

**The Beast And The Blessed by Ashley Breanne**  
**Chapter 106 – 123**

**The Warrior and The Witch chapter 1 - 18**

The Warrior and The Witch – One: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V. 11 years old

Everything hurt.

The throbbing in my head forced a whimper from my lips, and the cold night air made me shiver as it grazed over my body.

I had never fallen asleep with my window open before. My parents would have killed

me if they knew I had managed to pry the nails free of the wood for fresh air. I had

always been vigilant in ensuring I only left it open for a few minutes at a time so they

would never catch me. Yet, the smell of fresh pine on the breeze told me I had failed tonight.

My body fought against me, wanting to return to my deep slumber where there was no

cold or pain. Only my blanket was gone, and my mattress was hard and freezing. My

eyes shot open with panic as I felt someone pulling on my leg.

My vision was blurry, and my head spun as I grimaced from the blinding agony that

crippled me when I tried to move. The pain only worsened when I attempted to look

down, unable to see who was touching me. Very few ever did.

Their rough hands gripped my calf tightly, and I kicked in an attempt to free myself

from their hold. Their hands were too large to be my mother's, and my father hadn't

ever touched me. I was their cursed child.

He called me the devil.

I was their curse to carry and their secret to bury.

'Stop moving!' A voice snapped, and my head shot back painfully against the solid surface beneath me, hitting an already sensitive spot that I hadn't remembered injuring.

I had an idea of what was happening. My parents used to call in men dressed in black who told me they were there to purge me of the demon in my body. They would tie me to my bed frame, chant and yell while splashing me with water. But this was different.

The cold metal dug into my skin as the woman clasped the object around my ankle, pulling my leg until it was straight. I blinked several times as the world around me started to become clear. The dark night sky was illuminated by the bright glow of the moon above us, and I froze in a moment of panic when I realized I was outside and not in my bed as I had assumed.

I wasn't allowed outside.

I remembered my mother walking in to tell me it was lights out like she always did, and then there was nothing. No memory of getting ready for bed or lying down under my blanket.

Had I been sleepwalking? Was this to be my punishment for disobeying the rules?

"Joselin, don't worry, sweetie. We're here to make you better." A softer voice said, and

I flinched when the old, wrinkled hand moved over my face to tuck my hair behind my ear, prying the strand away that had been stuck to the wetness on

my cheek.

I turned my head away, trying to press it into the flat rock beneath me. But I had

nowhere to go as she used her thumb to lift my eyelid as far up as she could,

exposing the pure white underneath. It was the reason my parents had been seeking

help. The lack of color in my eyes was not like theirs. They didn't like that, never mind

what I could do... the powers I had.

I wasn't allowed to use them. It was one of the rules. One of the many rules. My

parents said it was the most important one. No magic.

The second one was that I was not allowed to leave the house or be seen by anyone.

The only people who knew about me were the people who came to fight the demon.

They had been in a long losing battle.

I cried out in terror as they cut my clothes from my body. My mother caught my eye as

she stood, silently crying, next to my father as she watched another woman grab my

head and force me to face the full moon above me.

My limbs pulled and jerked against their restraints as I frantically tried to get to my

parents and away from the women surrounding me. "Mommy!"

I didn't understand why I was being punished.

'I followed the rules! Mommy, I followed the rules!' I screamed as the stranger dug the

tip of the blade into my skin. "No! Ah!"

Searing pain shot up my arm as the woman dragged the metal across my skin,

chanting loudly in a language I didn't understand. My scream echoed into the night for

hours, drowning out the women performing their ritual. Until it

stopped, and I was left  
panting and sobbing.

My quiet begging for freedom and forgiveness was ignored as the  
women placed both  
hands on my body. I could feel them burrowing and moving  
through my bloodstream. I  
didn't like it. I had followed the rules.

My body went numb, blocking out the searing pain that covered  
almost every inch of  
my flesh. The only thing I could feel were the string-like tethers  
stemming from the  
witches holding and invading my body.

'Don't worry, dear. We are going to get this out of you.' The old  
woman croaked,

sounding giddy yet strained as she gripped my arm tighter.

I didn't want them to get it out of me. My parents may have seen  
my gift as evil, but I

loved having it. My powers had been given to me for a reason.

All the men who came to exorcise the demon out of me had never  
come close. But

they had also never done anything like this. They never cut my  
skin.

But these witches... these witches scared me. They hurt me. I  
didn't understand why

they needed to draw my blood.

I could feel them working their way into my mind and soul. My  
eyes stayed shut tight

as I tried to resist, but it felt like they were a part of me now. No  
matter how hard I tried

to push them away, they only wound deeper into me.

So, I let them in.

It was like opening a door, one I unknowingly could never close  
again. The bright and

strong feeling of magic washed over me, and I focused on it,  
pulling from it to get the

strength to break free and escape.

“What are you doing?” The older woman snapped, grabbing my jaw and forcing me to

look at her. My eyes opened, and I gasped as I could see the darkness of her greedy

soul in the depths of her eyes. “You ungrateful bitch! ■

She tried to pull her hand away, but I tightened my hold on the imaginary strings

connecting us.

I needed it. I needed to follow the tether to get to the hypnotizing, swirling light filled

with magic. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that if I could get to that ball of light, I

would be freed from darkness and pain.

Then the strings started growing thicker, burning brighter in my mind, and I pulled

them to me faster as I tried to follow them to the source. I could hear the women

screaming, their hands dropping from my body as they let out their displeasure, but I

couldn't stop fighting.

I didn't deserve this punishment. I had followed the rules.

My grip loosened when I reached the end of the strings. The light grew brighter than

anything I had ever seen before. Then, it faded to black. I didn't move for several

minutes, enjoying the warmth traveling through my body. But it washed away, leaving

me cold, wet, and in agony.

My eyes opened to see the moon had moved further across the sky. The metal chains

suddenly went slack with the sound of them falling to the ground.

I sat up slowly, crying out in pain as I looked around. My mother and father were still

standing there staring in horror. I had expected my mother to run

to me, happy that I was okay. But she just stood there with her wide eyes and a shaking hand over her mouth.

“That isn’t possible,” My father whispered, but I ignored him as I stepped forward on shaky legs.

It was a mistake as my mother flinched back against my dad’s side, and he quickly drew his gun from his waistband. The barrel was pointed at me, and I stopped, confused.

“Daddy? Mommy?” My voice trembled as the cold night air hit my wet skin, and I glanced down to see my pale body covered in blood. “I was good. Why did you let them hurt me?”

My soft insistence that I didn’t deserve my punishment this time was followed by me taking another step closer and my parents taking two back in response.

“Do it.” My mother voiced as she gripped my father’s shirt tightly in her fists. “Do it, Harold!”

The firing of the gun echoed through the trees, and the small bead of metal twisted through the air, stopping inches from my face. My breathing became more labored as I stared at the floating object.

This wasn’t a punishment. This was an execution.

“You tried to kill me.” My whisper came out quieter than I had intended, but they heard me as they flinched. My stomach dropped to my toes as I glanced between my parents, not understanding why they were doing this.

“Harold,” My mother pleaded, and he pulled the trigger once more.

I lifted my arm in front of my face like a shield, my eyes widening as the two bullets meant for me shot backward toward my parents. The metal left a small hole in the center of their foreheads, and their bodies dropped a second later.

One glance behind me confirmed that the three witches lay lifeless on the ground around the stone slab they had tied me down. My heart hammered in my chest, and the world spun around me.

Dead. They were all dead. I had killed them.

“No, no, no....” My voice trembled as I stared in horror at my parents. I hadn’t meant to hurt them. “Mommy?”

My stomach turned as I stumbled back.

It had been instinct to run, an instinct to hide so I wouldn’t get into trouble. My bare feet tripped and stumbled over the uneven forest floor, getting gouged and sliced open by the twigs and rocks I stepped on.

The sun had just risen when I heard something large dashing through the forest, followed by voices. I knew I wouldn’t have been able to get away with it. Someone would have found the bodies eventually and traced them back to me.

My head whipped back and forth as I tried to find safety. The closest thing within my sight was a large hollow tree on its side, just big enough for me to scamper inside.

The moss covering the wood was wet, and I avoided touching it as best I could until I

had gone as far as I could fit. My knees were to my chest, and I kept my head down, facing the opening as I waited with terror. Eventually, a shadow passed over the entrance. I held my breath, counting to twenty, before letting it back out as quietly as possible. But they still found me. I jumped when a boy around my age popped his head into the opening of my sanctuary. His deep brown eyes made me feel safe, and I lifted my head slightly as he moved to be fully in the entrance. "That's a lot of blood." He stated, staring down at me before shaking his head and holding his hand out in my direction. I could hear other people surrounding the log, and I pushed myself further against the tree trunk. Almost everyone who had ever seen me had been terrified. But when he looked into my eyes, he smiled. "You're safe. You can come out now. I've got you. I'm Tobias." Little did I know that I would spend the rest of my life hopelessly in love with that boy but never able to reach him.

Two: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V. – Present Day

One had to be a special kind of stupid to let their ignorance feed their fear.

Yet, as I stepped into the pub, the room fell silent. Bodies shifted, and multiple people began collecting their belongings to make a quick escape. Only one person in the building should have been afraid of me, and he was sitting with his back to me at the bar, trying to enjoy his day off.

I was about to ruin that.

My chest warmed as my eyes ran across his broad back and shoulders. He didn't bother turning to look at me as I approached him. I rested my elbows on the counter next to him as the bartender placed a beer in front of me and then rushed to the other end of the bar.

The sound of feet scurrying away as the room rapidly emptied made me grit my teeth, knowing I would have to leave a large tip to make up for the loss of his business. A

quick scan of the room showed only a few castle guards, who were used to me, had chosen to stay and were enjoying their meals.

But that was how it worked. I used to let their reactions get to me.

The people would take one look at my long white hair and colorless eyes, and they would leave. When I

was first brought here, a few people protested King Amery from taking me in. They lost, but it still bothered me.

But now, even though most of them had grown used to me, I embraced it.

I loved that I instilled a deep-seated fear in people. Humans, Lycans, Wolves, Fae...

you name it.

Except him.

He had never been afraid of me, not since day one. At least, that was what

I told myself. In reality, our past was a bit more complicated than that... more painful.

Tobias pushed his plate of food in my direction, and I bit back a smile as I grabbed a

fry before sliding the ceramic dish back toward him. I wasn't

hungry, but I wouldn't turn his offer down. His glass of water sat untouched in front of him, and I watched as a drop of condensation ran down the glass onto the paper coaster beneath it.

Tobias quickly pushed his thigh against mine, nudging me to grab my attention. The warmth of his body managed to make it through his jeans and into my skin. It was glorious, and I dropped my hands in my lap, hoping to hide the goosebumps that rose along my skin at his touch.

His rich brown eyes scanned my face, and I felt my breathing speed up when he briefly looked down at my body. When his eyes met mine again, I swallowed hard and had to turn away.

It was difficult enough for me to have to come here and ask him a favor. But seeing how he looked at me, his pupils dilated, and his lip pulled up ever so slightly on one side, always made my body feel warm and my mouth dry.

The man was a god, always just out of reach. If my family had been right, I was a demon.

The two didn't mix.

Maybe I was afraid of him too.

'I need a favor,' I muttered, bitter that I had to show up in a place like this to ask for help. "But you've been avoiding me. Should I even ask, or should I go to someone else for help?"

My childhood best friend had challenged me a few months ago to toss my reservations aside and go for it with Tobias. But there was no

point to it. He had a soulmate somewhere out there, and when he found her, she would be the luckiest woman in the world.

Yet, I did it anyway. Getting to be loved by Tobias, even for a limited time, would have been worth the heartbreak of him eventually leaving me for his soul mate.

I tried to get his attention by flirting with and touching him... He never responded. He wasn't like the others. Other men fell at my feet if I approached them. They loved to be able to say they fucked me, The King's Royal Advisor, but they never wanted anything more than that.

I wanted more than that, but I had only ever felt that way for Tobias; for the one man that rejected every advance I made and refused to touch me. So, I gave up the constant humiliation of his repeated rejections. It wasn't worth the pain if I never got the chance to be with him. But that didn't mean it didn't still hurt every time I saw him or was reminded that I wasn't good enough for him.

He made it easy and did everything he could to avoid me over the past two weeks.

Now I was here, humiliating myself again in public to tell him that I wasn't strong enough to do this on my own.

But he was the only one I trusted to keep it a secret, not only because there were very few people he would ever talk to, but because I trusted him not to. Tobias lifted his glass, the movement catching my attention. His eyes were open, holding steady on me as he sipped his ice water. I watched as he

swallowed, the tanned skin of his neck moving slightly as he did so. My mouth dried, and I took a large gulp of my beer, forcing my eyes away.

“Don’t make me beg, Tobias,” I said, placing both hands around my beer mug as it hit the wooden top of the bar, staring at the wall of liquors in front of us. “I’ll do this alone if I have to, but please don’t make me.”

He raised his eyebrow, silently asking me to explain. But even thinking the words make a ball form in my throat. How did I tell him that the horror I had experienced as a child may have happened again to someone else? How do I tell him what I had seen in the mountains the night before the war?

I pushed my chair back, ready to tell him to forget about it. But I stopped when Tobias placed his hand over mine on the bar top. Sparks erupted across my skin, and I felt my breathing halt as I stared at our hands. It wasn’t the first time he had initiated contact between us. Still, it was the first time he didn’t pull away immediately. 1

His amusement at the situation had vanished. He nodded once before standing to fish his wallet out of his pocket and leave some money. My heart dropped when he let go of my hand, but I masked my emotions and did the same, leaving a couple hundred as an apology for clearing out the bartender’s pub.

From the corner of my eye, I watched as Tobias lifted his hand instinctively as if he were going to place it on my lower back. But he clenched his hand in a fist and pulled

his arm back to his side.

I should have known he wouldn't want to. He had made it very clear over the past couple of months that he wasn't interested in any physical affection from me.

The disappointment that he didn't want to touch me was overshadowed by the humiliation when I looked up and saw the remaining patrons watching the interaction.

I held my head up as I walked calmly out of the building. Still, I knew they could hear my heart beating erratically and my uneven breathing as I shoved my feelings down. If he didn't want to touch me or want me touching him anymore, I would do my best to avoid it at all costs.

Three: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

It was the closest I could get us, and that made my stomach tighten.

Only a few weeks ago, Lycans, wolves, and humans faced off against a collection of witches and vampires for the right to the crown. We came out victorious because of the strength of our Queen's magic. All of the vampires had been burned to ashes, and the witches who had taken part in the treasonous attack had been executed for their crimes.

Yet, their spell was still in place, telling me that at least one witch involved in the casting remained. More than likely, they were still hiding here, in the mountains.

He wanted to know why I brought us here, and the answer

couldn't have been more disturbing to me.

"Because I couldn't get us closer," I whispered as I lifted my hand and ran it over the thick wall of magic. It was strong. Whoever cast this was not to be taken lightly.

"Someone survived, and I have a bad feeling about it."

I walked forward through the thick, water-like air filled with magic until I reached the other side. It was the same barrier I had felt the night before the attack.

The sounds of bones cracking and popping filled the area as Tobias shifted into his Lycan, prepared to fight. His hulking figure towered over me as he stood just behind my shoulder. I took a deep breath to collect myself, trying not to be distracted by his close proximity.

A cold breeze blew through the trees, making the oak leaves and the pine needles rustle loudly. The tiny hairs on my neck lifted, and I glanced around the forest. Each step forward had my anger increasing.

It didn't feel like we were alone, but they had masked themselves well. Tobias seemed to have the same realization as I heard him inhale deeply before letting a low growl out.

