Allure

Author not credited

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Introduction

ALLURE

Chapter 1

PROLOGUE

Somewhere in Linsea

Maisy

Cold October mornings were a sight to behold every day for me. It was one of the advantages of living in the mountains.

The early settlers of the village were travelers who saw the mountains as a great place to stay and even hide from their enemies.

It's been years now and we still resided here. I watched the foggy splendor taking in the cold air and feeling satisfied.

"Maisy, where are you?" I heard my father call and instantly woke up from my daydream.

I had this habit of imagining to be somewhere else and tended to drift far off.

"Coming Dad," I said and closed my windows.

The sight was ruined after all.

The wooden floorboard creaked as I rushed downstairs clothed in one of my mother's old gowns.

"Yes father", I politely acknowledged when I got to him.

My father was a middle-aged man strong for his age. Being the village' Chief, he mostly had nothing to do so he spent his life on his rocking chair, sipping a cup of palm wine and watching over the horizon.

"Maisy..." Her father said, sounding husky due to having much to drink at such an early time of the day.

"Yes, father." I bowed, praying he would send me to the ranch to pick up something.

Only then did I have some alone time, to meet friends and to ride the stallions.

After my mother's death, Father had been struct with where I should be and when I should be there.

Punctuality had become a part of me and although I sometimes broke the rules, the little I received was a slap and a warning not to do it again.

"I want you to go the ranch and remind Ewan to saddle up Ria for the big match." My father said.

Ria was his best horse and he mostly used her to win bets ranging from money to landed properties. Father hadn't lost a bet ever but Ria just put to bed recently and he was afraid she might not be up for the challenge tomorrow so she had to check up on her.

"Ok father." I gleefully replied, earning his glare.

"And those mess with the horses this time." My father warned.

I ignored his last statement and dashed outside.

I picked up a basket and raced for our orchard to pluck some apples.

Ria needed a treat if I was going to riding her this afternoon.

It was forbidden for women to ride horses but I had secretly taught myself and went on a joyride with Ria each time father sent me and Today was going to be no different.

"It's just like testing how far she can go," I told myself before running for the plains.

***

"You are here early," Ewan commented, brushing Ria.

Ria had chestnut coat as fluid as water, stocky limbs. The soft spring soil was no match for her hooves and in their wake sods would be sent flying in an arcing spray. Her head was extended forwards but the ears flat back, puffs of moisture escaped her nostrils with each breath she took. She wasn't exceptionally tall, fifteen hands at the most; but she was an impressive sight.

Ria reminded her of her mother who originally owned the stallion.

Ria whinnied me seeing me approach her. She then delightfully trot toward me.

I picked out an apple from my basket and fed her. She nibbled it away quick as lightning and licked at my fingers for more.

"Father said I should ask how she's faring," I told Ewan who got Ria all saddled up.

"She's still sore but good to go."Ewan said, "and I assume you want to take her out for a test drive."

"Yes please."

"Ok." He gave in immediately knowing how demanding I was.

"But don't go far off." He put in.

I nodded excitedly and gave Ria another apple.

Ewan got me into Ria and I galloped away.

A loud whinny, thunderous hoofbeats, racing across the plains, barreling through sand and running like the wind. Into the plush meadow, we went, smelling the clean, fresh air.

It was an exhilarating experience.

We cleared the 10-foot tree lying in our path, narrowly missing the 6-foot ditch on the other side but then Ria suddenly stopped.

I tried to get her to go but she maintained her position and staring into a small bush with fear.

I turned to the bus and noticed it was moving. I held my breath and wondered who was there.

"Is...anyone there?" I stammered.

I heard a twig snap and was greeted by glowing green eyes.

Oh, God!

The sight made Ria uncomfortable and she kicked her legs.

I worried more about our safety and prayed no harm would come to us and most importantly I prayed no harm would come to Ria.

Father might love me a lot but he would definitely more than scold me of his best horse took the fall for my mistake.

The creature came into the open and I got a look at it.

It was a wolf, a white wolf.

I noticed blood was trickling heavily from its hide.

The creature did nothing. It just stared up at us.

I tried to calm Ria ensuring that she made no movement and hoping the wolf would leave is alone.

I had no idea wolves resided in Linsea. Most of the time, all we ever dealt with was Bears.

The wolf trudged forward but this time Ria would not be kept calm.

She stomped her feet to the ground scaring even the Apex predator.

The creature stumbled back into the bush out of fear.

I knew I shouldn't but knowing the animal was injured, I got off Ria and approached the shrubbery following the trail of blood.

The blood trail stopped and I spun around to go the wounded beast but instead I found something bigger.

It looked like a human.

I approached the body with caution hoping I didn't startle the animal but in place of the wolf I saw a human, a man yo be precise.

Mud and grit had become enmeshed with raw pink flesh and was spotted with blood. One thing was for sure, it was bad.

I suspected the wolf had harmed him.

The injured man was five feet, ten inches, brunette and with quite a handsome face. He was dressed in a surcoat.

Then I noticed an emblem engraved on it.

He was a royal!

CHAPTER 2

Maisy

My humanity kicked in and I checked on his breathing. He was alive. I could feel the mist of warm air in my fingers.

I tore up his already charred clothing to see how serious his injury was.

The pinkish wound stunk horribly and I wondered how long he had been there.

Two days at most.

I couldn't be of help to him now. He needed medical help.

Ria couldn't go past the shrubs so I had to take the injured man all by myself until I got to the open where I could place him on Ria and get help.

"Forgive me." I pleaded before grabbing his feet and dragging him out like he was dead.

His head hit a stump or two but the pain was worth it to save his life.

I finally got to the open. Ria whinnied seeing the new person I had brought along.

I drop the man to catch my breath and inspected his head for any minor injuries.

Thanks to me, he now had a bald patch and if he survived, 'He would really thank me for that'.

Ria nuzzled him.

Innocent animal, what did she know? Ria stopped seeing her moist tongue didn't help matters.

The handsome stranger just remained numb.

I got Ria to go down a bit and managed to saddle him in using all the strength I could gather. I joined, sinking into the saddle and we began our journey back to the ranch.

I had no idea what I

I was going to tell Ewan or my father.

Ewan had a satisfied look on his face when he saw me.

I knew he would have been worried sick about me.

God knows what went through his mind.

"You got me worried." He came closer to help me down when he saw the bundle behind me.

"What's that?" He demanded immediately.

His face deepened when he inspected the bundle.

"A human!"

Shock could not comprehend what his face gave away. Ewan wasn't the bravest and he tended to cower at anything that could possibly a threat to him.

I got off Ria without his assistance and managed not to knock the man off Ria's back while doing it.

There was a fifty percent chance I would not get the help I needed here.

"I found him in the prairie. I think he was injured by a wolf."

"There are no wolves in Linsea," Ewan argued, refusing to buy my explanation.

"You have to believe me, Ewan."

Ewan ran his hands through his thick dark long hair, it was a way for him to try thinking.

"Maisy, I don't know what to do... Couldn't you just leave him there?"

"Unbelievable!" I couldn't imagine Ewan just uttered that.

"Ewan! Leave a human for dead just to protect my secret, I couldn't."

Ewan became so tense, I could swear he was beginning to cry.

"I know Maisy but if Spencer finds out I allow you to go on joyrides, I could lose my job. You know how hard it is to survive having no one but yourself."

I was torn. I couldn't betray Ewan but neither could I let the man die. I made up my mind to take the fall.

I climbed back until Ria and told Ewan what I had in mind.

"I make up some like that would keep you out of trouble."

I proceeded to go then I heard Ewan thank me.

I made a basic turn by pulling the rein and Ria turned to face Ewan blowing hot air in his face.

"You're welcome, Ewan." I acknowledged.

***

Spencer

Maisy hadn't made it back home for breakfast and I suspected she has gone on one of her joyrides.

I considered why I hadn't told her that I knew.

I rocked my chair back and began to contemplate what punishment I would give to her when she returned.

Of course, I couldn't be too strict but I knew I had to maintain balance.

She had been free-spirited lately and I worried it would put her in trouble.

She was the only one I had left after Eva left me in this cruel world.

I took a sip of my palm wine to deaden the weakness I suddenly felt.

It was only going to take my problems for a little while but it was a habit I could not stop.

My quiet morning was quickly ruined by the sound of hooves beating against the earth.

As if that wasn't enough, the beast yelled, as if telling the world of its arrival.

I could guess that 'whinny' anyway.

It was Ria.

That could only mean that Maisy brought her along.

I was going to lose tomorrow's bet!

I scampered outside to confirm my suspicion and how right I was.

Maisy got off Ria and walked up to me.

My fatherly instinct were at war,

I didn't know whether to hug her for being safe o to scold her for bringing Ria.

Maybe both?

Before I could decide, Maisy went back to Ria and threw something quite heavy off her. The 'thing' rolled to the floor and I got a good look at it.

A human.

"What's all this?" I questioned my daughter.

"She ripped open a part of his clothing and exposed a stomach-churning wound that made me look away.

I would need my palm wine if I was ever going to look at it again.

"I found him while riding home. He needs help."

I walked towards the unconscious boy and examined him.

He was devilishly handsome even in his bad state. He reminded me of my glory days, It also reminded me what a threat such a face could cause to a girl.

"Where exactly did you see him?"

"On my way home," Maisy replied, avoiding my stare.

"Ok. Call the healer."

Maisy nodded and ran to get him.

I gave my attention back to the boy admiring his dressing.

His style implied he was from the site and I could tell he came from a wealthy family.

My mind went to the various means the boy could be of use to me. I was still deep in thought when I discovered the emblem engraved to his collar.

"Impossible!" I muttered.

The emblem was a printed picture depicting a wolf with bloodstains on its mouth.

That emblem could only belong to a "Clarke"!

CHAPTER 3

Maisy

I dashed to the healer as quick as light and returned the same way.

Unfortunately, the old man wasn't as agile as me so I made it home before he did.

Father saw me and began to raid me with another round of questions.

"Maisy, Where did you meet him?" He badgered.

"Dad, I've told you before. I met him on my way back home. He was unconscious, attacked by a wolf."

"In Linsea?" My father raised an eyebrow.

I blamed myself for babbling too much. Father already doubted how I met the boy but now he would think I was hiding something.

I did believe he was more afraid for me.

"Ok." My father said, cutting how conversation short when the healer arrived.

The healer was led to the patient and instantly got to work.

I saw him open his kit and pull out a bottle with a thick brown substance.

He wiped away the diets from the open wound and poured the contents of the bottle over the wound.

It made a sizzling sound and the boy grunted the in pain.

The healer continued his treatment and picked up a needle to stitch the wound.

That I could not watch. I absconded and went to take care of Ria. She had done a brave thing today, in fact, we both did.

I fed her more apples ignoring the screams of pain the man I rescued made as his wound was being stitched up.

When the screaming subsided, I went back inside and picked on a conversation my father was having with the healer.

It was first about his condition and I took it as nothing serious but then my father said something.

"What do you think happened to him?"

"The bite marks on him are signs that he was attacked by a wild beast." The healer replied.

I got inside, feeling pleased. Father would hate himself for doubting me and I... could not miss the moment.

My father continued talking to the healer outside about the boy.

For reasons I think I knew, he didn't want the boy to stay here.

Hot boys and girls who would rather stay at home didn't go so well in his stomach.

I attended to the boy refusing to be tainted by my father's baseless assumptions.

I noticed he was sweaty and unbuttoned a greater part of his shirt for him to cool down.

"Where did you come from?" I asked no one in particular.

I was really curious. We had no Kingdom close to Linsea and he must have been on a really long journey for him to arrive at the forgotten part of the world and worse he came without guards. It was unheard of.

I checked on his wound which was now closed up. It was still sore as I inspected it.

I rose to take my leave but out of the blues, he held my hand.

"Don't go." He croaked.

This was a really awkward situation for me. He wasn't awake but I didn't think he was asleep either. It must be the drugs administered to him earlier.

I got over my coy demeanor and gently got his hands off me. I took a deep breath and tried to leave again but he grabbed my hands again and pulled me to him.

I was literally on him and I had to thank the heavens, his eyes weren't open.

I would have shrunk.

"Don't leave me." He mumbled.

God! This was awkward.

***

Spencer

I saw the healer off.

I couldn't have ever imagined paying the bills for a Clarke but I did.

It was a small world after all. It was a bit unsettling to see a Clarke on this side of the world. They preferred to stay where their money and influence could get them what they wanted.

My face wrinkled when I remembered what my wife and I faced in their hands.

I couldn't wait to send the boy parking as soon as he recovered.

I didn't need any drama in my already simple life.

I searched around the house for Maisy. I needed ger to take Ria back to the ranch for the match tomorrow.

She wasn't in her room. My guts instinct kicked and I checked Katrine's room where the injured Prince was laid and what do you know...

She was right there in his arms.

"Maisy!" I instinctively drop in on both and separated them.

I was boiling with rage as I dragged Maisy out.

"What was that?" I demanded.

I didn't wait for her answer before I chipped in something else,

"I'm very disappointed in you Maisy."

I spotted tears drop from her eyes but I was too mad to pacify her.

"You think I'm so cheap, that'll push myself on an unconscious boy because...he happens to be a royal? I should be the one disappointed.if only Mom was alive..." She retorted and walked off.

"Don't you bring her into this!" I yelled, "Take Ria back to the ranch. I didn't ask you to bring trouble to the house."

She didn't respond to me but I heard her leave the house and speak to Ria.

I felt disappointed as a father lashing out to my daughter and because of a Clarke.

I went back to my drink and drowned my sorrow before heading back to where 'Clarke' was kept.

"You know, I have the opportunity to kill you, to have revenge for all the pain your family has caused mine but I won't because I'm not a schemer like the rest of your family," I mumbled.

"I don't know what you're doing here so far from Nodith but I can sense it's not good. I hope you'll never succeed." I rambled and took another sip of my wine.

Ahhhh, Happiness.

***

Eric

The uncomfortable sting I felt was more than enough to get me up. I rubbed my eyes and fluttered them open to remember what had happened.

Where was I?

I remembered the fight with Conrad...my mission... It all came in a rush and I got a migraine.

I got off the pelt I had been placed on and investigated myself. I was still with my pills.

I checked the wound I had sustained from the fight.

Conrad has gotten his pound of flesh and would have tagged me as dead already.

I made up my mind to thank the people who saved me before I got back to my mission.

I had to get to Linsea.

I staggered outside and checked the hallway if anyone was there. It reeked of Ale and I could tell someone was around earlier.

I couldn't wait for their return to thank them, there were issues at hand that needed to be resolved. I found my clothing and searched for my pouch of gold.

Conrad didn't take that, it was bewildering.

I left for the door and got down the stairs.

The house that accommodated me looked like an inn, It was built from wood, not the cheapest one though but it was still a far cry compared to the Palace marble walls.

I couldn't wait to finish the mission and get back to Nodith and show Conrad what a monster I myself could be.

I was so engrossed in my thoughts that I didn't notice when a girl approached me.

"You're awake." She said.

That got my attention and I tried to give my reply whilst adoring her features. Sunbleached hair that was between gold and brown and her eyes were orbs of Chestnut brown reminding me of hot chocolate.

She had the most bewitching face that was complete with a smile that made her features simply outstanding but her face...

My wolf growled, uneasy seeing again what he thought was gone forever.

It took every inch of me not to take her down right there and make her mine.

All I could blurt was, "Tatia."

CHAPTER 4

Maisy

Those eyes were too mesmerizing to let go of.

All I wanted was to continue staring at his gorgeous blue eyes, silent talking until he said something.

"Tatia?"

Who the hell was that?

He advanced towards me and brushed a stray look away from my face.

What was happening?

A part of me enjoyed whatever he was doing but still, I had to modest. I took a step back and questioned him.

"What are you doing?"

My breathing was out of control. I felt like I had been running all day.

What effect did he have on me?

I had seen s lot of cute guys even butt naked ones and I hadn't had the slightest desire for more but there was something about his starry eyes.

For the space of time, we gaped at one another.

"You're real." He mumbled before crashing to the floor.

I rushed to him and checked on his pulse. It was really low.

He latched unto my hands again and I could hear him mumbling the words Tatia again and again.

"Dad couldn't catch me at such a compromising position." I breathed.

I removed his hands ignoring his pleas not to let him go.

Something had definitely happened to him. I didn't know what it was but I was dying to know.

Father walked in on us at the right moment.

"He was awake?"

I nodded affirmatively and departed from his presence to avoid his stares.

On my way to my room, I stole one last look at the stranger whom I had just shared an intense moment.

Father had him in his arms and was carrying him back to mother's room which was just right at the corner.

I didn't even know his name yet I could feel this connection with him. It felt so good that I didn't want to hold it back. I wanted to know him.

I got into my room, a creaking mess of dark wood. There was nothing special about it, just a pelt to snuggle in for the night and a satchel where I kept my clothes.

I settled in on the pelt and cast my eyes at the only source of light, My window.

The sun was beginning to set.

"Are you asleep?" I heard father's voice.

I turned to him and smiled,

"No."

"Ok. We need to have a talk." Father announced.

I sat up and listened to what he needed to say. I noticed he was a bit on edge and It got me worried.

"Are you alright?" I asked, concerned.

"Yes." Father chortled, "It's just about the boy."

"What about him?"

"Well, we can't keep him here. If he's from a royal family, they might be looking for him and I don't think we can continue caring for him."

"But..."

"If it makes you happy, he can stay with the healer until he is well enough to leave." He chipped in.

Now I could sense what was going on.

"No Dad, I don't think you're worried about any of the things you just mentioned. You just don't want him near me."

My father exhaled relief. He was so unbelievable. So that was really it.

"Do you really think I'll push myself on a complete stranger?" I clamored.

"That's not it Maisy, I'm afraid for you."

"Why? Just because he's kind of good looking and had the eyes of an angel..." I immediately shut my mouth.

How could I have blurted all that out?

"I'm worried because I know what family he comes from."

"What the hell was he talking about?" I speculated.

"You know him, How?"

My father sighed.

"I always knew one day I'd have to tell you this but I guess today is the day."

Now it was getting interesting. I never knew my father knew so much about the outside world. He was the kind of person that loved to remain in his comfort zone.

"Your mom and I didn't use to reside here."

"What! I literally grew up here." I voiced.

"I'll tell you why." Father continued, "We had to flee Nodith because of his family."

"Why?" I inquired.

"Because your mother was betrothed to a Richard Clarke. Your mother didn't want him but he didn't take No for an answer. We got support from no one. Not even your grandfather—"

Father couldn't continue and he burst into tears. I hugged him. He had never revealed that part of our family history to me.

They had gone through so much to be happy. If he wanted me to stay clear of the boy, I would.

I just couldn't believe they could be so cruel, I guess bad reputations lived on.

***

The kingdom of Nodith

Conrad

The tavern was the best place for me so late at night.

Useless drunks to force into a fight I was sure I would win and of course what was the place without women.

I could see tons around displaying their goodies for gold.

Money did make the world go round.

"So Conrad, Don't you feel guilty killing your stepbrother?" Lewis quizzed.

I drop my cup heavily on the table and turned to him.

He was too soft, too kind. No wonder his attraction lied somewhere else.

"Technically Lewis, I didn't kill him. I almost did but I didn't. Instead, I left him for dead." I replied.

I had a visual reimagination of beating Eric close to death.

It was the best day of my life.

"Top secret mission." I grimaced.

They thought they could get past me. I could imagine their faces now.

That throne would be mine and no one could stop me from ascending my birthright.

They threw me out like a dog, alienated me, Now, I'll show them what a threat I could be.

"But don't you feel guilty. I didn't help but I still feel like I had a role in his murder."

"Hush!" I snarled at him, my eyes feeling warmer and my claws retracting.

I controlled my wolf instantly using the breathing technique my mother had taught me. It worked and my claws disappeared just as they came.

"You have to shut up sometimes Lewis. You make my wolf angry."

"Sorry." Lewis apologized.

"Just get yourself a stable boy," I mumbled and took a last swing.

I turned to one of the dancers who had been making advances at me since I arrived.

I made a signal at her to come over and she came scurrying.

It was going to be a wild night.

My wolf needed release.

The prostitute took her place in my laps and mumbled in my ear,

"You're gonna have the best night of your life."

It made me giggle. They always said that but not with me. My prowess on the bed was unmatchable. First nights were the only time I paid in gold. After this night, she would be the one begging for my body.

"Name your price," I commanded.

Just as she was about to tell me how many pouches of hold she needed, Someone pulled me by the collar.

"Where is he?" My assaulter demanded, making a fist.

"Brother." I chuckled and held down his fist.

Anthony pushed me away.

"Don't ever call me that!" He warned.

"Just tell me where Eric is!" He demanded.

So they were beginning to suspect all was not well. Good.

"How do expect me to know brother?" I teased.

Regular dwellers and Dru formed a circle around us wondering why the king's bastard son and the one who rejected the throne were fighting.

"Last time I heard anything about him, I learned he was on a top-secret mission."

Anthony lost it and gave me a blow right in the mouth that sent me reeling.

My jaw felt dislodged and I tasted blood.

I wouldn't let him enjoy what he did.

"Maybe Eric has gotten to know how cursed his family is and left for good, Maybe he's dead. We may never know."

Anthony threw another fist but this time I caught it. My eyes felt warmer as I used every strength in me to crush the bones in his fist.

He wailed.

Weak and pathetic!

I let his hand go and he went spiraling to the floor jerking like a worm that had been salted.

My fellow jerks in the house mocked my half brother who was in pain.

"It sucks not being as strong as the rest of us." I drawled.

He didn't answer me. He just stared at me with hate.

Typical Anthony.

"Face it, Anthony, The throne was meant for me. I suggest you give it to me before the kingdom crumbles considering the economic state you put in." I concluded.

CHAPTER 5

Eric

I watched her sleep. Who could have guessed destiny had fated us to meet.

She looked just like Tatia

It took all the control I had left not to burst in and run off with her.

I quietly entered her room and locked it.

The skylight was a warm blanket of shimmery silver. My wolf danced around awaiting release, seeing Tatia's lookalike made it even worse.

It sought escape. I reached into my breast pocket and took out my pills.

I swallowed one and kept the rest. My wolf struggled with being subdued. My migraines returned and my sight blurred.

"You lose." I sneered to my wolf.

It stopped resisting as the effect of the pill ran in full effect.

I had just three left which meant I had to get her before I ran out of my pills.

I ran my hands through her hair ravishing the velvety silkiness. It reminded me of the wild nights I shared with Tatia under the moonlight.

It's funny how someone who looked just like her was on the other side of the world.

She shivered from my touch. I had to stop. I subdued my desire and hastened out of the room.

I returned back my room but I couldn't get the rest I needed.

I only had days to take Tatia's lookalike with me or lose the Kingdom to Conrad.

I needed to get on their good side yet, was it possible to get her to fall head over heels in love with me.

Was it possible?

I had to try. I couldn't stop, not yet. This was for Tatia.

I closed my eyes and tried to clear my thoughts.

Tomorrow would tell if I stood a chance.

***

Maisy

Angel held me close and tugged on the hem of my dress. I felt it fall loosely from my skin. His eyes were a temptation far worse than the call of the sea.

"Should we do this?" He husked, planting small kisses on my goosebumpy skin.

I shivered slightly but the truth was I didn't want him to stop.

"What should we? It feels so good." I retorted and pulled him closer.

He smiled and continued undressing me. He didn't stop until there was nothing but our skins touching.

He carried me in his arms and placed me on the bed.

"I'll be back." He winked and left me.

I grumbled and my soul ached for his body.

He couldn't just leave me like this, Not with the raw passion he had ignited in me.

He needed to put out the flames.

He came by a full moments later, butt naked.

My eyes instantly fell on his member.

It was a shame I couldn't see what was going to pleasure me soon. His whole body was silhouetted.

"Come to the light." I requested.

"Why Tatia?" He teased.

It felt good but who was Tatia?

He came into the light and I gasped.

"Those starry eyes."

My eyes flickered.

Goodness, it was just a dream.

I got off my pelt and reimagined my sexual dream with the stranger.

It was weird because I rarely had dreams and when I did, they happened to be nightmares mostly about someone dying or demons haunting me.

My nipples hardened as I remembered how delicate his touch was. His voice...It was divine.

"Good morning." Someone said, bringing me back to reality.

Handsome stranger was standing right there leaning seductively by the edge of the door and worse, he was shirtless.

In a way, I got what I wanted. I saw the light.

"You're awake." I blurted.

"Yes. You must be the one who saved me." He said.

His voice was just the way it sounded in my daydream.

God! Was I losing it?

I took a seat back at my pelt knowing this was going to conversation was going to lead to small talk.

Where was father when you needed him?

He walked a bit closer to me and began.

"May I know your name?" He politely requested.

"Maisy Quinn," I replied, putting my hands over my breast to conceal the fact that they were standing erect and knowing he would see the effect he had on me just being so close.

"I'm Eric. Eric..."

"Clarke." I cut in.

"I see you know me." He beamed.

He had perfect white teeth that worsened my situation.

" I don't know you but my father knows your family...What they did."

Eric adjusted his posture, suddenly uncomfortable that I made such a remark about his family.

It proved father wasn't wrong.

"What happened to you?"I said, changing the conversation.

"I...was attacked by a wild animal." He replied.

"How's your wound?"

"Better." He thumped his chest proving he was another idiot that would cause themselves pain to prove Macho.

"I see you're awake." My father broke in on us.

"Yes. I just wanted to know where I was." Eric proclaimed, seeing how strangely my father studied him.

"Good. Let's talk." My father said and they both headed outside.

I exhaled heavily seeing Eric gone. I locked the door and collapsed back to my pelt.

That was the hottest yet awkward moment I had in my life.

Today was going to be a good day, I could almost taste it.

***

Spencer

I lead the house outside. The splendor of the sun and the floral breeze that washed down on me, engulfing me in its essence calmed me down.

It was a struggle to act calm being so close to a Clarke.

"So..." I began, not even knowing where to start.

"I was thinking since you're Hale and healthy now, you can get going."

The boy was hardly disturbed by my decision but he didn't mean he agreed.

"I appreciate your hospitality but where I'm coming from is quite distant. Could I stay for a few more days?"

He asked politely, This was getting difficult.

I just felt like lashing out loud at him. I wanted to spit out what a bad person his kind was but I wasn't like them. There was this impression I was obsessed with achieving when I talked with him.

The memories....it had to be them.

I wanted to prove I was good and would always be better than a Clarke. If he wanted a few days more, I would gladly give it to him.

I mean, what harm could he cause in just a few days?

"Ok. You have three more days." I firmly stated.

"I appreciate your kind gesture." He said then turned to leave.

In my own house.

"Wait!" I stopped him, there was something I wanted to know, "You haven't told me your name or where you're from."

"I'm so sorry. I'm Eric, Eric Clarke and I come from Nodith." He answered.

"Your signet tells me you are noble blooded. Why would a Blueblood venture far from his home and all alone?"

I noticed how tense he became. He avoided my glare.

Now that was something I wanted to see.

"I'm looking for someone." He divulged.

I could tell he didn't want to disclose any further so I kept my thought to myself but I made a mental note to observe him more.

"I've been to Nodith once before. Who's your father?" I inquired, wanting to confirm my suspicion.

"The late King Richard Clarke." He replied.

Wait! Richard became king and he's dead.

I put that aside quickly. I had gotten what I wanted. He was Richard's son and a part of me knew this could be a no accident.

He was here for something.

Maisy joined in before I could ask any more questions.

"Father, I'm going to the river." She said.

"I would really need that." Eric chipped in, taking a sniff of his scent.

The bastard just wanted some alone time with Maisy. It was an uncomfortable moment for me and my "fatherly insecurities".

I couldn't follow Maisy to the river. She would feel I didn't trust her even if it was the boy I was worried about plus I had to get to the plains for my bet.

I convinced myself to let it go. I trusted Maisy.

"Ok but meet me at the desert plains after."

She nodded and headed off with the boy tagging along.

"Clarke!"

***

Eric

She didn't talk to me all the way to the river.

I was dying to start a conversation but I didn't want to come off as desperate even if I was.

"Stay here. I'll go for a dip first." She said, jerking me off my thoughts.

"Ok," I replied.

She left for the bright green waters at the distance.

I watched her strip down and when it got to her undergarments, she caught me staring.

I turned to give her the privacy she needed to get it all off.

My wolf took over for a split second and I tilted to where she was before.

She was gone.

My senses heightened and I could hear her heart thumping fast.

Probably the adrenaline from jumping into the cold water.

My legs lost control and I began to walk towards where I could sense her.

She gasped when she saw me.

"What are you doing here?" She demanded, cupping her breasts.

Her cheeks were red tomatoes and it made me smirk.

"I got tired waiting so I came here," I announced like an insensitive prick that I was.

"Well leave. I'm naked here." She panicked.

It was enjoyable, watching her struggle to cover up her exposed body.

She was beginning to shiver now.

"You look cold." I teased.

She gave me a disapproving stare and then she did the most daring thing I had ever seen a woman do.

She rushed out of the water and I saw fire.

No, I felt it. My face burned.

CHAPTER 6

Maisy

My decision scared me but I didn't care.

No one was going to take advantage of me like that.

I grabbed my dress from the earth and rushed to put them on.

His eyes were on me, I could feel them feeding on me.

I was quick. done clothing my nakedness, I approached him.

With the hate, anger, and humiliation I felt within, I slapped him.

The forest went cold. The birds stopped chirping and the air stopped playing with my hair. A sudden pain I felt in the guts returned 'me' back.

It dawned on me that I was alone with this perv and he could do anything he wanted with me. There had been cases of rape and murder in the village long before. There was no way I was going to become another tale to children.

I got ready for his worst.

His worst... He held his red cheeks and smiled.

"Perv!" I screamed.

He ignored my pain and just kept his eyes on me. I felt uncomfortable.

I left the riverside and took my seat on a rock.

I was red with embarrassment. All I could think of was how to get back at him.

He began to undress and I saw my opportunity. I didn't hide my intentions.

He got his shirt off and moved to his pants. He stopped and glanced at me. He caught me staring and smirked.

Just what I wanted, If he made me uncomfortable, he was going to suffer the same fate.

"Do you want to see something, Miss?" He teased.

"I think it's okay to watch Sir Eric, it's a game isn't it." I played along.

"Are you sure? I can tell you've never seen one before. It would be an honor if I am the first you see."

I was beyond disgusted.

How could this man be a royal? He was a prick... Yes! I said it.

The trousers slowly came off. I held my breath as he slid the only thing that kept me from seeing the huge bulge.

Down it went... I couldn't do it.

I closed my eyes. My mind silently cursed. My daydreams came washing me with desire. I didn't see it last night, what would a little peek cost?

My eyes still closed, I perceived his presence. The musky smell of sweat and dried blood were pungent to my nostrils. I battled with my lids, I wanted them closed but it knew I wanted otherwise.

"You didn't look." I heard him say.

I couldn't resist anymore. I opened my eyes. They met his, sapphire blue.

"Be quick. We have to go." I countered.

The urge to look below was far enticing but I knew control.

"I know.... but, won't you join me?"

"What?" My jaws dropped.

What kind of a man was he?

"I mean...you didn't have a proper dip. I bothered you."

"Unbelievable", I rolled my eyes.

"I'm done. Get into that lake now or I leave with or without you!" I stood up to him, threatening.

"Okay." He gave in, "But..."

He didn't finish his sentence. Actions spoke louder than words after all.

He swept him off my feet and into his arms.

Shock was my initial expression but when I faced his eyes, they were spells difficult to break.

"Put me down this instant!" I demanded.

"Ok." He said then he let me go.

I went tumbling inside. A cold rush overwhelmed me and for a moment my heart stopped beating, I stopped breathing.

I swam to tell light and took a deep breath. My hair was stuck to my face and I coughed.

I turned to his direction and caught me laughing.

Naked and laughing, My hands went for his legs that were an inch away from the water itself and pulled.

The slippery surface of the bank was all to my advantage and he joined me.

I enjoyed my sweet revenge but it didn't last long.

He splashed out of the deep and swam towards me.

"That was sly." He commented, coughing.

He got close, too close and our cold slippery skins were literally touching. He brushed my wet hair and cast his gaze to my face. I couldn't avoid his stare.

His member hardened and poked me.

That was the last straw. I pushed him away and headed for the bank.

"We need to go." I declared when I got out.

My clothes were wet so I had to change. I couldn't be late to the plains, Father would be scared to death.

***

Spencer

The bet was set. A hectare of land. I searched the crowd for Maisy. She hadn't arrived.

As a father, It was disturbing. I still didn't trust Eric but I was sure Maisy was safe.

Like I had hoped, Maisy arrived soon after with the Eric.

She was safe but...her expression...I just couldn't place it. I could tell something had gone down by the river.

I would ask her later.

I prepared Ria tightening her reins, She worked better when tense. I glanced at my competitor, A man in his early twenties.

He was the idle loan shark's son and needed some money for drinking. I needed a new land to expand the ranch. Ewan had caught a school of wild horses and I dying to subdue them.

I prepared myself.

The game gun fired and the field was turned into am arena of life and death instantly.

I took the lead thanks to Ria, She galloped the slope and bends as she ruled them.

She was panting heavily and I felt my pants turn cold.

My opponent gained the lead just as quick as I had gotten it.

His horse left dust in my face.

When the dust cleared up, I discovered Ria had made a wrong turn.

It made me burn There was no way I was going to lose my land.

And in a furious burst of audacity and will-power, I poured his heart into the beast.

Ria seemed to channel my burst of energy and gave a mad chase at her opponent, slowly gaining momentum.

There was still a few yards to cover so I was sure I stood a chance.

Ria gained the lead again and this time she gave our opponent a taste of his medicine. She kicked up soil right in his face.

I heard him curse.

I enjoyed playing dirty, I patted Ria for playing smart. Sometimes, I felt she could read thoughts.

I saw the red thread just before me.

Victory!

***

Anthony

I put my attention put the window as the Royal advisor kept on spewing how worried he was about the Royal house's financial state.

"And if we don't accept your brother's demands, the royals might start living like commoners."

"I will not allow Conrad into this palace. You know the Queen's dying wish." I reminded him.

"I know my prince but this are desperate times. Our neighboring kingdoms have broken business ties with us and King of Elyria threatens to wage war if we don't get him his gold."

That I knew. We were under the King of Elyria and we haven't given him tribute for two moons now. The gold mines were hopeless but I knew it was the world of Conrad.

" Thank you for the updates, Gregory."

The advisor nodded, bowed and left.

Emilia immediately rushed in.

"Are you crazy Anthony?" She yelled.

Oh God! Not again.

"What's wrong now, My dear wife?" I asked.

Emilia wasted no time in pouring out her feelings.

"I'll tell you. We are now living like common people, I had to sell my jewelry" she wept, "why can't you just accept that we are desperate, If you hadn't abandoned the throne for your younger brother, we wouldn't be in this financial crisis."

"So you came here to just complain?"

"And to plead to you Anthony, Give the throne to Conrad. I can't keep enduring this torture forever." She voiced.

Done with her impossible demand, She strode out.

Sometimes I wondered why I had agreed to marry her. The reason hit me harshly.

I had conformed to my late father's desire. My eyes went blurry when I remembered the sacrifice I had made for my family, How they squandered Emilia's fortune and trapped me forever with her.

I prayed Eric returned home if he was still alive. If not, This was another sacrifice I had to make.

To break my mother's dying wish and violate our customs.

CHAPTER 7

Maisy

After the incident at the Lake, I avoided Eric. It was strange due to the fact it happened today and I was acting like a rape victim. The assault was real though.

Eric, on the other hand, would not be put down so easily. He got his opportunity when we arrived home.

I went to my room to be just by myself but apparently I didn't shut my door and he came in.

"Hey, Can we talk?"

"Sure."

I wasn't ready to listen to whatever he had to say but if we were going to talk, I needed the door wide opened.

I nodded in approval and went for the door, pushing it wide open.

"What do you need to say? I'm pretty tired so can we just get to it."

"Sure. First, I want to apologize about what happened this morning."

He just mentioned it brought back all the memories I had locked away.

"Is that all?" I quizzed.

"And...I also wanted to thank you for saving me."

