

## **The Beast And The Blessed by Ashley Breanne**

### **The Beast And The Blessed by Ashley Breanne Chapter 61 - 81**

#### **Sixty-One: Killian**

##### **Killian's P.O.V.**

She was mesmerizing. The way her body glowed a bright white, similar to the moon was enchanting. But that was before she started screaming, crying for the pain to stop. Before she started scratching her chest open and coughing up blood.

Was it mine or hers?

The audience had been in awe of her, just as I was. I could feel it through our pack

bond how hypnotized they were by her ethereal glow. The feeling was quickly washed

over by horror. Was my mate going to die in front of the world?

Had it been an attack

from our enemies? Was she having a reaction to my blood?

I didn't have to call for her, Joselin transported next to Natalie, eyeing her with wonder.

"There is so much power." She mumbled as she tilted her head to the side like a dog

who had heard something unusual.

I couldn't spare her any of my focus. I had just barely caught Natalie as she crumpled

to the ground screaming in pain. "Do something!" I growled, my Lycan coming

forward. I pushed down my beast, knowing that it was more urgent that I be present in

this state for her.

Joselin stepped forward, but then I felt it. It was barely there, but her bones shook as if

they were trying to move...to break. Her scent grew thicker, and

my eyes widened as I grabbed Joselin's wrist before she could take Natalie and me away from here.

"No."

Joselin hissed as she ripped her arm away. "You just told me to do something. I need to get you both out of here and to safety."

I just shook my head, my eyes meeting the bloodshot ones of my mate as she

gaspd, trying to take in air but unable to. "She is trying to shift. She needs the moon."

Natalie's eyes darkened at my words, and I knew while she was in agony that she

was excited. She had been waiting to shift for years but was never able to.

"Baby, I know this hurts, but I need you to listen to me. I need you to try to feel your

wolf. Find her. Let her in." I knew she wanted to listen. She wanted to shift. But her

body was working against her mind, and she let out a scream of pain, sobbing just

after. I wasn't even sure if she could hear me.

The stadium grew louder as the wind whipped through the area, surrounding us in a

whirlpool that threatened to take the air right out of our lungs at a moment's notice.

"Killian," Joselin muttered, and I glanced up at her to see she was staring down at

Natalie still. "She won't... she needs to get to the infirmary. There is too much. Too

much power. She's not focusing it."

My eyes narrowed as I looked back down at my mate. She was a wolf. I could smell it.

Had I confused her body with my blood, with my strength and power? Was I indirectly

killing her?

“She can shift. I can feel it.” I whispered as I gathered her tighter in my arms, her cries growing quieter with my touch. “I can feel it. Stay with me, baby.” “You’re leaving me no choice,” Joselin muttered, and I growled as she launched on top of us, wrapping her arms around us and transporting us away from the arena.

The air continued to swirl around us until the room stopped spinning, and the infirmary flickered into view. Natalie groaned in pain, her eyes lowering as the cyclone surrounding us dropped, and a wall of dirt and crushed flowers coated the once-clean room.

Flora was the first healer to approach us, and I forced my arms open and let her see my mate. The golden crown clattered loudly to the ground from her head as the healers surrounded us, each of them trying to inspect my mate. There was a flurry of activity as they gently guided me to rise from my knees and take my mate to a bed. I did as they asked, my eyes never straying from my mate’s as hers remained closed. Her body had given up, or she had given up... The shift would have healed her. Her wolf would have protected her.

Instead, she lay in a hospital bed. I gripped her hand and refused to let go as they worked, feeling the energy flowing through the limb from their magic and efforts.

Joselin stayed back by the door, for which I was grateful. While she had done the right thing, there were already too many people around my mate. It had me on edge, and I

was glad that she wasn't pushing to be another person among the many.

She held the dagger in one hand, gripping it tightly, and the chalice in the other. I

wasn't sure when she had gone back for them, but I was grateful that she did.

"Was it the shift?" I asked around an hour later as the healers began to walk away one by one, having done all they could do. All they need now was for her to wake up. "Will she not survive the shift?"

Flora was newer to our pack, but she had healed my mate once before and Natalie liked her well enough. It made me trust her over the others. "She is very powerful, but not the way a wolf should be. I believe that your blood in her system is what saved her tonight."

I nodded slowly, trying to find a solution for the next time her body tried to shift. It

could happen at anytime, and I had to be prepared.

"I don't think it was your blood." Joselin's voice called out, and I turned to look at her

as she approached. "She has always felt powerful, and she could feel the magic when

Heath and Nolan were cursed."

"A hybrid?" Flora asked, her voice lowering as she glanced around, but the others

were too far away to hear. Being healers, they didn't have the hearing that wolves and

Lycans did. "It's possible, but one or the other should have come forward years ago.

I've never heard of both sides staying dormant this long." I

My eyes traveled back to my mate. I watched her chest rise and fall with every breath,

the scratches healed. While I could hear and see that she was alive, my other hand moved up to grab her wrist, needing to feel the strength of her heartbeat as well.

“I think she may need to go to the Sanctum of Light.” Joselin sounded hesitant, but I knew it was just because the place had always made her feel uneasy. We had explored it a few times as children, and she had refused to go back.

She had said it felt like there were eyes on her while she was in there, and the power she felt was suffocating. To others, the overwhelming concentration of power made everyone believe it was a way for the Goddess to connect with us and us with Her. 1

We remained silent as we tossed the idea around in our heads. I had never heard of a hybrid having this issue. One side always dominated the other, and eventually, only one side remained. It seemed she needed something to push one side to come forward.

She could have been anything that had or was able to sense magic, and that gave endless possibilities. Fae, witch... maybe she was a siren after all.

“After she has a chance to recover, we will go. The sooner, the better.” I agreed, nodding my head once.

## **Sixty-Two: Natalie**

### **Natalie's P.O.V.**

Loud talking disrupted my sleep, and I fought the urge to yell at them to shut up. But I

was distracted by the sparks shooting through my hand. I knew right away that it was Killian. I had felt them before but never this extreme. Was this how he felt our bond? Was it because of the ceremony when I drank his blood, or was it because I had finally shifted and my wolf was present? It felt as if I had drunk too much alcohol and had blacked out. I had no memory of last night beyond the first stabbing of pain once I had been crowned the queen.

“Did I do it?” I mumbled in my sleep-infused and groggy voice. The talking stopped, and the sparks danced over my cheeks as Killian cupped my face.

“You’re awake. Thank the Goddess, you’re awake!” He pressed a firm kiss down on my lips before pulling back and kissing my nose and cheeks in a flurry of happiness. I giggled as I forced my eyes open. His beautiful hazel eyes stared back at me with joy.

“What did she look like?” I wondered, the smile growing larger as I tried to feel in my mind for my wolf.

Killian pulled back, and the room fell silent. It was then that I realized I was not in our room. The overhead florescent lights were harsh, and I glanced around the rows of empty beds and the healers who were watching me with sad smiles. My head fell back against the pillow as my hope was crushed.

“No. No. No. No.” The repeated whisper had Killian pulling back slightly, rubbing his hands back over my hair as if he were smoothing it down.

“Baby, you didn’t shift.” His words were the final crack in the damn, and a tear silently fell over my cheek.

“No! I felt her! I was going to shift!” My protests were wasted on deaf ears as I dug harder in my mind to find any trace or proof of my wolf’s presence.

If Killian’s blood and the full moon didn’t help me shift, I had the feeling that nothing would. I was going to be trapped in a human body forever. I would never be strong enough to save Killian on the battlefield, and I would never feel whole. My parents were probably rolling in their graves at my failure.

A flash of resentment toward the Goddess flooded my system.

She was toying with me. She was punishing me for something I wasn’t even aware I had done. Was it this life or a past one that I had offended Her so?

She gave me my parents and made sure they would find me and take me into their lives, just to have them turn on me when I failed to live up to their expectations. She

gave me a wolf but refused to let me shift. She gave me a mate and a crown, but she

would be taking that away too when I failed to save my mate. I would be a human

among a field of supernatural creatures. Even if I did save Killian, there was no way I would be walking away alive.

One bite from a vampire, and I would be dead. The poison would be too much for my frail human body.

“We can try again! We have a plan. We just need you to get better first.” Killian

insisted. The heartbreak in his eyes had me closing my own. I didn't need to see how I had let him down too. He deserved a strong queen, and I would do my best to give him that. But I also needed a moment to embrace my emotions before I pushed them back down and stood tall next to him.

"It's not going to happen. Just forget about it." I whispered before opening my eyes as Killian used his thumbs to wipe away the tear tracks down my cheeks. "I just need to train harder. I won't let you down."

I tried not to imagine the glee my old pack must have been feeling as they watched me fail to shift once again. I would prove them all wrong one day. I would become stronger in my current form, and become unstoppable.

"Woe is you." Joselin's bitter voice said as she approached. "We haven't tried everything, don't get all mopey."

My eyebrows lowered as I glared at Joselin unamused. Normally, I found the way she interacted with people to be entertaining, but I really just wanted to punch her right now. "Do tell then. What's the plan? You want to take my blood and run tests on it? Then what? If Killian's blood and mark didn't help me shift, I am fairly positive that nothing will!"

Killian chuckled, but I didn't find any of this amusing. We should be on our honeymoon of sorts right now, locked in our bedroom and ravishing each other until the real world forced us to return to it. Instead, I was the only one in a bed, and I had a bitchy witch



taunting me.

“I want to take you to the Sanctum of Light as soon as you are feeling better. I think it will be good for you.” His explanation only left me with even more questions, and I

waited patiently for him to elaborate. Instead, his eyes moved up to the male healer,

and the unfamiliar man nodded once before making himself scarce. It was only when

we were alone that he spoke again. “There has to be more than just a wolf in your

lineage.

Most hybrids have one side dominate the other, and the weaker side fades away over time. I think...”

Joselin cleared her throat loudly, and Killian rolled his eyes with annoyance before continuing.

“WE think both sides are fighting to overpower the other, which is why the dominant

one hasn't come forward yet. The Sanctum of Light is a very powerful place, some

believe it is a direct connection with the Goddess, it may help the stronger side to rise

up.” I nodded in understanding, but I didn't fully agree with him.

I truly felt hopeless, but I didn't want them to know that. Not when I knew it would just

cause Joselin to mock me again for 'moping'.

“I trust you.” I held Killian's gaze, wanting him to know that I meant it. I may not

believe it would work, whatever the Sanctum of Light was, but I trusted that he would

only do what he thought was best for me.

That was something I could always count on. Him.

The idea of being a hybrid was unsettling. Maybe I would take

Joselin up on her offer to test my blood. There had to be some way to find out what I was. What I really wanted was for there to be a way to force my wolf forward. If going to this place would help with that, then I would do it. I just wasn't going to get my hopes up.

"You had me scared to death, my love," Killian whispered as he pressed a kiss to my lips, but my eyes were wide as I stared at him.

That was twice that he said the word love to me in the past twenty-four hours. Twice now, I felt my heart stop from excitement and happiness.

"I'm sorry," I whispered and took a deep breath, enjoying the way he smelled. The fact

that he was still in his suit pants with the top few buttons of his shirt undone and his sleeves rolled up on his forearms had me ready to melt. He looked like he was ready

for a photo shoot. "When can we leave for the Sanctum?"

"As soon as you are feeling up for it. I would prefer to get there and back before the council starts to show up, so we only have a few days." Killian growled when he

mentioned the council, still pouting that they were coming at all.

But I knew that we

needed the help. If our enemies could curse and cast spells on our people without us

knowing or being able to track the spell, then they were stronger than we were prepared for.

My eyes flickered over to the windows, seeing it was still dark out. It had to have been

early morning still unless I had slept the day away.

"When the sun comes up?" I asked, knowing I would need some

more sleep before  
being able to travel. Killian pursed his lips before nodding and  
sliding his arms under  
me to pick me up.  
“When the sun comes up.” He agreed, carrying me away from the  
infirmary as Joselin  
disappeared. “For now we will go to bed, my queen. We will leave  
at sun up.

### **Sixty-Three: Natalie**

#### **Natalie’s P.O.V.**

The dining room was swarming with people, even though the sun  
had just barely  
started to hit the tree tops. It seemed everyone wanted to see me  
or talk to me.

It made me really uncomfortable, but it was something I would  
have to get used to.

Every bite I took made me feel judged as I would meet another  
stranger’s stare.

I felt like a zoo animal.

Killian was settling a few things before we could leave, and I had  
figured eating here  
would be better than eating alone in the private dining room.

I was wrong.

Eating in front of everyone was like putting myself in a window  
display and praying to

the Goddess that no one would stop to look.

They all did, and my stomach turned as it fought to keep the food  
down in my state of  
high anxiety.

“Your majesty,” A deep and familiar voice called out from my side,  
and I turned to see

Damien. Relief filled me, and I quickly swallowed my bite and  
gestured for him to join

me, aware of the eyes and whispers on me and the bear-shifter.

'Damien! I am so glad that you chose to stay here! How are you?' I asked as he took the chair to my left, leaving the seat to my right open for my mate, should he join us.

"It is satisfactory." He said respectfully. But I could see the disgust in how his top lip curled up slightly, and I bit back a laugh.

For a man who had just been sleeping in the forest, a beautiful castle should have been an exciting experience. Instead, he looked like it was an inconvenience, and I knew he wanted to go back to sleeping in nature.

He glanced from me to my food pointedly. It was something I hadn't realized he was doing until Killian had hinted at the difference in treatment from Damien toward my mate and me.

I took a bite, watching as he then dug into his food. "Why do you do that?"

He silently raised an eyebrow at me, his mouth full of food as he waited for me to expand on my question.

"You did it the other night as well. You waited for me to eat before you would touch your food, but you didn't wait for Killian. Why is that?" I placed my fork down on my plate and narrowed my eyes at him when I saw his hand start to move as if he were about to put his down as well.

"You are the queen." He said simply. But I shook my head as he smirked with amusement. "You are not?"

"I am, but he is the sovereign. He is the one you should have been following." I felt someone walk up, and I turned and smiled as Charlie placed a

friendly hand on my shoulder in greeting.

“In title, yes. But there is something about you that makes my beast feel compelled to submit. He is our king, but your aura is stronger. For you wolves, I would assume it would be similar to an Alpha’s command, only you do it without realizing.” Damien explained, and I let my eyes drop to the table as I tried to understand, i

Only, I couldn’t. Why would he feel compelled to submit to me and not to Killian?

“I was curious about that myself,” Charlie said as she eyed Damien. He leaned over and kissed her cheek before whispering something in her ear that made her turn red.

The room fell silent as Killian entered, walking with purpose as he looked from me to Damien where he held his glare. I quickly shoved the last bite of my food into my mouth, and I stood as he reached our table.

“Are you ready?” I asked, cutting him off from whatever he was going to say to or about Damien. Today was going to be stressful enough without having my mate get into a fight with his soon-to-be brother-in-law.

Killian glared at Damien a moment longer before turning to me and smiling softly.

“Yes, my mate.”

Nerves were bubbling in my stomach, and I was glad that I had been able to hold down what I did of my breakfast. The last thing I needed was to throw up in front of the pack. Killian looked irritated by it, but I was glad that we were taking the vehicles.

Everyone was tense as we traveled for the next few hours, filling the time with unimportant small talk. I was positive that my direct guards in the car with us were aware, but I didn't know if the other several cars of guards knew what we were trying to do today.

Whether they did or did not, there was a lot of pressure riding on this...on me.

My eyes stayed locked on the overgrown ruins and forests as we traveled through

them until we reached the mountains. As soon as we arrived at the base and started

to head up the off-road path, the hair on the back of my neck stood up. The air was

thick, and I gasped as I felt what they had been talking about.

Magic was everywhere, but it didn't feel like Joselin's or even like the dark curse that

was on Nolan and Heath. It was light and airy but felt even more suffocating and

deadly than anything I had ever felt before.

Like a Venus Fly-Trap waiting patiently for an unsuspecting victim to walk into it.

I turned to look at Killian, seeing his jaw clenched the further up the mountain we

drove, winding around the hills as we climbed higher and higher.

As the SUV came to a stop, I eagerly looked out the front window, expecting to see

something grand. Instead, there were only more trees.

"We will run from here," Killian said as he got out of the car. The guards scanned the

area. Those that were in their Lycan forms already had the fur on their backs standing

up in agitation. I waited for my door to be opened as Killian came around to my side.

He opened my door for me, and I let out a noise of surprise as he stepped back and took off his shirt before shifting into his Lycan. The large beast was over a foot taller than Killian was in his skin, and I laughed as he picked me up into a bridal hold.

My chest warmed as I remembered the last time he carried me. I had been thrown over his shoulder, staring with jealousy at Mira when her mate carried her lovingly away from our old pack. Now it was my turn to enjoy being in my mate's arms, 1

Every muscle he had shifted, tensing and relaxing as he began a steady run through the trees. The guards surrounding us let Killian lead the way but stayed close to us.

