. “And they probably never will. But I heard it straight from Bastian when he asked me to dance at the Winter Solstice Ball.”

My heart raced. “What did he say?”

Ella glanced at Bastian and her lips curved into a faint, sad smile. “I asked him point blank if he was in love with you. His response took my breath away. Even more so when I saw how his eyes lit up when he looked at you.” I was barely breathing, waiting for her to go on. Ella met my gaze with a soft, sorrowful expression. “From the conversation, I don’t think Bayleon or Bastian have expressed their feelings for you yet to each other. But Bastian said you’d never choose him over his brother and that he didn’t deserve your love.”

I felt a sharp stab of pain in my chest and I clutched it with my hand, praying the ache would fade away. Ella’s words were like a dagger to the heart.

I could see the two men growing nearer from the corner of my eye, but I couldn’t bring myself to look at them yet. I wasn’t ready. Ella placed a warm, comforting hand over mine and closed her eyes. The faint sound of music floated outside the Great Room, and the light from the giant crystal chandelier danced across the walls.

“You’re a queen now, Lia,” she said softly. “We’re in the Great Room of your Blossom Court palace, and tomorrow is the Equinox Ball. Everyone is going to be here to celebrate with you and Kale. So maybe it’s time to talk to your guys. If you don’t, it will only make you more miserable.”

I sighed. “And what exactly do I say to them?”

Ella squeezed my hand gently and opened her eyes, looking back at me with determination. “The truth, Lia,” she said before Kai stepped up to the thrones and held out an arm for her.

She glanced back at me again before taking his arm and was whisked away down the two marble stairs toward Bayleon and Bastian, who watched us silently. For the past couple of months, the silence had gotten more frequent.

Ella looked back at me one last time before they left, and I silently nodded in agreement. Once the Equinox Ball was over, I would talk to them. I was never afraid of the thought of going into battle and fighting till the death, but conveying my feelings was going to be the hardest thing I had ever done. How could I explain that I loved them both? It was selfish to feel the way I did; selfishness was never a quality I had previously connected with myself.

“Do you wish us to accompany you to your chambers, my queen?” Bayleon asked.

I looked at them both, their eyes obscured by their silver face masks. It had been a long time since I had seen their eyes.

“I’m ready,” I replied, joining them.

We made our way out of the Great Room and into the main foyer of the palace, a tulip magnolia tree at its center with colorful pink and purple petals in full bloom. My heart raced as we ascended the marble staircase and walked down the private hallway to our designated rooms. The guest quarters were on the other side of the castle, so it was pretty silent.

When we arrived at my door, I took a deep breath and spun around to face them. My heart raced and my stomach twisted as I gazed at them. I wanted to reach out and feel the warmth of their skin, to gaze into their midnight-blue eyes and experience our conversations like before. Bayleon and Bastian had both changed—it was as though they were two completely different people. All the conversations we used to have, all the laughter that used to fill the air between us—it was gone now, and I felt so powerless. I could only wait for them to speak, but they were entombed in a heavy silence.

Finally, I forced myself to break it. “Have you two discovered anything about the strange magic we felt in the mortal realm yesterday?”

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Bayleon's brow creased in worry as he shook his head. "No," he said softly.

Bastian heaved out a sigh, and despite his best efforts, I could hear the fatigue in his voice. "Nothing yet—but we're keeping an eye out. I can't remember ever feeling something like that before." He briefly hesitated before he continued. "Let's hope it stays away from here."

"Let's hope," I agreed, my gaze darting between them. Bastian's jaw ticked and his fists clenched, mirroring Bayleon's gesture. Then, a heavy silence descended over us, making their clashing auras of energy and desire almost tangible. "Will you both save me a dance at the ball tomorrow?" I finally said, breaking the silence.

After a long pause, Bayleon nodded, and even though I couldn't really see his eyes behind the mask, I could tell he was searching my face as he stepped back.

"As you wish, my queen," he said softly, bowing his head.

Just as he finished speaking, Bastian spoke up, too. "I would be honored."

Without another look back, they strode away in opposite directions to their rooms which were connected to mine. I was tempted to use the secret passages between our rooms to try and get some answers, but I knew it wasn't the right time. They were hiding something from me, and I was determined to find out what it was.

Chapter5

Bastian

Sleep had eluded me once more. I watched the sun rise over the Blossom Court, its brilliant beams signaling a new day. I was surrounded by life and beauty, but all I felt in my heart was a pit of burning despair. I had been struggling against the torment for ages, pushing through it with all my might. I didn't know how much longer I could last. Giving into the temptation would be so easy; I could just leave and go back to the Tyvar, get my fill of women and then return to the Blossom Court. I'd have my strength back and the pain would be gone. The thought seemed simple, yet it was anything but. If I left the Blossom Court, it would betray everything I loved and held dear. Even if I were allowed to be with those women, it would never be Lia; she was the one thing I desired more than anything else.

The Equinox Ball was taking place at the worst time possible. I was already on edge and now had to witness all the suitors vying for Lia's attention. It was only a matter of time before she would choose her future king and I would have to leave—I had promised to remain by her side and protect her, but my grip on sanity was slipping away. I couldn't watch her with another man without crumbling.

I grasped onto the window ledge until my skin split and bled, hoping that if I inflicted enough physical pain, it would nullify the emotional pain, but it didn't work.

Taking a deep breath, I slowly exhaled, surveying the thousands of fae from the different courts gathered at the borders between the Blossom Court, the Spring Court, and Kale's Court of Rivers. My warriors were all in place and I could feel the swell of pride in my chest. I stood before the full-length mirror, fastening the bronze buckles of my vambraces, each one etched with a design of a warrior slaying a dragon.

As soon as I was finished, I'd join them to do my duty as one of their captains. I had promised Lia that I would save her a dance, but there was no way I would stay at the ball any longer than necessary.

There was a gentle knock on the door, followed by the gentle hum of a young voice.

“Bastian?”

It was Shaylah, one of Lia’s servants. My hair was still damp from my shower, and I quickly ran my fingers through it before slipping on my mask. When I opened the door, Shaylah’s smile widened as she held out a black tux with the Blossom Court crest stitched into the jacket with silver and gold threads and glittering jewels. It was something a royal would wear, not a warrior.

“What is that for?” I asked.

Shaylah stood in front of me, her honey-colored eyes sweet with innocence. She came from a long line of wood nymphs who had served the royal families their entire lives, and she was one of the first to ask Lia if she could join her court when she became queen. I remembered Lia’s joyous smile that day quite well, and I knew many other fae would soon follow suit.

“I’m so glad I got here before you went downstairs,” Shaylah said, her voice slightly shaky. I took the tux from her, and she sighed in relief. “The queen asked me to give this to you. She wants you and Bayleon to be her escorts to the ball.”

It was the last thing I wanted to hear. Lia and I have been to many lavish galas together in the past seven years, but I wasn’t expecting her to need an escort for the Equinox ball. It was the one event every year she’d go to alone so that potential suitors could court her. I knew Lia was tired of people pressuring her to find a spouse, and typically, I would’ve been thrilled to fill the role of her escort. But tonight, I wasn’t sure I could muster the strength to be near her.

“Thank you,” I replied, nodding at Shaylah, praying she hadn’t noticed my hesitation.

“I’ll go get dressed.”

Shaylah bowed and stepped back, and her braid, adorned with various flowers, swayed lightly behind her. “Have a wonderful night,” she said with a warm smile.

She disappeared down the hallway, and I shut the door so I could quickly change. When I opened the door again and stepped out, I saw my brother down the hall, leaving his room dressed in a tux similar to mine. His long platinum hair hung straight down his back and had intricate braids on the side. I ran a hand through my short tresses, and a part of me missed who I used to be. There was a time when I wanted to keep with the old traditions, but it wasn’t as common anymore, not with Lia’s generation. The Land of the Fae was evolving, and I didn’t want to be left behind. Bayleon kept with the old ways, and it worked for him, but I wanted to be a part of Lia’s world, to make her see me differently.

We stopped in front of Lia’s bedroom door and even though the silver mask hid Bayleon’s eyes, I could see a tiredness in them that I’d never seen before.

“Good evening, brother,” he called out.

“Same to you,” I replied. “Did you know this was going to happen?” I asked, flourishing a hand between us.

Bayleon shook his head, the muscles in his jaw clenching. “No. I was just about to join our warriors when Shaylah came to my door.”

I nodded. “Same.”

Bayleon stepped forward, his voice low but demanding. “I know something is going on with you. You’ve never been one to keep secrets. Do you have anything you need to say to me?”

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I could say so many things, but I refused to appear weak in front of my brother. Nothing ever seemed to bother him. I didn't want him to know of my pain, of how much I wanted and needed Lia. We'd shared many women before but none of them were her. She would never choose me over him, and I knew it. Did a part of me begrudge him that? Yes. I was never one to be jealous of any man, but deep down I knew Lia loved him. She cared for me too, but I had yet to know the full extent. Bayleon had never told me his true feelings, but I knew the truth. He loved her, too.

Before I could give a neutral response, Lia opened the door, wearing a midnight-blue dress and a crown of vines and blossoms. Her shimmering golden skin sparkled in the light, making me want to touch her and inhale her sweet flowery scent.

She smiled radiantly as she looked at us and said, "I'm glad Shaylah caught you in time." She grabbed our arms and linked hers with ours as we walked down the hall. My heart started to flutter the moment her hand touched mine.

"You look breathtakingly beautiful," I whispered, hoping she couldn't hear the strain in my voice.

"Gorgeous," Bayleon added.

Lia beamed at us and held us tighter as we continued on. Music was already playing outside, and I could hear everyone chattering and laughing.

"Thank you," Lia replied softly. "You both look quite dashing yourselves."

Spending a whole night beside her was going to be complicated; it was too tempting.

All I could think about was slipping my fingers through her hair and feeling her body close to mine as I kissed her. It wouldn't take away all the pain, but it would give me a little break.

When we arrived at the exit, I looked around. People from all of the fae courts were there, set apart by their differences. Winter fae had shimmering skin, Summer fae were tanned, and Spring and Fall fae had a light golden color. But Bayleon and I weren't like them. We chose to live in Spring, but our appearance stayed the same. We were cursed from birth, living in the Mystical Forest, and condemned from that second. The reaction was predictable at every ball we attended with Lia: some were angry, some were fearful, and some desired us. Fathers would keep their daughters away and husbands their wives. A few women always wanted to play with fire. I had lived off lovemaking for centuries, and it was almost painful to deny it when someone tried to give themselves to me. Even now, I could sense their longing, calling me to use my charms on them.

Keeping my eyes forward, I walked with Lia and Bayleon through the crowd. Everyone congratulated Lia on her new court. It was supposed to be a night she'd remember forever, a night for us all to enjoy, but I already wanted it done.

As soon as we stepped across the invisible barrier that marked the Court of Rivers, I could feel the magic in the air. The power of the court seemed to buzz, and I envied those who could control the elements. I imagined what it would be like to draw power from the earth and manipulate the wind; it was a luxury I'd never possess.

All the fae gathered around had these abilities, many of whom probably failed to recognize their luck. I wished I could join them, but my curse of seduction seemed like a heavy burden compared to their elemental gifts. We strolled alongside the river that snaked around Kale's palace and the tranquil water reflected the full moon's light.

We soon arrived back at the Blossom Court, where the air was filled with music and laughter. Tiny lights hung from magnolia trees, glittering like stars, and a long table had been set up near the trees, with hundreds of glasses filled with blue, sparkling faerie wine. I knew that one glass of this wine was more potent than three shots of whiskey.

Lia's grip tightened on my arm, and I followed her gaze toward a tall figure in Spring Court garb. His name was Cas, one of her former lovers, who was about a hundred and fifty years younger than me but closer to her age. He had trained with me on many occasions; he was a fierce warrior yet egotistical. That's why Lia had ended their relationship when Bayleon and I became her protectors.

Cas bent his head, his green eyes burning with longing as he looked up at Lia. "Good evening, Your Highness. Will you do me the honor of a dance?"

Lia shot me an almost playful glance before addressing Bayleon. "I will if my escorts don't mind."

Her words hung in the air between us like a challenge. Bayleon shifted his arm away from Lia and glanced at me, unable to refute the suggestion without appearing rude. It was apparent that he didn't want her dancing with Cas either.

"If that's what you wish, we will not stand in your way," Bayleon suggested.

Lia's eyes glinted with what seemed to be annoyance at Bayleon's answer, or perhaps disappointment. I couldn't help but wonder if this was her way of testing us or if she merely wanted to use Bayleon and me as an excuse to avoid the other men all night. The smirk on Cas's face widened as he offered his arm to Lia, and they set off to dance under the magnolia trees with everyone else. Over the past couple of years, I'd been able to handle seeing her around other men, but now I just couldn't take it anymore.

“I need a drink,” I grumbled, turning my back so I wouldn’t have to see Lia with Cas. I went straight over to the table of faerie wine and tossed back a glass, the liquid tingling down my throat. Before I could grab another one, Bayleon’s disapproving huff echoed behind me. “Do you have a problem?” I snapped, picking up more wine.

Bayleon sighed. “You’re on edge, brother. I want to know what’s going on with you.”

I jerked around to face him, keeping my eyes on him as I swallowed all the wine in one gulp. I saw the look on his face when he let go of Lia so she could dance with Cas. Setting the empty glass down, I stepped forward and squared off with Bayleon. His tight expression and rigid posture made it clear he wanted to discuss something important. I had to know the truth.

“You want to know what’s going on with me?” I countered, tightening my fists. “What about you? You didn’t want Lia dancing with Cas any more than I did.” Bayleon stiffened and looked away, his jaw tight. The air between us seemed unbearably heavy. He said nothing, so I continued, “Dammit, Bayleon, be honest with me, brother.” He met my eyes and even through the silver mask, I could see a wildness in them I’d never seen before.

His chest rose and fell rapidly as he spoke in a low growl, “Fine. I don’t like her around other men, especially ones she’s been intimate with.” His admission was the first time he’d ever revealed such a thing to me.

“Are you in love with her?” I asked.

We both stole a glance at Lia, lost in the music and oblivious to what was transpiring between us.

“I am,” he confessed, meeting my gaze again. “I have a feeling you are, too.”

Desperate to close off all feeling, I raised the crystal flute of bluish-colored wine and held it aloft as a toast. “It doesn’t matter. We’re not worthy of her. And even if we were, she’d choose you over me.”

I was almost surprised by my words, the bitterness and resignation that had spilled out of me. I needed to get away before the terrible anger and sorrow broke out of me, so I quickly placed my glass on the table as the musicians wound down their song. Just then, Lia came over and looked at us suspiciously.

“What’s going on?” she asked softly.

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“Nothing, my queen,” I replied with a bow of my head. “I was just about to leave.” She moved closer to me, extending her hand and gazing into my eyes with authority and tenderness.

“Okay, but I want you to dance with me first.” Then she winked. “That’s an order from your queen.”

Bayleon backed away and I grabbed Lia’s hand, feeling the pulse of electricity run through me the very second I touched her delicate skin. Having her this close was a cruel kind of torture, a punishment I certainly deserved more than anyone else. I had taken the lives of many women due to my cursed nature, which was why I figured I didn’t deserve love or joy.

Lia tugged me behind her, and we moved past the dancing people to a tranquil spot located on the side of the castle. A circle of blooming pear trees grew from the ground, their white petals floating in the air. She dragged me into the middle of the circle, creating a barrier between us and everyone else.

With her hand still in mine, she made no move to let me go. Heart racing, I stared into her eyes, hating that I was about to tell her I had to leave her court. I was afraid of what I’d do if I stayed. My fear was that I’d end up hurting her somehow.

“I thought you wanted to dance,” I said to her.

Lia smiled and it was such a beautiful sight. I was going to miss it. She let my hand go and bit her lip, a nervous gesture I’d only seen from her a handful of times. But Lia wasn’t the type to be scared of anything.

“I do but I had other plans tonight,” she murmured, moving closer to me so our bodies almost touched. Her lips pursed when she peered up at me. “Needless to say, it didn’t involve dancing with Cas.”

My voice came out low, almost possessive sounding when I spoke. “Trust me. I didn’t want you to.” She smiled as if that relieved her.

“Why?” she asked, her voice breathless.

I had to tell her the truth if I was going to leave. I’d kept it inside for way too long. I slowly raised my hands until my fingers intertwined with hers and my thumbs rested against her cheeks.

Lia’s gaze was intense; her eyes spoke volumes as if she had been waiting for me to make my move. I could feel the heat radiating from her body, and I knew the distance between us was bridging.

“Because I’m in love with you, Lia. I have been for a really long time.” I spoke in a low voice, my lips inches away from hers.

When she responded, “I’m in love with you, too,” a wave of emotion crashed through me. Her words were like a shock to my system, and my heart raced as she leaned further into my touch. Our eyes locked, and I could only focus on her full lips that I had fantasized about for years. All I wanted was to feel her against me, to know what it would be like to make love to her.

All of my desires ran rampant at that moment and I felt they might consume me. I was on the brink of losing control . . . and knew it’d be too much for her.

Hurting her would destroy me.

Chapter6

Lia

A sigh of relief escaped my lips as I finally said the words I'd wanted to say for years. Bastian's arms tightened around me, and I melted against him. I longed to see the warmth of his midnight-blue eyes behind his mask and feel his labored breath on my face. Even though he'd previously expressed to Ella that he wasn't worthy of my love, I wanted to show him he was.

Gently, I reached up and pulled off his mask to look into his eyes. His gaze locked onto mine and his breathing quickened.

"You are worthy of love, Bastian," I said quietly.

Before either of us could say another word, I rose onto my toes and pressed my lips against his. A shock of passion filled my body as we kissed. It was all consuming and I wanted more. His arms were like iron bands around my waist, trapping me against him. He kissed me so intensely that I could barely catch my breath. When I tried to pull away, he held me tighter, his lips never leaving mine. Then he suddenly stepped back, and I saw raw emotion in his eyes—confusion, regret and shame. His hands shook as he ran them through his disheveled hair.

His voice was full of torment when he finally spoke. "Lia, I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have done that." His shoulders slumped and his gaze dropped to the ground as he turned away. He took a few steps toward the pear trees before he stopped and looked back at me with a tear running down his face. "It won't happen again," he said before turning and running away.

"Bastian, wait!" I shouted, hoping to take off after him.

But when I tried to see which direction he had taken, all I could see was darkness. Bringing a hand up to my lips, I could still feel the warmth from our kiss and the spark of electricity that had passed between us. My heart raced and my mind reeled in confusion. What had just happened? There was only one other person who could explain the situation.

Steeling my courage, I whirled around, coming face to face with Bayleon. His expression mirrored Bastian's earlier anguish and shock, and a startled gasp escaped me. He opened his mouth to speak, but I beat him to it.

"I was just about to come and find you."

My pulse spiked even higher as his gaze flicked down to where I still clasped Bastian's mask in my hand. He didn't need to say anything for me to know how dire it was for his brother to be without his mask.

"What happened?" Bayleon asked, and I knew he had guessed the truth of our moments together, even if he wasn't ready to admit it.

"I'm not sure," I replied carefully. "But I think something is going on between you both that you haven't told me yet." Bayleon just stared at me, so I took the opportunity to continue, "What's going on with you two?"

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He took a deep breath and dropped his gaze to the ground. “Before I get into that,” he said, lifting his face and removing his mask, revealing eyes full of longing, “I have to know. Did you choose him?”

Even though his mask shielded his eyes, I could feel the intensity behind his stare, causing my skin to tingle. I wanted to tell him I had chosen both of them and end the torture of trying to hide my feelings, but at the same time, I was scared to cause a rift between him and his brother.

With a trembling hand, I reached up and cupped his cheeks, feeling the prick of stubble against the softness of his skin was beneath my fingertips. Then, slowly, I leaned in until our faces were only a breath apart.

“I choose you both,” I whispered, unable to look away as his gaze filled with surprise. “I was planning on telling you and Bastian everything tonight. I’m tired of fighting it. I know I shouldn’t want you both, but I do. I love you. . . but I also love him.”

His arms encircled me, pulling me close until our chests were touching. His eyes searched mine for what felt like an eternity before he said softly, “I never thought I’d ever hear those words leave your lips.”

“So, you’re not mad that I can’t choose between you?”

His eyes filled with sincerity and his lips formed a tender smile, which stirred something deep in my soul. “I would rather share you with my brother than not have you at all.”

A swirl of emotions rose within me, but joy was the strongest. Bayleon cast his gaze downward and paused momentarily, then looked into my eyes, his lips still curved into a faint smile.

“May I kiss you?”

My heart fluttered and I nodded in response. His arms tightened around my waist, and he leaned forward, his kiss gentle yet full of passion. An indescribable electricity rushed through me, reminding me of my connection with Bastian, only slightly different. The feelings I had for Bastian were raw and exciting. With Bayleon, they were deep and all consuming.

When Bayleon pulled away, he rested his forehead against mine, and without warning, I felt a wave of guilt wash over me as I realized I was harboring feelings for two brothers. Bayleon said he would rather share me than not have me at all, but that didn't mean Bastian would be okay with it. He ran away before I could tell him everything. Bayleon opened his mouth to speak but stopped and shook his head as if searching for the right words.

“There's something you need to know.” He released his grip on me, and anguish flashed across his face.

“What is it?” I asked, wishing to know what had him so conflicted.

Bayleon sighed heavily and kept his gaze on mine. “I know why Bastian couldn't control himself tonight. You may not be able to tell, but it took every ounce of strength in my body to stop myself from kissing you.” His eyes were a blazing fire as he continued, “Even now, as I'm standing before you, my desires for you are tearing me apart. It's an internal battle I fight every single day. I've been trying to resist them for a long time, but Bastian has reached the point where he can't hold on anymore.”

“What do you mean?”

Bayleon’s jaw clenched and he looked away. “My brother and I are cursed, Lia. There is only one way for us to be healed, but I would never ask that of you.”

Bayleon and Bastian were Tyvar, magical fae creatures who lived off the powers of seduction and had abstained from being with a woman for decades. In an instant, the truth dawned on me—how could I not realize that denying their nature would cause them so much pain? They needed me to heal them. I had the power to heal wounds and bring people back from the brink of death, but that wasn’t the kind of magic they needed right now. I grabbed Bayleon’s hand and met his gaze, desperation in my voice.

“We need to find Bastian. All it’ll take is one female to accidentally look into his eyes to seal his fate.”

We both knew that if he or Bastian chose to enthrall any women with their powers, the punishment would be death. And I wouldn’t be able to save them from that.

Bayleon nodded and quickly pulled his silver mask over his eyes before we ran toward the back entrance of the palace. My warriors, Ezra and Brig, stood guard outside and bowed when they saw us.

“Have either of you seen Bastian?” I asked, my lungs burning from exertion.

Ezra nodded toward the hallway. “He ran through here a few minutes ago.”

Relief coursed through me as I thanked them, and we made our way up the stairs to our private section of the palace. When we got to Bastian’s bedroom, the door was slightly ajar. Bayleon stepped protectively in front of me and carefully pushed the door open. It was a sight neither of us expected to see inside: Bastian’s room was a

wreck—glass shattered on the floor, curtains ripped apart—and at one of the windows was Bastian, hunched over and drenched in sweat. The moonlight glinted off Bastian’s sweaty, pale skin as he stood up and paced the room, his breathing fast and ragged. Red gashes crisscrossed his hands and arms from the broken glass, but his wounds were not healing as they should have. I glanced at Bayleon, who radiated pain and sadness. He grabbed my hands, the warmth of his skin spreading through my body and looked into my eyes with an intensity that made me feel like he’d looked into my soul.

“He needs you, Lia. You’re the only one who can save him.” His voice was deep and unwavering. I hesitated, but I knew he was right.

“What about you?” I asked softly, already knowing the answer.

He lifted his mask and tenderly cupped my face in his hands. “Don’t worry about me, my queen; I know you love me.” The love we shared was powerful and palpable in the air around us.

“I do,” I said softly. He nodded toward Bastian before releasing me from his embrace.

“Stay with my brother tonight,” he said quietly before turning to leave. “But tomorrow, you’re mine.”

He walked down the hall and paused at his room, sending me a fleeting glance before shutting the door. Then, taking a deep breath, I entered Bastian’s bedroom, closing the door behind me. Suddenly my steps felt too loud, and I feared he would hear me and turn around. But he remained facing away, unaware that I was there. I’d never seen him so angry and out of control. My heart ached for him; seeing him in such pain felt like a stab wound in my chest. If I had spoken up sooner, I could’ve saved Bayleon and Bastian some of their suffering.

The closer I got to Bastian, the louder my heart beat in my ears. Reaching out, I touched Bastian's shoulder, but he spun around and slammed me into the wall, trapping me with his body. When he realized it was me, his expression softened but he did not move away.

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“Dammit, Lia. What are you doing here? It’s too dangerous for you to be near me now.”

His tormented voice tore at my heart. I pressed my hands against his arms and sent healing magic into him; the deep wounds on his skin faded within seconds.

“I’m here to help you, Bastian.”

He shook his head in despair. “You can’t help me, Lia. Not like that.” He stepped away and turned his back on me, his shoulders slumped in defeat.

“I know,” I said softly. “But there is another way.”

Walking up behind him, I embraced Bastian and laid my cheek against his back.

His body tensed up in reaction and he warned me, “Don’t do this, Lia. You wouldn’t touch me if you knew what was going through my mind. Being close just intensifies all these desires inside me, and I don’t want to hurt you.”

I brushed a kiss against his skin before speaking, “You won’t hurt me. If anything, you should be worried about me hurting you.”

That remark shocked him and before he could respond, I pushed him onto the bed and he turned to face me. My fingers trembled with excitement as I reached behind to unzip my gown, my heart pounding. The fabric slipped off my body, and I shimmied out of it, revealing a black lacy bra and panties.

Bastian's gaze moved hungrily over me, pupils dilating, and the heat surged between us. I crawled onto the bed, straddling his waist, and my hair cascaded down around us. His hands moved over me, his gaze drinking me in as I pressed against him, wanting nothing more than to feel him inside me.

"Make love to me, Bastian," I whispered.

A feral growl escaped his lips as he grabbed my hips and pulled me closer. His lips found mine in a scorching kiss, and his hands cupped my face possessively.

His voice rasped against my lips, "Are you sure this is what you want?"

"Yes," I breathed, rocking against him. "Take me."

He pushed me onto the soft mattress and moved quickly to tear off his pants while I scrambled to remove my bra and underwear. His naked body hovered over mine, giving me a glimpse of his toned stomach and strong arms as he pinned me down. I felt his hot breath tickle my legs as he trailed his tongue up my body to my breasts, licking and sucking each one gently before taking one of my nipples in his mouth and biting down. I felt a wave of pleasure wash over me, and some of the tension left my body as I arched into him.

He pulled away from me slightly and spoke softly, "I wish you knew how many nights I dreamed of this, of having you in my bed."

Taking his face in my hands, I kissed his lips fervently. "You're not the only one."

Bastian had my body pinned beneath his as he slowly slid inside me. I could feel the heat radiating from his skin, a warmth that penetrated my core. His hardness filled me, both exciting and soothing at the same time. We locked eyes for an eternity as he carefully moved within me.

He grabbed his cock with one hand, and I watched as he slowly moved it in and out of me. His gentle movements sent waves of pleasure through my body, and I was overcome with a deep longing, a desire to have him take me to the edge and beyond. The sensations he was eliciting within me were unbearable, and I wanted nothing more than for him to ravish me with passion, yet every time he seemed about to let go, his self-control would take over, and he'd force himself to pull back and move with tenderness.

The sensations kept building until I felt like I was going to burst. And then, as if sensing my need, he suddenly thrust deep inside me, and I felt myself unraveling in pleasure. He drove into me with abandon, and I held on tight, my body trembling with the force of his thrusts.

Closing my eyes, I trailed my fingers up his back and down his arms, loving how his muscles flexed and tightened under my touch. I felt safe in his arms, protected. His warm breath tickled my skin as he kissed his way up my neck and over my cheek to my lips. Then, with his hands on both sides of my face, he held me firm and kissed me harder and deeper with each thrust between my legs. Finally, my orgasm slowly began to build, even more so when Bastian lowered a hand to my breast and squeezed, massaging it hard. It felt good with him pinching my nipples—the pleasure and pain of it sent shock waves down below.

Bastian pushed deeper inside of me, holding me tight. He was making love to me, slow and gentle, and I didn't want it to end.

“Is the pain lessening?” I asked, my words coming out as a whisper.

As he moved deeper within me, Bastian lifted his head and kissed my lips. “Yes. I feel nothing but you.”

Tears fell from my eyes and he wiped them away, speeding up his thrusts. I wrapped

my legs around him, pushed my hips against him, then arched my back when he lowered his lips to capture my nipples. The harder he sucked, the closer I came to an orgasm.

“Bastian,” I moaned, clutching his hair with my fingers.

He fisted his hands in my hair and tugged tightly as he increased the rhythm of his thrusts until my body felt like it was bursting into little pieces with pleasure. Then, digging my nails into his back, I screamed in delight as Bastian growled in my ear and pulsed inside me.

After a few moments of heavy breathing, he kissed me softly and rolled us over so I was sitting atop him. He was still erect inside me, and by the expression on his face, it was clear that he wanted more.

“I don’t think I’m done with you yet,” he said, smirking.

It was nice seeing him smile again. The Bastian I knew and loved was back. If making love to him was the way to heal him, I would gladly give him what he needed. I rolled my hips, loving the feel of him inside of me.

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“Don’t worry,” I replied, reaching behind my ass to cup his balls as I rode him, “I’m not done with you either.”

Chapter7

Lia

My dreams were filled with Bayleon and Bastian. When I woke up in Bastian’s arms, the reality of the secret I’d kept from him weighed heavily on my mind. All I wanted was to heal him however I could, yet I never got to tell him how I was in love with him and his brother.

Would he be angry or understand like Bayleon seemed to?

His embrace tightened as he nuzzled my neck and spoke, “I haven’t slept that well in a long time.”

I kissed his chest and sat up, my heart heavy with worry. “I’m glad.”

Light from the stained-glass windows spilled onto the bed, making his midnight-blue eyes sparkle. His expression changed as he noticed me staring and he sat up.

“Lia, what’s wrong? Do you regret what we did last night?”

My throat tightened and I grabbed his hand. “No,” I said breathlessly. “I love you, Bastian. Being with you is what I want. There’s just . . .” I trailed off, slipping out of bed to find my gown on the floor. I put it on even though all I had to do was walk

through the secret passageway to my room. Bastian had no idea the tunnels existed, but he was about to find out.

“There’s just what?” Bastian asked.

I walked around to his side of the bed and sat down. “Bayleon helped me find you last night. He saw how messed up you were in here.”

Bastian turned his gaze away. “I’m sorry you had to see that.”

Placing a hand on his leg, I sighed. “He’s the one who told me about the pain. He’s struggling with it, too.”

Bastian’s eyes snapped toward mine, his expression full of shock. “He never told me. I never saw his pain.”

Nothing was said for a few awkward moments as he peered into my eyes; it seemed as if he could see right into my heart. Then, finally, he let out a breath and glanced at our joined hands.

“You love him too, don’t you?”

I waited until our eyes met before nodding in agreement.

“Yes,” I breathed out. I wondered how he’d respond to my following statement. “And Bayleon knows what we did last night.”

His eyes widened in surprise. “He willingly let you be with me even though he was in as much agony as I was?”

I nodded, hoping he could see the truth on my face. “Yes. He knew you needed me.”

Bastian leaned back against the headboard, clearly confused as he scanned my face. His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed, and I saw the guilt flash in his eyes.

"Talk to me, Bastian," I murmured. "I need to know how you feel about all of this." I forced a laugh, but there was no humor to it. "Because I'm confused about what to do. I love you and your brother, but I will not choose between you." Reaching out, I clasped his warm fingers in mine and squeezed them tightly. "My heart belongs to you both."

Bastian rubbed his thumb over my knuckles, his deep blue eyes searching mine for answers. "I understand," he said softly. "It seems my brother and I have much to talk about."