Why was he so awkward?

He was so sure if himself by the lake, it was almost like he had become a completely different person.

"You're welcome."

Doubt troubled my mind. Something didn't seem right here.

"Why are you telling me all this?" I summoned the courage to ask.

"I felt it was right and I...want us to be friends." He disclosed, stretching his hands for mine.

What game was this?

"Is this some kind of joke?" I blurted out.

I mean...people just don't have a sudden change of attitude.

"Of course. So what do you say?"

I slowly stretched my hands and they clasped.

I felt my body tingle slightly as vibes I had never felt before surged through me.

I stared into his dreamy blue eyes.

I could see my beginning and how this was going to end.

But my heart sang louder than my reasoning.

I guess you never know what infatuation was until you became its slave.

I wanted to know Eric.

***

Four days later

He held me unto him and I stuck to him like a leech. His heartbeat was the perfect music I needed to hear.

The water was warm just having him ignite the fire in me.

"I'll be going soon Maisy." He revealed, stroking my wet hair.

"Stop saying that!" I punched his rock hard chest and broke away from his cuddle.

He had reminded me since the day we began our affair and has harsh as it was, He would be leaving me soon, For the castle and other girls.

He pulled me closer once again and planted kisses on my neck.

"I'm sorry. I don't want this to end too but my people need me." He cooed me but I refused to be pacified by those worthless words.

I reminded myself I had nothing to lose. He hadn't taken my dignity but I would miss his tales and company.

Why was I lying to myself?

Truth be told, I would literally die if he left me. Eric had visualized a beautiful world for my mind eye and given me Love my father could never give.

"But what can I do?" I mused.

"You know I love you right?" He whispered to my ear.

I didn't doubt his love nevertheless, I couldn't follow him to Nodith.

I hadn't told my father about us, I feared his hate for the Clarke's would cloud his judgment and I would lose Eric faster.

"I know Eric."

I turned, face him and put my arms around his neck.

"So let's tell your father."

I instantly panicked. There was no way I was going to reveal to my father that I loved Eric.

He was beginning to soften on Eric these past few days but Father never forgot his enemies.

Eric would always be a Clarke in his eyes.

"I can't Eric. We should go."

I got out of the river and clothe myself. Eric joined me soon after.

"I know he'll understand Maisy."

I badly wanted to believe what he said but I knew better.

"No Eric. Fate has put this boundary for a reason. Maybe we're not meant to be together."

"Don't say that." Eric countered.

He placed a kiss on my cheek and got dressed.

"You are spending time with him lately. Should I be worried?" Father asked when we got home.

"Stop it, Dad." I tried shaking him off.

Knowing my father, He would never forgive me for hooking up with a Clarke. He would feel bettered and I didn't want that.

Eric entered afterward and my father threw a strange question at him.

"When will you be going, Eric?"

Eric turned in my direction but I avoided his stare.

"Soon." He replied and proceeded to his room.

But my father stopped him yet again.

"It's been three days Eric. I've got a horse ready for your travel back to Nodith. It is surprising but I have a feeling you don't want to return home."

I got the scares. My heart began to thump hard for two reasons.

I didn't want Eric to reveal us or give in to my father's demands.

He briefly looked and me before returning his attention to my father.

"Mr Quinn, I'll be going tomorrow."

My heart dropped and I felt something pull it out.

"What!" I blurted out.

My father turned to me, confused. I shut my damn mouth shut and excused myself.

I remained at the corner watching Eric torture me.

That could only be it.

He never mentioned that he would be leaving tomorrow. Was that why he kept pressuring me to tell my father about 'us'.

Tears escaped my lids as I watched the only thing that mattered much to me recently slip away from me.

"That's a good idea." My father commented.

"Thank you for your hospitality." Eric appreciated and left for his room.

I took the opportunity and took him by the collar before dragging him to my room.

"What was that about?" I whispered after locking the door.

"I was going to tell you." He breathed.

I couldn't believe him. I wiped away the hot tears threatening to fall from my eyes.

"But I don't want you to go," I mumbled, barely audible.

"Then tell your father about us." He coaxed, "I'm tired of hiding my feelings for you. I want you with me all the time Maisy."

His eyes were dark with passion and I could sense the truth in his words.

I badly wanted to spew the words he wanted to hear but this was a tough choice for me.

To break my father or to break Eric

"It's now or never." His haunting voice reminded me.

"I..." I couldn't do it. My feelings were intertwined and it was difficult to choose one of them over the other but I couldn't keep my secret forever.

Even if Father wasn't going to accept Eric as the man I loved, I had to tell him. He deserved that much.

So I said the words,

"I'll tell him."

Eric pulled me close and embraced me.

"I love you Maisy." He said to my ears.

My tears slid down to his shirt, leaving them moist. I took a deep breath and locked my arms around him.

This was going to be the hardest thing I would ever do but I had to.

"I love you too," I said back but deep, deep down, I was torn.

***

Nodith

Anthony

The past few days had been hectic for me. Dealing with transformation changes since the ingredients needed for the pills were becoming too costly.

The threats of war were even worse and I needed a break.

This was one reason I never wanted Father's legacy. It was nothing but trouble.

A messenger came into my Chambers and bowed as the customs demanded before telling me the purpose of his visit.

"You have a letter, My Lord."

Good Lord, I grumbled within me.

It could be another death threat or a mortgage of the properties we owned. I guessed it wouldn't be long before Conrad has his way. We were literally falling apart and Eric was nowhere to be found.

The messenger handed me the letter and took leave.

I broke the candle wax seal and unwrapped the contents to read.

I was surprised to learn It was from Eric. Hopefully, he had some good news.

It read,

"My dear brother,

I have found Tatia's surviving sister and have gotten her to fall in love with me. If all goes well, I will be arriving home very soon."

My heart leaped in joy. Count Cedric's other grandchild was real. He wasn't just a bitter old man who created his own reality to cope with Tatia's murder.

That meant we stood a chance against Conrad, We would be rich once again.

CHAPTER 8

Eric

Today determined my future. Whether I would return home a Victor or lose the throne.

I was convinced Maisy would fight for what she thought we shared but still, I could not be so sure.

I had to be one step ahead.

Swallowing my last pill, I headed outside.

Spencer was waiting for me just outside.

The man was eager to get me out of his life as quickly as he could.

"The horse is outside and I prepared some food in case you get hungry."

I sent him a warm smile I managed to muster. If Maisy was going to do anything, She had to do it now.

Sh*t, I cursed silently when I realized she wasn't coming out. She backed down and at the wrong moment. Everything I had hoped for, my high ships came crashing down.

The walk of shame followed each step lead him closer to the mare.

I contemplated hitting Spencer with any object I could find.

"You're a Clarke after all." My father's haunting voice echoed.

I took a deep breath and reached into my sac where my trusty sledge hammer resided. I planned my next move. I had to be hard and quick, Any little slip up could cost me everything.

"Wait!" Maisy stopped me.

I gave a malevolent smile then turned to her.

"What's wrong?" Her father quizzed but her eyes remained on me. I could see their pain.

Poor, poor Maisy.

"I have to tell you something father." Maisy disclosed, sucking in a deep breath.

"Can't it wait...Eric is leaving and I have to escort him..."

"No father, It can't wait." She interjected.

I was literally beaming inside.

What a pathetic excuse for a woman. She actually thought fundamental relationships could be formed in three days.

It was jarring I hadn't bedded her already, Not that I intended to. All I needed was her help and when that settled, we would honor separate ways like we never met.

Her father tensed up and massaged his pulsing forehead tenderly.

If only he knew what his sweet daughter was going to say to him. He was going to be shattered after this. I could barely wait.

"It's about Eric....Eric and I." She stammered, her eyes letting out beautiful waterworks.

Drama queen.

This was surely going to be a stage work I would enjoy.

"What about you...and him?" He sent invisible daggers right me but that was just child's play. I had the immunity I needed, his daughter's heart wrapped in my bristled fingers. One mistake and he would crush his daughter to the very soul, So much that she might consider eloping with me. Whatever choice Spencer made, I would be the winner.

I was my father's son after all.

"I love Eric." She revealed.

The drumrolls reeled in and I patiently waited for what would happen next.

Just like I had predicted, Spencer whacked Maisy hard in the face. It sent her to another crying frenzy.

Spencer turned to me.

"Leave this place before I return or I promise you I'll kill you. No matter what status you think you hold." He threatened and stormed off.

Empty threats.

When he was out of sight, My attention returned to Maisy who took the earth as her solitude.

I joined her and wiped away her tears.

It worked like a charm. She stared at me, hurt and humiliated, regretting her decision.

"It's okay Maisy. I'm here for you." I placated.

"No, you're not." She pushed away.

"Go away!" She yelled at me, obviously blaming me for her predicament.

It took a lot not to snare but I knew what she wanted.

To be reassured that even if the world was against her, Someone cared, Someone would stand by her.

"I'm not leaving you here." I returned, eying her with sympathy and love in my eyes.

"Thank you." She sobbed and hugged me tightly.

The glistening object coming from inside the house caught my attention and I saw Spencer heading outside with a riffle.

He wanted me dead.

I ignored his presence until the metal poked me right in the head.

"Get away from her now!" He commanded.

Maisy got hysterical.

"What is wrong with your father?"

Spencer shoved her aside.

"You are too emotional right now Maisy. You don't know what kind of slithering serpent he is."

Now I had to play my lines right,

"I don't care if you kill me. I love your daughter and can't live without her. If you want your petty rivalry with my father to get in the way of your daughter's happiness, then shoot me dead."

Spencer corked the gun and was ready to fire. Maisy stopped him by getting right in front of me.

"You can't do this father. I love him."

"No, you don't!" Spencer shot back, "Relationships aren't formed in a week. He's using you and I can only blame myself for even letting him near you."

"I love your daughter." I spat just to add salt to his wounds.

He used the gun on my sharp mouth and I had a taste of the copper liquid.

This made Maisy lose it.

"This is why I kept it a secret from you!"

Spencer became quiet and dropped his rifle.

"What are you saying Maisy?"

"I'm saying you keep treating me like a child! I'm an adult and I can make my life choices. You have no right to choose who I can love."

Spencer embraced his daughter.

"I'm not trying to boss you Maisy. You can love whoever you want but I'm afraid for you. You don't know what his kind are, what they are capable of."

"No!" Maisy pushed him away, "His kind? Father, you're so obsessed with hating him because if something his father did."

Spencer wasn't done yet,

"If I didn't forget, What makes you think his family forgot?" He quizzed.

This part was actually hilarious. I enjoyed toying with his mind. The best part was, he would do anything to keep Maisy from me.

I enjoyed hunting but in this case, I had my prey by the throat.

"You think he'd marry me for revenge?" Maisy asked her father, surprised he'd even think that way.

"I'm saying..."

Maisy brushed him off and joined me. She clutched my hands for support.

"Now I want to know something father, Do you approve of us or not?"

The hunt was over. My prey was lifeless in a pool of its own blood and now I could enjoy the chewy goodness within.

I felt pity for Spencer. He actually thought I wanted to marry Maisy for revenge. It was far from that.

"Do I have a choice?" The hesitation in his voice reassured me I had them where I needed them to be.

Imagine my grin when I heard the word 'Yes'.

***

Maisy

It was a bohemian wedding in the late afternoon.

The area faced the breathtaking sunset, a sight I enjoyed watching each day. It was actually my father's idea. Despite him refusing to bless my marriage to Eric, He made up his mind to be a part of my wedding for my sake.

I was clad in a simple white gown that wasn't necessarily new. I used the cloth for special occasions like weddings and now I was using it for mine. It was adorned with nature's own gift, making it look brand new.

I felt like a bride, one I needed to be.

The venue wasn't an extravaganza, the end of each seated aisle, jasmine-scented candles hung from naked tree branches.

Spread down the aisle, were leaves scattered to make a comfy carpet, as far as the eyes could see, slightly moist so they wouldn't crack when they were being stepped on. A small group of close family friends dressed in their best attire for support, I was getting married to a Prince after all.

On either side of the aisle, they sat in stools set up for them on the sand.

"Okay Maisy, you need to breathe… Can you do that for me??" one of my bridesmaids asked.

I didn't know her personally but I was thankful she noticed.

Only minutes remained before my wedding began; I was nervous just like the first time I went to the river with him.

"I will try," I said to her.

I just need my mother's necklace to calm down. Father had given to me as a parting gift.

I clutched to it tight, almost feeling my mother's presence.

I saw Eric waiting at the end of the aisle and he looked just as nervous as I was.

At least, I wasn't alone.

Finally, the priest arrived and asked every to stand.

It was my turn!

I had watched friends get married, bow it was my time.

All eyes were on me. I immediately felt self-conscious and my cheeks turned beet red.

The flower girl lined the path, I would walk with white rose petals as the music started.

I only took two steps out before I began to feel dizzy, the nausea was eating me deep. Luckily, my father came to the rescue.

He escorted me down the aisle, which seemed longer than before. He became my strength; without him, I would faint.

The guests stared at me, waving at me, smiling- one thing was for sure, though… no one made a sound.

Up ahead I saw him, Eric. My future husband, the love of my life, my everything. He stood taller, his shoulders back and his starry eyes on me.

If I wasn't mistaken I could have sworn tears filled his eyes but that was just my feelings messing up with my mind.

At the end of the aisle, my father hugged me,

"I'm proud of you" He a knowledged and then presented me to my groom.

I felt nothing but pain. Even if he wasn't okay with me and Eric, he supported me.

Father placed my hand in Eric's and smiled.

As a couple, Eric and I stood in front of the priest before my father walked away.

He didn't talk to Eric and as much as it was upsetting, I knew he was doing his best to handle this situation.

I briefly tried to focus on me, My big day.

"You're beautiful," Eric said to me in a hushed tone.

I blushed.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today, to witness this man and woman join together in holy matrimony..." The priest began. He was quick, Heaven must have known how much I was dying to officially make Eric mine. I could pick out girl gossip from the crowd of how I managed to trap a prince.

The exchange began. The ring bearer can with the rings and Eric took the first turn,

"I, Eric, take you, Maisy to be my wife, my constant friend, my faithful partner and my love from this day forward. In the presence of our family and friends, I offer you my solemn vow to be your faithful partner in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, and in joy as well as in sorrow. I promise to love you unconditionally, to support you in your goals, to honor and respect you, to laugh with you and cry with you, and to cherish you for as long as we both shall live." He swore with nothing but compassion then pushed the ring into my annulary.

It sealed our bond for all eternity.

CHAPTER 9

Maisy

Tears flowed freely as I remembered what Eric spat right into my face.

It just didn't add up. He loved me in Linsea and now, He hated me.

I had made a grave mistake. I remembered father's warning and how I had ignored the warning signs.

"I'm so sorry father." I wept and tried the door multiple times.

Eric had kept me under lock and key and if I concentrated well enough, I could hear his guards say something about Tatia.

Everyone had been saying that since I arrived.

What was going on?

I sank to the ground, the marble was food and unforgiving, Freezing my essence.

I wished I could turn back the hands of time and amend my mistake.

My worries began when we got here...

***

Flashback

Nodith

Guards watched me walk in, arms locked in Eric's.

The stares made me self conscious. I could sense fear and disbelief in their eyes.

"Why are they looking at me like that?" I quizzed Eric, expressing my discomfort.

"Get back to work." Eric sneered authoritatively at them.

They immediately got back to what they were doing but I didn't miss the air of tension.

"It's all right. They are just surprised to see you." Eric said, trying to ease my distress.

"Okay." I held him tightly while led me around the castle.

I made up my mind to focus more on the magnificent scenery.

The Castle walls rose out of the darkness, out of the silent charcoal curtain. They are pitted and forlorn, no longer the bastions of protection and glory that I was sure they used to be.

Under my fingers, the stone was rougher than the callused skin of a mare and it left my skin cold, drawing dampness into my bones.

"Maisy..." I heard someone whispered and instinctively turned around.

"Did you hear that?" I shrunk.

"Hear what?" Eric questioned, walking double the speed to where his family were dining, as a maid had told him.

"I heard someone call my name," I answered, a bit petrified.

"You're just nervous." He determined and pushed open an oak door.

Golden lights streaks killed the blinding darkness and I caught a whizz of roast beef.

Eric and I had been traveling days without the basics and had to survive on what nature gave us. It was good, all that was beyond us.

The passage led us to an array of rooms.

Appearances could really be deceiving indeed. From the look of things outside the castle, I thought this place would be in the dumps.

"Before you think of picking a room, I want you to meet my family," Eric stated with a charming smile for me.

I took in deep breaths and remembered my father.

I tried convincing him to follow us but he refused every time I tried. He had a lot of memories with mother at Linsea, that I knew but I always thought old memories could be let go off to remember good ones. I badly wanted him by my side but he had already revealed to me that he couldn't support my marriage to Eric.

It was like he ripped himself from my life and took Ria along.

"Are you okay?" Eric asked in concern.

I returned to reality and felt my cheeks were moist. I had been crying and I didn't even notice it.

"It's nothing." I hastily wiped the teardrops off.

"It's okay." Eric assured, "I'm here for you."

We got to clear space and despite being so far away, I could hear small chatters and clanking of forks meeting the glassware.

The dining table was so huge, It looked like a bench for Giants.

Eric stopped and coughed gaining his small family consisting of two women and a man.

"Eric!" The man delightfully exclaimed.

The ladies didn't seem too anxious about the arrival of the lost Prince but they did notice my presence.

I observed the women stopped eating when they saw me.

It made me more uncomfortable.

What was going on?, I queried myself.

"This is Maisy." Eric disclosed to his jaw-dropped family, "She us my wife."

The younger one amongst the two ladies choked on her food.

"She's your new wife?" The woman repeated in disbelief.

She had the look of sheer horror hearing my title.

"This... Is..." She did not complete her sentence before she fled off.

What just happened?, I asked myself.

Apart from the awkward stares his family threw at me and the worrisome outburst of the lady that just left.

Eric led me to the table and I got a good view of the lady. She was older than me and had grey streaks of hair with the rich nutty black. Her lips were red and judging from her expensive clothes. Long story short, She looked extravagant.

"Who is this?" The woman questioned, shooting suspicious glares at the man next to her and Eric.

"Maisy, This is my brother Anthony's wife, Emilia and Emilia, This is Maisy, My new wife."

I extended a hand of friendship by curtseying but Emilia took her leave just like the other woman had done.

Cold.

I exchanged looks with Eric but he assured me nothing was wrong.

It made me want to tell on top of my voice. Did he believe I was blind? Since I stepped foot on the castle grounds, I didn't feel safe. Everyone kept their eyes on me and acted like they had seen a phantom surface.

I kept quiet though.

Anthony was the only one that did not seem to mind my presence.

"It's nice to meet you Maisy." He said pleasantly and planted a chaste kiss on my hands.

Eric sat in, ready to dine. A maid came by to serve him. While she was doing this, Eric discovered I wasn't seated.

"Aren't you hungry?"

"I'm good. Just tired." I lied.

The maid was sending those creepy gaze at me. God knows why. I couldn't risk staying here or even eating.

"Ok then, you" He referred to the maid serving him, "Take Maisy to her room."

The maid bowed humbly and escorted me.

My throat tightened as she led the way in eerie silence. She didn't even turn back for a second.

"This is your room, Princess." She opened a magnificent white oak door.

My eyes widened, taking in the splendor of its beauty. Golden walls that appeared to made from pure gold itself. a king-sized bed with pillows bigger than my pelt, sliding closets opposite the bed made from ivory and a fluffy velvet carpet.

The maid left me by myself.

Alone, I decided to do the most awkward thing I could think of.

I jumped into the bed. Bliss couldn't compare what I felt when I collapsed until the soft sweet smelling mattress.

"If only father was here." I thought.

Nothing would ruin this.

I was so wrong. I heard that creepy whisper once again.

"Maisy..."

I spun around intuitively.

Who is doing this?

"Stop it!" I yelled into the shadows.

The room I once thought was cool was beginning to feel like a hell hole.

A scratching sound followed, it sounded like a knife being scratched on... I faced the mirror and God! How I wished I was wrong but I wasn't. Almost transparent symbols were engraved in the antique mirror on the desk.

Dread filled my spine as I read what was written aloud.

"Run!"

CHAPTER 10

Maisy

I ran my fingers on the rough surface of the mirror. It was terrifying, seeing how deep the scarring was. I wanted badly to put it behind me but no one was in the room. It didn't make any sense.

The whispers came again. This time, they sounded like they were in pain. It was a chime of horrifying hushed voice.

"Who's that?" I yelled into the darkness, Whatever force was doing this.

I heard a clicking sound coming from the door out and watched it move. The door slowly opened. Like I was being controlled by a force, I followed.

Immediately I strode out, The door slammed shut scaring me senseless.

I closed my eyes and the whispers came again, the calling of my name on a thousand tongues. In a trance-like state, I maneuvered the castle like I had been there the whole time. The voices led me to huge twin doors.

My hands began to sweat and my breath loudened.

Why was I here? What laid in store for me inside?

The spirits continued their manipulation and I reached hands to the golden hinge

Its golden hinge was dusty and worn but glowed with proud age as I admired the intricacies in its ornate structure.

I pushed and the heavy door creaked open. I could see partially what resided within.

"This was the gallery."

I entered but was immediately pulled sharply outside.

"What are you doing?" Eric croaked.

"I... I..." I stammered, unable to find the perfect excuse to give him.

"I was just checking around. It was boring being alone in the room." I finally gave the perfect excuse. I had contemplated telling him about the writing on the mirror and the voices that would not just shut up but I kept silent. I didn't believe in ghost and I was sure he would just make sure of it.

"I'm sorry." He apologized and pulled me closer to him.

I had this strange assumption he was trying to avoid something. I fixed my gaze into the gallery wondering why he had pulled me out so briskly.

He saw me staring at the door and went ahead to shut it.

"It's too late to be wandering around." He said, "Let's go."

I smiled and followed him back to the room arm in arm but my mind lingered at the gallery. It was hard to explain but I believed something was waiting for me.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" I asked Eric when we got back to the bedroom.

"No." He replied as he collapsed on the bed.

He was present clad in a light silk golden robe that bared his chest. I felt lust rush over me instantly.

It was hard to control my desires when I was close to him but strangely he hadn't made the first move.

I stripped down to a similar black nightgown and joined him in bed. I made sure it exposed my cleavages in such a way that even the devil would drool.

Men were made to make the first move and Today would be the day.

***

Eric

Good Lord!, my dick itched in the comfortable robe I was wearing.

Seeing Maisy half-naked was more than tempting. My wolf fought its barriers to have a taste.

There was no way I was losing control again. Each time it was let free from its shackles, It caused pain to everyone I cared about.

I turned the other way going against its conduct. It wasn't very pleased. It continued to fight its way out and very soon it was winning the battle. My head was filled with pictures of Maisy begging for more, Her screams of pain and my grunts of ecstasy.

I couldn't hold myself any longer.

I got to my feet and scurried outside. My wolf punished me for neglecting his wants and the pains of my bones being crushed inside me sent me shaking.

It wanted release.

A walk in the garden would be enough to keep it at bay.

Nothing but the quietness of nature.

The Royal Garden was built by my late mother. It was the only thing I could remember her by as my father had taken away any momentum she left behind after her death to harden us.

The bonsai trees lined the perfect lawn. In the center of the trees was a pond as large as a small lake with flowering lily pads and a wooden bridge that crossed the middle so the exotic koi carp could be observed.

The breeze relaxed me and slowly the hold the wolf had over me was gone.

I thought about Tatia and how much she would be disappointed in me for stooping so low.

"What a surprise.", Sara joined me by the bridge.

I ignored her antics. I knew what she was here for and sadly I had caused it.

"What do you want Sara?" I demanded.

Seeing her so close reminded me of that night.

"I just thought I should walk in the garden and coincidentally we met." She answered in an overall exaggerated manner.

"Everything is not about you Eric. After all, You take what you want and when you're done, you throw it to the ground."

I did not miss the message.

"Stop it, Sara! Whatever happened that night was a mistake and I regret it."

"No Eric. It was a night of passion. I felt your need when you pulse inside me. Just give me one more chance."

She approached me seductively and placed her hand on my crotch daringly.

My body betrayed me. I got an instant erection and not to be wrong, I was horny as hell but I knew better than to go back to my mistakes.

"No Sara." I pushed away her 'grabby' hands-off, "We can still stay Friends but..."

"But you're over me." She finished, "You took everything away from me Eric. My inheritance, My virginity and now my love."

"I'm sorry if you feel that way but let's bury those skeletons." I mustered to say.

She looked at me, teary-eyed.

"Bury the skeletons? We can't Eric. You will be mine and always mine. I know you only married her for her inheritance like you married Tatia."

"Don't ever say that again!" I roared, losing control over myself, So much that I held her by the throat.

"I like it when you take me roughly." She said, licking my fingers.

I was bewildered.

"You're sick!" I stated and walked off.

"So much for relaxation."

***

Conrad

I fondled her heavy soft breast as she moaned in pure excitement.

My dick was stone hard in my pants, wanting to break their way out. It sent a sweet pain over me.

Emilia used her butt to torture me seeing how turned up I was.

My wolf instantly took over and I let it. I wanted it to torture her while I watched.

It turned her to me roughly and she knew the drill. She got down on her knees and worshipped me.

Lubricating my dick with saliva and sucking it.

Sh*t!, I moaned as her tongue danced on me.

The pleasure didn't last long since she wasn't deep throat but I gave her a reason to. I reached for her head and pushed it on the way down, Enjoying her torture as she gasped for Oxygen. The gurgling sound she made as she tried to breathe made me want all of her at once.

"Yes! Yes..." She mouthed as I thrust in her mouth, liking the way her throat constricted when I was deep enough.

I pulled out, having enough of her mouth and threw her on the bed. She got rid of her undergarments and made a missionary pose ready for my 'Ever hard' dick.

I put my fingers into her vagina and made it wet, ready for me.

When it was slick enough, I slid in.

"Oh!!!" She gasped.

Just the way, I liked it. I wanted them screaming when I penetrated. I thrust deep and swiftly.

I wanted her to have no rest, Just pain. When I was done with her, She needed to walk on her toes.

If only Anthony knew what I did to his darling wife each night.

"Now we can talk," I muttered huskily.

"Oh...It's about Eric. He's back." She cried.

The intensity at which I thrust into her was now slow-paced to give her the opportunity to discuss without screaming and shaking.

"I know. Did he find the girl?" I asked, adding saliva to my shaft for faster lubrication.

"Yes. He did. She's married to him..."

It made me burn and I Fu*ked Maisy with the rage I felt.

She screamed harder but meeting my thrust like she enjoyed the moment.

What could I say? She hated the Clarkes just as much as I hated my step Brothers. They ruined her life and they ruined my reputation.

Together we would ruin them, Take back everything they took from us.

I climaxed but withdrew before I could cum inside her, spewing semen on her and the bed cover.

I collapsed on the bed, satisfied and filled with Bliss.

CHAPTER 11

Maisy

End of Flashback

I heard footsteps approaching so I wiped away my tears and returned back into the bed.

He unlocked the door and came in tiptoeing which proved further that he had something to hide. I pretended to be fast asleep while he quietly shut the door and came to the bed.

I didn't feel his weight on the bed so I squinted my eyes to see what he was doing. I turned to his side.

I saw him pick up his pillows and dropped them to the ground. He intended to sleep there. I couldn't keep pretending, I had to know why.

"What are you doing?" I queried.

My question got him worked up and he was hit with a surprise.

"You're awake." He said, changing the topic.

He slyly took the pillow off the floor and dumped them close to me.

"Yes, Eric. What is going on?"

"What do you mean?" He countered, playing dumb.

"I'm not stupid." I replied with an attitude, "Apart from the fact that you are acting strange and secretive. We haven't had our first night."

It was shocking that I was the one making the first move. As a young girl, I had imagined how I wanted my first time to be and now I was married yet I was still a virgin on the fourth day of marriage.

He sat on the bed, sinking in.

"Maisy, I want this as much as you do but I just have a lot on my mind right now and I didn't think you'll be the one begging for sex."

Even I was surprised. It wasn't like me to be so outspoken.

He kissed me goodnight and went to sleep. He was perfect at eluding my questions but I guess he had some truth in his words. My father was a Chief and had tons to do but compared to being a prince, He was a free spirit.

I closed my eyes to get my mind off it all then I heard a scratching sound. Like nails being scratched on a rough surface.

I remembered my 'ghost experience' and was forced to open my lids.

Out of nowhere, Inscriptions began to form on the mirror next to me.

I hadn't informed Eric about what I saw before because when I checked the mirror earlier, The writing was gone. I contemplated calling his attention to the gory sight I was seeing right now but I was frozen cold.

I couldn't move, my eyes remained on what was being written on the mirror.

I didn't believe in ghosts and hauntings but knowing this was no prank was creeping me out badly.

The scratching stopped and the force made me read to the detail what was written on the glossy reflector.

There is still time

"Who's there?" I managed to mumble, Hoping whatever spirit was hunting me was at least a kind one.

The door opened mysteriously again. I didn't hesitate this time. I followed it's path without fear.

It led me back to the gallery and the door opened itself.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

Answers were within this room, waiting for me to find them.

I entered.

There was nothing spectacular about the gallery. Just a few paintings that didn't excite me but I kept searching. I was drawn here for a reason.

I discovered one painting was covered up and It seemed to be the biggest of them all.

I walked towards it. In the spare moments, I adored Eric's family painting which depicted his family. Him, His late mother who looked every bit the caring housewife, His father who had a scowl on his face and his brother.

They looked happy - minus the late King. Seeing him, I resented him Immediately. He had this mystery I could see in his dark eyes, A secretive nature in his proud stance, One that spoke of power and cockiness. If he was alive, I could tell I would hate his guts immediately.

I returned my attention back to the blanketed painting.

"Open!" The voices ordered and I obeyed.

The clothing glided off, coming to the floor in slow motion.

I stared at the painting in shock.

It was like looking in a mirror.

Right in front of me was...me. The picture depicted a noble me, One who wore her face with pride and knew power. It then dawned on me that it wasn't me. She might have my face but I knew me.

I peered down to see who it was dedicated to.

My jaw dropped when I read the words,

"To the beautiful Tatia..."

***

Spencer

It's been days since I had sent Ewan to Nodith but I haven't gotten a reply nor had he returned. I was beginning to get worried. If only I had swallowed my history with the Kingdom and gone myself but just having those unpleasant memories was too much to bear.

I stood like a watchman guarding the path inti Nodith like I did since Ewan left.

After hours of waiting, I accepted my fate and turned to go. He surely wasn't coming today.

The galloping sound I made out made me turn for a split second.

Someone was there.

I could make out a moving figure rushing right in my way.

"Ewan, Is that you!" I yelled.

He didn't reply but the figure kept coming. When it was close enough, I saw Ewan in a pool of his own blood.

His horse was limping, it's right leg chopped off right at the ankle. A gory sight indeed.

Ewan dropped to the ground when he got to me. I went to his aid, Oblivious to what happened to him.

"What...what happened?" I stammered, torn on what I was to do next.

He had two deep gashes in his abdomen and It wouldn't stop bleeding. We were too far from the village and I was afraid we wouldn't even make it.

Ewan stared back into the woods where he had just popped put from. I could sense his fear.

I fixated my attention there, puzzled and just staring into the dark path.

An abrupt thump on the earth made me apprehensive. It sounded like something the size of an elephant was running towards us. The golden lights, two of them peering at me and getting bigger frightened me. Ewan sucked in air and struggled to free himself out of my reach.

My survival instincts kicked in and I put Ewan on my back.

The horse would be a liability to us if I took it along so I abandoned it. It would give us some time to escape.

"What the fuck was that!" I scrutinized Ewan as I madly took the trail back to the village. Hopefully, we would be safe there.

"Maisy..." Ewan tried to mumble but he was too weak to place the right words.

He was still bleeding in fact, My clothes were now drenched in his claret.

"Maisy...is in..." He continued trying to say in a drunken manner. He was slowly losing his pull on the mortal cord.

Don't give up on me, I pleaded and continued running but I had to stop seeing those auric eyes I had avoided peer right at me again.

The creature which I could not identify preferred to remain in the shadows where it could creep out but I would not be afraid.

Fear killed.

"Hey!" I snarled at the creature.

I noticed a thick liquid drip to the earth and knew we were doomed. A whole horse wasn't enough for the monster and now it wanted us.

The creature let out a roar that shook the earth and stunned me well enough for it to charge for us but then it was hit by showers of rainbow beams.

The creature yelped in pain and faced the being that dared disturb its dinner.

I did the same. My savior was a four-legged beast of burden, my wife's living Memento. Add a silver horn and radiating body.

"Ria?"

CHAPTER 12

Linsea

Spencer

"How is he?" I asked the physician tending to Ewan.

The old man shook his head disappointedly.

"Chief, I'm afraid he won't make it."

Ewan blinked, his face disgruntled in pain. My heart bled seeing him in such a state. He was like family to me ever since I found him wandering ten years ago.

I joined him on the floor. If he wasn't going to make it, I could at least remain with him at the last moment.

My mind, however, was not with him. Ria was a unicorn. I twisted backward to see the creature. Ria was grazing like any normal herbivore would.

I remembered the bright rays of rainbows she shot at the beast after us. It was like she knew I was in danger. It made me wonder if Katherine knew Ria was a mystic.

"Spencer." Ewan groaned, now conscious.

"Don't speak." I urged taking a look at his severe injuries.

The physician had tried to sew up the cuts but he had revealed to me that it was a waste of time. Whatever monster did this had spread a deadly venom that affected the healing process. The injuries were sending a pungent smell, much alike to that of a dead rat.

"Maisy..." Ewan continued with great difficulty. He was vomiting out pink squishy flesh.

His own organs!

"What happened to Maisy?"I quizzed, slightly cursing myself for being insensitive.

This boy was dying just trying to tell.me something about Maisy.

"She's... trouble..." Ewan managed to muster before his fate overwhelmed.

He jerked violently, blood gushing out his mouth and nostrils.

I hurled up at the sight. Ewan became still, his peeved face now straightened.

"Ewan?" I shook him despite the bike in my throat, "Wake up Ewan."

The healer checked on Ewan, monitoring his pulse and placing his ear on his chest to feel his heartbeat. His facial expression gave me the worst news ever.

"Chief, He's dead."

I collapsed to the ground hearing this. I lingered on his last words, Something about Maisy and trouble.

Was Maisy in trouble?

The question remained unanswered. I was enveloped by the fear that Maisy might have suffered the same fate Ewan suffered if she was still alive.

She hasn't messaged since she left which either meant she wasn't in Nodith yet or she was in trouble.

Now I couldn't be having these negative thoughts.

I just couldn't help it. Ria lapped against the nape of my neck as if to pacify me.

I caressed her furry body. It was soothing and gave me the emphatic feeling that everything was alright. I stared into the beast's eyes, all my paranoia gone just seeing it's twinkle.

Maybe Unicorns were empaths.

Ewan's body had been covered up and soon it would be going for cremation, A ritual for the dead in Linsea. I faced Ria again speaking to her and hoping she could understand.

"Ewan's death can't be in vain. I have to find Maisy, To know if she's safe."

I took a deep breath remembering how I sent Maisy away with a total stranger just to teach her a valuable lesson. I could have followed her but I allowed my bad memories in Nodith to get in the way but there was a reason for all things I believed.

The heavens were punishing me for my misconception and Ewan had to suffer for it.

I was going to Nodith.

***

Nodith

Maisy

The morning sun illuminated the panes and rays of sunshine cascaded around my body making the chills warm enough. I wasn't able to sleep all night, Not with the thought that everything going on

right now was unbelievable. I didn't even know if what I saw was real. I've heard stories with supernatural elements in them but never had I thought I would be intertwined in such.

Reincarnation was real?

It was unbelievable but my past self was trying to make me remember something If that was even what was going on.

"You're up early." Eric yawned, Startling me from my deep thought.

I gave him a timid smile to get him off my back but what I desired was to ask him who this Tatia girl was. I remembered he called me Tatia while in Linsea. I thought at that time that he was in pain and couldn't comprehend what he was saying but maybe he could.

"Who's Tatia?"

Eric turned blue.