After a long run, I lifted my head off Killian's chest as the guards suddenly dispersed, making their way out into the trees and leaving Killian and me alone.

"Where are they going?" I asked, trying to look over his shoulder without wiggling too much in his hold.

Killian held me tightly against him as he glanced down at me once before looking up ahead.

"They are giving us privacy," He said. His voice came out in a low growl in his animalistic state. His body tensed even more, and his eyes narrowed as he slowed.

I followed his gaze, seeing the small opening of a cave. The magic in the air got thicker and more intoxicating. It was just barely visible, reminding me of the way heat would rise off the asphalt in blurry waves during the summer.

Killian stopped at the entrance, placing me down on my feet.  
“We’re here.”

## **Sixty-Four: Natalie**

### **Natalie’s P.O.V.**

The cave felt cool compared to the warm air outside, and I ducked my head to enter

the small space. There was a pathway leading in further, and Killian huffed in his

Lycan form as his head brushed against the top of the opening.

As the light faded from the entrance of the cave, I reached forward, placing my hand

on his lower back. Killian shivered at my touch, looking over his shoulder briefly before continuing forward.

My other hand trailed along the dirt and rock wall, and I gasped when a pointed object

that was protruding from the wall sliced the inside of my ring finger. “Ah!”

I yanked my hand back, holding my fingers in a fist to my chest as Killian stopped

walking. I could feel the hot liquid running down my palm from the incision.

“Are you okay, mate?” He turned around, hunching his shoulders in to avoid scraping

against the walls as he lifted my hand. I wasn’t sure how clearly he was able to see

the injury. The only thing I could see was his glowing red eyes.

But he growled as I

opened my hand, and his tongue slid over the injured flesh.

“Yes,” I whispered, in awe of the feeling he invoked in me. Even in his current state, I

was wildly attracted to him.

It must have been the magic in the air. As soon as his tongue flicked against my skin, I



was ready to have him throw me against the jagged wall and fuck me. I knew he could feel it too. His other claw moved up to intertwine with my hair, pulling my head up. My injured hand landed on his large chest as his nose pressed against my neck, and his tongue ran over my mark.

“Mh,” I moaned as his body shook.

“You are making it very hard not to shift back and claim you before the Goddess.” He growled, and I shivered in response. We both knew it wasn’t a good idea, but my hand slid down his chest anyway, my fingers dipping over each muscle and scar on his torso.

I knew without a doubt that he would claim me again. I needed him too. One last time before I tried to shift. If I didn’t make it through the shift, I wanted something to remember him by and something for him to remember me by. The cool air around us turned hotter, and I groaned as his tongue touched my mark again. Only this time, it felt cold as if he had just had a sip of ice water before touching me.

He pulled back suddenly, and I panted, grabbing his arms to steady myself as beads of sweat formed on my forehead. “You’re burning up. We need to get you inside.”

My disappointment was washed away as my body turned on me. My hands grabbed at my chest as the familiar pain from last night stabbed through my heart.

I let out a scream as Killian grabbed my arm and pulled me forward. I stumbled behind

him, my shoulders bouncing off the walls, getting torn up by whatever rocks were sticking out.

“No,” I shouted as I cried, not wanting to go further into the cursed cave. ‘ No!”

“It’ll help you turn. It’ll be okay. It’s going to work. I know it! You’ll be okay!” He said

firmly, but it sounded as though he was trying to convince himself rather than me.

My eyes frantically flickered about the room as the tunnel began to grow bright. I could see the crystal shards sticking out of the walls, and fought against every fiber in my

being that was screaming at me to run and trailed after Killian.

My free hand grabbed at my chest, while the other remained in his grasp. The

entrance to the cave opened before us, and I blinked rapidly as my eyes adjusted to the bright cavern.

“Deep breath,” Killian’s deep animalistic voice called out, but my lungs didn’t want to

pull in air as the magic in the air threatened to drown me. ‘ Deep breath. It will go

away soon, I promise.”

The walls of the enclosure were bright and colorful. Crystals and gems of all sizes

stuck out of the dirt, most only exposing small sections of color.

The rest were dirty

and hidden, hidden behind their unpolished coating. Joining them was a vast display

of moonflowers.

The white blooms were on display even though it was daytime, and I recoiled further

from the wall. Moonflowers were toxic to humans, and while I knew I was not fully

human, the idea of being surrounded by them terrified me enough that I couldn't enjoy the beauty.

There was a bubbling section of water that was crystal clear as it splashed and steamed like an active hot tub. A small stream ran from it across the room and disappeared under the wall.

Several tunnels could be seen around the wall of the cave, no doubt leading to a dead end, and the top of the cave opened up to the sky. Even without the moon, I could understand why they referred to it as the Sanctum of Light. The sun had already passed over the top of the cave, and yet, there were no shadows. It was as if each flower and crystal put off its own glow.

But the divine beauty of the space did nothing to stop the pain. As I leaned further into Killian's side, he pulled me to the middle of the cavern. The heat grew stronger, and my bones ached. This was nothing like my heat, nor was it like the night before when I had thought I was shifting during my coronation. It was so much worse.

I looked up at Killian as the tears fell faster, and my breathing became harder. How was I supposed to survive this?

The snapping of my leg had me letting out a scream, and Killian slowly lowered me down to the ground. My hands gripped his furry forearms tightly. My nails dug into his flesh, refusing to let him go.

But I knew he had been right. This place, whatever it was, was triggering my shift. I still wasn't certain that it held a connection to the Goddess.

While it was a powerful hideaway, as my thigh twitched and my bone felt like it shattered, I was leaning more toward it being a cursed place, 1 I had never seen anyone struggling so hard to shift, nor had it taken very long.

A whine of protest left my mouth as Killian pulled back and looked around us as if he were trying to find anything that could help.

“No... please!” I cried out as I felt the bones in my arm twisting beneath my skin.

“You can do this! This is it, mate.” Killian cheered, his hand hovering over my cheek as if he was scared to touch me.

I knew my wolf wasn't too far behind, but there was more to it.

The overwhelming pressure in my mind told me that my wolf wasn't alone. Whatever was fighting her for control was still at the surface. I didn't care what it was, and I didn't want it to win. I

wanted to be with my mate as a wolf.

Bone after bone, joint after joint, my body destroyed itself until I could do nothing but

lay with my cheek against the ground and pray to the Goddess for mercy. My lungs

were barely working, and I knew if I hadn't consumed Killian's blood last night, I would

have been dead at this very moment.

Instead, I lay limp as I silently cried. The energy to scream or beg for my end was

gone, and Killian whispered my name every so often to get me to look up at him. But I

couldn't even hold my gaze up. It took too much energy to look to the side and up at

his face.

Was this how my mother felt before she begged for mercy?

The world around us dimmed for a moment, and I was excited at the prospect of passing out. Anything would have been better than the constant torment and torture my body was going through. But then the cavern grew even brighter than before, and I wanted to curse the Goddess for what she was putting me through. Killian glanced up before backing away slowly, and I let out a whimper at the distance. I couldn't tell if it was horror or awe in his wide eyes. The glowing red of his beast was focused on the Earth around me, and I began to convulse. My mind was under attack as I felt my wolf fighting for control against the unknown creature inside me. With one final stabbing pain, my eyes fell closed. 'Freedom,' I thought to myself. 'No, my mate. Success.' Killian's voice sounded clear and loud in my mind, and I forced my eyes open. White fur covered my body, and I picked my head up slowly as I attempted to move my limbs. When they responded with no pain, I let out a laugh that sounded like an animal choking. It was me. I was the animal. I had finally done it. 'You are so beautiful!' Killian said as he shifted into his full wolf form. He towered over me before licking my cheek. Everything felt different. Natural, but different. It took me a few minutes to get to my feet. Killian pushed my other side with his head until I was up and steady. Then it took me even longer to get used to walking. The moon was high in the sky, hovering over the opening at the

top of the cave and reflecting off the gems and flowers. I had known that it had taken a long time, but I didn't expect it to take as long as it did. We had gotten here just past noon, and I had no doubt that it was almost midnight. I stuck my nose in the warm water before flinging my head toward Killian with a laugh. He had been patient and loving with me while I got used to my new form. I had been waiting for this since I was a kid, and I wasn't ready to go back to my skin just yet. I knew I would need to tell him about the feeling in my head. Something had happened during my shift, and I knew without a doubt in my mind that the other part of me that could sense the magic was still there. It was still inside me, as strong as ever. As the water flicked off my nose and splattered across his face, a shadow dashed across the flowers and into one of the caves halfway up the wall. My body tensed, and my tail tucked beneath my body as I braced myself. 'What is it, mate?' Killian asked as he took a protective stance in front of me. 'I don't think we are alone.'

### **Sixty-Five: Natalie** **Natalie's P.O.V.**

Killian shifted back to his Lycan, his joints popping loudly at the sudden change as he stood tall in front of me. "Come out!" He demanded. The Alpha command was thick, and even I felt the need to step toward him at his order. His body shook with anger, and

while I was excited to have shifted, I was in no way ready for a fight in this form. I had no training in my fur... I had barely learned how to walk. My gaze moved to the mouth of the cave, wondering if our guards would come to assist, but there was only silence. The magic in the air grew thicker. I shifted, not worried about my lack of clothing. My training had all been in my human form, and I wanted to be ready to fight. My fingertips touched Killian's back, and his fur bristled as a female peaked her head around the corner of the cave above us before transporting down to stand only twenty feet away. We both took a step back at the action. The only person that we had known who was strong enough to do that was Joselin. Even then, her ability wasn't as clear. She flickered in and out, while the stranger before us popped from one place to the other. The power she must have had to master that skill was terrifying. She was breathtaking. Her long ebony hair was curly and wild. Her eyes were a pale, sea-green. I shivered when I met them and found them locked on me. "You have grown so beautiful, my dear." Her soft voice seemed to echo through the cavern, and the hair on Killian's hackles rose. For me to have grown meant that she had seen me when I was little. But I had no memory of her. i "Who are you, and why are you here?" Killian asked her with a low rumble behind his

words. The underlying threat made me anxious. While he had been doing better to control his anger and reactions, pissing off a witch with no backup, especially one as powerful as she appeared to be had me feeling uneasy. "I do not have to answer to you. You are trespassing in my home, but if my memory serves me correctly, this is not the first time." She laughed as she pulled her gaze away from me and landed on my mate. "You seem to have a habit of bringing women to my home. First the witch, and now my daughter." i My mind shut down, and my lungs refused to pull in air. Beyond our height, we didn't have very much in common. There was little to no resemblance in our coloring. While she had black hair, I had brown. Her lips and eyes were bigger than mine were. We both had green eyes, but hers were significantly lighter than mine. I narrowed my eyes at her in disbelief as I failed to find a matching feature, anything that would confirm that she was my mother. "That's not possible." My denial caused a flash of hurt to go over her face, but she quickly masked it with a forced smile. "I assure you, my dear. It is. I birthed you myself. Right here in this very cave, as a matter of fact." She lifted her arms, palms up, to gesture toward her surroundings. But I refused to take my eyes off her as she spouted her lies. "I knew you would be beautiful and strong. I am glad to see that I was correct." "How could you be my mother? Prove it." I whispered, feeling my confidence fade. I felt desperate to know if she was a threat to our safety or just a



threat to my mind and heart. Either way, I would come out damaged from whatever happened here.

I knew my parents weren't my real parents. My mother had told me herself before she died that they had found me and taken me in. If the wrong person learned that fact, they could use it against me. I wasn't stupid enough to blindly trust a witch when I knew witches were working with the vampires.

"I don't need to." She smirked as she watched me step to Killian's side, not bothered by my being nude. "We are connected by our blood. If you try, you can feel it. You may have shifted, but the other part of you hasn't gone anywhere. If anything, you just made it stronger."

"The other part of me?" I whispered, my hand staying on Killian's side as he eyed her with distrust. He shifted to place his shoulder ahead of mine to shield me in case anything should happen, and I stood still as I tried to process this information.

She wasn't wrong. I could feel the magic in the air with every ounce of my being.

Having her here, someone to connect it to, was like fine-tuning an instrument. The pull of the magic toward her was there.

It was both comforting to know that I could, in fact, feel the connection between us. It helped to reassure me that she was not lying. But knowing she had been here this whole time, only a few hours away made me angry.

"Let me start over. My name is Aurora, direct descendant of Selene. Her gift runs

through our blood, and nothing will ever be able to mute or turn that part of you off.”

The witch explained as I felt my hand drop from Killian’s side. 1  
“This is insane,” I whispered as I turned to look at my mate. Killian growled as the woman took a step closer, and my head shot back up to glare at her.

“Your white-furred beast was not proof enough? That in itself should tell you how rare you are. Your father’s wolf was a pale, golden color. When you first walked in here, and I saw that you had his eyes and hair, I figured that your wolf would be the same.

I’m glad that you share at least that with me.” Aurora smiled warmly at me before the magic in the air began to thin as if she were calling a truce.

“Please, let’s talk.”

Killian huffed, his arm moving in front of my torso to protect me as Aurora walked around us to take a seat on a thick section of grass.

“If you are my mother, where were you?” My voice cracked as she gestured for us to join her.

“I was here.” She smiled sadly as she continued to stare at me.

“Why did you abandon me?”

Killian stopped me as I moved forward. I did as he silently requested, keeping my hand on his back as I waited for her explanation.

“I couldn’t keep you. You needed to be around your kind, and the vision I had told me that where I left you was where you were supposed to be. I had to put you first.” She

swallowed visibly, and I fought the urge to roll my eyes. She was the one who gave

me up. In my mind, she had no right to be upset. “I wish I hadn’t. I

wished I kept you with me, but there was a greater plan for you. You needed to be there, without me.”

“Why?” The loud yell of my question was mixed with a cry.

“I have been hunted for decades, my dear. With each passing year, my magic has been fading, and yours has been growing stronger. If I kept you, you would have been in danger every second of every day. My magic was leaving me, and I didn’t know if I could keep you safe. So, when Selene blessed me with the vision, I knew it was the right thing to do.” Her explanation made me want to curse the Goddess, but I bit my tongue.

It was the same for every child, people making decisions for them, and those decisions impacted the rest of that innocent soul’s life.

Killian’s arm dropped, and I looked up at him, pleading with my eyes for him to take me away from here...from her.

“I know you need time to process this. I will give you that. But we will see each other again soon.” She whispered.

I was grateful at first, for the space and time. But as she popped out of the cavern, my heart dropped to my stomach, and I couldn’t resist stepping forward and looking around for her.

My heart wanted to know her, but my mind was closed to the idea of her literally popping into my life after all this time. I was also bitter that she had chosen to use tonight to do it.

I had been waiting for this moment since I was a kid. I finally had

my wolf, and now all of my excitement was gone.

“Are you okay, my love?” Killian asked, and my heart sped up as it always did when he used that word.

“I just want to go home,” I whispered as I called upon my wolf. The transition wasn’t as hard this time. It still lasted a few minutes. But I was back on four paws and running toward the exit as quickly as I could.

### **Sixty-Six: Killian**

#### **Killian’s P.O.V.**

Natalie pulled my shirt on quickly when we got back to the car, and I shielded her back as all of my men were staring. They weren’t trying to get a look at her skin, I knew that. They were transfixed by seeing her wolf.

Lycans were normally double the size of regular werewolves when we were in our full beast form. Yet, Natalie was just as large. It was also her pure white fur that made everyone stop and turn. They didn’t exist that we knew of. The closest we had to her coloring was the wolves that lived up in the snow regions. But even they had spots of grey.

Natalie was the most stunning wolf I had ever seen, and they agreed. If it weren’t for that and the immense amount of power she was putting off, I would have been livid that they had watched her slip into my shirt. But even I was a little star-struck. I was proud as hell. My mate was a descendant of the moon goddess. She was strong, powerful, and...

My eyes traveled over her face as we began the journey home. In Shock. She was in shock.

Her lips were parted, and her eyes were wider than normal. They were glossy and barely blinking as she stared ahead at the back of the passenger seat. Her skin was pale and sickly, the blood had been drained from her face, and her hands were clasped in her lap above her thighs.

'You did wonderful, my mate.' I leaned over and whispered, my lips brushing against her ear softly. She took in a deep breath before turning to face me. I had expected to see water lining her eyes, or for her lip to quiver.

But the lack of emotion there had me even more worried.

She was lost in thought, thoughts I couldn't even begin to guess as her blank stare

looked right through me. 'When can I start training in my fur?'

I pressed my lips together, biting back the laugh at her question.

Out of everything she

could have asked or said, that was at the bottom of my list. 'As soon as you would like.'

"Do you really think she is my mother?" Her question was paired with her looking

away, trying to hide the hurt in her eyes. She had already lost her mother and father.