I nodded in agreement. "You do," I said quietly. "And once you have, I need to speak with you both together." Heaving a heavy sigh, I moved my hand away from his and stood, taking a step back. "I really have to go," I said firmly. "There's someone I need to find before they leave."

Bastian inclined his head in curiosity. "Who?"

A bright smile spread across my face, and I felt the corners of my eyes crinkle in anticipation. "I'll tell you all about it later. I've got a plan and hope it works—it could be life-changing for the three of us."

Slowly, I edged toward the bookshelf on the wall, trying not to laugh at Bastian's puzzled expression as he watched me.

"The door is over there," he said, nodding at the opposite wall.

A small button was hidden behind a row of classic novels on the middle shelf; I reached behind them and pressed it, making the door unlatch with a faint click.

Bastian's eyes opened wide in surprise and he smiled.

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“Ahh, so the queen has secrets,” he joked.

I smiled back and shrugged. “Not anymore—I had Carys install these secret passageways so that I could get to you and Bayleon quickly if needed, and vice versa.” Then, taking one last look over my shoulder at Bastian, I opened the door with a reassuring smile. “I’ll see you soon.”

He nodded solemnly and bowed his head in farewell. The passageway was just a tiny space between our rooms, connected by an antique dresser on my side. The one that led into Bayleon’s room was a bookshelf on the opposite wall. A part of me wanted to sneak through to see if he was in his room. I was nervous to see him, especially with him knowing that Bastian and I were together last night.

A knock sounded on my door and Shaylah’s voice echoed from the hallway. “Good morning, Your Highness.”

I was still in my gown from last night, so I quickly took it off and grabbed my bathrobe out of the bathroom. Shaylah was standing on the other side when I answered the door, grinning wide and holding a tray of warm croissants, freshly squeezed orange juice and raspberry preserves. Her honey-colored eyes matched her sun-kissed hair. She held out the food and my stomach growled.

“I know it’s early, but I thought you’d want to eat something before everyone heads home. Some of your aunts and uncles are already packing up to leave.”

Smiling, I took the tray from her. “Thank you, Shaylah. I’ll be down shortly.”

She bowed. "I'll let everyone know."

Shaylah turned to leave, but I stopped her. "Do you know where Bayleon is?"

She nodded and her eyes sparkled. "He's outside with your warriors. They started training at sunrise this morning."

"Thank you," I said.

Once she was gone, I stuffed two croissants into my mouth and ran for the shower. I felt so alive with anticipation; I couldn't wait to tell Bayleon and Bastian my plan, hoping they would agree to help me. It wouldn't work without their support.

After I bathed, I put on my warm green warrior leathers, then tied my red hair in a braid. Without delay, I hurried out of my room and down the marble staircase, the sound of voices echoing off the walls. Out of all the magical beings in the Land of the Fae, the prophetess was the only one with the power to help me. Unfortunately, I didn't see her last night with everything going on; I just hoped she hadn't left yet.

Walking toward the open palace doors, I could hear my parents outside saying farewell to our guests.

"There you are," a voice boomed from behind. I spun around to see my brother and Aidan, both carrying two large loaves of freshly baked lemon bread. I raised an eyebrow and looked from the bread to them.

"So, you two kings of your own courts, can't get your people to bake for you?"

Kale grinned. "Some of the best bakers in the Spring Court chose to follow you, sis. I would be an idiot not to take advantage when I come over."

He joined our parents at the front steps of the palace, leaving me and Aidan alone. Aidan's enchanting emerald eyes shimmered with excitement as he smiled at me.

"Next time I see you, I'll bring two loaves of strawberry bread. My bakers make the best."

I laughed and gave him a hug around the neck. "I'm counting on it! I haven't seen your court yet, so maybe it's time for a visit."

He returned my embrace and smiled. "I'd like that very much."

Saying our goodbyes, Aidan walked away to join his Summer fae. I spotted Bayleon in the crowd, his tall frame standing confidently with our warriors. I paused, my heart almost leaping out of my chest, but he quickly looked away and I noticed him glancing behind me. I didn't need to turn around to know who it was—Bastian. My mother stepped up beside me and followed Bayleon's gaze. She sighed and carefully tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, her amethyst eyes filled with worry.

"Things feel different, Lia," she murmured.

"They are," I whispered, the previous night's events weighing heavily on my heart. "I healed Bastian last night."

She paused and studied me for a moment before speaking again. "I hope you know what you're getting into," she said. "Bastian's not the only one who loves you. I'd hate to see this tear the brothers apart."

"No," I stated adamantly. "I choose both. I belong to them, and them to me."

Her eyes widened and her lips parted in surprise, but no words came out. I could tell from her expression that she was processing the news. No queen in the history of the

Land of the Fae had ever had two kings. My mother gently grasped my hand and locked our gazes. Her worry was palpable.

“I know you love them, but their curse isn’t something to be taken lightly. If you were to have sons with them, they’d be doomed just like their fathers. Is that really what you want?”

I stared deeply into my mother’s eyes, refusing to look away. “That’s why I’m going to break the curse. I will find a way.”

My mother couldn’t hide her shock as she uttered, “How do you plan on doing that?”

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I scanned the crowd until my gaze landed on a familiar figure dressed in a gown of Fall colors and standing with Carys and my aunt Calista. She was a petite half-brownie, half-elf, with curly brown locks and warm amber-colored eyes. She was the only prophetess in the land, making her respected and feared. Her attention jumped to me as if she sensed me seeking her out. She nodded once and I nodded back a silent agreement. I had to believe she could help. If not, I didn't know of anyone else who could.

* * *

“Thankyou for taking the time to come and see me, Elvena. I'm sure you can't wait to return to the Fall Court.”

She gave me a gentle smile and followed me into the palace foyer and through an archway to another hall. We strolled past two of my warriors and entered one of my sitting rooms with its wall of windows facing toward my brother's Court of Rivers palace in the distance. We each took a seat in the soft armchairs.

Elvena was several centuries old, yet no single strand of white hair marred her head. The only sign of age was her tiny wrinkles, but her depth of knowledge of faerie lore revealed her actual age. She leaned forward in her chair and patted my hand.

“It's my pleasure to help you, my dear. I've been expecting you to come to me for some time now.”

I cocked my head in confusion. “You have?”

A small chortle escaped her lips. “Yes, of course I have. I’m amazed it took you this long. I suspected you loved your Guardians long before you knew it yourself.”

A flicker of optimism lit up inside my chest, but the prickle of unease in her deep amber eyes made my stomach drop.

“I’m just going to come out and ask—do you know of a way to break the Tyvar curse?”

She exhaled slowly, leaning back into her chair. “I’m not sure how to break it, my child, but I may be able to seek out the information you need.”

“And how do you intend to do that?” I asked, curiosity pebbling through me.

Elvena smiled and clasped her hands together. “Your men will be key. They are full of memories and experiences I can connect with and search through. It doesn’t even matter if they remember it themselves. I just need to go far enough back.” She stood, her expression full of worry. “But know this—I cannot guarantee I’ll find the answers you seek.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I murmured, standing with her. “We have to try.”

Elvena lifted her palm to my cheek, her voice gentle. “And try we will. Now go fetch your protectors and meet me in the gardens for further instruction.”

I spun around and made my way out of the sitting room toward the back of the palace, where the training fields were located. Standing at the top of the stairs, I looked out to where my warriors were training, the noise of clanging swords ringing in the air. But Bayleon and Bastian were nowhere to be seen. I started going down to the fields when I sensed their presence nearby.

Taking light steps, I slowly made my way around the side of the palace and rested against the stone wall. Then, all of a sudden, I heard Bastian's voice, so I held my breath and listened intently to what was said next.

Chapter 8

Bayleon

I couldn't believe my eyes as I saw Bastian; his once-slumped shoulders were firm and determined, and his gaze was sharp and focused. Last night, he'd been on the brink of destruction, and today it seemed as if a new person had taken his place—a person whose passion burned through his veins, making each movement during his training with the warriors calculated and powerful.

As much as I wanted Lia in my bed, to have her in all the ways I'd dreamed of, I had to let her be with him. He needed her and she healed him, even if it was only a temporary reprieve. The curse was too deeply rooted to be healed by one night of lovemaking.

Unfortunately, I had now reached the point of no return. The night was hard, not only dealing with the pain ripping me apart from the inside out but also having the knowledge of knowing my brother got to be with the woman I loved. He spent the night touching her, tasting her . . . feeling her body wrapped around his. I didn't begrudge him that, but my own need was burning inside me.

Tonight, Lia would be mine. I just had to wait it out.

After training with the warriors, I took a break and leaned against one of the magnolia trees, weary from the day's exertion. I watched Bastian swing his sword with incredible speed and precision, performing each move perfectly. Finally, he finished with the warrior he was training and peered over at me, worry etching his face despite

his silver mask.

He nodded over his shoulder toward a grove of pear trees that Lia had grown the night before and said in a low voice, “It’s probably time we talk.”

Once we reached the pear trees, I faced him, only able to see a shadow of his eyes through his mask.

“I see you’re doing much better today,” I said, trying to break the tension.

Bastian shook his head and sighed as he ran a hand through his hair. “I am, thanks to you and Lia.”

I shook my head quickly, denying my contribution. “It was all her.”

“No, it wasn’t,” Bastian fired back. “I know you’re in love with her, brother, and you need her just as much as I do.” Moving closer to him, I asked why he hadn’t told me of his suffering. His mouth pulled back in a scoff as he turned away from me. “Why didn’t you tell me about yours?”

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“I wanted to appear strong,” I replied sadly.

He clenched his jaw and lowered his gaze, unable to hide the apparent shame that welled up inside him. “I’m the one who failed at that. It’s what angers me more than anything. I never wanted you or anyone else to see me so weak.”

“Believe me, brother,” I whispered, “I’m almost at that point. I feel like I’m barely hanging on.”

His gaze shifted back to my face, his expression unreadable. “Are you going to be with Lia tonight?”

I wasn’t sure how much Lia had told him, but I knew there was no option but to tell him the truth.

“Yes,” I answered, curious as to what his reaction would be. All he did was give a slight nod of acknowledgment. “Does that bother you?” I asked.

A hollow laugh escaped his lips. “I don’t even know how to answer that. I was certain she would choose you over me.”

“Why would you think that?” I was surprised by his assumption.

He shrugged his shoulders, a hint of bitterness in his voice as he spoke. “I’ve always felt second best to you. Our father certainly had no qualms about showing his favoritism.”

While it was true that our father had often spent more time training me than Bastian when we were children, Bastian had the undivided attention of our mother—something I would have given anything for.

I placed my hands on Bastian's shoulders. "Lia loves us both, brother. I need to know if you'll be able to handle her with me. There's no room for jealousy in this. Lia deserves our love and loyalty, not anger and discord."

Bastian blew out a sigh, his brows furrowed curiously. "Are you saying you didn't get mad last night knowing Lia was making love to me?"

There were so many emotions warring inside me, but anger wasn't one of them.

I met his gaze head-on. "I wasn't angry, but envious. I've waited so long to touch her in the same way you were able to last night."

His expression saddened. "I'm sorry, Bayleon. That had to have been torture." He hung his head and sighed. "But to answer your question, I can't promise things will go smoothly all the time. I love Lia and the thought of sharing her is not ideal, but"—he sighed and lifted his eyes to mine—"I will do it for you. You let her go so she could be with me last night when I knew you needed her just as much. You put my needs above your own." He held out his hand. "I promise I'll do everything possible to make this work. All I want is for Lia to be happy."

A promise in the Land of the Fae was a binding contract; they were never made lightly. His confession was all the affirmation I needed.

Grasping his hand, I squeezed it tight. "And I promise to do the same."

Lia emerged from the shadows, her gaze moving over our faces with a warmth so full of love that it seemed to radiate through her. She took my brother's hand in her right

and mine in her left.

“I’ve heard your promises, now here’s mine,” she said firmly. “I promise to love you both equally and with all my heart. You will never have to compete for my affection. I will give everything I have willingly.”

As Lia spoke, the wind whistled around us as if it was sealing our promises as tangible words in that moment. Looking into Lia’s eyes, I could feel the pure truth of her words reverberating through my whole body down to my very soul. We were bound together by those promises, and although I wanted nothing more than to sweep her into my arms and feel her lips on mine, I could tell something else was going on.

“Where do we go from here?” I asked.

Lia gently pressed her hands against ours, and a faint glimmer of excitement and hope twinkled in her eyes. “I want to break the Tyvar curse.” Her lips curved upward into a breathtaking smile. “Elvena’s going to help us. She’s waiting for us in the gardens.”

Bastian and I exchanged a glance, disbelief and uncertainty rapidly replacing our optimism.

“How is that possible? The curse dates back hundreds of years,” Bastian said hesitantly.

Lia released our hands from her grasp and cupped our cheeks instead, her gaze flitting between mine and Bastian’s.

“I don’t know if it can be done,” she whispered, “but I’m willing to try anything. I’m hoping you two will as well.”

I covered her hand with mine. “I’ll do anything for you.”

“Same,” Bastian solemnly echoed, leaning into her touch. Lia beamed, like a ray of sunshine had suddenly illuminated all around us.

“When all of this is over and the curse is broken, I want you both to be mine—heart, body, and soul. You’ll be kings of the Blossom Court.”

My brows furrowed as reality set in, doubts and worries creeping up on me once again. “What about the land? There have never been two kings. Will we even be accepted?”

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Lia's smile turned hesitant, her amethyst eyes clouding with uncertainty. "The land wants to help us; I can feel it. It knows how much I love you both and that I want you to rule the Blossom Court with me. I don't care how long it takes, but breaking this curse is what I'm going to do."

The enormity of the task weighed heavily on me as I looked from Bastian to Lia. There had to be a way—being with Lia for the rest of eternity depended on it. Bastian nodded in agreement, his face set in determination.

"Then let's break the curse," I said, offering Lia an encouraging smile.

She nodded and led us to the other side of the palace. Elvena was waiting for us in the gardens by the massive stone water fountain with two chairs around her. In between the two chairs was a small table topped with a bowl burning with a blue flame. Elvena had arranged all four of the natural elements—earth, air, fire, and water—around her. She beckoned us closer and gestured for Bastian and me to take a seat.

Lia stood before us, her face unreadable, as Elvena stepped forward. When Elvena's hand touched my shoulder, a current of electricity flowed from her fingertips, a powerful sensation that seemed to fill the entire room.

"Now close your eyes," she said softly, her voice mesmerizing. "This is where I need your help. What do you know about the Tyvar curse?"

"Very little," I replied, although my throat felt tight. "It was something we celebrated, not feared."

Thankfully, my eyes were shut, so I didn't have to witness Lia's reaction to my words. Nevertheless, I was flooded with memories of the past—some pleasant but most of them I would rather forget—and an intense feeling of guilt weighed heavy on me. I focused on the last time I saw my mother: when the Tyvar curse manifested on my eighteenth birthday. It was the day Bastian and I left to join the others. The memories flashed through my mind in a whirlwind—images too fast and fleeting to make out many details—but one clear vision stayed with me: my mother's face just before we said goodbye.

"Any luck?" Lia asked Elvena.

The heat in my head intensified as Elvena sighed. "No, not yet. I'm delving into their minds as far back as I can. It's getting harder the deeper I go." After a few minutes, Elvena lifted her hand from my shoulder and her voice sounded weary. "I'm sorry," she whispered, "I can't go any further. I need to replenish my energy."

She wasn't the only one depleted. The pain inside of me came back with a vengeance. When I opened my eyes, they brimmed with defeat, mirroring Lia's face. Even I couldn't conceal my feelings of discouragement. If Elvena, the prophetess of the Land of the Fae, couldn't find the solutions, then nobody could.

Lia's face was alive with urgency as she grabbed both my and Bastian's hands in hers. "No, we can't stop. If you need more energy, take mine. We can't give up on this."

The prophetess sighed and placed a hand back on my brother and me. "Are you sure?"

Lia nodded determinedly and squeezed our hands tighter, pressing her warm healing energy into our skin. I felt it flowing through my veins, pushing away the pain that had been consuming me moments before. Elvena's power seemed to coalesce around

us, tightening its grip as she delved deeper into my mind. Images flew by in a blur, muffled voices suddenly becoming more distinct until it felt as if the world was spinning around me. Lia let go of my hand and grabbed my left arm while Bastian held onto my right, steadying me.

When I opened my eyes, Lia's gaze searched mine for answers. "Are you okay? You blacked out for a few moments."

I blinked a few times, rubbing a hand over my chest before I spoke. "Did it work this time?"

Elvena walked around to stand in front of us, her face unreadable, before she smiled and grabbed Lia's arm, her expression hopeful. "I believe it did." She beamed up at Bastian, then shifted her gaze to me. "I went back to when you were in your mother's womb. I heard everything," she said. "She sang to you and told you tales each night, one of which was about how she was going to break your curse."

Bastian and I locked eyes, then I rose from my chair. "What did she know?"

Elvena exhaled and surveyed us all with a knowing gaze. "She knew where the curse originated from—it was the first place she intended to go when she could."

The room went silent as I waited for her response, eager to learn the truth after centuries of ignorance.

"Where?" I pressed. "Where was she going?"

Elvena rotated her head to look at each of us. "The elvish kingdom."

Lia was taken aback and both Bastian and I were astonished. The elvish kingdom was the last place I'd considered finding the answers.

“But why there?” I asked.

Elvena shifted her head slightly, cleared her throat and answered, “Because that’s where it all began. It was the elves who cursed you all.”

Lia made a noise of disbelief and shook her head. “I can’t believe it. Why didn’t any of them say something?”

Elvena held up a hand to stop her from jumping to conclusions. “If you choose to keep going, your cousin Aidan must come with you.” That was an unexpected request.

“Why?” Lia questioned, her eyebrows knitted together in confusion.

Elvena lifted her shoulders in a slight shrug. “I cannot explain it—it’s just a feeling inside me. My guess would be for his truth-seeking abilities.”

She said her goodbyes, leaving me alone in the garden with Lia and Bastian. Lia blew out a breath, her long red hair swaying as she turned toward Bastian and me.

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“Looks like it’s time for us to see the elves. We’ll leave out the day after tomorrow. Until then . . .”

She stopped midsentence and her worried gaze fell on me. I glanced at Bastian and felt his reassuring hand on my shoulder. “It’s your night, brother. You need to get better.”

He gently kissed Lia’s cheek before turning away, his broad shoulders set with determination. Lia cupped my face in her warm hands and all the emotion I had contained inside of me bubbled to the surface. Her lips brushed against mine and her sweet honeysuckle scent enveloped me. I desperately wanted her, needed her.

“I think it’s time,” she whispered against my lips.

“I think so, too,” I replied. “I don’t think I can wait any longer.”

* * *

Every step felt like an eternity as we climbed the stairs, and my heart raced a little faster with every one. My hand found Lia’s and I intertwined our fingers, desperate for a connection. She glanced over at me, and I felt my heart skip a beat—her eyes were burning with desire and I couldn’t help but match it. I had to restrain myself from pushing her up against the wall right then and there.

Once we got to her room, I quickly shut the door and locked it, bracing myself against it as Lia began taking her clothes off.

“Don’t worry about me,” she breathed out, untying her leathers and revealing her bare back. She smiled at me over her shoulder and murmured, “I won’t break.”

I was mesmerized by her glowing skin, wanting to feel its softness against mine. She turned around to face me, exposing her perfect breasts. I could feel my body heat up with desire.

Without a word, I stepped closer until I could feel her breath on my lips and then kissed her passionately, letting out all the desire that had been building inside me. I pulled away from the kiss and stepped around to stand behind her. With a fierce bite, I nipped the delicate area behind her ear as I kneaded her breasts firmly with my hands.

“You have no idea how long I have wanted to do this,” I said, my voice thick with desire.

Rolling her nipples between my fingers, they hardened in response to my touch. The second she pressed her body against mine, I could feel my arousal straining against the fabric of my pants. I hadn’t felt this kind of passion and intensity in years, and it was both terrifying and exhilarating at the same time. I knew that if we kept going, there was no turning back; once I gave in to this desire, I would be unable to resist its power.

Lia spun around and quickly pulled at my warrior leathers, her fingers working frantically to undress me. She plunged her hand into my trousers and caressed my length, making me gasp aloud. I yanked off my leathers and pants as soon as she had them undone. Lia bit my chest and I groaned as her moans only aroused me more.

“I want you inside me,” she whispered.

That was all the invitation I needed. We moved to the bed and I climbed on top of

her, delighting in the sight of her red hair cascading around the pillow and her naked body beckoning to me. I pushed my knee between her legs and spread her wide, then poised myself above her.

Leaning down, I wrapped my mouth around her nipple, loving how she cried out and arched her back to push her breast further into my mouth. She was so wet, I could feel it on the tip of my cock. Getting into position, I kept my eyes on hers as I pushed in gently at first, then slammed into her the rest of the way.

“Bayleon,” Lia cried, securing her legs tightly around my waist. The sensations were all too intense. As I thrust into her and held her tight, I could feel Lia’s touch healing me, giving me more energy I never thought possible. We moved together in synchronous bliss, our bodies intertwined. I pushed in deeply, savoring the way she contracted around me. Her lips closed over mine, and I held her face in my hands, our eyes meeting as we kissed.

Lia’s body quivered as I picked up the pace, her eyes rolling back as she came. After a few more hard thrusts, I let go, gripping her tightly as I climaxed. The pain was gone; all that remained was contentment.

I rested my forehead against hers and attempted to steady my breathing. We were still connected as I kissed her passionately.

“Thank you,” I whispered.

She smiled and rubbed my cheek. “You’re not the only one who needed this, Bayleon.”

I shifted onto my elbow so I could see her face. An array of emotions surged through me; I didn’t know what to feel. All I knew was that I wanted to be with Lia forever.

“I love you,” I said, gazing into her beautiful eyes. “I’m never letting you go.”

She leaned up and kissed me gently. “I love you, too,” she replied softly, “And I will never leave your side.”

Chapter 9

Lia

The sun rose on a new day, and with it, a spark of optimism. Bayleon and Bastian had been healed and were happily practicing with the warriors. I decided to take the opportunity to ride to my parents’ palace on horseback, so they could be informed of my plan to journey to the elven realm and break the Tyvar curse.

As I guided Prince Ashe through the Spring Court, I recalled my fifth birthday when my mother gave me the midnight-colored fae stallion with silver eyes that glimmered like molten metal.

His mane rippled in the morning breeze, and I felt his anticipation. “Are you excited about the trip?” I murmured softly. “It’s been a while since we’ve been on an adventure.”

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Prince Ashe had long been accustomed to battles and riding to victory. Luckily, there hasn't been a war in the Land of the Fae for three decades.

After I hopped off his back, I bounded up the stairs and into the castle. My father would be training with his warriors, but I had a feeling I knew exactly where I'd find my mother. As I strode through the corridors, people bowed to me reverently.

When I stepped into a long hallway lined with windows, I spotted my mother just outside, donned in her leather warrior suit and braid of red hair. Her bow was drawn with an arrow pointed toward a target. Although our archery sessions were few and far between nowadays, she was still a master of her craft. The arrow released from her bow and hit dead center as soon as it left her hand.

Smiling, I stepped outside and gave her an eager applause. "Nice job. I bet you can't do it twice."

My mother rested her bow and arrow on the ground and put her hands on her hips. She had a wry smile on her face that I knew all too well.

"Are you sure you want to go there?" she challenged, referring to the inside joke we'd shared between us since I was a young girl.

She was an excellent archer and loved to prove me wrong every time I challenged her accuracy. I couldn't help but laugh as my mother stepped closer and wrapped her arms around me.

"You seem happier today, Lia," she said, pulling back to look me in the eyes.

“I am,” I replied. “Bayleon is healed now. At least for a little while.”

Her smile faded a bit. “When I invited him and his brother to live in the Spring Court all those years ago, I never expected them to end up being my daughter’s lovers.”

She started walking slowly toward the weathered archway that led to a field of golden sunflowers. I followed her, feeling her fear and worry in the air. Her eyes were trained on the ground as if searching for answers in the dirt.

“I know you’re afraid for me, mother,” I said as I came up beside her. “But I’m here to tell you there’s still hope.” I stepped in front of her and smiled, but her face remained apprehensive.

“Do tell then,” she said.

Taking a deep breath, I let it out slowly and tried to convey my excitement with my words. “Elvena used her magic on Bayleon and Bastian last night to try and uncover information about the curse,” I started, “and it worked! She was able to gain insight that it was originated by the elves.”

My mother’s eyebrows rose in surprise as she processed this new information. “I don’t know what to say—they’re the last people I thought would be responsible for this curse.”

“I thought so, too,” I agreed. “But now that I have this information, I want to travel there tomorrow to learn more about it. That’s why I wanted to come here and see if I could get Fawn’s help. Things would go a lot quicker.”

My mother nodded. “I understand. I’m sure Fawn will be happy to help. I’ll walk with you part of the way.”

With their magical port-traveling ability, the imps tended to stay away from people who would take advantage of them, so most of them resided in the Mystical Forest. However, some also chose to live in the courts. If we sought out a favor from them, an offering was always made in return. I would never ask for anything without giving something back.

We set off toward the sunflower fields, where I knew the imp village was just beyond it.

My mother linked her arm with mine. “Please be careful, Lia. The curse was put in place for a reason. I don’t know what kind of darkness you will find.”

The sunflowers rustled in the breeze, their petals brushing against our arms as we walked beneath them.

“Do you think Aelfric and Rhoswen will know anything?”

My mother sighed. “It’s hard to say. They weren’t even a glimmer in the eye of their parents when the Tyvar were cursed. However, if there’s anyone who may be able to help us, it would be them. They possess archives of ancient historical events in their castle, some even beyond memory. I’m sure they’d be willing to let you take a look through them.”

Aelfric and Rhoswen had always been our family—ever since they’d taken the throne of the elvish kingdom, they’d been hoping for an alliance between their family and the Royal fae, but it hadn’t worked out yet. It almost did recently with my cousin Ella. The eldest elvish prince, Iston, had loved Ella for a long time, but when she met Kai, she chose him instead. There was still some tension between our people, but I hoped it had lessened some.

As soon as we reached the edge of the sunflowers, my mother stopped and hugged

me. “Be careful, Lia. Is anyone traveling with you besides Bayleon and Bastian?”

I met her gaze as I let her go. “None of my warriors, if that’s what you’re asking. But Elvena told me Aidan needed to be there. I don’t know why, but that’s one of the reasons I need Fawn. I need her to send him a message quickly.”

My mother cocked her head to the side. “Now I’m really curious. But if Elvena says he needs to be there, then he needs to be there.”

“I agree. I just hope he can meet me there tomorrow. I’m ready to get started.”

She embraced me once more. “When you have finished speaking with Fawn, there’s something I want to give you before you leave.”

“Okay,” I said. “I won’t be long.”

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She let me go and I took off down the path toward the imp village. Imps were tiny, about a foot tall, with sparkly wings. Their homes were inside the massive trees. I could go inside when I was a little girl, but now I wouldn't fit in. I remembered the day Fawn moved into her own tree. I'd watched her father carve out the intricate door.

As I made my way toward Fawn's tree, the usual chirps and calls of the forest gave way to hushed whispers. It was unusual for Fawn to venture beyond her village, but she never shied away from adventure.

When I arrived at her tree, I bent down and was about to knock when a voice from behind me rang out.

"Your Highness. It's been a long time."

I spun around to see her hovering off the ground, her pale green skin glowing in the sunlight. Her hair was the same color as her skin, but her wings were a richer green with silver sparkles that glittered as she flew up to me and smiled.

"What can I do for you?" she asked.

I pulled two letters out of my pocket. "I wanted to see if you'd deliver these for me. It's very important. I'll give you whatever you want if it's something I can provide."

I knew her kind well enough to know that my wording was imperative here; fae were known to take advantage of any loophole in a promise. Fawn hovered in the air until she was level with my eyes, her wings fluttering gently in the breeze.

With a playful smile, she tapped her chin with her tiny finger and raised an eyebrow. “It’s a shame I don’t need anything at the moment. How about you promise to owe me something later?”

I didn’t hesitate. “Deal.”

She pointed to the two letters in my hand, then looked at my face. “Do those need to go to two separate places?”

I knew what she was getting at. Fawn was smart.

“Yes,” I replied, watching her emerald eyes twinkle with mischief.

“That makes two return favors then.” She snickered triumphantly.

I gave a short nod of agreement. “Fine. When you figure out what you want, I’ll be here.”

She held out her hand and I placed the letter addressed to Aidan on her palm. “This one will go to my cousin Aidan at the Court of Fire and Water. I need you to come back with his reply.”

Fawn nodded and bowed her head as if in respect. “I will return.”

In a blink of an eye, she disappeared. However, it didn’t take long for her to appear again. I could see a slight crimson hue under her green skin when she did. She exhaled heavily, looking at me with annoyance.

“What happened?” I inquired.

Fawn huffed and folded her arms across her chest. “I’m starting to think I’m going to

need to ask for a third return favor after going through that,” she exclaimed.

“That depends on what happened,” I said, gesturing for her to go on.

She started flying back and forth like a person pacing the floor. “Well,” she began, “I went to look for King Aidan, and my magic took me straight to him. I figured he’d be in his throne room or training with his warriors.” Her face was even redder now.

“But I’m guessing he wasn’t there,” I asked, feeling I knew what she’d seen.

Fawn wrinkled her nose and shook her head. “No, he was in his bedroom with a woman who kept shrieking his name. And I don’t mean the way a wife would greet her husband.”

I grimaced in embarrassment. “I’m sorry you had to witness that.”

Fawn huffed in frustration. “Me too. But anyway, I gave him your letter, and he said to meet him midday tomorrow in the elvish kingdom and look to the sky.”

I raised an eyebrow, unsurprised he would fly in as his dragon. Fawn held out her hand for the last letter. “Let’s hope this one isn’t cringe-worthy, too.”

I laughed softly. “I sure hope not. This one is to King Aelfric and Queen Rhoswen.”

Fawn let out a long breath before giving me a quick nod and vanishing when she touched the note. About ten minutes went by and I started to get concerned with the length of time it took for her to return. I didn’t specify why I needed to visit the elvish kingdom in the letter. All I wrote was that I wanted to visit. There was something inside of me telling me not to disclose the truth. If I had, I wasn’t too confident that they would approve or even allow me to come. I adored Aelfric and Rhoswen and cared for them like my own parents, but I had to be careful and concise. Maybe that

was why Elvena told me I needed Aidan. Not only was he a dragon shifter, but he was also a truth seeker. That was what I needed . . . the truth.

A few more minutes passed before Fawn came flying back with a rolled-up scroll tied with a fancy red ribbon.

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“I take it you didn’t see anything scandalous?” I asked. She chuckled. “No. But the king and queen did offer me some of their famous berry wine while I waited.”

I laughed, already feeling the envy. “I’m jealous. I’ve heard their berry wine is second to none.”

Fawn fluttered down to the ground and sat in the clover, her body visibly more relaxed than when she left.

“I may have had too many glasses of it,” she admitted sheepishly.

With anticipation, I untied the ribbon and unrolled the scroll, curious to see what Aelfric and Rhoswen had responded with.

Dearest Lia,

What a grand surprise! We are more than happy to host you and your protectors for a visit. It’ll give us a chance to throw a ball in your honor.

We look forward to seeing you soon, and I can’t wait to hear more about the Blossom Court.

With love,

Rhoswen

Holding the scroll to my chest, I breathed a sigh of relief. Everything was set.

Chapter10

Lia

It was only going to be a half-day journey from the Blossom Court to the elvish kingdom if we took the snow-laden Winter Court route, so that was exactly what we did. Our fae horses moved three times faster than a mortal horse, which meant what could have been a full day's ride for someone else only took us a few hours.

As we emerged from the Winter Court, the elvish kingdom appeared in sight. The rolling green hills, such a stark contrast to the winter white, put me at ease. Bayleon and Bastian sat on either side of me on their horses, their presence a welcome comfort.

“What exactly is the plan? Are you just going to come right out and ask about the curse at dinnertime?” Bastian wondered, looking at Aelfric and Rhoswen's opulent castle up ahead, surrounded by giant trees, mountains, and waterfalls.