I almost wanted them to step out so I could fight them and finally release some of this frustration on someone, but the forest was empty. There were no animals of any kind, and the further up we hiked, the drier and more diseased the plants and ground became. They hadn't been like this before, and I had to pause

and confirm we were going in the right direction before we could continue. I was so focused on our surroundings that I jumped when Tobias placed his large claw on my hip. The need to pull away and eliminate him as a distraction vanished when I tilted my head back and saw his muzzle over my head as he stared out into the trees. It felt so natural to have his hand there, and I was sure he didn't even realize he was doing it. His chest brushed against my back as he slowly turned his head from side to side, scanning our surroundings, but I couldn't take my eyes away from him. He knew what he was doing. This was his job as one of the private bodyguards to the Queen. A flare of jealousy rushed through me as I imagined him doing this with Natalie, even though I knew he never would. I had never seen him touch her. He adored the Queen, as did the rest of her people, but it wasn't infatuation. He respected her and the king. Still, I knew he wasn't infatuated with me either, and yet, here we were. The back of my head brushed against his chest, and he looked down at me, suddenly realizing the position he had placed us in, and took a step back with his top lip pulled up in a silent snarl. The loss of his body heat made me shiver, and I pressed my lips together to stop myself from turning around and giving him a piece of my mind. He saw us as friends. I was the little girl he saved all those years

ago. Then one day,  
he cut me out of his life and didn't talk to me again for years. He  
didn't speak to  
anyone again for years. It took a long time to get him to let me  
back in, and even then,  
it was never the same.  
Now as adults, we maintained this acquaintanceship where some  
days I was his  
friend, and some days I was nothing more than a colleague. But I  
only wanted to grab  
and kiss him until he finally saw me as something more.  
"It's this way." I ground out, feeling my eyes begin to water. Once  
again, he pulled  
away from me like I was some disease-ridden animal when he  
was the one who had  
reached out for me this time.  
"Josie," Tobias growled, but I shook my head and kept walking. I  
didn't want his  
excuses. I also didn't want to hear him tell me how or why he  
wasn't interested. It  
would be too painful.  
"It's close. We need to keep moving if we want to get home before  
nightfall. ' I stepped  
over a fallen tree, noticing the small black lines that had run up  
the trunk. They pulsed  
faintly, and as I let my fingertips graze over them, I could feel the  
dark magic  
poisoning the plant.  
I saw the stone before anything else when I looked up. The large  
flat slab had been  
lifted atop another to be raised, and I swallowed hard as I pushed  
my childhood  
memories to the back of my mind.  
When I had stumbled across this during our attack, it had been  
covered in fresh blood.

Chains had been secured to the surrounding trees and sat in the dirt as they waited for their next victim.

But they weren't here now.

Everything had been cleaned. Even the dirt had been cleared of any footprints.

I approached the stone slab, letting my shaking hands gently brush over the discolored rock. I spent several minutes inspecting the rust-red-stained stone. Every

line and crack in the stone had been cleaned. There wasn't a spec of dried blood, and

I smacked my palm down loudly in frustration.

"It's all gone. Someone came back here to clean up their mess and hide any

evidence." I turned, walking around one of the trees that I knew had chains tied to it.

Chunks of bark lay scattered on the ground, having fallen from the friction of the metal rubbing against it.

I closed my eyes, trying to fight the memory of me pulling and yanking against the chains, trying to get free...to get away from the evil witches slicing into my skin. The

horror of knowing it could have been a child on that rock, getting their magic sucked

out of their soul, made me grab my knees as my mouth began to water and my stomach rolled. 1

Tobias approached me slowly, his claws gently scraping my skin as he pulled my hair

back to keep it out of the way. The tender touch and thoughtful gesture made my

chest hurt. I took a few deep, calming breaths as my stomach settled before standing

upright, thankful I hadn't been sick in front of him.  
"There is nothing here. This was a waste of time." I felt bitter and angry. All this confirmed was that at least one witch was still alive, practicing dark magic and growing stronger. I had seen the blood and chains. I had felt the evil air surrounding this area when I had snuck into this forest to do my part for the pack during the war. But now I knew they had survived. I spent the whole day on this stupid trek to find answers and had nothing substantial to show for it. I was left with no more information on the potential threat to our people and even more hurt and confusion from Tobias. Before he could say anything, I grabbed Tobias's forearm, and we were sucked into the darkness. I didn't know where to take him or where he lived. I had never been invited there or welcomed into Tobias's life outside of the castle. That realization seemed to be the last straw before all of my anger deflated, and we were left standing in the sitting room of my private tower. Defeated. "Thank you for traveling with me today. You may go." I dismissed him without looking back at him as I walked up the stairs to my bedroom. I needed to think through this and come up with a plan. The sound of him following me up the stairs made me tense, but I was done fighting today. Everything had been a struggle or a fight for the past few months. The only difference was that I had people on my side before the war. Now,

I was in it on my own.

My position in the kingdom had basically become obsolete. If I couldn't take down this threat on my own and prove myself to Killian and Natalie, I had no doubt I would be out of a job and a place to live. Killian had been my best friend since I was brought here. But even he had distanced himself after he found his mate. He said everything was okay between us, but it wasn't lost on me that he withdrew from me after Natalie falsely accused us of having an affair.

I understood. His mate came first. If I had one, I would do the same thing. But even after the air had cleared, he hadn't treated me the same. It was rare now that I could ever talk to him alone. If I did, it was like a silent alarm went off, and someone would come to interrupt us within a few minutes. He would keep the doors open when I would be in the same room as him alone, making it difficult to discuss any private or confidential pack matters, let alone anything personal. With his mate being a descendant of the moon goddess, she was more powerful than I was. She could talk to him privately or through the pack link about important matters without interruptions or eavesdroppers listening in, something I could no longer do. It was why I was positive that she would soon be taking over my role and I would be sent on my way. No home. No friends. No family. Then there was Tobias.

The fight for Tobias was a lost cause, and I knew it would be better for both of us if he just went back to avoiding me.

“Josie,” Tobias said firmly, his hand catching the door to my bedroom as I attempted to close it between us.

“Not now,” I said as I ignored him coming in behind me. His voice had been clearer than before. The rough growl behind each word was gone, and I knew that meant he was back in his skin. It also meant he was naked; my heart couldn’t take that right now.

Having him in my bedroom was like bringing a starving person a tray of food and telling them they couldn’t eat it.

“Yes. Now.” He argued back, but I moved into my bathroom and closed the door

between us. He didn’t stop me this time, and I let my head hang down as I gripped the counter’s edge, taking several deep breaths.

I turned on the tap, splashing some cold water on my face as I heard movement in my room.

Fuck this.

The water dripped down my face and onto my chest as I looked myself over.

One last try, Joselin. Get your shit together.

It had been a long time since we had been alone or in private, and I was going to take advantage of it and be bold. If Tobias still wasn’t interested, I would move on and find someone new.

I hadn’t been with anyone in months. Tobias was the only one I cared for, and if I had

a real chance with him, I wasn't planning on ruining that by fucking strangers. But I was losing hope that I had a chance. This was his last chance. If he didn't make a move, I would just go back to fucking whoever I pleased. My tongue ran out over my lips as I silently pleaded to the Goddess for this not to backfire before I dried my face and turned to the door. There was only so much rejection a girl could take, no matter how strong they were. The bathroom knob felt cold as I wrapped my hand around it and pulled it open. Tobias sat in the corner of the room in the plush chair where I enjoyed reading at night, and I let my eyes wander over his naked body. He looked livid. His jaw was clenched, and his hands gripped the chair's arms tightly as he glared at me. I couldn't tell if his eyes were black or brown in the dim lighting. "Now." He demanded again, and I smirked. I didn't want to talk right now. "One moment, I got my shirt wet while washing my face." His eyes dropped to my chest, undoubtedly seeing the very few drops of water on my top. But he didn't say anything as I reached down and grabbed the hem, pulling it up and over my head slowly

Four: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

I smiled at him as he growled out my name. The sound awakened my confidence even more as my fingertips trailed down my collar, over my chest,

to land on the tops  
of my breasts. The smooth skin there was soft to the touch, but I  
knew if I looked  
down, I would find the black lines of the Norse runes and knots  
that had been carved  
into my flesh.

His eyes followed the movement as I slid my fingers back and  
forth seductively at the  
edge of my lace bra. I felt giddy and powerful, seeing that it was  
working. He was

enjoying this. "What were you saying, Tobias?"

I watched with a smile as his Adam's apple bobbed when he  
swallowed before his  
eyes snapped up to mine. They narrowed as my tongue peeked  
out to wet my lips,  
and the warm brown of his irises darkened to black. ' Why do you  
keep doing this,  
Josie?"

My eyes closed at the sound of his voice. I adored it. The deep  
vibration and the way  
my name rolled off his tongue. What was even better was that it  
was reserved for me.

Beyond those above him in ranking, I was the only one I knew of  
whom he spoke to.

I didn't know what happened to cause it, but even after he shut  
everyone else out as a  
teenager, he still spoke to me if we were ever alone. It made me  
feel special,  
wanted. Loved.

Whenever we were alone, he spoke to me freely, but in front of  
others, he kept to  
himself. Yet, ever since I decided to show him how I felt and  
made my first move, he  
had avoided any situation that would cause us to be alone  
together.

I missed the sound of his voice. It was my favorite sound. He hadn't asked me to stop, and by the growing and impressive erection between his legs, I figured he was okay with what was happening here. If he didn't like what he was seeing or wanted me to stop, all he had to do was say so. Until then, I would keep going.

My other hand went behind my back, easily unsnapping my bra, and I let it slide off my body.

The sound of the fabric hitting the ground was followed by his eyes dropping from mine to land on my bare chest. I could feel my nipples harden under his watchful gaze. "Doing what, Tobias? Flirting with you?"

He growled as I stared at his hard member resting against his stomach. I could tell by looking that he was just the right size. No big enough to hurt but a generous enough size to fill me completely. He leaned back in the chair as if he were a spectator at a show. And he was. If he wanted a show, I would give him one. I smiled wickedly when he pressed his lips together as I popped the button of my jeans free. His nostrils flared, and I wanted to cheer in victory that I was finally getting a reaction from him. He was attracted to me. His reaction said it all, and it was empowering.

"You're not flirting."

I raised my eyebrows in disbelief and amusement as he kept his grip on the chair, leaving himself on display for me to admire. Everything about him, his broad and

sculpted shoulders, his toned chest, the subtle outline of abs, and his muscular thighs that I couldn't wait to sit on... he was mouthwatering. The zipper was next, and I pulled it down slowly as his gaze stayed locked on my hands, watching as I slid my pants down and stepped out of them. The black lace thong was the only fabric remaining, and from the heated look in his eyes, he liked it. I hooked the fabric with my thumbs, slowly pulling on them teasingly but not removing them. I knew how wolves worked. I knew he could smell my desire, that I was wet for him. But he was probably used to it. I was almost always turned on when he was around. At this point, he should expect it from me. It didn't make sense for Tobias to not know that I had been crushing on him as a teenager or that I was in love with him now. He should have been able to smell my desire for him, at the very least. It was one of the reasons why I hadn't made a move until now. He could have acted on my lust for him at any time but never did. Not until now. Tobias let out a low growl when I put the fabric of my panties back in place, letting my hands run up my stomach to my breasts as I moved toward him. I wasn't going to do all the work. I wanted him to be the one to take my panties off and seal the deal. I leaned forward, placing my hands on the top of the chair back as I waited for him to say something. Over the past few months, I had touched, flirted with, and tried to

tease him to the best of my abilities, but this was my most brazen attempt yet.

When he didn't move or say anything, I lifted one knee, sliding it between his thigh and the arm of the chair. I felt victorious when he moved his leg to make room for me.

His hand grabbed my hip, holding me steady as I pulled my other knee onto the chair and straddled him.

I held myself over him with my breasts in line with his face. His fast breathing matched mine, and I let my hands settle on his chest. The light layer of hair there was coarse

but softer than I expected, causing me to want to discover every part of him until I knew his body like the back of my hand.

I looked up, seeing he was staring at my face instead of my body, and I raised an

eyebrow in a silent question as I began to lower my hips. His hands tightened on my sides, pulling me down until I sat on his hardness. The wet fabric between my legs

was irritating. I wanted to strip down bare and have him rub his warm cock against my clit. Better yet, to sink deep inside me.

The moan that broke free had been an accident, and I bit my lip as he growled in response, the sound making more wetness pool between my legs for him.

"Do you not want to touch me?" My hand slid down his arm, grabbed his wrist, and pulled his hand from my hip up to my breast. His large calloused palm moved willingly

to cup me, gently massaging my breast. I gasped as he pinched my nipple between

two fingers expertly, and my hips rocked against his in response. “You have always been impatient, beautiful.”

I paused at his response. He sounded distracted as he continued to fondle me, but

how he said it made it sound like an insult. It wasn't my fault that I had grown tired of waiting. I had been in love with the man for fifteen years. That was long enough.

“I have been very patient, actually. Now, I want you to touch me, or would you prefer to taste me instead.”

My hips wiggled against his, and I moaned as he pushed my hips down with his other hand and rubbed his length against me.

“It's not just about what you want.” His deep voice made me look up at him, and I

found him watching me closely as if he were trying to read my mind. “I want to touch you. I want to feel you against me.”

I gasped as he reached up and slid his fingers into the hair on the side of my head,

pulling it to the side so he could run his nose along my neck until his lips reached my

ear, and growled a promise I would never forget. “I would fuck you so good that you

would feel me inside you for days. I would make you cum so hard that even when

you're touching yourself at night, years from now, you can't cum without thinking of me.”

My head dropped back as my heart filled with happiness at his words. He wanted me.

I wanted to tell him I already thought of him when I touched myself, but I bit my

tongue. Some secrets I could keep to myself. It would do nothing

for me if I told him that, and he wanted nothing more than a one-night stand. I would never be able to get off without him again because I never could before. It would do more than just ruin sex for me if this ended after one night. It would completely shatter my heart. He growled, and my eyes opened as I looked down at him. From how hard he was, I knew he was attracted to me, but did he want more like I did. "What's stopping you? I've been flirting with you for months." I whispered, leaning down and hovering my mouth over his. I had been dreaming about kissing him for years. It felt like it was too good to be true. All of my dreams would be coming true. He openly admitted his desire for me, and based on his impressive size and skillful hands, he would give me a night to remember. If everything went well, he would be mine by sunrise. "This isn't flirting. You're seducing me, sweetheart." His hold on me tightened, and I pressed my breast further into his palm as he continued to touch me and rock his hips in time with mine. My breathing came out in short pants, and I knew he could feel my wetness through my panties. "What's so wrong with that? Does it not feel good for you?" I whispered, enjoying our game but wanting it to end so we could finally get what we both wanted. As much as I wanted to reach down and slide my panties to the side so he could sink deep into me, I was still waiting for him to make that move.

Instead, it was my heart that dropped as he spoke.

“You still don’t understand. I don’t want you to seduce me.”

Five: Tobias

Tobias’s P.O.V.

This was not how I had pictured it. Having Joselin on top of me, pleasuring herself by

grinding on me. I had wanted her for so long... even when I shouldn’t have. Even

when it went against the will of the Goddess.

She had always been on my mind. She had always been the most beautiful, funniest,

and most brilliant woman I had ever met. What she was offering me was a dream

come true for any man.

“You don’t want me to seduce you?” Joselin repeated without emotion as her hips

stilled and her hands lifted from my chest. Her body was tense, and she lifted herself

up until she hovered over me.

She looked horrified, and my grip tightened, wanting to pull her back down and show

her just how much I was enjoying myself. But I respected her decision to stop and let

her move away.

This wasn’t what we needed. No matter how much I wanted it, it wasn’t what I needed.

She quickly climbed off my lap until she was standing in front of me. Joselin lifted her

elbows as she wiggled her hips away from my grip, not wanting to touch me more

than she already did.