To find out that she still had a relative out there, one who had abandoned her was not easy.

'I do think she is the one who birthed you.' My agreement was met with silence, and I

looked over her profile. She was stunning. Ever since I first saw her, I was taken by

her. But it was the power radiating off her that had me floored.

'The amount of power in The Sanctum... I feel it in you. At first, it was small, but over time it has grown more prominent. I can feel it very clearly now. It's as if I were sitting next to a full-blooded witch.'

A direct descendant of Selene. That was how the witch had put it. Although she had mentioned Natalie getting her fur color from her. Since she had jetblack hair, I had to assume that she was more than what met the eye.

"I don't know what to do with that. I just wanted to shift into my wolf." She mumbled, closing her eyes and letting her head rest back.

"You embrace it, my love," I whispered, as I reached over and grabbed her hand from her lap, my thumb moving back and forth over the smooth skin. Natalie's eyes opened as she turned to me. The empty glaze was gone, but so was the hurt. She looked torn, but the faint smile on her lips made my heart thump just a little bit harder during its next beat.

She opened her mouth to speak but snapped it closed just as quickly as the vehicle came to a stop. The gate of the city stood tall and strong before us. The metal glinted in the sun.

"The pack had been waiting to see you. Are you up for a short run?' I didn't want to push her into anything more when she was already so exhausted and more than likely overwhelmed. But I couldn't deny our people their happiness and wanted to ask her instead of making the decision for her.

If it were solely up to me, I would have had us driven right up to the door of our home

where she could relax and recover.  
But she nodded as she glanced out the window.  
I jumped out of the car, ignoring the early morning nip in the air as the sun was just starting to rise. The pack was quickly lining up on the streets, each person sported a large smile as they woke on their own and came to share in the excitement of their queen's first shift.  
Natalie took my hand as I helped her out of the car, standing in front of her to block others from catching an eyeful of my naked mate beneath my shirt. I knew they didn't mind, but I was positive Natalie would have. She had the power of a Goddess but the confidence and modesty of a human.  
It took only a moment for her to shift, and I followed behind her, transforming into my Lycan.  
I could hear the joy and gasps from the pack when they saw her. Her large form was bigger than even some of theirs. Her pure, snow-white fur was truly a sight to see, and I had never been witness to a more beautiful creature, i  
But it was her power, her magic. Magic I wasn't even sure she was in tune with yet, that radiated off her. As we took off at a light jog, the pack clapped and cheered, waking anyone who might not have been up already.  
When we passed, they all submitted, dropping their heads and exposing their necks to their leaders.  
The trip through the city was quick, and I smiled at my mate as I felt and watched as her mood dramatically improved. The pack had always accepted

her, but the open celebration of her had her feeling loved. It pulsed through our mate bond brightly.

Standing at the entrance to our home, up on the marble steps, was our family. Charlie clapped with excitement, and the bear next to her stared down at her with a look of wonder. Joselin stood next to them, her hands in her back pockets.

The staff I had grown up with lined the entrance, standing tall, only to bow as one unit as we came to a stop. One of the maids stepped forward with a silk robe for Natalie, holding it up in front of her, and my mate shifted back behind the fabric curtain as I stood behind her.

“I knew you could do it!” Charlie cheered as she rushed forward, and Natalie smiled graciously at her, accepting her hug. I stayed silent as the girls spoke animatedly, but I could see that Natalie was still bothered by what had happened. I pressed my hand to Natalie’s lower back, enjoying the way she shivered beneath my touch as I guided her inside before she could accidentally say something that we weren’t ready for the rest of the kingdom to hear just yet.

My nose wrinkled as an offensive smell wafted through the front door of the castle, and I clenched my jaw as I laid my eyes on my best friend’s handy work. The beautiful floor had been destroyed by deep and thick lines that were burned into it. The design of the symbol was brilliant, and I had no doubt Joselin had improved upon it to fit our needs.



It didn't make me any happier that the floor had been destroyed, but it was a small price to pay for security and safety.

"Oh, my goodness!" Natalie exclaimed as she examined the deep burn marks and

stepped into the room. The marks started at the doorway, and there was no way to

enter without stepping through it. "Is this at every entrance?"

Joselin nodded silently, but I could see the pride on her face as her hard work was

acknowledged. "Every door. I have a plan in place, but this is the best I could do on

short notice. I'll be busy working, making sure no one can access the castle through

other means over the next few days."

I lowered my head as I glared at Joselin. She was up to something, and by the way,

she stared at me as she smirked, I knew I wouldn't be happy.

"What are you planning, Josie?" I growled, but she just laughed as she flicked her

hand around the room to gesture to her hard work.

"This, but larger! Something that will go around the castle. An entire ring of them!" She

exclaimed excitedly. I narrowed my eyes, knowing that would take a long time, but

Joselin just bounced once on her toes before turning back to Natalie.

My mate smiled at me with a twitch in her cheek before she turned to the witch. I knew

whatever she was about to say was difficult for her based on her tense shoulders.

"Joselin, I know that will keep you busy. When you have a moment, I am ready for you to run your tests."

Joselin's eyes widened in excitement at the prospect of getting

her hands on Natalie's blood. I let out a deep breath in relief that Natalie had finally agreed. It was time that we got more answers.

### **Sixty-Seven: Natalie Natalie's P.O.V.**

Training had been lacking the past week. I had been able to move more weight and do body-weight movements easier.

I also got to learn some things in my wolf form, but it was harder than I had thought to

get used to moving more swiftly on four legs than it was on two.

Walking and running

were easy, but the complex movements as I dodged and attacked my opponents were

uncomfortable. The majority of the time, I ended up tripping over my own paws like a

newborn pup... which I guess I was.

Hours every day were spent training, and I found myself improving but not very

quickly. There was still an internal battle going on in my mind that left me with a

splitting migraine by the end of each day, and no answers for what I needed to do.

It was widely agreed upon by the healers that the other side of me should have faded

by now. I still hadn't told them what my birth mother had said about being a

descendant of the Goddess as Joselin hadn't had any time to look into my blood. So,

they treated me like any regular hybrid.

Joselin had been busy with her project around the outside of the castle.

No one had been caught in the trap she set in the doorways, and I

wasn't sure if that was a good or a bad thing. Either we could trust those around us, or the spell didn't work.

I smiled when she walked into the training room, but it fell when her look of anger landed on me.

"You are interfering, 'Your Majesty'!" Joselin shouted, and several stacks of weights dropped around the room as she approached me on the large training mat. She didn't seem to care that I was almost as tall as her in my beast form as she was in her skin.

I shook my head. A low, guttural noise left my throat as I stupidly tried to respond as if I didn't currently have a snout.

"You need to get it under control!" She shouted, and I tried to jump away as she grabbed a fistful of fur, pulling on it as we teleported to the library. My oversized body bumped into a bookshelf, sending it tumbling down.

So much for respecting my title in public. I was livid.

Joselin groaned in annoyance as she flicked her hand and righted the wooden structure. "We have the same parts, stop being a prude and shift back!"

I grumbled in annoyance as I did as she asked, wanting to lay into her but holding myself back since she had more power than I did, or at least, more control over it.

"Maybe if you didn't manhandle me, I could have shifted sooner!" Her glare never left mine as I refrained from covering my body.

She had seen it before, several times at this point, and while she had openly looked in the past, this

time there wasn't a single twitch in the muscles around her eyes to show that she was looking anywhere but into my soul as if she wanted to figure out what secrets I had buried there.

I narrowed my eyes at her as I remembered the last time she had been in this library with me. She had grabbed my face and tried to invade my mind. If she so much as leaned toward me this time, I was going to bite her. Wolf or human, my teeth would be cutting into her flesh.

Her face relaxed as she smirked, "Well, you sure have grown a backbone."

A small squeak was heard as a maid entered the room before dashing away quickly.

My eyebrows dropped as I turned back to stare at Joselin, unamused. "I need to get back to training."

Joselin turned away from me, showing me her back which made my beast seethe with irritation at the disrespect. But she carried on as she traveled around the shelves, taking a few books down as she passed them before carrying them over to me.

"You do." She plopped the books down on the table as a maid came running in with clothes. I thanked her quietly before pulling them on as Joselin began to flip through

the pages of the first book. When she seemed satisfied, she nodded and snapped it

shut. "Your training starts now. This is the basics of controlling your magic. Whatever

you unlocked at the Sanctum, is powerful. You're letting your magic leak through, and

it's getting in the way of my casting. Even just now when I turned

my back to you, the power you put off got stronger.”

She shoved the book she was holding into my chest just as my guards came bursting through the door.

“Would you NOT do that?!” Thomas growled at Joselin as he scanned me over. Tobias sent him a warning glare, slamming his hand roughly down on Thomas’s shoulder.

Thomas forcefully calmed under the silent reprimand from his superior. Only I had the suspicion that it was Joselin he was defending and not me. I bit back my smile at the silent giant and the small witch. They had an odd dynamic, but Joselin looked pleased that Tobias reacted to my newer guard’s outburst.

“We can’t defend her if you just disappear with her whenever you please!” He exclaimed as he gestured toward me but glared daggers at Joselin.

“Down boy!” She scolded as if she were talking to a pet, and Thomas’s face turned red while Tobias’s hand visibly tightened on his shoulder. I watched amused as they squared off before looking down at the book in my hands.

The beautiful brown hardcover was decorated with a gold outline of the tree of life, and a single word was etched into the bottom... In Latin.

I flipped through the pages in panic as Joselin and Thomas continued to bicker, growing louder with every word. Some held pictures, but every page was the same.

They were all in a language unknown to me.

“Listen here, mutt! You are one sound away from me skinning you

and using your hide  
as toilet paper!” Joselin was fuming, the black lines on her skin  
vibrating harshly  
against the pale background, and her hair picked up as if a fan  
was blowing on her  
face.

I could feel the power coming from her, but I was more concerned  
about the book in  
my hands. “How the hell do you expect me to read a book in  
Latin? Is this even  
Latin?”

The binding was well worn, and I carefully closed the cover as  
Joselin turned to me,  
her long snow-white hair resting back in place on her shoulders.

“That’s not my  
problem. I have a lot of work to do. I really don’t have time to hold  
your hand. Use one  
of the computers or a phone to translate it.”

Joselin turned, walking toward Tobias as I glared at her back.

“Bitch,” I mumbled, flipping her off behind her back.

A book shot off the shelf, landing right in front of Joselin, and my  
hand flew over my

mouth. She tumbled to the ground, smacking loudly onto her  
palms and knees, just

barely catching herself before her face could hit the floor.

My eyes widened as she flipped over quickly to be sitting on her  
butt with her hands

behind her as she glared at me.

“Did you just...” Joselin trailed off, her jaw twitching as we both  
remained silent. I felt

like a caged animal. All of my muscles coiled as I prepared for her  
to launch at me.

“Fuck.” George whispered as he moved into a fighting stance,  
knowing I was about to

be attacked and that she would have to go through them first.

'This is going to hurt,' Joselin said as she got to her feet, and I let out a small scream as she ran at me. Tobias wrapped his arm around her waist, holding her back to his chest as George and Thomas shifted into their Lycan form to block her path to me. I ducked behind a shelf, looking up as books started to fall down on me. My hands covered my head as I sprinted to the next aisle. "I didn't mean to!" I shouted. I heard Tobias grunt, and then there was absolute silence. The books stayed on the shelves, but I could feel the threat looming. My chest rose and fell rapidly as I held still against the unit, knowing as soon as I gave away my position, it would all be over. The bookshelves had solid backs. I was both grateful that I was able to hide behind them but also frustrated that it hid her too. My eyes glanced around quickly, and I let out a breath of relief that she was nowhere in sight. I pressed my lips together, holding my breath as I peeked around the shelving unit and saw all three of my guards unmoving and asleep on the floor on the other side of the table. The lack of witch was disturbing, and I froze as the hair on my arms and the back of my neck stood at attention. I didn't have to hear her to know that she was standing right behind me. She was like a poltergeist, ready to drag me down to Hell. I spun on my heels quickly, letting out a yell of fright as I shoved my hands in her direction to push her away. Only she had attacked as well,

sending us both flying backward into the shelves behind us. Our eyes met for only a moment as we regained our footing. The shelves began to fall, crashing loudly as they tumbled like dominos. I was happy that there were only a few. The rest of the books lined the walls. But it felt like forever until the last unit hit the ground.

I was unable to bite back my laughter as the corner of Joselin's lips twitched.

"Why are you two always fighting?" It was the roar from my mate at the doorway that broke us, and we laughed loudly as he stared confused.

"Sexual tension." Joselin snapped back as I shook my head with amusement. She surely was something else. I could see why Killian had chosen her to be his best friend.

### **Sixty-Eight: Killian Killian's P.O.V.**

The steady, low beeping of the monitor was still far too loud, just as it always was. I knew the healers were tracking her stats from inside the infirmary, but I couldn't help but look over the numbers on the screen myself, just as I had done a few minutes prior.

She was alive, but I wasn't sure that she would want to be. She had done everything she could to remove herself from this world, and yet we were going against her last request and forcing her to stay on this Earth instead of being with her mate and lost



child.

I had killed more than I would even be able to count in my lifetime.

I had shown mercy

to people I had barely met. But my mother would continue to

suffer in the realm of the

living because I was too much of a chicken to free her.

The sheen to my mother's hair was even duller than before, and I

couldn't help but run

my hand over it, hoping that one day she would turn her head and

press her cheek

into my hand.

Our relationship was awful when she was alive. I was constantly

scared of what she

would do and how she would react to everything. I wanted to stay

as far away from

my parents as possible.

But then, after my mother had been locked away, and we thought

she had been

healed, she became my mom again. She was loving and happy.

She seemed to enjoy

life and spending time with us.

The day I discovered it was all a ruse to gain her freedom was the

day she had finally

broken my heart for good. The last nail had been hammered into

the coffin, and I

knew that love was a trap as my father dove for the gun to save

her.

Love was used to manipulate and control the other person.

I didn't want to be like my father, weak and hopeless as he pinned

after a woman that

didn't want him. She was forced to be with him. After she

destroyed him, he destroyed

her.

Love was the guarantee of mutual destruction. At least, that was

what I had thought

until I met Natalie.

I dropped my hand down at the lack of movement and grabbed my mother's cold palm, her fingers remaining limp in my hold.

"You were wrong," I whispered as I listened to the machines pumping and swirling away to keep her alive. "I wasted so much time because of you.

My mate deserved

better than me, but she stayed. She was patient while I tried to fix the man that you

raised me to be. You failed me. You failed Charlie."

A small blip on the electrocardiogram made me look up at the screen, but it was

quickly washed away by the normal pattern of her heart beating.

Maybe this was it.

Maybe she was finally going to let go.

I glance down at the first woman I had ever loved and the first to have ever broken my

heart. "I expected more from you. We deserved more."

My eyes closed tight as I tried to push back the emotions that were bubbling to the

surface. Emotions that I didn't have until Natalie came into my life.

Before her, they

were tucked away in the depths of my mind, locked in an impenetrable box. But she

broke through it, and now I knew I couldn't put it off anymore. I had to face my past so

I could give her the future that she deserved.

The familiar statement that I had grown to loathe finally made sense.

Charlie had told me the same thing time and time again. She needed her brother, but I

had only ever been her ruler.

She deserved more, Natalie deserved more... and my mother deserved more, no

matter how much I detested her.

She had been kept alive by machines and wires for far too long, and it was time for her to find peace.

The child I once was, was screaming from the back of my mind. Begging for me to step away and leave his mom alone. I could hear him shouting at me that I was a monster and that I would never forgive myself if I went through with it.

I had watched her try to kill herself so many times... too many times.

I had shown mercy to my mate's mother and had allowed her soul to be returned to the Goddess and her mate, but the idea of doing the same to my own mother was too much to swallow.

The words tumbled from my mouth before I could stop them. I knew I was stalling, but

I did it anyway. I wanted a mother who would have stayed for me.

I wanted a sister

who didn't run from me every chance she could. I wanted a family that didn't live off of the pain and suffering they could cause each other.

"I found my mate, and she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. She wears

your crown well, and the people love her. You've already met her.

She came in here

not too long ago. I hope you know that I will treat her better than my father treated

you, and it will be a hell of a lot better than you treated my father.

Our kids will be

loved and cherished. I hope when you are looking up at us from whatever pit of Hell

you get sent to, you learn a thing or two about what it means to be

a family. I would hate to imagine that after all the suffering you caused, that you would do the same in your next life.” I licked my lips before pursing them together as I glared down at her.

If I kept reminding myself how much I hated the empty vessel before me, it might make this a bit easier. It shouldn't be this hard to make the choice. To let her live and suffer, or to kill her and let her die and find peace. She had suffered for so long, and yet, the bitter man I was wanted her to suffer for a bit longer. I wanted to make sure that she learned her lesson... but I also didn't want her to leave me.