"Tatia? Who's that?"

He wasn't going to spill what he knew that easily. I would have to play dirty.

"You kept saying her name in your sleep."

"What!"

He was shaken up. Just what I wanted.

"So who's Tatia?"

Eric got to his feet and stared at the horizon.

"I don't know." He blatantly lied.

"So what's her painting doing in the gallery?"

Then Eric snapped. He literally held me by the throat and in his eyes, I could see rage.

"What were you doing there?" He demanded.

"You're hurting me, Eric."

I tried to breathe despite his firm hold on my neck. He didn't relent. It was like I had awakened murderous tendencies in him. I did what I had to, I booted him in his 'area' and his suffering forced him to stop strangling me.

"What was that?"

"I'm so sorry. I don't know what came over me." Eric tried to plead but I was having none of his excuses.

I took a step away from him.

"Don't come any closer!" I warned.

My neck still hurt and breathing was difficult for me, It felt like I had a sore throat.

"I'm sorry." Eric continued saying.

"You tried to kill me and you're telling me sorry."

It just did not make sense. The spirit had told me earlier to run while I had the chance but I hesitated not knowing why. Could this be why?

"Maisy, You have to forgive me."

He approached me but I continued taking a step back, calculating how much time I had to bolt out the door to safety.

"Who is Tatia and why the hell does she look like me?" I asked.

He was worked up hearing the name Tatia before so I hoped it had the same effect on him and blinded his reasoning. That would give me enough time to make my exit.

"I can explain. I just want you to listen to me."

"No Eric, You listen to me. I don't know what is going on here but I don't like it. Maybe this can't work out."

I'd say I made a big mistake saying that. He charged at me like a Savage and I was too stunned to move. My willpower returned when he was near me. I absconded but my reflexes kicked in too late. He held on to my hands before I could escape and pulled me back to him. I used the rare opportunity to bite into his neck.

He cursed and threw me on the bed. He subdued me and used the bedspread as makeshift ropes. He bounded my arms and legs with ease despite the fight I put up.

"Why are you doing this?" I inquired.

"I didn't mean to hurt you Maisy but I can't afford to lose you now."

God! Was I going to be used in some kind of ritual that involved lookalikes?

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You asked who Tatia is. I'll tell you who she was. She was my late wife."

"What does this have to do with me?"

"You're her last living relative, The heir to the Quinn's inheritance."

This was unimaginable. I never believed anyone would actually do this. He married me for money.

"Did my grandfather know about this?" I inquired.

"He's still searching for you but he'll find out tonight at your ball," Eric replied, a sinister smile on his face.

"So you really did this for money, I thought there was actually sparks between us."

"Maisy, Sometimes the butterflies are the warning signs. Your father did try to warn you."

Tears escaped my eyes.

"You'll pay for this Clarke!" I yelled.

He chuckled and left the room, locking the room.

I was a fool. My father was right, A serpent was far better than a crippled Clarke.

CHAPTER 13

Nodith

Eric

"You told her everything?" Anthony quizzed.

"Yes. Not everything but most of it." I replied, pacing around the room.

All my hardworking couldn't go down the drain.

"Where is she now?"

"I tied her up in the room."

"Are you crazy!" Anthony yelled at me, "What has gotten over you?"

"I think it's my wolf. It's been getting control lately."

"Are you using your medication?"

"Yes," I replied.

But it was beginning to have a weaker effect on my wolf. It badly wanted Maisy. I didn't tell Anthony about this. He was more of the 'safe playing' guy and telling him could force him to abort the mission.

"So what do you plan on doing now? Now that she knows, Will she still play along?"

Anthony was right. It was unlikely she would see me the same way. She would see me as nothing but a beast.

But... she's trapped here with me. I can use that to my advantage.

"I'll go see her." I disclosed to Anthony but stopped at an afterthought.

"Where is your wife?" I asked.

"As usual. She's with her manwhore. It must have been an intense night."

I couldn't believe Anthony was okay with this. I knew he had no feelings for her at all but he was still her husband.

"And you're ok with that?"

"Of course Brother. I act like I'm blind to her escapades and I'm free to go on conquests of my one." Anthony replied, taking a sip of crushed berry juice.

"This tastes so good. Perhaps it will ease your wife's perception of you tonight." He commented.

I ignored his pleas for a fight and walked out.

On the way back to my room, I tried several mannerisms just to find the perfect way to get Maisy to see me as the one in control.

I unlocked the door and went in.

"About time." Maisy spat. She looked unconcerned and I doubted she had been trying to find a way out of her constraints. Her hair wasn't ruffled and she was calm, almost like she had a hidden agenda.

I peered into her beautiful brown eyes and said,

"Well now that you know why I married you, I'm thinking we strike a deal."

"I'm up for anything you say, Eric, it's not like I have a choice." She lifted her arms and made a face to me, "Set me free."

This was kind of too easy and I knew women. They were natural fighters.

"You're just going to let me go scot-free?"

"Of course Eric. All I would want is a divorce. I was stupid for believing in love at first sight. I'm definitely paying for my stupidity."

I loosened the ropes and shockingly, she didn't go right for my neck. She was just too hurt to fight back. A part of me hated me for doing this to her. She was Tatia's sister and this was what I was doing to her sister. I wanted to apologize but I couldn't find the right words.

"I'm really sorry if I took this too far but you have to understand..."

"What should I understand Eric?" She retorted, with tears in her eyes, "That you betrayed me for gold. That you trapped me for your own selfish ambitions and do you know what hurts more? The fact that I actually loved you."

"Once my debt is paid, I promise you a divorce and the rest of your inheritance."

Maisy shook her head. She wiped the tears on her Rosy cheeks and continued blackmailing me emotionally.

"I never knew Tatia but I'm glad she never knew you all her life. She might have taken her life herself."

My wolf snapped hearing such blasphemy.

"I loved Tatia!" I yelled back.

"Really?" Maisy sent back, not caring for the thunderstorm she was causing, "Because the way I see it, Your family are nothing but manipulative jerks."

She was right. I was acting so much like my father, It was beginning to scare me.

"I loved Tatia but I'll do anything to protect my family legacy, It was the reason I searched for you."

"So it was me you were looking for back at Linsea. Did you stage your accident too?" She mocked.

I could tell I was nothing but the devil in her sight, She despised me.

"Let's get this over with. I'll play this game of yours Eric, You'll get the money to pay up your stupid family debt and you'll give me back my freedom."

"That sounds good Maisy. I'm glad you're beginning to understand."

She scoffed,

"You'll get what you deserve Eric. You'll pay in your own blood." She swore.

I could see the glow in her eyes.

Women and grudges.

***

Maisy

Evening set in quickly. Considering I had done nothing for hours but wonder how my dumb made-up fairy tale had gone all wrong.

It would soon be night time and I would have to dress up in a pretty pink dress, wave my hands and give a smile to strangers - All for my freedom.

I wrote a letter to father but the servant told me the messenger hadn't been in the kingdom for days. I suspected they were just following orders from Eric.

Hot tears poured and I wept.

"How could I have been so stupid father? You warned me but I didn't listen."

I pondered on how I became so attracted to Eric in days. It was a magnetic pull I couldn't explain, I didn't believe in voodoo but just a few days inside these walls had made me a believer.

The door opened and I turned away, wiping my tears off. I couldn't let Eric see me in tears, It would tag me as weak.

"Your majesty, I'm here to dress you up." The servant curtseyed.

I fixed my gaze on her. A thin girl with porcelain skin, her hair was rough but despite her haggardly appearance, She was beautiful. I noticed a scarring on her neck, the initials of her owner. Sadly, she was indentured. Probably sold by her family to a loan shark.

"Okay."

I got up and stripped down to my undergarments. The maid got to work. Dressing me in one of "Madame Rosette" best. She tried initiating me in a small conversation but I was too driven away from my harsh reality to reply her. She took it as formality and stopped talking but then I asked her.

"How did Tatia die?"

She stopped what she was doing and I felt a sharp pain on my back.

"Ouch!"

The maid hurriedly pulled away from the needle she had unintentionally stabbed me with.

"I'm so sorry your majesty. Please, don't send me to the mines."

She was so afraid for her life.

"It's okay." I assured, "Just tell me what happened to Tatia?"

"We're not supposed to talk about it. His lord warned us." She disclosed.

Eric? Why would he do that? Tatia died in these walls and I needed to know why. The maid wasn't keen on answering my question did to the fear Eric had instilled on her. I needed to manipulate that.

"I think you better tell me, girl. The mines sound like a bad place for a pretty girl like you."

The girl squeezed her lips but finally gave in,

"She didn't die in the Castle. She..."

"I see you want to lose your life." A voice divulged from behind us.

I craned my neck to see the speaker.

The lady at the dining. What was she doing here?

The maid got more apprehensive.

"I'm sorry Miss Sara." The girl humbly apologized, even if she did nothing wrong.

"Leave here. My sister is in need of your services."

"But..." The maid resisted.

"Let us be." Sara sternly voiced.

The maid got the message and left.

"What do you want?" I demanded when we were alone.

I kept my eyes on the reflection the mirror portrayed even if I was only using it to monitor her.

I didn't know this Sara girl and I had a gut feeling that I shouldn't trust her.

"The truth is, I heard what happened." She revealed.

It's either news spread fast or she has been a bitchy stalker.

I couldn't shake away the bad vibes she gave.

"Why do you care?" I inquired, still keeping my eyes on the form-fitting, strapless, gold sequin dress, Perfect for the norms.

"Well, I'm worried about you. It might be the guilt but I can't keep this to myself."

"What do you mean?" I turned around, my gown twirling along and sending glittering broken lights around thanks to the lights shimmering on the shiny material.

Sara looked uneasy. It worried me deadly

"It's because you're not the first to take this route and you'll definitely not be the last. The Clarke's... they're nothing but monsters. They'll take everything you have. You're going to rich aren't you?"

She was babbling so fast and I could see tears in her eyes.

"You have to tell me, Sara." I nudged her to continue.

"You'll die just like Tatia, Maisy."

Time stopped and the chills overwhelmed me. I faced the mirror and somehow, I was drawn to a different figure that stood in place of my reflection.

A blue-skinned girl in a bloodied dress.

She smiled wickedly at me.

"Tatia?" I breathed.

CHAPTER 14

Nodith

Maisy

"What?"Sara exclaimed, wondering what had made me jump.

Tatia placed a finger to her charred lips and made the sound hush. It made me cringe.

"Are you Ok?" Sara asked, staring at the mirror.

She didn't shout. Which meant I could see ghosts or this was all in my mind.

Tatia continued to torture me. She stretched something unto the mirror. I couldn't read it clearly since it was topsy-turvy but when I concentrated enough. It said something about ticking.

I stared back at her and she gave me her terrifying toothed grin then she vanished.

"Are you ok?" Sara kept asking, seeing how distant I was.

The look on her face made me suspect she was beginning to think I was mentally ill.

"I am Sara," I replied, finally getting a grip of myself.

"So How did Tatia die?" I inquired.

"She's..." Before she could reply, the sound of trumpets drowned her voice.

She stopped. It was the fanfare. The castle must be buzzing with pimps and exotic women who wanted to have a gaze at me, The would-be queen.

"You have to go Maisy. We'll talk about this next time." Sara assured.

I turned to take my leave but she stopped me. She adjusted the heavy necklace on my neck and said,

"You'll sure this Maisy. You just have to believe."

"Thank you." I acknowledged.

I didn't trust her but I was going to play a game with even the devil himself to get to the bottom of this whirlwind of a life.

"I have to go now."

She nodded and I left her. Shutting the door and walking down the stairs in the company of maids assigned to leech on me, I thought about Tatia. I needed to know why she kept appearing to me and telling me you run.

"And this is the angelic Miss Maisy Quinn, Heir to the Quinn inheritance and our future Queen."

I turned beet red, shocked at the fact that I had reached the garden where the party was being held but was too far from reality to even notice.

The crowd gasped. Most probably from what I looked like. It was like seeing a ghost. Tatia was dead and out of the blues, A twin she never even had appeared. It was just enough to keep everyone jaw down but then the most surprising thing happened.

Someone from around the crowd clapped and others followed suit. It did a great booster to my confidence even as my legs shook, threatening to lose their mobility if I didn't stop moving.

I could hear their small talk, Their opinions about my dress, my curves and how I even looked better than Tatia... It made me nauseated but I managed to thrive towards where Eric sat.

"You look pale. Do you need a drink?" He asked.

I ignored him but he didn't give up. Everyone's eyes were still on me and I feared I might attract the wrong attention.

My greatest relief to was when some duchess was called upon and everyone turned to her direction.

Now I had my opportunity to tell Eric off.

"Just because I'm doing this Eric doesn't mean we can pretend to be in a little fairy tale."

"You lived in that fairytale up until this morning." He mocked.

He smirked seeing he had gotten to me.

"Can we just get this over with. You do your thing, I do mine."

"Ok." He replied," Your grandfather is waiting for you."

Eric pointed to a man seated in a carriage used for the crippled. The man was thin but his dressing spoke a lot about his class. His valet pushed his chair to where we were seated.

"It is nice to finally meet you Maisy. Can I?"

He was literally asking me to give him the opportunity to plant a kiss on my hand. I didn't like him one bit. He was my grandfather but everyone in this kingdom seemed to be nothing but manipulative people.

I gave him my hands. He kissed them. It was too long for my liking and I was afraid his teeth would fall out.

I couldn't push him off just yet. I needed to know why I never knew I had a twin sister, why I never grew up with her and how she died.

"How is your father?" He asked.

"Good." I gushed.

His valet coughed. An exaggerated one that had a hidden agenda. I didn't know what she was trying to do but she had been giving me a grimace since we met, a span of minutes ago.

"I forgot...Maisy, this is your distant cousin, Lucy."

Now I had a cousin. Why was this even hidden from me?

"Nice to meet you." I nicely responded, trying to ignore Lucy's hateful stare.

I didn't understand what she had against me.

"Lucy, It would be nice if you leave us now," Grandfather asked.

Lucy sent me another glare before politely telling my grandfather how ok she was with the fact he didn't want her around while we talked.

I led him around the more open part of the garden as he discussed mundane topics I hardly cared about. I think he noticed.

"Maisy, You're not talking. Are you alright?"

I didn't know how to reply. How would one react when a non-existent grandpa just showed up at the worst moment of your life and kept on babbling about your mother's childhood.

"I'm alright." I lied.

I figured he was already going through so much already. From my mother's flight to Tatia death.

"I don't think so." He stated, "You must hate me."

I didn't comment. I just stood there, bombarding my head with questions I would have no answers to unless I spoke up.

"How did you end up with Tatia?" I asked.

He sighed heavily before answering.

"Months before you and Tatia were born, I reached out to your mother. We began talking again and I tried to get her to come back. She was afraid that Richard would get his revenge for her rejection so she refused. Seeing how lonely I was, She gave Tatia to me. Your father was told one of the twins died."

It was upsetting that mother lied all these years to father. We had a family in enemy territory and we knew nothing about it, Not until she died.

"How did Tatia die?"

"Maisy...I don't think...."

"I need to know," I interjected.

He looked up at me and I stared into his deep brown eyes, a pit of chocolate nothingness that brought me to tears. I could feel pain and I was about to feel more than that.

"She killed herself a day to her wedding." He solemnly said, wiping away the waterworks.

I was meant to feel something, anything but there was nothing. Just a pitch-black fuzzy feeling I couldn't understand.

"I...need to go." I excused myself and went back to the party.

Grandfather called me back but I refused to turn back. I just needed to be left alone.

***

I sat alone, enjoying the solitude in the midst of the busy crowd. Eric was busy making new acquaintances and enemies so he wouldn't be a pain in my neck for a while. Just when I was beginning to enjoy my inner peace, Someone came over.

"Maisy, I've heard a lot about you." A masculine voice said.

I mean, Who does that?

I tilted my head to him, examining his features. Black hair that looked bronze in the lighting and darker eyes, so black I wondered if he could see. He wasn't that handsome but he had the face of a fighter and who wouldn't like that?

"What do you want?" I demanded.

"Come on, they didn't tell you about me?" His intonation on the words he spoke was like a siren song to my ears, inviting.

I shrugged, "No. Who are you?"

He pulled closer, stretching his hand for a handshake.

"I'm Conrad, Your brother in law."

My jaw dropped.

Not another Clarke!

CHAPTER 15

Maisy

"So you're one of them?"

Conrad gave me a hurt expression before giving a mature answer.

"We all have our flaws but my family...we have more than most people do."

He was right. Mine might be the fact that I was too trusting. The fact that I was betrayed by someone who I thought cared struck anew. I really wanted to cry but I swore not to look weak in front of anyone but It was just show, I wasn't strong and no matter how much I tried, I could never need someone else.

"Have you ever been hurt?" I asked, not even sure why I blurted that out.

"Yes." He replied, giving all his attention to me.

"Did you let them go? Did you ever forgive them?"

He paused, "You aren't me so I can't say."

I wiped away the drops that slipped past my walls before saying,

"What would you do if everyone lied to you and you feel broken beyond repair? I feel like the whole world has concealed a part of life I never knew existed and...I don't know, It's all just coming at once."

"I think it's okay to be hurt but how you take it matters very much." He said, "The world hurt me once in the past but you have to make that world yours."

Conrad called on a steward and he picked a cup of wine for me.

"It helps." He assured, pushing the cup into my hands before taking his.

I looked down into the contents. All I could see was my reflection. The imperfect and weak me that everyone threw around. I shut my eyes and gobbled the content down, draining even the last drop.

"Wow. It must really hurt." He commented.

It did and I wanted to drown the pain, to put it all behind me.

"How do you dominate the world?" I hiccupped.

The wine was beginning to have its effect and I felt dizzy.

"Set the spirits free."

That didn't make sense. He wasn't my life coach but I expected him to say what I wanted.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, there is something terribly satisfying you want to do to those who cause you pain. It's an inborn part of us. Revenge!"

That would be satisfying but I wasn't in control. I wasn't a rebel and didn't want to be.

"Why don't you stay in the castle since you're Eric's brother?" I changed the subject.

"Stepbrother." He corrected.

Now I got it. He was illegitimate.

"How does it feel?" I inquired.

"It used to hurt hearing the only title I got was illegitimate. I was reminded everywhere I went but I rose past that."

The Clarke's were fucked up, That I knew already but I didn't expect them to be cruel to one of their own.

"That's sad." I empathized, "I feel like you were sent here just for me."

"The feeling is mutual Maisy." He winked and walked away, abruptly ending our conversation.

Our meeting was fated by the heavens. I called the steward back and requested another cup of wine. I needed to be intoxicated to unveil my darkest thoughts.

One thing Conrad had blessed me with was Revenge. My burning desire for my pound of flesh intensified. It might be the wine or maybe it was just waiting for the right time to spill out but I said it.

I'll make you cower Eric.

***

Lucy

I took the fifth shot but it wasn't enough to drown the rage.

Grandfather was throwing away his hard work, our hardworking into the hands of the Clarkes. The one thing they were good at was squandering what was mounted on their path. They left every green pasture desolate when they crossed paths and that wasn't the painful part. The most hurtful part of it all was he was giving it all to Maisy.

I had to deal with Tatia until her fortunate death and just when I thought the stars had aligned for me, Maisy showed up, To take everything and drop them into the 'grabby much' hands of Prince Eric.

This was Royal Fuckery!

I wanted the inheritance more than anything in the world. I had worked my butts off since Tatia's death to impress grandfather but as it was he was an ungrateful soul. I squeezed hard on the metal cup I was holding, making it lose its original structure.

"Ahhhh!" I yelled and sent the cup flying.

It drops at the feet of someone. This certain someone was wearing Ruby red leather shoes too expensive to have cheap alcohol drop on them.

"Thank you so much, Luciana." Sara mocked.

I ignored her and collapsed on the table.

"What do you want Sara?"

"I just want us to talk, Like old times."

"You mean until you betrayed me by bedding my ex Swain."

Remembering the hurt Sara had caused me made me want to kill her just there but I was better than that and she wasn't my main priority right now.

"Let's forget Shawn. He wasn't good for you anyway. We have to stay in the present."

"Yeah..." I scoffed, "What do you want?"

"To discuss a common enemy."

I followed where her eyes went to. They went right to Maisy who like me was having shots too many.

"What about her?" I inquired, listening partially.

"We all hate her Lucy. She's stopping you from getting the inheritance you deserve and she's trapping Eric along with her."

I got my part well but the part about Eric being trapped was unheard of. I knew for a fact that Sara was obsessed with boyish Eric and everything hit the rocks when they had an accidental romp. She wouldn't get over the fact that Eric was just being a monster then and used her to satisfy his pain after losing Tatia.

I was about to give her a befitting reply but then an idea stuck on.

Forget working together to defeat the common enemy! This idea was gold. I would have it all, both Eric and the throne. After all, what Lucy Quinn wants, she gets!

***

Maisy

The restless feeling I had when I felt when I believed I was being watched returned. It gave me goosebumps.

I peered around to understand why I felt this way but no one had sent their watchful eyes in my direction.

The voices returned making my head throb. I bracer myself for whatever ghostly event was going to happen next and I wasn't wrong.

My half-empty cup toppled over. The liquid slowly left the cup which made me squirm. The juice slithered on the table, another attempt of someone from the other realm trying to tell me something.

The movement stopped when the words in wine spelled out 'outside'. I listened to what the voices had to say and left the party.

The guards Eric had put in charge of me followed me, The spirits informed me.

I didn't care if they followed me, as long as they did not stop me. I got to the main entrance where palace guards were fortified to prevent anyone who was not invited from entering. I couldn't go to the gates, they would try to stop me so I stood where I was and examined my surroundings.

Minutes later, I questioned if I heard anything at all or if they were just hallucinations.

A guard approached me.

"Your Majesty, Why are you here?"

I ignored his question and waited for what was to come.

"Turn around." The voices stated.

I did. Their statement led me facing the main gates again waiting for whatever was coming.

I didn't know if it was something evil or good that was on its way but I wouldn't know if I didn't play along. It felt like I was a pawn to a spirit with unfinished business.

A ruckus at the main gate returned my focus. I strained my head to see what was going on.

The guards were arguing with a man, they didn't want him inside but he kept on insisting he was Blueblood.

That man was my father.

CHAPTER 16

Maisy

"Unhand him!" I yelled to the guards as I raced to father.

They looked dumbstruck but they obeyed me.

At least I had that kind of power.

"He doesn't have an invitation." One of them commented.

I faced him, struggling with the desire to slap him dirty for handling my father roughly.

"This man happens to be my father. So let me ask you, Do you need your job?" The authority in my own voice made me cringe.

He kept his head down his submission and muttered his apology inaudibly. I ignored them and took father inside.

He hugged me when we were away from the gates.

"You're safe." He mumbled.

I wanted to tell him what I was facing right there but, What was he doing here?

"What happened?"

"Are you happy here?" He inquired, quite unexpected.

I was silent. A part of me wanted to tell him he was right but that would also mean I was wrong, That I was still a child and I couldn't face my own mistakes.

"Yes, "I replied.

His face turned serious, the lines on them was disturbing.

"Is anything wrong?"

"I have to tell you something Maisy."

He was pale, I could tell something had gone horribly wrong.

"Ewan...I sent him here..." Father mumbled shaking. He was incoherent and I couldn't make out a word he said.

"Father, You have to calm down. What happened to Ewan?"

"Something attacked him, Ewan is dead."

I felt my heart constricting in its cages.

"What?... How?" The words just came out, I wasn't really saying them.

Ewan was dead and I was numb to the head. I was already facing a lot and now this.

"I was worried about you since you didn't message at all so I sent Ewan to you. He came back but he was attacked... right in front of me and I could do nothing."

He couldn't hold the pain and he burst into tears, holding me for support.

"If Ria hadn't come. I might have died too."

While he said those words, I blamed myself for Ewan's death. My stupid choice had cost someone his future. Tears escaped my eyes just thinking about it.

"Ria?"

I caught on but what father said hardly made sense. How could Ria have saved him? She was just a horse.

" Ria isn't just a horse. She's a mystic."

I had heard tales of mystic. Mother had repeated them to me several times till I hated the stories and would what father said, They might actually be real.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"She's stabled outside. Do you want to see her?"

"I can't. They won't let me." I blurted.

Shut up Maisy!

Father became suspicious.

"Who?"

"I... We should go to the party."

"Okay." He welcomed.

On the way back to the party, my mind remained unsettled. Father didn't know that he had another daughter who was now dead. I couldn't just bring myself to tell him. Why? I had a feeling I was taking the path she took and if I truly was, I might end up like her.

***

Eric

"Who's that?" Anthony inquired pointing right at Maisy.

She was walking hand in hand with her father.

Why was he even here?

"That's her father," I answered absentmindedly.

"Do you think he's come to take his daughter back?"

"Anthony, You really have to stop this pessimistic view of life. It's really affecting everyone around you."

"You have to be prepared for the worst Eric, especially if you're going to be King."

I ignored him and walked up to Maisy. Even if Spencer had any such plans, there was absolutely nothing he could do. I was legally married to Maisy.

"Spencer, it's a pleasure to have you here." I greeted.

Spencer smiled and returned the commentary.

"It's nice to see you're treating Maisy well. She looks gorgeous tonight."

I glanced at Maisy. She was indifferent but I knew she was screening 'public show' deep inside.

"Yes. A Queen has to look her best and deserves the best."

I watched her clench her fist, releasing them and taking deep breaths. That meant Spencer wasn't being sarcastic. Maisy hadn't told him yet. I wondered why.

"Well since you're here. It would be nice to make up for lost time. Your father I law is right there."

"I don't think it's necessary... I'll be leaving soo..."

"Nonsense." I cut in, "I'm sure he'd like to see his son in law after such a long time."

Spencer finally gave in and left leaving Maisy and me to talk.

"So you didn't tell him? Why?"

Maisy brushed her hair behind her ear before defiantly saying,

"I don't answer to you."

I smirked.

"Where did the sudden courage come from Maisy, You were broken hours ago." I teased her.

It was a pleasure watching her stare at me with nothing but hatred. at least that what she thought she was doing. Her heart sang to me, it held love letters only mine could read.

"You might hate me now Maisy but you'll learn to forgive me."

I ran my finger from her neckline to her inviting lips, the way she bit them was so seductive that my wolf was literally gaining control.

"Forgive you? I can't wait for the divorce once you get the money you want."

"What makes you think that's all I want?"

Yes, Wolfie was out now.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

She pulled away from my touch.

"Why did that make you cringe Maisy?"

"Just stay away from me." She breathed and turned to leave.

I was having none of it. I held on to a hand and threw her in my arms.

"And what if I don't want to stay away from you? What happens then?"

"I don't get you. You're sick, This—is sick! One minute you're cold and the next you're acting like a lovesick puppy. Do you still care about me?"

I leaned to her ear and whispered,

"If you hate me so much. Why do you care if I care?"

She pulled away in disgust and stormed off.

Drama queen, Our drama queen.

***

Spencer

I had spent years avoiding Katherine's father and now I was heading right for him. I took deep breaths as images of the torture I went through in his hands mirrored.

He saw me before I reached him and I could tell he was surprised.

"It's nice...to meet you again." I awkwardly stated.

"Sit down Spencer." He obliged.

I sat. His voice sounded croaky, not the dominating one I was used to.

"How are you?"

"Good. You?"

"I've seen better days."

This conversation was getting nowhere, I hated to admit but I had way too bad memories with this man to even sit comfortably with him. This was a man that would have shot me down if he had the chance in the past. I knew I should let go of the past but I just couldn't let go of the hate.

"I'm so sorry Spencer." He apologized, surprisingly, "I caused you so many troubles in the past."

He seemed genuine and I was moved to pity. Time was the only thing that broke men.

"It's okay. You were just trying to protect Katherine. I would do the same and frankly, I think I understand more now."

Mr Quinn gave a weak smile, turning silent.

A girl I didn't know from Adam's came towards us.

"Who's this grandfather?"

Mr Quinn introduced me.

"This is Spencer, Maisy's father, and Spencer, this is Lucy."

"It's nice to meet you." The girl said.

It's usually nice to meet new people but I had a gut feeling this girl was bad news.

"How are you coping Mr Spencer?" She continued, "Losing two people in your life. It must be hard."

I tried to comprehend what she was saying but it was strange. I only lost Katherine and of course, Ewan but nobody here knew him.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm sympathizing with you, Mr Spencer. Losing your wife and daughter must be hard."

"Daughter?" I quizzed.

At this moment, Katherine's father began to act strange. I caught him sending eye signals to Lucy, begging her to shut up.

I searched the party with my eyes. I stopped when they spotter Maisy. She was very much alive.

"Maisy is alive, What are you talking about?"

"Her sister, Tatia." Lucy retorted.

What was she saying?...

CHAPTER 17

Spencer

"I don't understand what you're getting at." I got up and faced the girl called Lucy.

She played dumb then continued,

"I thought you knew."

"Knew what!" I snapped back.

Everyone turned to me wondering what made me fume badly. I could hear their murmurs and all eyes were on me.

Lucy looked at Dale then back at me.

"I'm sorry. I made a mistake." She mumbled and tried to leave.

I blocked her path before she could make her getaway and asked for the last time who Tatia was.

"She's no one. You're—hurting me." I didn't realize I was holding her so tight. I had literally dug my fingers into her shoulders. Blood seeped out and I had to let her go.

"What's wrong with you? Do you want to hurt her?" A male guest who couldn't take it anymore intervened.

"I just want to know what's she's saying?" I retorted not enjoying his cocky nature at all.

Katherine's father wheeled towards me and coughed out,

"Spencer, I think you should call down..."

"Don't tell me to calm down Dale!" My outburst surprised me. Despite my natural dislike for the man, I had always respected him, So much that I took his family name for mine.

"I'm sorry. It's just that I have a gut feeling you're hiding something."

Dale exhaled and shook his head disappointedly.

"Katherine didn't tell you then. It's time you know."

My heartbeat tripled hearing these words. I felt like a news that was going to crush my life was going to come out from his lips.

"Katherine had twins..." The old man paused and let the words sink in before going on, " She gave one to me. I named her Tatia."

All I could hear was a buzz. I couldn't just believe everything he said word for word. I knew Katherine. I knew her right from the cradle, She wouldn't do something like this. She would never do such.

"Where...Where is she?" I stammered, struggling to breathe.

This was going for the rocks, I could feel it.

"Tatia is dead."

The murmuring around me intensified. People spoke vile words to God knows who. I couldn't concentrate on that. All I could think of was how my pretty world in a glass sphere shattered to nothing but shards.

"What killed her? How did she die?"

Nobody answered. They all stared on like guilty fools.

"Somebody should tell me right now or I'll do something stupid."

Tears soaked my dry skin. How could Katherine have done this to me? I had a daughter who I never met, I didn't even know she existed and just when I knew she was a thing, She's gone.

Nobody replied and the silence got awkward. I deserved an award for bringing down a royal party singlehandedly. Maisy approached me, glazed eyes and swollen pink lips that quivered when she spoke.

"Dad, We can deal with this together."

It was hard for me to show what I felt within to the public eye but this was just something I couldn't control. I remained barricaded in my mental walls so I needed to ask something I think I already knew the answer to.

"Maisy?"

"Di—d you know?" I swallowed hard awaiting her reply. She didn't answer immediately. The message hung clearly in the air, a feeling of guilt.

"Wow! And you kept it from your own father? Bravo Maisy." I accused.

"I was going to tell you..." She sniffled but I cut her off.

"But you didn't. I deserved to know but you didn't respect me enough to tell me."

"I'm sorry." She begged, coming closer.

"You're sorry? Does it change things now? This isn't something you just forget Maisy. Your stay here has changed you. You're not the girl I used to know." I mused.

Maisy stopped talking, She stopped moving. I had drained her off any hope she had left.

"What's that supposed to mean?" She voiced barely audible.

"You've become what I've always despised. You're now a Clarke."

I gathered all the strength I had left and mustered the courage to walk away, from the lies, the plotting, the evils. It was a huge mistake on my part to ever come here. Just moments here had left me with new wounds I would forever nurse. I might have overreacted and Maisy got a buttload of it but most of it was from disbelief.

Katherine kept secrets. First Ria isn't just a horse and I have a second daughter. I could see grey lines.

***

Eric

Great! Spencer had single-handedly ended a party that was supposed to go on until the next morning. Not that I would be able to party after being reminded about Tatia.

Maisy had returned to the castle and here I was trying to find her. Anthony had made sure I went. His idea of showing that I cared.

I knocked on my Chambers door which was now locked.

"Open the door Maisy, Crying isn't going to solve anything."

She didn't reply but I could hear her mumbled wails.

God, Now I had to play the nice guy.

I knocked again,

"Maisy, Please open the door. Let's talk about this."

I heard her get up from within. Her footsteps thumping the ground with each step she made for the door. The lock unbolted.

The first thing I noticed was how messed up her appearance had become. Her hair was rough from all the pulling and tugging, her Kol was dripping down on her face and she looked pale but still beautiful.

"What do you want?" She demanded.

"You do know this is my room right." My idea for a joke was a bad idea and she slammed the door right in my face. With just minutes to spare before the door jammed shut, I put a brave show and wedged my feet through the doorway, stopping it from closing up totally.

I heard her screech before leaving the door.

I came in and met hee sitting on the bed, Hurt and angry. She was probably blaming me for all her predicaments now.

"You must be happy now." She jeered, "Why would the universe trapped me with something like you?"

Touche!

I joined her on the bed, keeping my distance and finally spoke.

"I know you see me as the enemy Maisy and I know I've hurt you in ways I cannot comprehend because I'm not you and I think it's time I apologized, I'm sorry Maisy."

She wiped off Kol from dripping on her new dress then sent me a quite odd stare.

"Is this some sick game of yours?"

"No." I assured, "I really am sorry and while I can't let you go yet. I want you to know it's because I need a particular your inheritance badly."

She gave a weak smile and said,

"Sorry doesn't bring my father back. Somethings can't be forgiven."

"What if I had a bribe? Would you forgive me?" I winked.

She giggled, a sweet memory that would remain evergreen in my memory.

"How?"

"Won't say but, I promise you he'll come for you tonight. He'll take back everything he said and Like you, he'll hate me with passion."

"I don't know why I should even take your words with levity. You've lied to me in the past."

My heart shattered hearing her just say that. I had kept my distance for two reasons. Tatia would always be the one I loved and being with Maisy would just be wrong. The second was to protect her from a fate that awaited her if we got to close. She would never understand so I didn't bother trying.

"Then give me this chance to prove myself."

"Ok."

It felt like the best moments I had with her was about to end but then the strangest thing happened.

Her arms held me tight.

Her hug was stronger than anything I'd ever known, as if holding me wasn't quite enough. I felt every ounce that I was press into every ounce that is hers. At that moment I felt awake somehow, more alive than I had been in so very long.

Her hug cocooned my secret hurt, I felt safe within those walls, protected.

It lasted minutes but those where the best moments of my life and if I could get a wish, it would be to relive the moment once again.

CHAPTER 18

Lewis

I walked up to the man buckling up his horse, Silent and adjusting the hood covering my face.

"What do you want?" The man demanded before

I even got to him.

"I want to talk," I muttered, rubbing my palms together to cope with the anxiety.

The man stopped what he was doing and faced me.

"What help can you people render this time?"

The tone he used indicated he hardly cared about what I had to say. He continued to saddle up the horse.

I coughed, trying to find the perfect conversation starter.

"You wanted to know how Tatia died, "I informed.

The man stopped and grabbed me by the shoulders roughly.

"Is this to taunt me!" He roared, his red bulgy eyes laced with rage.

"No...No..." I stammered, cowering in his domineering aura.

"I just want to help."

"Spill." He urged not letting go of me.

It was odd when I felt a twitch in my pants. An awkward moment for a boner. I brushed my quick attraction for the man and spilled what the secret I had.

"Tatia was murdered by the Prince himself."

The man gave me an ominous stare then said,

"Who? Eric?"

"Yes. Your daughter was engaged to Eric."

"Wait, What!" The man pulled me closer and we were literally touching. My Peter threatened to tear out if caution wasn't taken.

"Eric and Tatia were a thing?"

"Yes!" I mumbled.

"Tell me more."