“No. I don’t think we should fuck right now, Josie.” I stood slowly, my heart hammering

in my chest as the Goddess before me as she placed one hand

on her head with a frustrated groan.

‘I have been throwing myself at you for months. Months! I have been humiliating myself trying to get your attention! You should have just told me to stop if you didn’t

want me. Why didn’t you say something?’ She bent over, collecting her clothes from

the ground and holding them over her exposed body.

I growled lowly as she pulled her shirt on, covering her perfect, perky breasts and the curve of her waist.

‘I didn’t want you to stop.’ The admission made my cheeks feel warm, but Joselin’s

glare made me step forward to comfort her. Her guard dropped, her hands stopping

as she pulled her jeans back up, leaving her pants unbuttoned as I lifted her chin with

the knuckle of my index finger.

Her lips parted as I ran my nose across hers, our lips just barely brushing as I

watched her eyes flutter closed. ‘I adore your attention, Josie.’

I let out a breath of disappointment as she pulled away, moving out of my reach and

leaving me feeling cold and empty.

‘You adore my attention?’ She spat with venom, and my eyebrows pulled together in

confusion as she glared at me.

‘Yes, your attention, your affection. All of it.’ I wanted all of it, all of her. But was she

ready for that? Was I ready for that?

I had lived a long and painful existence, only ever finding peace when I was near

Joselin. That was an issue for me. I couldn’t expect her to solve all my problems and

fight my demons. There were too many. So, I vowed to never put her in that position, i

I also knew that what she wanted was far less than what I expected of her. For years, I watched as she used her beauty and charm to get any man or woman she wanted into her bed. It was only reasonable to assume that I was her next target, the next name on her list.

She had never been in a relationship that I knew of. She spent one night with a man and pretended they didn't exist to her the next morning. I would smell her on him and him on her, but they wouldn't even look at each other. I had even seen her join in with a couple or two occasionally. Sex was not taboo for our kinds, and many people engaged in it in public... some were willing to invite others in and share.

I would watch as she approached a pair in the middle of a heated moment with her head held high and ask them if she could join in. They would take one look at her and welcome her in.

Who wouldn't? Even the Queen, a descendant of the moon goddess, had been jealous of Joselin.

As terrifyingly powerful as Joselin was, she was the most beautiful creature on the planet. Everyone would stop what they were doing to watch as she joined in and came undone.

This first time I had seen it had been burned into my brain for me to relive every night.

They started by touching, tasting, and exploring each other. By

the end, the man was slamming into his woman from behind as she had her head between Joselin's legs.

The small moans and whimpers that came from my witch were addicting, and I had accidentally let out a low growl.

Joselin's eyes met mine when she heard the sound from across the club, and I

watched as she came. I wanted it to be me giving her such pleasure. I was seething with jealousy. I was ready to kill them for touching her and then tie her to my bed, so I

would be the only one she could ever touch or cum for again.

Then after a while, it felt like a game. I thought Joselin was doing it for me. It didn't

happen often, but when I saw her with someone, there was a magnetic pull between

us. Her eyes would meet mine and hold my stare as she came.

She was the most beautiful creature in the world when she reached her orgasm. Her

lips would part, and her cheeks would flush. She would let out this moan that drove me absolutely wild.

I wasn't ready for her yet, though. So, as much as I wanted to be the one she was

wrapped around, I stood back and let her have her fun. I let her enjoy herself. If that

was what she wanted, who was I to stop her when I wasn't ready to offer her more?

"My affection?" She laughed mockingly as she pulled at her hair, her eyes lining with

water. "You just let me rub myself all over you, and you didn't even want it. You just

liked that I was giving you attention but didn't want me to be physical with you? Do

you know how dirty that makes me feel like I just molested you even though you were grinding against me too?"

My eyes burned slightly as I felt my beast coming forward, angered by her tone. She didn't get a chance to move before I grabbed her by the waist and spun her around,

pressing her against the wall. "Sweetheart, I enjoyed every minute of what you just

offered me. When I do finally have you, I will give you plenty of reasons to feel dirty,

but I promise that you will enjoy every single one of them."

The urge to lean in and taste her was overwhelming, but I stopped when she turned

her head to the side, showing me her cheek when I was only a centimeter away.

Every contour of her body was flush with mine, but her arms hung limp at her sides,

and the interest she showed before was gone.

"I am done throwing myself at you, Tobias. You said that you are attracted to me, but

you have turned me down at every turn, no matter how turned on you may have

been." Joselin lifted one hand, placing it against my chest and pushing me back. I

glanced between her eyes, wishing I could see what she was thinking and feeling, but

I did what she wanted and stepped away. "At least you were a gentleman enough not to act on it."

I didn't feel like a gentleman at all. My chest felt tight, and my throat felt dry. I wanted

to tell her how I felt about her, but it wouldn't be fair to her to have my feelings hanging

over us when she didn't want more than one night with me. Even

if she did... even if  
she reciprocated my feelings for her, I couldn't offer her anything  
right now, and that  
would only make it all worse. 1

"Get out," She whispered, looking away as she slid out from  
between me and the wall,  
pointing to the door to her room.

'We are not done with this conversation.'" I snarled, desperate to  
feel her against me  
again. What she had just given me was like sampling a drug. I  
wanted more, and I  
wanted it now.

"Unless you have something to say that will benefit both of us,  
then yes. This  
conversation is over." Her eyebrows were lifted and pulled  
together as she waited for  
me to say something. But I had no idea what she wanted me to  
say. Did she want me  
to change my mind and tell her we could sleep together tonight  
even though it would  
rip my heart out in the morning?

Or, did she want me to tell her the truth, that I was in love with her  
and had been for  
as long as I could remember, that I wanted her to put her life of  
freedom and sex  
behind her and be completely devoted to me for the rest of her life  
so I could worship  
her every day? 1

I didn't even know what she wanted, if anything, beyond sex.  
I knew that my issues were still very much present, and I couldn't  
justify bringing her  
into my world when I could barely survive it on my own. It was the  
exact reason why I  
hadn't fucked her years ago. Having her as my friend was more  
important than

shoving my dick into her.

As far as I knew, nothing had changed for either of us.

Her freedom to do as she pleased with who she pleased was hard enough to deal

with when we were only friends. If I ever tasted her, I would kill anyone who dared to

touch her. She would be mine and only mine.

But if she was mine, I would have to tell her the truth. I would have to tell her about my mate. 2

“Get out, Tobias.”

Six: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

“I don't really think we have any time to waste.” Rona insisted as I glared at her. I

wasn't ashamed to be the first one to admit that I had woken up in a terrible mood. I

replayed the situation with Tobias a thousand times before finally falling asleep. “I'm

sure the others would like to go home soon.”

I knew the situation's urgency, but this did not qualify as an emergency. If anything,

Rona's reaction to having to wait only made me more suspicious of her. “From your

careful choice of words, I take it that you would prefer to stay in the castle, so I don't

see what your hurry is. Other things need to be done before we can fill the two empty council seats.”

Talia's betrayal and Agatha's death had hit me harder than expected, and I was angry

that two of the women who had trained and raised me were now gone. They were

both dead and now I had to pick two witches to replace them.

‘We will start bringing in pledges for consideration over the next few weeks, but I want any personal drama to be put aside right now.’ My glare moved from Rona to Cora, and she adjusted in her seat as she pursed her lips. Ever since Rona had caused Cora to lose her leg in battle a few years ago, the women were at each other’s throats.

I couldn’t forget Margot and Aisha. Those two women couldn’t be trusted to be left alone either, not after an incident where Aisha trapped Margot in a room with a rock troll as a practical joke. Margot got out with a concussion, a few broken bones, and the desire to dangle Aisha over the cliffside of one of the most inhabited siren coves along the coast.

She hung there for two days before someone found her and pulled her in.

I hated all of them except Agatha, but she was gone. Now I was left with four other women, and I didn’t trust a single one of them. Nor would I trust any of the pledges they would bring in.

‘For now, the meeting is adjourned.’ I stood and made my way to the door, hearing their grumbling behind me as I went. Today was not the day for them to test me, and it seemed everyone except Rona got that memo as she trailed after me on my heels.

Rona had always pushed my buttons, the evil bitch. Her mother used to bring her here to ‘play’ with me when we were kids while the council met. Her idea of fun was trying

to bury me alive or burning the hallway outside of my room to see how long it would take me to escape. Not too long ago, she killed her mother, stealing her power and taking her seat on the council. Rona had never been tried for it, and it had never been proven.

Still, we all knew what had happened.

As far as we knew, Agatha had no blood relatives left with magic. After betraying the crown, Talia's kin would never be trusted, leaving two seats empty.

'What is with the delay?' Rona sneered. 'Too scared to do your job?'

The dining hall fell silent as I stepped inside, Rona's voice echoing across the high ceilings. 'Not at all, but I am not going deal with filling three council seats instead of two.'

'Unless you are resigning, there are not three seats open.' The hopeful undertone of her words made me grit my teeth, but seeing Tobias sitting at the table eating, looking as unbothered as ever, caused my temper to flare up into a rage. He seemed so calm and collected when I had been up all night reliving the most humiliating and heartbreaking moments of my life.

'I will not be resigning, Rona. But if you do not leave me alone, I promise that there will be another seat open because I will rip your throat out.' I spun around to face her, cocking an eyebrow as she stopped a hair's breadth away from slamming into me.

'You're threatening me, and in front of all these people? That's

not very professional of you.” She chided.

“I am not known for being professional, Rona. I am known for being efficient and deadly to threats against our people. They know I will fight every threat against them, no matter the cost.” The rest of my threat was cut short by the feeling of the hairs

rising on the back of my neck and the familiar heat of a body stopping inches away from my back, distracting me.

I could feel him even though I couldn’t hear him, and I hadn’t turned to see him.

“All I am saying is that if we put this off for a few weeks, it might end badly. The sooner we can get those seats filled, the better.” Rona’s gaze was locked over my shoulder on Tobias, and I began seeing red. I didn’t like her looking at him like that, and I loathed that he felt the need to come to protect me as if he hadn’t ripped my heart out last night.

“I will say this once and only once. That is not your call. As the King’s Royal Advisor, I lead the council, and it is my decision to make. The meeting has been concluded, and right now, you are doing nothing but wasting our time. Select your pledge and be prepared to present them at the next meeting. Beyond that, our conversation is over.”

I held her glare as the silent room watched on in amusement.

When she finally broke and stomped away, I felt victorious until I bumped into Tobias

when I turned to make my way to the table. My shoulder bounced off his chest, and I

stumbled a step back, my eyes locked on his hand on my arm when he tried to catch me.

All I could think about was what his touch felt like last night, how incredible it was to have his naked body up against mine. But he wasn't mine and wouldn't be.

'Please unhand me,' I said through gritted teeth. Tobias looked back and forth

between my eyes, and I knew he wanted to say something, but he wouldn't. I was

happy we had people around, so he wouldn't talk to me. I wasn't capable of having a

rational conversation with him right now. Not when everything that happened last night was still so fresh.

He wanted me because he was attracted to me but didn't want to act on it. Attraction

and infatuation were two different things. He didn't want me, just my body. He was just

too good of a man to act on it.

I hated that it made me respect him more.

All of the other men that I had tried to be with wanted a quick fuck.

They wanted to

return to their friends and say they had bagged the witch. They wouldn't even

acknowledge me or look at me after. They just got up and left after they got what they

wanted.

It was a lesson I took an embarrassing amount of time to learn.

Most people avoided

me, making it difficult to converse with anyone, so I could get to know them and build

an emotional connection. After years of this, I decided to just grab what I wanted and

hoped they would enjoy me enough to want to stay once we were done.

They never did.

But watching everyone around me find their soulmates, that unconditional love, made me want it too. I would never stop looking for it, but I was growing tired.

I was tired of strangers wanting nothing more than a quick fuck and never giving me the time of day again after. I was tired of people rushing to get away from me when I came near. I was tired of getting my heart broken by a man who didn't even realize he was doing it.

I needed a break.

But it was something I could not afford, not with an unknown threat looming over us and a red-headed vulture in the castle waiting for me to make a mistake so she could steal my job and possibly my magic.

I could feel his eyes on me as I made my plate before returning to my seat at the table. Killian and Natalie were already eating, and the queen sent me an amused smile as I placed my plate on the table.

'Seems like you could use a good sparring session. Do you want to meet after lunch?

It's been a while since we got to train together." Natalie asked, and I knew it was a good idea. Still, her indirectly pointing out my bad mood made me return my glare to Tobias, the source.

His brown eyes burned through me, and I held his gaze as he ignored his half-eaten plate of food.

“That sounds great. It’s been a while since we got to train together. Just the two of us.”

It was an indirect snub at Tobias, which I was positive would be ignored. He had been released from being on her immediate detail unless she left the castle, but he still hovered around her.

Now that he knew there was another threat we needed to deal with, even if he didn’t

tell anyone, I knew he would be watching the queen closely.

From the corner of my eye, I could see Natalie glancing back and forth between

Tobias and me with an amused smile. But the longer I held his stare, the angrier I became.

It was petty and stupid, something I hadn’t done since I was a kid.

The prior council

members and the previous King and Queen yelled at me plenty of times about my

immature antics and pranks growing up.

Yet, as a cockroach climbed out of his food, the childish attack made me feel happier.

Killian coughed once, slamming his fist against his chest as he laughed from two

seats down. Even the corner of Tobias’s lips twitched as the disgusting insect

stumbled from the ceramic dish onto the table.

I couldn’t pull my eyes away from him if I wanted to. His heated gaze was filled with

amusement as he lifted his large hand and slammed his fist down on top of the bug.

My jaw dropped open as Tobias picked up his fork and scooped up a bite of his food.

He sent a wink my way as he shoved it in his mouth in a silent

declaration of 'Game  
On.'

Seven: Joselin  
Joselin's P.O.V.

Natalie dodged effortlessly as I swung at her. It was challenging to balance the need to get my frustration out and not hurt her. I knew she could handle herself, but I was going easy on her, and she knew it.

'This is ridiculous,' Natalie said as she stopped. "Are you trying to let me win?"

She placed her hands on her hips, and her glare made me smile.

"Yes. It's to boost your confidence, so when I take you to the ground in a minute, you won't be upset by how easily I do it."

Several people laughed, including Natalie. She threw her head back. Her long brown hair was in a high ponytail and swayed behind her slightly as she let out the musical sound. She may not have grown up as royalty, but she sure had it mastered after the few months she had been here.

Everything about her was flawless, and I was positive that if she were to shit her pants right now, she would still find a way to do it with dignity and grace.

"Then perhaps you need a stronger opponent to really challenge you." Her smile

widened, and I saw a mischievous glint flash in her eye as her gaze flickered over my shoulder. I didn't need to turn around to know Tobias was lifting weights on the other side of the large room.

From the second he entered the room, I felt his eyes on me,

making me secondguess every move I made. It was impossible to focus with him here, but I did what I needed to do. Until the pain in my chest stopped, I needed to pretend everything was the same as a few months ago. A time when we were friends and civil. I had kept my feelings to myself as much as possible and hadn't fallen all over myself trying to get him to notice me as more... and, in turn, fell all over him too. "Don't interfere, Natalie," I said lowly, praying that he couldn't hear me but knowing he would. Still, my heart dropped, and my hands went clammy when I heard the sound of large weights falling to the ground. "I didn't even say anything." She shrugged, but I could feel him moving closer. Natalie leaned in, whispering into my ear softly. 'I really didn't. I promise, not even through the link. This is all him.' She winked as she pulled back, and my eyes widened as I felt him stop only a few feet away, sending her a silent plea to be a good friend and save me from him. I wasn't ready to touch him again, not so soon. She looked torn, and for a moment, I thought she would help me out of this, that she had seen the pain and defeat on my face. The low growl behind me made every muscle in my back tense, and I turned slowly, keeping my gaze on his chest. A light sheen of sweat covered his torso, his muscles swollen and bulging from his workout. He had the kind of build that made me want to toss any pride I had left aside and climb him like a tree in front of

everyone.