Charlie was sure to run again, more than likely to go live in some cave with her mate.

If I made the choice to end our mother's life, Charlie may never come back.

I clenched my fists as I fought to make my decision. The same decision I had been fighting for years. Only now, I finally felt ready to do it. I had Natalie.

Even if Charlie never came home after this, I wouldn't be alone for once.

I had Natalie.

I loved Natalie, and I would show her how much she was adored. Then I would get to watch as she grew round with our pups, and we would make our own family. I only prayed to the Goddess that they would be happy while they were here before they eventually walked out on me too, ready to start their own lives. I nodded to myself as my mind was made up, my hand reaching up to the power

button on the first monitor. I didn't want her actual blood on my hands, and I didn't want to hear it as I killed her.

"Goodbye, mom." My voice broke as I pressed the button, and the beeping stopped.

The lack of noise made my heart beat faster as I moved to the next machine, the one that was giving her oxygen. The knob connected to the wall seemed small compared to my hand, and I tightened my hold on it as I tried to convince myself to turn it.

It was the first of many things that would begin to end her life. Do it.

Do it.

My knuckles turned white as I glared at the tube leading from the port in the wall to my mother's frail body.

"Killian?" Charlie's voice made me pause. I released the valve and turned the heart monitor back on quickly. "What the fuck are you doing?"

The screen turned blue as the name of the manufacturer was displayed on the screen before the dreadful but comforting rhythm of my mother's heart filled the room again.

"What the fuck were you just doing?" Charlie said again, this time yelling as she stormed in. ' Get away from her! Get out! Get out!'"

## **Sixty-Nine: Natalie**

### **Natalie's P.O.V.**

I could feel it. The sadness and panic pumped through our mate bond. It was subtle, almost muffled. But it was there.

It was the first thing that I had felt from Killian since I shifted. The fact that it came

through at all told me that he was hurting tremendously. I placed the towel on the counter, my damp hair hanging down and soaking into my shirt as my hand moved up to grab my chest as it grew more intense.

Killian.

I stumbled toward the bathroom door needing to get to him, pulling it open at the same time that the bedroom door slammed shut, and my mate marched toward me.

There was no second thought as I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and my legs around his waist as he picked me up and held me to him tightly.

The pain etched into his face, and the water lining his eyes made my heart shatter. He shoved his nose against my neck as he breathed in deeply, and I tightened my hold on him, wanting him to be impossibly closer so I could take his pain away.

But all I could do was hold him as he tried to steady himself.

Watching and feeling my strong king and mate breaking made me feel like my insides were being ripped clean

from my body, and I didn't know how to make it better.

"I've got you," I whispered, and his arms tightened around my waist. "You're okay. I've got you."

He had never shown any emotion so deeply. His hard and cold exterior had been melting more and more each day, and I had been worried for the day that he would finally embrace the pain and stress of his reality. The pressure alone was enough to break any man, but this was more than that.

This deep seeded agony that was pumping through his body and our bond was something I had never expected before.

Even when I was at my lowest, strapped to a pole with the flesh hanging in strips from my back, I had never felt this kind of pain. My pain had almost always been physical.

Killian's was emotional, and that was something that medicine and Healers couldn't fix.

"I've got you." I bent my head down, pressing a kiss against his neck firmly as he took in a shaky breath. His body grew rigid as he swallowed, but he didn't let go. I kissed the same spot one more time. The spot where my mark would one day lay when he was ready.

"You can't leave me." He growled, and I nodded even though I was thoroughly confused. "You're mine. You can't leave me."

He pulled back, and I looked over his face. The cold mask he had before was trying to force its way forward as he pushed his emotions down, but it was failing to hide the pain in his eyes.

His eyelids dropped as he pressed a punishing kiss to my lips. I accepted it greedily, kissing him back with everything I had, wanting to show him how much I loved

him...wanting to tell him that everything was going to be okay. Killian's tongue met mine as he kissed me deeper, and I let out a moan. His hand held me to him by the back of my head before he ripped his lips away from mine, but I

leaned in, following him, trying to steal one last taste.

“Say it!” He demanded, but the hurt in his words made my heart clench.” Say you won’t leave me!”

I desperately wanted to ask what had happened, what had caused this. But my need for information was far less important than his need for comfort. ‘ I won’t leave you. I’m yours, forever.”

Killian looked at me, staring from eye to eye before he seemed happy with what he saw there, and he pulled me back to him. “Mine.”

The kiss sent butterflies down to my toes, and I gasped as laid me down gently on the bed. His touch was new, invigorating. Making love had been slow and torturous, bringing me to new highs. But this...

Oh, this made my heart sing with happiness as he kissed me like I was the Goddess herself, and he wanted to worship me. His large and calloused hands trailed down to my hips before sliding up and under my t-shirt.

My arms were still wrapped around his neck as he dominated my mouth, taking every gasp and moan I let out as he began to grind his hips against mine.

“Again!” He demanded as he pulled his lips away and trailed them across my jaw and down my neck, leaving butterfly kisses in his wake.

“I’m yours.” The moan was loud and uncontrollable as he reached my mark, licking and kissing it before his teeth sank into my flesh as he bit down aggressively.

The orgasms ripped through me before I could prepare myself, and I dug my nails into his back as I arched into him. He moved with me as I grabbed the



back of his shirt  
and pulled it up and over his head.

“Again.” He stated calmly this time as he kissed down my collar  
before reaching  
between us and ripping my shirt from my body. The feeling of his  
chest and warm skin  
against mine sent goosebumps over me, and I lifted my hips,  
silently begging for him  
to free me from the rest of the fabric.

“I’m yours.”

Killian growled in approval as he rocked into my hips one more  
time before doing  
exactly as I had wanted and removed my shorts and underwear in  
one swift pull. He  
dropped his as well before climbing back over me and settling  
between my legs. His  
hardness slid in between my lips, and he coated himself with my  
wetness.

He was only there for a moment before he pulled back and  
pressed his tip to my  
entrance, pushing in as far as he could go. Our bodies collided in  
a flurry of hard and  
punishing thrusts. It was delicious as he fought to control himself.  
Our lips brushed  
against each other as we panted and moaned with every  
movement, but never fully  
connected.

Yet, our gaze did. He held my stare as I grew closer to my  
orgasm, and my eyes  
squeezed shut as he tilted his pelvis and began to rub roughly  
against my wet clit. The  
fiction was too much, and my wall tightened around him as I held  
him deep inside me.

Black spots danced in my vision as my body trembled. It was  
more than just my

impending orgasm. My beast was fighting me to come forward, demanding that I claim our mate.

Killian's muscled tightened as he let out a deep guttural moan. The sound of it sent me over the edge as he whispered with a wild look in his eye. 'Again.'

My teeth extended as I gave in to my beast, wanting it just as badly as she did.

"You're mine," I growled, pushing my head up and biting into the soft skin of his neck, placing my claim as he thrust into me faster, whispering my name over and over again before pulling out and cumming on me. Keeping his head still and allowing me to care for his mark with slow and loving licks.

### **Seventy: Killian**

#### **Killian's P.O.V.**

My hands were pressed together under my chin with my elbows on my knees. I had been staring out the balcony doors to the city below. It was one of my favorite things to do, a reminder of what I was working so hard for every day. My people.

But then I found my head turned as I stared at my mate sleeping soundly in our bed, and my hands dropped in front of me as I continued to lean forward, examining every exposed inch of her. Even the curve of her waist with the blanket covering her was attractive, and I still couldn't believe that she was mine.

She was all that I had left.

I knew Charlie would probably be gone by the time I woke up. She had no reason to

stay here when I had disappointed her again. She wouldn't have stayed for me, not after what she had just witnessed last night.

"What are you doing up so early?" Natalie's soft voice called out, and I looked up at her face, smiling as I met her gaze. She was finally mine in every way.

I was proud to have her by my side, and now I had the honor of wearing her mark. I

would stay true to what I said to my mother. I was going to treat Natalie the way a

mate and man should. She was my everything, and I wanted to make sure that she

felt it. "Good morning, my love."

Her smile stretched wider, showing her teeth as she closed her eyes. The look of pure

happiness on her face filled me with pride. I stood from the armchair, climbing over

her and holding myself up on my hands and knees as she rolled to her back. Her

brown hair was wild around her head as it fanned itself across the pillow.

I knew I was probably setting wrinkles into my dress clothes, but I didn't care. My

mate blinked up at me with her stunning green eyes, and I leaned down and stole a

kiss from her lips. "What made you smile like that? I adore that smile."

My question was met by another blindingly large spread of her lips, and suddenly

everything that had been weighing on me was lifted.

Her cheeks turned an adorable shade of pink. I leaned down again, brushing my lips

over each one before hovering with my nose brushing the side of hers. Her eyes

fluttered closed, and her arms lifted until she was able to grab the front of my buttonup with one hand and wrap the other around my neck.

“You keep using that word,” Her lips brushed against mine as she whispered. I

groaned, giving into temptation and pulling the duvet down as I kissed her deeply. She

allowed me to move the blanket, spreading her legs for me to fall between them.

“What word?” I asked as I let my lips travel down her bare chest until I reached her

perky breasts. Her nipples were hard and waiting, and I felt my dick twitch in my pants

at the thought of having her again. My thumb brushed over the pebbled peak as I

admired her naked body. The color was just a shade darker than her lips but looked

just as inviting.

My tongue passed over her nipple as I licked her before closing my mouth over the

small pink point and sucking. My teeth grazed her as she let out a moan and arched

her back toward me.

I moved to the other one, and her fingers laced into my hair.

“Love,” she moaned out.

I paused for a moment and felt her tense beneath me before I resumed giving her the

attention and affection she deserved.

My nose brushed against her breastbone as I dragged my lips down her stomach.

“That’s all? That word makes you smile so big and blush so bright?”

Her body trembled as I placed a kiss just below her belly button, and she hummed in

response.

“I can say it more if you would like, my love.” I teased. Her knees fell to the sides as she invited me back to my favorite place in the world. There was nothing that looked, smelled, or tasted better than her, and I left an open-mouthed kiss just above her slit.

My fingers joined in as I slid them down over her to her opening where her wetness had gathered.

She tightened her hold on my hair as I moved the tips of my fingers back up, spreading her labia and finding the little bundle of nerves that brought her so much pleasure.

Her breathless whisper of my name would not have reached my ears if I had not had supernatural hearing. It was so light, so airy.

That. That was my favorite sound.

“Yes, more would be good.” She gasped as I let my tongue meet her clit, rubbing and licking it.

“More of that word, or more of this?” I asked as I entered her with one finger and placed my mouth back on her center.

My eyes were open as I glanced up at her, meeting her stare as she looked down the valley of her supple breasts to me between her legs.

“Yes,” She moaned, closing her eyes and letting her head fall back. I pulled my finger out of her, and she wiggled her hips before glaring down at me.

“Keep your eyes open,” I smirked as she did as she was told.

“Good Girl.”

My mouth met her again, and she cried out in pleasure as I slipped two fingers back

into her this time. She always did seem to enjoy my praise, and I

loved that she grew  
wetter at my words.

Her panting became heavier as a little moan left her sexy lips with each thrust of my hand. I knew she was close, and I continued my pace as I licked her clit. Her thighs began to shake, and I looked back up to see her eyes were slowly closing.

A third finger did the trick without me having to speak, and her eyes shot open. I hit her g-spot as I curled the digits, reminding her that I was the one in charge still. Her hands tightened their hold on my head as I nibbled lightly on her clit before sucking it hard.

As the orgasm racked through her, I kept my mouth on her for a few moments more before pushing myself up and kissing up her body as I switched back to two fingers and continued to pump in and out of her wetness.

"I can say that word whenever you want. Just as I can fuck you whenever you want, my love." The meaty part of my palm brushed firmly against her clit as I kept my hand between her legs, and she twitched as she came down from her high.

Natalie smiled down at me, her fingers moving up to circle her mark on my neck. "I know, but you only say it as a pet name."

My hand stopped as I looked down at the Goddess beneath me. She had to know that I loved her. I told her all the time. Yet as I thought back, she was right.

"I do," I said as I pressed a kiss to her lips and pulled back to look deep into her eyes.

‘ But I do love you.’

The joy that washed over her face had me holding still as I knew it would be the first time I would hear it too. Only, it wasn't the right time for her.

“I..”

I cut her off with a kiss until she was breathless beneath me, her hips pressing up against my hand. “There is something you should know about that may make you change your mind, so don't say anything just yet.”

Her smile slowly fell, and I took my hand from between us, rolling onto my side until I was staring at the ceiling on my back.

Natalie had high hopes for me to be a good man, and I had not always been one. I

had been a strong leader, but I also took pride in the fact that others feared me.

She deserved to know the truth before she heard it from someone else. I was sure by

now that Charlie had more than likely told at least her mate what she had walked in

on, if not Joselin too. That was if Charlie was even still here.

I didn't need nor want my mate to hear from anyone else that I had just tried to kill my

mother. That I had been battling with the idea for years, but this was the closest I had

come to actually doing it.

“Nothing you can say will make me change my mind about you or about us.” She

said, rolling until she was facing me. Her head was propped up on her hand as she

lay on her side. But she gave me the space that I needed even though I hadn't asked

for it, and she didn't touch me.

So, I told her. I kept it short and sweet, explaining my thought

about why I should and shouldn't before falling silent.

My eyes closed as I waited for her to get out of bed, not wanting to be near me after

that. But there was no movement and no sound.

I forced my eyes open, masking my emotions as I prepared for the worst. But there

was nothing but love and understanding in her eyes. It was a look that I wanted to

hold onto forever.

"I understand how hard that choice would be for you, and I appreciate that you were

willing to share with me. Charlie may not understand right away, but with time, I think

she will be able to see your point of view." Natalie placed her hand on my chest,

leaning in to kiss just above my heart, and I felt my lungs empty as I let out a sigh of

relief.

I hadn't realized just how much her understanding and support would mean to me. I

had been severely wrong about mates my whole life, and I had a lot to learn if I

wanted to keep her happy... and I did want to keep her happy.

"I love you too." She whispered, and I felt my heart squeeze uncomfortably in my

chest. It was the first time I had heard those words from someone and truly felt that

they meant it. That they had chosen to love me and didn't say it out of obligation or

because they were forced to.

I opened my mouth, unsure of what I wanted to say, but felt the need to say anything.

A knock on the door made my jaw snap shut, and I winced as I remembered why I



had been up so early, to begin with.

“There’s no taking it back now,” I said, forcing a laugh out.

“Why would I take it back?” Natalie wondered as she pushed herself up to grab the sheet and cover herself in case anyone walked in. It seemed to be a habit of Joselin and Charlie, something I would need to address.

“I was up because the first council member to arrive had just been spotted entering the city. If anyone can make someone rethink everything about their life and want to die, it’s them.”

### **Seventy-One: Natalie**

#### **Natalie’s P.O.V.**

It was a mad dash to get ready. Killian had been planning on meeting them at the door without me, telling them I was still sleeping as the sun hadn’t risen yet, but it felt rude

to do so when we were asking for their help.

I slipped on a dress and pulled my hair up into a neat bun before I felt comfortable being seen by someone so powerful.

It was hard to keep reminding myself that I was allegedly a descendant of the moon goddess and that I carried magic too. The book Joselin had given me was frustrating,

to say the least. What was even worse was that Thomas waited several hours,

watching me type the book into a translation software and getting confusing results

back before he admitted to knowing and being able to read Latin.

He then spent until dinner, reading the book aloud as he translated it for me. The text

focused on how to harness your power source and become one

with it so you could  
bend it to your will.

I felt nothing, and I was almost positive that it was a practical joke  
Joselin was playing  
on me. I was even second- guessing whether I was the one who  
had tripped her with  
the book or not. There hadn't been any other magical incidents as  
far as I was aware,  
and a small part of me was hoping to keep it that way until I could  
at least master my  
wolf form.

Truth be told, for a queen, I felt like a hot mess. There was still no  
way I would feel  
confident to be on the battlefield with Killian and make it out alive.  
I wasn't even  
expecting to last five minutes.

I had to keep reminding myself that I had only been here for a  
couple months, and  
had my wolf for a week. When I put it into perspective, it didn't  
seem so bad. But I did  
have millions of people of all species watching and counting on  
me. That pressure  
would drive anyone mad, and I didn't know how Killian did it.  
He was a force to be reckoned with, but once we were  
downstairs, even he seemed  
on edge. His hand was cold in mine, his body tense as we waited.  
But we didn't have  
to wait long.

A single form moved gracefully through the gates, a black cloak  
trailing across the  
ground with a hood pulled over her head. She had no bags, no  
belongings besides  
the clothes on her back. Was she not planning to stay?  
I masked my confusion, doing my best to mimic the way that  
Killian would push down

everything and remain void of feeling. It was either nothing or anger from him. The people could always count on one of the two versions of their king.