Elves were legendary for their beauty, and Bayleon and Bastian both had some similarities to them. So there had to be elf blood in their lineage somewhere. Neither one of them have confirmed that with me, though.

I snickered at Bastian's suggestion. “As much as I'd like to do that, I think I need to be a little more tactful.”

Bayleon then spoke up; his voice was serious, but he wore a small smile when our eyes met. “If they know about the curse but aren't willing to talk about it, we'll have to find another way. That's where Aidan comes in, right?” he added.

I closed my eyes as I exhaled, feeling the weight of the situation pressing in on me. “Yes. He'll be able to tell me if they're lying.”

Bastian gave me a stern look. “And if they are? How do you plan on getting the truth?”

I had faith Aelfric and Rhoswen wouldn’t willingly lie to me, but I knew this journey was far from simple.

“I don’t think we’ll have any issues. My fear is they won’t know anything at all. We could easily be spending days scouring through old ledgers in their libraries.”

“Such an easy task, my queen,” Bayleon murmured, but his voice was heavy with sarcasm.

Bastian chuckled and it made me smile. “Nice, brother. I’m glad to see you’ve found some humor.”

Bayleon had always been the serious one of the brothers, but it seemed as if I’d broken through that barrier a bit. It made me wonder how things would change if we broke the curse. One of the things I looked forward to was not having to see them wear their masks twenty-four-seven. They would be free.

A spark of determination ignited within me as I looked between them. Nothing was going to stop us now.

“Let’s go,” I called out.

We rode our horses across the soft green fields until, eventually, the grandiose gates of the palace opened. Once inside the tall stone walls, it was like entering another world. The elvish kingdom differed from the fae courts, but it had some similarities to the Spring Court with all its lush vegetation and blooms. Everywhere you looked, there were enormous trees that almost seemed to twinkle in the sunlight and rivers that shimmered like they had an inner light. The elves didn’t have magic to

manipulate the elements, yet their land seemed enchanted.

Prince Ashe pranced as we arrived at Aelfric and Rhoswen's castle, and a group of their servants hurried down the steps to us. I slipped off the horse and one of the servants grabbed the bag fastened behind my saddle. Two others headed toward Bayleon and Bastian's horses, doing the same.

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Rhoswen stepped forward and threw her arms around me with a grin on her face and excitement in her sea-green eyes. She was beautiful, with golden blonde hair and milky skin that showed no imperfections. She was right at a hundred years old but didn't look a day over thirty. I could feel the softness of her earthy green dress under my fingertips.

“Thank you for letting us come,” I began, but before I could finish my sentence, a whoosh of wind blew past us, and a loud roar filled the sky.

Aidan flew by as his dragon, a reddish blur in the air. Several elves rushed out from within the castle to take in the sight and Aelfric erupted in laughter, slapping Bayleon and Bastian on their shoulders.

“Well, isn't this a surprise! Come on you two, Iston's waiting inside. I want you to try this new mead I brewed. Let's hurry before Aidan gets settled and drinks it all.”

That made me laugh. The last time Aidan visited the elvish kingdom, he drank several bottles of their berry wine. When it came to having a good time, Aidan was known for it.

Bayleon and Bastian glanced at me once and I nodded for them to go. They were now free from their pain, and I wanted them to enjoy everything they could.

Rhoswen stepped back and grabbed my shoulders. “Why didn't you tell me Aidan was coming, too?”

Luckily, it didn't seem as if she minded. On the contrary, she appeared really happy

about it. That was a plus for me. The last thing I wanted her to realize was that I needed him here so he could use his magic on them.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized. “It was a last-minute thing.”

A spark of mischief flashed in her eyes. “No need to apologize. My niece, Cathlyne, is here; we both know how much she fancies Aidan. Now that he’s a king, he’ll be looking for a queen.”

I snorted. “I wouldn’t be too sure of that. I think he’s enjoying his freedom.” But then the realization of her words dawned on me. Releasing a sigh, I looped my arm with hers and we walked up the stairs into the castle. “Please tell me you’re not trying to play matchmaker again? We saw how things ended with Iston and Ella.”

Rhoswen sighed. “Iston’s heart was broken there for a while. Still, I’ve been longing for a royal alliance between our people,” she said, letting go of my arm as we reached the grand staircase.

I smiled confidently. “It’ll happen sooner or later,” I said, knowing I still had two single female cousins. Anything could happen.

In the next moment, Aidan stepped into the room, clad in his court warrior leathers with his power radiating around him.

He stretched out his arms and jokingly said, “It looks like no one waited for me.”

Rhoswen and I both laughed at his remark. “Aelfric wanted Bayleon and Bastian to test his freshly made mead before you gulp it down,” she answered and hugged him, kissing his cheek lightly. “Nice to see you, Aidan. The men are in Aelfric’s study.”

He winked at me and took off down the hallway, his chuckle echoing off the walls.

He reminded me so much of his father, my uncle Drake.

“Come,” Rhoswen called, nodding toward the stairs with a mischievous twinkle in her sea-green eyes.

Taking two steps at a time, we ascended to the top of the staircase and turned down another hallway lined with fragrant flowers on either side. The scent and decor created a sense of cozy familiarity.

We stopped at a large wooden door covered in a mass of leafy vines, and Rhoswen opened it to reveal an opulent room decorated to give the impression you were outside. The walls were painted the same hue as an early morning horizon, and the floor was made of soft grass. A large canopy bed with flower petals draping from it stood regally in the center of the room; it was a stunning sight.

“This is perfect,” I gushed. “Thank you.”

Rhoswen flourished a hand toward the door. “Bayleon and Bastian’s rooms are just down the hall. I’ve also put some clothes in their closets in case they’d like to wear them to the ball tonight.”

Smiling, I opened my arms and hugged her. “I’m sure they’ll appreciate that. I’m looking forward to the festivities.”

And then, once tonight was over, it was down to business and searching for information.

Rhoswen let me go and stepped back toward the door. “I’ll go so you can rest. One of my ladies, Maylin, will be up here in a little while to help you get ready.”

I nodded and bowed my head. “That would be lovely. Thanks again.”

Rhoswen bowed and opened the door. “Until this evening.”

She shut the door gently behind her and I walked over to the bed, sitting down on the soft mattress. Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out the two necklaces with amber stones my mother had given me before I left. The last time anyone wore them was when Bayleon and Bastian wanted to be invisible during my last training day. My mother wanted me to have them on hand in case we ran into trouble. I didn’t want to think about anything bad happening to us, but there was a feeling in my gut I couldn’t shake. There were too many possibilities, too many things that could go wrong. All I knew was that I needed to be prepared.

* * *

The ornate gown Rhoswen left for me was the epitome of ethereal beauty. She’d chosen an exquisite fabric of warm cream with golden threads woven into delicate flowers at the waist and the hem. Maylin had spent hours curling my long, red locks before adorning my head with a crown of fresh, fragrant flowers. It was just as gorgeous as the crown the Land of the Fae had given me when I became queen.

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As Bayleon and Bastian escorted me into the ballroom with Aidan alongside us, I marveled at the presence of so many elves in one space; their energy felt pure and light, like nature's presence was everywhere. I smiled, remembering when my parents brought me to the elvish kingdom when I was younger. The elves didn't have elemental magic, but their presence was magical all the same. The Land of the Fae worked in mysterious ways; I could feel that connection to nature all around me.

It didn't take long for Aidan, Bayleon, and Bastian to draw the ladies' attention in the room. It seemed like Cathlyne, Aelfric and Rhoswen's niece, was going to ask Aidan to dance with her but instead chose Bastian—I suspected it was to make him jealous, though she had no way of knowing if it would work. Her friend Livi asked Bayleon to join her on the dance floor, and although he didn't want to, he eventually obliged. Aelfric's mead had loosened him and Bastian up a little.

Aidan held out his hand. "Want to dance, cousin?"

Taking his hand, I let him lead me onto the dance floor. Bayleon glanced over at me and even though his eyes were hidden behind his silver mask, I could tell he was disinterested in what Livi was saying to him. As long as I've known him, he's never enjoyed parties or balls. There was always the fear of death looming over him. The stipulation for living in the Spring Court was that he couldn't use his powers of seduction on anyone. Nevertheless, Bayleon was careful and precise in everything he did.

"What are you thinking about?" Aidan asked.

I looked up into his smiling face and then over at Bayleon. "I was remembering a

night about ten years ago at our Equinox Ball. Bayleon was alone on the terrace, and I asked him what was wrong.” When I focused back on Aidan, he cocked his head to the side, curious to hear more. “He had said being around so many people terrified him and that it was a huge risk.” I continued. “All it would take was his mask falling off for his magic to enthrall someone.”

Aidan nodded in understanding. “And your father was adamant on his orders. If Bayleon and Bastian used their powers, they’d be sentenced to death.”

“Exactly,” I said, sighing.

Aidan glanced around the room, and I followed his line of sight to Rhoswen who looked beautiful in a shining white dress. She stopped at the drinks table to get a glass of berry wine.

“Do you think we should bring up the curse while Bayleon and Bastian are busy dancing?” he asked. “It’s probably better to do it while they’re not around.”

His thought did make sense.

“I guess we should go over there then. I could really use a drink right now anyway.” We made our way over to Rhoswen, who smiled as soon as she saw us.

“The food should be served soon,” Rhoswen said as she handed me a glass of berry wine.

My stomach grumbled, but I pushed the hunger aside for now. The sweet hint of strawberry lingered on my tongue as I took a sip.

She gave Aidan his glass and smiled. “How is your new court treating you?”

Aidan gulped down his entire drink in one go. “Good. I’m enjoying it. The Summer Solstice Ball will be at my court this year. Are you planning on attending? I can give you and Aelfric the grand tour.”

Rhoswen nodded her head in response. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Her gaze shifted to the dance floor and landed on Bayleon with Cathlyne. She looked over at me curiously. “How’s it going with Bayleon and Bastian?” she asked.

I sipped my wine and smiled, knowing that Rhoswen had suspected something between us for quite some time, just like so many others in the realm. Aidan smirked at me, knowing I was about to take advantage of the opportunity. Rhoswen opened herself up to my questions without me having to find a way in. “Well,” I began, “I guess it won’t stay a secret for too much longer.” I felt my heart swell as I looked back at Bayleon and Bastian and knew I had to tell Rhoswen the truth. I wanted to tell her the truth, just like I wanted the whole world to know. Bayleon and Bastian were mine.

“They’re both mine, Rhoswen,” I confessed. Her eyes widened in surprise, and I laughed before continuing. “Yes, you heard that right. I love them both and they love me.”

Rhoswen’s jaw dropped. “You mean to tell me that neither Bayleon nor Bastian are asking you to choose between them?”

I held her gaze steadfastly. “That’s right,” I said, “they both have my heart.”

A disbelieving chuckle tumbled from her lips. “You are quite the courageous woman, Lia,” she said, her eyes narrowed in admiration. “I can barely manage Aelfric and his needs. I can’t even fathom the idea of two men.” I leaned in and murmured so Aidan couldn’t hear. “Believe me, it’s an exceptional experience.”

Her features lit up with a small smirk as she tried to muffle her snort of amusement. “It certainly sounds interesting.” Quickly, the smile faded from her face, replaced with a look of worry. “But what of your court? Any children you have with them will be cursed. Surely, you don’t want that, do you?”

My shoulders slumped at the thought, and I shook my head solemnly. “No, I don’t.” When I looked over at Aidan, he nodded for me to keep going. It was my opportunity to see how Rhoswen would react. I took another sip of the berry wine, my heart thumping in my chest. I wanted to know the truth. “Would you like to hear what I heard recently?” I asked her, looking into her eyes. She had a puzzled expression on her face as she waited for me to continue. Taking a deep breath, I knew I was about to say something that could go one of two ways. “I heard that the Tyvar curse started because of the elves.”

Rhoswen’s face went ashen, her eyes wide and her lips pulled back into a thin line. I saw the flicker of terror that crossed her features for only a moment before she quickly composed herself. I could hear the apprehension in her voice when she forced out a laugh.

“Not that I’m aware of,” she said quickly. “My people don’t use that kind of magic.”

I felt Aidan’s arm brush against mine, but I didn’t turn to look at him, my gaze still glued to Rhoswen’s face. She grabbed another glass of berry wine and nodded toward Aelfric, who was chatting with a group of men across the room.

“If you’ll excuse me, I think it’s time I grab my husband for a dance.” She hurried away, and finally, I turned to Aidan, my stomach churning with anxiety. The tenseness of his expression told me all I needed to know.

“She lied,” he said quietly. “She definitely knows something.”

The song playing in the background ended and Bayleon and Bastian wandered over to us, their eyes widening when they saw the look on our faces.

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I put on a fake smile. “Act normal,” I whispered. Before another word could be spoken, Bayleon and Bastian stiffened, their eyes widening as they studied the doorway. “What’s wrong?” I asked quickly.

Aidan stepped up next to them, his face a mask of worry. “Who’s out there?”

Bastian murmured something to him and Bayleon turned to me. “Remember the powerful magic we felt in the mortal realm?”

My heart raced as I remembered. “Yes, but why can’t I feel it now?”

He grasped my arm protectively, his body tense as he scanned the ballroom. “I don’t know. I can feel it coming from outside, but no one here appears to be under its influence like that man in the mortal realm was.”

I scanned the crowd, and everyone seemed to be going about their business with no hint of being under an enchantment.

Bastian’s carefree demeanor ceased as he faced Bayleon. “We need to see what’s going on,” he declared.

Bayleon nodded and steered me toward his brother. “I agree. You stay with our queen and dance. I’ll go check it out.” Before he could leave, I clutched his arm and he looked my way.

“Be careful,” I said softly.

He scanned my lips, then my eyes. "I'll be back."

I was worried about him going alone, but Aidan motioned to follow him and they exited together. Bastian held me tightly against his body, and my heart raced. I could tell he wanted to join them as well.

"Come on," he said gently, ushering us to the center of the room where others were dancing. The music was slow, and Bastian embraced me close and smiled at me weakly.

"What do you think is going on here, Bastian?" I asked while we swayed.

He heaved a deep sigh. "I have no idea," he said softly before his gaze shifted to the door. "Frankly, I have no clue."

Chapter 11

Bayleon

My mind raced with the possibilities of what we could be dealing with. Elves surrounded us, their eyes narrowed in suspicion as we hurried past them. Finally, we made it outside and I carefully surveyed the grounds.

"What are we looking for exactly?" Aidan asked, his voice laced with urgency.

We made it outside and I frantically surveyed the area, my eyes searching for some clue of what we were facing.

"I don't know," I replied honestly. I turned to him and shrugged, wishing I had the answers. "It feels like my magic, only stronger. A lot stronger."

Aidan's eyes widened in alarm. "That can't be good," he breathed out.

I shook my head slowly, my expression grim. "No, not at all I'm afraid. We encountered it in the mortal realm and noticed a human enthralled with it; he almost died but Lia managed to heal him."

A heavy sigh escaped Aidan's lips and he regarded me with concern. "And now you sense the same magic here? I don't think it's a coincidence."

The truth of his words hung in the air between us; it was undeniable. The magic intensified around me, beckoning me closer, and suddenly I saw him—a young man walking into the woods, his body stiff as if he was under someone else's control.

"There!" I growled, pointing him out. "He's about to disappear into the trees."

We took off after him, running like lightning, the night air vibrating with powerful magic. I glanced up at the trees and noticed they weren't shimmering in the moonlight—instead, there were dark clouds overhead, casting an oppressive darkness over us.

"Something's not right," Aidan warned.

We stopped abruptly, and I instinctively unsheathed my sword. A feeling of dread hung heavy in the air as if whatever was lurking in the woods was aware of us and wanted me. I could feel the magic inside me responding to it—surging through my veins like electricity. My heart pounded as Aidan tensed, his head snapping to the left.

"Whoever's out here is retreating fast," he said urgently, pointing his hand to his left. "They're going that way. I can sense about a dozen men."

“Is it elves?” I asked, holding my sword tightly.

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Aidan shook his head before turning his nose up in the air and inhaling deeply. “It’s hard to tell. It’s like their scent is masked somehow. But now there’s blood . . . a lot of it.”

His eyes glowed in the darkness as his dragon surfaced, allowing him to pick up on any unfamiliar scents. My stomach sank and my heart raced as we trudged through the woods, guided by a trail of bright red smears.

In the distance, I saw a figure sprawled on the ground. As we got closer, I noticed it was the elf I saw earlier, wearing a tan and green tunic now stained with blood. The dark clouds that once hovered in the sky were no longer there and the trees began to shimmer in the moonlight, rustling ever so slightly in the light breeze. An oppressive stillness hung in the air as I inhaled deeply, overwhelmed by the smell of death.

Aidan and I kneeled beside him, and I gently turned him onto his back. His neck had a deep cut, and his lifeless eyes stared up at us as if pleading for help. His young face was expressionless—he looked too young to have died such an untimely death.

“This is a trap, Bayleon,” Aidan said. “Whoever or whatever this is wants to lure you out.”

There was no doubt about it.

“I know,” I replied. “But who?”

Aidan turned to me, a look of regret in his eyes. “Don’t you have a lot of enemies?”

It was true, I did. I'd killed many people in my time, and lured innocent women to their deaths. I had no doubt their loved ones would eventually try to seek revenge. For the first time in over three decades, I didn't have the protection of the Spring Court. We were in the elvish kingdom, away from our armies and magic. It was the perfect time for someone to attack. Whoever was here knew I was coming this way.

Chapter 12

Lia

"They should've returned already," I whispered, my stomach churning with dread.

Bastian and I watched as the elves trickled out of the ballroom after a night of dancing and drinking berry wine. The evening had been glamorous, but I didn't have time to enjoy it after learning that Rhoswen had deceived me and something evil was stalking us. It wasn't a coincidence that we'd sensed the same energy when we were in the mortal world, and now it was here in the elvish kingdom.

Bastian drew closer to me and sighed. "Yes, they should have," he murmured.

My heart started to race, anxiety rising within my chest. "We need to find them, now."

Luckily, Bastian nodded in agreement. "Come on. Just stay close to me when we go outside."

We started heading toward the door just as Bayleon and Aidan marched in. Red splotches marked both of their hands and stained their clothing. Luckily, the ballroom was pretty much empty except for a few elves here and there. Several stared at Bayleon and Aidan, their eyes lit with fear. While they seemed to be in one piece, the blood had to have come from somewhere.

I quickly ran up to Bayleon and held onto his arms. “Are you all right?”

His eyes went to Bastian, then back to me. “No, not really. We need to see the king and queen immediately.”

Aidan stepped close to him, and I noticed the worry on his face. “There’s no more waiting for the right time, cousin,” he said to me. “Something’s really wrong here, and I don’t think it’s a coincidence it just happened to start when you three arrived.”

My gaze dropped to the deep red stains smeared on their clothes. “Where did that come from?”

Bayleon motioned his head toward the door. “That’s what we need to show the king and queen.” He explained everything quickly to Bastian and me before focusing back on Aidan. “I believe the lad was used as a means to get to me.”

Aidan nodded in agreement, his forehead creased in confusion as he surveyed the ballroom. “But they didn’t attack. I could sense they were still around us, but they backed off. What concerns me is that I couldn’t make out their scent.” His eyes focused back on me. “I don’t know if they were elves, fae, or something else entirely. But I do know there was some dark magic involved.”

Aelfric and Rhoswen were still busy talking to a group of noble elves and hadn’t noticed Bayleon and Aidan yet.

“We brought the young elf out of the woods,” Bayleon muttered under his breath, “and have hidden him in the back of the palace for now.”

With a heavy sigh, I set my sights on my protectors and Aidan. “Go there and I’ll bring Aelfric and Rhoswen. They should be able to identify him. I’m certain he must have family here who will be searching for him soon.”

The three of them took their leave, but not before Aelfric and Rhoswen noticed their departure. As our eyes met, I moved toward them, the seriousness of the situation clear on my face.

After bidding farewell to the other elves, Rhoswen intertwined her arm with Aelfric's, her expression uneasy. I'd never seen her like this before; she was always so serene and calm. Mention of the Tyvar curse must have unsettled her greatly.

"Did you enjoy the ball this evening, Lia?" Aelfric queried. "I hope it was to your liking."

"Yes, it was," I answered, glancing at them both, "but now it's time for you to find out why I am actually here."

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Rhoswen's face drained of color, her hands trembling as she clasped Aelfric's arm. He remained stoic, his gaze intense, but the furrow of his brows betrayed his worry.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

I nodded solemnly. "We need to go outside."

We walked in darkness down the palace hall, the candles lining the wall barely flickering in response to our presence as we marched past. Chilly air rushed in when we exited the castle and entered the softly lit garden.

Bayleon, Bastian, and Aidan were just off to the left, but I couldn't see the young elf until we got closer. It was a gruesome sight, especially to see someone so young meet such a tragic end. Finally, I stepped aside and allowed Aelfric and Rhoswen to catch sight of what we wanted them to see. Rhoswen gasped, and Aelfric immediately dropped to his knees beside the young elf lying on the grass. His head was hung low and a deep sadness emanated from him. Aelfric touched the young elf's face, sadness shadowing his expression.

"It's Cristo, son of Aneera and Dairion." But when he looked up at us, his eyes were blazing. "What happened?"

Bayleon put a hand on his sword hilt and sighed. "Magic was used to lure him out to the woods. King Aidan and I tried to get to him, but we were too late."

Aidan moved forward, and his power pulsed through the air around him. "I think it was an ambush; there were about a dozen men in the woods, but they ran away when

we approached.”

Aelfric rose and shook his head. “I don’t understand why this is happening; we’ve never had anything like this before.”

“I think it’s because we’re here,” Bayleon said, nodding toward Bastian. “The same magic we felt in the mortal realm a few days ago is here, too; it’s not a coincidence.”

“What kind of magic are you talking about?” Rhoswen asked. “Our people don’t have dark magic.”

Bayleon cleared his throat, and I could see the hesitance on his face. “When I felt it, it called to me. It’s almost like the Tyvar’s power of seduction, only different . . . stronger. But this power entralls men, not women.”

Rhoswen’s body froze as if a terror swept through her. I stepped up to her and met her gaze. “It’s abundantly clear that you know something, Rhoswen. I love you like a mother, and I’ve trusted you my entire life. You lied to me earlier and I want to know why.”

Rhoswen turned her gaze to Aelfric, and his expression shifted to understanding—his eyes had a knowing glint in them as he nodded silently at her.

She sighed heavily. “All right. I’ll tell you everything I know. But first,” she said, her voice heavy with sorrow as she looked down at the young elf’s body, “Aelfric and I need to find Aneera and Dairion and tell them their son is dead.” When her eyes met mine, tears were brimming in them, and she spoke softly. “Meet us in Aelfric’s study in an hour. I promise I’ll tell you everything.” She then cast her gaze over Aidan and back to me. “I’m assuming that’s the true reason why he’s here, to make sure I speak the truth?”

I couldn't bring myself to deceive her any longer, so I spoke candidly, "I only did what Elvena told me to do."

Rhoswen nodded, realization in her eyes. "I understand. Just be prepared for what you're about to find out." Her gaze then shifted to Bayleon and Bastian. "All of you."

* * *

Bastian and I stepped into the study, and my gaze darted around the room. Bayleon and Aidan were getting cleaned up and Aelfric and Rhoswen hadn't shown up yet. Bastian and I were the only two in the room. Ancient books lined the walls, and paintings of ethereal creatures hung between them. The furniture was carved from dark wood, and a thick velvet rug ran across the floor. An eerie silence filled the space as I glanced around, taking in the intricate details of artifacts that had always fascinated me. The elves and their lands were part of the Land of the Fae, but it was almost like we were in a different realm.

Bastian crept up behind me, pressing his body against mine as his arms snaked around my waist. His lips were soft and warm as they caressed the side of my neck, sending shivers of desire cascading down my skin. I melted into his touch, feeling an intense longing for him that I couldn't ignore.

"I wish we could have more moments alone like this," he murmured against my ear, his breath warm and sweet.

I smiled, leaning into him further and then turning around in his arms to wrap mine around his neck. "We will. As soon as we're back home, you can have me anytime you want."

A low growl vibrated in his chest, and something deep inside me stirred with anticipation. "That might be kind of hard. What if my brother wants you at the same

time?” he countered.

His words made everything inside of me tighten. What was going to happen if they both wanted me at the same time? I couldn't deny that the thought was exhilarating, a fantasy I'd dreamed about numerous times.

“And what if he does?” I murmured. “What happens then?”

His eyes blazed with unadulterated passion. “I don't know. I guess we'll see.” My cheeks flushed with heat and Bastian smirked as he leaned in for a kiss. “You're killing me, Lia. I can sense your need for me.”

His lips were electric against mine, and I moaned in pleasure as I tasted him. He pressed his hardness against me, making me want him more.

“It looks like you need me, too,” I teased.

A chuckle escaped his lips as he drew back and looked at me. “Always.”

We stared at each other for a few seconds, and I wished I could lift his mask to fully see into his eyes. The last thing we needed was for Rhoswen to walk in and be taken captive by his powers of seduction. Fae royals were immune to their powers, but Rhoswen wasn't fae; it was a risk none of us were willing to take.

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Smiling, I brushed a hand down Bastian's cheek. "What do you think you'll love most about being a king?" I wondered.

His smirk widened. "Besides you being my queen?"

That made me laugh. "Besides that. What else?"

Bastian held me tighter and kissed me again, his expression serious. "Honestly, I never allowed myself to think about anything like that; I can't. I'm cursed, Lia. I'm not supposed to know what love is, yet I feel it." He brushed a hand down my cheek. "I don't know why my brother and I were given a chance to love you, but when I felt it building inside me, I held onto it with all my might. At first, I didn't know what it was. But then, I just knew I needed to be with you, around you, and as close to you as possible."

"When did you first realize you were in love with me?" I asked.

Bastian tightened his hold around me, his answer instant. "It was ten years ago at the Winter Solstice Ball. I watched how you were passed around the dance floor with all those men wanting to catch your eye. You went through the motions, but I knew you were unhappy. I could tell you were about to explode."

My eyes widened. "You ended up cutting in on one of the dances. I remember that night. The guy I was dancing with was getting a little too adventurous with his hands. I was about to break every single one of his fingers."

Bastian laughed. "And I knew you would."

As I recalled that night in my mind, I couldn't help but smile. It was the same night I started having feelings for him and Bayleon, but I did my best to ignore them. I knew nothing could ever happen between us, not with them being part of the Tyvar. The only way I knew how to get them out of my mind was to be with someone else. That was when Cas became one of my lovers. He helped for a while, but there was no pretending when Bayleon and Bastian became my protectors. I couldn't fathom the thought of being intimate with other men when my heart clearly belonged to them.

"I'm sorry you had to see me with other men. I never wanted to hurt you or Bayleon," I murmured.

Bastian shook his head. "No need to apologize. However, there were several times I wanted to rip Cas's arms off. I thought for sure he was going to be the one you chose."

Footsteps sounded down the hall and Bastian let me go. We turned to face the door and when it opened, Bayleon and Aidan strolled in, dressed in clean clothes.

Bayleon's gaze instantly found us, and Bastian rested a hand on my back. "I'll let you and my brother have some time."

Bastian strolled away toward Aidan and Bayleon stepped closer, his eyes skimming the bookshelf behind me. His long, white-blond hair was as soft as a feather, and I wanted to trace my fingers through it.

"How many of these have you gone through?" he asked, his lips curving up ever so slightly. It was remarkable how two siblings could look alike but be entirely different. His seriousness drew me in, as did his brother's playfulness. They were yin and yang but combined they were perfect.

"Actually, I haven't looked through them," I confessed, turning to the bookshelf.

“Bastian and I talked the whole time.”

Bayleon stepped closer, his presence radiating heat against my back, and I turned to him. His eyes met mine, and I felt my heart flutter in response. Across the room, Bastian leaned against the wall watching us, a hint of longing in his gaze. Aidan was speaking to him but his focus was on me.

“What did you two talk about?” Bayleon asked.

A grin spread across my face. “For starters, we talked about the Winter Solstice Ball ten years ago. It was the night I realized I had feelings for you both.” Bayleon’s lips tilted up more and I loved that I could get him to smile.

“I wish I would’ve told you how I felt sooner.”

I nodded in agreement. “Me too. I never would’ve wasted my time with Cas or anyone else. I feel horrible for putting you and Bastian through that.”

Bayleon shook his head and clutched my cheeks. “Let’s leave the past in the past, Lia. All that matters is what happens between us now.” He leaned in, pressing his lips to mine in a gentle kiss. My eyes fluttered shut as I savored the feel of his touch. When I opened my eyes, we rested our foreheads together for a few blissful seconds before reluctantly stepping back.

“How are you feeling, by the way?” I asked him, my voice barely a whisper. “Do you have any pain?”

I knew that one night of lovemaking wasn’t going to heal the years of deprivation Bayleon and Bastian had gone through. He sighed and averted his gaze from mine.

“It’s still there, but not like it was before.” His voice was heavy with emotion. “I fear

that knowing you're mine will only increase my desires for you. And if we don't break this curse, I'm afraid my needs will become too much for you to handle, especially with Bastian in the equation."

He raised his gaze back to meet mine and even through the obscurity of the mask, the intensity of his deep blue eyes left me breathless. If he only knew how much I needed him and Bastian.

"Being desired isn't a bad thing, Bayleon."

He scoffed. "It is when it becomes too much. All I can think about is being with you—of feeling you wrapped around me." He sighed heavily, shaking his head in frustration. "I don't want my brother and me to hurt you."

I placed my hands on his cheeks and smiled reassuringly up at him. "You won't," I said softly. "I can handle this. And as far as the curse goes—I am going to break it. Until then," I continued, my voice gentle, "I'll do whatever I can to heal you both."

The sound of Aelfric and Rhoswen's voices reverberated through the hallway, and I felt my pulse quicken. My breathing grew shallow as Bastian stepped up beside Bayleon and me, our eyes trained on the door. Each second felt like an eternity as I tried to prepare myself for what was coming. I didn't know what we were about to find out, but I had to believe it would be the answers we were seeking.

Chapter13

Lia

Aelfric and Rhoswen shuffled into the study, their faces grim. I waited for Aelfric to close the door before I spoke.

“Did you find Aneera and Dairion?”

Rhoswen wiped a tear off her cheek and Aelfric nodded. “Yes,” he said, his voice heavy.

“Who did you say attacked them?” I asked.

Rhoswen expelled a sigh and gave me a swift glance, then Aidan, before returning her focus to me. “The elder elves are aware of the secrets of our kingdom. They’re just forbidden to speak of it.” Aidan glanced at me with curiosity, and even I was intrigued. Rhoswen gestured to the sofa and other chairs. “Please, sit down. This is going to be a long story.”

Bayleon and Bastian settled on either side of me on the couch while Aidan sat in the armchair to our left. Holding hands, Aelfric and Rhoswen sat across from us, their expressions full of sorrow. Rhoswen closed her eyes and took a deep breath before meeting my gaze.

“What I’m about to tell you was passed down to me. I have never spoken of it out loud until now.” Her words made my entire body tremble. I could sense the urgency

in her tone, the hidden fear.

“Many centuries ago,” she began, “Haleth, my grandmother from many generations back fell in love with a man named Ambrose. They were lovers for a while, but then he fell in love with her sister, Nienna.” I could only imagine where the story was about to lead. Rhoswen cleared her throat and swallowed hard. “Needless to say, Haleth wanted Ambrose and her sister to suffer for breaking her heart. So, she searched the Mystical Forest for anyone who could conjure up a revenge spell.” She shrugged. “Of course, she didn’t find anyone who would help her. At this point, she was blinded by rage and her desire for revenge. She was desperate.”

She paused and looked over at Aelfric, who rubbed her hand reassuringly. “This was the beginning of some really dark times here in our kingdom,” he said.

Rhoswen nodded and turned her attention back to me. “When Haleth came back, it just so happened that word had spread to a certain group of people who could help her.”