"Y—es they were engaged and a night to their wedding, She died. They said it was suicide but I know better."

He released his grip on me and paced disturbingly in circles.

"He deceived us... I bet Tatia doesn't even know." I heard him mumble to himself.

I stood there awkwardly as he continued his aside.

"How do you know this?" He inquired.

"I—used to work in the palace."

A comfortable lie, Conrad owed me big time for this. Lying to a hottie was so not in my groove.

I watched him brush his hair with his finger as he sighed, I could sense the desperation in his voice.

God, I could read him like a book.

"If what you're saying is true, then Maisy isn't safe. I can't leave her here."

I guessed this was what Conrad wanted, To get him to stay but why?

"But why are you telling me this?"

He just had to ask that. I wasn't prepared for this manipulative game Conrad forced me to play. I glanced at him briefly at Conrad who was hiding behind a rosebush and making hand signals at me.

I read what he was trying to say.

"As a human, I just thought you should know."

Apparently, it worked.

"Wow, Thanks. It's nice to see people with some humanity left in them in these parts. Thank you."

He left soon after and Conrad exited his hiding place.

"Good job Lewis."

"It didn't feel good. I wonder why you didn't just do it yourself."

"Come on Lewis, you are more believable. I'm the one who looks like a devil remember."

He was so right. He had this 'evil' grin that had normalized with him from childhood. It was what made him notorious as a child, even know that grin just made people tremble.

"And I noticed the way you acted around him, Do you like him?" Conrad joked, winking and poking me.

I was so not going to admit. Sure, Spencer was hot but I could tell he was straight and even at that, There was the age difference. Up till now, I'd never had the jitters for a mature.

"Come on, He's way beyond my league. I always have the stable boys at my beck and call." I defended.

"But you can still try."

I shrugged. Conrad had the habit of insisting on something until I was forced to give it a try so it was a good thing I knew his weakness.

"Can we just forget about me? Which reminds me, Why do you want him for?"

"Maths, Lewis. If he stays, he'll find out what Eric really married Maisy for and from what I've seen, Maisy is naive and can be easily manipulated. Her father would surely force her to back down from whatever deal they have made."

"And?"

"Must I explain everything!" He groaned in frustration, "I'll tell you. If Eric doesn't pay up the dues he owes. Edward, The King of Elyria will surely wage war and then I'll come to my people's rescue."

"And what if your plan fails?" I inquired. I knew he was going to fume but Plan B's were a necessity.

"Sometimes I wonder why I keep you around but I assure you, Lewis, this plan is foolproof, I'll make sure of that."

Conrad was a confident being, one that stood head high even in hard times. Left to me, He was better than his brothers. They all worked in their father's shadow. His rejection was what gave him strength and that was his greatest virtue.

***

Eric

The guards came in with information about Maisy's father being at the gate.

Being naked, I slipped into my robes and raced outside with a dozen guards tagging along.

It gladdened my heart that Maisy and I didn't share the same room anymore, I now had my own space and could go back to having restful nights.

"Is the princess aware?" I quizzed a guard.

"No sire, We only informed you."

I got to the gates in minutes.

"You beast! Where is my daughter, Where is Maisy?" The man yelled, banging the gates and threatening to break them down.

Luckily, the gates were lengthy, so there was no way he could climb his way inside. Conrad had really gotten him good. For the first time in a long time, My brother's manipulative nature had made things turn out the way I wanted them.

"I need you to calm down Spencer." I cooed. It felt like taming a wild horse, looked easy but dangerous.

"Calm down? You killed one of my daughters!" He accused.

Conrad even added lies, Impressive!

More than half of the Kingdom we're in the dark about how Tatia died. If Conrad had his way, he would speed what he knew out but he was sworn to secrecy and it was for 'our' good.

The commotion outside had woken Anthony and Emilia. Maisy came down a little later.

"Open the gates." She commanded, immediately she reached the gates.

The guards hesitated but with my approval, the gates were opened. He hugged Maisy as soon as the gates disappeared.

"We have to get out of here Maisy. It's not safe." I heard him say.

"It's okay."Maisy placated, over-joyous by the fact that he came back.

She stole looks at me and If I could read her mind, it would be searching for answers as to how I had done it.

"It's not okay Maisy. You don't know these people. They killed Tatia." He said perplexed.

"I know father."

I gave her a look that told her she was being stupid. She immediately reversed what she said.

"I mean— I just knew... But I can't go. I'm trapped."

Spencer broke the hug and peered into her eyes, wondering why the hell she would say that.

"What do you mean? Listen to me Maisy. We'll leave this place tonight and nothing can stop me."

That was my cue.

"Actually, you can't go anywhere."

Spencer shot me darts with his eyes. He took a step forward threatening to ram me down but I stood my ground. My guards could strike him down if he made the wrong move but I doubted if that would be necessary.

"What do you mean!" He demanded, taking his steps faster. He stopped when he was inches say from me. Security had taken a stance and we're ready to spill blood if necessary. Spencer saw this and chilled down, drawing his fists.

"Let us out if here and we won't be of any trouble."

"I'm afraid that won't be possible Spencer. Just to juggle your memory a bit, Remember I'm married to Maisy and technically I own her so I say where she goes and where she doesn't."

Spencer was enraged by what I said but Frankly, he knew there was nothing he could do. He had no powers here, No one so now he was basically my pawn.

Royalty could be a dick sometimes.

CHAPTER 19

Eric

After the drama outside with Spencer. I needed some well-deserved rest. There was a pack meeting after all.

I laid in bed, heartache all over. The only image my mind could conjure was Maisy. Her beautiful brown eyes and rosy red cheeks.

"You need to stop!" I almost yelled out.

My wolf sent me a fuzzy feeling, it felt like mischief. It was a bum I couldn't take the suppressing pills at this time of the month. The full moon was getting closer each passing day and using them might have adverse effects like killing my wolf which would be my death or giving it total control over my body.

This was the precious moment my wolf used against me to make me do it's bidding and during these times, I was its slave.

A knock on the door jolted me back to reality. I got to my feet and went for the door.

"Who's there?"

"Maisy." The voice replied.

Another fuzzy feeling ran through my spine. My wolf bounced around hearing her voice. This was a deadly for her...and me!

Flashes of the escapade with Sara flashed in my head. Her moans, her touch...

"Shut up!" I spat to the vile creature I shared a body with.

"What do you want?" I quizzed, tapping my fingers on the moist door to keep my attention on anything but her voice.

"Can we talk?" She retorted.

It would be nice If I didn't have something to lose or we rather. There was nothing in the world that would make me open that door.

"Are you sure?" My wolf teased.

"I'm naked." I blurted out to Maisy.

I could hear her giggle from outside.

"It's okay if you don't want to talk." She said.

She thought I was avoiding her?

Technically, I was and Is was a great idea to just let her assume that and leave me alone but I had ego problems and with an active wolf, This was a recipe for disaster.

"No! wait, I just put a robe on."

I opened the door slowly, singing to my head that it was only for a moment and how controlled I needed to be if I didn't want to look back and regret this day for the rest of my life.

"Hey." I awkwardly greeted when the door fully opened.

She gave me a smooth beam and stepped in.

"Look at what she's wearing."

I regretted obeying my wolf. Maisy was dressed in a cream silk gown that covered what needed to be covered or so I had hoped. The cloth was moist with most probably sweat and now stuck unto her small body. I could see her erect nipples without even batting an eye.

How close she was and yet I couldn't touch with killing me—us.

My wolf continued speaking words of sin into my ears, little devil it was but I diverted my attention to other things, From paperwork's to Maisy, back to how hard I was and back to Maisy.

This was a losing game.

"What do you want?" I asked as polite as I could be despite the battle of sides I was fighting internally.

"I...wanted to thank you about tonight..."

"It's no biggie." I cut in. My wolf was beginning to take over, That meant Maisy had to go.

"Are you okay?" She quizzed, placing her hand on my head unwittingly.

I shivered from her touch. I felt tingling sensation everywhere just from her touch. If I had my way, I would slam her to the wall and take her right there but I made a promise and I Eric did not break promises.

"I'm okay." I brushed off her hand.

She got the message and kept her hands to herself.

"I just wanted to say...it's a nice thing coming from you. Thank you."

Without probing, she headed for the door. I couldn't blame her, I was acting pretty weird.

"Goodnight." She mumbled.

"Wait!" I stopped her by holding her free hands.

She faced me and I saw her swallow.

"Yes?" She breathed.

I heard her heartbeat faster and her breathing lagged.

"You're doing something to her. This is your chance, make a move." My wolf continued with it's messed up pieces of advice. It definitely fitted the role of 'devil on the shoulder'. Problem was where's the angel?

"You wanted to say something¿," Maisy said, confused as to why I remained silent.

"Do something. Can't you see she wants something to happen?"

This was nothing but torture. Why did I even stop her? If I was even the one.

"I just wanted to thank you..."

"For what?" Maisy scrutinized me.

I had disappointed two, Not bad for a night. My wolf punished me, attacking a rib. I took deep breaths since I couldn't shout out in pain.

"For believing in me. After everything I've done. Thank you."

Maisy held my hands and peered into my eyes. Considering all we had been through a couple of days ago, I doubted we would even rub hands but the odds were...odd.

"It's okay."

She suddenly dropped my hands, like she had made a mistake.

"Sorry..." She expressed, looking confused.

"It's okay," I assured but the truth was it wasn't. I knew there was this attraction we had for each other but it was a line none of us was willing to cross but that didn't stop my wolf from cursing me for ruining his opportunity.

"Ok. Goodnight." Maisy said in a hurried manner and gave me a chaste kiss before walking out.

She circled back, an afterthought for what she just did.

I placed a finger on the spot her lips touched earlier. It was hard to decipher if this was real or just a daydream.

Maisy just kissed me and It felt good.

I just stood there, mesmerized with hands-on my cheek while Maisy stared on. Her face was readable. I could picture the surprise.

It wasn't her. It was the string that bonded us. Maisy loved me and it would be a lie if I said I didn't feel the same but Maisy was fire and I wasn't ready to burn.

***

The hollow sound the forest sent to me was unsettling. It wasn't meant to be so since I was a part of nature but It didn't. I felt chills down to my spine but thankfully the bonfire lighted gave me the warmth I badly craved.

We were five in number. Anthony and three-pack members I didn't relate with, especially Conrad. He stood there, eyes watching the flickering flame.

"Brother, is anything wrong?" He said in a tone he was fond of using when he taunted me.

I ignored him and waited for the arrival of Reece.

The forest went colder than it was before. Almost like great evil has come into her midst.

Ember's eyes appeared in the shadows and Reece approached our midst still in his wolf form. His transformation began immediately. His bones shifted in ways that would make you lose what you managed to keep in. I closed my eyes and waited for his grunts of pain to be over before opening them.

Reece grabbed a thick blanket from a pack member, clothing himself in the wooly material before staring back at his betas.

Reece brushed back his blonde hair into the blanket that Gabe him a more domineering look. He was very young but looked over forty. He was far older than me but Rival packs had older Alphas.

He grazed his fingers on his chin, they were in bad need of shaving but knowing who Reece was, It would be a waste of time to suggest that.

He itched his pale white skin and stared at me with those sinister blue orbs begore speaking.

"Brothers, we have come together again to celebrate the festival of Nights. As we always do. We mingle with other packs. Do with their women what the moon goddess desires." Reece stated in his baritone voice.

"But I doubt that will be possible this time. News has reached me about the return of the chimera."

All eyes turned on me as this was said. Anthony sent me a knowing look.

"It happened before and it's happening again Your Majesty, let the girl go before you kill us off," Reece said.

I took a deep breath to cope with how messed up this was. For a second, I thought this was one of Conrad's elaborate plan but Reece wasn't someone to take sides and definitely not from his beta.

"Your grace, The girl I assure you is human. She is nothing like her sister." I assured Reece.

"Wrong!" Reece snapped back.

"Tell me why the chimera is back then! She's a dead walker and she has to go!"

Despite the disrespect, I had gotten used to it. I was king to the humans but nothing but an ordinary beta in my pack.

Maisy being a whisperer... How did she survive all these years?

CHAPTER 20

Maisy

I crept quietly into the dark room which was now my room. The blinds were black and thick, blocking any moonlight from passing through. All in my favor. I shut the door and slowly as I could until I heard my father's voice.

He wasn't sleeping? What a wasted effort.

I smoothened my robe and tried to act like someone who had nothing to hide.

"I didn't want to disturb you."

Father got up, staring at me like he didn't believe what I just said.

"Sit down, I need to talk to you."

I had a good guess it was about Eric and I. I so did not want this conversation but what could I do? I sat close to him the bed cushioning my buttocks in a comfortable manner.

"It must have been hard knowing all these and unable to tell me."

My throat went dry. I remembered the very day I found out Eric's scheme. It brought me to the point of tears.

"I'm sorry for shouting at you. You were just trying to protect me and I should have paid more attention."

I stopped him right there,

"No. You deserved the truth."

Since our conversation was on a lighter note, I felt more comfortable...more open.

"Does he plan on going with a divorce?" He asked.

I picked a pillow and squeezed it tight. I was still keeping secrets from my father but he needed the truth.

"There's something, I need to tell you." I began.

Father gave me his attention, listening intently to anything I had to say. I took a deep breath and continued.

"Yes but there is a condition, I have to give him a part of my inheritance."

Father turned blue.

"Your inheritance? What inheritan... That inheritance."

He scratched his chin, thinking hard.

"Why would he want your inheritance?"

Whatever question he was throwing at me, I had no answer your them. It was the same question I had asked myself but never summoned the courage to ask Eric. He wouldn't even tell me the truth anyway. My thoughts diverted to Sara. She had helped me once before, Maybe she could tell me why Eric wanted my inheritance.

"Will you do it? You know, Give him your family inheritance? From what I believe, the Royal treasury might be empty and the tax being imposed might not be enough for their luxurious lifestyle. Don't you think he just playing you?"

I didn't even know. Eric was a whirlwind of everything. He could not be trusted. He was like good and bad mashed up on to one. Sometimes, I believed he was being inhabited by demons.

"I don't." I truthfully replied, " But I have to play his games to find my way out of this maze."

I fell on the bed and remembered how we met, how he perfected his lies. How I fell for it for being so naive and stupid.

"Do you still love him?" Father inquired, getting up and heading outside.

"No." I sharply replied.

Father gave a nod and left, shutting the door as he disappeared into the corridor. I let out sharp breaths. I had been holding the tears in but I couldn't back down now.

The tears flowed as I gripped the floral sheets, drenching them with salty liquid.

I was a liar. It was hard to believe but he still held a spot in my heart, the dark and empty part that left me hollow these days. If Eric came again wanting me, I was sure I would do it again. He had that kind of effect on me. I was supposed to hate him but I just couldn't bring myself to.

***

Lucy

I tucked the old man for the night. He still had the guys to ask for stories. O used to tell him dumb fairy tales as a child and up to now, I did it without complaint but Today was different. I just could not see myself doing all the work while Maisy enjoy the castle life and would still inherit everything, Even this Manor. I felt betrayed and unappreciated. Hearing the old man blabber about

stories made me feel like strangling him to death. Of course, if I did that, the dungeons awaited me. I was sure Maisy would be happy to eliminate any threat in her way. Her goody-two-shoes image was plastered to my brain like an indentured tattoo, Ugly and a reminder for life.

No! There's no way I was taking the scraps.

I needed to make my own move. I made the move after storytime. It was a topic my grandfather couldn't resist.

" I don't want you to go, grandpa. I haven't showed you who I want to spend the rest of my life with. I want to start a family before you go."

I added dramatic tears for more effects.

"Don't cry, Luciana. I might not be alone for much longer but I'm sure you'll make a great mother. You've always taken care of me without expecting favors or reward." He held my hands and stared compassionately in my eyes. I made my heart stone. There was no way those 'old dog' eyes were working on me.

"Thank you, Lucy."

I squeezed his hands in response and said dryly,

"You're my grandfather. I'll do anything to make you happy, especially at these times."

"Cheer up Lucy, This is just a repercussion for all my sins." He said.

My mouth twisted to a wicked grin. It was difficult keeping a straight face without looking like a sinister clown thirsty for blood. My eyes darted across the huge room to the tray placed on a marble table.

The medicine was doing just what I wanted it to.

I didn't feel guilty harming this man who I happened to share a bloodline with. He had said it himself. This was a repercussion for all his sins. The almighty only deemed it fit that it was me who would finish the job.

"What have you always wanted Lucy?"

I faked a surprised look and pretended to think hard about it.

"Grandpa, I don't want much... This house holds so many memories of us and even Tatia. I want this house to preserve those memories. To tell my children the stories." I breathlessly let out.

Too easy.

Grandfather was an emotional fool. It was unbelievable to know that he was a ruthless businessman who dined with kings during his youth. Gone are those days. Now...he was just a broken old man who was trying to fix all the wrong he made in his youth.

"You only want the house?" He raised an eyebrow, coughing loudly after speaking.

"Yes," I replied.

I knew control. I made no mistake in my dealings. It was fair to say I took his genes.

"Okay." He voiced, "You can leave now. It's getting late. Get some sleep."

I obeyed like.a good girl and walked out. When those doors closed, I gave my victory dance.

It was a sure banter I was going to get more than what I bargained for.

I headed to my room to get some beauty sleep. The whispers came. I hit my head, hoping to reset it. This time, the screams of the spirits were strong. My head pulsed and I felt liquid... thick hot liquid dripped from my nose.

I ran my fingers on my moist nose and checked what it was.

Blood!

My vision blurred as I raced against time for my room.

I chanted the holy words that kept my nature at bay. Their screams intensified and I felt myself slipping away. Blocking the spirit channel in me had its side effects. Every word of advice or manipulation they had in store came at once when the necklace wasn't on me.

I pushed the doors able, now half-blind. I knew where my jewelry box was and could trace it even if I was blind. I got the box and scattered it's contents to the floor. The exceptional jewelry was a golden sculpted butterfly with glowing emeralds adorning the wings.

Its touch sent warmth and comfort to my soul. The sprits had lost their hold.

Stupid demons.

CHAPTER 21

Eric

"Reece has a point you know. Stories about a monster attacking travelers have spread far and wide in Nodith."

I ignored Anthony's pestering. My brother wouldn't even take my side. I needed a plan B.

"We can fasten the coronation so I get the money before I get our divorce."

My eyes searched the trees that now held untold dangers to me, Even Wolfie had his tail between its leg.

"Not a bad idea, I suppose. The killings will increase if we don't take a step."

I never really thought about Maisy's heritage. Her late sister had the gift but she couldn't have had it. I had been keeping her in the dark on a lot of things and she showed no signs of knowing what I intended to do.

But... When she arrived in Nodith, She had been mumbling about ghosts.

How could I be so stupid?

I could cross away any excuses, Maisy was indeed a whisperer and that meant she wasn't safe. I quickened my steps just imagining she was in danger. Memories of Tatia's last moment with me flashed so bright that the whole scenario seemed like it was happening again. The pain of watching her and just laying there numb and useless while she slipped away.

Endorphins sent my heart racing and my body ached.

"Are you okay?" Anthony quizzed.

"Yes." I sent back, my blood boiling for no reason.

Anthony stared at me wide-eyed,

"Eric...your eyes..."

Damn! I was shifting.

"I think you should head back to the castle without me." I managed to say before my wolf completely took over.

First, my fingers elongated, taking the form of golden brown claws. A howl escaped my throat, resulting from the pain that shot through my body.

My Howls drowned the nocturnal music. I shrunk then the pain stopped. I stared up at Anthony, puffed and ran off.

***

After my release, I stood naked in the middle of the woods. My hands dug into the moist dark earth searching for the chest buried within. It was one of the many buried in strategic positions to curb with the after-effects of torn clothes.

I found the chest and got it out. Opening it, I brought out the clothing inside out. A sleeved vest lacking the sack coat and a pair of black pants, ruffled so much that no one would recognize me if they didn't pay attention.

I wore the shirt and moved on to the pants but something slipped out from the pocket. I stopped for a moment and picked the ring up. A golden band that had the emblem of the Clarke made from emeralds. It had a beryl tint in the moonlight. It was a gift I I to government Tatia. I briefly wondered what it was doing in my pocket. I remembered instructing a servant to toss it far away.

I dropped on the earth, taking in the decayed brown leaves that reminded me of Autumn then I did the astonishing, I spoke to the ring.

"Tatia, Are you there?"

The wind played with my hair, it felt like hands caressed me. I took it as a sign and continued,

"You must be angry with me for bringing her here to die and I don't know... Maybe you were right It's difficult to break from your family's codes. I feel like I'm becoming every bit of my father... Manipulative, selfish and secretive. I haven't even told Maisy how I truly feel about her."

The wind threw some dust in my eyes. Somebody was jealous.

"I can't even act on those feelings. Maisy isn't safe with me. I couldn't protect you and I'm sure I can't protect her too. Truth is ever since you left me, I haven't found peace and I doubt I will, Not until I know you're happy."

Tears crept out of my lids and I succumbed to the grief I felt deep inside.

"I just want to know how you're doing where you are... Just give me a sign, Anything..." I lamented.

For a brief second or maybe shorter than seconds, I saw the jewelry shimmer.

***

Morning came quick and I was preoccupied with paperwork even before daybreak.

To think that I was up all night.

"How are you doing?" The devil's mistress inquired as she brought a tray of food inside.

I didn't lock the door.

"What do you want Sara?" I demanded immediately, straying from my work table.

"I brought you breakfast. You were too preoccupied with work to even come downstairs for food."

"I'm not hungry." I retorted.

"Really?" She batted an eyebrow, " What did you eat?"

That would have been an easy question if I knew why I was so full. I definitely went hunting in wolf form.

"Does it matter?" I said, changing the subject.

She was silent, just standing there staring at me with 'that' look in her eyes. It didn't take me time to guess why she was so helpful.

I took the tray containing the food from her hands and placed it on my desk. The rough manner at which I handled the tray made the orange juice spill into what I was doing.

"Good Lord!" I said under my breath as I rushed to save the papyrus. It wasn't too late. I managed to get to it before the ink began to run. I dropped it where sunlight could rectify it and turned back to Sara.

"Is there anything else?"

It would only make that much sense since she was still standing there. I didn't feel comfortable with her presence at all. It was harassment and I should be the one in that position.

She gave me a sly look and walked towards me. My mind could vividly picture how this was going to go wrong.

I backtracked,

"Sara, You have to stop. This obsession of yours is becoming a cause for concern."

She didn't relent. In fact, I'd say her steps quickened and now I was in the most awkward position. The edge of the bed was no place to be when a sex-obsessed girl comes for you like this.

I watched her fondle with the back of her dress and her clothes floated to the ground.

She was wearing nothing underneath.

She came prepared.

Her petite body was enough to be worshipped in my plans. A tickle in my groin informed me of more trouble.

I couldn't let Sara have her way. I was going through enough emotional turbulence in my life.

"You don't have you found this Sara... You're beautiful and any man would want you."

She stopped approaching and stroked her chin,

"If that's so. I want the man who took me that night. The man who dominated me."

"Sara, stop this madness! Whatever happened that night was a mistake and I just want to forget about it."

Sara ignored my pleas and pressed close forcefully locking our lips.

Before I could react, The door swung open. So quick that I was too stunned to move. It was Maisy.

Her emotions were not hidden on her innocent face. Her pain was evident in the crease of her brow and the down-curve of her plush pink lips and her eyes, her eyes showed her soul. They were a deep pool of restless ginger, a black hole of hopeless grief.

I pushed Sara off me and approached Maisy as quick as my leg could carry me.

"Wait Maisy, I can explain."

She didn't give me a chance, she didn't hear me out, The door just slammed shut, right in my face.

That was it! No more Mr Nice guy.

I confronted Sara who stood there satisfied with her work.

"You wanted to be dominated, Didn't you?" I roared.

"Yes." She got to her knees, a submissive by choice.

I didn't know if this was actually me or my wolf but one thing I knew was I wanted to torture Sara.

My pants fell to the floor

"Do you want my cock, Sara?"

"Yes."

"Beg for it!"

"Please."

"Louder," I yelled.

"Please!"

Now she would know pain!

CHAPTER 22

Earlier...

Maisy

Eric hadn't come down for breakfast. I was slightly concerned.

I had seen him early this morning covered in much. It wasn't every day that happened.

I took a deep breath before knocking on his door. There was no reply but the door half opened against my knuckles.

I could hear someone squirm and it got my attention. I walked in and my shoulders sagged at the horrible sight of Sara and Eric in a carnal position.

A muffled gasp escaped my throat. I couldn't believe this. I felt betrayed and I didn't know why.

They hadn't noticed me as they continued talking. I couldn't figure out or even listen to what they were murmuring. I was away, somewhere peaceful for my heart to heal.

The sudden wetness of my face snapped me back to reality. I wiped away the getaway teardrop.

Eric wasn't worth it.

I gathered the strength to leave the room, reminding myself that he wasn't mine and that this was his nature.

But his husky voice stopped me. I could feel the desperation in them.

He was begging me to listen, To turn back and ignore what I clearly saw just to listen to him.

I ignored his pleas and banged the door back in place.

For a brief second, I gave him the second chance he wanted. I stayed there waiting and expecting him to burst out of the room for me.

It was a wait I would never forget. Minutes felt like hours. Yet, he never came. I walked back to the door, my bones aching and placed my ear on the door.

"You wanted to be dominated..."

I stepped back. It was unbelievable. He was unrepentant and was a good pretender. The strength I thought I had lost returned, fuelled by hate.

Yes! I hated Eric, I despised him.

My strength got me back to my bedroom. The only place where I didn't have to pretend to myself.

The bed was too comfortable for me to hold on to the pain so I fell to the floor. The cold hard floor was what I need right now.

There was no way, I was going to give that bastard my family inheritance.

"If he thinks I'm trapped with him, he's got it all wrong. In fact, he's the one who's trapped."

Father had gotten his findings done and identified why Eric needed a part of the Quinn inheritance. My grandfather wouldn't give him willingly what he needed so he went on a journey to find me, the last surviving blood. He managed to trap me and brought me here for marriage. I knew the tales already. How much pain and effort he put into his master-plan for it to work. I had kept my head low because I actually thought he was doing it with good intentions even if it almost ruined me. But now... Now my eyes were open. There was no way I was going to pretend I didn't see the nasty scar, I was going to become one.

***

Eric

I stopped at the last moment.

What was I doing?

I pulled up my pants and scampered for the door.

"Where you going?" Sara yelled, agitated.

I turned back for a sec,

"Get out of here before I return," I warned and exited the room.

I got dressed whilst running, rushing to get to Maisy if I still had an opportunity.

My blackouts were becoming a cause for concern. My wolf was beginning to gain more control over my mind, my sanity.

I knocked on Maisy's door. It was quiet in there.

"Maisy, Can we talk?"

The door opened slowly and Maisy peeked out. Her pout lips gave me the butterflies.

"I hardly think there is something for us to talk about." She piped.

"No, there is. I just want to tell you whatever you saw in there wasn't what you thought..."

"You know something, Eric? I don't care. I don't care what you do with your life. This! is a compromise and will be ending soon then you can do whatever you want."

"No. You need to stop fighting Maisy. I—know what I saw." I insisted.

She gave a mock laughter but it was hollow, just for show. She was trying to prove something.

"What did you see Eric? Tell me?"

"You were angry, You were hurt. You don't have to pretend." I said softly.

She stared at me, unsure of how to react as we made eye contact but then the chestnut browns flared.

"So you think I'm obsessed with you. Get a life, Clarke."

She had never called me by the family name. She was keeping her walls up.

"So you feel nothing for me at all?"

"The sooner that sticks in, the better."

"But I remember you were the same person who pecked me right here," I said, pointing to the part her prickly lips touched last night.

"That was a mistake. Not the first since I've met you."

Harsh!

"But you know what a mistake you repeatedly make is right?"

Her perfect reply was slamming the door right in my face. It missed my face by a hair.

Drama queen.

"It seems Reece orders are bound to come true," I said to Anthony when I stepped into his Chambers.

"Good."

"Really?" I raised an eyebrow.

"What do you expect me to say, Eric? You know if we don't get rid of her soon, Reece will."

"Because he hasn't been challenged." I put in.

Anthony stopped and made eye contact.

"I hope you aren't having any ideas about a revolt."

" What! I was just saying. I have enough on my plates already."

I understand why Reece was so against Maisy being here. She was a living threat to the safety of the people. It was a hard choice for him but he just lacked humanity, the one that made you weak. Since he didn't relate to the world, it was bound to happen.

"So, why exactly are you here?" My brother asked knowing me well.

"Can't I just come just to open my heart to you. Does there have to be a reason?"

"For a Clarke, there is always a reason and there is no need to lie Eric."

"Okay. I know you're going to hate this but it's the truth... I don't want Maisy to go."

Anthony walked up to me and put his hands on my shoulders. His stunning blue eyes examining me. I could see them searching my soul.

"I've noticed." He stated.

"Is that all? You won't tell me what next step I have to take?"

Anthony nodded,

"I won't Eric. I know enough of how listening to others can ruin you. You are your own man. You can make your choice."

I bit hard on my lower lip. This was going to be harder than I thought. If Anthony had pushed away my madness, I would have obeyed without question or tried to.

"I want her to stay. I want to defy Reece for her sake." I said aloud.

"Why would you do that? You'll get you and her in big trouble."

Now, he was doing it.

"I don't know Anthony but every time I stare into her eyes, glance at her body. I just..."

"Do you actually love Maisy or is just because she looks like Tatia?" Anthony interrupted.

I looked at Anthony unable to answer his question. It was considerate to know why I wanted Maisy to stay but there wasn't any valid reason. I couldn't open up to Anthony as to why I wanted Maisy close. It would be easy to say that It was because of hee looks but I knew it was something else.

Seeing Maisy in a hurt state had broken my wolf's hold over me. I hated seeing her in pain and a part of me enjoyed seeing her smile. There wasn't much of that since she was with me but I still didn't want her to leave.

I had felt this before and I had promised myself that I wouldn't feel it again, For Tatia's sake.

I was breaking that promise.

CHAPTER 23

Eric

"Do you..."

A haunting presence at the doorway stopped me. I turned there to see an apprehensive guard.

"What do you want?"

" Father Nicholas is here."

Anthony turned blue and If I had a mirror, I'd be the same.

I sent the guard on his way and said to Anthony,

"Why is he here? The coronation isn't until a week after."

"I have no idea. Let's find out."

We trotted on. Father Nicholas's face lit up seeing us appear.

"Well, Well, Well. It's a wonderful surprise to see you, chums, all grown up."

Goodness, How conceited could this man be. He visited two months ago.

It was like he had ties with the castle.

"It's wonderful to have you here father Nicholas. Why are you here?"

Anthony dealt me a jab that sent me reeling. I grimaced back.

"I get the feeling you don't want me to be here." Father Nicholas implied, inspecting the castle like he was searching for something or someone.

"Of course not. I was just curious. My coronation is three weeks away and you're here." I said, lacking the empathy needed.

"I'm here to check the affairs of the castle. How are you faring?"

"Good. How'd the church Father?"

"The congregation has never bloomed. You'd know if you came. Even beings like yourself need the Lord's protection."

I hated when he said that. He and my father were close but he was nothing but a family friend. Someone who kept out secret.

"We would father... but we have a lot on our plates right now," Anthony said to the man, being the cultured and prim one as always.

The priest cut him off, running his fingers on the peeling walls.

"I see. The kingdom is in ruins."

He enjoyed doing this. For a worker of the path of light, He was loose-lipped. It was a wonder how our secrets were still locked in there.

"Where is the girl?" He inquired, breaking the silence.

"She won't be coming. She's emotionally unstable right now." Anthony was kind enough to answer.

I remained there physically but not mentally. Maisy was hurt and alone... All because of me.

"I mean... Why wouldn't she? Women want love and the moment they find out they've gotten nothing but convenience it breaks them but it would mean nothing to your brother. She's not the first poor souls he's torn apart.

A part of me felt like he was referred to my fling with Sara. Sara was a drama queen. There was a high possibility she'd spilled it all in the confession room.

Father Nicholas flicked his fingers in my face seeing how gone I was.

"Eric, you know if that Monster inside is still a bother. The church is here to help you bind it."

I rolled my eyes and ignored him, remembering the several times my mother had taken me this long Church for cleansing. Of course, my father hadn't told her anything about what he was and she thought I was possessed. Long story short, The exorcism failed and my Mom got a little in on the Clarke family secret.

"That won't be necessary father. I can keep it in check." I assured.

He winked,

"I'm sure you can but... When do I get to meet Tatia's sister. Perhaps, I can pacify her."

Anthony sent me a knowing look. I had to say, my brother knew me well. Father Nicholas made me uncomfortable whenever he was around and I didn't want him near Maisy or her demons.

***

Maisy

Father had gone visiting grandfather leaving me alone in the grand room. I wasn't entirely alone. The crickets would not stop disturbing. Just when I wanted to sulk forever. I never knew it to be so hard to keep a grudge. It was like a flesh-eater, causing me pain than the eyesore it gave to the sight.

The banging on the door caught my attention and I quietly walked up to it.

"Who's there?" I whispered in a hushed tone.

"It's me, Eric."

"Go away." I immediately blurted, No need to think that through.

The fire of pure hate that failed to ignite burst into flames at threatening intensity.

"I know you're angry but you can't live your life in a box." I heard him say.

I would say It was. Why was I doing this to myself? I would look weak and simply pathetic. I needed to take my stand.

If I was ever going to make him pay for his crimes, Then I better own myself.

I put my hands on the doorknob but then had second thoughts.

This was a show of bravery. I was still picking up the shambles of what remained of me. There was no need to break broken glass all over again.

"Nice try Clarke but this box is better than your sight," I said.

I heard him let out a stiff giggle.

"Really? That wasn't what you used to say about my eyes?"

Curse him and those devilish eyes.

If he was going to use that against me, I had cards of my own.

"They do say no one could resist Lucifer's charms well until they got to know how he is."

"Good one Maisy. I'm beginning to get the feeling you aren't angry anymore."

"Go away." I drooled my words and returned back to the four-poster bed. I wasn't going to be taking any of his shenanigans anymore.

"I know you say you don't want to talk to me but Maisy, You have to admit. I have a way with words but If you want me to leave you alone, I suggest you come with me."

"Make me."

He laughed,

"Trust me Maisy, I don't know what would happen if I barged in and couldn't control myself. You are... Sumptuous."

Goodness, did he just make me sensual. Fuck that!

I opened the door, fearing no one.

"What exactly do you want?" I demanded.

"You finally gave in." He continued to play around.

I closed my eyes and took a swift deep breath, my lips and brain working interchangeably to concoct the most wicked venom but an unknown voice stopped me. The voice said my name and for a second I thought it was the voice in my head but I opened my eyes.

It was a man. He was clean-shaven and had scythe-shaped eyebrows. His nose and half-dome cheekbones sat above an oaken jaw. His shoulders were part of his burly physique that didn't fit into the tight cloth. I could have sworn he forced it on, I never knew Priests to keep attention to how they looked cause this one did. He approached me with a tiger-like tread and his nomad-blue eyes twinkled, They were Saturn round.

"Hello Your Majesty, it's a pleasure to meet you." He bowed and I felt he deserved the honors of placing those lips on my hands.

I stretched forth my hands and he placed his lips on them. I instantly felt a jolt run than my spine. It was something that made me jerk.

The voices in my head became active letting out a roster that messed with my head.

This wasn't a warning. It felt a lot like pain and the strange thing was I could feel their pain.

I immediately pulled away from his touch.

"Are you okay?" He asked.

"Y—es." I stammered.

I didn't know what I felt at that time but this man was beginning to give me bad vibes.

CHAPTER 24

Father Nicholas

She pulled away. I could feel the devil just from her stare.

She had a gift just like her sister. This spelled doom for the Kingdom.

"Are you ok?"

She did answer but her looks told a different story. I briefly glanced at Eric. I noticed he wasn't comfortable with me talking to her.

"It's nice meeting you Your Majesty," I said.

"Please don't call me that." She retorted.

How could I blame her? She was being used and what was the use of a title that wouldn't stay on her.