The cold morning air made the atmosphere even more ominous as our guest approached, stopping at the base of the large marble stairs that led to the front of our home.

Matte grey nails were the first thing I noticed. They were at least two inches long and came to points like claws as she lifted her hands and pulled down her hood to reveal a short, jaw-length bob of curly red hair.

Her blood-red lips and smoky eye makeup had her looking ready for a runway, but I

had the feeling that she was more interested in torturing people than she was posing

for them. The way she walked up each step with her head held high, told me that she

had been here countless times before and knew she held power within these walls.

What bothered me the most was that she looked no more than thirty. She had to have

been closer to Killian's age than I was. Even though he wore my mark, the way her

eyes traveled over him made my beast rise up within me in anger.

'Rona, thank you for coming. I am sorry to hear about Melinda's passing, but I trust

that you will be more than satisfactory in taking her place.'" Killian kept one hand at his

side while the other held mine and his jaw twitched with irritation as she raised her

hand toward him. She seemed to be expecting him to kiss her knuckles as if he were

below her.

My eyes widened in fake admiration as I interrupted the moment, not willing to let my mate stop so low as to bow to her even though we did need her help. He was the king, and I had the feeling before she left, one of us would need to remind her of that fact.

'Oh, what a beautiful ring," I said, grabbing her hand and pulling it to be facing me before letting her hand go. She dropped it to her side and curled her lip at me, her eyes landing on Killian's mark on my neck.

'Yes, dear." She said dismissively, and I narrowed my eyes at her. She turned back to Killian. "It was a great loss indeed. She will be missed."

The lack of emotion in her voice led me to believe that she could care less that

Melinda, whoever she was, was gone.

'May I present my mate, Queen Natalie Amery. Natalie, this is Rona Wi I la one of the members of the royal council." Killian said. When his eyes met mine, I could see the

fire burning in them. He was angry at the witch but amused by my antics. That much was clear. I wasn't sure if I was going to be praised for the way I handled the situation or punished.

Either way, I had the feeling that I would thoroughly enjoy myself, and so would he.

My anger rose as the witch then turned to the servants waiting and snapped at a young man to show her to her room.

It was something that I had never felt before, but her dismissal of both myself and

Killian had me seeing red. I wanted to make her bow to us and choke on the blasted ring that she had tried to shove in Killian's face.

My hands shook.

The witched paused and turned to face me with amusement in her eyes.

'Two powerful witches in one castle, and you still called upon the council,' Rona tsked

tauntingly. "One would assume that had the proper royal advisor been chosen, they wouldn't need to call for help. It is lucky for our people that I was able to make it.

Where is she anyway?'

I had the feeling that Joselin was nearby listening in, but I could not see her. Instead, I

answered for her, hoping she wouldn't pop in and ruin the moment. "I have her

working on more important tasks than greeting our visitor."

I wanted her to know that there were more important things and people than her,

contrary to the way she carried herself and disrespected her king and queen.

Killian squeezed my hand gently as he nodded in agreement.

'Hm. So be it." She said snidely as she turned her back on us and began toward the

door. The balloon of anger that she had set in motion snapped inside me, and I felt

myself losing my temper as I called out her name.

'Rona!' My voice carried, full of power. She spun around, looking unimpressed. "The

proper way to greet your King and Queen is to bow."

She grunted as her body arched against her will. I glared at her, wishing for a moment

that I could crumple her body until her perfectly painted face smashed into the ground.

Killian pulled gently on my hand as Rona glared up at me from her forced position, and I waited until she looked down submissively before letting the anger inside me dissipate.

She scurried into the foyer, wrinkling her nose at the rune Joselin had burned into the flooring before walking right over it and up the stairs, being led by the shaking servant boy.

I waited until the doors closed before I turned to Killian. Joselin appeared behind him with a smile on her face. I knew she had been watching. I could feel her.

“I didn’t know I could do that!” I exclaimed, and Killian shook his head, but the corner of his lips twitched.

‘Not even five minutes in, and you have made an enemy of one of the council members. This is going to be fun.’ Joselin said as she shook her head. ‘Told you they are bitches.’

### **Seventy-Two: Killian Killian’s P.O.V.**

I smiled as I saw Natalie leaving the library up ahead, presumably to get ready for the pack dinner. She looked around the corner in front of her before moving forward, and I laughed as I knew the paranoia today was caused by her interaction with Rona this morning.

The witch was new to the council but not someone to be trifled with. It was common knowledge that she had been the one to kill her own mother,

Melinda, for her seat on the council. There had been no proof, and no one dared to openly make a claim against the witch.

Like most of the council members, Rona and Joselin had personal conflicts. Only theirs were not magic or title related. I knew Rona had stayed in her room the entire day, according to my guards. Joselin was itching for a fight as she wandered the castle, hoping to run into our new arrival under the pretense of working.

I was not looking forward to having them all here at once. Every time they had been called together, it was nothing but drama and fighting all day and night. I remember as a kid that they had almost taken down the castle's north side when a fight between two council members resulted in a load-bearing column of brick crumbling to the floor.

It would have been bad for all involved if they hadn't used their magic to hold the floor above them up while the other fixed it.

They all seemed to hate each other but shared a love for their land and people.

It had been a relief when Rona walked over the casting in the foyer without any issue.

Still, while she may not have been against us, I wasn't positive that I could trust her entirely. I didn't trust anyone besides Natalie, Joselin, and Charlie. They were my people.

I stalked behind my mate, fascinated as she stopped at the next junction, took a deep breath before lifting her chin, and turned the corner. Her eyes still glanced both ways

as she turned, checking for her newfound enemy.

'What are you doing?' I whispered against her ear as I snuck up behind her.

Natalie jumped before spinning around with her hand on her chest. I glanced down at

the small amount of cleavage there as she breathed rapidly, looking up when she

gently smacked my bicep. 'Don't do that!'

I laughed, grabbing her hand and pulling her fingers to my lips, where I pressed a

kiss. 'You seem a bit jumpy.'

My musing made her eyes narrow as she pulled her hand from mine and spun on her

heels to stomp toward our room.

'Don't be mad, my love,' I said as I followed behind her, enjoying how she shuddered

at my words. Now that I knew she enjoyed hearing me say the word love, I would

tease her with it as often as possible. The blush on her cheeks alone was worth it.

'Then don't laugh at me!' She responded as she pushed the bedroom door open and

entered our closet. I leaned against the door frame, admiring her body as she stripped

off her jeans and shirt, standing before me in her bra and underwear.

If we had the time, I would press her against the wall and take her right here and now.

But tonight was a big night.

Not only was our first council member here, but Nolan and Heath were finally given

the all-clear that they were okay. There was no sign of the curse still being at play, and

the pack was ready to celebrate that they made it through alive.

As hosts, we needed to ensure that we were on time and looked



presentable.

When she finally slipped into a royal blue dress and pulled her heels on, she brushed past me in the doorway. I didn't move, and she looked at me from beneath her eyelashes with a heated stare as her body slid against mine. She tried her best not to react, but I enjoyed watching as her eyes dilated and her breathing picked up. It was glorious to see that she was just as affected by me as I was by her.

'You look beautiful,' I whispered, and she ducked her head as her cheeks lit up and rushed toward the bathroom to style her hair with a meek, 'Thank you' thrown over her shoulder. I had the feeling that she knew exactly what was on my mind.

The way she glanced over her shoulder at me as I began to unbutton my shirt so I could change was empowering. It didn't matter that I was the king. One look from her, and I knew I could be a beggar in the streets and still feel powerful with her by my side.

I pushed everything to the back of my mind as we finished getting dressed. Natalie placed her hand in the crook of my elbow as I guided her down the hallway and to the dining hall.

The pack was seated, talking loudly and animatedly with excitement as they welcomed Nolan and Heath back.

They bowed and submitted respectfully as we were announced and made our way to our seats. Charlie was sitting on the other side of me and looked

away quickly when I pulled out Natalie's chair for her. I let out a deep breath, relieved that she had stayed. But I knew we still needed to talk about what had happened. The bear was next to her, and he stared at me for a moment as if he were contemplating speaking before he settled with a single nod of acknowledgment. Rona was sitting beside Joselin stiffly as Joselin smirked and lifted her glass to her lips. It seemed that I had missed their reunion, and I was grateful to have not had to deal with it. From the looks of it, Joselin came out with the upper hand, and Rona was not pleased. I held back the amusement I felt at the witch pouting when she had come into my home so sure of herself earlier this morning. She was quickly learning her place. I just hoped it was on our side of the battlefield when the time came. The room fell silent as I raised my right hand. "Tonight, we welcome back two of our own from the clutches of darkness. They bravely risked their lives for our people and came out victorious. We are honored to have them as a part of our pack. Heath, Nolan..." I glanced from one to the other as they sat in the center of the room. Heath was next to his mate, and Nolan had both his mate and children on his other side. "Welcome back, and may the Goddess be with you. I would also like to welcome the first of many esteemed guests that will be joining us. Rona Willa, it is a pleasure to

have you here.'

She smirked as I turned to her, no longer seeming bothered by having to sit next to Joselin. I turned away, not wanting to give her any more ideas than she already had.

'Tonight,' I said as I grabbed the glass from in front of me and lifted it high, 'We celebrate!'

The pack stomped their feet as they cheered and howled. Several people clapped

Heath and Nolan on their shoulders as I took my seat.

The wait staff moved in synch as they began to bring out the first course, moving

swiftly through the rows of hungry Lycans.

'It's not right. It's too dark.' Natalie whispered.

### **Seventy-Three: Natalie**

#### **Natalie's P.O.V.**

Killian leaned over, grabbing my hand as I stared in horror at our pack. They were

laughing and talking loudly as they dug into the first course.

Drinks were flowing as

they celebrated. The noise was deafening, and I heard a high pitch ringing in my ears.

But there was something alarming about the air in the room. It wasn't as dark as it had

been in the infirmary, but I felt ill just being here.

I didn't want to offend the men who had risked their lives for me by staring with

distrust, and I looked up at Killian as he gazed at me with confusion. "You don't feel

it?" I asked.

Killian looked at me for a moment longer before turning and slowly examining the

room. He shook his head as he looked back at me, and I turned

away from him to meet Joselin's curious stare and Rona's annoyed one. 'You feel it, don't you?' Both witches shook their heads, and I sank back into my chair. 'It's not right. Something is not right.' The food in front of me looked delicious, but my appetite disappeared as I watched the pack dig in. The others may not have sensed it, but I did and trusted my gut. I could not enjoy the evening when I knew something bigger was happening here. Something evil. Tobias seemed to have heard me from where he was eating, and he glanced from me to Killian, who had also not touched his food. They were watching...waiting. They trusted me and my instincts as well. Their eyes inspected each person for something to be amiss, but everything looked normal. 'It's too dark,' I whispered again, as my stomach tied in a knot. The air felt thicker, and I struggled to pull in a deep and calming breath. Charlie reached across her brother and grabbed my hand, squeezing it as she spoke to me through the pack bond.' Don't worry. Nothing will happen here. Everyone had to cross over Joselin's casting to get here tonight, and there are guards at every entry point.' I forced a smile at her attempt to calm me, but I also wanted to scream to the pack that they needed to run. Only, I had no proof. It was nothing but a gut feeling, one that no one else seemed to

be having, and I didn't want to ruin their celebration because I was scared. Killian nodded to my plate as he rubbed my knee soothingly.

"Eat something, my love. We are safe for now." I knew he was trying to calm me, but from how his eyes turned black and glazed over, he was contacting someone else through the pack link.

Several guards shifted with unease, and a few of the pack members stood as they continued their conversations. But I knew they were on alert now. The food before me made my stomach turn, and I couldn't imagine holding anything down until the darkness was gone.

I didn't want to look at the food, let alone eat it. Most of the room seemed oblivious to their change in demeanor, but as I met Heath's eyes, he smiled brightly and lifted his glass to me before downing the drink. The way he held my gaze as he swallowed each gulp was an open challenge.

I could feel the air growing darker and thicker, the room dimming slightly as I looked away from the warrior who had risked his life for me.

'No, no, no.' The word spilled from my lips softly, and Killian tensed further. 'It's here. It's too dark!' My hand grabbed Killian's forearm as I looked up at him with wide eyes, my nails breaking through his skin. "We have to do something!" Heads began to turn as my panic was noticed. I looked around the room, positive that my fear was evident. Several people stopped their conversation to watch me as I continued to spiral.

Heath laughed at something Nolan said, and the man stood from his seat, placing his napkin on the plate of food in front of him. Heath's mate smiled up at him lovingly as he leaned down and pressed a kiss to her temple before looking back and holding my gaze once more.

'It's him,' I whispered in realization before looking to Tobias, who was waiting for my order only a table away, begging him to intervene. Several guards stepped forward as

I shoved my chair back, allowing it to topple over loudly as I stood. I tried to find my

magic as I had done when I faced Rona this morning, but there was no time as Heath

grabbed the steak knife from next to his plate. "It's him!"

My scream made the dining hall fall silent, and Tobias jumped out of his seat.

'Stop him!' I couldn't move as Heath smiled, the whites of his eyes turning black as he

laughed before sliding the jagged edge of the blade across his throat. Tobias reached

him just as he collapsed forward.

Heath's body crashed loudly as he slumped over the table. Tobias stopped only a few

inches away, hesitating as he reached for but did not touch the body.

'Don't touch him! Everyone get back!' Killian was on his feet next to me and was over

the table in the blink of an eye.

The blood-curdling scream of Heath's mate tore a hole into my heart. I tightened my

hands into fists, my nails breaking through the skin of my palms as I stared at the man

hunched over the table, his blood spilling out onto the ground.

Tobias changed his mind and reached for the woman instead of the body. He grabbed Heath's mate as she tried to claw her way free to get to her other half, sobbing and screaming Heath's name as more guards moved in and forced everyone back and away from the rapidly growing pool of crimson liquid.

The clatter of dishes and silverware made me jump as I watched Nolan's mate shove everything off the table and out of his reach as she eyed him warily, her children standing behind her protective stance.

The fear in her eyes seemed to mirror his. While he appeared terrified that his friend had just been compelled to kill himself, she was terrified that her mate may do the same ... or turn on her or their children.

Nolan stood slowly from his seat, his eyes still locked on his pack brother's body as he lifted his hands in a surrender motion. His eyes were their usual color, but I couldn't tell if the darkness was coming from Heath still or from Nolan. He looked terrified as he turned to face Killian and whispered, ' Don't let them get me too.'

A large man burst through the main doors only seconds later with chains rattling as several guards surrounded Nolan. He willingly allowed them to restrain him. Tears

silently ran down his cheeks as he glanced at his mate.

'I'm going to be okay. They'll figure this out. Take the kids home. I love you.' His voice shook as the guards pulled on the chains.

## Seventy-Four: Natalie

### Natalie's P.O.V.

Killian had been pulled away, and I was back to being locked in our room like the

helpless damsel in distress they saw me as. I was getting stronger every day. But I

had a long way to go, especially with my magic.

Only a few people knew about it. I was sure that Rona would run her mouth sooner or

later. The family and my immediate guards were the only ones we planned to tell

about it. I had ruined that by accidentally using my magic on Rona.

Telling people was still on a need-to-know basis, and no one else needed to know for

now.

They would probably have their own reservations about the matter. I feared it would

become like the healers again, with people trying to capture and control me. My

mother had said that she had been hunted for years. Was that to be my fate too?

Mother.

I wasn't sure how I felt about that word when talking about someone other than the

woman who had raised me. But it was what and who I needed. I needed a family

member, a mother, to hug, hold me close, and tell me everything would be okay.

The war in my mind between my wolf and magic was leaving me with a constant

migraine, and if anyone knew how to overcome that obstacle, it would be her. She had

said that I would see her again. But I didn't know when, and I didn't know for how long.



I wanted to return to visit her, but I had more important things to focus on.

My legs were crossed under me as I sat on the couch in the sitting room. George and Tobias were waiting outside, but Thomas had decided to join me inside the room. His back was against the wall, and he periodically scanned the empty room every few minutes.

His eyes would turn black as someone spoke to him through the mind link, and I grew more curious.

‘How did you learn Latin, Thomas?’ His eyes never traveled to me as the wind picked up outside, but he smiled softly as he answered.

‘My mother taught me. She spoke it fluently. She worked with the archives and always said it was important to know the languages in which our past was written to educate ourselves and better our future. She knew seven languages, but I only picked up a couple. 1’

I looked back down at the glass of water on the coffee table before me, glaring at it as

I waited for it to levitate, spill, or turn to tequila. A quick inhale through my nose

confirmed that I had failed. “That is very wise of her.”