“I am done training for today, actually.” As soon as I spun toward the training field to get some air, his hand wrapped around my wrist. My head snapped up to Natalie, but she had her back to me as she moved to one of the open treadmills.

Traitor.

The heat of his hand felt like I was being burned, and the fleeting thought that I could be okay with a scar of his hand around my arm swam through my mind. It would be his mark, even if it wasn't the one I wanted. I would be able to carry it with me forever.

I closed my eyes as I realized just how insane this man had made me. It was unnatural.

I hated how much of a hold he had over me. My lips pressed together in irritation as I ripped my arm out of his grip, my anger fueling me as I swung my arm around for a punch.

If he wanted to insist on sparring, so be it.

His arm lifted, blocking my attack with his forearm. I jumped to the side as he swung his leg around to knock my feet out from beneath me.

Tobias cocked one eyebrow at me, and I could see he was enjoying this. It was a sick game of cat and mouse as I threw jab after jab at him and dodged his attacks. His

smirk and the heated look in his eye only made me hit harder. Every move and touch felt sensual, awakening my body as we danced around each

other on the mat. It was torture, and I knew as his eyes melted from their usual brown

to black that he could smell the effect he was having on me. The collection of pack members coming in to watch from the training field made the room grow so loud that it was distracting, but I did my best to push them to the back of my mind.

I gasped as he hooked his leg around mine, taking me to the ground. The impact of my back on the mat knocked the breath out of me, but my head was cradled in the palm of his hand. He wasted no time setting it down as he straddled me, his hands pinning my arms down by my head.

His lips were mere inches from mine, and his eyes glanced down to my mouth, making me hold my breath. My usual confidence had taken a blow last night, or I would have lifted my head up and met him halfway, kissing him for the first time in front of everyone.

But I wasn't ready to face that kind of rejection again, not so soon. I felt like Tobias was playing with me like a toy. At least when I had been making an advance on him, I actually wanted him. I wanted all of him.

He just enjoyed my attention.

Eight: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

The darkness had never looked more appealing than it did at that moment. Either that or I opened the door before me and faced the man I knew was standing on the other side. I didn't need to hear him or see him to know that he was

there.

I could sense his beast, his aura.

He was lying in wait patiently, like he was waiting for the perfect moment for him to

pounce on his unsuspecting prey. Only I knew Tobias was on the other side of the door.

My heart was beating rapidly, giving me away as well. He knew I was here, and I

knew he was listening to the erratic thumping in my chest. He had been for the past

five minutes that I stood there, staring at the doorknob.

Was he the lesser of two evils?

Knowing he was willing to wait for me to leave my tower instead of walking right in to

confront me made me even more anxious.

The darkness I would need to teleport through gave me enough pause, but being

unable to walk freely down the hallways made me angry. This was my home. I didn't

even know where Tobias slept, but it wasn't in the castle.

Yet, he was preventing me from doing my job by cornering me.

After a long internal debate during my shower, I finally decided to talk to Killian about

my suspicions. But to do that, I would need to get through the wall of muscle that had

gone from ignoring me the past few months to avoiding me the past two weeks to

torturing me.

On the other hand, I hadn't traveled through the empty realm on my own since my

near-death experience. Every time I considered it, a shiver would run down my spine,

and I felt the nails clawing at my skin again.

They had wanted me to stay last time. A knife was sticking out

from between my shoulder blades from Talia. She had helped raise me, but as soon as she had the chance, she had thrown that dagger with deadly precision and lodged it into me. It wasn't surprising. She had always held grudges and was vindictive, but she was also one hell of a teacher.

What had caught me off guard were the sudden presences in the darkness. Before, it was always quiet and empty. I could travel through to anywhere I desired in the blink of an eye. But at that time, there were others.

Demented voices, hands, and claws pulled at me, tearing my clothes and skin, trying to drag me away from Aurora and Agatha as I fought to get them to safety. I had done my best to get them out of that darkness quickly, but one creature trapped in that world scared me above the others.

I had felt their warm breath on my exposed shoulder only a second before their rough tongue slid across my skin, tasting the blood that dripped down from one of the scratches they inflicted on me.

In my mind, I had seen the exit of their world. I was ready to leave and take my people to safety, but as my blood coated their tongue, the low growl of satisfaction made me freeze with terror. Every hair rose as I felt my mouth open in a silent scream.

If it hadn't been for Aurora pushing what little magic she had left to me, I don't know if I ever would have come to my senses.

Yet, now that I was stronger, it seemed easier for me to zip

through that world to get to  
where I needed to go rather than facing Tobias.  
I counted in my head to one hundred, taking long and calming  
breaths as I tried to  
decide if it was worth the risk.  
While Tobias wouldn't kill me, I needed a break from his mind  
games.  
My hand turned the knob as I settled on ignoring the man as I let  
my feet carry me to  
Killian's office. Tobias was leaning against the wall across from  
my tower entrance, his  
arms crossed and eyes glaring at me impatiently.  
"Wrong choice," I whispered as I let myself go, flickering into the  
darkness that filled  
my soul with unease. I watched through the first two flashes as  
Tobias lunged forward,  
grabbing my hand before we were sucked in and prepared to  
travel.  
My hand tightened on his as I silently thanked the Goddess that  
Tobias had come with  
me, even if I wasn't ready to speak to him. It took everything in  
me not to stop and  
glance around in the vast emptiness as I felt eyes on me. I knew  
Tobias could sense it  
too, as he let out a warning growl.  
It only confirmed that I was not ready to travel there again.  
Whatever had gotten a  
taste last time was still there.  
Killian. Get to Killian.  
As quickly as we had entered, we were free, standing in front of  
Killian's open office  
door. The king raised an eyebrow at our joined hands, and I  
pulled away from Tobias  
aggressively, shoving mine into the back pockets of my jeans.  
"Joselin, Tobias," Killian greeted respectfully. I flicked my hand

back, not bothering to look at Tobias as I shut the office door in his face. I knew I didn't have much time. As soon as I closed the door, leaving the two of us alone in his office, I had probably set off some alarm bell somewhere. We wouldn't be alone for long. "We need to talk about the war." I started, moving forward to stand before his desk, not bothering to wait for his permission before slumping into one of his visitor's seats like I used to when we were younger. "Natalie is extraordinary, isn't she? I haven't ever seen that kind of power before, let alone that kind of unpracticed control." He picked up the paper he had before him as he muttered, scanning over the words before grumbling in annoyance and setting it to the side. "Not the point," He let out a distracted chuckle as he continued to work, so I waited for him to look up at me again before speaking. "Someone survived. At least one witch, and by the feel of it, she is powerful." "Can you deal with it?" He asked, and my eyebrows pulled together as he continued to shuffle through his work. I knew he had been busier than usual lately. Still, I wanted to snap at him for how he dismissed me when I was discussing a threat to his mate and possibly to myself. Perhaps, I wasn't so far off on my theory of not being needed or wanted around anymore. "Natalie is still training. I do not think she is ready to face off against another opponent so soon." And there it is.

Once she was trained and felt confident in her abilities, she could handle the threats herself, and there would be no need for me.

“Yeah, don’t worry about it. I have it covered.” In no way did I sound convincing, but he seemed too distracted and busy to notice. Either he trusted me greatly or didn’t care about what I had to say. At least he couldn’t say I didn’t warn him. Still, it didn’t make missing my best friend any less. “Ian, what do you say tonight we sneak into the kitchen after dinner and grab a couple pieces of pie for old time’s sake?”

It was one of my favorite past times with him. Until this most recent year, after a hard day, we used to sneak into the kitchen and steal a few bites of whatever dessert the cooks had made that day. We would climb up on the kitchen counter and stare out through the large window at the back garden. It didn’t matter if we were twelve or twenty-five. The tradition had been long-standing. The cooks knew about it. Even when they didn’t bake anything that day, we always found peanut butter and jelly on the counter or a pudding bowl in the fridge just for us.

Then I had a vision about finding his mate, and our traditions crumbled. While building his relationship with her, I had given him space. Now, I could barely work in the same room as him without something or someone causing us to go our separate ways.

Killian had Natalie, and while she was also my friend, there was no room for me to join as a third wheel. They enjoyed spending all of their free time

together and alone. I was at odds with Tobias, unsure where we stood, but I was positive our friendship had probably been ruined. Charlie, Killian's sister, had been the only other real friend I had here. She had left to visit her mate's family to ensure their health and safety after the war. No one had heard from her since she left, and she usually went anywhere from a few months to years before she would come back home to visit.

"I'm kind of swamped tonight, Josie. What about tomorrow? Natalie and I can come down for a short bit." He glanced my way, and I forced a smile as I nodded.

Looks like it would be all three of us.

"Sounds great. I'll just leave you to it then." I glanced at the clock on the wall as I walked out of the office. Seven minutes. That had to be a new record.

The thought was cut short as Natalie's smiling face appeared at the end of the hallway. She waved as she approached, and I lifted my hand halfheartedly in response. The petty part of me in the dark part of my mind wanted to tell her that she was late to interrupt my conversation with Killian, but I forced it down.

There was no need to take my bad mood out on her when I just needed more sleep after last night's horrific events.

"Hey, I was hoping I would see you again today," Natalie exclaimed, but her feigned excitement was masked by the nervous way she tugged at the wolf pendant around her neck.

“Here I am,” My palms smacked my thighs as I lifted my hands slightly and let them drop.

“It’s so weird to see you walking around instead of popping everywhere.” She laughed, but it sounded uneasy. I held still as she moved up to my side and tilted her head closer to my ear, once again reminding me that she was a good friend as she kept her voice low. “Rona was just telling everyone who would listen in the sitting room about what happened... about your parents.”

My jaw clenched as I stared straight ahead down the empty hallway.

“I advised her to watch what she says, but that woman is just...” Natalie trailed off, knowing she needed to be careful when speaking about others in public. Even if we thought no one was close enough to hear her, we couldn’t be sure.

“Thank you,” I said, storming away from her, down the stairs, and to the main sitting room. I wanted to wring that witch’s neck.

The fireplace was sat cold and empty, and the windows were open to let in the afternoon air. At least half a dozen people were present, but I didn’t bother to see who they were. My gaze was locked on the man who had shattered my heart as he sat on the couch with Rona beside him. Her legs were thrown over his thighs as she spoke to him with a seductive smile.

Nine: Tobias

Tobias's P.O.V.

'I don't like this.'

The words continued to run through my mind, flooding me with guilt as I tried to understand what I had done wrong. Joselin had called it flirting, and I called it

seducing, but in the end, we were both enjoying each other.

I didn't want her to seduce me. I wanted her to fall in love with me.

I leaned back on the couch, needing a minute to myself while Natalie was with Killian.

I was no longer on her full-time detail as her bodyguard, but as I was on-call and

worried about the new threat Joselin was looking into, I was staying close.

Joselin was the only positive thing about being stuck in the castle all day. Having her

around made dealing with the rest of the council members tolerable. Still, I felt out of

my mind, surrounded by all these women trying to kill each other constantly, even

more so now that I had upset Joselin.

I thought we were having fun, flirting, and sparring. But she didn't like it.

I needed to talk to her about it, but she seemed more determined than ever to avoid

me. Something that she hadn't done in a long time. How could I understand what I

had done wrong when the infuriating woman wouldn't speak to me?

"You look tense. Want to talk about it?"

I glanced down, my top lip curling up in disgust as a hand was placed on my shoulder

from behind the couch. Her long grey nails curled to have their points against the skin

of my chest, and I bit back a groan of annoyance. She was a council member, one that I was very familiar with.

Rona laughed at her own joke as she moved around the arm of the couch, her hand sliding across my shoulders and the back of my neck as she did so.

She had been a little terror as a child, and I knew she was just as bad as an adult. It had been an enormous disappointment when her mother died. As soon as the news reached the kingdom, I could feel Joselin's turmoil at the realization that she would have to work with Rona now.

"Oh, come on. Don't be so serious."

I refused to look at her, staring straight ahead as she sat on the couch next to me, so close that her thigh pressed against mine.

My beast bristled with irritation, and I ignored her, checking in with one of the guards stationed outside the hallway of Killian's office to see if Joselin had left yet. She wouldn't get away from me without telling me what I had done wrong and how I could make it up to her.

I knew she wasn't so arrogant as to be angry that I had bested her in front of a crowd.

She had never had a problem with that before. It used to just make her try harder to win. It was one of the things I admired about her.

My quiet solitude had been interrupted by Rona. But it was entirely destroyed by a group of warriors entering the sitting room to relax on their break.

If I couldn't wait

here alone, I would just go into Joselin's tower and wait for her

there.

The guard confirmed she was on her way down, and I tried not to smile at the news.

I pushed off the arm of the couch, ready to stand but freezing when Rona lifted her legs and placed them over my lap.

“I’ve been trying to figure out what makes you tick for a while now. What it is that you

like. I think the silent act is all a game, and you probably like being in control.” She placed one hand on my chest as she leaned in, her other

resting on my knee as she let out a low, airy giggle that made my skin crawl. “Is that

it? Do you like taking control, Tobias?”

I almost snorted as I imagined tying her up and leaving her hanging in the dungeons.

Maybe then she would get the hint.

My beast was ready to come forward, to take control and rip the wicked witch’s legs

from her body to get them off me, but I held him back. I couldn’t disrespect a council

member, especially one as crazy as Rona.

I lifted my hands, not wanting to touch her. But without physically removing her, it

didn’t seem like she was going anywhere.

Joselin’s scent tickled my nose, and I felt my beast calm as I looked up and saw her

standing in the doorway. Her hands were in fists at her sides as she glared not at the

woman putting me in this uncomfortable situation but at me. She was livid. The

designs on her skin vibrated quickly like she were a bomb ready to explode.

I jumped up, ignoring the malicious laugh next to me as Rona’s feet roughly hit the

ground. She knew exactly what she was doing.  
“Josie,” Rona called out, standing up next to me. I started moving away from Rona, stepping toward Joselin but pausing when she backed up. The pain on her face was quickly masked by anger, and I shook my head as I silently denied whatever story or theory she had brewing in her brain. “Don’t you just love a man who takes control? I was just learning how Tobias loves to dominate in the bedroom.” Joselin’s head turned as her eyes fell on the redhead next to me. “I warned you that today was not the day for you to start your shit.” My eyes widened as Joselin thrust her hand forward, sending Rona across the room and through the window. The sound of the glass shattering was followed by guards running to the source of the noise. Those already in the room stood frozen, watching with wide eyes.  
“Oh, this is going to be fun.” Rona chuckled as she stood in the grass, shaking the pieces of glass from her hair. A small shard stuck out of her cheek, and she pulled it out without flinching, letting her blood drip from her cheek and onto the ground.  
Joselin flickered for a moment before appearing on the other side of the window, a twisted smile on her perfect lips. “I’ve been looking forward to this for years.”  
My bones popped as I jumped through the window, shifting into my Lycan form as quickly as possible to stand by Joselin’s side. I may not have magic, but I could fight for her until my last breath.

The fact that she was willing to fight for me too, made me hopeful that there could be more between us one day. I let out a snarl as Rona walked forward, flinging her hands in front of her as she threw rapid castings at Joselin. I wasn't concerned about Joselin's ability to handle herself. Still, I was relieved as my witch easily blocked each attack without any effort. If anything, Joselin looked bored, angering Rona even more. Joselin rushed forward when Rona was only a few feet away, slamming her fist into Rona's face. I let out a growl of excitement, eager for my chance to defend my woman but enjoying watching my little warrior witch kicking ass. Rona's head snapped to the side, and Joselin pulled her arm back to strike again. I didn't understand why she wasn't using her magic, but I knew how good a solid punch felt, and I think Joselin needed to get it out of her system. Her whole body seemed to relax as she let out her anger in the hit. "That is enough!" Natalie shouted, using her powers to separate the two women. "I am tired of always having to break up fights!" Joselin didn't bother to struggle against the hold Natalie had on her, but Rona was furious. "She tried to kill me!" "And I'm sure you were the instigator!" Natalie yelled back, her power pushing out around her, making me want to submit to the Queen. Rona went silent and crossed her arms with a glare but eventually gave in, submitting to Natalie. Natalie growled lowly, and Rona lowered her head even more before

turning and walking off.