"I understand how sad you are your Ma... Maisy but if I could change Eric I would."

"I don't need help from anyone to fight my battles." She stated and walked out on us.

Rude!

Now alone with the boys, I could really speak my mind.

"We need to talk Eric."

"Sure. Let's head to the study."

Eric led the way and Anthony tagged along but I stopped him.

"Sorry Anthony but just him."

He nodded despite looking hurt, A dogged fighter.

"Why are we here?" Eric demanded when we got to the study.

I took a seat on one of the armchairs, examining the splendor of the room as I spoke.

"It's about Maisy. She isn't human is she?"

His silence confirmed my suspicion.

"Eric, You know what happened to Tatia and your father right?"

"I do." He muttered solemnly, knowing very well what I was getting at.

"Your father died trying to save Tatia but that didn't save her. I'm concerned about you."

Eric diverted his attention to the bookshelf, picking the book of hunts and placing it on the white oak table before me.

"You don't need to. I can protect myself."

I scrolled through the opened book. He was reading on Chimeras. The same monster that ended King Richard and Tatia alike.

"You think your readings can help you defeat the famed beast that remained undefeated for years."

"I know." He cut in, "But I also read from the Royal scrolls that it was bound before. If it was done, We can do it again."

"Enough!" I slammed my fist into the table, sending the book mid-air.

I stopped seeing how uncomfortable it was to lose my temper.

"I'm sorry but tell me, Eric, Why do want her to stay?"

Eric paced around, unwilling to give me a direct answer.

"Because it's safe here. She has her family and my protection." He answered.

"Really?" I got up and approached him, "You are an incredibly selfish human being my boy. You want to risk your kingdom's safety for this petty thing called love. I didn't offer to be your Godfather if you're going to just be stupid."

"What are you saying?" He quizzed, resisting my words of wisdom, "I don't get your games, Father. One minute you are against my marriage of convenience and now you want her out of the Kingdom. Why?"

"I am a man of God, My prince but I'm also human. I give faith but we have to be smart here. Men in power have to make compromises. You'll always make them and when you do, You have to be strong. Maisy is a beautiful and brave woman but what is inside her compromises your future together."

I placed my hands on his shoulder to make my point known more. His expression told me he was taking it all in.

"Now you have to be the King your father wanted you to be."

***

Spencer

I felt inflated walking in a building that brought so many memories.

The Quinn estate used to be a sight to behold but time had performed irreversible deeds upon the once proud and mighty mansion. The steeple that once could be seen from anywhere in the village owing to its polished glean no longer shined, a rusty relic of ages gone by. Bricks and cement had been eroded away, washing the colors from the once beautiful building. But from within, the magic lived on. Great halls of chandeliers and tables lay stagnant, dusty, yet held the weight of many parties, songs, dances. The floors lay expectant, as if wishing for one last pair of boots to walk by.

"You made it." Mr Quinn paddled towards me unaided.

"It's nice to meet you," I said trying to create a conversation. It was difficult doing something like that remembering some of the things he did to me. I grew up in this house being the child of his housekeeper. He uses to treat me like.his own son until I took an interest in his daughter.

"Does this place remind you of her?" He whizzed, seeing how withdrawn I had become.

"It... Yes..." I stammered.

"I'm sorry." He pleaded, placing his hands on mine reassuringly.

It was a difficult job for me to give him a smile but I did, He needed it. No hate would ever make me forget that.

Lucy came with a tray of tea. She dropped it on the table and left us. The odd glow in her eyes made me wary. For a second, I believed we were being poisoned.

That's how paranoid I could be.

I took my cup and spoke,

"You called me here for a reason I suppose."

"Yes." He replied, taking a sip of the tongue scalding liquid, " It's about the inheritance I plan to leave on to Maisy."

This was good. Now I could mention Maisy's dumb idea.

"Yes... About that..." I began unsure of how I was going to tell him that Maisy didn't want the inheritance. In her words, she would rather be trapped with him than pay for her freedom.

"Oh please, Don't tell me you don't need the money."

"I'm sorry but..."

"I know you can't forgive me, Spencer. I've caused you a lot of pain but trust me I want to make amends. If I don't have enough time to make up for my stupid mistakes. The least I can do is let her leave a good life."

He then dropped the cup of steaming tea and took my hands,

"So I'm begging you, Spencer. Don't take this away from me."

I wasn't the emotional time but he was on the brink of tears. He truly wanted to make amends but this wasn't what I wanted, It was what Maisy wanted. It just hurt that it had to be coming from me.

"I understand Mr Quinn..."

"Don't call me that." He pleaded, "I understand it doesn't sit well with you but if you're okay with it. I'd like it very much if you call me father."

My face wrinkled just hearing him spew those powerful words like they were just a title. That title meant a lot and I would abuse that word. I didn't disagree, I just kept mute when he said when needed to be said.

"I just wanted to say. As much as I admire your will to try and make amends. You have to understand that Maisy believes she can't handle that much— privilege."

It was a tongue twister but I think I nailed it. That way, he wouldn't think Maisy wanted nothing to do with him.

"Oh! I thought so. The estate is quite huge to be managed alone so I thought I'd split it between Maisy and her cousin."

"I'm sorry, What!" I blurted.

Like on cue, Lucy returned with bread in her hands this time and that fake smile plastered to her face. I had a feeling she had a hand on this, I wasn't against her but she was just an Indentured daughter. Her freedom was more than any gift in this world.

She looked and acted a lot like her conniving father, Katherine's adopted brother. The schemer that once wanted the Quinn estate for himself. It wasn't like me to judge people based on how their parents were but I was in Nodith and here the apples don't fall far from the tree.

CHAPTER 25

Maisy

I sat alone in the courtyard-almost alone if you count the maid assigned for me. I ignored the fact that I wasn't a free bird and gave my attention to Ria. I had instructed that she be brought to me even if I didn't have the will to ride her.

We shared this connection and just watching her graze made me think of mother. It was the last moment I had of her. The wind and the silence, It was perfect but apparently it wouldn't last for long. Someone coughed to inform me of their presence and even when I ignored them, they didn't give him up.

"I see you're still upset." The priest acknowledged taking a seat close to me. He signaled the maid to leave us be. The maid bowed in respect of the Cleric and disappeared. Not far enough, so she could still attend to me when needed.

"I have something to tell you."

"I don't want to listen to anything you have to say. Even if you are a man of God, I know you have in on this."

The man snickered and licked his lower lips before speaking,

"Truthfully, I play a small role here. Do you know what that is? Not stopping this facade."

"Then stop it."

"I might be of influence but I am not God."

"So why are you here? To make me feel better?" I quizzed.

"To give you this." He reached his hand into his breast pocket and pulled out a small black book.

That was a red light. When someone brings a suspicious black book, you question everything.

"What exactly is that?" I quizzed, threading with caution.

"This... is your sister's journal."

"What!" I exclaimed, snatching the book from his hands. I instantly scrolled through it. It was inked.

"Where did you get this?" I demanded.

"Tatia handed it a week before she took her life." He replied.

I noticed his eyes were teary. The sadness was there. I looked back at the journal then asked.

"Why are you giving me this?"

"If you want to survive a Clarke, You need to know the stories."

The way he said those words implied he knows what Tatia went through before she was driven to take her own life.

The priest took a sigh and got to his feet.

"It was nice meeting you Maisy."

I looked up and said,

"Thank you."

I didn't know if he was doing this for selfish reasons and honestly, I didn't care. This was something I could use to know Tatia. It was something.

When the priest took.his leave, I buried my eyes into the book. It instantly caught my attention.

"Today, I know I'm not alone or maybe I am. I can't tell grandfather what I see. It's torture to know who will die next."

Did Tatia have those weird voices in her head? We were twins so It wouldn't be far off. I scrolled to the next page.

"I don't love him. Why would grandfather do this to me? The Clarkes took my family away and now they want me."

That part was unsettling. I remembered Father telling me grandfather had betrothed mother to Eric's father, Did he do the same to Tatia? The thought of that made me sick to the stomach. It waa repulsing how he believed he had total control over how people's life should go. I flipped to the next page angrily.

"There's something wrong with Eric. I don't think we share a connection. I can't keep holding on."

The last part sent me to the brink of tears. Tatia begged for help but she never got it. She was surrounded by selfish and manipulative men who only wanted their way. Grandfather wasn't giving me the entire properties to amend his most. It was the guilt. He was a murderer!

Eric

Anthony rushed into my study looking ruffled and disturbed.

"Are you okay?" I quizzed, dropping the quill in my hands.

"No, and neither will any of us."

"What happened?"

"The chimera attacked a pack member during watch hours."

I sucked in air.

No... This was bad.

"Do you think Reece knows already?"

"Of course he does. He has eyes everywhere."

I could already guess what he would do. Maisy was in danger. Reece treated each member like his own son. I got goosebumps remembering Maisy was in the open garden with nobody but a human maid to protect her. I immediately called for a guard and instructed him to get Maisy. He dispatched immediately.

"Is he dead anyway?"

"Not yet. The chimera's venom hasn't killed him yet."

I could picture Reece angry at the world. Could that mean the Chimera was closer? The strange thing was, we were never attacked by the monster on our return. If it wanted Maisy, It had the opportunity to do that then but... It didn't. Something didn't seem right.

The guards hadn't returned minutes after I sent him and I was beginning to get anxious.

"Where is he!" I snarled, my wolf gaining temporary control.

"You need to calm down." Anthony cautioned.

The guards returned soon after with Maisy. She looked angry... And beautiful.

"You're safe," I muttered and tried to enclose her in my arms.

"What are you doing?" She resisted.

I took a step back remembering we were not the power couple.

"Sorry I just wanted to be sure you were safe."

"Well, I'm not." She solemnly replied, looking like an angel even if untold horrors resided on her tongue," I mean I'm living with a monster himself. What else could be dangerous?"

I frowned,

"I'm sorry Maisy. I'm only looking out for you."

"I know honey. Is that all? You're just looking out for me or is it some dark secret you're keeping yourself."

"What do you mean Maisy? You're always picking petty fights with me. Sometimes I wonder what goes on in your mind."

"You're such a good liar. It all comes out so effortlessly."

She turned to leave. My heart could bear the heartbreak so I held her back.

"I know I lied Maisy but I want you to know that I truly loved you."

She pulled me even closer, so close that I could see my reflection in her bright brown orbs.

"Really?" She slurred, "Was that before or after you ruined my life."

She broke free from my hold but stopped one more time.

"Ah.. I forgot to say this, I won't be leaving you any of my inheritance even if you keep me tied to you for eternity."

"You do know that's bad for both of us." I retorted, hoping the fear of spending her life with a terrible man like me would somehow make her change her mind.

"I know it won't but I won't let you win." She sent back.

I huffed, "you need to stop this... What has gotten into you?"

"The truth." She replied.

I stood there confused. The truth? These were pieces I couldn't put together by myself but then she waved a black book in my face.

Tatia's journal.

***

Unknown

I scampered the pathway like I was being followed. One could never be too safe. The bucket of rotting meat made me gag but It was for love.

I would never let her suffer.

I arrived at a wide glade and the blood-stained earth informed me this was my stop. I had the feeling I was being stalked so I did what I did each night.

I dumped the meat on the ground and waited for it to catch the scent. It saw the red meat and poked its head out of the shadows, the head of a lion with a dark mane that looked like it was covered in blood, the body, and hooves of a horse, and a serpentine tail. It immediately lunged for the treat on the ground, crunching away. I bent down and stroked its mane. It resisted but it would never hurt me. My daughter would never hurt me.

"You did well today but That's not all the Clarkes will face. There is something that matters to him and I want it!"

CHAPTER 26

Eric

Where did she get Tatia's journal from?

Anthony shared the same surprised look as me. He was the one to hide everything that reminded me of her.

"Where did you get that?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter now." She retorted, holding unto the book like I could snatch it at any moment.

"Do you believe what was written there?"

"Why won't I? These are words from her heart."

" When I met Tatia, I despised her but trust me we grew into love."

She didn't reply. She just looked at me in disgust.

"I know your love Eric but let me tell you this. I won't be giving you my inheritance if I even have one."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I rejected my grandfather's pity gift. He also deserves to suffer. Men like you think you can always have your way..."

"Sometimes I do Maisy but trust me if I don't get that inheritance, Bad things are going to happen."

"I don't care. Overtax your people but just stay away from me."

She turned to leave but I held her back.

"Would you really do this to me?"

"If you think I care one bit about you, You've got something else coming." She retorted.

The hate in her eyes, they were real. I didn't want this. It felt like fate was pushing us apart despite how much I believed we were destined to be.

Anthony sensed our conversation was deviating to something heated and excused himself along with the guard.

The door was shut on the way out.

"I should go," Maisy said as she fought to free herself from my grip.

"No!" I snapped back like a hungry wolf and led her to a chair. I forced her to sit then continued trying to convince her to change her mind about her decision to reject her inheritance. To be fair, A greater part of our conversation was about what she really thought of me.

"I know you're angry and broken Maisy and it's all my fault."

"Wow! You must replay take pride in that. For your information, I'm not hurt. I've lost hope in you."

I was completely lost. My mother had said those words to father numerous times. His affairs broke mom beyond repair. I was beyond shocked hearing those same words from Maisy.

"I'm not my father!" I blurted out, digging my fingers into Maisy's shoulders until I was sure they bled.

"Let me go!" She screamed on top of her lungs. She kicked me off her and sprinted for the door.

"Wait Maisy, I'm sorry." I pleaded, trying to comprehend what just happened.

"You are sick!" She said and jumped out of the room.

I didn't go after her. I remained on the cold marble ground. The hole in my heart deeper than the pain.

I never wanted to be like my father but apparently, his shadow never left me. I'd tried to escape it so many times but it was always there. Even I could not escape the allure of a Clarke.

***

Maisy

Getting outside, I bumped into Sara. She looked guilty. I could tell she had been eavesdropping.

Seeing she had obviously been gotten out, She said to me.

"I couldn't help but overhear what was going on. Did you fight?"

I knew melodrama when I saw one and this was no different.

"So?"

"Did you really mean the part where you said you won't give him your inheritance."

That was it. I couldn't keep playing her games anymore.

I flared back,

"What exactly do you want to know? Can you stop beating around the bush?"

She turned white, a bit afraid and taken aback by my reaction.

"Forgive me for being concerned. Don't you think that's a stupid idea? You'll be trapped with a man you don't love."

"Is that really why?" I mocked knowing she was obsessed with Eric.

"Because if that animal in there craves you," I Said on top of my voice so Eric could hear me from within the room, "Enjoy it while it lasts."

Sara opened her mouth to obviously deny her involvement with Eric but I clapped her down and left.

I went to the stables. It was somewhere away from Eric and his problems. Ria was my companion and a good friend. Even if she wasn't human She was Abe listener and even if I sounded like a maniac in need of help, She sometimes gave me the perfect solution to my problems.

Ria neighed sighting me from afar off. She was bridled but that didn't stop her from expressing how happy she was to see me.

"How are you doing baby?" I cooed as I brushed through her chestnut fur. It was warm and moist from touch, A perfect stress reliever.

"Sorry I couldn't visit. Had a lot on my mind lately."

I freed her from her restraints and led her to the open field. Now all I had to do was let the race get to me and I'd pour out all my pain in hopes that they would disappear.

"Hey." Conrad waved at me.

God! I wasn't expecting anyone and definitely not another Clarke.

"It's you. Nice to see you again." I pretended to be surprised. I had to remain positive that he would state his business and leave me alone.

"You ride horses?" He quizzed.

God! He was beating around the bush.

"Obviously," I replied, slurring my words so he wouldn't miss the sarcasm.

"I also saw you talking to your horse."

I flushed but wait... Was he stalking me?

"How exactly did you know this?"

"I was at the stables earlier. What troubles are you having exactly?"

"None of your concern." I sharply retorted while keeping an innocent smile, earning the title of bitch.

"I don't mean to be a bother but I also ride horses. I have one called Midnight, A mystic like yours." He instantly changed the subject.

I gasped unintentionally,

"How did you know?"

I hadn't told anyone and Ria wasn't in the habit of showing the world just how special she was.

"Midnight fancies your horse or should I say unicorn." He winked at me.

"Are we going to talk about horses with horns or are you going to really get to the point as to why you are here?"

"You need to pipe down. My brother has really overdone himself this time."

"What do you mean by this time... You know what? Forget it."

My mood had been killed yet again and I was in no mood to talk to anyone. I just wanted to be alone but that was too much to ask for.

"Thanks for your time Conrad but I don't think you can help me."

I retreated back to the stables to return Ria.

"Wait!" He chased after me, setting his hands firmly on the still burning injury that was inflicted on me earlier. A sharp pain shot through me and I was sure the next thing that would happen was he would receive a resounding slap but when I turned, No one was there.

In fact, everything was different. The beautiful green grass was left bare in a caked earth. My eyes continued searching the earth, I felt like it was going to lead me to something. I traced blood and it sent my heart racing. Was this real? My eyes continued following the blood until It all went black.

I blinked, holding my pulsing head.

"What happened?" I asked no one in particular.

"You lost your balance. Are you okay?"

Conrad was worried. Did I pass out? I examined where I was. There was grass again. That meant it was just a dream.

"Yes. I think so. How long was I out?"

"Minutes." He replied.

I got to my feet and wiped the tears forming in my eyes. When they cleared, I got a good look at Conrad.

"What the hell!" I gaped and pushed him off me.

My eyes couldn't stray from the horror on his right shoulder.

It squawked at me. I exchanged looks with Conrad. He was confused. I sensed that he was oblivious to the giant black bird on his shoulder.

"Do you see it?" I asked.

"What?" He answered, peering over his shoulder.

He couldn't see it. Then why could I see a Raven on him?

I wasn't a fan of birds and especially not birds that stood for nothing good. It turned from bad to worse when that mysterious whisper spilled into my ear,

"There is still time."

CHAPTER 27

Spencer

Late in the evening, I made up my mind to leave for the castle. It was a mental struggle leaving Maisy to fend for herself there. Mr Quinn was very convincing so I decided to stay until after dinner. I decided to get to know Lucy better.

At that time, She was just staring outside watching the sunset. She didn't talk much and especially to me.

I walked up to her and said,

"What are you doing?"

It was the perfect conversation starter. Quinn was asleep which meant he wouldn't be here to cut into our would be an intense discussion.

"Nothing." She replied, avoiding eye contact.

There was something about her I couldn't quite place. A gut feeling that she was bad luck.

"I don't mean to be rude but what happened to your father?" I quizzed.

Her face turned white, ghost white. She appeared to be afraid and agitated. A lump formed in my throat. I could tell whatever happened to him wasn't good. For a moment, I thought she was going to burst into tears and tell me a sad story that would make me feel like the devil himself.

"But..."

"He was murdered." She cut in.

"That's sad..."

"I wouldn't say he didn't deserve it." She continued, "And I know what you're doing. You think I don't deserve your daughter's inheritance. I'm a freeload right. Just an indentured who got lucky."

That hit me more than I would ever know. Silas was indentured before Quinn bought his freedom. She was a freeborn.

"Why would you think that?"

"I'm not the one who's saying it. It's you."

"I literally said nothing."

"You don't have to say it out loud. I'm not like my father. I've heard more than enough stories to know he wasn't the Father any child would want."

It was almost like she could read my mind. I didn't think of her as evil. I was just concerned.

"I'm sorry to hear about your father. If you want to talk about it..."

"I can do it myself." She retorted sharply before storming to the kitchen.

I could hear her sobbing inside. I figured it was better to leave her to herself. She apparently hadn't gotten over it and my presence would only make it worse. I guess my suspicions were all for nothing but still who killed him? He was a terrible person and had many enemies but Murder was severe even for a man like him.

Quinn eventually roused and joined me. Lucy remained in the kitchen cooking.

The mystery behind Silas' murder kept me unease so I decided to get the whole juice from Quinn.

"I had a talk with Lucy. She said something about Silas being murdered."

"She told you?"

"Yes. Did you find out why he was murdered?"

"I'm still surprised she remembers. She was just a little girl. About his murder, He was daggered in his sleep. The dagger belonged to the rebel group, paladins I believe."

"Paladins?"

The famed revolution only dealt with vanquishing all supernaturals. They wouldn't kill Silas if he was human. He had to have been a supernatural and a dangerous one. I knew the sect but I doubted Lucy knew.

***

Maisy

Ignoring the horrible vision I saw, I escaped to my room. It was away from humanity. It was almost like I was running mad. The voices returned with a firing intensity. It felt like a thousand voices telling you what to do.

"Stop! Stop!" I begged, Collapsing on the floor and curling up to a ball.

It got so worse that I suspected my ears were starting to bleed then it suddenly stopped. The pain disappeared and I felt instant relief. I remained on the cold floor trying to get a hang of myself. I was breathless and my ear rang painfully.

The voices... They had disappeared for a long time. I wasn't being haunted by Tatia anymore. It began afresh after my encounter with Conrad. A crow was a bad omen, Signifying sickness and death. If what I saw was a revelation or something, That would mean Conrad was going to die.

A knock on the door interrupted my thoughts. I got up and rushed to the door before it was opened. No one could see me in this state. I've had enough drama for one day.

I opened the door halfway so whoever was outside would only see a small portion of my face.

"What are you doing here?" I stiffened seeing Eric.

He stumbled making me guess he was drunk.

"Are you drunk?" I quizzed, trying to act concerned.

"Can we talk?" He slurred.

"Go away." I retorted and shut the door as quick as I could.

Eric had anticipated my move and put his hand in before the big bang.

That had to hurt.

"Are you okay?" I blurted.

"Yes, but Can we talk?"

I rolled my eyes and reopened the door.

"I don't want to hear it."

"Okay... But just give me three minutes."

"What! I don't even want to be near you..."

"Please?"

His eyes looked so innocent, seductive and enticing. Who could resist that?

"Two minutes," I said after a quick thought and let him in.

"So what do you want to talk about?" I quizzed taking a seat on the edge of the bed.

He was beside me and I could tell he was staring but I was so not going to let that bother me even if it did.

"I... came here to talk."

"I know that already Eric. Just get to the point. Your time is running out."

"Okay." He took a deep and slow breath before saying, "I love you Maisy."

The look in my face said it all. I couldn't breathe. I didn't like this effect one bit.

"You've said that a million times Eric. Why should I believe you? Is that what you came to tell me? Pathetic."

I got to my feet, headed to the door, opened it and begged him to get out.

"Maisy why do you keep hurting me. I came here drunk just to tell you how I feel. I can't take it when you keep hating me. It makes me bleed."

This part was really hilarious. He said I was the one causing him pain. This narcissistic son of a god was blaming me for the pain he caused me. I was going to give it to him hot and raw.

"Well, Hopefully, you'll die from your bleeds. How dare you blame me for this! It's you, Eric! It was always you." I retorted, unconsciously walking up to him in my mad rage.

I stopped when I noticed how close we were. I would see my eyes in his star-like eyes, A perfect hue of golden.

"I'm sorry Maisy. I had no intention of hurting you but If you're going to be safe. You had to be far away from me."

"Like I'll fall for that. You must think I'm really a blonde to fall your dumb antics. I'm sure Sara wouldn't object to your lies."

"Maisy, I did marry you for your inheritance but you've been destined to be mine."

Possessive tendencies, Could this get any worse?

"I know we share no stories but Maisy, Believe me when I say I love you." His eyes were heavy, almost like they would shatter if I said the words I needed to say.

I couldn't give me to his antics I didn't want to be broken again and again.

"That's too bad Eric. Whatever I felt for you is gone. Whatever is left is my hate."

It took a lot to say that and it was even more difficult keeping a straight face while doing it. I saw teardrops escape his eyes. He was hurt, This couldn't be drama. It made me feel terrible but I shook it off, Eric deserved worse.

I watched him clear his eyes and approach me. His eyes were glazed, the bright blue in them now replaced by a stunning steel blue. They looked cold.

"What are you doing?" I breathed and tried to get away from him. My legs failed me and he reached me. His hands caressed my fingers and I felt so weak that the knob slipped away from my hands. Eric shut the door and fixated his attention all on me.

"I can tell you're lying Maisy."

"Really?" I retorted, putting on a brave face. The effect of his touch with overwhelming but I could survive. " You seem to be living in your built-up fairytale Eric."

"There is only one way to prove that now isn't there?"

"What do you mean?" My voice wavered, it was difficult breathing being so close to drugs.

His lips brushed mine. Not innocently, like a tease but hot, fiery and demanding.

I tried pulling away before I lost myself but I couldn't seem to. Even my body wanted to sin.

In this fiery moment of pure passion, I couldn't think straight.

"Stop me if you hate me Maisy." He whispered slowly.

To be truthful, All I could hear was his voice, empty words.

I wanted to do it so badly. To push me away and prove to him there was nothing left but He was a mistake so beautiful I couldn't refuse. A temptation I desired. He was sin.

CHAPTER 28

Eric

The sun was the only light strong enough to wake me. Not when I was sleeping close to Maisy. Nothing happened between us last night since I was still dressed but what mattered most was I meant a lot to Maisy.

The shouts of ecstasy outside got me off the bed. Throwing away the blinds, I saw villagers dancing their hearts away to the seductive beats of drums. What exactly was happening? Then it hit me.

The night of the dead.

It came with a speech. The mandatory need to visit our deceased graves and most especially the King's grave.

I turned back to Maisy. She was asleep and looking so damn beautiful. I joined her on the bed and stroked her frizzly hair.

"This shows how much you love me Maisy. It's going to hurt that I'd have to break it again if I can't get the money. I love you."

I kissed her on her forehead and tucked her in before leaving.

"Reece came with a letter." My brother, Anthony said immediately I entered the Royal court.

"You are an expert in ruining my day brother." I teased

"I couldn't help it. My day was ruined twice."

"What's that supposed to mean? Did Reece break your bones before delivering his message?"

"No. I actually found out who my wife's whore is."

"And?" I pushed.

"Our little brother Conrad."

I wouldn't say I was surprised. It was just like him but seeing how calm and collected Anthony looked was what bothered me.

"What do you intend to do?"

"Nothing."

"Are you serious?"

"Dead serious. I never loved Emilia. She was just forced on me by father. The same man we have to bring good tidings to today."

"So you're just going to leave her to cheat with Conrad who you know is clearly using her to get to you."

"Well, She just has to find that on her own. I'll be getting a divorce soon anyway."

"I don't think so. Maisy still doesn't trust me." I said with a sheepish smile.

"I don't think this is the time for such jokes. The king of Elyria has stopped with his threats. Spies have reported he's plotting another war. I know this is a lot coming from me but you have to make second plans."

"I know Anthony. I just don't want to hurt Maisy again." I revealed.

"Well, With what I have in mind, You're going to breaking her a lot."

"What's that?"

"I overheard Sara and Lucy's small talk. Lucy might be getting half of the Quinn inheritance."

"No. Anthony this is coming from you. I can't do that."

"So you'll rather watch everyone die and the survivors taking as slaves because of Love? Let me remind you yet again brother. I sacrificed my happiness for this family. It's something you have to do."

God, I hated this. Always having to put others before myself.

"Do you think she'll accept my proposal? If that happens to be my last resort."

"Of course. A pardoned who has an opportunity to put her name in history. She'll take whatever offer you have to give, Even being your consort."

***

Maisy

I couldn't take what happened between Eric and me off my mind. I had actually made it open to him that I still cared but what could I do? His touch was sweet poisons, Deadly and irresistible.

The door slightly opened and I pretended to be asleep just in case it was Eric. I couldn't face him right now.

"Maisy?" My father called out.

"Dad!" I got up to hug him.

He was early and dressed funny. His face was masked in white powder and he was dressed in old black rags.

"Why..."

"Noctem mortuorum." He filled me in.

"Night of the dead?"

"Yes. You should get dressed. Your grandfather insists the Royal family join him for the feast tonight."

"Ok. Is it done?" I inquired.

"Things didn't go as planned but you won't be the sole heir of the properties."

"What do you mean?"

"Lucy will be taking half of the inheritance and if you stand your ground, Eric will have no choice but to go for Lucy."

That saddened me. Eric and Lucy? A part of me couldn't comprehend Eric doing that but who was I kidding? He had told me he would still choose the kingdom over me any day. Plus, I didn't want father to suspect I was going back to trouble. It just wouldn't sit well.

"Do you think Lucy will agree to any of that? She does know we are married."

"Are you okay?" Father asked concerned.

"Yes. You should go. I'll get dressed."

"Ok."

Father left and the maids dropped in. Two in number. One had a black gown designed to impress. The silk dress was an intricate and delicate sculpture of threads. It looked like cobwebs bejeweled with watery like stones that shone even in dim room. The other had white paint similar to that father had on.

I got undressed and faced the mirror. The maids gathered up the dress and helped me wriggle into it while the other began applying the paint so I decided to ask some questions. Today's celebration was new to me.

"Why exactly are we celebrating today?"

"It's been celebrated even before our birth. From the stories handed over, We know it's a day the spirits commune with the living."

I snickered,

"Has that been proven true?"

"I've never experienced it but my Aunt claimed to have seen her late husband during this celebration."

I had a weak belief in ghosts. I had seen Tatia and I was sure of it. If this day could strengthen her connection to the mortal realm. I was sure she was going to contact me, Maybe telling me why I needed to run.

"All done." The maid said, snapping me from my deep thought.

I gazed at the mirror to see me. I was never the beauty queen. I never dressed to impress but this was me, The girl in the mirror.

I straightened up, smoothed the frock neatly into place, and performed a clumsy pirouette followed by an impish curtsy imagining Nobles feasting their eyes on me.

A maid insisted the very image of a painting depicting a sorceress, lady Gallagher, one hanging in the gallery rumored to have punished men for disagreeing with her.

If only I had that power.

***

Tatia

The nightmarish desolate grounds called the passing was nothing but Hell.

With nothing but my last pass, The king's crown, A souvenir Richard handed to me to contact the living.

My legs ached. It was a Herculean task walking in trappings, The chains kept my spirit from returning.

To think I would be ascending in weeks.

I stopped and looked high to the magistrate. A flaming skeleton who looked down at me menacingly.

"What do You seek?"

"A visit to the mundane realm," I replied.

"Nature of Death?"

"Murder."

Saying that was tough. Remembering being gutted with a knife by someone I couldn't remember was bad enough. The others said my memories would return once I ascend but I couldn't do that now. My sister and Eric were in danger. Their hourglasses, Their happily ever after was in compromise and I had to fix that.

"Your pay?"

I raised up the crown and his bony fingers grasped them. I watched him toss it to the other side. He picked up a bottle of pure white light and handed them to me.

"Happy Noctem mortuorum."

I couldn't tell if he was smiling or just being evil. He didn't matter. He didn't have a face. I gave him a faint smile and opened the bottle...

CHAPTER 29

Maisy

The carriage ride to grandfathers was an awkward one, Considering I ended up with Sara, Emilia, and Anthony. It was either that or I ended up with Eric.

I turned behind me to have a peek at the carriage behind ours. It was too dark to see it but my mind wouldn't be at ease. I couldn't help but wonder what was happening in there.

Considering their bad blood, I wouldn't rule out attempted murder.

"You look worried. Are you okay?" Anthony asked.

I had never had a conversation with him so It was no surprise I turned beet red.

"I'm fine."

His gaze lingered on me.

"If you're worried about my brother, You don't have to. He can take care of himself."

Shallow. They were all shallow. Here I was worried about my father's being, mental well being to be precise and all he would pin my worry on was Eric. Pathetic!

"I don't think so." I briefly muttered before turning quiet.

"Just leave her alone Anthony. The rich don't mingle with the paupers." Anthony's spiteful wife incited, giving me a dirty look.

I understood what she meant. I was going to be filthy rich when my grandfather eventually kicks the bucket.

"Maybe. At least I'll actually get to keep my inheritance. The smart move you didn't make." I gloated, satisfied at her discomfort.

"You're right. But... Is Lucy safe?"

"I don't know her. Neither do I care. If she makes a stupid decision to trap herself in a family like this one. It's her choice."

"What a coincidence! Sounds like what Tatia would have said. Guess cruelty hasn't left the bloodline."

I clenched my fist, fighting every tremor that wanted to get at her just there.

She wasn't worth it.

I brought out Tatia's journal and resumed reading, Ignoring the world around me.

Emilia smirked, "Looks like you're taking lessons from the dead."

Something told me she just wanted to get me to hit her. If that was the case, She was definitely hitting the brick wall.

"Of course..." I replied just as sarcastic.

"...If I don't want to end up like her. I should know every stupid move."

"She's not wrong." Sara teased her sister.

She then faced me,

"Don't take it personal. She just gets grumpy when her schedule gets messed up."

All this while, Anthony had remained silent but the mention of 'schedule' got him talking.

"What schedule Emilia?"

"Why do you care?"

"Because we are married."

"Since when did you see that role as serious?"

Marital issues? Seems like this family was cursed.

The carriage came to a halt and the rider informed us we had arrived at our destination. The red curtain shielding us from the outside world opened, giving me a view of the family Manor. It was considerably dark and the only source of light was the candles compassed around the building.

A maid came to lead the way. The body with me followed the girl as eager as early birds. I guessed this was only for the reputation, One they didn't have. At least, Not one to be proud of.

I threaded the path slowly, gawking the splendor of what was in front of me.

It was impossible to miss. An overlay of color, It depicted beauty with brains, The sister I never had.

All I could mutter was,

"Tatia."

***

Eric

Seated with a man that despised you for a span that felt like forever. I was more than elated to get out when the carriage stopped. At the same time, I knew where I was going was only going to bring back memories. Memories. I so wanted to forget.

From the distance, I caught the view of one of Tatia's mural. It was circled in candlelight which brought out the colors in a unique way.

God...

"Dale told me you made that," Spencer said.

I tilted to him. Just to be sure he was actually talking to me. I felt weak to the knees knowing he was actually referring to me.

"Yes." I stuttered, shocked.

"What was she like?" He asked.

This definitely wasn't my greatest strength. Describing someone who was now a vague existence in my memory.

"She was a good person," I replied.

It was an understatement. Tatia was an angel. Someone who understood anyone. She was loved by all but if I was ever going to get over her death, I had to let go of the basics.

"Well if that's all you have to say about her. I don't think you knew or loved her like you claimed."

"Maybe." I retorted, walking faster to the building in hopes to end this conversation before it escalated.

It was a thing notable to my family. Cursed with lycanthropy, Jinxed with unhappy marriages and the inevitable sacrifices. It was who we were. It would never change so if Maisy deserved any happiness at all, It was definitely not with me.

Spencer got the message I passed in his own way and finally let me be.

We were approached by Mr. Quinn who was as always been led on to us by Lucy, The new pawn in the Clarke family games.

"It's nice to see the Royal family honored my invitation."

"It's our pleasure."

Mr Quinn noticed my eyes was on the painting and said,

"I hope it doesn't disturb you. It's just that it's noctem mortuorem. There is a chance she might appear, I just wanted her to be on everyone coming here mind."

"It's okay. I don't mind." I lied.

Spencer got in before me and Dale turned back to have a serious conversation.

"Are you serious about the divorce?" He asked.

I fixed my attention on Lucy who acted like she barely existed before answering.

"It's for her own good. The chimera is back and I can't risk her life." I disclosed.

Dale caressed his chin, whispering to himself before returning to our conversation.

"What do you think that abomination needs a whisperer for?"

I wished I had an answer for that. It needed that specie for something. If not, It wouldn't go into hiding all these months. I clenched my fist remembering the pain that beast brought me. The unforgettable suffering. Now everyone thought Tatia committed suicide on our wedding day but the truth was far sinister than that.

***

Three months ago

I awoke to find myself numb, The dead grass poking into my back, like tiny needles. I opened my eyes and gasped in a breath, coughing out dry blood. The blood cloth in my throat restricted my breathing.

My eyes adjusted to the darkness and my sight got clearer.

"Eric?" I heard her call my name.

I followed the voice and found Tatia rested under a tree.

Her dress was painted crimson and she looked pale.

"Are you alright?"I quizzed, limping towards her.

She obviously was not. She had a deep cut at her abdomen region and was bleeding badly. Through it all, She managed to keep her smile.

"Why aren't you healing? Ask the spirits for favors." I pleaded, holding her hands.