‘It is,’ He nodded in agreement, eyeing the water glass with amusement before looking

away again. He took his job very seriously, and I appreciated that.

He was very young, no more than a year or two older than me, and I knew he had

worked hard to get his position at my side so early in life. ‘Back when the humans had

overpopulated, they had put rules in place that the people and

governments were supposed to live by. The original documents were written in cursive.

‘Their governing body loved to distract their people with fake news and stories to keep their attention away from what was happening in the world. They enjoyed having an ignorant body to govern. It made the people easier to control. No one cared when they took something as simple as cursive from their children’s education. It was a primary tool the people needed to have in their arsenal to be able to read any historical legal and governing documents.’ a

I nodded as I remembered hearing about that in school. We had learned cursive, but we had never been forced to learn another language in school. Now I had to question if it was a failure by my pack or my leaders.

‘After that, things got worse because the people didn’t even realize how much the government had taken from them until it was too late. They lived in blissful ignorance for so long that, eventually, the government didn’t have to worry about the people.

They just had to keep them entertained while they buried their secrets and bent the masses to their will. 2

‘All of the different species had come out of hiding almost five years before the government announced their discovery of us to the people. That was only because they couldn’t dispute the mass amount of evidence at that point and needed to control the narrative.’ Thomas went silent as he momentarily narrowed

his eyes at the balcony doors before looking away again and shifting his weight. His distrust of the system took me by surprise as he stood guard. I knew Tobias would have been the one in here if he hadn't just been so close to Heath and Nolan, potentially exposing himself to the dark magic. So, Thomas had volunteers to take on the role.

'Why did you choose this as your career?' I wondered how he managed to guard people of power when he did not trust them. 'It doesn't seem like you trust political figures, yet you protect them.'

Thomas's eyes flickered up to me briefly with worry, but I knew he wasn't scared about my opinion of him. He was worried about his position and the title he had earned.

It was an interesting realization and told me a lot about him as a person.

'I figured the best way for me to make a difference was to ensure the safety of the good to prevent evil from retaking control.' His eyes landed back on the cup, and I followed his stare.

Straining myself didn't seem to work, but that was all I was doing. The only two times I had used magic were when I was angry. But I was too heartbroken to be mad after what happened to Heath.

'We appreciate your service,' I said, trying to get the image of Heath out of my head.

There surely was evil about, and I wished I could borrow some of Thomas's

determination and strength.

The bedroom door opened quickly, and Killian nodded to Thomas, silently dismissing him. Thomas scanned the room once more before taking his leave.

Killian looked void of emotion, but I knew better. I knew him. I could see the worry in his eyes and the tension in his shoulders. He had lost another man today, someone, that he was closer to than the others. But his hard mask was in place, and I stood as he approached me.

I leaned into his palm as he cupped my cheek, kissing my lips firmly. It was sweet, gentle, and heartbreaking. I knew without a doubt that he had more bad news.

“Something else happened, didn’t it?”

Killian rested his forehead against mine as he closed his eyes. I pressed up on my toes as I stole a chaste kiss before grabbing his wrists as he held my face. His hazel eyes opened, and I saw his love for me shining brightly. ‘You know me so well.’

I nodded, and he laughed half-heartedly as he pulled away, letting his hands drop to my hips.

‘I sent a few patrols out to the northern mountains. They had strict orders and shouldn’t have moved in. They were just there to observe.’ Killian released his hold on me as he moved to the bedroom and grabbed a bag from the top shelf in the closet.

“One of the patrols hasn’t reported back, and there was evidence of injury.”

My heart dropped at what he was saying. I knew with war, there would be casualties

on both sides. The bodies falling now were just the beginning, but it didn't make it easier to hear. My eyes returned to the bag as he shoved a few clothing items in it.

"You're going? Can't you just regroup and make another plan? You're the king! You shouldn't have to go up there yourself. What if something happens?"

Killian hesitated before zipping the bag shut and tossing it on the bed. 'Nothing will happen to me. I have fought in too many battles to stand to the side now. Joselin will be there too to collect information and try to get a trace on the witches. If anything happens, she will get me out.'

I bit my lip, wanting to argue with him. It was common knowledge that he was one of the strongest beasts in the world, but that didn't make him invincible.

'She won't always be there.' Killian moved toward me as I spoke, and I couldn't help but let the worry leak through my tone. "If she could just pop you out of the situation whenever you needed her to, she never would have had that vision of me saving you.'

He nodded in agreement before pressing a kiss to my forehead. "I know that, my love.

But my time has not come yet, and I will not let my men fight alone or be left behind.

I'll be home soon. I promise."

Tears filled my eyes as I blinked rapidly to hide them. I understood where he was coming from. It was one thing to order men and women to their deaths for him like a coward and another to fight alongside them as their leader.

That didn't mean I wasn't bothered by the fact that he was leaving.

'I love you, my mate. Please try to get along with Rona and take care of Charlie.' He whispered before capturing my lips in a passionate kiss that forced the tears to fall free from my eyes.

### **Seventy-Five: Natalie** **Natalie's P.O.V.**

"I'm very curious about you," The strong female voice said from behind me, and I tried not to flinch as I continued to eat my breakfast in the private dining room.

I had learned my lesson the last time I ate alone in the main dining room and didn't want to put myself under that scrutiny after what happened last night. I also wasn't ready to be back in that room quite yet. The nightmares I had without Killian by my side only a few hours ago were horrendous.

He was my heart and soul. Without him there, I was tossing and turning all night. It was amazing that I was ever able to sleep before him.

The short and curly-haired redhead flicked her finger a few millimeters by her thigh, and the chair beside me slid away from the table as she sat down.

I had sat in Killian's chair as he was out for work. It felt wrong to leave the head of the table empty for someone to swoop in and claim...like Rona.

I didn't know her yet, but it seemed like something she would do. A servant quickly brought her a glass of water before going to the kitchen to gather Rona a plate of food.

I silently cursed the vampires and witches even more than before as I was left with the snake. "It is healthy to be curious to an extent." My musing seemed to entertain her as a smile stretched over her face. Yet her stare was calculated, and she scanned me over like she was dissecting me in her mind. 'When I first heard about you, they said you were a human he had been entertaining himself with.' My beast roared inside me in anger at her disrespect, but I pushed it down and did my best to keep my face void of all emotions. Killian would have been proud. 'Then I heard that you were crowned the queen and marked. After that, news of you being a white wolf started to spread... that's something that hasn't been around for a long time, but I have yet to see it for myself to validate that rumor.' Rona eyed me from the seat to my left, where I would typically sit when Killian was here. I hated that she was in my chair, getting her smell on it. "But now I've experienced for myself that you have magic. There are so many different stories about you being told by people. So, which one is it? Who are you?" My eyes narrowed as I placed my fork down. "I heard that you murdered your mother for her seat on the council and that you're here to try to win over my mate for a higher status. So, who are you?" The first statement was horrifying to imagine, but I had heard the rumor from too many people as I passed by them for me not to give it merit. The

second was only reinforced for me when I heard that Rona had been looking for Killian earlier in the day, not realizing that he had left. After the way she had looked at and treated us when she first got here, I knew I was right to feel possessive of my mate around her. She was looking for someone to sink her nails into, and she wanted the king.

“You do have claws, after all. Down, kitty!” Rona smirked, seeming to enjoy our bickering, but I was annoyed by the whole thing. Killian had asked me to play nice, but I didn’t know how. Not when she was intentionally antagonizing me. “I will tell you that I feel you growing stronger, so I know I was not mistaken that you have powers. It is fascinating that there were so many rumors about you shifting into the great white wolf. Most rumors stem from some aspect of truth.”

“You may believe what you would like to. But we do not have time to dwell on gossip when our people are dying.” I held Rona’s gaze even though I could feel my cheeks warm with anger. Everyone knew I could shift into a wolf, but only a few knew I had any ties to magic. The fact that she was one of the few who knew about that side of me made me uneasy.

“It’s such a shame Joselin’s spell wasn’t strong enough to catch a piggyback curse. Maybe it would have been useful if you had helped her cast it.” Rona’s words made me sit up straighter as I eyed her curiously.

“You know what that curse was?” Joselin should have been here



to talk to Rona about this instead of me, but I would get any information I could now. "Every witch who witnessed the events of last night would have known it was a piggyback curse. I'm sure even precious 'Josie' knows what it was now." Rona rolled her eyes as I raised my eyebrows, picking up on her bitter mocking of Killian's nickname for Joselin. I waited silently, expecting her to elaborate, and she did. "It's a dormant curse until needed. Most curses stay active and constantly work to fulfill their purpose. With a piggyback curse, they hold on and don't activate until the caster needs to use it. It is primarily to take control of the host, but I've seen it used in other ways too. The only downside is the longer it stays tied to that vessel, the weaker it gets." The doors opened, and Charlie entered, preventing me from saying anything more. Dark circles were under her eyes, and her nose was slightly pink as if she had been crying. Yet she held herself with confidence and purpose as she joined the table. 'Good Morning, Charlie.' I greeted her with a warm smile, but she nodded toward me without saying a word. The servant brought in two more plates, and Rona and Charlie dug into their breakfast without another word. I ate slowly, hoping Rona would finish and leave so I could talk to Charlie alone. But my hopes were crushed as the two women scarfed their food down before making excuses to go, leaving me on my own. I knew I needed to try to connect with Charlie before Killian got

back. What she had walked in on could not be so easily forgiven and forgotten, and I knew something needed to happen soon to prevent that anger from sitting and festering while Killian was away.

Not sparing it a second thought, I rushed out of the room, hoping to catch up to

Charlie before she left the grounds and entered the city. I had the feeling that if things weren't fixed soon, she would go for good, and I knew Killian had the same fear.

The hallways were empty as I walked quickly and with purpose. I spotted the head of

curly brown hair standing in the courtyard, talking to a group of women. She laughed

as one of them reached forward and touched the side of her arm. It was a forced laugh. I knew Charlie tended to throw her head back when laughing, but this time she didn't.

The women around her leaned in close as they spoke to her, too low for even my wolf

hearing to pick up from across the way. I paused as I stepped out of the foyer, and the

sun hit my face. The tall and willowy blonde stood in the back of the group, her glare

focused on me as she curled her lip in disgust.

Her already slender body looked emaciated and frail, as if she were sick or starving,

and I felt my heart drop as Charlie looked over her shoulder at me before whispering

something to the other women. It was the blonde who had been sleeping with my

mate, giving her attention back to the princess.

They laughed again, loudly this time, and my stomach dropped to

my toes when they turned to look at me.

Seventy-Six: Natalie

Natalie's P.O.V.

Not knowing who I could trust was hard, but being without Killian was even more challenging. I had tried to reach out to him several times, but there was no answer.

Either our pack link was broken, or I wasn't doing it right.

Since I could talk to other people through the link, neither option seemed viable. But I

had to trust that Killian was okay. I knew deep inside that he was okay and that I would feel it if he wasn't.

Charlie had been pleasant around other people, but I hadn't gotten to talk to her one-on-one in the week that Killian had been gone. A week of worry and anger.

It made me lethal in my training, and I had improved more in the past week than in the

few months I had been here. If Killian insisted on being in as many of the battles

before the war, fighting with his men, then I wanted to be strong enough to fight

beside him as his mate and queen.

Rona had been spending time 'tuning up' Joselin's spells, as she had referred to it.

After she walked in and saw me training in my fur, I had lost hope in keeping my

secret, but she became a different person. While she was still openly a bitch, she was

more respectful and willing to talk and help than I had imagined.

It was the other council members that should have been arriving any moment that had

me biting my nails.

The worst of the best... that was how Joselin had described them, and it was a unanimous agreement between the Amery siblings and Joselin that there wasn't a single pleasant member of the council. If I thought Rona was hard to deal with, I couldn't imagine what the others were like. I didn't even know how many more to expect, and I wasn't about to ask Rona and let her know how ignorant I was on the topic. Charlie sat beside me on the stairs, and my eyebrows raised as she bumped her shoulder into mine in a friendly gesture. Yet, the petty woman in me was still angry that she had been treating me differently and was clearly talking about me to the women who hated me. I wanted to ask her what she said, but I didn't want to let her know it bothered me. That was one good lesson I learned in my old pack when they beat and bullied me. They only did it more if I let them know how much they had hurt me. It brought them more pleasure when they realized they were making an impact. Then things would always get worse. "He'll be home soon." She whispered as she stared ahead at the sizeable grand entrance to the foyer. "He might have a few new scars, but he'll come back to you." I closed my eyes and tried to fight back the tears that wanted to be free. The thought of him being injured and in pain made my chest hurt. "Thank you, I just wish I could contact him." Charlie's shoulder brushed against mine as she leaned back on

the steps, resting her upper body on her forearms. "He does this. Every time he goes to battle, he shuts himself off. I wasn't even sure he realized he was doing it at first until he became the king, and people needed to talk to be able to report to him. Now I think he does it out of habit."

My hand was cold as I rubbed it over my left eye and cheek. "He could at least tell me he's okay every few days."

I ignored Charlie as she shook her head, staring back at the doorway as if he were going to walk in any moment and sweep me off my feet.

"The man you first met is different from who he is today. But the man he is during battle... that's someone else entirely. I have only ever seen him that way once, but it was something I will never forget." Charlie's voice wavered slightly, just enough for me to hear the fear in her voice.

"You're scared of him?" The idea of Killian being someone even his sister was terrified to be around was almost amusing. But he was closing himself down for a reason, and none of the possibilities I could think of to explain why were laughable.

"I would be stupid not to be. I pray to the Goddess that you never see him that way because if you do, you would be scared too." Her voice was low and steady, as if she had suppressed her emotions like Killian usually did. It seemed to be a requirement of

the job. "You really love my brother, don't you?"

"I do," The nod that accompanied my words was unconscious,

and I bit my lip as I tried to think about anything other than Killian and what he was doing right now. I didn't know if he was still searching for our missing people, fighting our enemies, or being captured by them. "Are you sure it's safe to talk to me right now? The past week, anytime you were alone with me, you bolted. You've only talked to me if there were other people around. Want to tell me what I did wrong?" The foyer was empty as I looked around, but that didn't mean there weren't people within earshot near the banisters on the floors above us. From the corner of my eye, I watched as Charlie winced before sitting up next to me with her arms on her knees in a very manly position. For a woman with a royal upbringing, I assumed she picked that up from her time away when she was off on her adventures with her group of mercenaries and her mate. "It wasn't personal. I just wasn't ready to talk to you yet. Whenever you looked at me, I could see the wheels spinning in your head and the pity in your eyes. I know you know what Killian did, and I hope you agree it wasn't right." Charlie pleaded, and I couldn't look away. It was like I was being sucked into a hypnotic state with her bright green eyes. "I think it is a hard situation for anyone to be in." The smell of the burnt floor and some herb still clung to the air, only it was thicker since Rona had messed with the spell. It wasn't offensive, but not entirely pleasant either. If I weren't waiting for the announcement of the second

council member's arrival for me to be out front, I would have been upstairs in my room, where it only smelled like Killian, recovering after a taxing training session where I had managed to take down Thomas twice as Tobias stood to the side, observing. "Natalie, you don't know what it feels like, so I would appreciate it if you would mind your own business." Her harsh words fueled me with fire, and my eyes narrowed at her.

"I do know what it's like, Charlie. The only difference is that with your mother, Killian has been killing himself for years, trying to make the decision as her next of kin as to whether he should show her mercy and put her out of her misery or if he should leave her to suffer here alone without her mate. When he killed my mother, she had been conscious, begging, and screaming for him to show her mercy and send her to the Goddess, where her mate was waiting for her!" My voice raised as I glared at her, and she looked stunned.

"I'm sorry for your loss." She muttered before looking away and down at her hands. It didn't fly past me that she hadn't apologized for how she had spoken to me. Like brother, like sister. I never should have expected an apology from her, and I wouldn't make that mistake again. "Why hasn't he done it before now?" I shook my head as a bitter laugh left my lips. It didn't take a genius to figure it out. I could feel his heartbreak and panic through the mate bond anytime we spoke about

Charlie's plans for the future or the adventures she had gone on. It was easy to figure it out between that and his reaction when she caught him in their mother's room, contemplating the option to send his mother to find peace.

"Because you abandoned him, Charlie! Time and time again, you leave him to deal with all this shit alone! Your father and mother were both gone, and his last family member ran as far as she could to escape. He had been scared that once he did it, once he showed mercy and let your mother finally find peace with her mate and child, you would leave again and, this time, never come back. That man adores you! He put aside his feelings about the bears to make you happy by giving Damien a chance. He even asked for me to take care of you while he was gone." Charlie gaped at me as I got to my feet. The guards hadn't announced it yet, but I could feel the magic moving closer. So, I approached the front door, carefully stepping over the burnt divots in the flooring.

"I didn't ab...."