Joselin also dropped her head and turned to walk away, with me following right on her

heels. Her actions only added to my questions. Had she been fighting for me?

She didn't bother closing the door behind her as she took off up the winding staircase of her tower to her study.

"You didn't need to do that," I smirked, crossing my arms as I noticed she avoided looking at my naked form. "I didn't touch her or encourage her. But you fighting over me was really fucking hot."

Her back stiffened, and I was tempted to walk up and start rubbing her shoulders, maybe trail a line of kisses between her shoulder blades. "Don't worry, Tobias. You made your stance clear. I'm not going to keep throwing myself at you. Your virtue is safe."

She snorted as she forced a laugh, just like she would have before she had become open about her attraction to me. The knowledge that she wouldn't touch me or try to get my attention anymore made me feel empty and cold. My beast was livid inside me, and I held him back from taking control as I tried to figure out how to tell Joselin to wait a little longer for me.

Joselin carefully pulled the ring off her swollen knuckle, lifting it to be seen clearly in the sunlight. The wet, crimson-red liquid on the stone's setting made me feel pride for my witch. Having the blood of an enemy was a powerful tool.

“Besides, I got exactly what I was there for.”

Ten: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

Tobias had sat in the corner of the room, watching me for hours. Only this time, it didn't bother me. I forced myself not to think about him even though I could feel him.

I was so focused for a while that I forgot he was even there until he stood up, making me jump. I glanced over my shoulder, watching as he moved with purpose to the door before pausing and turning back to me.

‘Josie,’ He started, and his voice made me swallow hard. His sudden shift in

treatment toward me, the touching and flirting, made my name sound all the sweeter on his lips.

I resented it.

‘I'm going down for dinner. Would you like to come?’

I knew he wasn't inviting me on a date. He would just walk me down to the dining hall,

and we would go our separate ways to eat among the pack. Still, my heart beat faster at the invitation.

“No, thank you. I'm not hungry.” I stared down into the bowl with the small amount of blood I was able to pull from the ring. It should have been enough, but something was blocking me from taping into it.

While the challenge was intriguing, I was tired of struggling to find the answers I

needed over the past few months without digging through book after book. Then

again, if it was easy, the people we were up against wouldn't be considered threats.

I wasn't mad at him about Rona. I knew he was telling me the truth when he said he didn't touch her or encourage her. She was a crazy bitch, and how she spoke to me after I walked into the room was obviously an attempt to antagonize me.

"About this morning in the gym," he started, and I tensed as I waited, peeking up at him from beneath my eyelashes. "I'm sorry that I made you uncomfortable. After what happened last night, it has been so fucking hard not to touch you today, not to drag you back here and finish what we started. I thought you were enjoying us sparring together."

I scoffed, lifting my head as I pursed my lips. "It wasn't about us training, Tobias. You only want to touch me now because I said I was done throwing myself at you. I don't appreciate that. Find some other toy to play with. You had your chance."

He let out a low growl, and I lifted my hand in his direction as he took a step forward.

"You are not a toy."

"Don't, Tobias. You've been playing with my emotions for months now because you enjoyed me giving you my attention. Now that you don't have it, you are suddenly interested in me? Like I said, find someone else to play with. Don't be cruel." As I finished speaking, my voice started to crack, and I gritted my teeth together.

His eyes widened, and he opened his mouth to speak, but I

wasn't in the mood for his back and forth. He didn't want me until he couldn't have me. That wasn't going to fly with me.

"I really don't have it in me to argue with you right now. Please don't make me kick you out of my tower. Go eat your dinner. I'm going to be working for a while." I looked back

down at the ring. My long white hair fell over my shoulder, shielding me from being able to see him, but I released the breath I was holding when I heard the door shut and his footsteps retreating.

Even when he wasn't here, he was still a distraction. I was second-guessing sending him away even though I knew it was the right move for me.

I needed to focus on figuring out what Rona was up to.

There had to be a way for me to tap into her through her blood. I had done it before

with others. The fact that I couldn't do it to her either meant that she had figured out a

way to block me or I didn't have enough blood.

I was going to try everything I could, even if it took hours, and it did.

I had sealed myself in my tower for most of the night and the next day. No one was

allowed in, and I refused to leave until I had no other option.

I sighed as my tower grew dark for the second time since collecting the blood. It would

be easy to return to it again later, but the sooner I found out who was involved in the

darkness afoot, the better. Whatever shield she had on her blood felt impossible to get

through, but I would break it or her eventually.

I scowled at the bowl before locking the sample away in my vault

with my other valuable collections. It had already been preserved, so I knew it would stay warm and liquid to work with later.

The clock on the wall told me I only had a few minutes, and I changed quickly before racing down to the kitchen. I didn't debate teleporting for a second. It was too mentally draining. Going into a place I wasn't sure I would make it out of, had no idea what was in there or who had sampled my blood, was exhausting.

A tray of brownies was sitting on the counter with foil over them, and I smiled widely.

This was precisely what I needed. I smelled them as soon as I hit the hallway.

I tapped my nails on the counter as I looked at the time once more. Killian was only a few minutes late. I was sure they would be down soon. Based on what I had seen of their relationship, which had been far too much, they were probably fucking one out before coming down.

There was no need to grab plates. I doubted the food would last long enough between us to need them.

The large island was cold, sending a shiver down my spine as I slid onto the hard surface. My eyes kept dropping down to the tray of brownies as I waited, but I resisted the urge to dig in without them. He said they would be here. 'You must be the famous Joselin.' The unfamiliar voice made me turn, but I didn't bother getting off the counter. If needed, I could easily deal with him with a flick of my wrist.

The man was leaning with his shoulder against the door frame, his arms crossed over his chest as he eyed me curiously. His short blonde hair was wild as if he had run his hands through it several times, and the light layer of scruff along his chiseled jaw seemed almost out of place.

Between the white button-up shirt and the black dress pants, he looked like he was going to a meeting. My eye dropped down to his sleeves, where he had rolled them up to expose his forearms.

While he seemed smaller than the Lycans, he was still pretty toned for a wolf.

‘Then, you must be one of my adoring fans,’ I whispered before looking out the large bay window behind the sink. He was handsome, but he looked a bit young to me.

‘It would be a lie to deny that now that I’ve seen you.’ His shoes barely made a noise as he walked quietly toward me. ‘What brought you down here so late?’

I turned to look at him as he leaned back against the counter to my right. His gaze locked on the window to see what had captured my interest. All of it did, and from the faint smile on his face, it also seemed to catch his.

The dark, looming trees had flashing specks between them as torch bugs danced in the cool night air. The sky was illuminated with more stars than any one person could count, and the moon was only a faint crescent teased by thin lines of fluffy clouds.

‘It is beautiful,’ He stated when I didn’t answer him. Even with me sitting with my legs

crossed up on the counter, I could tell that he was taller than me. I looked back at the clock, scowling, when I realized it had been over an hour and a half that I had been waiting for Killian and Natalie before the stranger showed up.

Surely, they weren't going to be joining me.

The disappointing realization made my shoulders drop, and my hands tightened on my knees before I gave in and went for the dessert that I knew was waiting for me.

The foil was loud as I pulled it off the pan, and the smell of freshly baked brownies grew stronger.

I grabbed one of the leftover pieces before turning to see an amused look on our guest's face. "Did you want one?"

His smile grew wider, revealing his white, straight teeth. "Were you going to eat them all by yourself?"

I glance down at the pan. There were only six left. Emotional eating was something I excelled at. "Yes, I was."

He let out an infectious, deep belly laugh that only made me feel happy for a moment before it faded away. I wanted to go up and burst into Killian's room, demanding an answer. But I was also done pushing myself into people's lives when I wasn't wanted.

If they wanted me around, it was their turn to put in the effort.

"Then, I will only take one. I'll be a gentleman and leave you the rest." He lifted the

chocolate dessert to his mouth, taking a large bite before sending me a wink.

"Your name?" I demanded, and his amusement only seemed to grow.

“Holden,”

I nodded as the name rang a bell. “You’re Natalie’s half-brother, right?”

Holden laughed again, the fingers of his empty hand moving up to unbutton the top

button of his shirt. “Yes, that’s right.”

“Hm, a little young, aren’t you? Isn’t it past your bedtime?” The corner of my mouth

twitched as I spoke, but I kept myself together.

“Eighteen is not too young for you, though, is it? You’re what, twenty-four?” He tilted

his head to the side, taking another large bit of his brownie as he inspected me more

thoroughly this time.

“Twenty-six.”

“That’s not a big difference. But it is past my bedtime, so maybe you should take me to

bed,” Holden wiggled his eyebrows at me, and I smiled at him for the first time. He

looked almost stunned to get that reaction out of me.

“Hm. As appealing as that sounds, I’ve never been a fan of sleeping in carshaped

bedframes. So, I’ll just turn into my bed for the night.” I hopped off the counter,

grabbed the tray of remaining brownies as I did so, and held it tightly as I walked

around him.

Holden didn’t move, forcing me to brush against him as I passed. He smelled

wonderful, and I kept my gaze averted as I escaped.

“Joselin, I’ll be staying here for a while to get to know my sister, but I look forward to

getting to know you. You are the most beautiful creature I have ever seen.”

Eleven: Tobias

Tobias's P.O.V.

She had wanted me, and I had pushed her away.

She was done waiting. I was out of time.

I knew with every beat of my heart and breath in my lungs that I wanted her to be

mine. Everything about her drew me in, called to me. She was the embodiment of

seduction. But she was also funny, intelligent, and loyal. Every time we spoke, all of

my responsibilities vanished from my mind, and I just wanted to spend all of my time

with her.

Even Ana didn't make me feel this way; that had been a hard pill to swallow. I had

tried so hard to protect her and to love her. But I had failed on both accounts. It was

unnatural. It was against the will of the Goddess.

My beast felt the pull to Ana, but my mind had always been on Joselin. For that, I

would never be able to let Ana go. The guilt alone was too much for me.

I ripped open the door to my father's house. The musty smell of the abandoned

property made my nose wrinkle in disgust. It had been so long since I had been here.

I hated doing it. It always brought back too many memories.

Yet, I also hadn't built up the courage to fix the place, so I could sell it. It was mine

now that my father was gone, but the horrific memories inside made me want to burn

the place down instead. I didn't want to have to go through and renovate it to hide the

horrors of my past.

I was physically strong enough to do it, but I didn't know if my

mind could handle it.

The easiest of the issues would be the scratches on the inside of the door and walls of the closet in my childhood bedroom.

The most difficult would be having to rip up the flooring and replace it to hide the blood stains on the first floor.

I had thought I could mentally prepare myself to move on and offer Joselin everything she could ever want. It didn't seem possible with the ghosts of my past still here.

Maybe this was the closure I needed.

I had always hated this house. Every room was walled off from the others, making it darker than I'd like. The closed off floor-plan was exactly what I had avoided when I purchased my current home.

We had a few things in common, Joselin and I. Our horrific upbringing was what we had bonded over when I found her. Soon after, she became my best friend, my only escape. I had hoped for her to be my future as well.

Then I found Ana, and it felt wrong to spend time with Joselin. Now, Ana was gone, and the only thing stopping me was my guilt. The only way to move on was to let go of Ana. She wasn't here to forgive me

anymore. I could beg and plead to the Goddess until the words lost all meaning, and I had, but it made no difference.

I glanced down at the discolored wood.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow I will take care of it. Tomorrow I would get my closure so I could move on.

I walked to the front window, cracking it open to air out the house a little while I was

gone before locking it behind me and leaving.  
It was for me. It was for Joselin. It didn't matter if I felt I couldn't do it yet; I couldn't face those demons. I had to do it. If I didn't, I would lose her forever. I glanced back at the castle over the buildings, seeing her tower. She should be here with me, or I should be there with her. Instead, I was alone, and she was alone. How would it feel to crawl into her bed and wrap my arms around her while she was sleeping? Did she cuddle, or was she a mover, always trying to find a comfortable position? Was she sleeping right now or still working on her spell? As soon as I got home, I flopped down on my bed. The horrors that awaited me were always the same, one memory or another. I closed my eyes, threw my forearm over them, and drifted asleep within seconds, not bothering to turn off the light.

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I could hear him. His voice was low and deadly as he scolded her. Her sweet innocence could have gotten her out of anything unless it was with him. He despised her kind. She was a disgrace to this family. A human mate would dilute his perfect Lycan bloodline. He repeatedly reminded me of that while trying to force me to reject our bond. I thought she was beautiful. Ana. I found her when I had first shifted at fourteen. We were lucky like that.

Regular wolves had to wait longer, but Lycans... Lycans were stronger and shifted as soon as their beasts were ready. I had seen some of my pack mates undergo the change as early as nine. We could find our mates at any time after that. It was one of the many reasons why we were superior to wolves. Wolves didn't find their mates until they were nineteen. If the wolf hadn't found their mate, they had to present themselves as a potential breeder for our kind. The Offering is what we called it. It was how King Killian had found Queen Natalie. I hated The Offering. Attending those and the mating mixers when I knew I had already found my mate was torturous, but no one knew about Ana. After what happened, I wanted to keep it that way. We had been on patrol to one of the human cities, checking in with our people to ensure everything was running as it should have been. My father had me tag along, wanting me to start learning the ropes as soon as I shifted. She had been one of the maids cleaning the bunkhouse, working so young at only fifteen. As soon as I walked into my room, I smelled her. Ana probably thought her life was about to be better. She probably thought I would take her away to the capital, and she would live with me among royalty. She never expected that having me as a mate would mean she would have to deal with my father too. He was furious.

I was already a disgrace to him, but it was even worse that I had been paired with her.

Yet, he brought her back with us anyway, claiming she was to be a maid in our

household. No one knew she was my mate at that time.

I should have known better.

She should have listened.

I told her I would help her run. I told her I would distract him so she could make a

break for it. She never did. She insisted that she wouldn't leave without me.

He would never let me leave. He would rather see me dead than let me go, and we

both knew it.

"You vile human. You can't do anything right, can you? We should have rid the Earth

of your kind ages ago." His growl of disgust made me flinch. I

opened the front door,

dropped the groceries to the floor, and raced toward my mate. My beast roared in

anger as I saw his fist colliding with her delicate body.

Ana cried in pain, her body smashing against the entryway wall as I reached her.

My father turned at my growl, snarling at me when I stood between him and his prey.

He reeked of liquor and moonflower oil, a potent combination to which he had grown a

tolerance.

'Leave her alone.' I snarled, shifting into my Lycan as he watched with rage that I had

dared to challenge him.

'You are as weak as she is, boy! Know your place!' He snapped, gripping me by the

neck with his claw digging into my flesh as he shifted only his hand.

He was right. I had minimum training and hadn't mastered control of my beast yet. He had decades of training and experience on the battlefield. I was just a teenager...a kid.

'She is mine!' I argued when his hand tightened around my neck. My father laughed mockingly before his other fist flew and crashed into my face. I

didn't have a chance to make a plan of attack. Hit after hit, my father launched a full strike at me, avoiding my snapping jaw and claws swiping at him.

I let out a groan of pain as black dots danced in my vision, stumbling backward as he tackled me down. The back of my head hit the floor, but I could still hear Ana crying and begging my father to stop.

Run, Ana. Please.

Only we had been too young to mate, and she couldn't hear me. Each hit took more out of me than the last, and while I could feel my body trying to heal, he was attacking too quickly.