"They won't help. I haven't fulfilled my end of the bargain." She giggled, her face wrinkled in pain.

"You can't die on me Tatia."

"Fate can't be changed, Eric."

"Wait... What! Don't tell me you..." I trailed off unable to finish my sentence. I felt a lump grow in my throat as I imagined my worst fears becoming reality.

"...They've told me, Eric." She whimpered, now shaking as she succumbed to her wounds.

"They want you to find her Eric."

"Who? I quizzed.

"My sister."

"What sister?"

"I wish I had enough time. Find Maisy. That's all I know."

There was an awkward pause between us. The tension in the air was a mix of pain, Love and fear, Fear of the unknown.

"Protect her Eric. Promise me you will." She made me swear.

"I promise," I muttered at the moment, and with her last breath, Tatia uttered her parting words.

"I love you, Eric."

CHAPTER 30

Maisy

"Mr Quinn has really outdone himself this time," Emilia said to Sara as they admired the decor of the hall.

I set my eyes on the swinging chandeliers in an effort to ignore the stares of the servants. Judging by the bulging eyes which obviously indicated shock, I was certain they were the household helpers who were surprised to see a living replica to the late heiress. It could be that... Or the fancy dress I was made to wear. Still, I wasn't comfortable with it.

The royals abandoned me before I could even notice and I watched them join a group of elite women. It was a basic instinct to join them but considering how vain our conversation was going to be, I knew I had to pass.

I drifted my attention to watching other people be happy or pretend to be. Even my father seemed to be having a conversation with this certain boy.

Look who doesn't have a social life.

Considering I grew up in a conservative environment, It wasn't that far to guess why I was so antisocial.

...or jumped at a marriage in a week.

"Hey..." Conrad jumped right at me, Interrupting my mental report.

"Hi."

"How are you faring? Heard you're getting divorced soon."

"Who told you that?"

"Word spreads fast. You should know by now that the walls have ears."

"Yes. This place is definitely disturbing."

So disturbing that everyone was going to watch the Regent-Soon to be Prince marry for the third time.

I gave a quick glance at Lucy. My cousin who was next in line where we had failed. She was trolleying my grandfather right my way. I wondered if She would be okay with it.

"If you're thinking it's not okay for Eric to remarry, I'll tell you this. Our father married five times before settling down with the late Queen and I'm not adding his mistresses. So...It it's tradition." Conrad filled me in before taking his leave right before my grandfather walked in on us.

"How are you doing tonight darling?" My grandfather says, giving a glare to Conrad at the same time.

"Fine."

"Considering all the things going on in your life, You're definitely putting a brave front. Reminds me of Tatia."

This made my toes curl. Yep, I was tired of being compared to Tatia. Everyone here wasn't ready to let go of her memories. Father was right. After the divorce, I had to leave Nodith.

"When you're in the wrong place. It doesn't hurt that much."

Grandfather turned to Lucy and asked her to excuse us. She bowed in respect and left us.

"Maisy," He said holding my hand, "You are home and I know you might not understand it now but Nodith is home."

Somehow I had this suggestive premonition he wasn't hinting on Eric.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'm not supposed to tell you this... But I have to tell you about the women of our family."

Women of our family?

I didn't know if It was my curious nature or the stillness that overwhelmed me but I actually have him my attention.

***

Eric

Mingling with masks could be tiring sometimes but it was a way to get the blank thoughts out. I fixed my attention on Maisy. She was listening with rapt attention to her father. My guts wrenched knowing her time here would soon be up.

I gulped down a goblet of fine wine. The sting in my throat made me feel like a man again even if I was shattering on the inside.

Anthony approached me walking hand in hand with Lucy. He wasn't going to give me the time to think. He never did.

War is coming and you need time to think?

I hated the inner voice. I hated my role but It was something I just had to do with a smile. I had been taught that since childhood. Smile and everyone thinks you know what you're doing.

Brother," Anthony coughed, gaining my attention, "Lucy wants to hear what you have to say to her."

God! He didn't even break the iceberg. The hard job was always left to me. Heartless.

Having said that, He abandoned me with Lucy.

"Lucy... I..." I stuttered, unable to find the right words.

I needed to make sense but I knew better than to believe she'd just take anything I threw at her.

"Sara has filled me in Your Majesty." She informed, her eyes faced down.

"What... Well..."

"Do I accept?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"I am. I'm pretty sure Tatia would have wanted this and I wouldn't want this kingdom to go down in flames."

Excitement wasn't quite what I felt at that moment. It was actually a relief. I could almost burst out laughing at the world.

"I never expected this conversation to be this easy," I confessed.

Lucy gave a nervous smile and said,

"This is for everyone's good and if I can give a helping hand, I will."

"What can I say? This is just so good to hear from you true."

"Thank you works." She replied.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. So... I was wondering about you and Maisy... Are you going to let her go this easy?"

"It's the right thing to do. If I care about her at all, I have to let her go."

"Is that what Tatia would want?"

"I don't know."

Tears welled up in my eyes remembering Tatia's last night alive. I couldn't protect her then but this version of her could be protected but definitely not by me.

"You're sad."

"No I'm not."

"Is this about Tatia? It's noctem mortuorem after all."

"Please stop!" I warned. It was hard to muster the words and an even greater task to keep calm.

Conceal...

"I know it's been months but you're allowed to care." She said.

"I've moved on," I muttered.

"You literally want to cry."

She then moved closer to me and said,

"I was never close to Tatia but you were and I can't imagine the pain you're going through right now but it's okay to show them. It's okay to cry."

Those words were the last straw. The waterworks were coming full force and there was no stopping them.

I walked out of our conversation and headed outside.

As I raced out, Flashes of my happy times with Tatia filled my blurry eyes.

Nobody compared to her, Not even Maisy. It was difficult trying to move on. Pretending to forget it all.

My tears were the only thing that kept my spirit alive when it was burning in pain. The pain could not be extinguished but they made me live.

It is my tears that keep my soul alive in the furnace of this pain. They cannot extinguish what has been, yet only carry me forward until a time comes when that seating despair would die. So maybe Lucy was right. It was okay to cry. It was a thing of pride.

So I let it out, All of it.

***

Maisy

The secrets Grandfather told me was enough for me to make me a living dead. Frankly, I wasn't in control of my legs as they strode to where they pleased.

"The women in our family have been blessed by the gods to see the dead. Have you been seeing Tatia lately?"

His words resonated deep inside me.

Small pieces of the past came together. How I had these tremors being close to the sick. Those ones who never made it. I always knew.

The painful part was Mother. I knew she wasn't going to make it. If I knew, It meant she knew too. She knew she was going to die but kept it from me. How could one live so happy knowing your time in this world was over?

That mere thought brought tears to my eyes.

"Are you okay?" A voice asked.

That voice pulled me back to reality. I faced the speaker which turned out to be Conrad.

"I don't know." I disclosed.

He walked up to me and said,

"Are you crying?"

"Maybe."

"Do you maybe want a shoulder to cry on?"

"I... would like that. I would like that very much."

Tears they say makes you weak, vulnerable but sometimes you have to be vulnerable to heal.

Our bodies touched and I instantly felt the pain wash away. Humans were communal creatures, Unable to do without interaction. I learned that today. Sometimes, The best interaction was silence. That and crying on someone's shoulder, One that gave off the vanilla scent.

CHAPTER 31

Lucy

Tricking was the easy part. I had gained Prince Eric's trust. A first step to taking back what was taken from me. The excitement in me could not be contained. I needed to tell someone.

I peered in Maisy's direction. She and grandfather we're in a conversation so deep He barely recognized my presence. It was the perfect time to slide away. No one would notice the disappearance of a pardoned slave. I headed to the empty balcony to do something I actually cared about, To speak to someone I actually had a bond with.

Certain I was alone, I took off the necklace. It gave a shimmery green glow inciting the presence of the entities.

"About time." My father's disheartening voice broke the silence.

I faced the fading figure. A streak of grey smoke that still kept his apparition.

"I'm sorry. It's just that Maisy's arrival has attracted the chimera and if I'm going to be alive to see that our vision becomes reality. I have to be alive."

"I get your point and I'm proud of you."

His words of encouragement made me smile yet brought tears to my eyes at the same time.

"You should be happy Luciana. You're making progress. No matter how slow."

It wasn't about my progress. It was about my self titled grandfather. Murdering my father in cold blood, Pinning it on the paladin. Feeding me in his delusions until I found the truth myself.

"It's not about the progress. Are you okay with the fact that your murderer is still alive?"

"Lucy, " I watched him try to hold me. I also saw those hands pass right through me. It hurt more than the pain.

"Lucy, That doesn't matter. I'm glad you got to live the life I never got to live."

"Are you?"

I had seen a lot of spirits ascend. It was all unfinished business but Father had been with me since childhood which meant he hadn't done his. I guessed he would never find peace until his murderer was marble cold.

"Yes, Lucy. I'm glad I have a daughter who's braving the same world that wants to tear her down."

"Does Mom feel the same way?"

"I'm not close to her but I'm sure she's proud."

I knew she was late. According to father, She couldn't live with the pain she caused, She took her own life.

"Well... I have to go now." I informed.

He gave me a knowing smile and I was prompted to wear back the necklace, The only thing I could remember my mother by.

Thanks to the potential spell laced on the necklace, Father vanished. I headed back to the party to see fit that the agenda kept going as planned.

I wasn't evil. I didn't pretend to be who I was not either. I wasn't a Quinn. I wasn't their blood. Grandfather was convinced with his delusions but I wasn't. Slaves would never be really free. In their eyes, we're still slaves. They gave us titles but that was only to make us happy while he continued doing what we were bought for with a happy face. History had to be changed and I was the slave for the job.

***

Maisy

The pain subsided and my reasoning returned. I was in the arms of a Clarke. A man I was meant to despise. I instantly stepped back, pushing his arms away from my body.

"I have to go..." I stated, feeling awkward when our eyes met.

"Are you sure? You look like you need to go home."

That sounded very nice. Except, I didn't have a home. Just a cold castle that wouldn't let me move on with my life.

"Also, What happened?" He asked, rubbing on a part of his shirt where I had painted with my runny makeup.

I surely wasn't going to divulge any detail about what grandfather told me. Even if I did, I would look like a liar or delusional maniac.

"I can't tell you..." I answered, being as honest as I could, "But let's just say my family isn't the ordinary type in this fucked uptown."

"I appreciate your honesty. Not clear but if it makes you feel better. My family especially the Males have a secret that would carry us to our grave."

That spiked my curiosity. His words sounded like grandfathers. It made me what to know what secret exactly but remembering the Crow incident, I was kind of afraid to know. If their secret was similar to ours, The Crow incident wasn't just an incident. It was a sign. One I didn't want to admit.

"What's the secret?"

"I can't tell you. You'll be leaving the family soon. But..."

"But what?"

"If you tell me yours. I'll say mine."

"And if yours sucks?"

"Trust me. It will keep you awake all night." He winked, taking a step back from me.

I wasn't going to push further. Something that would keep me awake sounded scary enough to kill the curiosity.

"Being with your family for a short time, I'm sure whatever secret you're keeping best remain a secret."

"If you say so. Coming inside?"

"No. I'll just stay here for a while. I need the air."

"Ok then. See you." He said and walked back into the party.

The night was chilly, Comfortable enough to let me admire my grandfather's garden. To think it will be all mine when he kicked the bucket.

Fifty percent actually.

My eyes continued to wander the plush green, I was engrossed that I hardly notice the gawky figure staring right at my path. I let out a muffled gasp as the figure walked towards me.

Walked? More like float. The figure's legs weren't touching the ground. It looked like it was but I was an observer. The legs were skimming on the earth like they weren't supposed to mix. The second thing I noticed was the body. The nearer it got, The better I could describe it. The figure looked like it was a woman but the other thing was it was near transculent. I could actually see through the body.

I contemplated running for my life but something stupid wouldn't let me. My legs were firmly rooted to the ground and wouldn't move even when I willed them to. I momentarily looked behind me to see if anyone was seeing what was coming at me. A few people glanced in my direction but

judging from how calm they remained, I was sure they were oblivious to the spirit or whatever it was.

My body shook vehemently, it felt like I just jumped in freezing water. It had to be the spirit. I jerked my head forward and let out a shrill whimper at the sight in front of me.

"Tatia?"

***

Eric

Lucy was right. Burying up the pain didn't help matters. I had been hanging on to my title for so long. I forgot what it felt to be human. I headed back to the party since everyone would be expecting me.

Back at the party, I scanned the room to find Maisy. It wasn't easy considering the crowd. I stopped searching and approached Mr Quinn. He was easier to find being the only one in a wheelchair.

"Where is Maisy?"

"She went out. Probably to clear her head." He answered.

"Why?... Did you tell her?"I inquired.

"Yes." He disclosed.

"What! What happened to keeping her safe?"

"If I wanted Maisy to be safe, I had to tell her the truth. Moreover, I didn't want her to think she was crazy or anything."

"Ok. Where is she?"

He backpedaled his chair and faced the garden area.

"She's not there." He said, thoughtful. "Maybe she's with Anthony."

In an instant, I became worried sick. I just had this gut feeling something wasn't right. I had no idea what or why.

"Anthony!", I called for my brother when I managed to find him amidst the crowd.

"Yes, brother."

"Have you seen Maisy?"

"No.", Sara cut in, jumping uninvited to our conversation."I saw her with Conrad earlier.

This made my throat go dry. My eyes scanned around for Conrad.

Nowhere to be found.

Paranoia hugged me tight filling my mind with the worst-case scenarios.

"Eric..." Anthony tried to speak but I wouldn't let him. I dashed outside not caring if anyone was watching.

I caught her scent, ginger sweet. She was here for sure. I could also sniff out Conrad. His scent was stronger than hers, hinting he was here for a longer time. I continued following the scent. It leads me into the garden, getting stronger at each step I took forward.

Judging the path she took, I was sure she was heading to the... Forest. Good lord!

"The chimera..."

CHAPTER 32

"I can't believe we never met." The apparition said.

I still couldn't decode what was happening and why I had followed this entity to the middle of nowhere.

I mean, I knew absolutely no one.

"So you are Tatia?" I mumbled, barely audible.

"Isn't it obvious?" She cracked.

It was but I still couldn't believe she was real–sort of. If this was actually Tatia and I went imagine this whole thing. It meant grandfather was right.

"So you've been the one haunting me?"

"About that, Malevolent spirits might trick you into doing them favors and being the new whisperer, You must be losing some sleep."

I didn't get why she was so amused. Not to sound like a bitch but, She was dead! How could that be amusing?

It would be a nice reunion if I knew her well but I didn't. So it was just awkward. It made me question why she drew me here.

"Is there any reason I'm here exactly?" I questioned, Biting my tongue mildly.

I must have sounded insensitive but what could I do?

"I came to warn you sister, You and Eric's time in the mortal veil is burning thin. You are not safe."

Eric? The mention of his name made me fume.

"If Eric dies, I doubt I'll care and you don't need to worry about my safety. I'm leaving Nodith as soon as my divorce is finalized."

"You won't. That's not the path written for you."

I snickered,

"Let me guess, You saw me die? Did you see why? You died sister. You know why You were with him. He ruined you... And I can not share that same fate."

I said this in tears. It sounded harsh and hateful. I'd always wished for a sister and what we would do if I had one. Long story short, I had one. I always had one. I never got to meet her alive and now that I can meet her, In saying trash about her.

"I didn't mean to sound..."

"I know," Tatia assured, flashing me a smile and trying to hold my hands.

Like the first time, It went right through me.

"...And I can tell you're afraid. You don't know what fate awaits you if you're with him but trust me, I saw you in my visions. You are safe here."

"How did you die?" I paused, took one look at her face and continued, "No one here has told me. I just wanted..."

"I don't remember." Tatia retorted, her shoulders shrugged down.

That was... unexpected. She didn't remember her death. Was that even possible?

"You don't remember your death?"

"I know it sounds stupid but my memories have been locked so I don't interfere with the present. I have flashes but it's just about the monster."

"The chimera!"

Eric was dead serious about protecting me from whatever monster that was. I wondered if it was responsible for Tatia's death.

"I wish I could tell you more. You don't how much it means to actually meet you in person."

"Same but..."

"There isn't much time left for me here Maisy but I want you to promise me one thing, You won't leave."

It was too late when my mouth got enough air to make words. Her already transparent body faded and just like that, She was gone.

This night as determined to leave me broken. I was sick of crying, Sick of watching what I never even had slipped past me. The hurt took over was more and my eyes stung as the tears rushed for their first taste of freedom. But I didn't. The tears didn't pour out like they wanted to. My throat suddenly went dry and an unusual chill coursed through my body. This wasn't hurt. It was fear. I felt like I was being watched. It was a gut feeling I couldn't explain but trust me, I knew it. Someone's eyes were definitely on me.

In the tranquility of the bushes, There was trouble. I could feel it. I faced the vicinity I was sure my stalker was and boldly said,

"Who's there!"

There was no reply. This time I could make out my stalker's heavy breathing.

"Eric, Is that you?"

"I thought you hated him," Conrad said as he pushed his way away from the bush.

"What! Why are you here? Are you stalking me?"

"Relax. I was worried. It's not every day a Noble abandons the world for the secluded forest."

That meant he never saw Tatia.

"Well, I'm safe and clearly don't need your protection." I retorted, taking a domineering stance.

"Agreed." He smirked, giving me a meaningful stare so intense it made me wonder what message he was passing.

"Can I at least escort you back? This place is dangerous."

"I can handle danger."

I clearly could not so you can only imagine my face when an inhuman hand ten times the bulk of mine snapped his neck.

"God!!!"

Conrad collapsed to the ground, blood flooding out his nostrils and painting the earth red.

Was he dead? Would I be too?

My eyes trailed away from Conrad as slow as caution as I tried to get a view at the culprit. Legs of a horse, I would never escape it running. Face of a lion.

Nodith was totally the place for me.

***

Eric

She was close, I could tell. Conrad was here too. God knows I was going to kill that bastard. And Maisy... What was she thinking? Did she know how unsafe these places were?

I paused for a minute, taking the new metallic smell in. It smelt a lot like blood.

My blood ran cold and my lost strength returned.

They say to expect the unexpected but I wasn't ready to dash head-on in front of a chimera.

Maisy was frozen, unable to move or even breathe. She was scared to the bone.

The monster turned in my direction, baring out its yellow canines in aggression. It was probably reminded of our last duel. It totally ignored Maisy's presence and charged at me.

I took one look at Maisy then back at the beast. I couldn't fight it like this. At least not in this body. Although, I wasn't sure I was ready to risk it all.

Screw it!

There was no time to think of consequences. I discarded my shirt then my shorts while looking at Maisy.

She gave me this funny look. Like "We are about to be monster food and you're getting naked".

The chimera kept circling me, waiting for my attack. I shut my eyes briskly and channeled the beast.

When I opened my eyes, I heard Maisy gasp. I peeked at her.

Her eyes widened when I did. As my transformation continued, I watched her shrink backward.

She was afraid, afraid of me...

CHAPTER 33

Maisy

Too scared to move, Too scarred to breathe, Too stiffened to look. Maybe not... My eyes stayed glued on the distorted figure screeching in pain. Each agonizing cry reminding me of the first time I met Eric. I watched him shrink, his bones tearing out of his skin. He was changing...into something different, Something inhuman. I clamped my eyes shut, trying not to faint. Right now, It felt like the only sane thing to do.

His screams stopped. My trembling eyes flickered, catching the sight of ghost-white fur, a creature on all fours.

Eric... He... He shifted into a wolf! My subconscious took me down a memory lane. The white wolf... Eric! They weren't separate entities. They were one and the same. The jitters were literally leaving me dry.

My head felt blank, a heavy and light feeling altogether. I couldn't comprehend what I was seeing or maybe I didn't want to.

Was I actually seeing this?

The truth hit me hard. This was Conrad's big family secret. The Clarkes were werewolves.

In that frozen second between standoff between two beast, I see their eyes flick from me then back to each other in preparation for the big fight.

A wolf's face should be unreadable but the moment Eric or the white wolf rather peered in my direction, I could see things. The steel-blue eyes filled with worry, fear and for a split second, I didn't know what to feel.

Betrayal? Or the fact that he was willing to sacrifice his secret for me?

The beast charged first, gaining momentum and slamming into Eric who was only a diminution compared to it. His shrill cry shot into the sky seeing blood trickle off its claws, It was one of excitement. It was clearly winning this battle.

My gaze returned to Eric who was lying wasted on the earth, his white coat tainted with his own blood.

Even if I could barely move, I tried to help Eric.

"Eric, Get up."

I was frozen stiff buy my quivering lips could still make words. Eric, Still in wolf form seemed to get encouraged and he jumped to his feet. He back at the creature, his movements were faltering as if each step pained him and his head was sunk low to the earth.

The creature was ready for Eric's frail attack. I had to pity him. In this form, He would be an Apex predator but this was not the case. I could tell this was going to be the killing blow or maybe it was just my premonitions.

I closed my eyes unable to watch as shrieks and howls of beasts drowned the night.

Then, There was dead silence.

My curiosity got the better of me and I was forced to open my eyes. In place of what I and initially expected which was, of course, Eric's fall. I witnessed an unexpected turn of event. My eyes trailed to where Conrad's lifeless body once laid. He wasn't there. Of course, he wasn't. He was the change of event. He was the black wolf aiding Eric. This changed everything.

***

Unknown

I watched from the shadows. The view was quite splendid. Humans were hard to predict but my my... The Clarke brothers were puppet in my hands. The battle between Valentine and the spirit wolves was a sight to bewilder but my attention was divided. I had eyes on the whisperer. She seemed scared. Funny. She hardly knew what lied in front of her, The task keeping her alive, keeping them alive.

Valentine sent a mental who asking if it was time. A waste of good fight. She could be such a fun killer. I nodded in approval and watched her intentionally let them win. The black one bit hard into her leg, a pain that shot through me considering we shared the merge. I manage to keep my curses unheard. Some tasks were worth more than petty revenge. The savages saw this as an opportunity to deal a finishing blow. I witnessed them pounce on Valentine and sink their fangs into her like she was another of their meal.

My neck stung and I felt warm blood trickle down my amice. I reached behind my all and retrieved the old rag doll. My life force was slipping away, Valentine was leaving this world. Prepared to end her misery and save me, I gave her the last instruction then snapped the doll in two. Her scream engulfed the woods and silencing the bedeviling nocturnals. It hurt to watch Val fall but my little girl never failed. The savages thought they were victors but at what cost. Crimson trickled down the black one's fur as realization hit them. Sad, sad truth. Little midnight was hit. Valentine hit hard, tearing fur, skin, and flesh. His fresh wound ran from his head down to his tail area. Midnight fell to the earth instantly, his transformation reversing.

Damn, The fatality was worse in this state.

Ghost girl looked like she had seen death eye to eye as Conrad battled to start alive.

"It is time."

***

Eric

"Conrad!" I rushed to my brother's side in a moment of brief relapse. He was fatally wounded and having lost someone I loved to this once, I was sure Conrad wasn't going to make it.

"Conrad, Just breathe. You're going to be alright." I said, not knowing the right words to tell in times like this.

"Your lie sucks. I know I'm going to die."

"Don't say that. You're different."

"Yeah... Tatia was different. The spirits didn't show her so much mercy."

God! This was so like him. Making stupid references. Death did suit him. I had no idea why I cared. We were destined to be rivals after all.

"Why do you care so much brother? You should be happy I'm dying. Then you don't have to deal with the stupid spirit wolf prophecy."

Maybe. If Conrad had fallen before now, I would have probably rejoiced but something was different. The Conrad I knew wouldn't have come to my aid. He did something stupid for me and now, Now I just couldn't sit and watch him die.

Cursed Chimera venom!

What made it so bad was, I couldn't move him as the venom would spread faster. He would be dead before we reached the Quinn estate but I had another idea, One One enough to work.

"Maisy! Maisy!" I yelled to her repeatedly but she remained unresponsive.

When I got closer, I noticed she was trembling.

"Maisy?"

"Stay away from me!" She warned, Her eyes glazed, with fear.

Her hard exterior was only a coping mechanism to help her adjust to the unheard horrors she had seen in one night.

"I know you're scared Maisy but you have to listen to me. Conrad could die if you don't help him. I don't know if you can do it but you have to contact the spirits."

She stared blankly at me for a brief second before twisting her head around, jerking in fear. It was almost like she was seeing things that I couldn't.

Wait... Things I couldn't see.

I took hold of Maisy's with one hand and fixed my eyes on her. She wasn't looking at me but I had to try.

"Maisy, What's wrong?"

Slowly, Maisy tilted to face me.

"They want favors."

CHAPTER 34

Maisy

Things don't make sense when you are face to face with the dead. Two of them. Of all the secrets revealed today, The realization that I was one of them hit harder than any pain I could ever feel. I was a monster. It didn't look real and I definitely didn't want it to feel real but here it was, I could see ghosts.

"What do they want in return Maisy?" Eric's trembling voice echoed.

I turned in his direction then back at the spirits before me. The words lingered in my throat a little longer than they should have but I managed to say them.

"What do you want?"

The older looking plump one had Kohl black hair that plunged down her shoulders. Each tendril moving like they were submerged in water spoke.

"If you promise to stay, I'll help him."

What! I wasn't expecting this from a spirit still trapped in the mortal realm. This was my first but frankly, I expected impossible favors even if in truth, This was an impossible favor. This spirit wanted to stay in Nodith. I felt like she could read my mind. I didn't want to stay here. It was so messed up here, so unsettling and nowhere comparable to home. It prompted me to ask why she would want such a simple yet impossible wish.

"What do you stand to gain if I do that?"

"A lot actually." She answered, "you see, I promised Tatia this and If this doesn't happen. I might never ascend. I want to meet my family... please."

Tatia did this? To make me stay?

"What did they say? " Eric quizzed his attention on Conrad who was bleeding out.

It was selfish of me to do this when someone's life was at risk but I was willing to take the second offer.

"What's your offer?" I asked the next spirit. The Amazonian figure set her Eden green eyes on me as if studying me and I did the same. She was beautiful. With seraph's ears and a pixie's nose, anyone would kill for. I wondered what killed her. Probably this godforsaken kingdom. She

blinked and her lips parted into a smile and not the sweet kind, I could feel something sinister coming.

"I once lived a simple life. It was all I wanted but someone took that away from me. I never even got to confess my love for the boy I loved. He stripped me from my family and killed me, I was raped to death. All I want is for him to share my fate."

She, on the other hand, wanted something that could actually be done. A bad person who deserved death, That I could leave with.

"She wants someone dead," I said to Eric.

"Why? We can't just kill someone."

"Whoever he is, He raped her. He was the cause of her death! I think he deserves it. Now, do you want Conrad dead because you're unwilling to kill someone."

"It just doesn't seem right..."

"You turn into a monster when you please. How can you tell what's right?" I cut in.

It was an honest slip. It was all the fear within talking but some things couldn't be taken back.

"I am not a monster." He retorted, His irises flashing steel blue.

"That's...not what I meant," I said, avoiding his gaze.

Conrad yelped, shaking violently as life continued to slip past him. We were losing him.

"Do it!" Eric expressed, moral virtues now thrown out of the window.

"Ok."

I faced the spirit asking for her Killer's death,

"Who is he?"

"The monster goes by the name Anthony. Anthony Clarke."

My spinning world crashed for a second. Clarke? Anthony Clarke.

The spirit wanted vengeance against Eric's brother.

"Who does she want dead?" Eric's shaking voice queried. His attention entirely on his stepbrother who was losing to death.

I couldn't do it. I just couldn't bring myself to believe that man was a murderer. He didn't look like one and worse, Telling Eric those heartbreaking words were torture on their own.

I was torn. If I wasn't so attached to my humanity, I would pick the deal in a goal. It was for a greater good after all and If Anthony was truly a murderer, Maybe death was destined for him. But, Something In Eric's eyes drew me back. The pain was there and I didn't want to be the one to add to them. I had more than enough family problems in my life anyway.

"You don't want to hurt him Maisy. Even if you've been caused nothing but pain by him, You care and he cares for you. I'm not making the choice for you here but I'm sure you wouldn't want to wreck his already messed up life. Look at him Maisy, It'll destroy him. I'm begging you, Choose mine, Stay." The other spirit lectured.

Droplets of teats escaped my eyes as I made the choice. Who was I to be, A destroyer or a self destroyer?

"I'll stay," I muttered, hot droplets of tears skittering down my face.

It was a hard choice, A sacrifice for the greater good.

"Good choice." The spirit acknowledged.

I closed my eyes and nodded in agreement. The wind howled sending a surging feeling down my spine. The world seemed to stop and for a moment, I was sure a drop of water to the ground would be louder than death. I wondered if it worked. My eyes flickered open and I looked down at Conrad.

"It's gone," Eric noted, staring at Conrad's healed torso in disbelief.

"Good." I mused, my head feeling lighter than usual.

"Who does she want dead?"

I tried to answer but the light head feeling got worse and before I could say the right words, my sight turned black.

***

Eric

I caught Maisy before she could fall. She was pale, Obviously drained from using spirit magic.

"I'm alive," Conrad announced getting to his feet and examining his torso.

"This is unbelievable." He continued, obviously in wonder.

I ignored him and headed back to the party. Now that he was fine, We could forget this day ever happened and go back to hating ourselves.

Suddenly, He said something that made me burn.

"Could Tatia do that too?"

It took every part of my being not to drop Maisy and punch his guts.

Ten seconds of escaping death and he was back yo his old ways... Somethings never change.

"You're not answering brother." He probed.

He was really bent on making me snap.

"Go home, Conrad."

"I just want to know. If she could do that, How did she die?"

That was the last straw!

I turned back to face him, my nostrils flaring.

"Don't ever bring that up again or I promise you I'll kill you with my own bare hands."

"You could but just seconds ago, You were concerned about me dying. Why bother?"

He just wouldn't just up!

"Because we've had a lot of deaths in our family. No one in our line has ever died old and happy and I want that to change. We can't be that cursed."

"That's a terrible lie brother. You care. You're just afraid to show it."

"Believe what you want to believe Conrad but I'll never recognize you as family."

"Taken. Bye, brother."

"Bye Conrad."

Conrad took a different route so It was obvious he wasn't returning to the party. Without his annoying voice to taunt me, I had some alone time.

I looked at Maisy, My Belle. I could already sense she would leave Nodith as soon as she regained consciousness. Sadly, I got my wish. Maisy roused, babbling rubbish to herself.

An aftereffect of spirit magic.

On the bright side, Her state would leave her totally honest and I for one couldn't wait to take advantage of it.

"Maisy, Do you hate me?" I asked, Praying she would surprise me.

"I don't think I can. I wish I could."

That had to be the best thing I've heard all day. This was something I was sure Maisy would deny any day.

"Do you see me as a monster?"

"I... don't know."

"Will you leave?"

"I can't. In return for Conrad's healing, I have to stay." She responded.

That was weird. I remembered her saying the spirit wanted revenge.

"But you said, She wanted death on her killer."

"I couldn't choose that. I couldn't hurt you."

"What do you mean?" I quizzed, dead in my tracks.

"Anthony..." She drawled.

"Anthony?"

"Anthony's the killer."

CHAPTER 35

Eric

It had to be a lie. Maybe just a hallucination. There was no way, No f*cking way Anthony was a killer. It was just unbelievable. Still, my mind couldn't get Maisy's words out of my mind. Anthony was the family's white sheep. The sacrificial lamb who would do anything to please his blood.

I was greeted at the garden by Father Nicholas and The Quinns.

"What happened to her?" Father Nicholas demanded, placing his palm on Maisy's forehead in a concerned manner.

"I need to get her back to the castle before anyone starts asking questions." I chimed in, aiding for the carriage.

Father Nicholas, Still not satisfied with my report on Maisy's condition followed me.

"Did she by any chance use the whisper?" He inquired, His brown eyes investigating my secrets.

"She didn't," I claimed.

My steps got quicker. The priest was not one to give up easily once he set his mind to something. The guards sighted me and opened the carriage doors in diligence. I dropped Maisy in and instructed the rider to wheel us home.

"You aren't going anywhere, Eric!" Father Nicholas bellowed, forcing the rider to stop.

The poor boy glanced at the priest then back at me wondering who to obey. One thing I was sure of was he was leaving the castle walls tonight.

"She uses the whisper, didn't she? You know how dangerous this is to her life. Her sister would have wanted you to protect her!" The old man ranted.

"Not anymore. The chimera is dead."

"What do you mean?"

"Conrad and I killed it so you don't have to worry about Maisy or her safety anymore. I'm pretty sure I can handle it."

"And how exactly did that happen? How did she even leave here without your knowledge?"

"I don't know." I retorted. A big lie on my path. Tatia was fond of finding herself in strange places even when she didn't mean too. It was nothing new, Neither was it strange.

"This is why She should leave. It's what's best for her."

Believe it or not, I would really enjoy exchanging words with this Nazi but I had other pressing matters to attend to. So I swallowed my urge instead and instructed the Rider to carry on.

As the carriage trudged past the steep lane, I heard Anthony's voice from behind me.

The rider sent a gaze in my direction waiting for my signal.

"Stop." I directed.

Anthony caught up to the carriage breathless. I could see he was seething.

"What the hell? Why are you leaving? Have you found her?"

" Yes but she isn't doing so well. I have to get her back home."

"Alone? What's up with you? Just wait, I'll get Sara and Emilia then we can leave."

Lord, It was so difficult keeping all I had in my heart concealed.

I desperately wanted to say it all and hear from my brother's mouth that it was untrue but No... I trusted Anthony. Asking that would only show I doubted my family.

"Are you alright?" Anthony quizzed, staring at my worried face in concern.

"I am." I assured, letting a weak smile to kick away any suspicion on his mind, "Get them I'll be waiting."

I watched Anthony raced back into the Quinn Manor before instructing the Rider to carry on.

***

Mr Quinn

"Do you think Maisy has the whisper like Tatia?" Lucy inquired as she wheeled me back to the party.

"Sadly, she does," I replied uninterested.

The part was beginning to get on my nerves. Ironic, considering I threw it for Maisy.

"Hello, old friend." A familiar voice interrupted my thoughts.

Where have I heard that before?

I looked up to face the speaker and was caught aback to see Osei. My gloom mood lit up almost immediately.

"What a wonderful surprise!"

Osei hadn't changed one bit. It's been twenty-five years since we last met and she looked young as day. Of course, her once bright frizzy hair had streaks of grey and her smooth ebony skin was now lined with wrinkles. She also seemed to have gained more weight.

"I would say the same. You haven't changed one bit."

Oh... I knew lies when I was told one. Osei could walk and looked like she was kissed by the goddess of fruitfulness. I, on the other hand, Looked like I was blessed by her evil twin sister.

"Don't mention it. If you don't mind, Why are you here?"

Osei gave Lucy an awkward gaze. Then, I could tell she was here for serious business.

"Lucy, excuse us," I ordered.

Lucy was unsatisfied but obeyed me all the same. When Lucy was too far to eavesdrop, Osei spoke.

"She reminds me so much of her father."

"Lucy is nothing like Silas!" I retorted sharply, almost shouting.

"Well, you loved Silas with everything you had. Didn't he betray you in the worst way possible?"

God... What exactly did she want?

"Are you here to open up old wounds or talk?"

"I am Quinn. You might think I'm just reminding you of how complicated your family life is but I'm not. You have to tell her the truth before someone or something else tells her."

"I'll tell her at my own time," I concluded, hoping to end my family conversation right there.

"Do you have the time?" She joked.

"Lord... You and your dark humor."

"You know me... How's Nodith faring? You know with supernaturals in power, There is bound to be a struggle."

"I don't know what you're going on about. The kingdom is clearly fine."

"Really? The order has got to know Nodith is in great debt and a chimera is on the loose. How?"

"Tell them there is no need to worry. Prince Eric will be getting married to my granddaughter soon and would be able to pay up the Kingdom's debt and as for the chimera. It's dead. The wolves killed it."

"I'm glad they are able to keep the balance. Maybe the order didn't make the wrong choice but what baffles me is the chimera. You do know where they come from don't you?"

"Necromancy," I answered.

"So who would do that?"