"Yes, you did. You ran and left your brother behind. But don't worry, I'm here now, and he won't ever be alone again, so you can go back to worrying about yourself." I pulled open the door, silently cursing myself as it shut behind me.

'Way to go, Natalie. Burning bridges with everyone you talk to.' The thought crossed my mind, and I shook it free from my thoughts. I had bigger things to focus on.



Seventy-Seven: Killian  
Killian's P.O.V.

My skin was itching, and my body was tense as I waited for the vehicle to make its way through the trees. There wasn't much room in the off-road cage, but we didn't need much... just enough to get the bodies to take them back to their families.

Two had survived the patrol of six. They had been found chained up, hanging from a tree, as their blood slowly drained into the rune in the dirt. They had several bite marks on them that seemed old, but the injury to drain them hadn't healed yet, so we knew someone had just been here.

It was horrific to find them this way, and after what happened with Heath and Nolan, I was going to take no chances with our two survivors. They would be restrained with medical help until we could be sure they hadn't been cursed too. I didn't want to risk losing more of my men and women than I had to, and I especially didn't want Natalie to have to witness it again.

But it was good news that we had found them here this way. With this and the thick magic in the air, we now had a more narrow section of mountains to search. The enemy seemed impatient and hungry, meaning they would make more mistakes.

Now that we had a location, we could take action instead of sitting around, waiting for them to attack.

It also meant that I could go home to my mate.

I had my men searching the forest as we waited for the car and

the bodies to be  
picked up. I was pleased to get back several reports of tracks the  
enemy had failed to  
hide, and the rotten scent of vampires wafted through the air  
occasionally.

They were here. They were close. But they were hiding.  
Until I could get even more men out here, I wouldn't be risking  
more lives to hunt on  
their land. They knew it better than we did, and I was positive they  
had traps in place.

So, we played it discrete, taking notes of everything around us  
and discussing it  
through our pack link, but putting on the show for anyone  
watching that we were  
disappointed that we didn't find anything.

We would go back, regroup and then go from there.  
I was going to rain hell down on them.

\*\*\*

The trip back was solemn. We ran for hours, getting home just as  
the sun was starting  
to set. The power from the castle made me groan, and I knew  
nothing good was going  
on inside.

The only good thing would be seeing Natalie. I had shut myself off  
from her,  
something I didn't want to do but knew I needed to. If I felt her, I  
would be distracted,  
wondering what she was doing when I felt her get frustrated or  
angry. I would be  
jealous when she was happy, wishing I was there to make her  
laugh.

But there could be no distractions allowed when in war.  
I also didn't want her to feel anything from me. That side of me  
was something that I  
never wanted her to see or experience. She deserved better than

the cold and cruel  
man I became on the battlefield. 1  
The guards stood tall as I walked past them, but I could see the  
tension in how they  
held themselves as if they were ready to run, flinching when there  
was a loud clatter  
from down the hall.  
My jaw clenched as I walked past several maids scrubbing a  
singed part of the wall,  
trying to remove the burn marks.  
I pushed the dining room doors open to see five of the seven  
council members  
bickering, but not a single one was sitting and eating their meal.  
Two of the witches  
had their steak knives floating in the air by their heads, ready to  
launch at the other as  
they faced off.  
My entrance was just in time to see Cora pressing her palms to  
the dining table with a  
malevolent smirk.  
The voices were loud as the women yelled over each other, and  
my eyes widened  
when Cora's voice became louder than the rest. "How is your  
mother, Willa?"  
The snide question was full of malice, and I knew Cora was  
picking a fight. She hated  
Rona for costing her a leg in battle a few years prior. Bringing up  
her mother, knowing  
Rona had been the one to kill her, was an obvious threat to out  
her.  
"Six feet under and buried face down." Rona laughed darkly as  
she glanced down at  
where Cora's leg would be if the table hadn't been in the way. "It's  
a shame your fat  
ass is still alive and kicking. Speaking of, how's your leg?"

Cora stood next to Natalie. I smiled when I saw my mate, who sat at the head of the table calmly, taking another bite of her dinner. Clearly, this wasn't her first meal with them, and the poised way she carried herself was admirable. "Don't look so smug, child. Your time is coming! I'll make sure of that personally!"

Cora's yell of outrage was followed by her thrusting her palms toward Rona, the force sending Rona flying backward and skidding across the floor. 2 But it was the way my mate lit up in anger, looking even more beautiful as her drink was knocked over her dinner plate, that held my attention. Natalie threw her napkin on the mess as she got to her feet. "You are all acting like children; I have had it!"

"What are you going to do? Turn the car around?" Rona sniggered as she pushed herself up to her feet.

"That is enough! Now, SIT DOWN!" All of the women sat stiffly in their chairs, and the knives clattered to the ground. Rona was dragged back by force as Natalie's magic wrapped around the women, silencing them and forcing them to her will.

I growled as a chair suddenly took my feet from beneath me and pulled me across the room to the table, locking me against the wood. Natalie's wide eyes met my own as I held the table's edge in surprise.

"You're back," She whispered as I tried to free myself from her spell with little luck. But it gave me a moment to look her over for injury. Only I could see that her strength had not only increased in her magic. Her arms looked slimmer and

more toned, and I

knew she had been working hard to train.

“Yes, my love. Now, please release me, so I can greet you properly.” I tried not to

laugh as she blinked several times before a smile stretched over her face.

“You’re back!” She exclaimed again as my chair slid back an inch, and I knew I had been released.

I jumped to my feet and met her halfway around the table, gathering her in my arms

and taking in her scent to calm my beast. I had been uneasy without her over the past

two weeks. Natalie shoved her face against me, and I felt my chest warm as she

greeted me so lovingly.

Never before had I experienced a warm welcome home, nor had I realized how much

I had missed her. Having her in my arms again was a gift from the Goddess, and I

never wanted to let her go.

“Are you finished eating, my love?” I asked, wanting to take her away from here, so I

could greet her the way I had imagined for the past few hours of my run.

Since I couldn’t shift without being naked, I held myself back.

Rona wasn’t the only

one who had been openly curious about me since I had met them, and I wanted to

give them as little to work with as possible.

One of the witches slammed their palm down on the table, and the spell was broken.

But not a single one moved.

Natalie nodded as she beamed at me, her arms not letting go of my beastly state. I

forced my eyes away from her, feeling a slight pain in my chest as I did so to greet our guests. "Ladies. It is an honor to have you here. I hope that you all have settled in well. Please let our staff or us know if you need anything." I glanced down at my mate, half tempted to throw her over my shoulder and carry her away. But she made a choice for me as she jumped up, using my shoulders to lift herself as she wrapped her perfect fucking legs around my waist with her head in my neck.

A few of our visitors laughed knowingly as I turned and carried Natalie away, pausing when Joselin opened the door to the private dining room and joined her peers.

"And, please try to keep the damage to a minimum. You break it, you fix it. Our staff does not deserve to have to clean up any damage you cause."

Natalie called over my shoulder just before Rona chimed in with disgust as she saw Joselin.

"Damn it! I thought I was finally free of you! I had hoped the vampires would have taken care of you for me."

Joselin pursed her lips in fake sympathy as she walked by, "Such a shame that you're still breathing, Rona. Maybe next time you can go with us if you weren't such a chicken shit. All talk and no bite."

I rolled my eyes as I let out a huff of irritation. I looked down at my mate, who was clinging to me like a koala bear, and exited the dining room as the yelling started again.

Seventy-Eight: Natalie

Natalie's P.O.V.

My head moved up and down on Killian's chest with every breath he took. Since I had shifted, my stamina had significantly increased. While our time together was wild and exhilarating, it was nothing like now. Now it was pure, raw, and primal.

Killian seemed to be enjoying that he could let himself be free and wild with me. He held nothing back, and I enjoyed every second of it. Being too rough wasn't an issue when we healed within seconds. My nails, his nails... my teeth, his teeth. They scratched, scraped, and bit the other person as we lost ourselves to our natural instinct, but not a single mark was left in the end.

My fingertips trailed over his chest in small circles, enjoying how his fingers mirrored my movements along my spine. After so long without his touch, I was half tempted to climb back on top of him and never let him leave the bed again. I felt whole when he was here, even more so when he was inside me, but I couldn't keep him as a prisoner here. Eventually, someone would barge in looking for him, demanding he leave our bed.

I didn't want him to, but he had to. As the sun rose in the sky higher with each passing minute, I knew he was about to.

"Do you want to get an hour or two of sleep before we start the day?" My breasts pressed against his side as I bent my elbow and rested my chin on the back of my

hand over his peck. He was staring at the ceiling, his hand continuing to travel over my bare flesh, and I could practically see the thoughts flying through his head. He was with me physically, but the sun was up, and he was now in work mode.

“I can’t, my love.”

My eyes closed as I savored the way the word rolled off his tongue.

There had been a moment in our relationship where Killian went from calling me Little

One to My Love. I hadn’t pinpointed exactly when the change from sexually desired to

adored happened. Still, I would cherish my new term of endearment. Because even

though, at the time, he hadn’t been ready to tell me that he loved me, he still indirectly

told me in his own way.

I would never get tired of hearing it. But Killian’s next statement had me opening my

eyes and anxiously picking my head up.

“We have their location now, but we lost four men. We must plan our attack before

they can prepare any more defenses.” His jaw was tense as he refused to look down toward me, and I knew he was angry at the loss of more of his

men. But that was uncontrollable in war. There would be losses. We just had to do our best to minimize the casualties.

“How can I help?” My lips pressed against his skin, and he sucked in a breath through

his teeth before clearing his throat.

“I need you to keep training.” Killian looked down at me, rolling onto his side slowly

until we were chest to chest. “I could care less about my life, but I can’t have them



take you from me. Even if we were to lose, I need you to live.”

“We won’t lose. The good guy always wins, right?” I forced a smile as he pressed a kiss to my forehead. I knew it wasn’t true. It was a very ignorant statement, but I was trying to stay positive.

’History is written by the victors, and the person writing it will always write themselves to be the good guys.”

I mulled over his words briefly, but he changed the subject before I could respond.

’Did you talk to Charlie?”

I winced at his question, knowing I had let him down. Secretly, I hoped I could talk to

her before he did, and we could work things out without him knowing. But he would

find out one way or another. I wasn’t going to keep secrets from him.

Killian sighed at my silence and closed his eyes as I pushed myself closer, pecking his

lips multiple times to remove the disappointment from his face.

’Natalie.” His knowing tone sounded almost as if he were scolding me, and I let out a grumble of defeat.

’I tried, but then we argued, and she hasn’t talked to me since. But she’s still here, and

I’ll make things right with her. I promise.” I pulled my lip between my teeth, gnawing on

it nervously as guilt washed through me. He had asked for me to take care of his

sister while he was risking his life to save our people.

Instead, we avoided each other for a week, fought, and then went back to silence. It

was not what he had asked of me, and I felt like I had let him down.

“Should I ask what you fought about?” His question made me feel ashamed because it had been him. I had said things to Charlie that weren’t my business to say.

“No, I saw her talking to a few women who aren’t exactly trustworthy. It made me angry because I was sure she was talking about me. When she tried to talk to me later, we just didn’t see eye to eye.” Killian pulled his eyebrows together, and I could feel the disbelief in our bond. Even I didn’t want to believe that Charlie had said anything against me, and I had no proof to say that she did. “I don’t even know what she said. But I was just so angry that she was talking about me to that woman!”

‘What woman?’ Killian’s voice deepened.

I rolled away from him, wanting his comfort but not wanting to talk about the woman

he had been fucking before me when we were naked in bed together. It felt wrong...dirty.

“The woman from Charlie’s ball. The one who said you had been sleeping with her, and I was just your plaything to warm your bed.” The words tasted like acid, and I kept my gaze away from him as I rolled out of bed. My back popped as I stretched my arms above my head, trying to act like it didn’t bother me. But it did. It bothered me more than I would like to admit.

I was no angel either. I had been with Jake for years before he mated my sister. But

Killian didn’t have to deal with Jake walking around our home. He didn’t have to see

the constant reminder of the person who had been sleeping with his mate.

I didn't see her very often. This was only the second time we had crossed paths, but that was two times too many.

'Lindsey?' He hummed. I glanced in the mirror and smirked that he was very openly checking out my ass as I walked toward the bathroom.

So, she has a name.

The bitter thought felt ridiculous. Even though I could see her in person, knowing her

name and hearing it from his lips made her feel all the more real.

'I didn't realize she had been released yet. Her time in the dungeon was her only

warning. If she disrespects you again, I will kill her.' He didn't seem to be focused on

what he was saying. The offhanded way he mumbled his response was as if he

couldn't be bothered with the woman.

It made me feel good.

I turned to look at him as I reached the bathroom door, and he groaned with

happiness as he stared hungrily at my naked body.

"You would kill her for me?" I asked as I leaned against the cold doorframe, crossing

one arm over my body to grab my other elbow. Killian growled lowly, sending a shot of

warmth through my stomach to my core.

The dark look in his eyes made me lick my lips as he climbed out of bed and marched

toward me.

"I would kill anyone for you."

Seventy-Nine: Natalie

Natalie's P.O.V.

“You were right.” Charlie’s voice carried through the empty library, making me tense as she approached me.

I had moved on to a new book, one I could actually read myself, which Thomas was happy about. I had been studying how to enchant items and was almost ready to try it after I reviewed it a few more times.

My legs were curled beneath me, with a blanket thrown over my lap. So far, only two council members seemed amused by me, but the rest wanted to kill me.

I had accidentally locked them in a room together this morning so they could work out

their differences. The only problem was that I couldn’t get in to talk to them about the

war, and they either hadn’t found a way out yet or were all dead.

My magic grew stronger by the day, and I still had no control over it. I had discovered

that I could do some powerful spells, but they happened on their own, and I hadn’t

figured out how to undo them yet. I figured starting with something small, something I

could focus on would help me master my craft.

If not, I would just have to find a way to get food to the room of angry women before

they died. I doubted they were doing anything with the candles, crystals, and maps I

had left in there for them.

Charlie’s voice made me freeze, and I ripped my eyes away from the page I was on to

look up at her. I promised Killian I would make things right, but I wasn’t sure how to do

that when I firmly believed in what I had said when we argued.

“Just hear me out.” She pleaded as she moved to sit on the couch

next to me with one leg pulled up as she faced me. I turned to give her my undivided attention, closing my book on my finger and holding it on my thigh. "I have only been thinking about myself and have a lot to make up for with Killian. But I still need to put myself first. He is killing himself, putting his people and kingdom before himself, and it had almost cost him his mate and his happiness.

"If I hadn't left, I never would have found Damien. Now that I have him, if I could go back and do it again, I would. I would still go because now I'm not alone. Killian is happy because he has you. But before you, he was miserable. I was miserable without Damien. But I can do better to be there for Killian. I will do better."

My empty hand rested on hers on her lap as I squeezed her hand before pulling back.

"I understand where you are coming from, and I am sorry for how I went about that conversation. It wasn't right. I was just so angry that you were talking about me to Lindsey and those other women. They have made it clear that they do not like nor respect me, and it hurt when I saw you all looking and laughing at me."

I looked down, mentally kicking myself for acting like a child instead of a leader. It was embarrassing to admit to her that I felt betrayed. She was one of my only friends here, and not being able to trust her was heartbreaking.

"That's why you were so mad at me?" Charlie laughed, leaning back against the

armrest of the couch. "We weren't laughing at you! We were laughing at Killian. I told them I thought my brother had no chance of winning any arguments against you because of how strong you are now."

My cheeks warmed as I glanced back up at her to see the amusement on her face.

'Did you really think I would talk bad about you? We're sisters now. We have to stick together." Charlie laughed again as she looked down at the book I was reading.

She had said it before, but the reminder that I had a sister now and that this was how our relationship was supposed to be shocked my system. It was so different than growing up with Haylee. It was something I would have to get used to.

"Why isn't the council helping teach you when they aren't looking into the vampires and witches?" She nodded toward the book, and I sighed in frustration.

"They are a bit...uh... stuck at the moment. I'm letting them focus on more important things right now." Tobias snorted from where he stood against the wall at the entrance to the library, and I shot him a glare.

"Is that what all that yelling and banging was earlier?" I nodded as she laughed, but when I listened closely, she was right.

The castle was strangely quiet, and I groaned at the thought of the carnage I would walk into. If I ever got that door open.

'Oh, shit." The whisper of dread left my lips as I placed my book on the cushion between us, losing my place and getting to my feet. My guards

and an amused  
Charlie followed my slow jog down the hall and to the conference room. "Are you guys still alive in there?"

I flinched when the yelling started again, but this time was joined by solid objects slamming against the wooden door.

"I think they might need some time to cool off." Charlie laughed as I felt someone pushing into my mind, using the pack link to alert everyone that someone was heading our way.