My pulse started to pound. “Who?” I demanded, totally immersed in the story.

Rhoswen blew out a shaky breath. “Haleth was overwrought with so much anger that she contemplated ending her own life. She walked right out into the lake and was set on drowning herself when someone appeared.” I was on the edge of my seat with the suspense. Rhoswen leaned forward in her seat, her eyes directly on mine. “It was a siren, Lia. A very powerful being named Diawen.”

My eyes shot over to Aidan, who sat utterly still, his mouth slightly agape. I knew of sirens, of course. They were talked about in stories just like werewolves and vampires—creatures that roamed the mortal realm, not the Land of the Fae. But as I looked at Bayleon and Bastian, I could tell they possessed a similar power of seduction, only they hypnotized females. Sirens were known for hypnotizing males.

Puzzled and confused, I glanced back at Rhoswen. “But how?” I asked. “Sirens live in the mortal world. Not here.”

Rhoswen shook her head. “They weren’t born here; they say they found their way over centuries ago. Our kingdom was their home; they lived in Glimmerglass Lake on the far east side of our land. Only the royal family knew of their existence.”

Taking a deep breath, I processed this new information. It was a lot to take in and I had a feeling there was a ton more I was about to find out. Rhoswen looked down at the floor, a distant expression on her face.

“My ancestors promised the sirens they could stay here, thinking they’d be able to control them.” Her gaze shifted back to me. “But they were wrong. The sirens were too powerful.”

“Are they still here?” I asked.

Rhoswen shook her head. “No. They haven’t been for a long time. Glimmerglass Lake disappeared before I was born, and I still don’t know why. Since the sirens live in water, they had to leave. They can walk on land for a short period of time, but that’s it. We have other places with bodies of water, but there have been no signs of the sirens.”

“Until now,” I added quietly.

She looked down sadly in response. “Until now.”

Bayleon shifted beside me, his shoulders stiff. “How does this all connect to the Tyvar?”

Rhoswen raised her head and exhaled deeply. “Before Haleth could drown herself,

Diawen pulled her out of the water and told her she could help. All Haleth needed to do was lure Ambrose to the lake.”

“What did Diawen want in return?” I questioned.

“Blood,” Rhoswen answered. “All she wanted was a drop of Haleth’s blood.”

I didn’t like the sound of that. Blood was powerful.

“What was Haleth’s blood used for?” I asked.

Rhoswen shrugged. “I don’t know. It was never revealed. But I do know what happened to Ambrose.” The regret and shame were evident in her voice. She averted her focus to Bayleon and Bastian. “Haleth tricked Ambrose into thinking Nienna wanted to meet him by the lake. When he got close enough to the waters, Diawen used her siren magic to hypnotize him. It was there that she made him drink a potion. I don’t know what was in it. But when he ingested it, he was given the powers of seduction.”

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Rhoswen surveyed the group, her emerald eyes scanning us all before settling on Bayleon and Bastian. “Ambrose was the first of the Tyvar,” she said slowly. “He was the one who gave your people that name. But it turns out that the curse wasn’t so much of a burden to him. Haleth thought he would suffer from being unable to be with Nienna, but it seemed he enjoyed every minute of seducing other women and killing them.” She paused and her gaze shifted to me. “Nienna, however, is the one who truly suffered. She had to watch as Ambrose changed into a completely different person. Ultimately, he was quickly banished and Haleth lived with incredible guilt for what she had done.”

“What happened to Haleth?” I asked.

Rhoswen’s smile was sad but genuine. “She married and had children but never found true happiness. Everyone said it was her punishment for what she did. But Nienna found love again, despite all the pain her heart had endured at Ambrose’s hands. She lived a long life with a husband she truly cherished.”

At least, there was a happily ever after to the tragic story. With a trembling hand, Rhoswen stood and padded across the room to a painting on the wall. She ran her finger over the edge of the frame until she found the hidden latch. When she clicked it, a small door slowly opened and Rhoswen reached inside to pull out an ancient leather-bound book. Its pages were yellowed with age and frayed at the edges. She gazed at it momentarily, then sat back down and placed it on her lap.

“When news of Ambrose’s banishment began to spread, our people were thrown into a state of fear and chaos,” Rhoswen said sadly. “Many were abducted by the Tyvar or forced to make deals with the sirens that often ended in tragedy. It took a long time,

but eventually, our king and queen issued a decree banning any of our people from ever going near the lake again, and any caught dealing with the sirens were subject to execution.”

I could hardly believe what I heard—it seemed too harsh for such a beautiful place. It was hard to imagine the elves in such dire circumstances.

“How did things eventually go back to normal?” I asked curiously.

Rhoswen sighed sadly and her shoulders dropped down in resignation. “Fear, unfortunately,” she said, her voice heavy with regret. She gestured to the leather-bound book on her lap. “This is a collection of names of those who were turned into Tyvar. Some volunteered and some were forced; it’s written beside their names. There’s even a list of women we believe were sold to them and those who voluntarily gave themselves up.”

Bastian stood and took the book, carefully running his fingers over the cover before opening it and looking through its pages. The paper was dry to the touch as if it would crumble in his hands, but that didn’t stop him from fully immersing himself in the information within.

Rhoswen watched with a look of curiosity on her face as if she was expecting something from him. A few seconds later, Bastian halted with his index finger lingering on a name. His jaw clenched and he sighed quietly.

“What is it?” I inquired.

He looked over at me and then at Bayleon. “There’s something you need to see.”

I leaned back so he could hand the book to Bayleon. Bayleon examined it and his facial muscles tightened once he saw the name. “Amadar: volunteered to be Tyvar,”

he read aloud. "I suspected but I never knew for sure," he uttered.

"Do you recognize the name?" Rhoswen asked.

He closed the book and exhaled deeply before passing it back to her. "Yes, Your Highness," he said. "It's our father. He chose to be a Tyvar of his own free will."

My mouth dropped and I gasped; this answered many of my questions. I was sure elven blood ran through their veins somehow.

"Which isn't shocking," Bastian added. "The man was an arrogant ass."

Rhoswen glanced between them. "When I first encountered you two long ago, I couldn't help but notice your similarity to the elves. However, I didn't think it was my place to ask about it."

Bayleon hung his head, his shoulders tense, and he sighed deeply. "Our father never talked about his lineage. All that mattered to him was being the leader of the Tyvar and passing that legacy down to Bastian and me."

Rhoswen asked softly, "What of your mother? She had to have been a strong lady to survive his powers."

Bayleon's face twisted in pain and Bastian's eyes glowed with a suppressed sadness. He cleared his throat before speaking. "She was from the Summer Court and had an affinity to earth. I remember watching her transform dirt into flowers and rocks into gems."

A heavy feeling of sorrow filled the room as silence took over. We'd gotten a lot of answers and information, but there was still nothing on how to break the curse.

“You’ve given us so much information, Rhoswen,” I said, “and we’re very grateful. But do you have any idea on how to break the curse?”

She looked over at Aidan and then at me, knowing he’d be able to sense the truth. When she shook her head and said, “no,” I knew it was the truth without looking to Aidan for confirmation. Aelfric and Rhoswen stood and the rest of us followed suit.

“Just because I don’t have the answers doesn’t mean you won’t find them. It’s obvious the sirens are back. You’ve witnessed that tonight.” She smiled sadly at us. “If there’s anyone who can defeat them, it’s the four of you.”

Aelfric agreed with a nod. “You have our permission to go anywhere in our kingdom. Find your answers and do what you must do. Just be careful. The sirens are dangerous.”

Aidan’s eyes shifted to his dragon, and he smiled. “So are we.”

Bastian faced Bayleon and me and I could see the determination on his face. “Tomorrow, we hunt. What do you say?”

If the sirens were back, there was a reason for it. I had to believe we were in the right place at the right time. Even if they were after Bayleon and Bastian for some reason, they had Aidan and me behind them. I wasn’t going to let anything happen to my men. Bayleon nodded at his brother and Bastian focused on me, waiting for my answer.

“Yes,” I replied, taking Bastian’s hand in one hand and Bayleon’s in my other, their touch electrifying every nerve ending in my body. “Let’s find us some sirens.”

Chapter14

Lia

After the talk with Aelfric and Rhoswen ended, it was late. Bayleon and Bastian followed me out of the room while Aidan went the opposite way to make a stop at the kitchen before retiring for the night. We passed others in the hallway, giving brief nods as we went.

Once behind the closed doors of my bedroom and away from prying ears, we could speak. I walked over to the window and peered out at the shimmering trees that glowed in the moonlight.

“If the sirens are here because of you, what do you think that means?” I asked, glancing at Bayleon and Bastian’s silhouettes in the window.

Bastian stepped away from the wall and paced the room. “I don’t know. Apparently, this Diawen created us. Why she would have a use for us now makes no sense.”

I chewed my lip, my mind racing with possible scenarios, only I couldn’t focus on just one, which meant I had no idea about anything.

Bayleon stepped forward with clenched fists, his gaze intense through his mask. “Not unless the sirens are after you.”

The air seemed to still around us as we stood in silent contemplation.

“Why would they be after me?” I wondered, furrowing my brows.

Bastian ran a hand through his closely cropped, whitish-blond locks and huffed. “Because you’re you, Lia. You’re the queen of the Blossom Court now with magic that a million others would kill for. If Diawen only needed a drop of blood to turn someone into a Tyvar, imagine what a drop of your blood could do.”

Bayleon nodded solemnly in agreement, his expression grim. “The same thing goes for Aidan,” he said. “He’s a dragon king now—his blood is just as powerful as yours.”

My stomach coiled into tight knots but not out of fear—out of rage. Others had been coming after my family for years, trying to steal our power; I should have seen this coming. All I knew was that I was ready for the fight. I was prepared to take on anyone who stood in my way. I wanted the cure, no matter what it took.

Letting out an exhausted breath, I took off my shoes and sat back down on the soft mattress. The lush green grass floor felt comfortable against my feet, helping to soothe me. When I looked at Bayleon and Bastian, they seemed to be silently speaking to each other through their masks.

“What are you two thinking about?” I asked, studying their expressions as they stood in the shadows.

Bastian pushed away from the wall, releasing a sigh as he removed the mask covering his midnight-blue eyes. He knelt in front of me, and I gasped as I was met with a pair of intense, passionate eyes.

Then Bayleon took off his mask and stepped forward, tossing it carelessly across the room. “I believe we were thinking about you, my queen.”

I glanced back and forth between them. “And?”

Bastian intertwined his fingers with mine, and electricity shot through my veins. “And we don’t want to leave you tonight.”

My heart began to race faster than lightning, and I felt short of breath. “What are you saying?”

Bayleon began to unbutton his shirt with purposeful slowness, exposing his chiseled chest. “We’re saying we want to be with you. If you want both of us, then both of us you’ll have.”

My breathing quickened, my mind reeling from the thoughts of being with both of them. Bastian helped me up and turned me around, his fingers pulling at the ties of my dress.

“Just tell us what you want,” he said, his voice husky with want.

“I want to be with both of you,” I murmured.

Bastian chuckled as he pulled the dress from my shoulders, letting it fall to my waist. “That’s what we wanted to hear.”

Bayleon kissed his way down my neck, his hands lifting to my breasts. I moaned as I ran my fingers through his hair.

“Turn around and face us,” Bayleon growled.

Breathless, I did as he said and turned around. Bastian kept his eyes on mine as he lowered my gown the rest of the way to the floor, his fingers caressing my skin the whole way down. He nipped my bottom lip between his teeth when he stood back up.

“We want you to feel every touch, every caress, everything.”

His hand squeezed my ass as his thumb teased at my clit. His lips closed around my left nipple, and I cried out as pleasure rippled through me. Bayleon’s tongue darted out and swirled around my right nipple before sucking it into his mouth. I whimpered, my fingers tightening in their hair as my insides clenched with need.

“Please, I can’t wait,” I moaned.

Bastian laughed as he pulled back and his brother did the same, their eyes greedy as they looked at my body. Bayleon pulled me into his arms, his lips taking mine as Bastian’s hands reached around my waist. His lips trailed over my shoulder and down my spine. I moaned as the intensity of their touch made me feel as if I was about to explode. Bayleon nudged me onto the bed and my eyes widened at the sight of Bastian, already naked with his cock heavy between his legs. I gasped as he covered me with his body and moved down between my legs, his tongue whipping out to taste me. He buried his face against me, causing me to cry out as he sucked on my clit. I shuddered against him as his tongue worked me over until I couldn’t stand it anymore. I moaned, arching my back to give him better access as his tongue swirled over my clit.

Bayleon climbed onto the bed beside us, and Bastian tasted me one more time before rolling onto his back and taking me with him. Bayleon grabbed my hips, his fingers digging into my skin as he knelt behind me.

“I want you to come with me inside you,” he growled.

He rubbed his cock against my ass, his fingers trailing around my wet flesh before disappearing between my folds. I whimpered, my hips jerking in anticipation, as Bastian began twisting my nipples, his skin like fire beneath me. I was cocooned between them and loving every minute of it.

“Please, I need you both,” I begged.

Bayleon grabbed my hips and pushed the head of his cock inside me from behind. I moaned and arched my back, my ass pressing against his body. My body was on fire as Bastian continued to flick my nipples and touch every square inch of my body. I moaned and shuddered against them, my lust taking over as Bayleon began to stroke my pussy from behind. I gasped, my hips jerking against him as his cock sank deeper.

Bastian smirked, his fingers gripping my nipple as he rose up to meet my gaze. "You will always be ours," he whispered, leaning forward to kiss me.

At the same time, Bayleon pushed himself fully into me, causing me to cry out. Bastian kissed me hard and deep as Bayleon began a slow, steady rhythm. I moaned against Bastian's mouth; my hips tilted to allow Bayleon deeper inside me.

Bastian drew his mouth away from mine, his eyes dark with need. "Come for him so you can come for me."

It was as if his words made it happen. I screamed into the room as pleasure seared through my body. I writhed, my nails biting into Bastian's shoulders. Bayleon growled low behind me, his hips working harder against me. I shuddered, my body clamping down on his cock, clenching tightly around him. I milked him to completion, loving the feel of his cock pulsating inside of me. My orgasm went on and on, my body thrashing between the two of them.

Finally, I slumped in Bastian's arms, my body trembling as I panted for breath. Bayleon pulled out of me, and Bastian tugged me closer.

"Are you ready for me, Lia?"

I nodded, wrapping my arms around his neck. Bayleon kissed my shoulder, his hands burning hot as he cupped my breasts from behind, squeezing them.

“I love you, my queen,” he whispered.

Tilting my head to the side, I kissed him, moaning into his mouth as his tongue caressed mine. “I love you, too.”

He kissed me once more and slid off the bed, giving Bastian his time with me. Bastian grabbed my legs, pulling them onto his lap, spreading me wide to him. He rubbed the tip against my wetness, and I shivered.

With a hand on my hip, he guided his cock into me, my insides clamping down on him as he slid into me. He moaned as pleasure washed over his face.

Placing my hands on his shoulders, I leaned back, my head resting on the pillows. I watched as his cock slowly slid in and out of me, his muscular form above me.

“Fuck, Lia.” He groaned, and he began to thrust harder. “You feel so good.”

I moaned, my hips bucking toward him, my body rocking against his cock. I loved the feel of him sliding in and out of me. He grabbed my hips, his thrusts becoming more urgent. I was getting closer and closer to my orgasm, and Bastian was right there with me. Grinding into him, eyes locked on his, I sucked in a shaky breath as I neared my climax. I lifted a hand, gripping his hair and pulling him down to me.

“I’m going to come, Bastian,” I told him.

My words were breathy, my body tensing as the familiar wave of pleasure washed over me. I felt Bastian’s cock swell, his body stiffening as he thrust into me a couple more times, groaning as he emptied himself into me.

Breathing heavily, he leaned forward, pressing his body into mine. “I love you, Lia,” he whispered.

I nodded. “I love you too, Bastian.”

With a groan, he pulled out of me and collapsed onto the bed beside me while Bayleon laid down on my other side. They both draped an arm over my waist, and I felt my heart swell.

“Is this how it’s always going to be?” I whispered.

Both men chuckled and it made me smile. If I could just break their curse, everything would be perfect.

Chapter15

Bastian

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With Lia in my arms, sleep came quickly. But I was awoken just as fast when a familiar evil tugged at my soul. Before, we didn't know what it was, but now we do. Sirens. I had their magic inside me, and I could feel it when they were near.

Slowly, I slid my arm away from Lia and Bayleon's eyes snapped open, his gaze darting about the room.

"I feel them," he growled, his low voice husky from sleep.

"So do I," I replied. Carefully, I slipped out of bed and threw on my clothes while Bayleon did the same. "Shouldn't one of us stay with Lia?" I questioned.

With a heavy sigh, Bayleon stared down at her as he dressed. "She's safe in the castle. Aidan's just down the hall." When he faced me, his eyes were blazing. "I'm not about to let you go out there by yourself. If the sirens want Lia, they'll have to go through us." He quickly glanced over at Lia before addressing me. "Be ready out front in five. I'm getting my sword."

I had to gather mine as well. I looked at Lia one last time, sleeping peacefully in the bed with her fiery red hair spread around her. She was going to be livid when she found out we'd left without her.

After putting on my mask, I rushed to my room and slipped into my battle attire before sprinting outside with my sword. Bayleon was already waiting for me, dressed in his warrior gear and ready for a fight. The two elf guards posted by the entrance remained still, their eyes trained on us but not saying a word. I didn't want any of the elves involved, not when they were susceptible to the sirens.

The siren's magic grew stronger and as I looked to my right, trying to pinpoint the location, Bayleon's hand suddenly shot out and pointed to a distant figure.

"There," he hissed. "They're luring someone into the woods like they did earlier."

In the distance, a male elf trudged slowly forward, walking as if in a trance. "It's a trap," I grumbled, and Bayleon huffed in agreement.

"Of course, it is. But we have to try and save him. Maybe the sirens will give us some answers since we are a part of them."

We were basically male sirens. The only difference was that we didn't live in water. As we ran through the woods, it seemed as if the life had been snuffed out of the land. The once gentle breeze was now a cold, prickling wind that scraped against my skin. Everything around me had an aggressive aura, and I felt as if I were slipping into quicksand, getting progressively more and more sluggish. The elf was all but gone by now, and when I glanced at Bayleon, he too, was stuck in one place, struggling to move his legs.

"Someone's here," he growled, unsheathing his sword.

I could hear footsteps all around us, like rats scurrying in the grass. An intense rage boiled within me, but it did nothing to break me away from the force binding me to the spot. The darkness around us seemed to be deepening by the second. I scanned the forest for any sign of movement, and suddenly, I saw who was with us.

As Bayleon and I dropped to our knees, the atmosphere around us crackled with energy. An intense pain shot through my head and I fell forward, feeling blood dripping down my face. As I gritted my teeth and tried to push myself off the ground, a heavy boot slammed into my chest and knocked me back down. I felt the world spinning around me, thick darkness enveloping me. But before it could take me

completely, a familiar voice rang out in the distance. I knew exactly who was there.

Chapter 16

Lia

I rolled over, expecting to find the warmth of Bayleon and Bastian's bodies curled up with mine. But all I felt were cold, empty sheets. That didn't matter, though—thoughts of last night and how amazing it was quickly warmed my body. Even now, Bayleon and Bastian's scents lingered in the air, making me smile.

Through the window I could see the sun was already out, indicating they'd most likely been up for a while, probably formulating strategies for our next mission: hunting sirens.

Throwing off the covers, I got out of bed and headed to the bathroom. After washing up, I pulled on my dark green leather warrior gear. My sword hung from my belt along with a small dagger and two quivers full of arrows were strapped to my back. I made sure to put the two necklaces my mother gave me into my pocket. If we were going to hunt sirens, having the chance to be invisible could help.

I crossed the long hallway to the grand staircase, where the delicious aromas of freshly baked bread enticed me to follow the trail toward the kitchen. As I strolled down the stairs, one of Rhoswen's servants, a woman with long, chocolate-colored hair and sparkling blue eyes waited for me at the bottom. She bowed her head and curtsied, her angelic smile full of warmth and sincerity.

"Good morning, Your Highness. King Aidan is in the dining room, waiting on you. King Aelfric and Queen Rhoswen will be joining you shortly."

"Thank you," I said, smiling back. She started to walk off, but I held up a hand,

halting her. There was no mention of Bayleon or Bastian. “Have you, by any chance, seen my protectors?”

Her smile faded. “Not this morning, Your Highness. I’m sorry.”

I shook my head. “It’s okay. I’m sure they’re around here somewhere.”

The ornate dining room was just around the back of the grand marble staircase and down an intricate mosaic-tiled hallway. When I stepped inside, a lavish spread of food was artfully arranged across the huge oak table, with various freshly squeezed juices and fruits at the center. Aidan was standing by one of the towering windows overlooking the palace grounds, dressed in his brown and gold warrior gear, with a glass of sparkling clear liquid resting in his hands.

“Good morning,” I called out.

He slowly turned around and smiled slyly, his teeth so white against his tanned summer skin. “Yeah, I’d say so . . . for you, at least.”

His words sent an electric jolt through my body, my cheeks flushing bright red. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

He chuckled, his grin spreading wider across his face. “Let’s just say,” he replied, “my dragon hearing can pick up a lot. I might have to find something to put over my ears tonight if you decide to have a threesome again.”

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Groaning, I covered my face with my hands and felt the full heat of my embarrassment. "I am so sorry."

Aidan chuckled. "It's okay."

I walked over to the table where I filled a glass with tart lemon berry juice. Aelfric and Rhoswen strolled in, and I turned to smile at them.

Rhoswen stepped closer, lightly pressing a kiss to my cheek. "I'm glad to see you aren't angry with me," she said softly.

"I could never be angry at you," I replied, taking her hands in mine. "You helped us tremendously last night. I have faith that we'll get to the bottom of this curse soon."

Rhoswen gave me a nod of encouragement before we all helped ourselves to heaping plates of breads, fruit, and cheeses. We sat down around the table, and I savored the meal, appreciating the much-needed sustenance after burning so much energy the night before. Every now and again, I caught myself staring at the door, wondering if Bayleon and Bastian would stroll in.

Rhoswen glanced over her shoulder at the door, furrowing her brows when she turned back to me. "Is something wrong?" she asked.

I shook my head. "I don't think so. I haven't seen Bayleon or Bastian yet this morning."

Aelfric grabbed a carafe of orange juice and filled his glass. "Two of my guards

informed me that they went out very early this morning.” A look of concern passed across his face. “Are they not back yet?”

A feeling of dread coursed through my veins. My gaze snapped to Aidan and he jumped to his feet, his eyes darkening into warrior mode.

“I didn’t know they had left,” I said, standing quickly.

Rhoswen gasped and stood. “You don’t think something happened to them, do you?”

I hoped to hell it hadn’t. Aidan marched around the table and nodded toward the door. “Let’s go. I can track them.”

We took off out of the dining room and tore out of the palace doors. Aidan stopped in the grass and breathed in deeply, his eyes shifting to that of his dragon.

“I have their scents, but it’s not just theirs I smell. There are others, and just like last night, I can’t make out what they are; they’re masked somehow.”

He nodded toward the forest and my stomach dropped. We ran swiftly across the meadow and stopped at the tree line. Aidan’s eyes glowed as he pinpointed where we should go next. I don’t know how far we ran, but it had to have been miles. Finally, up ahead, I spotted an opening.

“What’s out there?” I said, trying to see what was beyond the trees.

Aidan narrowed his gaze, obviously able to see farther off in the distance than I could. “It’s Glimmerglass Lake.”

I ran as fast as possible toward it, dodging tree limbs and bushes. When I reached the edge of the trees, I stopped dead at the sight before me. I gazed at the bleak landscape

of cracked mud and sparse patches of dead grass in front of me, a far cry from the majestic lake I had envisioned based on the tales I'd heard. Could it really be that the land had drained this lake to punish the sirens for their mischievous ways?

"Where to now?" I asked Aidan, who was sweeping his gaze across the desolate expanse.

"This is it. It ends here."

His words sent a chill down my spine, and my mind raced to make sense of it all as my gaze darted around in search of any clues of where Bayleon or Bastian might be. There were no footprints to track, nothing to prove that my men were even there. My heart began to pound with fear, but then rage replaced it. Whoever had taken them was going to regret it. I was determined to find them and bring them back, come hell or high water.

"Where the hell do we start?" I hissed.

Aidan's gaze smoldered as he turned to me. "We fly. You up for that?"

He stepped back to give himself room to shift, but then his head snapped to the right as if sensing something. He grabbed my arm and pulled me behind a massive tree. My heart thundered in my ears.

"What is it?" I said, keeping my voice low.

He peered around the side of the tree, his green eyes blazing. "I think someone just used a portal to get here. One second there was nothing and then there was this incredible surge of power. I know that feeling; it's the same when people come and go from the Land of the Fae." He breathed in and then slowly let it out. "It's a female, Lia. And her magic isn't masked. I've never felt someone like her before."

It had to be a siren. And just as I thought it, I could feel the woman's power. It was the same power I felt in the mortal realm the other day.

Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out the two necklaces. He stared at the necklace in my hand curiously before cocking his head to the side and meeting my gaze. I moved closer and clasped mine around my neck. His eyes widened as I slowly disappeared from sight, and he smiled.

"No need to explain," he said.

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Once he put his on and faded away, I reached out and found his arm. “The siren is mine. I want to get the answers out of her.”

Aidan’s voice was low and serious. “Got it. She’s about four hundred yards northwest through the trees. I’ll be right there with you.”

Taking a deep breath, I nodded and began running in the right direction, picking up speed as my heart pounded in my chest. Sweat poured down my back as I ran. Despite never having killed anyone or been in an actual fight that wasn’t training, an undeniable sense of determination filled me as I approached the siren’s location.

Through the trees, I could see her—long, caramel-colored hair flowed down her back. She was clad in mortal clothes—jeans and a form-fitting gray T-shirt—but exuded an aura of power and strength.

As she got closer, I could see her features in more detail. She looked young, probably midtwenties, but that didn’t mean anything in our realm. Someone could be eight hundred years old and only appear to be thirty-five. The woman’s eyes were a piercing blue like the sea and were slightly bigger than an ordinary mortal’s. Her face was perfect and flawless as if it had been carved from rock. Her lips were full and pink, and her skin had an unearthly glow. Even if I couldn’t feel her magic, I would’ve known for sure that she was some sort of otherworldly creature. They were known for their ability to make men fall helplessly in love with them and do whatever they wanted. From what I heard, they could turn into mermaid-like creatures in the water and could only stay on land for a short time. This siren, however, didn’t seem too worried about that as she walked steadily through the woods.

I stepped back, my heart racing, every muscle shaking with anticipation. I held my dagger tight, its metal hilt cool in my hand as I waited for her to come closer. She stepped past me, and I made my move, springing forward and wrapping an arm around her neck. She gasped, her breath hot against my skin. I brought the blade closer, the edge pressing against the softness of her neck.

“Who the hell are you?” I demanded. But she was unfazed.

“Seriously? You have to be pretty pathetic to attack someone when they can’t see you coming,” she sneered.

The battle began, her writhing against me, trying to break free until we tumbled to the ground in a tangle of limbs and fabric. I ended up on top of her with the sharp edge of my dagger directly beneath her chin.

Quickly, I yanked the necklace from around my neck and revealed myself. Her eyes widened in shock as I ceased holding her and snarled my warning. “There, now you can see me. But I can guarantee you won’t move from this spot if you try to fight me again.”

The siren glared at me with her piercing blue eyes like a thunderstorm about to burst, and I felt the subtle prickling of her magic against my skin. She seemed desperate to have her power penetrate me, but it wasn’t strong enough to consume a royal fae like me.

Instead of me falling under her power, I gave her a small smile. Rage and fear swirled in the air around us like an electrical current, so I let her go and she jumped to her feet, challenging me with a single brow raise.

“Who are you?” she growled.

“I asked you that question first,” I said coolly.

She huffed and her posture tensed. “Lerissa.”

I narrowed my eyes. “Are you a siren?”

Almost immediately, fear flashed in her gaze before she lifted her chin high in defiance. “No.”

I heard Aidan laugh from somewhere behind us. “Now, that was an outright lie.”

He appeared out of the shadows in full view with the necklace dangling in his hand. Lerissa gasped, her mouth agape as she raked her gaze over him.

“I know you,” she said. “You’re Aidan, King of the Court of Fire and Water. I can sense the flames beneath your skin.” That was something else I’d heard about sirens . . . they had a pathological hatred of fire.

Aidan’s smile faltered and he stepped forward, brows furrowed. “How do you know who I am?”

Lerissa snorted. “Everyone knows who you are. If you were susceptible to a siren’s charms, you would’ve been taken by now.”

Aidan’s eyes widened and he laughed in disbelief. “By who? You?”

Lerissa shrugged nonchalantly, but I got the feeling their exchanges were a little flirtatious. “You’re not my type. Besides, you have Little Miss Fiery Cunt here who seems like she has a jealous streak.”

I snapped, my temper flaring. “First off, watch your mouth. My name is Lia, Queen

of the Blossom Court. And second,” I continued, looking pointedly at my cousin, “Aidan’s my cousin. I’d say that makes him not my type either.”

Lerissa tipped up a shoulder in a careless gesture. “Some humans screw around with their cousins, brothers, sisters, fathers, uncles . . . nothing shocks me anymore.”

“Well,” I said firmly, “that’s not how it works here.” When it was clear she wasn’t going to be able to run away from us, I sheathed my dagger. “Now that we know you’re a siren, what are you doing here?”

She flung her arms out wide. “Taking a stroll.”

My patience was running thin. Of course, that wasn’t the truth, so I didn’t even look at Aidan for confirmation. I stepped forward, ready to grab my dagger again if I needed to.

“I’m going to ask again, what are you doing here?”

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She smirked, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “I got bored.”

That was it; it was all I could take. There was no time to waste, not with Bayleon and Bastian missing. Grabbing Lerissa’s neck with one hand, I pushed her up against a tree, knocking the breath from her lungs. She gasped and tried to pull my hand away to no avail.

“I don’t have time for this,” I shouted, squeezing her neck. “Either you tell us the truth now or I’m going to make this extremely painful for you.”

Her voice was raspy as she stammered a reply, her body thrashing against the tree trunk pressed against her back. “I thought you fae were supposed to be honorable. I’ve done nothing to you.”

With one hand still gripping her neck, I stepped closer until I was inches from her face. “You’ve lied to me, and you have one more chance before we take this to the next level. Now tell me what you’re doing here.”

Lerissa sucked in a ragged breath and shook her head, desperation pulling at the edges of her voice. “I told you, taking a stroll.”

My grip tightened and I looked over my shoulder at Aidan. “I think it’s time for the heat.” I jerked her away from the tree.

Lerissa screamed and tried to break free, but it was too late; Aidan had already created a ring of flames around us. As I let her go, she stumbled back and cried out in pain as the fire licked at her skin, peeling away layer after layer of flesh. She stood at

the center of the circle, her skin glowing orange from the heat of the flames that surrounded her. I calmly walked around her, my skin never burning as I stepped close to the fire. My healing magic prevented the flames from marking my skin.

“Aidan is a truth seeker,” I said coldly. “All you’ve given me is lies. If you tell the truth, we’ll get rid of the flames.”

Lerissa’s screams echoed through the trees as she frantically looked over at me. “Dammit, just ask me your questions! I want this over, please!”

I crossed my arms over my chest and narrowed my eyes at her. “Why are you here?”

She sighed and lowered her head. “I always come here to get away from the shithole I live in.”

Aidan shifted in his spot and peered at me through the flames. “True, but there’s more she’s not telling us.” Lerissa clenched her jaw and looked away.

“What else?” I asked firmly.

She threw her hands up in frustration. “Fine! I felt magic; sometimes it calls to me, and I want to get closer to it.” Her eyes met mine and her power expanded all around her. “You would, too, if you were stuck living in the mortal world.”

She was a strong woman, and I could only imagine what her power could do to someone who wasn’t royal. Dropping to her knees, Lerissa hung her head to keep the flames from burning her face more.

I turned to Aidan. “Dial it back.”