"I'm not..."

Before I could complete my words, Father Nicholas cut in, "What a wonderful surprise. Osei, It's good to see you here. What's with the August visit?"

"Can't an old woman just have fun? To be honest, I just missed the old times. Hunting down monsters... Good times."

"Times change now don't they? We used to hunt them. Now we work with them. I would have never thought this day would come."

"True. How is Valentine? Where is she? She must be all grown up now."

Osei's words made me choke. Ahe hadn't even spent a day in the kingdom and she had already opened all our skeletons. How could I blame her though? She had no idea what happened to valentine.

Osei noticed how cold and silent Nicholas became.

"Are you alright? Did anything happen to her?"

"She's dead." Nicholas shot back bluntly.

That had to hit a nerve. One would think that was enough to keep Osei's mouth in her pockets but No! She just had to talk.

"Bless her. What happened?"

Osei! How can you be so insensitive!

"I couldn't save her." Nicholas burst into tears, "My child was raped and left for dead. She was all I had."

CHAPTER 36

Father Nicholas

Finding a dead body in the middle of nowhere would a hurdle on normal days but with the fire that burned inside, This was no normal night. The hurricane lamp flickered as the strength of the wind intensified threatening to leave me in darkness if I didn't put an end to this insanity.

The gods didn't even put an effort, not with their grandmaster by my side. The smell of fresh dirt hit home. I dropped the lamp to inspect the disheveled earth.

This had to be the spot.

Using every fiber of my being, I hit the earth with the shovel, continuing to upheave the wet dirt until I finally struck flesh.

"That has to hurt."

With caution, I used the shovel's tip to carve a sigil to the earth. The symbol glowed, giving a dull purple glow. It meant her spirit was still bound to the mundane realm. That done, I cut my palm to draw blood and spilled droplets of the crimson red liquid on the crooked body.

"Blood of my blood, Vengeful spirit, I summon thee..." I paused and waited for the usual impiccio. Necromancy was unnatural so nature was sure to put up a fight.

Strange! No lack of air or strange weather. Maybe nature wanted this.

"...Hear my beckoning and step into the light."

This time nature fought back. The greens surrounding me turned black. Nature was snuffing life out of its creation. Being a creature of the divine mother herself, I dropped to the floor literally feeling the life in need gradually draining. It became a huge task to breathe and it worsened. Nature wasn't going to let the abominable repeat itself. Just when I thought it was over for me, Nature gave up the fight.

"Father." A whisper called out to me.

The earth trembled as she hovered over me.

"Did you do it?" I queried, remaining on the ground trying to gather my strength.

"Yes."

"Good. Happy birthday Valentine."

***

Eric

The guards joined with some female servant escorted the still unconscious Maisy to her room. I headed to the study room to get my thoughts together.

Your brother is not a murderer. You literally grew up with him. Why then would you do this to him?

"My Lord, My lady is awake." A maid informed.

"Thanks. You may leave."

She bowed and excused herself.

I was really in no mood to see anyone but I still needed answers. I got my sorry ass together and headed to Maisy's chambers. In my distress, I forgot to knock which was unusual for me.

"Maisy, we need to talk."

"About what?"

She looked pale and extremely tired but I carried on,

"Did you mean what you said? Is Anthony a murderer?"

Her lips trembled and I could tell she was shocked hearing my question. She, however, masked the truth and tried to mislead me.

"What are you talking about?"

It was a valiant attempt but my wolf senses weren't that shallow.

"Nice try Maisy. I get you want to help but trust me if you want to help this family, the best thing to do is to tell the truth."

"I... Tatia said the spirits could be deceptive. Maybe the spirit just wanted me to make try wrong choice." Maisy said in a breathless whisper, putting her hands on mine before awkwardly withdrawing them.

I wish it was that easy for me to believe but why would the spirit choose Anthony.

Maybe because your suspicions are not far fetched.

Maybe. There was once a time Anthony was reckless Royal. He had someone he actually loved and everyone knows what happened to her. Raped, brutally murdered and set on fire. Everyone knew the gruesome end of Valentine Flament. The question was Did Anthony kill valentine?

"What's on your mind?" Maisy questioned noticing I was wrapped in my own world.

"Nothing." I retorted, "I should leave you to rest now and before I forget, Thank you Maisy."

"If it was you to me. I wouldn't be here." She scoffed.

I expected a smile or a nod. I was being nice after all but she just wouldn't let her walls down.

"Well, I should thank the spirits. You're stuck here Maisy. Get used to the new normal."

"Is that a dare? I can walk out of here at the cost of your step brother's life and it's not my problem."

Her stubbornness put a smirk on my face and made me forget my mental battles for a moment.

"Well, you're forgetting three things Maisy. One is, I'm about to crowned Prince and I basically rule here. Two is, My stepbrother is a maniac who would do anything to survive and if that means you not stepping out of this Kingdom, He'll take a go and trust me you don't want to mess with that bad wolf."

"And three?" She inquired, definitely enjoying our stupid conversation.

I leaned in and said,

"I know you Maisy. You're a lover, not a murderer."

My senses caught the tingling sensation my voice sent to her body. The scent, the faster heartbeat, The Sweet discomfort. This moment could last forever. My head played all the dirty ways this encounter could end up too arousing the inner beast. At least, we agreed on something for the first time. With time, her heartbeat slowed down and she replied,

"You should be saying that to your new wife to be. So, leave a girl to rest. She has a had a long weird and disturbing night. So if you don't mind, I suggest you try to find out what terrible things your brother might have done."

"She's lying.", My wolf growled. "Take her now!"

Tempting offer but I had something called self-control and that last part was definitely put in to hurt me. Sadly, He did not. It only proved no matter the crazy shit happening, Maisy just couldn't seem to hate me. So she did the only sane thing she could muster, push me away.

An enigma indeed.

***

Anthony

Unbelievable! I couldn't believe Eric would abandon me. Now I had to be in the same carriage with the visibly angry sisters. We got into the vehicle, shielding inside with the leather curtains.

"Where is your brother by the way? Did you have to whisk us out of there just when the Duchess of Withall arrived?" They continued to grumble in the carriage.

"It's late. You know this place isn't safe at night." I retorted.

"Didn't you say inside that the chimera is dead?"

"True." I admitted, "But can you just agree on something with me. You are my wife and you should be supportive."

"Okay." Emilia shot back just as I heard a sharp scream from outside.

"What was that?" Sara questioned.

"Aaron! Why isn't this thing moving?" I yelled at the rider.

Silence!

I angrily flipped the curtain blocking the outside world and was caught by the gruesome sight. Aaron was a bloody mess of blood and bone. The horses were unusually calm but my senses said otherwise. I looked into the distance and cloaked into the darkness was a pair of blazing orange irises and crimson-stained canines.

I immediately regretted my decision. The girls trembled at the sight and almost immediately, Emilia jolted out.

"Emilia!"

The chimera got it's sight on her and immediately went for the prey. I tried to shift but it just wasn't working so I did the most stupid thing that popped into my head at that moment. I joined the chase.

My eyes burnt with liquid as I tried to catch up with every strength I could sum up. It was useless. I watched the beast get closer to Emilia with each leap and Emilia an inch closer to meeting her maker.

Useless! She'll die just like the rest of them. You couldn't save the one you loved. Why would she be an exemption?, The voices rang into my head and they were right. Emilia's screams for help as she clenched to life hung in the air and I could do nothing but watch. When her screams subsided, The creature snapped her neck off. I watched the detached member roll then it occurred to me that I was next.

I didn't budge. It wasn't the fear. I wanted this, I wanted death. I saw my life flash before my eyes as the chimera crept towards me.

This was it. I deserved death. For Valentine's death, For Emilia's death. I closed my eyes and waited to meet the feared grim reaper.

I heard scratching but felt no pain. The strangeness of the situation made me open my eyes. The creature wasn't harming me. Instead, It was inscribing something on the floor. I hesitantly looked to see what this mindless creature could be doing. Tears escaped as I read the words, "I, Valentine."

CHAPTER 37

Eric

"What happened?" I asked a guard I could find.

"The chimera attacked travelers Sire."

But it was dead. I examined the bloody scene. The rider was decapitated, Blood covering his entire half and the horses were brutally maimed. I continued to watch the spectacle with dread. I still didn't understand how this could happen. I could vividly remember the killing of the abomination and we buried it. Even that shouldn't cheat death.

"Sire, We found Sir Anthony." A guard yelled a few meters away from me.

The words couldn't even make it out of me. I ran to the limp body and I swear to God, My blood ran cold when I confirmed it was Anthony. This wasn't a random attack on another villager like I thought. It was Anthony's carriage.

"Anthony! Wake up!" I called out, shaking him and praying he was alright.

He had to be. Unlike every being here that had come in contact with the monster, Anthony was untouched...at least physically.

A physician attended to him while the guard from before came to inform me they had found a body. The body was brought to me blanketed in white. I unfolded the fabric. My eyes widened seeing Emilia's eye stare coldly into mine. Her head was detached similar to the rider. I suddenly felt sick to the stomach. The rider and Emilia were dead but where was Sara?

"Have you found Lady Sara?" I asked.

The guards shook their heads in response. I scanned the area praying Lord Declan hadn't lost both his daughters in one day. It would be catastrophic even if the man was dead.

"She's dead. She's dead. Her head goes snap. She's dead." a chilling whisper sang out of nowhere.

The guards swiftly reached for their swords and enclosed me in a protected circle.

"Who's there!" They roared in unison, Their eyes on every corner yet, The voice continued to sing. As the maniacal singing got louder, A crooked figure became visible in front of us.

"Who's there?" I demanded.

The figure paused, giggled and continued to sing.

"...The monster got them all. The monster got them all."

The singing, It was beginning to sound like a child's take on what happened here. It made me wonder...

"Sara, Is that you?"

The singing stopped and I heard the figure sobbing. I pushed away from the circle and approached the figure. It was Sara and she looked traumatized.

I grabbed a blanket from a guard and draped them over her shoulders. She had to be traumatized. She had barely escaped death and worse, She had seen life being snatched away right in front of her. A life she knew and grew up with. I didn't have to be close to Sara to know she loved her sister and I could only imagine what she must be going through right now. Sara hugged me as she sobbed on my shoulder.

"She wanted revenge." She mumbled.

I nodded. The only thing I could do right now was agree with whatever she said no matter how absurd it sounded. She was emotionally unstable.

The royal physician did a quick check-up on Sara examining her eyes and mouth. The look on his face after the examination said it all, Sara had gone insane.

With all of this madness taking place, I knew I had to give a speech to enlighten people on what was going on and possibly try to calm them down as soon as possible even if there was nothing to be calm about anymore. To be truthful, I was afraid. I wasn't sure if I was ready for the responsibility of King yet. There was so much on my neck; from paying a huge debt to stopping the never-ending killings of a reanimated zombie. It was just choking.

"You?" I called a common servant, " Send word to the messenger that I want every villager in the royal court by dawn."

He nodded and sprinted into a carriage on its way to the castle. I got into my carriage with a still disoriented Sara.

"Take us to the Quinn Manor."

Thing is, even if I was to keep the villagers updated on what was going on. I couldn't tell them the magnitude of what was going on; That even the Royals of Nodith weren't safe. It would be catastrophic. So for now, No one would know of Sara's condition.

***

The carriage stopped in front of the manor and I made sure Sara's face could not be seen before I exited the vehicle. The morning skies were a tired blue blanketing us in a perfect cover. A servant got ahead of us to inform the Quinns of our presence.

"What's wrong?" Osei inquired letting me into the house.

I wasn't aware she was in the kingdom and most importantly why she was visiting. Did this have to do with the order?

"I need to speak with Mr. Quinn."

Osei gave me a menacing glare before disappearing to call who I requested. She returned a few seconds after with Mr Quinn and Lucy.

"Here they are."

"Thank you but I'll like to speak with him in private."

Osei didn't appreciate my saucy nature and clearly stated she wasn't going anywhere.

"This is what I warned you about Quinn, Something terrible has clearly happened and he doesn't want the order to know about it." She grumbled.

Now she was going to go to tell the story of how privileged supernaturals were in Nodith. Sincerely, I was sick of hearing it. The order left my family to deal with most of the problems they created themselves and the moment things went wrong, We were blamed.

"Excuse me, I have no idea how something I did resurrects on its own. If you ask me, I suspect foul play."

"Wait, You mean the Chimera?" Mr. Quinn asked, a bit concerned.

"Yes and this time it attacked my family! Emilia is dead and sincerely I don't know what to do anymore."

Osei sneered, "If it was even dead, to begin with."

God! This woman could be annoying. I ignored her and got to the reason why I was here.

"I'm hoping I can hide Sara here. With everything going on, I still have to keep the people believing they are safe even when they are not. I can't have double damages in one day."

"Seems to me like a ruse to cover up bad leadership."Osei cut in.

"Osei, Calm down. The boy is doing his best." Mr Quinn retorted.

My wolf was so close to hitting that wise mouth of hers.

"So Eric, What do you plan to do now?"

"If Sara can stay here. I'm certain I can drop the bad news to the villagers and I have to fasten my coronation. It's the only way to solve Nodith problems."

"No. You can't fasten the coronation. The order has principles you have to follow." Osei argued.

"Well fuck those principles! There isn't much time left before the king of Elyria decides to wage a war against Nodith and with the growing conflict, I have to be Alpha if we are ever going to have a chance to kill that monster!"

"I think Reece is doing a fine job as Alpha. You Clarkes are reckless." Osei shot back.

What a bitch.

"Stop it both of you! Acting like children." Mr. Quinn scolded, " You can leave Sara here. I don't know about fastening the coronation but it's entirely your choice."

"I really appreciate your assistance."

Lucy assisted Sara inside and I turned to leave.

"Wait!" Osei's voice boomed.

I turned to face her expecting another bitchy confrontation.

"...if you are sure you killed the Chimera, Do you remember where exactly you left for dead?"

"Yes. Why?"

"If it didn't occur to you before, Resurrection is unnatural. Especially with a zombie. I suspect foul play."

She did have a point. Someone somewhere did this.

"I remember."

"Take me there." She ordered.

***

Conrad

News had gotten to me on the Chimera recent attack. Which was exactly why I needed to leave the kingdom. I didn't even make it last time. I quickened my steps while trying to collect my thoughts.

"Emilia is dead."

The throne wasn't even worth it anymore. I didn't need the approval of anyone, Not anymore. I had enough money to live a respectable life outside Nodith. It took her death to make me see this Kingdom was fucking cursed.

I stopped in my tracks when I sniffed something odd.

"Who's there?" I growled, not taking any chances.

"Calm down, it's me." Father Nicholas spoke, coming into the open.

"Father? What are you doing here?" I demanded.

"I should say the same. Are you running away?"

"Sorry to break it to you but I'm not the stupid brave kind. The monster is back and I'm not waiting for it to come for me before I know I should run."

"Smart but I can't let you."

"You're not my father and he didn't leave you to take of me. I'm the bastard son remember."

Father Nicholas approached me, His hands behind him and with a knowing smile.

"You're not a mistake. You're simply a... compromise."

"What¿" Before I could register what exactly his words meant, I felt something driven into me.

It burned. I looked down to see a dagger most probably silver impaled to my abdomen. I couldn't fight and even breathing was a herculean task. I looked up, into his eyes and wondered why he would do this. I needed answers.

"No hard feelings Conrad. Valentine just told me the gypsy girl can't leave if you're still alive and I can't have her figuring out my plans. Say hi to your father for me."

That said, I slumped to his body as the poison spread deeper. My sight blurred and slowly I accepted the darkness.

CHAPTER 38

Maisy

The darkness cloaked the bloodshed between strong felines. One clothed in light, The other in darkness. Breathing heavily, I watched the clothed beast tear each other skin off. I made out human physique from within the animal skin and continued watching as they both tore their way out of the animal skin. The white wolf was Eric. The black wolf was Conrad. I could see the hate in both their faces as they charged on each other the second time to finish the job. However the light seared through the darkness. Plastic melted and the true monster was exposed. The blood brother.

"Anthony!"I squirmed.

My eyes were heavy hut I could tell I was in bed. It was just a dream. A really strange one. I remembered Conrad's face melting to reveal Anthony under a mask.

"You look tense. Is this bad timing?" Someone noted making me jerk.

I wasn't aware someone was here. It was Conrad but the instant I saw his almost transparent blue skin, I knew what the dream might have meant.

"Conrad? W-hat happened to you?" I inquired.

It was shocking to see someone I saved a day before dead. Did he know it?

"I don't know. I keep getting these flashes but... I can't be dead. I'm Conrad." He stuttered.

It must be a really frightening moment for him. I didn't know what to say but from what I knew, He could only be in the mortal realm if he had unfinished business so I had to ask.

"How did you die?"

"I remember leaving the Kingdom to escape the Chimera..."

"It's alive?"

"While you've been sleeping Maisy, a lot has happened. Emilia is dead."

"Good Lord. Were you killed by it?"

"No. Someone did. I can't just can't remember who."

"Ok but you remember why they killed you right?"

I didn't believe I could sound this insensitive but what could I do? He was dead already. The least I could do was find out why.

"I remember... They didn't want you interfering."

Interfering? How... No! It hit me hard. Conrad died because of me. Whoever did this didn't want me for obvious reasons and since I was bound to Nodith as long as Conrad was still alive. That would also mean whoever did this was dangerous. Why would they not want me here anyway?

"You have to recall something about the murderer. Conrad, Try!"

"I can't. It just not coming."

Tatia had mentioned something about that. Apparently, there were restrictions placed on spirits to keep the mortal realm in balance. Long story short, Conrad was basically useless and he couldn't leave until his murder was avenged, At least that was what was registered in my head.

"Does it hurt knowing you're dead?" I asked, my eyes pooling with tears.

I wasn't close to him and I knew he only conversed with me to spite Eric but I was human, I felt that way.

"I don't know. No one really cares what happens to me. I'm the bastard son."

Touchè. I noticed he carried that reputation. He seemed to hate it but it had been a title he had refused to let go.

"You're no bastard. There are people who care. If you stay long enough, You just might find out."

He smiled, It wasn't the mischievous one I had usually seen plastered on his face. This looked genuine.

"Thanks. I might..." He then stopped looking at me strangely.

"Are you okay?" I asked, getting off the bed.

"I just feel weird." He answered. He stretched out his hands and as if on cue, They burst into flames. Bright blue cackling ones that burnt through his spirit.

"What's happening?" I asked, afraid and worried sick.

As the flame spread to his body, I noticed the part where they started from we're gone, erased from existence.

"I think he knows I'm here. He doesn't want me here." Conrad theorized.

"What? No! You can't go."

"It's not like I have a choice." He retorted. I saw the pain in his eyes as the fire continued to burn the cord his spirit clenched on to.

"I remember something."

"What?" I managed to say without choking.

This was difficult. I just couldn't take it.

"Something about my killer was he mentioned Valentine." Those were the last words Conrad said before he vanished.

The feeling of grief intensified and I wept. He had to be avenged. This was every form of wrong. I swore I would find his killer but to begin, I needed to know this Valentine.

***

Eric

I left Osei to the spot where the Chimera was buried and shocking, it was upheaved.

Someone did this. How else would a shovel be here? Talk about sloppy. Osei continued to use her eagle eye to scan the area but I had already gotten what I was here for. It was the same Chimera. I was lost in my thought before Osei brought my attention to something. I was known to skim the surface but It was unbelievable I missed it the first time. Right in the dirt were sigils.

"So a witch did this?"

"No. That's dumb. During the great hunt, Witches gave up their abilities to hide and those who didn't left the Kingdom. I can boldly say there isn't a single witch in Nodith. Plus these sigils aren't ancient."

"Okay. Does that help us find the culprit?"

"I hate your guts but you're right. However, I do have a clue who might have done this."

"Who?" I inquired.

"A paladin."

"What? The order?"

"God! How stupid are you? The order are retired paladins like myself who believe humanity and supernaturals can coexist as one but one has to rethink these days."

I ignored her insult and focused on the bone of our conversation.

"So why would you think a paladin would do this?"

" We were trained to kill all mystics. Vampires, werebears, werewolves, and even Witches. For better results, Some of us resorted to magic and totem. This is a sigil for blood necromancy. Used to reanimate slain soldiers if we were sure to be defeated."

Father had told me the tales against my Mother's wishes. I knew the hell mystics went through when they were up against the former killing machines.

"So the Chimera was reanimated to continue its murderous ways. Who would want that?"

" A lot of paladins were against the treaty made between the order and mystics. You have a lot of enemies your majesty."

That was the first time she had ever respected me or gave me a bit of motherly advice.

"You know I've always had the opinion you hated mystics. I've never known this part of you. You should show it more."

Her reply was a grimace and a "Say that again and I'll show you hate" look.

She looked up and said, "It's almost Dawn. You should head back to the Castle for your speech."

"I totally forgot about that," I admitted and hastily headed to the Quinn Manor.

"But your Majesty, I just want to set something straight." I heard Osei yell.

I turned back to hear what she had to say.

"...I don't hate mystics. I just think it's safer you remained in the shadows."

Osei reminded me of something my mother had said to me a night after I had my first shift. I remembered bragging about how much I wanted to world to see what I could do but she told me, "The world isn't ready for you yet."

CHAPTER 39

Eric

"His Majesty arrives." The announcer informed as I entered the royal court. The congregation rose to their feet to welcome the presence of their would-be king, Someone they could look up to and adore, Someone who would protect them. I wiped away the bead of sweat that had formed on my forehead. I turned back momentarily to my brother and the royal advisor whose note I was to give the people today.

I needed to be strong. If not for me, For them. I took a deep breath and walked up to the table. I paused and examined the expression written on their faces before beginning.

"We all know the tragedy that happened yesterday. We are here to mourn the loss of one our own, A daughter of the white owl, Lady Emilia. She was a woman of valor and she will never be forgotten. I urge you all to stay indoors at night and avoid unnecessary visits to the forest. I sincerely hope an unfortunate event like this never happens again."

I got a standing ovation for a job well done. That wasn't all though. The Chimera wasn't the only thing my people were afraid of. The debt we owed was another cause for concern.

"... That said, There is another news I'd like to convey. It's not new hearing my father, The late King let Nodith in debt and penury at the time of his death. A debt that threatens the security of the Kingdom as I speak but I can promise you we won't be threatened by the King of Elyria anymore. Because Tomorrow, will be my coronation and my marriage to Lady Luciana Quinn."

The whole congregation went silent before erupting into a scream. I glanced in the direction of both Anthony and the Royal advisor. They were puzzled, shocked and enraged. I hadn't mentioned it to any of them and even if It broke so many rules, I knew it was the right thing to do. As my eyes strayed back to the audience, I saw Maisy. Her eyes were glassy; filled with pain and I knew why. When I finally faced the crowd again, my mouth went dry. I couldn't stop thinking about the look on Maisy's face. A part of me felt I shouldn't be the one to blame. She was the one who repeatedly said she hated me. She swore she would never give her inheritance and she would be of no use if I couldn't have her inheritance. I sounded like a golddigger saying this but it was how it worked around here.

I momentarily returned to the mortal plane and noticed I'd been standing for so long without saying anything that it got awkward.

"Thank you for your time," I said, ending the meeting since there was no news left to give.

The villagers clapped me as I headed back into the palace.

"What was that about?" My brother and the advisor spat in unison.

"I did the necessary." I bluntly replied.

"Changing the fate of your coronation, That was reckless!" The advisor chastised, "Just think of what the order would do if they found out."

"I don't care. They are not the ones that have to watch people die. My brother could be dead, Sara ran mad and Emilia is dead. I had to take drastic actions."

"If you say so. I have no choice but to agree with you, your majesty." The Royal adviser said before leaving me be.

Anthony however wasn't done with me.

"This is about becoming Alpha isn't it Eric?"

"Yes." I agreed. It was all about becoming Alpha. Reece wouldn't do what needed to be done to protect the kingdom. I mean what kind of protectors would we be if the people we swore to protect died each passing day.

"I know it's painful to watch all this but you have to be patient. It's a virtue you'll need as King."

It was sickening hearing people who had no idea what I had to go through give me their opinions on the right way to do things and even if Anthony was my brother, I just couldn't take it.

"If you are so learned in things like this, Why didn't you take the throne?"

I regretted it the moment they slipped out. I wished I could take them back but it was too late now. Anthony backed away from me. What was I becoming? I barged into the study room to clear my head but instead, I bumped into the one person I had been trying to avoid all morning.

"Hey, Maisy?"

She stared at me blankly before speaking.

"I'll be leaving tomorrow."

"I don't understand. You can't leave... It was the price you paid to revive Conrad..."

"Conrad is dead!" She retorted.

"What are you saying? I know my stepbrother. He is a survivor."

"Wrong! He came to me."

"His ghost? Is he here?"

It was scary. For Conrad to be dead? This couldn't be real. Could it be the Chimera?

"Something happened to him. Something terrible. He said he wasn't attacked by the Chimera."

"So who did it?" I demanded, slamming my fist into the desk in front of me and causing it to dent.

All my life, I had felt nothing but resent towards Conrad but he was a pack member and we were born to die for one another. The sudden urge to avenge him made me boil.

"He didn't remember but he did mention something, a clue maybe. He said, Valentine."

"Valentine?" The mere mention of that name brought back awful memories. It also made me wonder what the missing link was? What did Father Nicholas's daughter have to do with all these?

"You know who that is don't you?"

"She's late. She was Father Nicholas's daughter."

"Well," Maisy said, getting up and heading to the door," I hope you solve it."

Was this her final goodbye? Why did it hurt so bad?

I didn't stop her. I couldn't. She had been through so much already and It had been my fault but there was something I had to do. Something I hadn't done from the start.

"Maisy," I began, gaining her attention as she faced me, "This is kind of coming late but I have to say it. I'm sorry for everything I've put you through. You deserve better and I hope you get your happily ever after."

Her eyes shimmered, clouded with tears threatening to fall. She nodded and I could sense the pain it took for her to turn and walk away from it all.

When she vanished, I felt empty. I was sure I did the right thing. She deserved someone better, A kingdom where she wouldn't be restricted and more importantly away from me. It was just but why did it feel so wrong?

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Maisy

My eyes drip with tears. My walls, the walls that held me up, made me keep my chin high just collapsed and left me in shambles.

Moment by moment, they fell. Salty drops poured. Unable to keep walking straight, I pressed my head against the wall, It was the only thing comforting me as I continued the now difficult journey to my room. The trembling worsened as I reflected on our conversation.

I couldn't stop the tears from pouring. Why couldn't I stop crying? It was my idea anyway. Who knew it was such a hard act to follow.

I finally made it, ignoring the questioning remarks of the servants who stood guard by the door, I pushed the door open and ran in with an unmatched strength.

Father was by the bed waiting for my arrival.

"He accepted", I sniffled.

"It's okay, Maisy. You'll be alright." He said, getting up and hugging me as tight as he could.

I accepted it and let it all out. It hurt bad. How he Let me go that easily, His asking for forgiveness and how chill he was. I expected more. I wanted more. Was it possible to despise someone so much yet still love them with every piece of you?

I heard a knock on the door and the voice of a servant girl relaying a message.

"You have a letter, your Royal Highness."

I headed back to the door to retrieve the letter. It was from Eric. Against the wishes of my heart, I unbounded it to read its content.

A small bottle dropped from within. I picked it up and examined the crimson red content inside. I returned my attention to the letter and read,

"Dear Maisy,

I sincerely I'm sorry for all I've done to you. The least you deserve is your freedom and I'll give you that after my coronation..."

I couldn't bear to read anymore. My eyes welled as I imagined how easy it was for him to say this. I had to come to terms with the fact that he was done. He had gotten what he wanted from me since the beginning. I must say, good things do fall apart.

CHAPTER 40

Eric

Conrad's death was a game-changer. There was no way I could tell.it to anyone until my coronation was over. It would ruin my already laid down plan which was pretty smooth. Plus, preparation was already made. It would be disappointing to dash the people's hope. I had seen them flock in and out the castle today, Their face clearly filled with adoration. I couldn't bear to dash those hopes but something else bothered me. Maisy mentioned Valentine being a clue and I had tried to ignore it before but I just couldn't now. The only answer that rung repeatedly to my eardrums was Anthony and when I pondered a bit about it, a part of me believed I wasn't far from the truth. Conrad had a secret affair with Emilia and there was surely something I was missing but I had a theory that the ghost asking for vengeance against Anthony was Valentine.

"Your Majesty, " A maid whispered interrupting my thoughts.

I faced her and noticed she was holding the holy regalia. A purple robe that had become a tradition for royals to wear while being inaugurated to office. I instructed her to hand it over just before Anthony took the robe off her hands.

"Excuse us." He ordered.

Now wasn't the smartest time to ask him but I needed to get it off my chest but still, How does one accuse his own brother of murder? The maid nodded and exited the room leaving us both to converse.

"Dad would have been so proud," Anthony noted, equipping me in the robe.

"Yes, I'm sure he would."

He looked so happy as I felt like a terrible human knowing I would ruin today for him. Not use on how to start our conversation, I jumped straight to the point.

"Anthony, Do you ever miss Valentine?"

"Why would you ask that?" He questioned, looking at me directly in the eye.

This was the time. Holding back would be wrong. I had to tell him everything that ran through my mind at the moment and if he hated me for it then so be it.

"I just thought you should know that Valentine wanted you dead..."

Anthony backed away, "You...mean she hasn't ascended?"

The look he had on his face. Was that guilt? Was I right to doubt Anthony's brightness? No! I had to be wrong.

I turned to face him and asked, "What bothers me is why would Valentine want you dead?"

"I don't know." He stammered, How do you know this?"

"Maisy saw her. Also, Conrad is dead."

"What? Why are you telling me this? Eric, what's going on?"

He was tensed and could barely stay focused. Almost as if he wanted to forget something or maybe he was hiding something. This gave me the strength to continue.

"Before Conrad left this plane. He mentioned Valentine. Do you know why?"

Anthony turned blue. He was confused as to why I would ask him any of this but my brother was no fool. He didn't take him long to put the pieces together.

"You think I'm somehow involved in this."

"Anthony, I just want to be sure."

"You didn't trust me. I'm your blood! You should know me more than I know myself."

"Anthony, I'm sorry but I just wanted to be sure—"

Anthony raised his hand to silence me,

"Be sure of one thing Eric, I'm disappointed in you."

He barged out and I could bet I had strained our relationship.

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Lucy

Perfect. I checked out my appearance in the antique mirror. All I've craved for since this dream popped into my head.

I admired the strapless, cream dress of semi-embroidered fabric accentuated my thin waist and flared out a bit. I had to admit, Madame Rosette really outdid herself. I hoped Maisy saw this before she drowned herself or something. Dad had to see this.

"Leave me," I commanded the servants sent to dress me. They obeyed, bowing curtly before scampering out. When I was sure I was alone, I loved myself in and tore away the emerald necklace from my neck. His presence overwhelmed the room and I started back into the mirror to catch the look on his face.

"How do I look, father?"

"Splendid, You've made me proud."

"I know. I'm wondering Dad, Now that our dreams are coming through. Will you ascend?"

As he was about answering, a knock interrupted us.

"Who's there?" I demanded.

"It's me, Osei."

What did she want? I gave my dad a knowing look before putting on the necklace and opening the door.

"What?" I demanded.

"I need to have a word with you." She replied curtly.

"It can wait." I retorted and shut the door to her face but she managed to wedge the door using her feet and keeping it open just enough for her to enter.

"That wasn't a suggestion Miss Luciana."

"Okay, What do you want?"

"To ask you a simple question. Why as you bent on ruining your family?"

A funny accusation. Ahe of all people should know. Was she here to make a mockery of me or something? I figured the best I could do was entertain her.

"I am not doing whatever you think I am doing. Maisy didn't want to help the Kingdom and I was willing to. Grandfather has clearly stated that unless he marries the girl along with the inheritance. He can't help this kingdom."

"It's sad you know. You think you are not a part of this family. I'm sure that is reason enough for you to destroy it."

"What are you talking about?"

"It's clear you know and I know this because I've been where you are right now."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You talk to him, don't you?"

Was she referring to my father? How did she even know I had the whisper? Frankly, She was beginning to get on my nerves.

"Who?" I asked, playing dumb.

"Your father. That manipulative bastard putting you up to this."

She did not just soil my father's reputation. No one cares do that. It made me burn.

"My father is none of that! He killed him and I'm going to make sure I take everything from him just like he took from me."

"Quinn loves you, Lucy. If your father loved you, He would have changed. He would have told you the truth. Do you know who your mother is?"

"It doesn't matter." I shot back, wondering why she would bring that up. Of course, I had brought the topic up with both Quinn and my father but they usually change the topic or avoided answering entirely. So I assumed she had shared a cruel fate like my father.

"It does and it's stupid Quinn refuses to acknowledge that you need to know the truth."

"And the truth is?"

"That your father was a vile man but he was terribly handsome and during his time here as a slave, He had an affair with your grandmother. An affair that birthed you, Lucy."

"She wasn't even alive when I was born." I retorted, definitely done with her lies."What the hell are you saying?"

"That's what you were told Lucy but the truth is she committed suicide because she couldn't bear to face the consequences of what she had done."

"I don't believe you."

"Then rip that amulet off your neck and ask him."

She was really daring me. How the hell did she even know the necklace warded off spirits. In my bid to prove her wrong, I ripped the amulet off and immediately my father returned, I asked him,

"Tell her the truth! Tell her who my mother is! Tell her!" I spat, spasming and crying.

Even with blurred sight, I could see the guilt in the depths of his eyes. I dropped the amulet. Osei couldn't be right. No, I could not have been living a lie all these years. Maisy couldn't be my blood, Let alone my niece. That was fucked up! But, here it was. The truth was staring me right in the face and I refused to accept it.

"Father, Just say the words, Let me hear them. I'm begging you."

He approached me and I noticed the tears in his eyes. He just had to say the words. At this point, I didn't care if he would lie. I just wanted reassurance that all I've been conditioned to love or hate was true but the look in his face betrayed me.

"Lucy, Some of it is—"

I couldn't bear to hear it. I shut my eyes and channeled the powers I hadn't used in a long time. I felt the energy return to my body. I opened my eyes and said to him,

"I said your spirit to this plane before but now, I see you free."

"Wait—" He yelled but it was too late.

CHAPTER 41

Lucy

With my father banished to where he rightfully belonged, I didn't know what to do and sure as hell didn't know how to feel. All my life, I had wanted the ruin of anything that shared relation with him but now, It turned out I shared relation with him in ways I couldn't even begin to comprehend.

"I'm sure this a little bit too much to comprehend but..."

"I have to ask him myself." I cut Osei off before she could finish her statement.

"No... He can't know I told you." She began but I dashed out of the room before she could stop me.

"Grandfather! Grandfather!" I screamed, running room after room to find him before Osei could catch up with me. Using my side-eye, I could see her on a mad chase.

I stopped running upon reaching his room. He was on the bed having managed to wriggle out of his wheelchair independently.

"You look beautiful Lucy." He complimented but my mind was far beyond that.

"Am I Maisy's aunt?" I queried.

In the nick of the moment, Osei dropped in, terribly horrified to discover she was too late. Grandfather was stunned. He turned in Osei's direction and said,

"How could you tell her, I trusted you!"

"I had to. You know she was only doing this for revenge."Osei shot back.

" I had it handled."

That was it. They were all going to pretend I wasn't a living, breathing creature in front of them. It was all the confirmation I needed from all three parties. Everyone here was only concerned about themselves. My father, My supposes grandfather turned stepfather... The sinking feeling worsened. The wedding was to start in an hour's time but I wasn't so sure I could put up with it any longer. It all wasn't making sense. Their incessant arguing made the weird sensation in my throat worsen.

"Enough!" I shrieked, so close to shattering the glass.

My outburst gained their attention and I used the moment to rant out how fucked up I felt.

"You had this handled? I poisoned you every day and hoped that one day you'll collapse and die. I had a vision where I saw Tatia die and I did nothing to stop it. I wanted nothing but ruin for this household and all you have to say is you have it handled... Unbelievable."