The hall fell silent, and I narrowed my eyes as Tobias gestured from me toward the hallway with his head, wanting me to lock myself back in my bedroom. But I had trained far too hard to go back to being the weak prisoner, hiding from an unknown threat.

My back straightened, and my chin lifted as I stared him down. Satisfaction washed through me when he looked away, submitting to me.

"Well, it looks like they are going to get that time to cool down after all. We have a visitor to greet." I smiled, turning on my heels and walking away as the witches grew louder.

The excitement of meeting the last council member replaced any fear I had. Since they had been invited, I heard countless people discussing a witch named Talia. She was the previous royal advisor before Joselin.

From what Killian had told me, she went a little mad after what happened with the queen.

Yet, everyone still seemed to love her. They talked about her like she was the greatest thing to join this world since magic. Multiple times I had heard people talk about how betrayed she had felt being replaced by Joselin when Killian had taken the throne.

They all agreed that she was the only one who could keep the council from killing each other and led them with pride.

Now it was finally my turn to see what all the fuss was about. Killian met me at the top of the stairs on his way to meet our guest. He greeted

Charlie with a nod and me with a chaste kiss on the lips. I could see how stressed he

was now that he was stuck playing catch up from his time away from the castle. It was

disappointing that I didn't know how to help him beyond dealing with the council.

'Do you think it's Talia?' Charlie asked with excitement laced in her words. She was

damn near bouncing on her toes at the prospect. "Do you think she is still mad? She cant be, right?"

Killian gave her a look of uncertainty with his lips pressed into a line, and his

eyebrows pulled together. "We will find out."

"Maybe she can release the council from the room I accidentally trapped them in." My

mumble made Killian's gaze shoot to me, and I giggled as I saw the genuine panic on

his face for the first time.

A door slammed down the hall, and the loud stampede of angry women had me

moving behind Killian and pushing him out the front door as quickly as possible. I



knew they would just follow us, but at least in front of our people, they had to act united and civil.

Charlie ducked to be on the other side of Killian as he stood tall, staring down the steps and over the courtyard as he waited for our guest's arrival.

Her positioning was

perfect to be as far away from the angry mob as she could be while I was stuck

standing to Killian's left, the closest to the door and to them.

"Chicken," I mumbled to Charlie, who raised an eyebrow at me with a smirk. Yet, I

grabbed Killian's hand to keep me tethered to him so the council couldn't hurt me.

I felt the magic before I saw her approaching the gate across the courtyard. The

familiar pull had me letting out a deep breath. I no longer had to make the decision to

seek her out as she had stayed true to her word and came to me.

Charlie jumped as Aurora, the alleged direct descendant of Selene and my mother,

appeared at the bottom of the steps and made her way gracefully toward us.

Her jet-black hair was pulled up in a high ponytail, and her pale green eyes looked

tired as they landed on me. The soft smile that stretched across her face when she

gazed upon me dropped as the council burst through the front door. They were

disheveled and angry, looking as if they had been trapped in an arena against a

raging Lycan for the past few hours instead of locked in a conference room with each

other.

Joselin was the first to notice my birth mother. Her white eyes

widened, and she dropped into a curtsey that even I had never been graced with. The other women spared Joselin a confused look for only a second before they stopped and looked at Aurora as well. One by one, they dropped into a formal greeting. “How the hell did you get them to do that?” I asked, astounded as a few council members turned their heads to glare at me. I narrowed my eyes back at them, and Aurora chuckled. “She is the descendant.” Cora snapped at me. “Everyone should be bowing to her. Even royalty.” My mother didn’t respond to her as she turned to Killian and me, dropping down into a curtsey before us. Cora’s eyes widened before she looked back down to the ground, mimicking my mother. “Your Majesties,” She addressed. I felt as if I needed to reach out and touch her, whether it was on her arm or a hug. But I wasn’t there yet. Maybe after I got to know her, I would feel more comfortable. “Aurora, we are glad you could make it,” Killian responded for me as I was torn on how to address my own flesh and blood. “You sound pleased but look disappointed. Was I not who you were expecting?” My mother looked over the council as they stood tall. The collection of women blocked the entryway. “We had been expecting the last of the council, but you are a welcomed surprise.” I offered, my hand tightening around Killian’s. My mother nodded in

understanding  
before looking back at me with a sad smile.  
“I see. I am disappointed that I don’t see my old friend, but she made her choice.” My mother gestured with her hand for Killian and me to enter the house first, so she could follow. The council did not miss the sign of respect, and I saw a few pout. “I have known Talia for many decades. Had she chosen this side, she would have arrived first. We will just have to make do without her. With my daughter here, I am sure your people will be fine.”

Eighty: Natalie  
Natalie’s P.O.V.

The tone of the council changed after the announcement that Talia had chosen the other side and that I was Aurora’s daughter, making me a descendant as well. They focused even more on tracking the witches, trying to get a lock on them before the battle. If we could take them down, the vampires would be no problem.

But the magic that was protecting them, hiding them, made it almost impossible to fight them in battle.

No one had brought up Talia again, but I could see the anger and disappointment in everyone’s eyes. Especially Charlie’s. She seemed to have a connection with the witch and had been excited to see her. For the rest of the night, the princess looked crushed. She and her brother had mastered masking their emotions, but even she

couldn't hide how upset it had made her to hear of the treason. I kept glancing at Killian in the mirror as we prepared for bed, but he was void of emotions. The eerie feeling that had settled over the castle only worsened when the sun went down.

"Bound...darkness...runs free."

The low and deep voice barely reached my ears, and I looked up at the mirror, watching as Killian rinsed the soap from his hair through the glass shower wall. It was a sight that normally took all thoughts from my mind and left me a desperate mess.

"What did you say?" I called out, hoping to be heard over the running water and thoughts going through his head. Killian opened his hazel eyes, staring at me with confusion as he shook his head.

"I didn't say anything."

I hummed in response as I brushed it off. No one else was in the room, and if Killian hadn't spoken, then perhaps I had picked up someone's thoughts in the pack link.

That was even more concerning than if Killian had been the one who said it.

For anyone in the pack to have thoughts that contained those words so close together made me feel even more unsafe in our home.

"Sorry, I thought I heard something, but it wasn't clear." I pulled the brush through my hair, biting my lip as I considered the consequences of letting it go unannounced.

Killian would need to know about something like that. "Is it possible to cross signals in the pack link? Like for someone to accidentally pick up on

someone else's  
conversations or thoughts?"

Killian shook his head, and I tried to focus on his face, not the soapy water running down his torso. "Thoughts can never be heard in the pack link. You have to speak to someone, and I've never heard of accidentally tuning into someone else's conversation. What did you hear?"

I let out a breath of relief that it couldn't have been one of our pack members then, and a quick scan of the room proved it to be empty. "I thought I heard someone talking about darkness and running free, but it must have been in my head."

Killian stared at me momentarily before looking away to turn off the water. He didn't seem concerned, so I had to trust that everything was fine.

"Let me know if you hear anything else." His tone was firm as he grabbed the towel and dried off. I felt dismissed, but at least he didn't make me feel like I was crazy.

"Yeah, okay." I half-heartedly said as I walked to the bed and got under the blanket.

Killian didn't say anything more on the subject as he joined me, spooning me from behind and whispering a sweet "Goodnight, my love" next to my ear.

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The room was still dark when I woke, and I sat up as the thick air closed in on me. In the past, when I had felt this, I struggled to pull enough air into my lungs. But now, while it was physically evident there was something dark afoot, it didn't bother me as

much as before.

“Bound,” The dark voice whispered again before fading to silence, and my hands gripped the blanket tightly as I turned to Killian. He had rolled onto his back during the night, which happened often, but he almost always turned back to hold me in his sleep.

His eyes were closed, but I could see them moving behind his eyelids as he remained deep in sleep.

“Killian,” I called out, placing my hand on his chest. His usually hot skin felt chilled, but his body moved as he took in deep and even breaths. I pushed against his body again, trying to wake him. Only this time, I realized I wasn’t touching him at all.

Invisible to my eye, there was a cold barrier between us that prevented me from actually getting to him.

“This has to be a dream,” The whisper left my lips as soon as the thought crossed my mind, only to be confirmed as the bedroom door opened slowly to an empty hallway.

I paused for a moment before getting out of bed. There was something either my mind wanted me to see, or the owner of the voice wanted me to see. If it could help save my people, I needed to know what it was.

“...in the blood...” The voice called again as I reached the hallway and found the guards standing watch, not seeming to notice me as I walked right by them in my pajamas.

The pull was getting stronger the further down the hallway I went

until I stood before  
the door I had once dreaded. The heavy wood opened on its own,  
and I stood still as I  
glanced into the dimly lit room. The ominous feeling I once had  
associated with the  
dying or dead was still there, but the body wasn't. Laying on the  
bed was nothing  
more than the golden crown I had been wearing during my  
coronation, the same one  
the queen before me had worn.  
Only all of the gems had been replaced with blood-red rubies.  
I felt the need to go into the room and take my crown back from  
the clutches of  
whatever spirit had brought me here tonight, but I stayed rooted to  
my place in the  
hallway.  
It wasn't right. It was a trap. I just didn't know who or why they  
were pulling me in.  
The room flashed before me, as bright as day. My mother-in-law's  
body, Lillian Amery,  
appeared for only a moment before it went dark again, and only  
the crown remained. I  
clung desperately to the memory of what it looked like in the real  
world, trying to force  
my body to wake up.  
But the walls began to distort, and the temperature dropped until I  
had no choice but  
to wrap my arms around myself to preserve some of my body  
heat.  
Yet, I still couldn't move.  
The room flickered again, and the queen being kept alive by her  
machines flashed  
into my vision before the dull and evil grey realm consumed me  
once more.  
"Darkness will run free!" The voice called again, sounding louder

than before.

I turned my head to look down the hallway, gasping as a hulking shadow figure rushed toward me. I pulled at my feet, desperate to get away. But they were fused with the floor.

“No!” What I had intended to yell came out in a shaky gasp as a puff of white air left

my lips from the rapidly dropping temperature.

My scream ripped free as the shadow figure reached me, and I closed my eyes. My

body finally responded as I dropped to the ground, wrapping my arms over my head

and pressing my forehead to my knees.

“Your majesty!” A voice shouted with horror, but I couldn’t unfold my body. ‘Grab a healer!’

I convulsed violently as the air warmed, but my body remained frozen.

“Where is she?!” The deep roar was familiar. It pulled at my heart, and I lowered my

arms to look up at my mate as he ran toward me. The bright light of day flickered in

and out, the darkness fighting to regain control.

“Do not touch her!” I wanted to growl at the woman who appeared between myself

and my mate, but my mate did it for me. “She is not yet back in our realm. Only she

can bring herself back. You can’t disrupt, or she will be stuck there forever.”

Eighty-One: Killian

Killian’s P.O.V.

Natalie was looking down the hallway. Her green eyes, which I adored, had turned



light blue. Her skin washed of its usual pink hue, leaving her the color of snow. The blue and purple shade of her lips made me want to pull her into my arms and hold her until she was warm again. She was fighting. I could see the struggle as her arms tightened around her torso, but our mate bond was empty. I had woken up with it empty, and none of the guards had seen her leave. She had just disappeared, and the entire castle and city had searched for her for hours. It was early afternoon when I felt a flicker of her presence in our bond. As it disappeared again, the maid yelling for a healer caught my attention. Several guards immediately alerted me that my mate had appeared in the hallway outside the infirmary. Only she wasn't entirely there. Her image was solid but would periodically flicker like a poor-quality hologram. Her ghostly complexion ripped at my heart. I wanted to save her, protect her. But I didn't know how to save someone from something I couldn't see. Was it possible? "No!" She cried out, throwing her hands up as her figure solidified, sending everyone flying back against the wall. I growled, the drywall crumbling as I pulled myself out of the hole. Something was attacking my mate, and I couldn't do anything about it. I turned to her mother, my body morphing and shifting as I transformed into my Lycan. "She shares your magic! You save her! Bring her back!"

“If I could, I would have.” Her calm statement was met with my fury as I grabbed her arm and spun her around to face me.

“Bring her back, now!” I ordered firmly but felt desperate. I was ready to beg and plead for my mate to be returned to me so I could hold her in my arms and protect her from the world around us. I would take on every enemy and every threat I could to keep her safe. She would never have to deal with this again if I had my way. 1

“I can’t!” The witch yelled as she glared at me. My hands began to burn as my grip tightened on her arm until I had no choice but to release her. “If we touch her while she is in the other realm, we could be taken there with her and trapped forever.”

I glanced back to my mate, watching with horror as breath after breath resulted in a foggy puff of air leaving her lips in the warm corridor. “And if we touch her while she is in our realm?”

“The risk of getting the timing wrong is too great! She is going in and out too fast.”

Aurora shouted as I walked around her and crouched before my mate. “You have no idea what kind of magic is at play here!”

I ignored her, staring at Natalie, watching her form jump back and forth between solid and transparent. Her breath went from thick to misty clouds, leaving her lungs. As the witch said, it was a lot to risk, but she was worth it.

As soon as her form solidified, I reached out, wrapping my arms around her frozen body, pulling her to me. “I’ve got you!”

Her arms flailed as she fought me off, trying to put as much distance between us as possible, but I wasn't going to let go. Not now, and not ever. "Natalie, it's okay! Come back to me!" The louder I spoke, the more she fought. "I've got you, my love."

Her body went still, and I held on tighter as she shivered aggressively and began to cry, releasing loud, racking sobs. The guards around us shifted nervously as they waited to see if she was okay.

"May I look at her, your majesty?" One of the healers stepped forward. Natalie gripped me tighter to her, whimpering and shoving her body as close to mine as possible. I let out a warning growl for the healer to stay back.

He dipped his head in submission before moving away but staying close enough that he could help if needed.

Natalie sobbed for a few minutes more as we waited, worried for her mental and physical well-being after what we had just seen of her. I couldn't imagine what she had just gone through. As she calmed, I held her tight in my lap, my muzzle laying over the top of her head, trying to shield her from the outside world as much as possible.

I waited until her breathing had begun to normalize, and her body felt warmer to the touch before I spoke. "Natalie, what happened? Who took you?" She pulled back, shaking her head with a horrified look as silent tears ran down her cheeks. "The voice."

A growl left me as I remembered her mentioning she heard a

voice talking to her while

I was in the shower. I had sensed no one near us, and no new or dark magic had

been in the air. It was only hers. But someone had been there, so close to her while

she was sleeping, vulnerable. She had let her guard down as she slept in my arms,

and I had let her down. I had failed to protect her.

I would find the son of a bitch who took my mate, and I would torture them every day

for the rest of my life.

“What voice?” Charlie asked.

“The voice from last night. He was talking last night, but I couldn’t hear what he was

saying.” Natalie looked over my shoulder. I turned to see which guard she turned to,

but they moved aside, and her gaze held steady, locked on my mother’s bedroom

door. “He brought me here through there.”

“Where is there?” Charlie pressed again. I was curious, but I was more bothered by

how Natalie rapidly filled with anger as she stared at the door.

“Through the dark place. He tried to keep me there with the shadow men. He said I

needed to hear him.”

My arms tightened around Natalie, but she shook me off as she stood up and walked

stiffly toward the door. The movement seemed unnatural, as if she were a robot, but

no one stopped her.

I wanted to see what she would do, and Charlie let out a growl as Natalie turned the

handle and shoved the door open. A sick feeling of unease pulsed through the mate

bond as she stood in the doorway.

“She wasn’t there. It wasn’t right. I was brought here through there, but she wasn’t here.” Natalie was talking in circles, and I could see the confusion on both her mother’s and my sister’s faces. “Everyone else was there, but she wasn’t here.”

“Love, we need to get you some food and maybe have the healer look at you. Did you get hurt?” I stepped forward, shifting into my skin as I placed my hand on her hip, but she jerked away, stepping into the room.

“He told me.” She whispered.

Charlie stepped into the room in a protective stance at the foot of our mother’s bed as

Natalie leaned over my mother’s body before stepping back and pacing the room, shouting, “He told me!”

“What? What did he tell you?” I asked, stepping forward to try and calm her as her heart beat erratically.

“He told me!” Natalie stopped walking. The color returned to her face, and her green eyes landed on me as she yelled. “Bound in the blood, the darkness runs free...

Killian, she needs to die!”

My arm wrapped around Natalie’s waist as she lunged forward with a war cry, her hands turning to claws as she swiped at me, trying to escape my hold to get to my defenseless mother. I barely noticed Joselin rushing into the room as Natalie

continued shouting, “Bound in the blood, the darkness runs free!”

“Sedated her!” I

shouted as she fought harder to get out of my hold. Charlie growled loudly as she

stood between my mother and us, and Joselin moved quickly to cast her spell, causing Natalie to fall limp in my hold.

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