The flames receded but only a tiny bit. I could still feel the heat on my skin. Lerissa

kept her face hidden, her body hunched over with exhaustion.

“There were two men here earlier and now they’re missing,” I explained. “Was it sirens who took them?”

Lerissa lifted her head and laughed, but there was no humor to it. Her dry, burnt skin cracked and peeled away even more. “I don’t know. From what I understand, sirens haven’t lived in this realm for a very long time. All of my family are in the mortal world, living in disgusting, polluted waters. But I’ve already told you that I felt magic calling to me. That would mean there’s another siren here.”

Aidan walked up to the flames and nodded. “Truth.”

If Lerissa didn’t know anything about Bayleon and Bastian, then I was back at square one. I knelt before the siren, her pain evident in her eyes. “What do you know of the Tyvar?” I asked her.

Lerissa sighed. “I’ve never met one personally. I only know of them from the stories my mother told me. Apparently, they have the powers of seduction just like sirens, only slightly different. Their magic is more of a curse. I was brought up not to kill men with my powers.” She glanced over at Aidan and then back to me. “But I’m not going to lie, I’ve had my fair share of fun with the opposite sex.”

Aidan nodded, relaying that was the truth.

“I have another question,” I said, waiting for Lerissa to bring her crystal blue eyes to mine. When she did, I stared right into them. “This siren you’re trying to track down is obviously very powerful if you can feel her magic through realms.”

Lerissa’s jaw tightened and her shoulders slumped, obviously realizing she couldn’t lie. There was only one siren I could think of that could be that powerful. If it was

her, then it could be what we needed to venture on to the next step.

“Who do you think she is?” I inquired, my heart racing with anticipation.

Lerissa huffed and slammed a fist into the ground. “I can’t tell you.” Aidan added fuel to the flames, and she grit her teeth, hissing with the pain.

“You’re going to have to, Lerissa,” I warned her. “There are lives at stake here and I’ll do anything to get the answers I need. I don’t want to hurt you and it definitely doesn’t bring me joy to see you suffering. All I want is the truth. If you help me, I’ll help you.”

Tears streamed down Lerissa’s cheeks, the liquid sizzling on her heated skin as she looked up at me. “Do you promise?” she said, meeting my gaze. “I’ve heard promises are sacred to the fae. So, if you promise to help me, I promise to tell you everything I know.”

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A part of me wondered if she knew the rules of our realm. Her words held great power even if she didn't live in the Land of the Fae. She'd have to keep her promise no matter what.

"You do realize what you're asking, right?" I said, regarding her curiously.

Lerissa nodded mutely, her face charred and blistered from the fire's flames. "I'll do anything to get away from this fire. Besides, there isn't much I know."

I extended my hand, knowing that was how humans usually sealed deals. "I promise to help you," I announced.

When Lerissa hesitated for a moment, I wiggled my fingers invitingly, daring her to seal the promise. She finally grasped my hand and looked me in the eyes. "I promise, too."

A warm energy ran from my palm into hers when our skin connected, healing her blistered and burned body until it was as good as new. Lerissa gasped and stepped back in shock, staring at her healed hands with wide eyes.

Aidan put out the blaze with ease and Lerissa sighed in relief. "Thank you," she whispered gratefully to Aidan and me. Then turning to me again, she asked, "How did you heal me?"

I shrugged nonchalantly. "It's one of the gifts I was given."

She smiled knowingly and looked around at the destruction left behind by the fire.

Bending down, I placed a hand gently on the ground and sent my healing magic through the land. The burnt ground turned back into bright green grass with a ring of colorful flowers.

Lerissa watched with fascination. “Must be nice to be royal.”

I smirked and stepped back up to her. “It has its advantages. Now back to the question you didn’t want to answer. Who do you think the siren is?”

Lerissa’s happiness faded and she hung her head. “This is hard for me. I haven’t spoken any of this out loud . . . ever. My own mother doesn’t know what’s going on.” She blew out a sigh and glanced over at Aidan before turning back to me. “When I started feeling the magic pulling me here, I thought it was a sign. I’ve wanted to find a way for my family to get out of the mortal realm for years. There was a time when we lived in the Land of the Fae. I wanted to see how we could make that happen again.” She averted her gaze to the ground and blew out a shaky breath. “There’s only one person who has the power to do that, and I have a feeling she’s the one I’ve been searching for.”

My pulse quickened and Aidan’s eyes widened. I wanted to hear Lerissa say the name.

“Who?” I asked.

Lerissa lifted her gaze to mine. “Diawen. She’s my grandmother.”

Chapter17

Lia

That was it. That was the name I wanted to hear.

Lerissa's face darkened with realization and her brows furrowed like a storm cloud gathering on her forehead.

"Something tells me you've already heard that name before," she said, her words slow and measured.

"We have," I said, nodding. "She's the one who created the Tyvar. And if she's here, she's the one I need to find. She has something of mine." I stepped closer, my voice growing quiet and serious. "And you are going to help me find her."

Lerissa drew herself up, lifting her chin defiantly. "I promised to help you, but that doesn't mean I'll let you hurt my family. I may not have met my great-great- however many greats, grandmother, but she's still family to me. I need her help."

"So do I," I agreed. "Her being dead doesn't do me any good, so if what I'm thinking is correct, she has two of my men with her for some unknown reason. I'm going to need her help to break the Tyvar curse and as she's the one who made it, she should know how to break it as well."

Lerissa cocked her head to the side, her gaze narrowing as she sized me up. "Fine. I'll help you find my grandmother, but in exchange for my help, I need you to keep me safe and permit me to stay in this land while we search. From what I've heard, no one of my kind is welcome here."

"I will keep you safe," I said in a low voice. "But if you so much as try to turn on me in any way, I will kill you. Don't mistake my niceness for weakness."

Lerissa held up her hands in surrender. "I never thought you were nice to begin with," she said dryly, "not with watching my skin about to bubble off my bones."

Aidan came to my side, his expression serious as he studied Lerissa. "We want to

find your grandmother to break the Tyvar curse and you want to find her to conspire a way to live within our land. Where exactly do you plan on that being if she finds a way? Glimmerglass Lake has dried up.”

Lerissa’s face paled and she bit her lip. “I was really hoping that question wouldn’t be asked. And, of course, I can’t lie to you.” Aidan’s eyes shifted to his dragon and she stepped back, releasing a shaky breath. “Whatever you do, just keep your fire away from me. I’ll tell you the truth, but I know it won’t do anything in this case.” She huffed and glanced at us both. “There’s one place my family has dreamed of going to. We’ve heard of its beauty and its vast oceans.” A knowing look passed across Aidan’s face, and I already had a feeling I knew where she was talking about.

Aidan chuckled darkly and shook his head. “The Summer Court.” Lerissa bit her lip and looked away. Aidan’s smile faded and he huffed. “Diawen just lured two innocent elves to their deaths in just a day. No matter how powerful she is, she won’t have enough magic to get past our defenses or convince any of the fae to let your people stay. My family and I control what goes in and out of our courts, not her.”

Lerissa nodded slowly. “I know. All of the summer courts are out of the question, especially with you, your parents, and your sister being dragons. As you can see, fire is what sirens are most afraid of.”

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Aidan's burning eyes softened, and he smiled warmly. "Before I surrounded you with flames, you didn't seem too afraid of me."

She shrugged her shoulders and pursed her lips. "Call it false bravado," she said hesitantly.

His brows rose in surprise. "And? I know there's something else you want to say. I can feel it."

Lerissa let out a huff and flung her arms up in exasperation. "Okay, fine. I thought you had sexy eyes before they turned all scary and dragony. I wasn't afraid of you before that." She gazed around the elvish kingdom, admiring the lush trees and vibrant flowers. "This place is new to me," she whispered almost inaudibly. "I've been here several times but only for a few minutes. It's the only place I feel like I belong."

"How long can you stay on land before you need to return to the water?" I asked.

Lerissa shook her head. "There's no limit for my family and me. I have friends who can only stay on dry land for about two hours, but after that they have to find water. My mother says it's because we're Diawen's descendants. She's the most powerful of the sirens."

"That's good to know," I said, ready to get moving. "Can you feel Diawen's magic at this very moment?"

Lerissa nodded. "I can, but she's not anywhere close."

Aidan nodded toward the path that led back to the castle. “Let’s get going then.”

He took the lead and I motioned for Lerissa to walk between us. I didn’t sense that she was going to run, but I wanted to be prepared.

“Are you really taking me to the castle?” Lerissa asked. She glanced at me over her shoulder, and I flourished a hand at her jeans and T-shirt.

“You need to change your clothes. You don’t exactly blend in looking like that.”

We walked most of the way silently, but then Lerissa turned her head, her gaze curious when she looked at me.

“These two men you want to find; do you love one of them?”

My heart clenched in my chest. “I do,” I answered, knowing she could see the truth in my eyes. “I love both of them.”

She smirked and her eyes twinkled. “Who’s the siren now?”

* * *

The elves were curious about Lerissa when we brought her into the castle, especially since she was dressed in mortal clothes. Aelfric and Rhoswen weren’t too pleased having her within their walls, so we didn’t stay long.

Aidan packed up bags full of food and supplies and got the horses ready while I had Lerissa change into a set of my warrior gear since we had the same build. Once everything was done, we headed out of the elvish kingdom on horseback. Aidan had flown in as his dragon, so he ended up on Bastian’s chocolate-colored stallion while Lerissa was riding Bayleon’s white mare. She’d never ridden before and if I wasn’t

wholly concerned about my men and if they were all right, I would have found the situation humorous with her bumbling along and bouncing unsteadily in the saddle. Lerissa was about to see and learn a lot about the land her ancestors had once inhabited. If only she were familiar with the land, I'd have a better understanding where she was leading us. But, unfortunately, all we had to go on was the pull she had inside her.

Right now, it appeared to be leading us toward the Mystical Forest. Luckily, there was a shortcut from the elvish kingdom to the forest which meant we didn't have to travel through the courts.

Over the day, my thoughts drifted to Bayleon and Bastian, wondering what could be happening to them. They had their strength back, but for how long?

Lerissa and I rode together, with Aidan taking up the back. As soon as we entered the Mystical Forest, Lerissa stared around in astonishment. The sparkle in her eyes seemed genuine, but she was still a siren. I had a feeling there was something more to Lerissa that I could see. Diawen was the strongest of her kind, and that same blood ran through Lerissa's veins. If Diawen was behind the disappearance of Bayleon and Bastian, then she would be my enemy, and Lerissa was sure to follow suit.

"I never dreamed it would be like this," Lerissa marveled as she took everything in.

Rays of sunshine streamed through the trees, carrying specks of gold dust along on the wind. Even the natural sounds of chirping birds and trickling streams seemed enchanted. But not every part of the forest was full of fuzzy animals—some held far more menace.

We were headed toward the direction of Redcaps Village, and I was eager to reach our destination. If Diawen had gone through there with Bayleon and Bastian, the Redcaps would surely recognize my men. Unfortunately, our journey took longer

than expected because of Lerissa's lack of experience riding a horse. I was scared that we wouldn't be able to locate Bayleon and Bastian before the sun went down.

"Where do you live in the mortal world?" I asked, looking over at Lerissa.

Her long, caramel-colored hair glinted in the sunlight, and her porcelain-like skin seemed to glow. She snarled her lip and snorted in disgust.

"Off the coast of Oregon. Don't get me wrong, there are beautiful places there, but it's nothing like this." Her voice was like a song as she looked around, gesturing at the towering trees and wildflowers that filled the forest. "The air here smells so pure and clean, and I can only imagine that your lakes and oceans aren't full of complete shit and garbage." She closed her eyes and sighed wistfully. "I remember the first time I stepped through a portal into the elvish kingdom. My heart sank when I saw that Glimmerglass Lake had dried up. Just once in my life, I wanted to see what it was like to swim in magical waters."

Aidan's deep, resonating voice floated through the air. "Did you ever contemplate sneaking into the Summer Court oceans?" he asked.

Lerissa turned to face him, her eyes twinkling mischievously. "Since I can't lie to you, I'll go ahead and say yes. Sadly, I can't think about it anymore because you'll be on the lookout."

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Aidan's brows furrowed, his voice full of authority. "You're right. I don't want my warriors lured to a watery death."

Lerissa clutched the reins, her lips pressed together in indignation. "I told you, I've never killed anyone before. Not all sirens want to murder men for sport." Then she shifted her gaze toward me. "Your lovers are both Tyvar, right? Have they killed any women recently?"

I shook my head. "Not since they pledged their allegiance to the Spring Court a few decades ago."

Lerissa threw a hand up in the air and turned back toward Aidan, challenging him. "And there you go. Just because you're a dragon doesn't mean you're a monster, does it? In the mortal world, dragons are mostly seen as villains. You can't judge a person by what they are, it's who they decide to be."

I was impressed and noticed a faint upturn at the corners of Aidan's lips, suggesting he felt the same. Lerissa continued to lead us down the path, a satisfied smirk spreading across her face.

"You sounded very wise with that last statement," I said. "How old are you anyway?"

She turned to meet my gaze, her deep blue eyes glimmering in the sun. "I'm twenty-eight, the youngest and last of the Diawen line. None of the sirens have been able to get pregnant since my mother had me."

That was interesting, and I could feel an underlying story behind it.

“I’m assuming sirens don’t age like normal humans?”

She shook her head. “No. I have much older friends, and we all look the same. Staying young and beautiful is an advantage of being what I am.”

“How many women are in your family?” I inquired.

A look of sadness passed across her face as if she was thinking of a memory. “I have my mother and three sisters, but my eldest sister chooses to live in the ocean. I haven’t seen her in over a year.”

“I’m sorry,” I said, feeling genuine sympathy. “Why haven’t you seen her?”

She shrugged. “She likes the peace and solitude of the water. There are times when I like to disappear, too, and just swim for days on end.”

Out of all the stories I’d seen about sirens, they were made to look like mermaids. I was curious to see if that was true.

“Do you change form in the water?” I asked.

Lerissa lifted her brows and smirked. “Are you asking if I grow a tail?”

“Do you?” I countered.

She chuckled and nodded. “Yes, we are the mermaids you hear about in fairy tales.”

“Well, we’re far from one now,” Aidan said. We both glanced back to see him pointing off into the distance. “We’re almost at the Redcaps.” His gaze shifted to Lerissa and there was a hint of warning in his eyes. “Whatever you do, don’t piss them off. I don’t know what happens if a Redcap gets a taste of siren blood. You

might end up with a huge mess on your hands.”

And I knew he meant that literally. The Redcaps were friends of my court, but they were still dangerous men. I just hoped they’d seen Bayleon and Bastian.

Chapter18

Lia

As we made our way closer to the Redcap village, Lerissa’s eyes widened with terror. “What the hell am I looking at?”

She gasped when she caught sight of their hulking frames, talons for hands, and pulsing red caps that dripped blood down their faces. They were an intimidating sight dressed in their heavy armor and iron-shod boots, and I was glad we had their allegiance rather than their ire. The Redcaps could effortlessly chase you down, even with all that weighted armor.

I hadn’t been this deep into the Mystical Forest in a long time. Aidan rode ahead and into the village, but I pulled on my reins, causing Prince Ashe to slow down.

“Seriously,” Lerissa called out, slowing her horse down. “They look like goblins with blood running down their faces.”

“That’s because that’s what they are,” I replied.

Not only did they look scary, but they were fierce killers. The Redcaps congregated around Aidan and he hopped off his horse, his smile wide as he talked to them. They were our allies, and I knew they were in awe of Aidan since he was one of the dragon kings. But above all else, the Redcaps respected my mother. She was the one who saved them a long time ago and continues to help them to this day.

Lerissa swallowed hard and tensed, her knuckles turning white from holding the reins too tight. “So, is that blood dripping down from their caps?”

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I nodded. “Their caps are their life force. If they dry out, their bodies weaken and wither away. That’s why they must kill to keep their caps moist with blood.” Her mouth gaped and I could see the fear in her eyes.

“Who do they kill to get that blood?”

Under normal circumstances, I would joke around and scare her, but I was too focused on finding Bayleon and Bastian.

“They don’t kill innocents anymore,” I assured her. “A long time ago, when my mother came here to search for my father, the Redcaps were physically sick and tried to kill her. But, when they took her blood, they found that it healed them and made them stronger than ever before. So, ever since then, she gives them her blood on the new moon each month.”

I focused on the group of Redcaps waiting for us, and right in the middle of them was the one Redcap I wanted to see. Grishom. He smiled, his teeth rotting and black and his cap pulsing a bright red. He was the one who came to the Spring Court every month for my mother’s blood so she wouldn’t have to travel here.

“They aren’t going to hurt us,” I assured Lerissa, placing a hand on her arm.

I hopped off Prince Ashe’s back, and the Redcaps around me immediately stilled, dropping to their knees and bowing their heads in respect.

Grishom, the leader of the Redcaps, lifted his head. Looking into his dark eyes was like peering into the night sky, but behind all that, I could see his soul. Redcaps

weren't usually known for their capacity for kindness or even the appreciation of life, but my mother had changed them. I smiled at him before shifting my gaze to survey the other Redcaps around me, their bright red caps pulsing in time with their own mysterious energy.

"How are you, Grishom? It looks like your people are doing well."

Grishom gave me a crooked smile and nodded his head. "Aye. Tis because of yer mother." He glanced at Aidan and then narrowed his gaze at Lerissa before settling back on me. "Why ye out here tis late?"

The other Redcaps slowly stood up, heading back toward the center of their village where a giant hog roasted on a spit. I nodded in the direction of Aidan and Lerissa.

"We're tracking a woman who we think passed through here recently."

Grishom bristled and his face transformed into a mask of rage. "Aye. A dangerous and powerful one, that's fer cert'n."

Taking a shallow breath, I inched closer to him. "Did you happen to see my protectors, Bayleon and Bastian, with her? You've met them numerous times in the Spring Court. They're Tyvar."

He snorted as if to indicate his familiarity with them. "Aye, I saw 'em, hunched over on horses, they were. Lots of blood; I could smell it. Tis over a dozen Tyvar with the woman."

That was not what I wanted to hear. The need and urgency to find them only grew within me. If they were being beaten, it would take away all the progress of my healing them. They would go right back to suffering.

Aidan's eyes widened and he growled low in his throat. "I detected several men in the woods when I went out with Bayleon the other night. Diawen must've masked them somehow."

I didn't know what to think about any of this information. "Why would the Tyvar take Bayleon and Bastian? And why would they be working with Diawen?" I said, directing the question to Lerissa.

She shrugged helplessly, her eyes full of confusion. "I have no idea. I'm just as confused as you are."

Grishom laid a hand on my shoulder. "Tis something wrong? Do we need to fight for ye?"

The Tyvar were fierce warriors, and with Diawen's help, I feared they'd be more dangerous than ever. I didn't want any of the Redcaps getting hurt because of me.

Gently, I patted Grishom's hand and looked at him. "No. You've already done enough by giving me this information."

Grishom chuckled heartily. "Tis not much my men could do that ye couldn't, little lass. Ye are yer mother's daughter."

Fighting was one thing, but the Tyvar had an extra weapon: their encampment was shrouded by a veil of smoke in hopes that unsuspecting victims would venture through. If a man mistakenly stumbled into their camp, it was unlikely he would ever see the light of day again.

When they captured my mother, she was accompanied by her Guardian and another one of her men. The Tyvar were set to kill them, but she offered herself up to save them, and in the end, because of her identity, they let her go. Now, though, I needed

to know what the Tyvar were plotting with Diawen in order to make a successful plan. But unfortunately, that wasn't going to happen. There was no choice . . . we had to get to Bayleon and Bastian, even if that meant going into the Tyvar camp.

The Redcaps down by the fire hollered out to Grishom and he left to join them. Aidan's eyes blazed with the anticipation of a fight.

"I'll go as my dragon. I can take out the whole camp."

Lerissa gasped and shook her head. "No! If Diawen senses your fire, she'll leave. That defeats the whole purpose of me helping you. I want to see her. I have no doubt it's why she and the Tyvar didn't attack you and the other guy. You could take them out in a second with your flames."

"And also," I added, "some of the other Tyvar are Bayleon and Bastian's friends. Of course, not all of them got along, but it doesn't matter. You can't kill any of them, at least not until we figure out which ones are our enemies."

"And how are we going to do that?" Aidan asked. "We can't just walk right into . . ."
He stopped midsentence and smirked, his eyes twinkling with mischief. "Actually, we can."

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He reached into his pocket for the necklace with the amber stone. I pulled mine out and my pulse raced with impatience; I was ready to get to my men. My attention turned to Lerissa, who already knew what our plan was. We'd used the necklaces to make us invisible so we could apprehend Diawen.

"There's only one problem with my plan," I said to Aidan, but keeping my focus on Lerissa. "We only have two necklaces, but there are three of us." I looked over at Aidan. "You're not going to like this, but Lerissa's right. If Diawen senses you, she might run and I need to know why she has Bayleon and Bastian."

Aidan huffed. "I can't let you do this on your own. You need me."

"I do," I agreed, "but I can't take any chances. I need you to hang back far enough and wait."

His eyes blazed. "What if you need help? How will I know?"

I felt my shoulders rise as I mentally weighed my options. "I don't know," I said, "but I'm hoping you'll get a sign somehow."

Aidan's jaw clenched and his fists tightened in obvious frustration. Without a word, he pressed the necklace into my hands. I tucked it into my pocket, not wanting to give it to Lerissa until I was sure she wouldn't use it as an escape route.

I locked eyes with her and spoke slowly, deliberately. "If you betray me in any way, I will hunt you down."

Her lips pursed, but after a beat she nodded. “Got it.”

The darkness of night had settled on the forest, yet I was determined to keep going. “There’s one thing I’d like to do before we leave,” I said. “I’ll be right back.”

Aidan stayed with Lerissa while I walked toward Grishom and the others gathered around the crackling campfire consuming roasted pig. Grishom rose and beckoned for me to join the feast, but I waved away the offer with a smile on my face.

“Not this time,” I said, “but thank you for your kindness. Although, before we go, I wanted to do something for you all.”

A few steps away from the fire was a large stone table that had a huge stone bowl atop of it—this was where they would pour the blood required to make their caps vibrant. Just a single drop of my mother’s blood would be enough to do so. If I offered them mine, it would do the same. They had helped me, and I wanted to help them.

Reaching for my dagger, I pulled it out of the sheath and walked over to the bowl. Grishom’s eyes widened when he realized what I was about to do. I held the cold blade to my palm and closed my hand over it, slicing it down my skin. My blood pooled into the bowl and the Redcaps’ eyes widened with anticipation and appreciation. Once the stone bowl was full, I stepped away and watched my skin knit back together with my healing magic.

Grishom bowed to me, and the rest of the Redcaps followed suit. “Thank ye, little lass. Tis a gift we will accept.”

I said my farewells and joined Aidan and Lerissa by the horses so we could be on our way. We knew where we were going, but we had no clue what awaited us.

Chapter19

Bayleon

My jaw had been fractured more than a dozen times and my skull had been cracked even more. Pain engulfed me, over and over, as I floated in and out of consciousness. I couldn't recall the journey from the elvish kingdom to our current location or how long it had taken. All I knew was that the men Bastian and I had led for almost two hundred years had turned on us . . . and leading them was Diawen. Only she was nowhere to be seen at the moment.

I'd caught glimpses of her as I floated in and out of the darkness. Her hair was as dark as night, and she had bright blue eyes that could pierce into anyone's soul. However, it was her voice that was mesmerizing, all smooth like honey. I knew not to listen to it.

We crossed the bridge and into the fog when we arrived at the lake that bordered part of the Tyvar encampment. The second we passed through, my eyes widened in shock. What used to be my former home—the village I helped build—had increased in size since last I'd seen it. There were now at least two hundred Tyvar, double what it was before.

I glanced at Bastian, who had two black eyes and blood on his face; he stood speechless, looking at all the men in shock. I couldn't help but wonder how long Diawen had been among them, using her magic to turn more and more into Tyvar. My old home was coming into view and my heart felt heavy. I hadn't lived there in many moons, but I remembered the day I carved it out of the hill myself. The coolness of the ground and the smell of the earth were what I had loved most about my home. Though I often longed for the simplicity of my old life, I wouldn't go back for anything.

“Welcome home, Bayleon,” Rogan sneered from atop his stallion.

My gaze shifted over to him, the one whose betrayal felt like a knife to the chest. “This isn’t my home anymore,” I growled.

Rogan had grown up with Bastian and me; I’d even trained him to fight. We’d been like brothers once. His hair, which had been long and brown at one time, was now cut and tied back with a leather cord. He looked the same as he did years ago, but now I saw greed and hunger in his emotionless brown eyes.

“You’re right, it’s not,” Rogan agreed. “That’s why we’re going to finish this.”

“Finish what?” Bastian fired back.

Rogan turned his attention to my brother and smiled. “You’ll see.”

The horse I was on snorted and skittered as the imposing sight of my old dwelling came into view. Rogan hopped off his stallion and two unfamiliar men grasped my arms, yanking me from the saddle. I winced as their rough hands met my sore ribs before gritting my teeth, squaring my shoulders, and striding toward the door with Bastian in tow.

Once inside, thick coils of rope were strewn around two poles, a chilling reminder of Diawen’s promise for us to remain weak. Through my frame of seething rage, I hid my strength and willed myself to stay calm until I could use it for its intended purpose. Before being beaten to unconsciousness the first time, I’d heard Diawen speaking to Rogan. She ordered him to keep us weakened so we wouldn’t interfere with her plan, but she didn’t know that I had been quietly fortifying myself for the right moment.

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Bastian was pushed to the ground by one of Rogan's men, his body hitting the hard dirt floor with a smack. His eyes filled with fire as he turned his head toward Rogan. His arms were roughly yanked back, and the ropes were painfully cinched around his wrists by two more of Rogan's men. Bastian opened his mouth, about to speak words of defiance, but instead, he clamped his teeth back together. There were many things that I wanted to say, but this was not the time for words. I had to be ready to act if I wanted my actions to speak louder than any words ever could. I just had to wait for the right moment.

Once Bastian was firmly strapped to the pole, the men turned their attention to me. First, they wound the restraints tightly around me from my wrists, up over my torso and back down to my waist. Then, my ankles and legs were bound together. Rogan came around behind me and checked my ropes, letting out a pleased hum.

"Good work," he muttered.

The men left the room after Rogan waved his hand, leaving just the three of us. He stepped forward, a devious grin plastered across his face.

"It's been a while, brothers," he said.

"Why are we here?" I scoffed, unmoved by Rogan's words.

Rogan's face twisted in anger, and he stepped closer to me. "It's a shame you had to be forced to return. Unfortunately, not all of us were allowed to be with a queen," he sneered.

Fury burnt in me, and I could feel my body trembling with rage. Bastian's anger radiated through the room, and I desperately wished he could control himself better. When it came to Lia, he let his emotions get in the way.

"You son of a bitch!" he shouted. "You stay away from her!"

Bastian shouted more curses, but then Rogan struck him in the face with such force I heard bones crack. My brother's head lolled forward, and blood dripped from his mouth, pooling onto the floor.

Rogan chuckled and slowly stepped closer, his eyes dancing. "Bastian has a mouth on him now. He used to not be so vocal. It looks like the fae changed you both."

"I'm going to ask again," I said through clenched teeth. "Why are we here and why are you working with Diawen?"

Rogan's face went blank with surprise, but he quickly regained his composure. He strode over to a table, grabbed a bottle of mead, and took a long drink before turning back to me. Then, holding a dagger in his hand, he pointed it at me and spoke in a low voice.

"I can't be the true leader of the Tyvar until you and your brother are dead. Many here won't follow me until I claim that right."

I eyed the blade carefully, then met his gaze with defiance. "And yet, you felt the need to weaken us beforehand. It proves that you don't have the strength to beat me at my best."

Rogan's grip on the knife tightened, his knuckles turning white as he rushed toward me. Then, suddenly, an invisible wave of power blasted him away, sending the dagger flying through the air.

“Enough!” Diawen shouted.

She emerged from the shadows behind him, her long raven-colored hair cascading down her back and her crystal blue eyes glinting in the light. Her beauty was so divine, almost angelic, but I steeled myself and refused to be cowed by her presence. She sized up Rogan with a critical eye before turning her attention to Bastian and me. A sly smirk crept onto her lips as she stepped toward us, but then she stopped when Rogan spat under his breath.

“I’m ready to end this,” he hissed.

Diawen’s eyes darkened with fury when she turned to him. “Not yet. You know what we’re waiting on. It’s only a matter of time.”

Rogan’s lips pressed together, and a wild glint sparkled in his eyes. “I’m ready,” he said.

Diawen snorted in frustration. “I’m sure you are. Now, off with you. I need to speak to Bayleon alone.”

Rogan gave me a menacing look before he walked out, the door clattering shut behind him, leaving me alone with the siren. She gracefully moved closer, her black dress billowing around her as she bent down to my level. A faint look of admiration and curiosity crossed her face as she traced her long fingernail down my skin.

“What makes you and your brother different from the others?” she asked, searching my eyes. “Did the fae change you that much?”

“What do you know about that?” I replied, my voice full of disdain.

A sly smile spread across Diawen’s face. “Oh, I know a lot,” she said, pacing the

room, her steps so light it seemed like she was gliding over the floor. “I’ve been watching you for the past couple of years. I know that you left your men here to go live in the Spring Court and it seemed like you were trying to be a better man, maybe because you loved someone.” Her voice rose with excitement. “And that’s when I saw you and your brother with her, the Spring Court princess, only now she’s the Blossom Court queen.” Diawen laughed, a chilling sound that seemed to reverberate off the walls. “And, of course, I wasn’t surprised when I found out she wanted to break the curse,” she said, shaking her head. “It was always so obvious that she loved you and your brother.” She sighed heavily, her lips pursed in a frown. “But I can’t let that happen. I was hoping it wouldn’t come to this.”

“Come to what?” I growled, my voice thick with anger.

Diawen stepped closer to me, stopping just centimeters away from my face. She looked deeply into my eyes, her gaze filled with remorse.

“For you to die,” she replied, reaching out to run her finger along the braid in my hair. “Of all the Tyvar I’ve created, you and Bastian are the ones I hate to see suffer the most. If you just stayed where you belonged, none of this would be happening right now.”

With my jaw clenched, I stared at her. “If you or any of the Tyvar so much as touch Lia, I’ll tear you to pieces.”

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Diawen smiled, her eyes twinkling with amusement. “Oh, my sweet Bayleon, I have no desire to harm your beloved queen. The last thing I want is to start a war with the fae. I may have my power, but I am no fool. That is a battle I could never win on my own.” Her expression softened and her lips curved into a gentle smile. “I am sure your queen has found a way to track you and will be here soon. She is a very wise woman.” Diawen rose to her feet and cast a glance in Bastian’s direction before turning back to me. “When she arrives, Rogan is going to kill you and your brother. Once that is done, Lia will no longer need to find a cure for the curse.”

“But what happens to Lia after we’re dead?” I asked.

Diawen snorted in disbelief. “Rogan imagines he will have his way with her, but we both know your queen will kill him within a few seconds. Regrettably, after that, she will return home to grieve over her passed loves.”

I allowed a short laugh to escape my throat. “Lia will hunt you down,” I stated with certainty.

Diawen shrugged. “If she is chasing after me, then I know she’s not searching for a way to break the curse.” She started for the door.

“What would happen if she did?” I called out, causing her to pause.

Diawen slowly turned around to face me, her features filled with an arrogant assurance. “She won’t. And she isn’t the first one to try.”

My mother came to mind and I tensed; Diawen noticed the change in me. She

nodded, her face conveying her understanding.

“Your mother was a formidable person. Anyone who can withstand the Tyvar’s seduction is a powerful individual. No wonder she gave birth to two remarkable children.”

“What do you know of her?” I snarled.

Diawen interlocked her fingers, her expression turning impatient. “Your mother was a bit too clever for her own good. Like your queen, she sought to break the curse because of her love for her sons. She didn’t want the Tyvar life for you. It turns out she was very close to an answer. But I couldn’t let that happen, so I informed your father of her doings.” As soon as she brought up my father, dread flooded through my gut.