Grandfather... Stepfather or whatever he was to now become mute. Tears flowed freely as I imagined all the righteous things I had desecrated but not this; I stared down at my dressing, The formal wear that symbolized purity. I had done a lot of bad things but this was going to be the worst. Breaking the sacred vow and staining the ceremony. How could I not see it before? I had to set things right. It wasn't too late to rewrite my rewrite on Maisy's destiny, I have to set things right.

I got my sorry ass up and headed outside much to their dismay.

"Where are you going?" Osei inquired.

I tucked my hair behind my back and faced them, the feeling of disdain, betrayal and some other sensation I hadn't felt since I found out the truth, Something I craved to get back from the Quinns; Freedom.

"To stop me from ruining my Niece's marriage."

***

Eric

"With the power bestowed on me by the almighty..." Father Nicholas's voice trailed away the moment my attention span was taken from the ceremony to the crowd. I peeked a glance at the attendees, finding my bride to be waiting to be called on for her impromptu wedding but I wasn't searching for her, I was searching for Maisy. I kind of hoped she stayed so I could formally divorce her while seeing her again for the last time. I let out a sigh of relief, the moment I saw her sitting in the third row of the congregation. She stared straight ahead, ignoring me and determined not to spare me a glance. Did she even know how much this hurt me?

"...I crown you Eric Clarke as King."

Following that, I was then anointed with the holy oil and the crown was placed on my head. Father Nicholas commanded me to get face the crowd and continued,

"People of Nodith, Hail your new king!"

The congregation bowed in a thunderous voice said, "All hail the King!"

The procession of the coronation ended but it couldn't be complete without my wedding to Luciana. I waited for her to walk up the altar the moment the villagers took their seats to watch us being bound together in holy matrimony. I stole a gaze in Maisy's direction but she wasn't looking

up. She was face down on her father's lap; crying her sorrows away. It hurt but the show has to go on.

The people made another standing ovation for the bride to be when she reached the top of the altar.

Father Nicholas did the necessary, telling the church how God had preordained marriage and other unimportant stuff, I couldn't bear to listen to. My gaze was ok Luciana then back to Maisy, The one thing I had on my mind right now was for the almighty to grant me the opportunity to change the hands of fate, My doomed fate. When Anthony got married to the late Emilia, I imagined it must have been tough for him as he was dealing with the murder of his beloved yet he fulfilled his number one duty to the Kingdom. I wished I was that brave. I needed his support but Anthony wasn't there for me this time. I had sent him away with my own very hands.

"King Eric?," I heard a faint whisper call my name. I apologized when I discovered I had been soliloquizing and had been lost in a train of my own thoughts."Say your vows."

I did a run-through on the words I didn't mean and repeated them as they came to mind.

"I, Eric, take you Lady Luciana to be my wife, To have and hold from this day forward... For better or for worse, for richer, For poorer, in sickness and in health, To...love and cherish; until death do apart."

I reached out for the smaller ring and tried to place it in her ring finger but at the last minute, She pulled back her finger and the ring fell to the marble floor, making a clicking sound and spinning wildly. The crowd gasped in shock as this was seen as a bad omen I perceived.

"No King Eric." She said.

"Whhyy?"

" Marriage isn't a ring worn or the paper signed. It is not something endured but savored. It is the union of two hearts beating as one, each that would sacrifice for the other's happiness and wellbeing. Marriage is meant to be perfect and not a compromise. I can't marry you King Eric because you've found someone already and I wouldn't want to be the wedge between you two."

Luciana's reply got a lot nagging reaction from the congregation but deep down, I knew this was the reply of the Almighty. Maybe he heard my prayers... Which meant this could be my last chance to make a decision that would haunt me for life. I looked at Maisy and this time she was facing me; Our eyes met and my wolf growled conflicted between duty and desire.

Your heart will never lie, It told me and this time, I believed its words. I picked up the fallen ring and walked down the altar, all the way to where Maisy sat. Eyes were on me, I could hear the wagging tongues but it didn't matter, I had made my decision.

"Maisy, I'm sorry for everything I've done to hurt you but ever since I've met a person like you, You've made me laugh, worry and repeat. Today, I know that is what love means to me..." I paused to see the effect of my words on her. She didn't look fazed but she seemed to be listening, so I continued. "...I love you Maisy and I thank the heavens for giving me a chance to see I don't want a life without you in it. I hope you still feel the same way about me so I have you know. Maisy, Will you be my queen?"

Silence ensued and I was sure she was going to reject me. Why shouldn't she? I had brought nothing but torment in her simple life. My heart sank big I wasn't going to give up so easily not until she said the words, No matter what turn they took, I wanted to hear them.

"... it's not about the money. I don't care about the money anymore. It's... My heart... It's..."

She stopped me by putting a hand over my lips. The hurt was gone. It was now replaced by amusement; embarrassment for me.

"I wish I could quit you Eric but something about you just keeps me coming back. This enchantment..."

"Does it mean you...accept?"

"I do."

CHAPTER 42

Maisy

He was going to put the ring. I pressed into my father for support. I couldn't take this but who was I to complain, He wouldn't stop even if he wanted to. I could see the distress in his eyes. None of us wanted this but fate was bound to puppet us. Just as he was about to complete the vow, I saw my cousin pull her finger. You could say my heart almost jumped out of my throat. It was so unexpected. The ring dropped to the ground and made this hollow ringing sound. The one question was why was Lucy rejecting marriage?

"" Marriage isn't a ring worn or the paper signed. It is not something endured but savored. It is the union of two hearts beating as one, each that would sacrifice for the other's happiness and wellbeing. Marriage is meant to be perfect and not a compromise. I can't marry you King Eric because you've found someone already and I wouldn't want to be the wedge..."

They both turned in my direction the second Lucy said those words. I started into Eric's eyes; They shimmered like stars. My heartbeat would not stop hitting against my rib cage so hard. I held my breath the moment he picked up the ring and walked down the altar.

What was happening?

My eyes dutifully followed him as he got closer and closer until he finally stopped. Did he change his mind about the marriage? My mind was really in shambles.

"Maisy, " My mind blanked. Was he really going to ask me to marry him again? I peeped at my father to see how he would react but he looked pretty okay with what was happening. So I listened.

"I'm sorry for everything I've done to hurt you but ever since I've met a person like you, You've made me laugh, worry and repeat. Today, I know that is what love means to me..."

I couldn't be hearing that. Was he being sincere? What was I even saying? Why else would he be here saying this? Yet, Those words made my heart melt.

...I love you Maisy and I thank the heavens for giving me a chance to see I don't want a life without you in it. I hope you still feel the same way about me so I have you know. Maisy, Will you be my queen?" He continued.

He said he loved me... I've heard him say it before but it had never felt so sincere. He was chasing after his heart...for me and he wanted me to rule side to side with him? I glanced at my father again but he still didn't give me any reaction. I felt like he wanted me to face my battles alone. In this case, battles of the heart. A choice here was going to be hard, not that hard though. A part of me

believed he was doing this for the inheritance. Lucy rejected him and here I was, the jinxed girl who found it hard to say no to the man who had lied to her repeatedly. This had to be bad for the heart. He stopped and took a good look at me; ripping through my head and trying to gather what I thought of me. He knew I was wary.

"... it's not about the money. I don't care about the money anymore. It's... My heart... It's..."

He couldn't be lying. There was no guarantee I was going to say yes and here he was giving it everything he had to get me to say yes. This wasn't a last resort. This was from his heart. I got up before he could embarrass his title. He was king after all. I spared a look at my father one more time and this time, He reacted. It was that smile you gave your daughter the moment she finally takes her first steps without falling. I took in a deep breath before pouring my heart to him;

"I wish I could quit you Eric but something about you just keeps me coming back. This enchantment..."

"Does this mean...you accept?"

"I do."I retorted, half giggling when I managed to say the words.

He didn't have to say the rest. He immediately took my hand, caressing it as he held the gold ring to my ring finger. He pulled off the first one he placed and slid in the gold band. I admired the Wolf signet imprinted on the flawless gold. I looked into his eyes seeing nothing but his adoration.

"Your turn." He whispered, handing me my old ring.

This was so beautiful. I couldn't believe it was happening. I held his hands and said the words that came to mind.

"Since I set my eyes on you, Its been always you. I don't know what charm you've cast on me but your enchantment has me in place and if there is one thing I can ask, It will be, Eric, Will you be my soulmate?"

"Always and forever."

I fixed in the ring and he drew me in, trapping me in his arms and gently leaned in, kissing me. His lips were warm and left me with a burning desire. When we pulled apart, I was breathless. If our burning lips didn't touch, if my heart didn't sing his name and if his eyes weren't adoring my very being, I'd probably believe this was a dream. It had to be.

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I walked up to Lucy after the procession had been completed. She sat alone and was lost in her own thoughts. I had to appreciate her for bravery. It wasn't easy to turn down the perfect life.

"Thank you," I said, gaining her attention.

"For what?" She queried, wiping away tears from her eyes.

Where was I to begin? Gearing up Eric to accept his feelings, allowing me to accept what Eric meant to me...

"I don't know how things would have played out if you didn't stand up for what was right."

"I know." She grunted. It was hard for her and I could understand her. I wrapped my arm around her and continued.

"You stood up for me there even when you could have it all for yourself. You bought for what was just. I'm sure if I had a sister, She would do the same thing. You were like a big sister there."

Her sobbings got louder and she broke my embrace.

"Trust me when I tell you I'm not and before you ask why, I just want you to know I've done terrible things, unthinkable things that I can't live with... At least, not here."

"What do you mean? You're leaving?"

"I have to," she replied. "But before I do, I have to give you this."

She revealed to me an emerald necklace so beautiful and bright, I could swear it was glowing. She turned it to the slightly sharp edge and pricked her finger. Drops of crimson slid on the green crystal and I watched its green glow drain before being replaced with a magenta color.

"Take this, " She instructed.

"What is it for?" I asked, collecting and examining the necklace.

"The spirits fail sometimes. Sometimes you have to do the forbidden to survive. Tatia was failed by the spirits and me. I can't fail you."

I really did not understand what she was saying but I was thankful for the parting gift.

"Why do you have to go?"

"To heal. To forge my path. My Destiny was never here and it was stupid for me to try to steal yours."

"Mine?"

"Don't worry. It will be clear soon," She assured before getting up. "Goodbye, Maisy."

"Goodbye, Lucy."

***

Anthony

I was unable to get the thought of my own brother having questions of what I was capable of. I grew up with him. I thought he would know me better.

"Can you believe it, Valentine?"

I was drunk. It was the only reason I would be at the exact spot the love of my life died three years ago. I could still smell her hair. I could hear her screeching my name and she wriggled in the flames that took her life. I remembered the look in her eyes when she died and I couldn't save her. I smashed the ale bottle to a tree just thinking about it. My brother put that on me. He could actually imagine me doing something that horrible to the woman I cherished so much I would switch places with her in a second. I ran my hands through my hair as thinking about it just gave me a headache. In my lowly state, I saw a shadow approach me. The figure was huge and I guessed it was guard sent by Eric to find me.

"Just go away," I ordered.

However, the figure remained, giving me a funny response. Whoever it was sure sounded like a wounded cat. I turned back and instantly jumped backward coming face to face with the chimera. It took a step backward too. Surprisingly, I was sure it didn't want to hurt me. I remembered it's last attack and how it let me live. I was probably crazy with too many drinks but I took a twig and inscribed the words, Valentine, to the earth. It looked down and drew a heart on the inscription. It looked at me and got back to inscribing. I watched it write my name and add another heart to my name.

"Good lord, You are Valentine. Aren't you?"

"Of course she is." A familiar voice informed.

Startled, I turned to face the speaker but the moment I did so, something painful surged through my whole system and my whole world went blank.

CHAPTER 43

Anthony

"Where am I?" I asked myself the second I got conscious.

Everything was blurry but I could comprehend quite well where I was. The haunting echos of dropping water and the smell, It was a cave. I tried to struggle out of whatever was restricting me but I couldn't. The strange part was I wasn't bound. It was something else. A crackling sound followed and the room was ignited in a rich orange color. I got a view of what was weakening me. A silvery liquid I knew too well. Mercury. Was I taken by a hunter?

"I see you're awake." The familiar voice said.

I tried to take a look at the monster but his face was hidden behind the torch, covered in the velvety darkness.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"I actually don't know Anthony."

The voice, it definitely rang a bell. Father Nicholas. God! It didn't make sense.

"Father Nicholas?"

"In the flesh, " He placed the torch on a holder and approached me. "How do you feel?"

"Like... What is happening?"

"Simple, " He replied, "You've become part of my very twisted game."

"So you're the chimera's master and somehow the chimera is Valentine. Why are you doing this?"

"I thought you were a smart lad Anthony. Guess I'm wrong."

"You surely can't be doing this for Valentine. That I'm sure of."

"But I am."

"You killed people. You turned your daughter to a raging monster. What kind of father does that?

" The one who loves his daughter! My daughter was raped by bears, sent by your very wife Emilia. As if that wasn't enough, She set her on fire and let her burn and you and I weren't there to save her."

What was he saying? Emelia was vain and all but she wouldn't kill Valentine. She never gave me warning signs. As if hearing my thoughts, he continued.

"Of course you wouldn't know but Emilia knew you didn't love her so she decided to take the life of that innocent girl your heart belonged to. After all, there is no cure to a broken heart."

"That doesn't make sense. A lot of people have died thanks to your sick revenge. Is it worth being a monster to even the innocent?"

"But it is." He retorted. There was this manic glee in his eyes. He was definitely insane.

"You're sick."

"No. I'm smart and resourceful. Killing a fee is a small price for my big reveal."

"And that is?"

"Eric would have never been pushed to become King if I didn't push him to. Now he's king and there will be a banquet tonight. The whole Kingdom will know who rules them... What rules them and trust me when I say, Fear rules."

No... He planned to expose us at the banquet. I had to do something. But what use was I now? Struggling was useless in this pit of mercury and I didn't know what he planned to do with me... I was dead meat.

"Why are you telling me all these? Do you plan on killing me?"

"I planned to but Valentine was against it. It's the only reason you didn't wind up dead with your wife and its the only reason you're alive now."

"You do know the moment I manage to escape, You're screwed right?"

"Thanks for the head-up but I have a better idea. Ever wonder what happened to Sara?"

"You made her mad?"

"With some magic. I have perfect use of you. Did you know your Father's brother was a vargulf?"

I knew how unstable my uncle was before My father had to take him down himself. He was famous for ripping travelers in two during the new moon. It was what earned him the title ripper. My father feared he couldn't be saved and had to take him down before he caused more harm.

"I know. Did you bring him back too?"

"I wouldn't risk that but I can assure you, It's not going to skip your generation."

Then it hit me...

***

Maisy

I could hear them screaming with joy and could feel their feet disturbing the ground around me. With the Kingdom debt all paid up, Why wouldn't they. I took a small sip from the goblet in front of me while watching Eric converse with a group of men who he revealed were his fellow pack members. I felt so good inside, I was sure I was going to die of happiness. I took another sip and felt someone tap my shoulders. I turned to face the person but she ended up being a ghost.

"I didn't ask for favors."

"You will when you all die." She retorted before fading away.

I questioned if I actually saw that or just had too much to drink. I wasn't left with enough time to comprehend what just happened before Eric returned.

"You look pale. Are you alright?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Are you sure? Or maybe you're imagining how sex with a werewolf will be." He teased.

"I'm pretty sure I can handle it." I shot back with a glare.

We laughed at our dirty remarks. Eric picked up his goblet to drink just before the same spirit appeared right in front of me.

"He's being poisoned. Won't you save him?"

What was the meaning of this? I faced Eric and saw the goblet so close to his mouth. I wasn't sure if it was indeed poisoned but I wasn't taking chances. My reflexes kicked in and I pushed the cup away. In an instant, The party stopped and all eyes fell on the gold cup as it tumbled on the cobblestones with its content all over the place. Eric gave me a questioning look and I answered with what the ghost told me. A servant went to pick the cup and gasped returning all eyes on the spot again.

"What is it?" Eric demanded.

Everyone kept their eyes on him as he brought the cup back to the King. We both examined the insides of the cup and I noticed traces of a silvery grey liquid; It was definitely not wine. Eric took the words right out of my mouth.

"Mercury."

I watched him turn to his pack members! There was dread in his eyes and I knew why. Half of them had gobbled down the wine. I peeked into my own drink spilling the contents into the table in front of me. Every last drop was wine. No traces of any foreign element. So maybe whoever did this was only trying to kill the king. Eric breathed in relief knowing I was safe before ordering the servant to bring the wine taster.

"Did you poison me?" Eric asked the young man immediately he showed up.

"No, sir." He replied, trembling.

The party was over with this act. Everyone was asking the question "What just happened?" While Eric thought, People's attention including mine were taken back to Eric's pack members who suddenly began to cough and choke. It was beginning to look like they were poisoned. Eric got up and raced to where they sat while I remained seated wondering if this was what the spirit said. I felt the necklace on my neck, I had never experienced the whisper in this manner before. Was this why Lucy handed it over to me? My thoughts were shaken up when a scream erupted from the people and I turned to see one of the poisoned men now flashing golden irises and with a distorted body. They were... Shifting...

***

Eric

I gasped when Reece flashed his golden orbs at me. This was bad. Liquid mercury or any form rather was extremely toxic to werewolves. Them shifting was their body's last resort to save them but I doubted it would be enough and even then, I couldn't have everyone seeing them shift. Where was Anthony when you needed him?

"Reece, Stay strong. I'll lead you and the others away from here. Try to be strong."

I pulled a table spread from one of the tables and hid their faces under the cover clothes. However, Someone had managed to wriggle put and was now in the third stage of transforming. The screams from the crowd made it sure I knew that our cover was blown. It was out. Nodith knew werewolves were back. I faced them and could see the questions in their faces. I didn't know what to say or how to even react but one thing was sure; I faced the culprit. He was going to pay. He tries to run seeing I was pissed but was tripped by Maisy. I picked him and raised him high. My wolf half took over and I could tell he was afraid seeing me transform but I didn't mind. If he didn't confess or give me the name of whoever put him up to this, There was going to be violence.

"Why did you do this? Who sent you?"

"I didn't do it. You have to believe me."

His reply took away the last piece of humanity left in me and I attempted to take his life before someone stopped me.

"Enough." The person growled.

I tossed the betraying bastard in such a way that he would be too sore to even think of escaping and faced the speaker. It was none other than Father Nicholas. Anthony was with him.

"You want to know who put him up to this? well, I did."

"What are you saying?" There was so much going on right now, I couldn't wrap my head around anything. The day wasn't even over and I was already facing something that looked like treachery.

He snickered and pointed into the darkness. I followed his hands and saw the link that put it all together. The chimera walked into the open sending everyone into a frenzy of insanity.

"You're the master. The one responsible for all this death. Why...would you do this?"

Low couldn't even begin to comprehend what I felt. This was the greatest betrayal. What I still didn't understand was why Anthony was by his side. As if that wasn't enough, Maisy took the big reveal personally.

"You killed Tatia..." She didn't even let the words sink before she charged at Father Nicholas, armed with nothing but a ceramic plate.

I watched Anthony charge at her with inhuman speed, In a minute he was right in her face and she was left frozen solid. The ceramic slipped past her hands and crashed, splitting to smithereens the moment it hit the floor. Anthony peeked in my direction and I noticed he was different. He gave me a cold look that sent shudders down my spine. That wasn't Anthony. At that same moment, My lost strength returned. I ran to save her life but I was a tad too slow. I watched him grab her by the neck and raise her up while she scratched and struggled to breathe. I would never forget the snap Maisy's neck made seconds after and how he tossed her aside like he was done playing. His heart has to be made of stone. The evil glint in his eyes and the smell of danger. I forgot all about my vendetta because it wasn't worth it anymore. I didn't know what to fight for... What to question... It all felt like a blur.

I picked Maisy, checking if she was still alive. Her pulse gave nothing. She was...dead.

CHAPTER 44

Maisy

The blackness was tainted by a drop of white and the light slowly enveloped it. I got to my feet wondering where everyone was. I was led by a buzzing sound and each step brought me closer to a blinding light. I felt like it was calling to me.

"Stop." A voice thundered before me and a figure crept out of the light.

"Who are you?"

"I can't believe you've forgotten the voice that told you fairytales every night." She replied.

She got out of the light and my heart missed a beat.

"Mom?"

"Aren't you going to hug me?"

I jumped at her, holding her in a tight embrace as I silently wondered why she was here. It had been years since she passed, She should be in the afterlife.

We broke the hug and she looked into my eyes, tears escaping her eyes.

"They said you would die but I didn't realize how painful it would be when it actually happened. You shouldn't be involved in this mess... You don't deserve this."

Her words brought flashes of what definitely brought me here. I remembered the grip on my throat, The soulless eyes, and Eric's overwhelming fear.

"This is not a vision right? I'm dead, aren't I?"

"Not yet," My mother confirmed. "It's up to you to make the choice. Do you want to stay or do you want to go?"

Of course, I wanted the home I had unfinished business and a burning desire to get revenge for what was done to me. I wasn't about to let go but she had to be telling me this for a reason and I was still puzzled as to why she hadn't ascended.

"Why are you here?"

"It's the choice I made. You see, I bargained with a spirit to be here at this time for you."

"You knew I would die?"

"I knew you would need help. Maisy, This isn't just a fight for revenge. This battle has been destined to happen a long time ago. A time where we wouldn't have to hide in the shadows anymore."

"What do I do then?"

"I know all you want right now is to kill him for murdering Tatia but you can't. The spirits can't help you kill and using a favor that can't be granted without payment will leave you scorned by them. You need to be smart."

"But everyone is scared, They don't see him as the monster. They see Eric as the monster and I'm sure they know I am too."

She reached for my hands and held them compassionately, in the way only a mother would and told me.

"You have to stand with your humanity. The greatest monster is within us but you're battling a deceiver so you have to be a wild card. Like the old ones would say, Knowledge is everything."

"Knowledge?" I repeated.

She nodded and just as I proceeded to say something else, Darkness tainted the light and my existence slowly began to fade. Something... A black hole snatched me away from my mother's arms and I watched the light consume her at a slow pace.

"Seems like you've made your choice," She yelled. "Finish that bastard and tell your dad I love him."

I didn't even get to reply before it all turned black.

***

Eric

I laid there lifeless hoping Maisy would just snap out of it. I was glad her family wasn't here. It would break them. Father Nicholas resumed to poisoning the people with his vendetta.

"This is your king. This is the very people you entrusted your life to. They were nothing but bloodthirsty monsters!"

"No," Someone from the crowd shot back. "You're the master of the Chimera. You are the one behind those brutal killings. They are monsters but you are one of them."

"No one said this when my only daughter was murdered. No one remembered this when the ripper terrorizes the Kingdom for years. Did you care to know who those culprits were? The monsters who killed my daughter were the King's personal guards. Werebears who raped my daughter till her body couldn't handle it anymore. To cover their tracks, They burned her like wood and we're

covered up by the late king himself but why wouldn't he? Your late king had secrets of his own. For years, Nodith was terrorized by his brother. You knew the killer as the ripper but let me tell you this, It was a werewolf and that beast who terrorized you for years was the late King's brother."

Yes. That was one of the twisted things I remembered about my family. It was the reason I despised our name but I couldn't fight the truth. Maisy couldn't die for nothing. I was going to take a stand even if it cost me my stupid life. This man was the reason Tatia was dead and I was a hundred percent sure he was responsible for Conrad's murder. It all made sense no I pushed Maisy aside and prepared my wolf for a battle to the end.

"You didn't tell them the whole story Father Nicholas, " I faced the crowd who were still shaken stiff by all that had happened and began. "My father loved his brother but he became unstable after the war between the paladins and the supernatural. When he found out my uncle couldn't be saved, He took his life for you all. He was never a monster unlike you Nicholas. We trusted you and all you do is betray us. You killed Tatia, You killed Conrad..."

" ...and you killed Maisy. I'm going to make you pay " I growled, my wolf took over and I felt my senses heighten. The bloodlust went haywire.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. I didn't kill Maisy. Your brother did. If you want to cause someone pain, He's all yours." Father Nicholas, said, clicking his finger.

As if under his command, Anthony approached me with the aim to cause me harm. He was under some sort of spell.

"What did you do to him?"

"I thought it would be beautiful if history repeated itself. Your father killed his brother when he became a vargulf. So I thought why not make Anthony one?"

"You drove my brother insane? You are a monster."

"Don't tell me you are heartbroken? You should be a king and not a whining baby. Kings make the sacrifice, don't they? Aren't you a king?"

No has had to handle this in the history of Kings. Of course, it had to happen during my regime. I looked in the direction of my pack members. They were all dead, Maisy was no more, The entire kingdom knew of our existence and it was somehow on my shoulders to fix it. I took a look at the bastard that did all this and it made my blood boil. I charged for Nicholas shoving my brother out of the way. Just before I could deal with a winning blow, I felt the air knocked out of me. Valentine, the chimera managed to catch me unawares. Her uppercut sent me reeling backward and I tasted copper.

My quick defeat excited Father Nicholas.

"You are not a king Eric. Accept defeat and maybe I'll spare you and your fellow rats."

I wish Osei were here to see him. One of her one being the monster they feared we would become. But now, I was beginning to fear something had happened to them. I got to my feet to try again. I was a Clarke and...

"And you are not a man of God. Run and maybe you can be saved." Someone took the words out of me.

Someone who shouldn't be alive. I turned to face that certain someone and was surprised to see Maisy alive.

***

Maisy

My mouth was filled with the coppery tang of blood, and it felt like fire was rushing through my veins. I wanted revenge. I clench my fist, my nails digging into my palms and ignited whatever powers worked within me. In seconds, The jewelry of my neck let out a strange, bright light. I watched it flicker, giving out a vibrant red-purple glow.

"Favors?" The spirits queried, a little crowded than usual.

It had to be the necklace. It was somehow acting as an amplifier to my abilities. I closed my eyes and remembered my mother's words.

"What are you going to ask them for gypsy girl? That they kill me? That they turn back the hands of time? There are some things they can't give you girl." The false priest taunted me.

It was a bid to let me make the wrong choice. To be brash and ask for a favor in a fit of rage and even if I wanted that right now, I had to be smart about it.

"So what's it going to be gypsy?"

"It's going to be knowledge." I retorted.

I faced a spirit and asked what it wanted.

"Kill that bastard priest!"He growled.

"Done," I assured. "Give me knowledge. Knowledge of those before me. Give me the wisdom of an old one."

I slumped immediately whatever I asked for surged inside me. I moaned as my vision shifted and the world erupted with colors. I heard Father Nicholas command his monster to go after me and end me the second time but this time, Eric beat them to it.

My head at first, hurt, but then I suddenly feel confident, filled with power. I looked into Father Nicholas eyes and I saw fear. Eric was still in a combat with his brother while the chimera charged for me, convicted to end me with one slash. My lips began to chant words I barely understood myself the faster it got to me and the moment, It dealt the striking blow, It exploded to nothing but chunks of flesh and insides. It fulfilled me. Deep down, I knew it wasn't me performing those miracles. It was something else. I felt empowered... More like possessed. My feet left the ground and I raveled as Father Nicholas cowered.

"Anthony, stop her." I heard him say and I twisted my head backward to see Anthony in full wolf form coming at me like a rabid beast.

This pathetic excuse of a villain was sending puppets to do his work. I directed a finger that shot a beam of light at Anthony rendering him unconscious. I wanted to stop whatever I was doing right there but it soon occurred to me my body wasn't mine anymore. I could feel someone or something calling the shots. I knew what it planned to do with Father Nicholas and I wasn't up for it. I could visualize the atrocity already.

'Who's this?', I sent.

And I got a reply. It was something that scared the daylight out of me.

'Merihem, The red death'

I was possessed. As horrifying as it sounded, I didn't even know why.

'What are you doing inside me?'

'You asked for knowledge. I was the only being the could give it. In return, You offered me a place to stay.'

Good grief! Tatia had warned me about the deals I made but this was beyond it. I cut it out when I landed before the terrified Father Nicholas. The things going through my head were unheard of and I wanted to stop. I managed to temporarily gain control of my eyes and use the corner of my eyes to find Eric. He was beaten up and I could sense the air of worry in his expression. He wondered what I planned to do to Father Nicholas and the moment, I sprouted a pointed tail, He knew something was wrong. He limped for me begging me to stop and that was when I lost control again.

"Beg for your life." I snarled, or rather the demon did.

Father Nicholas was a fool to mess around with what resided in me and I scoffed when he grabbed some sort of talisman and began to chant a repelling spell. I witnessed the tail behind me slice the charm off his hands effortlessly leaving him in pain.

"Maisy, What are you doing?"

"Watch," I replied, giving a wide-toothed grin.

My imagination was flooded by Father Nicholas' scream and I could not be surprised when his bones began to bend, twist and break in the most inhumane way possible.

"Stop!" Eric yelled, trying to stop me but I shot him back with a telepathic wave so strong, He flew two feet away from where I stood.

Father Nicholas stopped screaming in agony and I realized he was gone. I hated myself instantly.

"Get out of me!" I wept.

Eric got up and limped at me once again. I got another vivid imagination of what the demon planned to do now that he was done fulfilling what he thought I wanted. Nodith was going to burn. Everything was going to die. No!

Eric gave me a puzzled stare and I realized I was in control again. The demon was still very much there but for some reason, It wasn't manifesting yet. I felt it's a struggle to gain back control. It was now or never.

"Eric, I think I've been possessed..."

"How?"

"Listen to me! There isn't much time. You have to stop it. It wants everyone dead. You have to kill me." I instructed.

I lost control again but hijacked it from the demon just in time to convince Eric I was dangerous alive.

"Maisy, We'll find a way around this. Be strong." He tried to comfort me but I knew better.

Whatever the demon was doing, I was sure if it gained power over my body again, it was game over.

"Eric! Do you know what your duty is as King? You have to put your people first. Their priority comes before yours and definitely before mine. So do your duty."

He nodded. His eyes shifted to the side again and became glazed with a glossy layer of tears. As he blinked, they dripped and slid down his cheeks. I bit my lip tightly in an attempt to hide any sound that wanted to escape from my lips when he wrapped his hands around my neck. My heart sank.

"I love you, Maisy Quinn."

The demon was on the verge of total control but I managed to hold it down to let him hear me say those words. My lower lip quivered as the words slowly made their way out of my mouth. "I love you, Eric. Always and forever." I began, yet what followed was engulfed in tremors. "Do it."

He tightened his grip on my neck and the last thing I heard was a cracking sound.

***

Eric

The world will never forget someone like Maisy. Maybe that's why everyone fell silent. Against all the numbness and filth I felt for myself right now. I knew Maisy deserved better. She would have wanted me to be strong. I took her lifeless body in my arms for the second time in one night and headed outside. It surprised me when I saw people tailing behind me. It didn't matter what she might have been. To them, Someone fell trying to make things right. A queen sacrificed her life for her people. They did the traditional right of singing; a belief that the spirit shouldn't wander away from her ever after. When we reached the sepulcher, The tombstone was rolled away and I went in to place her to rest. Inside, I had the last chance to look at her before she would be encased like the rest of the bodies here. Maybe tomorrow, She would be embalmed. I held her hands and kissed them. I was lost in the torrid vortex of the moment. It was a moment that would carry me forward until death decided to free me from its clutches.

"It sucks being a Clarke," I mumbled.

"You hate that name so much." Maisy retorted, blinking her eyes open.

"God..." I didn't question anything else. I pulled her close to me in a tight embrace. I literally locked her in my arms hoping she would never drift away from me again.

"How am I alive?" She asked herself but I didn't care. She was alive and that was all that mattered. But then I realized what had happened. Maisy was pale and alive but I couldn't hear her heartbeat.

"Maisy, Did you drink the vial I gave you?"

"Yes. It tasted terrible."

"It was vampire blood. It was a last resort to keep you safe. Guess it was handful after all."

"Eric, I couldn't stop thinking about you... I can't believe I'm seeing you again."

"It's mutual love."

In that moment, space and time, I pressed my lips against hers. I chuckled beneath the salty tears, "You're never leaving me again". Then we hovered right there, quite soundless for a long time, simply feeling each other's presence. It was just as I imagined it, Perfect.

Chapter 45

EPILOGUE

Eric

(A week later)

I briefly looked for support in my wife's eyes as I began the speech. I felt honored that the people looked beyond differences between both warring parties and has me reinstated but returning had been nothing but easy. Neither was it easy to face the fact, I was facing thousands of people who knew I wasn't one of them. I felt foreign but Maisy was there to give me the support I needed if only I could get the thought of how wild we were last night. I shook off my dwindling thoughts and focused on my speech.

"I'm here to thank you all for keeping an open mind in the recent discovery of the supernatural in Nodith and I will forever be thankful for reinstating us in. For years, Humans and mystics have battled one another due to fear. Fear kills and we have to admit we do stupid things when we are afraid. I hope from now on, both factions can work hand in hand for the progress of Nodith."

There was silence when I was done. The good kind of silence. Everyone had been through a lot and I didn't expect them to be up and running any time soon.

I headed back to the castle seeing Osei talking to Maisy. I was reminded of Anthony and Sara. Osei had taken my brother along with Sara for a spiritual treatment having informed me their predicament was caused by dark magic.

"How are they?"

"They are fine. They are both making progress and even if it takes years, They will return to the people you knew," She assured me. "The order also praises you for what you stood through but I'm here to tell you I'm proud of you... For opening their eyes and proving to the order that people are ready."

"Thank you, Osei."

She nodded and turned to Maisy.

"Nodith is open-minded to werewolves. I wonder why Eric didn't tell them you are now a vampire."

Maisy stole a glance at me before replying,

"He wants to take it one step at a time."

"How is your father coping with this new development? I learned he has returned to Linsea."

"Yes... He didn't like it at first but when he found out it's the only reason I'm still alive, He just had to accept it."

"You were really strong Maisy, " Osei began. "I just hope you are able to understand what you have become and please doing make me regret this secret."

The big secret was not everyone knew Maisy we now undead. Vampires were one of the complicated 'monsters' the paladins fought in times before. They were ruthless and almost invincible, which was one of the reasons I didn't want the order or Nodith to know. It was better off a secret.

"You won't regret it, Osei. I give you my word."

***

Maisy

"You look worried?" Eric's baritone voice drew me away from my train of thought.

I was worried. In the course of the week, I've had the unending taste and hunger for the crimson liquid that ran through every person's body.

"It's about your vampirism right?"

"I'm just worried, Eric. What if it can't be kept a secret? This lust to bite into every living person throat and drink them dry is killing me. And I thought hearing voices in my head was bad enough."

"Don't sweat it Maisy. I promise it will be okay. I'll be here for you and if your thirst worries you, Remember my blood is your for the taking."

"Shut up," I said, hitting his bulky arms. I knew what he was doing. Being a vampire has a lot of perks I wasn't expecting. Like how drinking the blood of someone you loved was far intoxicating than sex or Ale. I learned that one yesterday. Another thing was drinking werewolf blood can drive one to a state of frenzy. Something I'd call high. If he hasn't restrained me last night, God knows what would have happened.

It was fun remembering beautiful and dangerous memories like that but I had to be serious. The blood lust wasn't the only thing bothering me.

"But would you still love me years from now when you'll need an heir?"

"Maisy, " He said, putting away the falling traces of my hair behind my ear while he continued. "I know when that time comes, It will be hard but I know we'll get through it. Moreover, we can adopt. No one has to know."

That manic glee in his eyes. I knew I was in for it all. The secret, The lies, The drama...

A perk of being a Clarke.

"I guess I am a Clarke now."

"True." He teased.

He then leaned forward making my pulse raced. It that strange feeling you would get even if you weren't truly alive. I stared into his eyes, Those little stars that dragged me into this in the first place and I saw the depth of his soul and his love for me. His lips touched my cheek. Time stopped. I swore my heart came alive and my breath caught in my throat. Our fingers locked together similar to puzzle pieces. As the soft skin of his mouth left the side of my face, He whispered.

"So don't worry Maisy. It's going to be a good life."

I believed him even if my thought weighed me down and I feared the unknown. I was sure he would be my side for a very long time and honestly, It was all I wanted. To have a forever with the man my eyes mirrored, The man who made my heart beat again.

Who wouldn't be allured?