'Stop it!' She yelled as my father slashed his claws down my chest, splitting the skin open as he had done countless times before. It was his way of teaching me a lesson. I

knew he did it on my front because he wanted me to see the potential scars.

That would have been the end of it, of my punishment. He would have sliced open my chest with his claws and locked me in my closet until I learned my lesson.

But she had to anger him more by jumping on his back.

My father shook her off, spinning around with his knee on my chest, and grabbed her

by the throat. "I've been trying to decide what to do with you. But you just made it very

easy. You're weak, and I won't have you tainting my legacy." I clawed at his thigh, trying to blink away the blood that had run into my eyes. The world spun around me, and I couldn't breathe with his body weight pressing on my chest. I felt myself growing weaker and weaker with every passing second.

It happened a second before I heard it. The first of my ribs broke. Then the second.

It wasn't the first time he had broken bones, and it wouldn't be the last.

Ribs were the easiest to hide. I had dealt with them several times before.

Ana was sobbing from above me as I struggled to get free. Then she let out a scream.

One that would haunt me for the rest of my life before she fell silent.

My body went limp. My fight and will to survive left my body, and I gasped for air as

my father stood up, freeing me from his hold. I was too young to understand the pain I

was in. It was far greater than anything I had ever felt from his abuse. There was a

distinct ache in my body as I felt part of my soul die.

Warmth covered my arm and side as I lay there, staring at the ceiling, begging the

Goddess to show me mercy.

Ana's smell grew stronger as I regained control of some of my body and forced myself

up even though I wasn't ready to move just then. My body hadn't had enough time to

heal, but that didn't mean I couldn't shield her from the sadistic monster that had

raised me.

I couldn't understand what I saw for a moment and laid my broken

torso over Ana's,  
wanting to protect her, even if I was too weak to fight. It was only  
after I heard my  
father laughing that my mind caught up with the reality of the  
situation.

Her beautiful heartbeat was no more, and her empty eyes stared  
back at me as I  
pushed myself up to look at her.

Her throat had been ripped from her body, and all of her blood  
was pouring from the  
wound.

'No,' I whispered, placing my hand over her neck, trying to help  
her as the blood  
leaked between my fingers.

My father's sadistic laugh made my hackles rise. I released my  
mate, turning to my  
father, who stood over me with a broad smile. "You killed my  
mate, and now I've killed  
yours. Beautiful, isn't it?"

The look in his eyes as he glanced down at my mate was half-  
crazed, and I saw red.

'I'm going to kill you,' I growled, stumbling toward him. "I'm going  
to kill you."

I launched into his midsection, my teeth digging into his side as  
we flew through the  
air and landed on the living room floor. I felt his claws ripping into  
the skin on my back,  
but I only held on harder, pulling and tearing at the skin until it  
gave way.

He snarled at me, his body shifting into his Lycan and latching his  
jaw around my  
shoulder. But not even the Goddess could have stopped me as I  
slashed and bit my  
father in a mad frenzy. I had no control over myself as I let the  
years of abuse and the

murder of my mate fuel me.

Piece by piece, I tore him apart, unable to control my actions or thoughts. I just

needed his blood. My beast had taken control, and I enjoyed it as I tore into my father

until he lay limp beneath me.

I stepped back, shifting back to my skin as my beast gave me back control. He was

the only family I had left. Yet, as I stared down at him and watched as he choked on

his blood, I held no remorse for him.

“You’re a sorry excuse of a father. I won’t be surprised if the Goddess turns you away.

You’re weak.” I spat through a growl as he turned his head and let the blood pour from

his mouth. “I should have killed you a long time ago. You deserve this.”

He smiled widely, his teeth covered in blood as he took a pained breath. ‘ I’m proud of

you, boy. You sound just like your father.”

Twelve: Joselin

Joselin’s P.O.V.

I was a woman on a mission. Nothing would stop me, and if anyone tried, there would be hell to pay.

The cold metal tray in my hands was dirty but empty as I carried it down the hallway. I

wouldn’t let anyone, not Killian or Tobias, bring me down again.

Yet, my eyes seemed

to move on their own across each face I passed, looking for Tobias and failing to find

him.

The guards dipped their heads to me as I strode past them, my heels clicking against

the floor as I approached the king's office door. There was no knocking, no warning of my entrance as I shoved the door open. Killian growled at the rude and unwelcome interruption but didn't bother getting up. Natalie was sitting on his lap and greeted me with a smile. I couldn't return it. 'Joselin,' Killian greeted, and I stopped before his desk, ignoring the man sitting in the visitor's chair to my left. There was a moment of silence as I stared down at my best friend and his mate before tossing the dirty tray onto the wooden surface between us. A few crumbs bounced out, and I felt satisfied when his anger melted away and was replaced with realization. "Shit, Josie. We were..." "This better be good." I snapped, and Natalie looked between us, confused. 'After all the shit I have done for the two of you and have put up with because of you, I would love to hear this.' "Hm," The man hummed, and I looked down at the blonde as he eyed me with appreciation. "You look even more beautiful this morning. How is that possible?" I blinked down at him, feeling my anger melting away a small fraction before I forced my eyes away from Holden. His green eyes were a shade lighter than Natalie's, and I had to scold myself when I immediately found myself comparing them to the brown of Tobias's. "You two have met?" Natalie asked, but a suspicious undertone refueled my anger toward them.

“Yes, we met last night when you and your mate stood me up.” Natalie flinched but looked surprised as I turned my glare from her to Killian. “So, let’s have it. What was your excuse this time?”

“There were a few personal matters to attend to,” Killian said, his voice short and clipped. It was Natalie’s cheeks growing pink that gave him away. “One hour. That was all I asked of you.” My voice dropped, but my anger was still there, bubbling beneath the surface. “We have been best friends for fifteen years. I pushed it aside when your mate accused me of sleeping with you. I’ve accepted that you no longer wish to be alone with me for more than a few minutes at a time, and even then, you keep the door open to stop Natalie from getting upset or worried about our friendship.”

“Hold on now. I didn’t know about any of this.” Natalie argued, and while she looked angry, I was pleasantly surprised that she kept her magic under control. She was improving. No matter how angry I was and how certain I was sure she would make my job obsolete soon, I was still proud of her.

“Which makes it even worse because once again, he didn’t want to be alone with me, said he would bring you, and then didn’t even tell you about it. That tells me that he never intended to show up at all.” I wished I had a beast like them at that moment. At least then, I could have growled at Killian as he lifted his hand to silence me like I was one of his annoying underlings, complaining about some

irrelevant bullshit.

“I know you are upset and have the right to be. I got distracted and didn’t mean to stand you up.” We stood staring at each other, waiting for the other to break. I had the feeling he was waiting for me to accept that as his apology while I was waiting for an actual one and maybe hoping he had the desire to reschedule to be there for me.

But he had told me time and time again. He was a king. He apologized to no one.

It was so rare that he ever said he was sorry to me, and even with our friendship crumbling, he wouldn’t do it. “You really don’t see it still, do you?” Killian opened his mouth to speak, but I saw him thinking over my question.

“Killian, I asked you as my friend to be there for me when I needed you. I asked for one hour of your time, and that was too much for you. You are a good person and a great king, but you don’t understand the difference between making something a priority and making it your only priority.

Charlie was begging you for years for you to be there for her...” I watched his

shoulders hunch down slightly, and Natalie got off his lap, keeping her hand on his shoulder.

“That’s not fair, Joselin.” She scolded, and I tried to push aside my annoyance, knowing she was only defending her mate and wasn’t intentionally trying to be rude.

“He has a million things he has to split his time between.”

Killian looked at a loss for words. I knew if I could read his mind, I would hear the

same thing he always bitched to me about when it came to his sister Charlie. He was always so frustrated that she constantly demanded more from him and for him to 'be better' when he felt he was already trying his hardest. He told me how frustrating it was when he had nothing more to give, yet here I was doing the same thing.

Even I had to admit that he had been getting better since finding Natalie, but he still had a lot of growing to do, just as I did. We all did. No one was perfect, and I kept trying to remind myself of that as I forced my disappointment down.

I waited another moment for him to say something, but he seemed to be at a genuine loss for words for once in his life.

"Yeah, I know that. But before he found you, I spent the last fifteen years supporting him through everything with his parents and his coronation. I buried myself in his work to help keep the weight on his shoulders from crushing him. I have put up with a lot of shit, and I get our relationship won't ever be the same now that he has you as his person instead of me." I turned to look at Killian, seeing the pain on his face but not sparing him any more of my pity or concern.

"I had just hoped that our relationship would have been one of the things he felt was important enough to put some of his time into, even if it meant both of you hanging out for one hour and eating a fucking brownie with me. It really didn't seem like it was too much to ask for, but maybe I was wrong. ■

I needed a break, but I couldn't afford one. How could I take time off when there was a potential threat in the castle? It would have been easier if it was just a threat to me, but not knowing what they were planning made it so that, once again, I had to put others before myself.

"I'm taking the day off," I said, realizing I wouldn't get anywhere with Killian, not today or in front of a stranger. Holden may have been Natalie's biological brother, but Killian had enough pride not to give up his cold king act in front of someone he barely knew.

"Wait, I wanted to talk to you." Holden grabbed hold of my arm as I started to teleport.

Even if the darkness had begun to scare me, where I wanted to go was too far away to travel by foot or car in one day.

I looked at him with wide eyes as we entered the darkness. It wasn't the first time someone grabbed me while I was traveling to the other side, and I was sure it wouldn't be the last. "Why does everyone keep grabbing me?"

Holden looked panicked as he glanced into the emptiness, his fingers loosening on my arm.

"No!" I shouted as the connection between us started to break.

"Don't let go!"

My hand shot out, grabbing the back of his neck and pulling him to me until our bodies touched. His free hand immediately found my hip, holding my body against his as the cold air of the ocean blew across my skin.

"That was new," He murmured, but I couldn't let go. It didn't matter who he was or his

relation to Natalie.

It had been so long since anyone had held me. The closest I had gotten to physical comfort in years had been Killian, throwing his arm over my shoulders a couple of weeks ago like he used to do when we were teenagers. Every other touch had been sparring or meaningless sex that did nothing to make me feel better.

I didn't need to say anything. Holden seemed to understand, and his arms wrapped around me tightly.

Several minutes passed as I listened to the waves crashing and the subtle enchanting song from the rocks below. They would soon give up when they realized it was no use.

I pulled back, nodding as I whispered a 'thank you.'

"Is it safe to let go now?" His hands moved to my biceps as he looked down at me, and I pushed aside my humiliation from letting my emotions get the best of me in front of him. Still, I had hit my breaking point, and I needed it.

I nodded, pulling away and turning toward the ocean. It was a sharp drop down, nearly 100 feet to the water from where we stood. The airy song from below faded off as they recognized my magic. They knew there would be no snack here for them today.

"I am impressed. Most people throw up their first time." My heels dug into the ground, and I kicked them off, letting my toes sink into the soft grass.

"It wasn't my first time. Aurora brought me here that way when I met her a couple of

days ago, but how she did it was different. It was bright and easy. When you teleported, it was dark and didn't feel right." I heard him approaching me as his voice grew louder.

I looked over my shoulder at him, my arms moving up to wrap around my torso to protect myself from the chilled breeze. That was interesting news, and it made me eager to talk to Aurora, Natalie's mother when I got back home. But I was in no rush to leave just yet.

'Is this your place?' Holden asked, walking closer to the edge. I watched as he looked around with fascination. "Where you go when you want to be free?"

Free... such an interesting choice of words.

Considering that I had nothing forcing me to stay in the castle, I had a lot that I wanted to stay for. No matter how hard it all was, that was a part of being a family.

'I am free. I had been locked away for a long time before finding my home there. This is just where I go when I need air." My eyes closed, and my head tilted back as I listened to the sound of the ocean and enjoyed the smell of the salt water.

When I opened them again, Holden had moved closer to the edge. He was looking down into the rocks and water below, and I knew they were calling to him.

"I wouldn't get that close if I were you," I warned, stepping up next to him as I looked down to see the naked woman sunbathing on the rocks. Her long blonde hair was

fanned out around her, and I saw her seductive smile grow more prominent when she saw me. Holden looked taken by the siren, and I placed my hand on his forearm, snapping him back to the present as he lifted his foot to join her other victims at the bottom of the ocean.

He growled in agitation, taking several steps back but pulling me with him, shielding me behind him from the creature below.

“She’s as much fun as she looks. It’s when she tries to eat you after that kills the mood.”

Thirteen: Joselin  
Joselin’s P.O.V.

I was amused when Holden had to get another look at the naked siren. He was amazed that she looked so normal until I told him that was how they lured in their victims. Their song and their bodies were a beacon to any species.

When they fed is when they would shed their skin and reveal their slimy, boney, true forms. Vile creatures.

I had seen them snatch a poor Sprite out of the air and bite them in half like a candy bar. It was not pleasant.

The ground beneath us had been lifted to a comfortable lounge bed with soft, short grass. I had offered to take Holden back to the packhouse, but he refused.

‘If I don’t think about the siren wanting to lure me to my death, this is the most relaxing place I’ve ever been,’ Holden said with his hands behind his head

as he stretched out beside me. He was attractive. I would give him that. But it felt wrong to think about him any other way when he was only eighteen while I was twenty-six. Granted, he looked older. Much older. Being a wolf did wonders for his build, but I didn't feel physically attracted to him.

"She'll give up soon. If not, we can always kill and take some of her blood. Once you drink even a drop of it, their pull will no longer work on you." I smirked as the siren below us went silent. She knew she stood no chance against me. She barely made it out alive last time.

"Is that why she doesn't bother you?" He turned to look at me, and I smirked at him.

"I can be scrappy when I need to be." I felt my heart slow as he smiled at me. It was a feeling I had never experienced before. He knew none of my past or the horrors I had to face. There was no pity or disgust. Most importantly, there was no fear. "It really doesn't bother you, does it? The way I look."

"It does." He reached over, letting his hand rest on mine, but I pulled away. 'I think you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. That bothers me because I haven't smelled anything from you that would indicate you have any interest in me. I will win you over, though. I can be very stubborn when I want something.'" His green eyes bore into me, placing his hand back behind his head and flexing his muscles as he wiggled his eyebrows.

"And what is it that you want from me?" There was a voice in my head, shouting that

he just wanted to fuck a witch, but I pushed it to the back of my mind.

“I want to spend time with you. You are breathtaking and strong. You deserve to be treated like a Goddess. If you’d let me, I could be the one to do that for you, or I can be your friend, but I require our midnight snack to be cheesecake next time.”

His words warmed my heart, and I turned away from him to look at the ocean before us as pain stabbed through my chest. “You have a mate out there who will be your entire world soon. Don’t let anyone get in the way of you finding that happiness.”

He let out a sigh, and from the corner of my eye, I watched as he followed my gaze to the horizon and ran his fingers through his hair.

“Besides, it wouldn’t be fair to you for me to lead you on.” I could picture Tobias as clearly as if he were standing before me. It wasn’t as if it were the first time I had thought about him today, but it was the most painful for some reason.

“Who is he? Can I take him?” Holden lifted his head, his eyes narrowed, but his lips twitched as he tried not to smile.

“He can kick your ass in his sleep, but I don’t think he would care enough to actually do it if he saw us together.” My ankles crossed as I adjusted, uncomfortable with the topic.

“Why not?”

I laughed, the pain audible as I closed my eyes to prevent them from watering.

“Because he never cared before.”

“Ah, so he is an idiot. Now, that I can work with. If I can’t fight him, maybe I can help you to make him jealous.” Holden’s suggestion hadn’t been new to me. I had tried to make Tobias jealous several times, but that was before he ever showed any interest back.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, but I appreciate the offer. I’ve tried to move on for years, and nothing has worked. Finally, I decided to go for it and tried to get his attention. I thought being loved by him, even for a short while until he found his mate, would still be better than not having him at all. He wasn’t interested.” There was a heavy silence between us as I admitted my pathetic story of unrequited love. A witch fell for a beast who was fated to another.