“You see,” Diawen continued, “there are a lot of men here who don’t want the curse broken. They enjoy being what they are. Your mother was a threat to that. And, of course, I couldn’t allow her to succeed.”

“So you had her killed,” I said, feeling my fists clench and a wave of heat wash over me.

Diawen shook her head. “I didn’t have to do anything. Your father did that on his own. He was the one who killed her.”

My breath caught in my throat and my vision blurred as I processed this new information. The anger and hatred I’d felt so many times before poured into my veins and I could imagine myself lunging at him and tearing out his throat, only that was never going to happen. The bastard was already dead. Our mother would’ve been alive today if he hadn’t taken her away.

A wrenching sense of regret filled my chest and I felt like my world was crumbling around me. I could've done something to protect her if I'd only known. Diawen released a deep, resigned sigh, then turned and disappeared through the door.

Bastian groaned and lifted his head, his body quivering with fury. Blood bubbled up in his mouth and he spat it onto the floor. His eyes slowly opened, blazing with anger, and he hissed.

“That son of a bitch. I’m going to enjoy killing him.”

I nodded grimly in agreement. “You and I both,” I said. “Rogan is going to suffer greatly.”

He winced as he leaned against the pole, looking over at me. “What did I miss?”

I swallowed and took a deep breath. “Everything. Diawen is luring Lia here so she can watch us be killed. That way, she’ll give up searching for the cure.”

Bastian’s eyes widened with fear for our queen. “What are we going to do? Lia can’t come here.”

I nodded. “You’re right. We must find a way out.”

I wrenched against the ropes, feeling them bite into my wrists, and a steady trickle of blood began to seep from the wounds. A surge of determination filled me, and I ignored the pain, pushing against the bindings harder. Bastian did the same, but we both stopped when the door opened and Rogan strode in, dragging a Summer fae behind him. Her tanned skin glistened and her golden blonde hair cascaded down her back. Her green eyes were glazed over, and she seemed to be under Rogan’s power. He pulled her to him, his hands roughly exploring her body, and she moaned with pleasure. He laughed, his evil leer spreading wider.

“It’s torture, isn’t it?” he goaded, pushing her toward the bed in the corner. He looked at Bastian and me with a malicious smirk on his face. “I’m going to need my strength before I kill you both. I hope you enjoy the show.” He stalked over to the bed and then glanced back at us. “You’re going to want to watch this. It’s exactly what I’ll do to your queen when she arrives.”

The rage boiling inside me was overwhelming, and I had to fight against the urge to lash out. I gave Bastian a warning look, silently urging him to stay calm—now was not the time for us to act. We had to bide our time, to be patient.

Soon, there would be a chance to take our revenge.

Chapter 20

Lia

As we approached the lake, I saw the thick fog crawling over the water, masking the Tyvar encampment. I motioned for Aidan to stay back while Lerissa and I stepped out from behind the cover of trees, my sword, dagger, and bow and arrows strapped to my back.

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I pulled out the two amber necklaces from my pocket and ran my fingers over the smooth stones. Lerissa pinched her eyes shut, her chest rising and falling with deep breaths.

“Are you scared?” I asked.

She shook her head. “Not scared. Just nervous. I can feel Diawen’s magic calling out to me. It’s like a magnet pulling me closer.”

I squeezed her shoulder. “Once I free Bayleon and Bastian, we’ll go to Diawen. She’s the only one who knows how to break the curse.”

Lerissa opened her eyes, staring back at me with skepticism. “What if she doesn’t tell you how to break it? Are you going to kill her?”

With her conspiring with the Tyvar and taking Bayleon and Bastian, she deserved to pay for what she did. That sort of deed couldn’t go unpunished. The problem was that I had no clue how powerful she was. I didn’t know much about sirens or what kind of power they possessed besides seducing men. A part of me still felt as if Lerissa was hiding her true strength.

I met Lerissa’s gaze and shook my head. “No, I’m not going to kill her. But one way or another, I have to get the information I need.”

I looked down at the necklaces and reluctantly handed her one, knowing I was putting my trust in her. She peered into my eyes but made no move to put the necklace on.

“How do you want to do this?”

“Well,” I began, “I would say we should stick together, but once you put that necklace on and disappear from sight, all I can do is trust that you’ll stay by my side until we find my men.”

Lerissa nodded and fastened the necklace around her neck, immediately vanishing before my eyes. I half expected her to run off, but I could still feel her presence beside me. Now it was my turn. I slipped on the necklace and watched as my own body disappeared.

Shortly after, I felt Lerissa’s hand touch mine, her grip firm. “I’m ready.”

We cautiously set foot across the wooden bridge, the fog billowing around us with every step. The air carried the scent of smoke and something musky. I felt Lerissa’s hand tighten in mine as we passed through the fog and the Tyvar encampment came into view. The last time I was here, there were only a few hundred in number, but the place had grown. Everywhere I looked, there were round huts and people. Small groups of men huddled around tall campfires, laughing and drinking from deep wooden mugs.

Further away, I could hear the muffled moans and cries of pleasure from the women behind tightly shut doors, a sound that brought a lump to my throat.

“Is that seriously all they do?” Lerissa whispered, her voice barely audible.

I squeezed her hand in response. “Yes.”

Despite the apparent joyousness of the evening, I knew it would be fleeting—many of those women would not make it through the night.

A door opened to one of the houses on our left, and two Tyvar stepped out, their laughter obnoxious and grating. One had short brown hair and was muscular, his skin gleaming in the moonlight, while the one had curly blond hair and was tall with elvish features like Bayleon and Bastian. Both wore the identical brown and green thin fabric tunics that all the Tyvar wore, but there was something particularly cocky in how they stood.

“Rogan beat the shit out of those bastards today,” the brown-haired one said, slapping the other one’s shoulder.

“I thought those guys were the strongest of the Tyvar,” the blond one said, and the brown-haired one snorted.

“They were until they stopped fucking. That’s what happens to us if we don’t. We get weak.”

The blond one scoffed. “I heard it’s because they fell in love with a fae princess. Idiots. Who would give up what we have for that?”

I could feel my blood boil as I watched them, my fists clenching and unclenching. We continued through the camp as soon as they were out of earshot.

“Where do you think they are?” Lerissa asked.

I squeezed Lerissa’s hand when I spotted exactly what I was looking for. “Straight ahead,” I said. At the far end of the camp, carved into a hillside, was what I assumed to be Bayleon’s home. Two men stood guard outside the entrance. “No other place here has men standing guard,” I murmured. “They have to be in there.”

Lerissa pressed closer to my side. “How are we going to get inside?”

I hated what I was about to do, but there was no other option. Releasing Lerissa's hand, I quickly drew my bow and fired two arrows. They found their targets causing them to slump to the ground, and Lerissa gasped, her hand flying to her mouth.

"I'm sorry you had to see that," I said, knowing she wasn't used to this way of life. "But we have to hurry." I went to grab one of the men and Lerissa followed, aiding me in dragging the body away from the door. When she returned, I noted her footprints in the dirt. "Thank you," I whispered.

I stepped forward, my hand reaching out to touch her arm, but instead, I brushed the back of her head. I glanced nervously around us, making sure nobody was there to witness the door miraculously open.

Taking a deep breath, I grasped the handle and the hinges creaked ever so slightly as I pulled the door open and rushed inside. Lerissa followed right behind me, her gasp echoing off the walls. I took in the scene before me—Bayleon and Bastian maskless, tied to poles, their faces bruised and battered. As soon as they heard Lerissa's gasp, they snapped their heads around to look in our direction, but they couldn't see us. I ran over, knelt between them, and placed my hands on their faces.

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“It’s me,” I whispered. “I’m wearing the necklace.”

I sent my healing magic flooding through their bodies and watched in awe as their wounds began to heal and their bruises faded. Bastian murmured my name and my heart swelled. I cupped his cheeks and kissed him before quickly pressing my lips to Bayleon’s. It wasn’t enough to give them the strength they needed, but it was something. I moved around behind Bayleon and touched the ropes, only for it to burn my hand, the sound of my skin sizzling. I couldn’t see the damage, but I knew there were blisters.

“What the . . .?” I hissed low, jerking my hand away. I healed within seconds.

“What’s wrong?” Lerissa asked, her voice next to me.

I slid my dagger out and sawed at the thick ropes. “Iron. There must be traces of it in the fibers. It’s toxic to the fae.”

“Who are you talking to?” Bayleon asked.

I continued to saw on the ropes. “It’s a long story. But first, I have to get you and Bastian out of here.”

“No,” Bayleon and Bastian both snapped at the same time.

“Listen to me,” Bayleon demanded. “Stop cutting the ropes. I don’t know how much time we have.”

Reluctantly, I stilled my knife and faced him and Bastian, only they couldn't see me. I didn't want to remove the necklace in case someone came in.

"What is it?" I asked quickly.

Bayleon nodded toward the door. "You have to get out of here. All of this was a trap to lure you in. They knew you would come for Bastian and me."

"They? As in the Tyvar?" I questioned.

Bayleon huffed. "And Diawen. They're working together."

My heart raced with impatience. I wanted to know the answers, but I wanted to free him. "But why?"

"Lia, you have to leave," Bastian growled.

I grabbed Bayleon's face and even though I was invisible, it was as if he could see me. "Tell me," I demanded.

His jaw clenched. "There are a couple of reasons why we're here. Diawen knows you want to break the curse and Rogan wants Bastian and me dead so he can be the true leader of the Tyvar. It's a win-win for them both. Diawen wanted you here so you could see us die. That way, you'll give up on your quest. With us gone, you'll have no need to break the curse."

I didn't know what to focus on first. Should I go out and kill Rogan so he can't fight Bayleon and Bastian, or should I go after Diawen? Judging by how much Bayleon and Bastian had been beaten, I had no clue if they'd win in a fight to the death. The only way to get them strong again would be a night full of pleasure, but that wasn't going to happen.

“Surely you have some friends here, don’t you?” I asked, desperation in my voice.

Bayleon sighed. “Maybe. It’s been a long time since we’ve been back. Their allegiance has probably shifted.”

Letting his face go, I moved around behind him again, using my blade to saw at the ropes. “Then it’s settled. I’m freeing you both now. I don’t give a damn what you say.”

The ropes were so thick it took all my strength just to cut through half of the strand. Sweat poured down my face and my heart raced so fast I thought it would pop out of my chest.

“Do you have another knife?” Lerissa asked. “I can help you.”

“I wish I did,” I replied, still sawing away. “I’ll remember to carry two next time.”

A bead of sweat ran down my temples, and the salty drops pooled in my eyes and stung like fire. My hands shook, and I had almost worked out one full strand of the thick rope that bound Bayleon. I was close, so close, to ripping it apart and releasing him from his restraints.

Suddenly, the door flew open, and a gust of freezing air rushed into the room. A woman with long black hair and bright blue eyes, wearing a sleek black dress, stepped inside. Diawen. Her features were familiar, a near clone of Lerissa. The only difference between the two was their hair color. I could feel Lerissa’s arm against mine and hear her shallow breaths.

A knowing smile spread across Diawen’s face as she glanced from Bayleon to Bastian. “I seem to have underestimated your queen. She got here a lot faster than I anticipated.”

I crept forward, feeling my fingers close around the handle of the dagger, tight and cold in my grip. I wished I could've drawn my sword but the sound of it sliding out of its sheath was too much of a risk.

Diawen inched closer, and I saw the wonder in her eyes as her fingers touched Bastian's face.

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“I heard your queen could heal with a single touch. It’s utterly fascinating.”

She was only steps away from me, and I had one chance to apprehend her. Time seemed to grind to a stop as I took a deep, steadying breath and readied to lunge. But before I could move, Lerissa appeared before me, the amber necklace dangling from her hands.

“Stop!” she cried, her arms spread wide in Diawen’s defense.

At that, Diawen looked over in awe at Lerissa and then flashed a smirk in my general direction, sure of her advantage. Tears shone in Lerissa’s eyes as she glanced back at Diawen.

“Do you know who I am?” she asked, her voice quivering.

Diawen nodded, her expression of awe deepening. “Yes. You’re my family.” She lifted her hands to Lerissa’s face. “I can feel our power coursing through your veins.”

With Diawen knowing I was there, I tore off my necklace. My temper was wearing thin. “You wanted me here and here I am. There are just a few problems we need to clear up.”

Diawen dropped her hands from Lerissa’s face and tilted her head. “What would that be?”

I felt rage flowing through me, boosting my determination for a fight. “My men are not going to die. I’ll kill Rogan myself and anyone else who comes near me, even

you.”

Diawen’s smile grew larger. “Oh, Lia, I don’t doubt it. I already told your men I’m no fool. I have no intention of starting a war with the fae. Rogan wants to murder your lovers so he can be the leader of the Tyvar. That’s none of my concern. My only mission is to keep you from attempting to break the curse.”

I stared her down. “But why?”

Diawen’s startling blue eyes stayed fixed on me. “Because if you break it, we all lose.”

My stomach twisted at her response. “What do you mean?”

She stepped away from Lerissa and held out her arms like she was offering herself up for death. Lerissa’s eyes widened in shock, and she turned to me pleadingly for help, but I kept my gaze focused on Diawen.

Diawen lifted her chin defiantly in the air. “The Tyvar began with my blood, Your Highness. If you want to break the curse, you have to kill me. But know this”—she glanced over at Bayleon and Bastian before fixing her gaze back on me—“If you kill me, they all die. That is how you free them, Lia. It’s your choice to make; I’m right here.”

“I don’t believe a word out of her mouth,” Bastian snarled, his voice laced with anger. “Just kill her and be done with it.”

“Please,” Lerissa pleaded. “Don’t do it.”

Diawen stood there, her arms still outstretched in her surrender, her face determined and unwavering. I didn’t know what to believe. However, one thing was clear; it was

a risk I couldn't take.

Footsteps thundered on the ground just outside and I knew my time was up. The door suddenly crashed open and a group of Tyvar marched in, led by a tall man with broad shoulders and a cruel glint in his eye. It had to be Rogan. He was the one Bayleon and Bastian used to talk about, only now he didn't seem like a friend. His gaze slid down my body, and I could see the hunger in his eyes.

"Good. You're finally here. The festivities can now begin."

There were four more men behind him, and they all advanced toward me. Diawen pulled Lerissa out of the way so they could get to me. I wanted to fight, but there were even more Tyvar outside the door. There was nowhere to go.

"What's going to happen?" Lerissa called out, her voice trembling.

Diawen squeezed her arm and whispered something in her ear, but Lerissa's face remained stoic. The four Tyvar circled me, a barrier of leather and steel preventing me from getting to Bayleon and Bastian, who were both strained against their bound wrists. Rogan stepped in front of Bayleon and Bastian, his face illuminated by the torches behind him. He slid a blade from behind his back, and the sharp sound of steel against leather filled the room. He leaned in and swiped the blade across Bayleon and Bastian's chests in a single, smooth motion. Blood pooled onto the ground, and Bastian spat insults at Rogan while Bayleon remained rigid, his jaw clenched tightly.

"This ends tonight," Rogan said, and he sheathed the blade with a soft click. He scanned the room, stopping when his gaze met mine. He motioned toward the Tyvar holding me and their grip tightened.

But before they could pull me away, Bayleon spoke up in a booming voice, "I warned

you before and I'm saying it again. I see you. I'm going to kill every one of you who put your hands on what's mine. Be ready."

His words hung thick in the air, the promise of death lingering in the darkness. I could feel the terror radiating from the Tyvar, and then slowly, the grip on me loosened but tightened again when Rogan chuckled.

"You'll be first to die tonight."

Bayleon lifted his chin, his eyes blazing. "We'll see about that."

The Tyvar pushed me toward the door and Bastian shouted. "Why didn't you just kill her, Lia? This would all be over."

I was able to look back at him for a split second. "I couldn't risk losing you," I said before being pushed out the door.

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As soon as I stepped outside, more Tyvar swarmed around me. They took my dagger, sword, and bow and arrows, but I knew I had other methods of fighting. I already had a plan in mind. However, that plan wasn't going to work when I saw where they were taking me.

The men guided me to the middle of the village, where a post similar to the ones Bayleon and Bastian were bound to stood, only instead of ropes, iron cuffs were waiting for me. My mind was racing, and I frantically tried to devise another plan. I couldn't use my magic if I was restrained with iron.

Rogan grabbed my arms and pinned me against the pole while the other Tyvar secured the iron shackles around my wrists and ankles. The metal burned my skin, and the pain was unbearable, but I kept my temper at bay. Rogan clutched my chin and pointed at the circular area in front of me where other Tyvar started to gather around.

"You're going to have the best view out here," he sneered. "And I'm sorry about the iron. It's just a precaution. We can't have you interfering." He leaned down, his lips just a breath away from mine. "When it's all over, I'll let you go home. Unless you want to spend some time with me."

"How can I when you're going to be dead," I fired back.

Rogan burst out laughing and stepped back, his eyes roaming over my body. "Suit yourself." He nodded at the men around me. "Stay close and make sure she doesn't escape."

Closing my eyes, I tried to concentrate on my magic. The iron was like a barrier that kept my power concealed inside of me in its own prison. I had a plan and it was going to work, only now, I didn't know if I could fight through the iron. I'd never had to do it before. But now, there was no other option. I had to.

Chapter 21

Lerissa

I watched through the door as the four men led Lia away, shackling her with iron cuffs to a pole in the middle of the village. Even though I was far away from her, I could hear the iron scorching her skin, the sound making my stomach roll. But through all of that, Lia kept her chin high, not showing an ounce of pain. As for the rest of the village, it was quiet, save for the occasional breeze rustling a few leaves.

"Lerissa, dear. Come. We have much to discuss." Diawen's voice, sweet like honey and strong like a gust of wind, pulled my attention away from Lia.

She grabbed my hand and guided me out of Bayleon's home to a small hut in the corner of the village. Inside was warm, and the glow of the many candles cast a yellow hue around the room. I saw a long, red gown draped over the side of the bed, and Diawen gestured to it.

"I was going to change into that, but I think it'll look lovelier on you." She came up to me and ran her fingers over Lia's dark green leather warrior uniform I was wearing. "You might fit in more wearing the gown than this when we go back to the mortal realm."

I stared at the dress, then back at her. Her hair was perfectly coifed, and her dress was sleek and black down her youthful-looking body. She had to have been hundreds if not a thousand years old and didn't appear to be over twenty-five. Our eyes were the

same shade of blue and our features were eerily similar; it was as if I was looking at a mirror image of myself.

“I don’t understand any of this,” I said.

Diawen sighed and clasped her hands in front of her, her eyes softening in a motherly way. She gestured to the bed, and I hesitantly sat while she knelt before me, taking my hands in hers.

“Over the years, I’ve watched you and the others in our family,” she began. “Our line is the most powerful of the sirens, and yet I knew there would come a day when one of us would have the potential to be as strong as me. You were the one who sensed my power through the realms. No one else has been able to do that.”

“What does that mean?”

She smiled and her eyes twinkled. “You’re special, Lerissa, and I want you by my side, where you’ll be safe.” With that, she let my hands go and rested her palms on my cheeks. “As soon as things are done here, we’re leaving.”

“You mean when Bayleon and Bastian are dead?” I said it more as a statement than a question.

Diawen dropped her hands from my face, her lips pursed. “You disapprove.”

She got to her feet, and I thrust my hands in the air. “If you haven’t noticed, I’ve lived my entire life with humans, following their way of life. So, killing isn’t something I’m used to. The first dead bodies I’ve seen was when Lia shot the two Tyvar in the head with arrows.”

Diawen’s eyes narrowed, her face lit with a strange energy. “You’ve never killed

anyone? How is that possible in the mortal realm? I come across over a dozen humans every day that I wouldn't mind luring into the sea."

I shook my head. "My mother was against it and taught my sisters and me only to use our magic when needed."

Diawen smirked, her lips curving upward. "And yet, you used your magic to open a portal into this world. Something tells me you want to explore all possibilities." Her eyes gleamed with excitement. "You are from my line, Lerissa. I have magic that goes beyond normal siren powers, and I know you do, too. I know you're stronger than you've let on."

There were things I've kept inside of me, secrets I haven't told a single soul. Even my own mother and sisters didn't know. If word got out, I would be hunted down by every magical being both in the mortal world and the Land of the Fae. I had to protect my secret; it was how I gained the upper hand in the world. Even with my all-powerful grandmother standing before me, I wasn't stupid enough to tell her the truth.

"What you told Lia about the curse, was it the truth? Does killing you mean that all the Tyvar will die as well?" I asked.

Diawen's eyes darkened. "No. That was a lie. I knew Lia wouldn't sacrifice her men."

"Is there even a cure?"

"There is," she confessed, closing the distance between us, "but you're not going to want her to find it."

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A feeling of unease passed through my gut. “Why?”

Diawen sighed. “Linking the Tyvar with my blood gives me more power. I can draw upon their essence. The same goes for you. All that power you have is because of your connection to not only me, but them as well. If Lia breaks the curse, all that special power you have goes away. No more living on land. You’ll be stuck in the water.”

The tight coils knotting in my stomach only intensified. Being condemned to the water would be hell. Diawen placed her hands on my shoulders, and I could see the truth in her eyes.

“Creating the Tyvar was what gave us our freedom. I did it for myself and my bloodline. Think of your mother, sisters, aunts, and cousins out there in the mortal world. Do you really want to take away what they have?”

“No,” I answered. It was a selfish choice, but I didn’t want to live in the polluted oceans for the rest of my life. “Does creating more Tyvar make you stronger?”

Her grin widened. “Yes. But I’m all out of one of the necessary ingredients. There should be plenty of Tyvar in existence to keep our line strong.”

“Not if something happens to Lia,” I said, wondering if she’d even thought her plan through. “She’s a queen with a powerful family. If Rogan kills Bayleon and Bastian, she’ll bring hell down on the Tyvar. They won’t stand a chance against tens of thousands of fae and their magic.”

The leer that spread across Diawen's face caused chills to run down my spine. "Then I guess I should probably go with Plan B."

I swallowed hard, not wanting to know the answer but needing to. "Which is?"

She walked over to a small wooden box on a table beside the bed, picking it up as if it were the most delicate thing in the world. A gleaming blood-red amulet on a silver chain glinted in the candlelight when she opened it. She brushed her finger across the stone and beckoned me closer.

"Touch it, Lerissa," she whispered. "Feel its power."

I didn't have to touch it to know it was filled with magic I'd never been around before. However, what I did know was that it was filled with dark magic. I feared that if I touched it, that darkness would seep into me.

"I can feel it from here," I said, keeping my hands at my sides. "What is it for?"

Diawen closed the box and cradled it in her arms. "I have some powerful friends in the mortal realm, my dear. The fae aren't the only superior race in our realms. Others are just as strong."

Yes, there were powerful creatures who lived on earth, but I questioned whether they were stronger than the fae. I've been around witches before, but none of them exuded the power that Lia and Aidan possessed.

Diawen gave me a sly smile. "All I have to do is put the necklace on Lia and push her into the mortal world; she won't even be able to take it off. It'll trap her there and she'll be no more than a mere human with it on. Her power will be nonexistent. If her people tried to find her, they won't be able to trace her."

I swallowed, dread curdling in my stomach. I had a feeling I knew where the rest of the plan would lead.

“So, what happens to her after that?” I asked.

Diawen stared at me, and it was clear she wasn’t going to answer. “She’ll be taken care of. That’s all you need to know.” She gestured to the dress she had left on the bed. “Change clothes and I’ll be back in a little while. You have some time to rest.”

With that, she left the room with the box, presumably to put the necklace on Lia now that she was tied up to a pole and couldn’t fight back. I wondered if this had been Diawen’s plan all along—to capture Lia and eventually kill her.

Chapter 22

Lia

The chains were too tight, branding my flesh with a searing heat as I moved against them. The iron blocked my magical healing, but I was still able to dull the worst of the pain. The horizon was beginning to blush a hopeful pink as I tried to focus my magic toward Aidan, but the oppressive weight of the iron made it hard to send my message. I tried to make a tree appear before him, but the iron was too powerful.

I switched my focus to the lake, willing a wave to swell and crest higher and higher, but I still couldn’t push my magic out of the prison inside my body.

Taking a steady breath, I closed my eyes and pushed past the pain, trying to tap into my power despite the iron restraints. Suddenly, the energy around me changed and I opened my eyes to see Diawen walking toward me, a mysterious wooden box nestled protectively in her arms. She waved her hand and the Tyvar retreated, giving her a wide berth as she stood before me.

“I’ll never understand why iron can hold you like this,” she said. “It’s hard to comprehend how powerful you can be, yet so incredibly weak against one element.”

I clenched my fists. “It’s called balance,” I spat. “Everyone has a weakness.”

Diawen stepped closer and our eyes met. I could see the challenge in her gaze. “Iron isn’t the only weakness you have, Your Highness. Love can be more destructive than any metal,” she said with a tilt of her chin.

“What would you know about love?” I challenged.

She shrugged her shoulders, her eyes flicking toward the men gathered around the village. “I’ve seen it tear through families. I’ve seen it consume relationships and leave nothing behind.”

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I swallowed and shook my head. “That’s not love. You don’t understand what love is.”

She scoffed. “Your men are about to die, Lia. Love won’t save them.” She paused. “Love will only bring you heartache and pain.”

I locked my jaw and glared at her. “No,” I said, my voice low. “It’s what’s going to get me through this. I’m going to get out of here with Bayleon and Bastian by my side and I will break the curse.”

Diawen cocked her head to the side. “So, you’re going to kill me, is that it? That’s the only way to release your men.”

“I’m not an idiot, Diawen,” I snapped. “You knew very well I wouldn’t risk Bayleon and Bastian’s lives. But unfortunately, you’re the only one who can free them. One way or another, I’ll get the information from you.”

Diawen stepped closer, a menacing gleam in her swirling blue eyes. “Is that so? How are you going to do that when you’re dead?”

“I thought you didn’t want to start a war with the fae?”

She traced a finger down my cheek, her nail razor sharp. “Oh, I’m not going to start a war. I’m just going to kill you.” She smiled and stepped back. “When your men lose against Rogan, that’s Tyvar business. Your people have no right to intervene. But what your people will know is you were so heartbroken over losing your lovers that you decided to spend some time alone, away from your court.” She gave me a mock

frown. “It’s just a shame you won’t ever be going back. I can’t risk you finding the cure and ruining everything for me.” Diawen tapped the box. “I have a gift for you when it’s time.”

A rage burned in my veins like wildfire, searing through my body and threatening to consume me. I could feel my magic thrumming beneath the surface, waiting to be released.

“You’re going to die for this, Diawen. It may not be today, but it will be soon.”

Diawen tilted her head back and laughed cruelly before striding toward the circular pit where Rogan practiced and prepped for the upcoming fight.

Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes and attempted to summon the water in the lake, hoping it would heed my command. Suddenly, wild cries from the camp diverted my attention, and everyone turned toward something on my left.

A few moments later, Bayleon and Bastian appeared, their faces bruised and beaten and their wrists bound together. Surrounding each of them were four guards, all were Rogan’s men and new to the Tyvar. It made me wonder where all the others were, the older Tyvar who were loyal to Bayleon and Bastian.

Bayleon and Bastian glanced over at me at the same time and their eyes glowed with anger. They needed it; they needed that fuel for the fire just like I did.

The fight was about to begin.

* * *

My pulse raced as the Tyvar army crowded around the pit, most had eager expressions but some of them had blank faces. I had to hope the stoic ones were men still loyal to

Bayleon and Bastian. Lerissa had changed out of the green leathers I gave her into a red gown, and she took her place beside Diawen. I searched for her gaze, but she never looked my way. Before, when it was just us and Aidan, I sensed something good in her, but Diawen's influence would soon erase it.

Rogan stepped proudly into the middle of the pit, ready to fight, and then Bayleon's ropes were cut and he was pushed in. My stomach dropped; a chill of dread ran through me.

"Concentrate, Lia. You can do this," I muttered to myself.

Rogan and Bayleon sprinted toward each other, their feet scraping against the dirt and grass. Bayleon reared back and his fist came forward, impacting Rogan's jaw with a loud crack. Rogan stumbled backward, and Bayleon followed with a flurry of punches. Rogan blocked them, but Bayleon kept coming as though he had no fear of the pain he was enduring. Bayleon was weakened, but he was still a formidable opponent.

They moved so fast that it was hard to follow, and when they were still enough for me to focus on them, I watched in horror as Rogan's fist connected with Bayleon's ribs, and I heard the sickening sound of bones breaking. Bayleon collapsed and Rogan kicked him in the face, sending him flying across the pit.

Bayleon laid on the ground, struggling for air, his chest heaving. Time seemed to stand still as I watched Rogan raise his blade, ready to plunge it into Bayleon's back.

Without thinking, I screamed out, "No!"

A deep, guttural roar from Bastian filled the air around me and my heart felt like it had stopped. I closed my eyes and reached out with my magic, the rage within me finally summoning enough to flow through my body and to the lake. My skin burned

against the iron, but I could feel the water rise in response to my call. The ground beneath me began to shake as the lake rumbled, ready to do my bidding. When I opened my eyes, my entire body was trembling with the amount of energy inside me. The iron was not going to hold me back any longer. Rogan hesitated, his muscles tensed, ready to strike.

As I unleashed my magic, hoping it would send an alert to Aidan, Bayleon rolled away and jumped up, just in time for the blade to miss him. It plunged into the ground instead. Rogan stumbled back as Bayleon's newfound strength caused him to lurch forward. His eyes widened in terror as he realized that his demise was near. Even Diawen looked on in fear, a stark contrast from the strong, confident bitch she was before.

Amid the chaos, it became clear who remained loyal to Rogan and who believed in Bayleon and Bastian. Fists flew between the Tyvar, and Bayleon had the upper hand on Rogan as his powerful blows left him battered and bruised. Meanwhile, Bastian's ropes had been cut and he was fighting off the four men who had been restraining him, taking punches to the stomach but never ceasing in his fight. But unfortunately, the odds were not in their favor; there were too many of Rogan's men in the crowd.

Bayleon's eyes were wild with rage as he advanced on Rogan with a loud battle cry. Another Tyvar lunged at Bayleon, but with a single movement, Bayleon seized the sword from the warrior's grip and brought it down with a vicious slice across the man's back. His lifeless body crumpled to the ground.

Bayleon turned his wrathful gaze back to Rogan, who had struggled to his feet, one arm outstretched in a feeble attempt to defend himself. With a final roar of determination, Bayleon swung his sword in an arc of power, slicing through Rogan's neck and finally ending the violent conflict. Sadly, it was far from over. Bayleon and Bastian were surrounded by about a hundred Tyvar, with the odds seemingly insurmountable.

Everything was still and silent until Diawen locked eyes with me and began to move closer, her steps measured and purposeful. Lerissa's gaze met mine and all I could see was dread as she surveyed the Tyvar, then me, then the box in Diawen's grasp. Whatever was inside it, I knew it wouldn't be anything good.

The force within me resonated outward and my magic connected with the lake once again. The earth rumbled beneath us like an earthquake and Diawen stopped, scanning around to locate where it was coming from.

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A smile spread across my face as her attention returned to me. Then the sound of galloping water began to build until a thunderous roar surrounded us. I unleashed the water in one massive burst that crashed into the Tyvar encircling Bayleon and Bastian, pushing most of them away toward the outskirts of the village, but there were still some around.

Diawen and Lerissa were also taken in by its power, but I knew it wouldn't hold Diawen for long; she was a siren born of the sea. Being in the water was one of her strengths. Bayleon and Bastian desperately tried to reach me, but a few of the men who had evaded the wave managed to stop them. I had to free myself before Diawen returned with even more ferocity. Fighting against her with iron shackles around my wrists would be nearly impossible.

Footsteps echoed behind me, but no one was there when I tried to look for the source. Then, I felt a sudden touch on my shoulder and heard a low hiss escape the lips of who I assumed to be Aidan.

"Son of a . . ." I gasped, completely taken aback by his presence. "Aidan?" I whispered.

"Yeah, it's me. Damn iron," he spat as his skin sizzled from touching the cuffs. Jangling keys echoed as he searched for the right one to unlock my chains.

"How are you invisible? Lerissa and I have the necklaces." He huffed as he struggled to identify the right one. "She came to me and said you needed help but didn't have time to explain why." The keys jingled more. "So, she gave me the necklace and the keys and left."

My heart suddenly filled with worry for Lerissa, knowing that my own magic had swept her away.

“Aidan, listen,” I demanded. “There has to be more Tyvar here who are loyal to Bayleon and Bastian. Can you sense them anywhere? Maybe they’re in some kind of prison in the encampment.”

Aidan stilled behind me, and I knew he was trying to concentrate. A few seconds later, he started back on the iron shackles. “I think you’re right. I can smell many of them on the opposite side of the camp, but it’s like they’re enclosed inside the earth, probably an underground dungeon.”

I had to believe Aidan was right. If not, we were in even more trouble.

“I need you to free them,” I said quickly. “Rogan’s men will be coming back for blood, and we need the others to help. Please, go! And when you come back, you know what we need.”

Aidan’s chuckle was low and sinister. “You got it.”

The sound of a key sliding home was music to my ears. A whoosh of air blew past me as Aidan hurried off through the camp. Bayleon and Bastian were still fighting off Rogan’s men, but I could see their bodies were growing tired from. I was ready to get out there and fight with them. But before I could slip out of the shackles, Diawen appeared out of the trees, her hair and body drenched from the water. She looked like an avenging dark angel, ready to kill.

“Enough of this,” she shouted, opening the box. “You’re coming with me.”

She drew closer and reached into the box, pulling out a red amulet hanging from a silver chain. All I needed was for her to get closer. Then, I’d have a chance to

apprehend her. The only person I knew who could help us force the cure out of her would be Elvena.

With my magic, along with others in my family, it should be enough to help Elvena extract the information from Diawen's mind like she did with Bayleon and Bastian. It was the only thing I could think of that would work. Diawen wasn't going to give me the answers voluntarily.

Lerissa appeared by the tree line, holding a hand to her chest as she tried to breathe. When her eyes landed on me, they widened in panic. She hurried down past the men fighting until she was right behind Diawen.

"What are you doing?" Lerissa asked, her voice uncertain.

With the necklace in her hand, Diawen dropped the wooden box to the ground. "Plan B. The second I put this on her, I'm making a portal and we're getting out of here."

Lerissa's gaze darted back and forth from me to Diawen; it was clear she knew what Plan B entailed. Diawen inched closer, lifting the necklace so she could slide it over my head. Before she could take another step, war cries erupted from the far end of the camp. Tyvar that I recognized from many years back raced toward Bayleon and Bastian, their swords drawn and ready to fight. Then, a few seconds later, another war cry erupted from the sky.

A blast of fire sprayed above us, and Lerissa dropped to her knees while Diawen recoiled in both anger and fear. She moved away and I lost my chance to apprehend her. Aidan dropped down from the sky as his dragon, the earth trembling as he made contact with the ground. His glowing red eyes fixated on Diawen and he opened his mouth, the heat from his flames sending fear through her; I could see it in her eyes. I ripped my arms and ankles from the shackles, my skin healing within seconds.

Diawen stepped back, her fear turning to rage as she took her place beside Lerissa and grabbed her arm. Aidan wouldn't be able to use his flames without hurting Lerissa.

"It's over," I hissed low, preparing to lunge at her.

Diawen snarled and gripped Lerissa harder, pulling her in front of her body. "You're right, it is," Diawen agreed, her breaths coming out as rapid pants. "Your lovers survived, but they'll still be cursed. You'll never get the cure."

In one quick move, she summoned a portal and stepped through it, still holding onto Lerissa. I could see the sadness in Lerissa's eyes before she disappeared.

My men were alive and there was no greater joy than that, but my chances of finding the cure had just vanished.

"Lia!" Bayleon and Bastian yelled as they rushed to me.

I hugged them both, letting my healing powers flow through them. As I pulled away, I noticed all the fallen bodies around us and the ones left standing.

"What now?" I asked, not wanting to let go of them.

They stepped back and gazed at each other before settling their eyes on me. "We go home," Bayleon said softly, taking my hand in his.

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Bastian grabbed my other one. “And we live our lives together.”

“What about your men?” I questioned.

Bayleon hung his head. “They aren’t going to be a problem. All the ones Diawen created recently are dead. Though”—he looked up at me, giving a small glimmer of hope—“the others said that if we ever found a way to break the curse, they would join us in the Blossom Court.”

My heart overflowed with pride but quickly vanished when I remembered that Diawen had gotten away and our chance of finding a cure was gone.

“Maybe one day,” I uttered, holding onto some faith.

I couldn’t give up hope . . . not yet.

Chapter23

Lia

One Week Later

The news of what happened between Diawen, the Tyvar, and my men and I had traveled quickly through all the courts and the elvish kingdom. Secrets that had once been hidden were now known by all the fae. Diawen was dangerous, and I knew she would not come to our land willingly; it was to her advantage for me to search for her in the mortal realm, where I was more vulnerable. I didn’t care what I had to do;

I was going to find her. The only problem was that Bayleon and Bastian didn't want me to continue the search, not after what happened. But giving up wasn't an option. A fire was burning within me to break the curse and I couldn't let the fire die down. I wanted Bayleon and Bastian as my true mates, to be bonded in marriage; I wanted them to be the kings of my court. None of that was going to be possible until I freed them. The Land of the Fae wasn't going to let me bond with them without their curse gone.

As the sun set, casting a deep purple hue across the sky and turning shades of pink and orange in its wake, Bayleon and Bastian joined me on the balcony. They were still wearing their warrior gear, but their masks were off, illuminating their midnight-blue eyes.

"You've been out here for an hour. What are you thinking about?" Bastian asked.

I smiled at both of my men and then turned my attention back to the setting sun in the distance. "I was thinking about today," I said, snickering under my breath. "While you two were training with our warriors, I had a visitor."

Bastian came up to my left and Bayleon to my right, the combined heat from their bodies melting into me like a cozy quilt.

"What did Fawn want?" Bayleon asked.

I stared at him in surprise. "How did you know it was Fawn?"

A smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth. "I'm one of your protectors, my queen. I know everything that goes on in this court."

My stomach twisted uneasily at the reminder; soon, I would have to leave them all behind to embark on a quest for Diawen, but now wasn't the time to think about such

things. The joy inside me was too strong and I grinned as I turned away from the setting sun and leaned against the balcony railing to get a better view of both Bastian and Bayleon. My heart swelled just looking at them; they were true treasures, mine to love and cherish forever.

“As you know,” I began, “I owed Fawn two favors for helping me out before, right? Well, she came to me today to ask for one of them. And let me tell you, her request totally took me by surprise.”

Bastian raised an eyebrow and cocked his head in curiosity. “I’m intrigued. What did she want?”

“She asked if I could grow a bigger tree in their village for her sister, Fiona,” I explained. “She’s about to have a baby and Fawn thought a larger home would make Fiona and her mate happier. I thought it was really sweet.”

Bastian smiled sadly, his eyes far away.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

Bastian looked over at Bayleon before turning back to me. “Nothing. Just memories.”

Bayleon sighed heavily and stepped closer to Bastian, placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “I remember too, brother.” He turned toward me and reached out with his free hand, taking both of mine in his grasp. His touch sent tingles racing up my arm, setting my skin alight with warmth. “Our mother used to make things grow all the time with her earth magic; we loved watching her do so.”

Bastian nodded slowly in agreement, his eyes still distant. “And I always used to wish I could do the same thing she did—that I had those powers, too.” He stepped closer to me and gazed into my eyes pleadingly. “I’ve always envied your people, Lia. I would

give anything to be able to do what you do.”

My heart ached as I placed one of my hands on his cheek, feeling the stubble beneath my fingertips. “You’re perfect the way you are,” I whispered reassuringly. “You make me happy—both of you do.”

Interlocking our fingers together, I pulled them both toward the door, allowing the warmth from our connected hands to flow through us like electricity.

“Now let me show you both how happy you make me.”

Keeping them satiated made them strong; if I couldn’t find a way to break the curse, then at least I could give them moments of joy whenever possible. Until then . . .

Chapter24

Lia

I spent the entire morning with Bayleon, Bastian, and our warriors, training like usual. Aidan arrived early this afternoon to speak with Bayleon and Bastian about fighting strategies and tactics. He was impressed with how the Tyvar fought and wanted to utilize some of those skills with his own warriors in his court. I was happy to see my men and my family growing closer.

My parents also visited, and my mother and I had a contest to see who could hit the target with the most arrows. I'd been beaten by my mother more times than I could count, but this time . . . we tied. It was a welcome victory. Everything seemed to be returning to normal, but unfortunately, normal wasn't part of our lives here in the Land of the Fae. There was always something or someone waiting around a darkened corner. I hate that I felt like that, but Diawen was still out there.

Did she have a necklace that could hurt me? Yes, but I wasn't afraid of her. She wasn't going to get near enough to me to be able to get it around my neck. My hatred for her welled up in my chest and felt like tiny knives jabbing me, provoking me. I didn't want those feelings to consume me, but they did. Diawen was within my grasp and now she was gone.

I feared it was going to be a long time before our paths ever crossed again. The thought was almost enough to drive me insane. I didn't like the feeling of not having control of my life. Bayleon and Bastian were my future; if I couldn't break the curse, our lives together would be limited. As long as I had them by my side, I knew I'd be

happy, but there was more I wanted to give them.

My steps were silent against the garden path as I wandered through the lush foliage. The sun was setting, casting a golden glow across my palace and its sprawling grounds. With every few steps, I'd pause and take in a deep breath of the sweet-scented air, letting it fill my body with warmth and peace. At last, I made my way to the fountain; its trickling water provided a gentle soundtrack for my evening.

Sliding my fingers through its cool depths, I sighed in contentment. Behind the gardens, a vast green field stretched into the horizon. It was mine—my court, my land—and an electric thrill of power coursed through me at the thought. Closing my eyes, I let my magic flow from my fingertips onto the ground below. When I opened them again, an explosion of color spread out before me—thousands of pink and yellow tulips danced in their beds of grass. A low rumble of thunder echoed across the sky, seeming to travel directly to my heart. An eagerness built within me as I imagined making love to my men beneath the warm embrace of the storm. We had yet to do that, and I looked forward to it.

“Very beautiful, dear,” my mother called out.

Smiling, I watched as my tulips swayed back and forth in the gentle breeze like dancers twirling gracefully across an imaginary stage.

“Thank you,” I said, glancing back at her. Her red hair had been styled into a romantic updo, but the wind had freed some of the strands and they fluttered around her face like tiny flames. “Are you and dad about to head home?”

She came up beside me and bumped me with her shoulder affectionately. “Yes. Although, I think your dad is having a little too much fun with your cousin. Aidan convinced all the guys to partake in a few drinking games.”

“And you didn’t want to join them? Usually, you like showing them up.”

My mother threw her head back and laughed, locking eyes with the twilight sky before returning her gaze to mine.

“Yes, I do. I blame it on all those long nights I spent with the warriors when I was younger. Your grandparents hated it.”

I shrugged, feeling a rush of pride surge through my veins as I thought about my mother’s strength and courage. “You weren’t just a princess. You were a warrior. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to be strong.”

She nodded slowly as if she was reliving past memories—both pleasant and painful alike—in her mind. “I know. It just wasn’t the way things were back then. So, when your father and I had you and Kale, we both agreed to start training you the second you learned to walk.”

I linked my arm with hers. “I’m glad you did. If you hadn’t, I wouldn’t be able to finish my quest.”

Her head jerked toward me, and I didn’t have to look at her to know she understood my meaning. I had debated on telling her, but I needed someone to know. That way, she’d know where to look if something happened to me.

“Your quest? Lia, no. I know what you want to do, and I think you should let it go. Bayleon and Bastian are here, and they’re yours. Making love to them to keep them healthy doesn’t seem all that bad.”

Shaking my head, I looked over at her. Yes, I could heal them with sex, but it shouldn’t have to be like that.

“I want to hunt Diawen down,” I growled. “The Tyvar curse should never have started.”

My mother stood before me, her hands grasping mine and her amethyst eyes full of worry. “I agree. But you have to think about this, Lia. What’s going to happen if you waste years of your life consumed by hunting her down? That’s not a way to live.” She flourished a hand around the field of tulips. “This is your home and it’s beautiful. You’re in love and you’re safe here. The last thing you want is to jeopardize that.”

She was right; I didn’t want to jeopardize what I had, but I had this overwhelming urge to keep fighting. Tears stung the back of my eyes, and I closed them, hoping I could keep them from falling.

“I love my life,” I murmured, opening my eyes to look into hers. “But if things stay the way they are, I’m going to miss out on the one thing I really want.”

Understanding flashed on her face and she cupped my cheeks. “I see,” she whispered. “You want children.”

I nodded. “I do. And I don’t want them to be cursed.”

My mother pulled me into her arms and sighed. “I wish I knew what to say, Lia. I understand your need to want to have children with the men you love.” Her arms tightened around me and I rested my cheek on her shoulder. “However, there is something I really want you to think about.”

My tears fell down my cheek and onto her dress. “Tell me,” I said, my voice thick with emotion.

She rubbed a hand soothingly down my back before letting me go, her expression serious and determined. “Bayleon and Bastian need you, Lia. If you go searching for

Diawen and something happens to you, you would condemn the men you love. If you are no more, they have no one to heal them. And we both know what Bayleon and Bastian will do.”

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They wouldn't go back to seducing women . . . they would choose to die. My heart ached as I thought of what might happen to Bayleon and Bastian if anything ever happened to me. I remembered the pain and fear when Diawen and the Tyvar took them away, and it hammered at my chest like a drumbeat.

"If I don't kill Diawen," I said, "what happens if she takes them again?"

My mother's eyes softened as she looked at me. "There will always be what-ifs," she replied quietly. "When that dark sorcerer took your father, I wanted nothing more than to kill him with every fiber of my being. But in the end, none of that mattered—all that mattered was getting your dad back safely." She reached out her hand and smoothed my hair back. "Vengeance didn't bring me happiness, Lia; only your father did. And in the end, I wasn't the one who killed the sorcerer." Her eyes swirled with power as she looked at me. "Diawen will pay for what she's done, that's for certain. It may not be today or in ten years, but it will happen. Let the vengeance go."

It was easier said than done. Everything she said made sense in my heart, and it would be stupid of me to pursue Diawen. But my mind wanted to challenge and force me the opposite way.

Before I could even respond, a figure caught the corner of my eye. I looked over to see Shaylah running out of the palace and through the garden toward us, holding the hem of her emerald dress up in her arms.

"Your Highness!" she shouted, waving her free hand in the air.

There was a huge smile on her face, so I knew nothing could be wrong. My mother and I started toward her so she wouldn't have to run so far. When we met her, it was at the edge of the gardens. Shaylah clutched her chest as she sucked in a much-needed breath, her honey-colored eyes lit with excitement.

"What's going on?" I asked, laughing.

Shaylah's cheeks were red from exertion and she beamed. "Good news, Your Highness," she said, still gasping for air. "We just got word at the palace that Ember and Ren just welcomed their daughter. They want you there."

So much happiness burst through me that I didn't even know if I could keep it contained. Ember and Ren's daughter was the first to be born in my court. I had to see her.

* * *

As I sprinted toward the cottage, I could see Ren and his parents standing outside. Ashur stood beside Elissa, a full head taller than her slight frame. He was my mother's Guardian and Elissa was my mother's best friend. Although time had changed much about them, their warm dispositions remained the same.

When Ren and I were kids there was a time when my mother and Elissa thought we would end up together. Little did they know his heart belonged to Ember the entire time. As I neared, they bowed in greeting and I hugged them quickly. My eyes were drawn to Ren's beaming smile as he opened the cottage door and gestured graciously inside.

"Ember's waiting for you," he said.

"Who does Korra look like? You or Ember?" I asked with a grin, eager to meet my

best friend's daughter.

An amused smirk graced Ren's lips. "Me, of course."

I chuckled and hurried through the door. Ren and Ember both had blond hair, but Ember had beautiful curls. I could just imagine Korra having the same.

My heart raced as I tiptoed down the hallway, cautiously trying to be quiet in case Korra was still sleeping. Sweet fragrances filled my nose from the flowering potted plants that lined the walls.

When I reached the bedroom door, I slowly turned the handle and peeked inside. Ember, her hair still a little messy from the delivery process, was carefully cradling a bundle of blankets against her chest. She hadn't noticed me yet because she was lovingly gazing at her daughter. My breath caught when Korra let out a tiny yawn and a small hand peeked out from under the blankets.

Ember lifted her gaze and gasped when she saw me. "Oh Lia, come here! I want you to meet Korra!"

Tears began to form in my eyes as I crossed over to them. I sat down on the bed beside Ember and looked down at this perfect little being who had just graced our lives with her presence. Her eyes were closed, but I smiled when I noticed the tiny blonde curl on top of her head.

"She's breathtaking," I whispered.

Ember nodded. "She is. Do you want to hold her?"

I eagerly outstretched my arms for the little bundle and Ember gently placed Korra into them. I brought her close to my chest and took in a deep breath of her unique

baby scent.

“Hey, Korra,” I said softly, “I’m your faerie godmother.” Ember snickered at my words, and I winked back at her. “Well, I am. This little girl is going to have everything she could ever want. I’m going to spoil her as often as possible.”

Ember shook her head with a knowing smile. “At least until you have your own kids. Then you’ll be too busy spoiling them.”

My smile faded and the lump that had been lodged in my throat for days resurfaced again. Ember noticed my pause and put a comforting hand on my arm.

“Lia, what’s wrong?”

An emptiness began to creep up inside me, but I tried to fight it off. Bayleon and Bastian were enough; I should be happy with just them in my life. But still, the pain of never getting to experience motherhood was almost too much to bear. And if I did happen to get pregnant and had a son, he would be doomed with the Tyvar curse.

“I still want to break the curse,” I confessed. “But there are too many risks. In the end, if I don’t find the cure, I’ll never be able to experience this.” I nodded down at Korra. “It makes me sad.”

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Ember nodded. “I understand that. Honestly, I was hoping to have a heart-to-heart with you.”

My brows furrowed as I kept my gaze on hers. “What about?”

Her expression saddened. “The curse. I know you’ve been preoccupied with finding the cure. I’ve been worried it’s consuming you.”

Guilt spread through my body. “Has it been that noticeable?”

She nodded. “Very much so. I don’t want to see you unhappy, Lia. If you want to go after Diawen, I’m sure no one will be able to stop you. If anyone can break the curse, it will be you. I’m your best friend, Lia, and I love you. I just hope you see what’s in front of you before you go out and put it all at risk.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “You sound like my mother. She said something similar to me today.”

Ember beamed. “She’s a smart woman. The question is . . . are you going to listen to us?”

Korra cooed and it warmed my heart. These were the moments I didn’t want to miss. Tears filled my eyes, and they ran warm down my cheeks.

“I know it’s hard, Lia.”

“It is,” I admitted shamelessly. I blew out a heavy sigh and smiled down at Korra.

“But I can’t give up on this.”

Ember hung her head. “So, you’re going after Diawen, then?”

I looked at her until she lifted her gaze to mine. “No,” I answered.

Her eyes widened. “No?”

I shook my head. “I won’t go searching after Diawen, but I am going to keep hoping for a change. There must be another way to find the cure and if I get the chance, I’ll go for it. And I’ll do it in a non-dangerous way. No risks to those I love.”

A tear slid down Ember’s cheeks. “I think that sounds like a plan.”

It wasn’t my first choice, but I had to think of Bayleon and Bastian. But most of all, I had to have faith.

Chapter 25

Lia

The savory aromas of roasted meat, vegetables, and fruits filled the hallway, a welcome reprieve since I hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast. As I approached the dining room, hearty laughter emanated from within, lifting my heart and making me smile.

When I entered, I was struck by the changes in Bayleon and Bastian—they seemed more relaxed and open, their smiles filled with joy. They were dressed in beige tunics that showed off their taut physiques, paired with brown leather pants. Aidan raised his glass of faerie wine in salute, his smile wide. Bayleon and Bastian bowed to me as usual, despite my insistence that we were equals and they didn’t need to do that.

“It’s about time you got back,” Aidan teased, “we were about to eat without you.”

With a shake of his head, Bastian extended an arm for me to take; I kissed him and then Bayleon, tasting sweet faerie wine on their lips and wishing for more.

Bayleon pulled my seat back from the table and smiled. He had a ruggedly handsome face, framed with tousled, long blond hair that glinted in the candlelight.

“How was your visit with Korra?” he asked.

I couldn’t help but feel my heart fluttering as I sat down. “It was fantastic,” I said, gazing up into his face.

As usual, his eyes were covered by the silver mask he and Bastian always had to wear. Bayleon took the seat to my right and Bastian to my left while Aidan sat across from us and poured more faerie wine into our glasses.

“It’s going to be a long time before I have any kids,” he said casually.

A spark of jealousy ignited in my gut at his flippant attitude, but I quickly pushed it away. If Bayleon and Bastian noticed anything amiss they didn’t let on, instead piling food onto their plates and laughing about stories from their adventures of the day. We enjoyed our dinner together, drinks in hand.

Lifting my glass, I held it out to Aidan. “I’ve enjoyed having you here, cousin. We need to do it more often.”

Aidan raised his glass. “I agree. Next time, you three need to come to my court.” He smirked. “And maybe we can get the rest of our cousins to come. It’s been a while since we’ve all been together without our parents. Traditions are nice, but I think we need to make new ones.”

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I drank to that. “I’m sure we can arrange that.”

Shouts of alarm erupted from outside the castle, and Bayleon, Bastian, and Aidan were on their feet instantly. Before I could react, Bastian and Aidan ran out the dining room door and Bayleon blocked my path.

“We’re staying here,” he growled.

Outside the walls, the clamor of voices swelled until it seemed to shake the palace. I wanted to investigate, but Bayleon stood in the way. Frustration boiled within me; if Diawen attacked, I wanted to be part of the fight. I stepped forward, meeting his mask-covered eyes with a steely look of determination.

“Let me out of here, Bayleon.”

He shook his head slowly. “Not until we know what’s going on.”

With my fists clenched at my side, I stepped up to him. “I love you and I know you want to protect me but I’m going to get out of this room. You and Bastian didn’t train me just so I can sit on my ass. Hurting you hurts me, and I don’t want to fight you, but I will if it gets me out of this room.”

Bayleon exhaled softly before nodding in agreement. “Forgive me, my love. You can’t fault me for wanting to keep you safe.”

I smiled and cupped his cheek before dropping my hand. “From here on out, our duties are to protect each other. If there’s a battle, we’ll ride into it together. When I

told you we were equals, I meant it. I know you'll sacrifice your life for mine, but you need to know I'd do the same for you. Now let me out of here so we can deal with whatever's going on together."

Bayleon quickly stepped aside, and we ran toward the palace entrance where Bastian and Aidan stood ready, swords drawn and eyes steady. The shouts of the approaching enemy grew louder, and in an instant, a familiar woman with wild, caramel-tinged locks raced through the door only to be tackled by two of my warriors. They tumbled to the floor in a heap.

"Lia, it's me!" Lerissa called out from underneath my warriors. "I don't want to do you or your people any harm. I need help. Please! I'm in so much damn trouble."

My heart raced as I glanced at Aidan, who gave me a nod—his eyes assured me she spoke the truth. Knowing what I had to do, I motioned for my warriors to let her up. They lifted Lerissa up by her arms but stood close, their bodies tense and ready to react at a moment's notice. I could see the desperation in Lerissa's crystal blue eyes.

"What are you doing here?" I inquired, my voice full of suspicion.

"I can't go back home," she said quickly, her breathing labored. "If I do, Diawen will come after me." She stepped forward, clasping her hands over her heart. My warriors blocked her from getting closer. "Please, Lia. I can help you break the curse. There's so much I have to tell you."

Her words caught me by surprise and I froze. There was no hint of deceit or mischief in them. Aidan stepped forward, resting a hand on my shoulder as I studied her carefully.

He nodded his head. "She's telling the truth, Lia."

I considered this for a moment before motioning to my warriors. “Let her go,” I said. They stepped away from her and I motioned for her to come closer. “Come on. We’ll go somewhere more private.”

Bayleon and Bastian led us down the hallway while Lerissa walked beside me with Aidan trailing behind us. Bayleon and Bastian led the way into one of the sitting rooms, their polished boots clicking against the marble floors. We followed them, our footsteps muffled by thick rugs that hugged the corridors. Aidan shut the door behind us with a resounding click and stood guard while Bayleon and Bastian flanked me as I settled onto the plush couch. Lerissa took the chair opposite me, her hands shaking violently as though she’d just run a marathon. But it was more than exertion that spiked her adrenaline; she had accomplished something no one else had ever dared to do—she broke into the grounds of my palace.

“I didn’t think I was going to make it here alive,” she said, voice cracking. “I thought for sure your men would kill me.”

A low chuckle rumbled from Aidan’s throat. “You’re obviously very clever to have gotten as far as you did. I’m intrigued.” He smiled at her and I had a feeling that wasn’t the only thing he was interested in.

“Tell me everything, Lerissa,” I commanded. “You said you can help me break the curse. I want to know how.”

She nodded. “And I’ll tell you, but helping you comes at a great cost. That’s why I need your help in return. It’s the only way I can tell you everything.”

Aidan cleared his throat. “Truth.”

I hated that I had to have his assurance on whether she spoke the truth. Yet, in my heart, I wanted to believe her words.

“Why did you turn your back on Diawen?” I asked. “If you were able to do that with your own kin, why should I put my faith in you?”

Lerissa’s eyes darkened. “Because Diawen’s evil. I felt it the moment I touched her.”

My curiosity was piqued. “You felt it when you touched her? Is that a siren power?”

She shook her head. “No. It’s something only I can do. Most sirens just mesmerize men. But since I come from Diawen’s line, my magic is stronger. I can do things no others can.” Her shoulders rose with her intake of breath, and she let it out slowly. “I can feel a person’s true nature,” she confessed. “Take, for instance, the first time we made contact. The second you touched me, I could feel the purity in your soul; it was like a beacon of light.”

I glanced at Aidan and he gave a slight nod of approval, a sign that Lerissa’s words were genuine.

“So, when you touched Diawen . . .” I said, letting my query drift off.

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“It was dark and menacing,” she said in response. She exhaled deeply and held her stare with mine. “Diawen has kept me on the run for the past week, refusing to let me return home. My mother is unaware of my location or situation. Coming here was a risk, but I’m hoping it pays off in the end.”

“That depends on what information you have,” I replied.

Lerissa gave a small nod of acknowledgment. “I know why Diawen doesn’t want the curse broken—if the Tyvar are healed, her bloodline, which includes me, will lose their ability to live on land. That was her motivation for creating the Tyvar in the first place. She was tired of being confined to the waters; she wanted the luxuries of living on land. The more Tyvar there are, the stronger her family becomes; we’re all connected.”

My stomach churned as her words sunk in. Bayleon and Bastian both had somber looks on their faces. If Lerissa helped me break the curse, they would be free, but she’d have to give up living on land.

“You’ll be stuck living in the water? Is that what you’re telling me?” I asked.

Her anguish hung heavily in the air; I knew this decision couldn’t possibly be easy for her. Lerissa’s eyes began to mist over, and her bottom lip trembled.

“Yes,” she whispered, fresh tears streaming down her cheeks as she hastily brushed them away with the back of her hand.

“Why are you telling us this?” I felt my chest tight with emotion for her.

She took a deep breath before continuing, “Because what Diawen did isn’t right. I don’t want to condemn others so that I can have power. That’s why I’m hoping you will agree to my next request.”

Curiosity got the best of me, but I already had an inkling of what she was about to ask. “What do you want from us in return for your help?”

Lerissa bit her lip nervously before speaking. “If I can help you, all I ask is permission for me, my mother, and sisters to live here in the Land of the Fae—they’re good people.”

My first reaction was to agree. I’d give her anything if she could help me break the Tyvar curse. There was just one problem.

“Would a simple lake suffice for you?” I asked. “My court doesn’t have the bodies of water you’re used to in the mortal realm.”

Lerissa’s face lit up and she nodded. “I don’t care, just as long as I’m here with my family and we’re safe.”

Aidan stepped forward. “You can live in my court.”

Lerissa gasped and I turned to him, shocked by his offer.

He looked at us both and shrugged. “If she’s sacrificing her livelihood for my family, I think she deserves more. My court has plenty of oceans.” His eyes darkened with power when he focused on her. “But you have to live by my rules. There are no second chances if you break them.”

Lerissa jumped to her feet and ran over to him, throwing her arms around his neck. “Thank you. Thank you.”

It took him a few seconds, but he closed his arms around her waist to embrace her back. It was clear they had a connection; I saw it the very first day with her flirtatious comments.

“I won’t let you down,” she said to him. Aidan let her go and she turned back to me, her smile radiant. “I’m ready when you are.”

Excitement bubbled in my chest. “What do I have to do?”

She came over to me and took my hands. “I have another gift that no one knows about. I don’t even know if I’ll still have it once the curse is broken. If I do, I only ask that you don’t tell a soul. If word were to get around, I would be hunted by every creature in the mortal realm and probably here in the Land of the Fae as well.”

She glanced at Bayleon, Bastian, and then over at Aidan. They all nodded in agreement. Her secret was safe with us.

Lerissa breathed in slowly and let it out. “I can find out things I don’t even have the answers to. It can be from the past, present, or future. For example, if you want to know how many kids you’ll have, I can show you. I don’t know how or why, but I’ve been able to do it with my mother and sisters. They would ask me things and the answers would come to us in a shared vision.”

My mouth gaped in astonishment; it was all so fascinating. “How does it work?”

She shrugged. “We have to be in the water so I can draw energy from it. But also, the person has to be worthy. With you, I don’t think that’ll be a problem. Once the question is spoken, the vision will appear with the answer.”

I didn’t want to waste another moment. Letting Lerissa’s hands go, I pulled her in against me, hugging her tight.

“Thank you, Lerissa. If this works, I’ll owe you everything.”

She laughed. “Living here is all I’ve ever wanted.”

I pulled away and motioned toward the door. “Let’s see if I’m worthy.”

Chapter26

Lia

We stepped out of the palace doors and into my garden, which was filled with lush foliage, marble statues, and blooming flowers. In the center was the fountain with shimmering waters that sparkled in the midday sun like diamonds, only now it glowed in the moonlight.

Lerissa and I padded over to it, and she beckoned me to join her in the water. We sank to our knees, the warm liquid caressing our skin as we settled in. Bayleon, Bastian, and Aidan joined us, standing around the fountain with expressions of curiosity etched onto their faces.

Lerissa turned to me and whispered, “Take my hands and close your eyes.”

With bated breath, I did as she said. As soon as our fingers intertwined, I felt a jolt of energy race through me. Her magic embraced mine in a rush of sensations that left me reeling.

“I knew it,” she murmured, letting out a small snicker. “You’re worthy. My magic has accepted you. I can feel your mind connected to mine.”

And so could I—though all I could see was white fog surrounding us both.

“What do we do now?” I asked softly.

“Ask me what it is you want to know.”

I took a deep breath and spoke in hushed tones. “How do we break the Tyvar curse?”

At once, my vision erupted in a burst of blinding light. The water in the fountain churned violently as its magical energy intensified. A buzzing sounded in my ear, and I was thrust further into the white fog with Lerissa by my side. Then, the haze started dissipating, and I could tell we were somewhere else, somewhere I had been just recently. We were in the elvish kingdom, only the lake spread before us wasn't there anymore.

“Glimmerglass Lake,” I whispered, my voice sounding far away like you'd imagine it being in a dream world.

Lerissa still held onto my hand, her gaze lit with wonder as she stared at the water. “It's beautiful. I wish it were like that again. Not that I would enjoy its waters, but at least it wouldn't be a baron muddy mess.”

I looked around for more clues from the vision, but it was still only the lake.