I wanted to kick myself for ever becoming so emotional and weak. “So, I’m hearing you have a thing for wolves. That means I have a chance.” Holden smirked at me, and I rolled my eyes.

The low sound of humming started again, followed by the powerful and hypnotizing voice of the siren.

“Alright, let’s go.” I stood up, seeing the glazed look in Holden’s eyes from her song.

The oversized lounge chair I had created dropped back to the Earth, and Holden jolted back to reality upon impact with the ground.

“What was that for?” His eyes moved from me back to the cliff’s edge. I grabbed his hand, holding it tightly.

“Come on,” I ordered, and he looked down at our hands before raising his eyebrows

at me suggestively.

“Where are we going this time?”

“Fishing.”

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“I feel incredible!” Holden said, throwing his arm over my shoulders as I walked toward the dining hall for dinner. I had never felt so light and relaxed as I did after

drawing blood. There was nothing else like it.

Killian and Natalie hadn't arrived, and I was happy they hadn't. I knew seeing Killian

would ruin my good mood.

“How long will the effects last?” I laughed as his eyes darted around the room as he

saw everything with a different view. When I had my first and only taste of siren blood,

everything had a blue tint, but it was somehow clearer and brighter than before.

“It lasted a few days for me. With your metabolism, it might be a day, maybe two.” I

said, wishing I could relax fully and let my arm wrap around his waist as my mind told

me to. It amazed me how his touching me bothered me less than when other people

did it, but I still wasn't entirely comfortable.

He was a physical person, but I needed baby steps.

“What the world is that smell?” I heard Natalie ask, and I tensed before turning around

and dipping my head in a respectful greeting. I had probably pissed them off enough

today. I didn't need to give them even more of a reason to kick me out of my job and

home.

“Your Majesties.”

Holden's arm dropped from my shoulders as he sobered and

bowed as well, our voices overlapping as we greeted our leaders. “That would be siren venom,” Killian said, his eyes landing on my bicep where the bitch had managed to get a hold of me. I wore it proudly, knowing every Lycan and wolf here would know I had fought and bested a siren. “Josie, a word.”

Oh, how I wanted that word to be, ‘No.’ That was a sure way to make him lose his temper. He had been doing very well at keeping himself in check, and I didn’t want to be the person he lost it with. I nodded once, following him to an empty sitting room down the hall, leaving Holden and Natalie alone to talk.

I hesitated as I spun toward the door, wondering if he wanted them open or closed. He had taken me aside, so I assumed he wanted privacy for this conversation. Still, I knew he would be uncomfortable being alone with me. I was starting to believe he thought I was a siren too, waiting for the perfect moment to cast a charm over him and ruin his life.

“Close the doors,” He ordered. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath at his clipped and agitated tone.

This was it. I had lashed out too many times, and now I would be let go. I doubted anyone in the city would let me purchase or buy a house from them without hiding who I really was. I would have to find a safe place to build my own. It wouldn’t be difficult with my magic, but it would be lonely.

History told me that my newfound friendship with Holden would be

shortlived. Once Holden found his mate, she wouldn't be too keen on him spending time with me. So, I couldn't count him as a friend yet. I did as Killian ordered, turning to face him but not moving closer. I stared at his chest, not bothering to offend him further by looking into his eyes. "Did you get seen to?" His question surprised me and my hand moved up to cover my bicep where the siren had sunk her teeth into me. It was a euphoric experience. One that would have drugged me enough for her to have me at her mercy had I not already tasted her blood. I hadn't imagined he would care anymore. He certainly hadn't paid any attention to anything that didn't involve Natalie over the past few months. He hadn't tried to visit me in the infirmary after the war when I had been stabbed. Granted, I had sent Natalie away during her attempted visit, but Killian didn't even try. I had wanted to talk to him about the horror I had experienced, not with the stabbing but with the monsters in the darkness. He was the person I trusted the most. I had expected to see Killian or Tobias, but they never came. It wasn't until I had shown my face again that I discovered Tobias had made it a mission to avoid me. Killian was so focused on helping Natalie control her powers that he ignored and pushed aside everyone else. "I'm very sorry, Josie. I will work on being a better friend." His hands were in fists at

his sides, and I knew it was because he was having difficulty apologizing and admitting that he had done wrong.

“You’re...” I stumbled over my words. My eyebrows raised as I tried to hide my entertainment at his apparent internal conflict and power struggle. “Sorry. Yes.” He looked unamused as I smiled widely at him. The day was getting better, and I could only pray to the Goddess that it would stay that way.

My smile crumbled as my hand massaged the bite mark on my arm. There was still one question that I wanted to hear him answer. “Why didn’t you check on me after the war, after I was stabbed?”

Killian scoffed, his hands stilling at his sides, showing me he was confident in his answer. “I knew you were strong enough to get through it, and you did. You were out working again two days later.”

“I had to.” I wasn’t ready to tell him my fears about being replaced by Natalie.

Everything I could do, she would be able to do too. Her magic was stronger than mine was.

Killian waited, silently demanding that I explain, but I knew better than that. We had been friends for too long for him to pull that shit on me.

“Things will never be the same between us, Ian. I get that. You have a mate and will be starting your own family one day. I know it’s important to do everything possible to hold onto that. It’ll just take time for me to get used to our different dynamic.” My

stomach growled, empty as I hadn’t eaten since the brownies last

night with Holden.

“You will always be my family, Josie,” Killian said, stepping forward to place a hand on my shoulder.

I smiled at him sadly. If only I could believe that. Family had never been good to me.

My parents, the previous king and queen, Talia...

“You too,” I whispered, discretely stepping away to open the doors, letting his hand fall

to the side. There was no point in stirring the pot by having his scent on me when we

returned to Natalie. She didn’t seem to care and trusted me well enough now, but I

knew Killian.

I knew he was constantly stressed and terrified to do something that would ruin his

relationship. He had thought he had lost her once, and that had been the first time I

had ever seen him on his knees before anyone. If keeping my distance would help

him feel more confident in his relationship, then that is what I would do.

Holden smiled brightly when I saw him still waiting with Natalie.

She glanced between

us, openly curious.

I was surprised when she said nothing as he held his arm out for me, and I looped my

hand through it.

The door opened for us, and we entered the packed dining hall.

My eyes immediately

found Tobias, and I looked toward my seat. I wanted to show him that he couldn’t get

to me anymore, but the look on his face made me question my reaction to his

presence. 2 He was furious.

Fourteen: Tobias

Tobias's P.O.V.

I growled as I threw another collection of old, stained floorboards into the back of my truck. It wasn't often that I drove it. I despised the sound of the large machine, and being trapped inside the cage felt suffocating, but in times like this, I had no other choice.

Neighbors, who had done nothing for years when they heard the crying or screaming inside my childhood home, were outside watching as I gutted the house as quickly as possible. The new flooring order wouldn't arrive for a couple of weeks, but I felt my chest grow lighter with every floorboard I ripped up.

The longer I stayed in the house, the less I seemed to notice Ana's scent. It hurt to know that the last piece of her I had was about to be thrown out. Still, as I dropped the last load of the blood-stained wood into the truck bed, a little bit of the guilt I had been carrying lessened.

It was a step closer to leaving my past behind and moving forward to the future, toward Joselin.

I worked until the sun started falling, returned home to shower, and then went to the dining hall.

The head table was empty, and I glared at the door impatiently to catch a glimpse of my witch. Her smell was so unmistakable that it was as if she were in the room with me, and my nerves drove me wild. I needed to tell her about Ana and that I was finally

getting closure. I needed to ask her to consider giving me a little more time.

My spine straightened as the doors were pulled open, and Joselin walked in, her hand in the crook of another man's arm. I felt my stomach twist, and I saw red. Her gaze slid right over me as if I was just another face in the crowd, and I wanted to jump over the table, throw her over my shoulder, and take her back to my house.

A sickly, sweet smell rolled off her as she walked by, and I growled as I saw a bite mark on her perfect flesh. Siren.

Had she not learned her lesson the last time?

Joselin's head turned, looking over at me at the sound, but she kept her lips pressed together as she walked by.

I knew exactly who the man was. We had been warned of his arrival in the castle, but

I hadn't expected my witch to be with him.

He smiled brightly at her, enamored by her beauty, and it made me want to kill him.

But he was Natalie's brother, technically a member of the royal family. As much as I

wanted to kill him, I had to restrain myself.

Still, he needed to leave before I took his departure into my own hands.

"You guys should have seen her. Joselin was incredible. I've never seen someone fight like that!" The man offered Joselin a piece of bread as he boasted about her, and she accepted it. He had a child-like excitement about him, but he sounded old enough

for me to challenge him and not feel guilty.

"Tobias taught her most of what she knows,' Natalie said, and I

smirked as I knew she had my back. Joselin turned to glare at the queen before looking back at me.

That's right, baby. Eyes on me.

"Tobias?" The man asked, his elbow bumping against my woman's, and I growled again, not bothering to look away from Joselin to the newcomer. I had gone all day

without seeing her, without her scent and her touch. If anyone took her away from me

now, I would tear them to pieces. "Ah, the man glaring at you?

How long did they train

together? Fifteen years, maybe? n

His tone was getting under my skin, and I was ready to throw my knife at him and

skewer him to his chair. The fact that he knew how long Joselin had been in my life

told me that she had told him about me. What she shared, I couldn't be sure.

"Yes," She whispered, the soft response coming across her lips like a defeated sigh.

Joselin cleared her throat, shifting in her chair as she forced her eyes away as one of

the servants placed her plate in front of her. The rest of the pack was buffet-style, but

my plate remained empty as I watched her closely.

She could feel me. I knew she could. Her perfect legs pressed together, and I licked

my lips when she looked up and met my stare again.

Oh, baby. Don't you worry. I'll ease that ache for you real fucking soon.

My stare followed every bite to her mouth as I watched her lips wrap around the

utensil. Everything about her was unintentionally sensual.

Natalie quietly spoke to her brother, but I ignored them, focusing

only on my woman. I would never let Joselin go, not until my dying breath. "Huh?" Joselin said, tearing her eyes away from her plate to look at the blonde.

"I said you should let me take you dancing tomorrow." He repeated, and I felt my eyes burn as they turned black when my beast came forward. One more word from his mouth, and I would issue the challenge.

"Only if you think you can keep up with me." She smirked, but I didn't miss how she lit up at the invitation.

"Hm, I think we would move well together." He responded, and my nails extended as I held myself back from ripping his throat out. Killian changed the topic, asking when Aurora and Henry, Natalie's father would return from their trip. The conversation flowed from there, not going back to the date my woman had just agreed to.

I waited until Joselin was done eating, making sure she had her fill before I stood. Joselin looked back up immediately, seeing my clean, untouched plate before me, and held my gaze. No words needed to be said as I approached the door, silently calling her to follow me. I could feel her watching me with every step I took, and I knew without any doubt that she would be a few steps behind me. My back pressed against the hallway next to one of the conference rooms down the hall, and only a second later, she emerged from the dining room. Her long hair looked windblown and wild, begging me to run my hands through it. The woman confidently walked, her chin up and back straight, her

heels clicking on  
the floor.

“Tobias,” She greeted, stopping a few feet away and facing me head-on. The sound of my name on her lips was torturous, and I wasted no time pushing off the wall. “Was there something that you needed?”

My arm wrapped around her waist, and I spun her, forcing the conference room door open. She let out a gasp as her body collided with mine.

“What are you doing, sweetheart? You’re playing a dangerous game.” I growled, nipping her earlobe gently. The smell of her desire was prominent, and I wanted nothing more than to tear her clothes from her body and sink into her as deeply as I could go.

“I’m not playing a game, Tobias. You are.” Her words were hard and clipped, but her hands rested on my shoulders as I pushed her against the wall, cupping her jaw as my thumb ran over her bottom lip.

Her mouth parted open as she released a sweet little sigh that made me grow hard.

“I’ll make the rules simple then.”

Her chest was pressed against mine, back arched off the wall. My lips brushed against hers as I spoke, and she trembled in my hold as the hand around her waist slid lower until I slipped my hand beneath her top and onto her bare skin.

I tilted her head back further, running my nose down her throat until I reached her neck. My tongue slid across her skin where my mark would one day lay, and she

moaned loudly, her hands moving up from my shoulders to sink into my hair.

My heart beat quickly in my chest with relief, knowing I hadn't lost her just yet. She was still mine. She just needed a little reminder of what we were both working toward, what we could be.

"If you want to go dancing, you go dancing with me. I am done sharing you." I

growled, my teeth scraping against her skin, but knowing it wouldn't be fair for me to

mark her just yet. Not without talking to her or asking her if she wanted to be mine. "I

have watched you play this game with others for too long. You've had your time to

enjoy yourself, and now I am claiming what is mine."

Forget more time. I needed her.

Joselin's hands tightened into fists in my hair, attempting to pull my head back, but I

wasn't done. One taste of her sweet skin was not enough, and I was seconds away

from fucking her on the conference table.

"And what is it that you think is yours?" Joselin released my hair, realizing it wouldn't

have the effect she wanted, and slid her hands down my chest, her nails scraping the

skin along the way. She had never backed down from a challenge, and I knew that

she was enjoying this as much as I was.

My hand moved from her jaw to her throat, and she gasped when I ran my nose up

until it touched hers. I had waited long enough.

Joselin let out a mixture between a cry and a moan as our lips connected, and I

groaned with pleasure as her tongue touched mine. Every nerve

in my body lit up, and I pressed myself against her further. I pulled back for a moment, needing to make sure this was real before capturing her lips again. Joselin bent her knee, running it up my thigh. I released her throat to grab her ass with both hands, picking her up as she wrapped her legs around me. Her body formed perfectly to mine, and I pressed her against the wall harder when she tried to wiggle her hips against mine. "If you don't want me to fuck you right here, right now, you better stop." My growl was met with a moan of pleasure as Joselin dropped her head back against the wall, panting. Her eyes popped open as she looked surprised, but then her lips curled up into a seductive smirk as she trailed her fingers along my jaw and to my lips. "Would you do it against the wall or over the table?" Her taunt had me growing harder. I growled, squeezing her ass as I debated bending her over the table and spanking her until she learned her lesson. I opened my lips to speak, but the sound of a knock made me growl in anger toward the door. His scent reached me only a second later. If Joselin hadn't been wrapped around me, I would have slaughtered him for interrupting. "That's for me." She laughed, letting her legs loosen around me. "I don't give a fuck." I let her slide down until her feet touched the floor but pressed a hard kiss to her lips as I cupped her face, trying to keep her from leaving. Joselin laughed as she pushed me away gently. I dropped my

head, running my tongue over her neck one more time. I wanted that pup outside to smell me on her, to know he was too late and she was mine.

"I already made plans with Holden to go dancing. So, I will have to break your rules tomorrow night." There was a brightness about her that I hadn't seen in a long time.

She was enjoying this.

"Sweetheart, you are just begging to be punished."

She pulled away from me, stepping backward toward the door with a bright smile.

"Mh, I look forward to that."

She turned her back to me, her hand wrapping around the doorknob as I called out to her one last time.

"Josie," She stopped looking over her shoulder at me with a heat that could melt metal. She was so fucking beautiful. "If he touches you again, I will kill him.'

Fifteen: Joselin  
Joselin's P.O.V.

"Do I need to ask if you're okay, or can I assume by your smell that things went well?"

Holden asked with a grimace, but there was disappointment on his face. He moved away from me subtly, but I didn't have it in me to feel guilty.

Tobias said I was his.

I had nothing to be mad about ever. The world could burn around me, and I would still be happy.