“Am I missing something?” I asked, turning my attention to her. “I see Glimmerglass Lake, but what does it mean?”

Her eyes widened and her mouth dropped. “Lia, look.”

As I turned my head toward the lake, two silhouettes materialized before me. As they solidified, I realized that it was Lerissa and myself. In my hand was a wide glass decanter, while Lerissa held a sharp knife with a steady grip. With nimble fingers, I lowered the decanter into the water to fill it up while Lerissa drew the blade across her palm. Blood welled up from the cut, dripping into the water in the vase. As she withdrew her hand and cleaned it in the lake, I watched as the wound healed—no

mark was left behind to show what had just taken place.

“I didn’t know Glimmerglass Lake had healing waters,” I murmured, stunned by what I’d just witnessed.

It was surreal watching ourselves like we were in some sort of time-defying movie. My counterpart handed over the blade to me, and I passed her the decanter. This time, it was my turn to slice my own palm. The blade’s edge cut over my skin before crimson droplets hit the surface of the liquid inside. In an instant, a blinding light illuminated everything around us as if day had suddenly broken through the night’s embrace. Squinting hard against its searing brightness, I shielded my eyes with both hands. A moment later, when I dared to open them again, Lerissa and I had somehow found ourselves back in the fountain in my Blossom Court. The vision was gone as swiftly as it had come.

Lerissa smiled and opened her eyes, her skin beaming like the stars. “Who would’ve thought you’d be a key ingredient?”

I had my healing powers, but I had no clue my blood was the key to saving Bayleon and Bastian.

“What does it all mean?” I asked her.

Lerissa smiled. “I’ll tell you everything once we get there.” She glanced over at Aidan. “Do you think the dragon king could give us a ride? We could be back with the cure in no time.” Her voice was loud enough for him to hear.

Aidan chuckled and shook his head. “I thought you were afraid of me as the dragon?”

Lerissa bit her lip. “As long as you promise not to burn me to a crisp, I’ll be fine. I just know the sooner we get the cure, the sooner I can get my family here.”

Aidan's eyes darted to the distant fields. "I'll be out there waiting."

He ran off, and I turned to Bayleon and Bastian, their faces creased with confusion. They helped me out of the fountain, and I stood between them, resting my hand on their chests.

"The cure requires three things," I said. "We have two of them here, but we need water from Glimmerglass Lake."

Bastian shook his head in disbelief. "But it's dried up! How is that possible?"

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“I don’t know,” I replied. “All I know is we need it. Maybe the answer will come once we get there.”

Bayleon placed his hand over mine. “Let us accompany you.”

I kissed him deeply, feeling his warmth seep into me. “No,” I said softly. “I need you to stay here. This won’t take me long.”

Turning to Bastian, I locked my lips onto his, savoring the bittersweet tang of our passion. “I want both of you to meet me in our special grove when I return with the cure,” I murmured, glancing at them both. “Tonight, everything changes.”

My heart fluttered as Lerissa and I descended toward Aidan’s dragon form in the field. My dreams were finally about to come true.

* * *

Aidan flew us up to the front of my palace and I rushed in to grab my weapons—strapping my dagger and sword to my belt and my bow and arrows on my back. Then, lastly, I fetched an empty glass decanter and held it tightly in my arms before Aidan took us back into the sky. Lerissa’s grip was tight as she clutched my waist while her face pressed against my back. Now and then, she’d dare a glimpse of the ground below but quickly retreated into my warmth. I hadn’t flown on Aidan’s back in years, so the rush of wind was invigorating as we raced through the sky.

We took a direct path to the elvish kingdom that led us directly over the Winter Court—the snow below sparkled in the moonlight like millions of little stars. Soon

we reached warmer air, and I could see the twinkling lights from Aelfric and Rhoswen's palace in the distance. Unfortunately, there was no time to warn them of our visit, so I could only hope they would understand why we had to come in such haste.

Even though it was dark, I could see the barren lake below. Aidan's dragon wings whooshed in the air as he lowered us to the ground.

Holding the decanter in my arms, I slid off his back and Lerissa joined me by the edge of what used to be the lake. The land was dry and cracked, and had not changed since the last time we were here. I thought I could use my water magic to draw some up from within the ground, but I couldn't feel anything. Aidan's thunderous dragon footsteps pounded on the ground and when I looked back at him, I watched him shift back into his normal form. He walked past Lerissa and me onto the dry dirt and placed his hands on the ground. I wasn't the only one with the magic to control water; he also had it. I tried to hold onto hope that he could pull some from the ground, but when his troubled gaze focused on me, I knew it wouldn't be so.

"I'm assuming the lake was filled up in the vision?" he asked.

I nodded. "It was. But I can't feel a single drop beneath the soil."

Aidan stood and sighed. "I can't either."

I watched him walk around the bed of the lake, his face betraying the same frustration that gnawed at my stomach. We had come so far and yet we still stood empty-handed.

After setting the decanter down in the grass, I trudged to where he stood, digging my fingers into the damp soil. Even though I knew it was useless, I channeled my magic into the ground one last time, begging with every ounce of me for even a tiny drop of water to appear. But none did, and all that remained was the bitter tang of

disappointment.

“Please,” I begged. “There has to be a few drops somewhere.” But again, there was nothing.

Aidan’s hand settled on my shoulder. “Maybe it’s not the right time,” he said softly.

“When will it be?” I asked, glancing at him.

His gaze was heavy with sadness. “I don’t know.” We stayed there for a few more moments, and then he squeezed my arm. “Let’s go back home. We can try again another day.” I nodded in agreement, and we started back toward Lerissa, who had a worried expression on her face. “What do you want to do about her?” Aidan asked quietly. “You said she had to get the cure if she wanted to stay. We don’t have it yet.”

In light of what she did by betraying Diawen, there was no way she could go back to the mortal realm, and she was obviously scared for her family as well.

“She deserves to stay,” I answered firmly. “When you drop me off tonight, let her go and get her family so they can come here, too. They’ll need your protection.” Aidan nodded and there seemed to be an excited gleam in his emerald eyes. “Is there something you’re not telling me?” I probed.

He gave me a mischievous smirk. “What? Lerissa’s beautiful and I find her interesting.” Despite our night not being as planned, I couldn’t help but smile at his words.

“Just remember,” I cautioned him with a grin, “she’s a siren. I would hate for you to end up with a broken heart!”

We were almost to Lerissa when a tiny glimmer of light caught my eye. It was

coming from the trees and seemed to be getting brighter. Suddenly, Diawen emerged from the shadows. She had a silver blade clutched tightly in her hands. Everything felt still and slow, like I was stuck in a dream. I wanted to scream out for Lerissa to look behind her, but before I could, Diawen threw the blade with such precision that it seemed to hang suspended in midair. Lerissa's eyes widened in shock as the blade made contact; she let out a whimper of pain. My body shook with anger as I glared at Diawen's menacing figure.

"That's what happens when people betray me," she snarled.

Aidan's roar reverberated through the night sky, sending chills down my spine and driving me to action. I reached for my bow and notched an arrow with practiced precision before releasing it toward its target. The arrow flew true and embedded itself in Diawen's chest, her eyes wide with shock as she fell back against a tree. Suddenly, time slowed, and Aidan and I raced toward Lerissa, who was lying on the ground with the blade sticking out from her back. We both dropped to our knees beside her, my gut clenching at the sight of the blood pooling around her body.

"Can you heal her?" Aidan shouted desperately, his body radiating heat as his dragon threatened to be unleashed due to his mounting rage.

Tears filled my eyes at Lerissa's stillness and emptiness; I had been unable to protect her. "Take out the knife," I ordered, feeling my magic swell within me.

Aidan did as I said and tossed the blade onto the ground just as the light exploded from my hands and into Lerissa's body, consuming her. Tears streamed down my face as I felt my strength ebbing away. No matter how much energy I put into healing Lerissa, it wasn't enough: her eyes were still dull and lifeless.

Crying out in desperation, I called upon the last of my power. More than anything, I wanted to retrieve the cure—but even more than that, I wanted to save Lerissa

because she had been so unselfish. She had gone through so much to help me, the Tyvar and the men I loved. Stretching out with one final burst of magic, my body shuddered with effort.

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Exhausted beyond belief, I collapsed onto the barren ground of Glimmerglass Lake, my tears mingling with the dust beneath me. I couldn't see Aidan anymore, but I could hear his labored breathing as he stayed vigilantly beside her. Closing my eyes, I gave in to the grief. Lerissa was gone. I didn't want to get up or face Aidan, let alone look at Lerissa.

How could I not have been strong enough to save her? I felt so weak and powerless that my body refused to move.

"Lia," Aidan murmured as he knelt beside me. My eyes were too heavy to open, so instead, I just remained in silence. "Lia, you have to see this," he said more urgently.

I opened my eyes and could barely make out the sight in front of me, but it was what I could hear that caught me by surprise . . . it sounded like a river rushing somewhere close by.

Aidan's arms gripped me tight and he helped me sit up, his eyes gleaming with astonishment. My vision was still foggy, so all I saw was his face but when I listened closely, the water became louder and louder.

He smiled wider and nodded to his left. "Take a look."

Hastily, I wiped away the tears running down my cheeks with the back of my hand and looked toward the sound. The moment my gaze landed on the scene before me, my mouth dropped to the floor. What used to be Glimmerglass Lake was slowly filling up with crystal-clear water, which raced toward us with force and determination. Its warmth and magic enveloped my skin, restoring all the strength I

had lost in an instant. The water lapped at my ankles, and I saw Lerissa's lifeless body drifting in its depths. Her curly caramel-colored hair fanned out around her head like a halo, her skin pale and flawless against the aquamarine of the lake. Tears filled my eyes as I realized we couldn't leave her there.

"We need to take her with us," I whispered, my voice thick and choked with emotion.

Aidan pulled me into his arms and kissed the top of my head. "Okay," he agreed softly.

He started to walk away when suddenly Lerissa's body jolted and she lifted her head out of the water, gasping for breath. My heart leaped and I stared at her in stunned silence as Aidan rushed over and knelt beside her, splashing water everywhere.

She blinked a few times before turning to me. "What the hell just happened?"

Relief washed through me, and I grabbed one of her hands while Aidan took the other. We helped her stand up before I hugged her tightly, amazed that the wound on her back was now perfectly healed. I was about to explain when fear echoed in her voice.

"Diawen. It was her, wasn't it?"

I followed Lerissa's gaze toward the tree where Diawen had been, but she was gone. Aidan ran over and picked up the arrow I'd shot into Diawen's chest.

"She's not here," he shouted.

Panic filled Lerissa's eyes and dread settled in my gut. Diawen was still alive.

"She almost killed me," Lerissa said, rubbing a hand over her chest.

“But she didn’t,” I said. “I hope she thinks she did so that she doesn’t come back for you. But I don’t think she stuck around after I put an arrow through her cold heart.”

Lerissa’s eyes widened. “You shot her?”

I nodded. “Next time, I’ll slice off her head if I have to. That should do the trick.”

Relief seemed to pass through her body, but there was still a hint of fear on her face as she turned to the lake and gasped. “How did this happen?”

I couldn’t answer the question, so I shrugged. “I’m not sure. I tried to heal you after the blade struck you. I gave you everything I had, but it didn’t seem to work. Then a few minutes later, the lake began to fill up and the water gave me back my strength and you came back alive.”

Lerissa bent down and submerged her hands in the water, gasping with delight when she stood again and faced me with tears in her eyes.

“It was you, Lia,” she said softly with a smile on her lips and laughter shaking her shoulders. “You are the one who healed the lake with your magic; whatever you did on me was absorbed by the land.” She smiled wider. “You did it.”

It was hard to believe that I had restored Glimmerglass Lake. But what I was most happy about was seeing Lerissa alive again. However, it wasn’t going to be long before her life was going to change. Soon, she would be confined to living mainly in the water. There was a guilt in my soul I was afraid would never go away because of that.

Lerissa smiled as she gazed out at the water. “I never got to tell you about the cure. Do you want to know why it needs our blood and water from Glimmerglass Lake?”

“Of course,” I replied, curious to hear the story.

Lerissa blew out a sigh, still keeping her focus on the lake. “The original potion that turned men into Tyvar only had two ingredients: Diawen’s blood and water from the sea she was born in. That sea is all dried up now. She’d saved some of the water and used it on the men she just recently turned into Tyvar.” Her eyes shot over to mine. “She can’t make any more now. But, at least we have all we need to heal them all. She’s going to get a big dose of reality when we break the curse, and she loses a lot of her power.”

Lerissa walked over to the grassy bank and picked up the glass decanter I had left there. She pulled out the cork stopper and lowered it to the lake, almost filling it completely.

“You need Diawen’s blood for the cure,” she explained. “Since I’m part of her line, mine will work. It makes sense why you’d need it since it’s part of the curse. That’s why your healing blood and the magical Glimmerglass Lake water are used to counteract Diawen’s essence. It reverses the spell.”

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Aidan chuckled. “That is very interesting.”

Lerissa smiled at him, and I was happy to see they had a genuine connection. Maybe it was a good thing she was going to live in his court. Lerissa held the decanter to her chest and nodded at the knife on my belt.

“Are you ready? I know your guys are waiting on you.”

Taking a deep breath, I unsheathed my knife. I was more than ready.

Chapter27

Lia

My heart raced as we made our return to Blossom Court; the glass decanter was tucked close to my chest. Inside, the liquid glowed like a thousand stars and flickered in time with each beat of my pulse. When we arrived, Aidan circled around to the pear tree grove—the perfect place for a special night ahead. Bayleon and Bastian were waiting for me there. Aidan descended gracefully and I slid down his scaly skin, clutching the decanter tightly in my arms. Lerissa was about to come down too, but I stopped her.

“Go get your family,” I said. “There’s no time to waste.”

She hesitated, concern creasing her forehead. “What if the cure doesn’t work?”

I smiled. “It will. We’ll visit you once you’ve settled in your new home.” Guilt

blossomed inside me at the thought of the time Lerissa had left on land, but I squashed it down and offered her a comforting grin. “If we heal the Tyvar tomorrow, you know what that means don’t you?”

She nodded sadly. “I do, but it’s okay. I’ll have Aidan’s ocean to enjoy.”

She patted his head affectionately and he snorted out smoke before she winked at me, and they flew off into the night. I rushed through the veil of pear trees, clutching the decanter to my chest. My heart raced with both excitement and fear as I could see Bayleon and Bastian’s eyes widen with shock at the sight of me. They immediately came running toward me, and I set the decanter down so we could embrace in a three-way hug. The warmth of their arms around me was a calming comfort, and I breathed in their scent.

I pulled away from them slightly and lifted their masks, exposing two pairs of captivating deep blue eyes that had my heart yearning for something more.

“Are you okay?” Bayleon asked, his voice so sweetly smooth in my ear.

I nodded before Bastian spoke to me on the other side. “Did everything go as planned?”

A wave of regretful sadness washed over me as I remembered everything that had just happened with Lerissa and Diawen.

“Not exactly.” I paused before continuing. “It’s a long story, but I’ll tell you all about it later—right now is about us.” I licked my lips nervously and smiled. “I want you both to take the cure, and then I want you both to officially be mine.”

Both men looked at each other for a second before turning back to me. Bastian was filled with curiosity, while Bayleon seemed a little guarded.

“You want to seal the marriage bond?” Bastian asked.

I nodded. “Yes. That’s if you want to be bound to me for all eternity.”

Bayleon sighed. “What if it doesn’t work, Lia? What if you can’t bind yourself to us both?”

A mixture of hope and determination filled me as I reached up and touched his cheek reassuringly.

“It’ll work,” I whispered softly. “I can feel it in my soul.”

My hands trembled as I picked up the decanter and pulled out the cork stopper from the decanter. Bayleon and Bastian were eerily calm, yet my heart raced with anticipation. We were so close to unlocking something incredible; I still couldn’t believe it was real. Bastian cautiously took the decanter from me.

“Who wants to go first?” I focused my magic on the cluster of pear trees around us, weaving vines and fragrant flowers around them in a protective cocoon so no one could see us.

With a flick of my wrist, I summoned two tiny cups made of pear tree leaves and gave them to Bayleon and Bastian. “You can take it together.”

I quickly filled their small leaf cups before carefully placing the decanter back on the ground. They glanced into the cups and then at me, lifting them in unison. Nothing was said; it was just silence as they both tipped their heads back to drink the cure. Nothing seemed to exist in the moments of anticipation, and we were left wondering what would happen next.

Suddenly, Bayleon and Bastian collapsed to the ground, gasping for air. I rushed to

their side, cupping their faces and lifting them up. I sucked in a breath when I saw what was happening—their skin, which was usually pale, was now turning golden, like mine, and their eyes were now speckled with gold. It was as if they had been transformed: no longer Tyvar, but now part of my court. The Land of the Fae had accepted them. The first task was done. Now I had to see if they'd be honored as my husbands . . . as kings of the Blossom Court.

“Hey, talk to me,” I urged, glancing back and forth between them.

Bastian held up his hands, looking at them like he'd never seen them. He placed them both on the ground, and a second later, a singular red rose grew before him. Mouth gaping, I watched on in utter fascination.

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“I have magic,” Bastian murmured, disbelief in his voice. He jerked his attention to Bayleon, his eyes wide. “It’s our mother’s affinity for the land. I can feel the magic coursing through my veins.”

Bayleon gazed at me, his expression hopeful. I nodded for him to try, so he placed his hands on the grass. Flowers of various colors bloomed all around us and I squealed with joy.

“It worked.” I grabbed their hands, examining their changed skin. “You’re free. You belong to my court.”

Bastian cupped my face with his free hand and kissed me. “We belong to you.”

Still on our knees and surrounded by flowers, I was ready to take them as my husbands . . . as my kings. Everything felt right. I held onto their hands, combining us.

“You belong to me, and I belong to you,” I said to them both. “I love you and I will always love you, even after I die and we find ourselves in the Hereafter. Our love will never end. I have never been happier than I am in this moment. I’m ready to bind myself to you in all ways possible. You are my loves, my soul, and my kings.”

Bastian was the one who spoke next. “Lia, you are the only woman I’ve ever loved and I’m thankful that you were able to see through all my flaws and love me back. I owe you my life and will do everything I can to keep you happy. My love for you is endless and I look forward to everything we will share together.”

Tears filled my eyes as I turned to Bayleon. He looked down at our clasped hands and brought mine up to his lips, kissing my knuckles softly.

“You saved me, my love. I was prepared to live a life of agony just to be in your presence, but you freed me from that. You have always had my loyalty and love; now you have my heart. I’m ready to have you, not only as my queen but as my wife, as well. I pray the Land of the Fae deems my brother and me worthy of that.”

I held their hands tightly and closed my eyes, speaking the ancient elvish words of binding that would join us together. “Amin mela lle ilyamemie ar’ ten’oio.” We said it together, the words perfectly in sync. As soon as our voices faded, a gust of wind surged around us and I opened my eyes to see delicate petals floating all around us.

At that moment, I felt an unbreakable connection between them and me; it was like we were being sealed together. Hot tears rolled down my cheeks at the sight of Bayleon and Bastian wearing crowns made of vines decorated with colorful gemstones. They gazed into each other’s eyes knowingly—they had been accepted as my kings.

Overcome with emotion, I hugged them tightly and planted passionate kisses onto their lips before pulling away slightly. “It worked . . . you’re both mine.”

Bastian’s eyes darkened with unadulterated passion. “And now it’s time to show you you’re ours.”

He kissed me fiercely, his hands working at freeing me from my clothes. Bayleon moved my hair to the side and kissed the back of my neck, sending shivers down my arms. I couldn’t wait to have them both, to feel them inside me.

Within a few seconds our clothes had been removed, and I stared at their gloriously naked bodies. We were surrounded by our private grove of pear trees with a bed of

flowers beneath us; it was magical.

My flesh warmed as Bastian's hands roamed down my body, holding me close. I looked up at them and breathed in the intense moment.

Bastian's hand roamed over my breasts and I moaned. Bayleon's hand trailed down my body, his fingers brushing against my clit. I closed my eyes and let them work their magic on me. Bastian turned me in his arms and kissed me hungrily; he pulled back and grinned.

"Is this how it's always going to be?"

I nodded. "Yes. Only it'll be better every night."

Bayleon caressed my breasts, licking one of them and sending me over the edge.

"I want to be inside of you," Bastian said hungrily, his voice heavy with lust. I felt my skin heat up in anticipation and could barely contain my eagerness.

"Then take me," I said, my voice low and full of longing.

Bastian stood over me, his muscular body looming above me as Bayleon knelt between my legs. His fingers danced around my swollen clit, sending waves of pleasure through me as Bastian slowly pushed himself into me. I gasped at the sensation and groaned as Bayleon's tongue teased my nipples. He sucked one while Bastian licked the other, and I was overwhelmed by the dual sensations coursing through me.

I felt Bastian swell inside me and whimpered as Bayleon bit gently on my taut nipple. The pleasure was almost too much for me to bear, and with a sharp cry, I let go and gave in to my orgasm. As it ripped out of me, Bastian shuddered deep within me

before kissing me deeply, a satisfied sigh escaping from his lips.

With one last kiss, he moved away so Bayleon could make love to me—however, this time, I wanted to be in control. I pushed Bayleon onto his back and straddled his waist, sliding down ever so gently onto him. Bastian wrapped his hands around my waist from behind, kneading my breasts and kissing my neck as I rode Bayleon.

I rocked my hips back and forth, feeling Bayleon getting harder inside me. I couldn't help but close my eyes and let out a sigh of pleasure. Bayleon thrust his cock harder into me, his fingers digging into my skin.

“Is this what you want?” he asked me. “Is this what you needed?”

Bayleon pulled me down to him, his lips crashing onto mine, tongue diving into my mouth. My body was trembling; I couldn't hold in my pleasure any longer. I screamed out in ecstasy as I came, my core tightening around his cock. Bayleon continued thrusting into me as I came down from my orgasm.

“I love being able to feel you like this,” he growled, breathing heavily.

I could feel his cock throbbing inside of me as I milked him to completion. Then, once the high from our orgasm had ebbed, we laid on the bed of flowers, me in between the men I loved.

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“That was amazing,” I told them. “I love having you both.”

Bayleon held me from behind as I laid my head on Bastian’s chest. Both men wrapped their arms around me, holding me close. I felt amazing ... complete. Bayleon leaned over and kissed the back of my shoulder, pressing his growing cock against my back. A smile spread across my face. This was what I wanted, to have both my men and to love them.

We laid there most of the night, pleasuring one another until we passed out from exhaustion. I wanted to give Bayleon and Bastian a night to remember, a night full of hope, love, and the promise of a beautiful future. I think we succeeded.

Chapter28

Bayleon

ONE WEEK LATER

Living with the same affliction for nearly two hundred years, it was hard to believe everything had changed so quickly. The moment I drank the cure, I felt the pressure of being cursed drift away as if it had never been there. I didn’t have to hide my eyes from anyone anymore. When I saw my skin had taken on the golden shimmer of the Spring fae and that my eyes were no longer what they used to be, I felt immense pride swell within me. I wasn’t an outcast with the fae anymore; I was one of them—a king.

Our army has blossomed ever since Bastian and I traveled to the Tyvar to deliver the

cure. We'd arrived at the encampment to find only those loyal to us remained alive; everyone else had been killed because of their betrayal. After we shared the elixir, each of our men underwent a transformation similar to ours and their true magical powers began to awaken within them. The Tyvar curse had overpowered the part of us which prevented access to our true nature.

It was still mind-boggling that a single siren could've placed such a powerful curse on us. However, Diawen was still alive and, hopefully, weakened now that the Tyvar was no more. While Bastian and I were busy giving our men the cure, Lia watched over Lerissa's family in Aidan's court. Unfortunately, once our men drank the potion, Lerissa felt her magic change. Her newfound ability to remain on land wasn't as strong, only allowing her a couple hours on the ground each day. I couldn't even begin to understand how much debt I owed this girl for giving us a second chance at a real life, at being able to love without boundaries.

Shaylyn bowed her head to me as she passed by in the garden. "Good afternoon, Your Highness."

As if this blessing wasn't enough, my brother and I had been honored by the Land of the Fae itself—an honor I prayed every day to live up to.

The jovial sound of horse-drawn carriages and muffled voices echoed from the depths of the palace as I rushed down the path toward the entrance. Bastian stood stoically at the door, nodding courteously to those who arrived for Lia's special evening. His face lit up when he saw me approach, his blond hair combed neatly and the cape around his shoulders trimmed with gold embroidery. Lia had gone all out with our outfits, ensuring everyone knew we were the kings of the Blossom Court. I stood beside Bastian as fae from all corners of the realm bowed humbly in reverence as they passed us by.

"It's about time you got here, brother," Bastian teased with a smirk. "Did you happen

to see all the lemon trees lining the north side of the garden?”

Before I could reply, my attention was immediately drawn to Lia as she walked out of the palace; her red curls piled high atop her head were adorned with delicate flowers and her crown shone brightly in the sun. The emerald dress she was wearing clung to her curves perfectly as she appeared before us and kissed Bastian lightly on the cheek.

“I saw the lemon trees,” Lia said. “They’re lovely.”

Then she turned to me and pressed her lips against mine, tasting like sweet honeysuckles. “But I also saw the cherry blossom trees on the south side of the grounds,” she whispered in my ear before pulling away.

“I did that for you,” I murmured back reassuringly.

Her amethyst eyes twinkled knowingly before she interlocked our hands together, linking herself with Bastian and me.

“Thank you, both of you,” she said, smiling sweetly.

“Are you ready for tonight?” Bastian asked, bringing her hand up to his lips and kissing it gently.

Lia smiled and winked at us. “More than ready. I want the whole realm to see how amazing you are.”

My gaze raked down her body. “I don’t think anyone will be looking at us, my love. They will be captivated by you.”

Bastian chuckled. “At least we don’t have to worry about other men trying to take

what's ours now."

I lifted Lia's hand and kissed it. "And what a relief that is."

Lia smiled. "You never had to worry about that to begin with. Even when you didn't know it, I was always yours."

I looked deep into her eyes. "And you always will be."

Chapter 29

Lia

Not long ago, we had our Equinox Ball. But I wanted to throw this one to introduce Bayleon and Bastian as Kings of Blossom Court and to help more former Tyvar blend in with normal society. They would not have to hide their eyes or dread the prospect of inadvertently killing any women they mesmerized. Some had been cursed for centuries. Seeing them adapt so quickly was truly heartening. The Blossom Court guard had become much stronger with their presence.

Across the ballroom, my attention landed on the people I wanted to see. Ember was in the corner with Korra in her arms, talking to my cousin, Ella, whose belly seemed bigger since the last time I saw her. She was due in a couple more months. Bastian danced with my mother and Bayleon with my aunt Ariella, so I hastened to Ember and Ella. Although I wanted to speak with both of them, what I wanted more was to hold Korra myself.

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“Hand her over,” I called out, extending my arms open in anticipation.

A giggle escaped Ember’s lips as she delicately placed Korra in my embrace. Korra was awake, her eyes a majestic blue like her father’s. I bounced her gently in my arms, my heart warming as her lips pulled back into a smile.

“You are so adorable,” I cooed. “We’re going to have to keep the boys far away from you.”

Ember snorted. “Don’t worry. Her father will handle that one.”

I looked over at Ella and down at her belly. “How are you feeling these days?”

Ella rubbed a hand over her stomach. “Amazing. Kai talks to the baby every day. It’s adorable.”

I focused back on Korra, her eyes growing heavy the more I rocked her in my arms. “I bet it is,” I murmured.

There was a time before when I was envious of my best friend and cousin. I believed I wasn’t going to be able to have normal children because the Tyvar curse was still bound Bayleon and Bastian. Now they were free, which meant our kids would also be free; it was a good feeling.

“So,” Ella began, her voice sounding mischievous. When I looked up at her, she grinned wide, her eyes lit with curiosity.

“What is it?” I questioned.

She snickered and peered around, obviously making sure no one could hear her. “What is it like to be with Bayleon and Bastian at the same time? Do they not get jealous of each other?”

Ember smacked Ella’s arm. “Don’t you think that’s personal?”

Ella shrugged. “I can’t help it. I want to know.”

Rolling my eyes, I leaned in close. “It’s wonderful,” I said, leaving it at that.

Ella waved her hand for me to continue. “You can’t tell me more?”

I winked at her. “It’s none of your business. Let’s just say we’re all satisfied.”

We laughed and it felt good to catch up with them. There was always something dire going on in the Land of the Fae, but I hoped things would settle down for a while. I had no doubt Diawen was still alive and would make another move at some point, only I didn’t think her wrath would be directed at me; she would go after Lerissa. Aidan was adamant about keeping her safe; I trusted he could do it. And who knows, maybe it was all over. Only time will tell.

We talked for a few more minutes and then Elvena joined the conversation. She clutched my arm and nodded toward outside the ballroom.

“There’s something I think you’d like to know. Can we talk in private?”

My heart started to race and I swallowed hard. I couldn’t tell if it was good or bad. All I knew was that whatever it was, it was important.

* * *

Elvena's wordsechoed in my head as I made my way through the palace, winding around corridors and hallways until I reached the back exit that led to the garden. Not a soul stirred as I walked out, feeling the rush of cool night air caress my skin.

Moonlight shimmered like diamonds scattered on the ground, guiding me toward the secluded grove of pear trees hidden behind thick vines. With every step, I grew more and more excited. Bayleon and Bastian probably expected me to be in bed, but I knew they'd find the note on my pillow, asking them to meet me in our pear tree grove. It was our special place, and this was a special time.

When I heard their voices approaching, my heart skipped a beat. Stretching out an arm, I parted the curtain of flowering vines, allowing them passage into our secret space. Bayleon and Bastian were shirtless, wearing only dark green leather warrior pants that hugged their toned bodies. A leather cord held Bayleon's hair in a neat ponytail while strands of Bastian's brushed his forehead in a wild tangle. Once they were inside, I enclosed the three of us within our grove.

They both stared at me, their eyes twinkling curiously. A smile lit up my face and I walked toward them with a lightness to my step.

"Are you wanting us out here tonight?" Bastian asked.

A laugh escaped my lips and I reached for their hands, clutching them tightly and feeling the warmth of their skin beneath my fingertips.

"That's not why I wanted you out here, but I'm sure it can be arranged." I met both of their gazes, tears pricking at the corner of my eyes. "There's something I need to tell you and I wanted it to be here in our special place."

Bayleon rubbed a thumb over my hand affectionately in encouragement. “Tell us, my love.”

With trembling lips, I released their hands and placed mine on my belly. Their eyes widened in understanding and a joyous realization spread across their faces as they glanced between each other and back to me.

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“I’m pregnant,” I said softly. The air around us turned electric with excitement, but I quickly grabbed their hands again before they could celebrate fully. “There’s something you need to know, though.”

Bastian glanced down at my stomach and then back to me, anticipation written all over his features. “Do you know if it’s mine or Bayleon’s?”

I bit my lip, emotions swirling within me like an eddying river. “That’s the thing . . . you’re both the fathers. We’re having twins.” Both of their jaws dropped in surprise, so I seized the opportunity to cup their cheeks and smile. “Elvena told me this evening,” I said, loving how flustered they were. My gaze focused on Bastian. “We’re having a daughter,” then turning to Bayleon, I added, “And we are having a son.”

A wave of emotion rushed over me, and tears began to flow down my face. As if on cue, Bastian and Bayleon embraced me tightly in their arms, each showering me with kisses. It was an absolutely perfect moment for us all. When they eventually let go of me, I stepped back so that I could look them in the eye. To my astonishment, tears were streaming down their faces as well—the first time either of them had ever cried in front of me.

“Are you happy?” I asked them.

Bastian touched my right cheek while Bayleon put his on my left. “You have no idea,” murmured Bastian before pressing his lips gently against mine. “I love you, Lia. I never thought I’d become a father; words can’t express how I’m feeling.”

I glanced over at Bayleon and he smiled. “You have given us everything in the world, my love.”

“And you have done the same for me; I love you both so much, I don’t know what I would do without you.”

With that, Bayleon kissed me tenderly. “You’ll never have to find out.”

THE END