"I'm better than okay, but you might not be." There was a slight skip in my step when I looked over my shoulder and saw Tobias hadn't left the

conference room. He would need a minute to calm himself down, and I bit my lip as I thought about turning around and walking right back in there to claim him as mine too. "What the hell did I do?" Holden pulled open the door to the dining hall, and a few people looked taken aback by the smile on my face. Natalie raised her eyebrows at me, and Killian curled his lip when I walked past, no doubt smelling what I had just been up to. "He's going to kill you," I practically sang happily, but Holden did not look amused. I looked up as Tobias entered the room, his eyes immediately landing on me. It made me happy when he filled up his plate and began eating this time, but I knew he was listening to everything I said. "For interrupting?" Holden asked, and I laughed when he looked from me to Tobias. "No, I think it was good you did," I smirked when Tobias growled. I would have loved to have him take me right then and there, but more than that, I wanted to be sure he wanted all of me. He had no problem ignoring my advances for months. I wanted to be sure that he was interested because he wanted me and not just because I stopped throwing myself at him. He would have to earn it, and I looked forward to the fun we were about to have together while he did so. "So, cheesecake?" Holden asked, and I looked back at him to see him staring out over the rows of tables with pack members talking and laughing. I knew what he was really asking, and I nodded. Friends.

“Cheesecake,” I replied, my smile falling as I looked at him. He looked worried and sad, and I wondered what was going through his mind. He had a mate that was waiting for him. Once he turned nineteen, he could find her, but he didn’t seem excited by the idea.

“Does this mean we aren’t going dancing tomorrow?” He lowered his voice but could still be heard by anyone who cared enough to listen. I met Tobias’s stare. His brown eyes had remained black since our rendezvous in the conference room, and his hand was tight around his fork, his knuckles white.

“That’s still happening. I’m looking forward to it.” It made me smile wider as Tobias stabbed his fork into the wooden table before standing up and leaving the room. He wouldn’t be coming back tonight. I had pushed his buttons and was looking forward to my punishment.

“You’re really going to get me killed, aren’t you?” Holden asked as Killian and Natalie stood to excuse themselves from the table.

“Don’t be a baby. Fight like a man!” I insisted, standing as well, eager to get back to my tower for the night to take another look at Rona’s blood now that I was calmer. I also didn’t like that the council had stopped eating in the public dining hall and chose to spend each night eating alone in their rooms or the private dining room. It was suspicious.

I would have joined them if I didn’t hate them. I could have tried to get them to spill everything they knew about what was happening or what would

happen. Until I got to the bottom of the magic on the mountain, I would not trust any of their pledges to join us.

Holden held his arm out to escort me from the room, but I shook my head. If Tobias was going to kill my new friend, he would have to wait until after we went out

tomorrow. I wanted to go dancing.

“Can I at least walk you back to your room?” Holden asked, and I stared at him

momentarily before nodding in agreement.

We were halfway there when I broke the silence, hoping he would give me some

answers after I had told him about my love life. “Why are you so scared to find your mate?”

“I am not scared to find her. I’m worried about what situation she will be in when I do.’

He lifted his arm, rubbing his hand along the back of his neck as he tilted his head

from side to side.

I was buzzing with curiosity. Most wolves were over the moon about the prospect of

finding their mate, but Holden wasn’t, which was unusual.

Beyond Killian, I hadn’t known anyone else to be resistant to the bond with their fated

mate. “What makes you say that?”

Holden let out a pained, almost dark chuckle, and I watched as the happy boy turned

into a man. One filled with pain and exhaustion, hiding behind the facade he wore the

rest of the time. “I can’t know for certain, but I might have already found her. There

was this girl growing up. She was the brightest thing I had ever

seen. Always smiling and laughing. I wanted to be around her all the time so that she could share some of that happiness with me.”

He slowed, and I matched his pace to let him speak. Clearly, he needed to talk about

it. “She had this boyfriend that wouldn’t let anyone near her though, so I never got my

chance. When she was seventeen, she got pregnant, and her light dimmed. When

she turned nineteen last year, I thought that she would find her true mate, but she

never said anything if she did.”

I nodded slowly, “And you think she might be your mate?”

“It’s just a thought. The way she looks at me sometimes, I feel like she is trying to

communicate with me. I tried talking to her through the pack link a few times to see if

she was okay, but she always has it blocked.” Holden dropped his hand back down,

sliding them into the front pockets of his jeans. “I have the feeling that if it’s not her, it’s

going to be someone in a situation like that. They might already have a kid or be

mated to someone they chose for themselves, and I’ll have to suffer through their

rejection of our bond.”

“Well, if that is the case, you’ll always be welcome here. I have a few witches who I

could introduce you to. We don’t get mates, so you don’t have to worry about that with

my kind.” I bit back a laugh, imagining him with Aisha or Margot.

He might be able to

hold his own against one of them, but they were a few years older than me.

Rona was closer to his age but would chew him up and spit him right out.

“A witch and a wolf, are you sure you won’t get jealous? Having to see me around all the time with another witch might drive you crazy to know that you missed your chance with me.” He smirked as we reached the door to my tower, and I laughed.

Tobias was the only man who had ever gotten under my skin and into my heart. All of my possessiveness and jealousy were reserved for him.

“Or, if you’re still here this weekend, you can always attend the mating mixer and see if any women here recognize you as their mate.” I had not been looking forward to it.

Every few months, everyone with Lycan blood who hadn’t found or chosen a mate would meet to search for their fated. If they didn’t find them, they could go to the wolf packs for The Offering to select a breeder.

I placed my hand on the doorknob, feeling the magical field almost sizzling at my touch.

Something wasn’t right. My smile fell, and the markings on my skin vibrated in anger, knowing someone was in my personal space.

“Holy shit,” Holden muttered as he stared at me wide-eyed.

“Someone is in my tower.” The low declaration made his eyes turn black, and all

amusement melted from his face. He looked ready for war, and I was proud that he was willing to fight beside me.

I knew this would happen, but I had expected it to happen sooner.

My guess had been

while we were on the cliff this morning. I had been wrong.

It seemed she wasn't as smart or fast as I had assumed she would be.

The door flew open with a flick of my finger, and I stormed in with my hands raised.

The sitting room was empty, but I could feel her still in my tower. I teleported up the stairs within the blink of an eye, staring at my destroyed study.

Rona stood in the middle, her face as red as her hair, as she glared at me.

I felt Holden rush up behind me, but he paused at the sight of the angry witch.

"You bitch," Rona roared before throwing a fireball at me. I knocked the attack to the

side, pulling the oxygen from the air around it to suffocate the flame and force it to go out.

"That's not very nice, Rona. I have company. Use your manners." I chided, earning a screech of anger from her.

"I should skin you alive!" Her threat was meaningless to me, and I rolled my eyes. I

would let her attack slide since I had attacked her only two days ago. The difference was that I wasn't stupid enough to let her get a sample of my blood when I did it.

"You probably should, but you can't, and you won't. Now be a good little mommy

murderer and get out of my tower before I call the guards in." I wanted nothing more

than to watch her get dragged out of my room, but I knew it wouldn't happen. She

could easily handle them with her magic.

But she wouldn't get one up on me.

"Did you think I wouldn't find out about this?" She lifted her other hand, holding the

bowl from my casting bench. The minuscule amount of her blood was still inside, and I narrowed my eyes as I forced myself not to look at my hidden safe. If I did, I would be giving myself away.

“So, you did. Do as you must, but then get out. You have made such a mess in here, Rona, and as I already said, I have company.” I had to briefly consider grabbing and teleporting her into the darkness to leave her to the creatures lurking in the shadows.

But if I knew her as well as I thought I did, she would overpower them and make them do her bidding.

Holden released a feral snarl behind me when Rona stepped forward, lifting her hand like she wanted to punch it through my chest and rip my heart out. The sound made her stop, and I raised an eyebrow at her, waiting to see if she had the guts to take me on in a real fight.

Wolves challenging each other was cute. They would wrestle and fight to the death.

But witches... witches held duels. All elements and magic were at play, and anyone nearby was at risk of being hit by a rogue casting. It was deadly to all watching, not just the witches participating.

Her jaw twitched as her teeth ground together, and I eyed her with amusement as she lit the contents of the bowl on fire.

She didn't need to know that the actual sample I had was already tucked away in my safe. Although, after she had been able to get through my ward to enter my tower, I

would have to redo both it and the protection spell on my locked-up, hidden treasures.

Her boots stomped loudly against the flooring as she strode toward the door, stopping at my side. "If you ever take something that belongs to me again, I will kill you."

I turned to face her with a wicked smile, knowing it would only piss her off more. "You know I can't resist you when you talk dirty to me."

Sixteen: Tobias  
Tobias's P.O.V.

This was the last place I wanted to be, but it was where I needed to be. The music was too loud, and the smell of alcohol and body odor was offensive. Still, I was here, watching and waiting.

Joselin hadn't agreed to be mine yet. We weren't together, but I would be damned before I let her go on a date with another man.

I hadn't felt threatened when she had been sleeping with random people. But her going out on a date with a man who looked at her the way that only I should was not going to stand.

I took a sip of my water, my eyes on the door as I waited for her to enter. If they were going dancing, this was where she would be. It was her favorite place because it was right by the bunkhouse, so it was filled with guards who were used to her, and very rarely would anyone care if she was among them.

It was the town's people who didn't know her that had a problem. Several of my pack members nodded at me in greeting but didn't bother approaching

me. They knew I wouldn't talk to them unless I had to. They didn't mind. I had risked my life for many of them in the past, and they knew my silence was nothing personal. I used to talk. I used to talk a lot. My father hated it. He beat me, telling me to keep my mouth shut. He said it made me a good warrior to know my place, respect my superiors and not waste my breath on those below me. It wasn't until I was older that I realized he wanted me to keep silent so no one would know he would torture me at home despite knowing our neighbors could hear it. They knew about my home life and did nothing to help me or stop him, and I would heal before anyone could see it. But then he got his hands on Ana. I was just a young teenager, practically a kid still. Those words would haunt me forever. 'You sound just like your father.'

Just like that, his life-long lesson finally stuck with me. I didn't want to sound like my father. Joselin was my escape. Joselin was a fucking angel in the hell that was my life. She was the only one it was safe to talk to, and she loved when I spoke. She would listen to everything I had to say like it was the more important thing in the world, even when it was nonsense. It was impossible to miss Joselin as she entered the bar. Her long white hair was in a high ponytail, and I felt my eyes burn to the black of my beast. She rarely wore her

hair up, and I fucking loved it. The way it emphasized her neck and where my mark would one day be placed was like a beacon, calling me to her. I could do a lot with a ponytail and knew she would enjoy every second of it.

The man, Holden, was right behind her. This time, he kept his hands to himself, and I grunted in approval. He leaned in, whispering by her ear. The music drowned out his words from reaching me, and I watched closely as she perked up with a confident smirk, her head moving as she scanned the room.

That's right, baby. I'm right here.

When she didn't turn in my direction, I leaned back in my chair.

She wanted a night

out, but I had laid the rules down very clearly, and I was a man of my word.

I watched them closely, waiting for him to slip up, but he stiffened as she leaned

toward him, inching away. Her smile fell as she noticed the distance he placed

between them, and guilt suddenly overshadowed my jealousy.

Joselin pursed her lips, facing the bar and away from me as she ordered a drink. The

bartender, Joey, glanced up at me as she did so, and I nodded once, confirming that I

would be the one paying for it.

I was relieved when I saw her turn again, trying to find me in the crowd but failing.

Knowing that I had just made her happy with such a small gesture reminded me of

how perfect she was and that she deserved more. I would give her more.

Her head dropped back, and she laughed as her date ordered his drink and was

forced to pay. They stayed at the bar for a while, talking and sipping their drinks while

I sat back and waited.

Eventually, Joselin stood. I felt my pulse rise as she gestured with her head to the

dancefloor, staring at the queen's brother expectantly. He was hesitant, and my teeth

ground together as I waited for him to choose between life and death.

Joselin shook her head, her ponytail swaying behind her. Her lips and cheeks puffed

out slightly as she let out a breath of disappointment, walking away from him and

toward the dance floor.

Her hips swayed side to side as she matched the beat, her hands running up her hips

to her neck before holding them above her head briefly. As I watched her move, I

couldn't stop the purr of pride and pleasure. With her arms up, it was like she was a

beacon of light. She called me to her, begging me to watch as she lost herself in the

music.

I growled as my eyes were forced away to the man moving up next to her, seeming to

have moved past his reservation.

Joselin's tensed at the sound as she saw Holden approaching, but she still didn't turn

to me. She knew I was here. She had heard me vocalize my anger but stayed where

she was. Her body began to move more seductively as she stepped toward Holden,

and he stepped back but danced next to her stiffly.

My mouth dried as I watched Joselin roll her hips with the beat, her ass perfectly in my

line of sight. Temptress.

I couldn't take it anymore. My woman wanted to dance, and I promised her

I was the only one she would be dancing with.

I stood from my seat, the chair sliding back against the flooring with a noise of protest

that was muffled by the music. The wolf looked up at me, watching me cautiously as

he moved further away from Joselin, stiffly swaying.

Joselin paused, her confidence wavering as one of the female guards stepped

between them. Holden smiled, grabbing her hand and spinning the woman out. The

kid knew how to dance. I would give him that.

Her hair was soft as I picked up a piece, wrapping it around my finger before pulling

on it lightly, making her look up. Goosebumps rose along her skin as I dipped my

head down, my lips brushing her ear as I growled out my demand.

"My turn, sweetheart."

I knew no one would hear me over the speakers, but she did. She heard me loud and

clear as I kissed her neck and grabbed her hips.

Her body trembled in my hold as she leaned back against my chest. "Can you keep

up with me?"

It didn't take long before she was grinding on me, rubbing her perfect ass against my

body. I swayed with her, refusing to lose contact. Even when she spun around to face

me, my fingers trailed across her stomach.

I was angry that she had the nerve to come out tonight with another man still. Yet, I

was also the happiest I had ever been as my pack watched as I

publicly made my  
interest known. There was no doubt that most of them knew of my  
attraction to  
Joselin, but I wanted every last one of them to know. I didn't want  
anyone else  
touching her ever again if I could help it.

One of Joselin's legs pressed between mine, and I pushed her  
closer to me with my  
hand on her lower back. She took my other hand off her hip,  
guiding it up her side,  
over the swell of her breast, and to her chest. Her heart was  
thumping as quickly as  
mine, and I licked my lips as I pressed my palm more firmly  
against her warm skin.

I wanted to take her away from here, to show her how good we  
would feel together  
with less clothing, but I promised her she could dance. So, I let  
her dance.

Song after song, she ground and rubbed against me, touching me  
as often as  
possible. My hands had moved down to her thighs, feeling the  
soft skin at the bottom  
of her tight, little black dress. I didn't care who was around us or  
how many people  
saw. I wanted them to.

Joselin spun around, rolling her hips against mine as she dipped  
to the floor before  
coming back up. I reached down, adjusting myself in my pants as  
my painfully hard  
erection strained against my jeans.

Seventeen: Joselin  
Joselin's P.O.V.

My mind spun, and I couldn't tell if it was from my drink or the  
man pinning me against

the wall. To be in his arms, house, and bedroom was a dream come true.

I wasn't surprised when Holden told me he could smell Tobias in the bar. I was

excited. I knew he would show up, and the result was far better than expected. His

possessiveness was invigorating and sexy as hell.

Still, as he leaned in and let his nose touch the tip of mine, I was hesitant.

He wanted to reward me, and I was more than willing to accept my prize. But he still

needed to prove that he wanted more than just sex. If I just wanted sex from him, I

would have come to him and cum for him long before now.

"And what is my reward?" My fingers trailed over his peck, and he glanced down

briefly as I moved them up, dipping my fingers up and under the collar of his cotton

shirt, drawing circles against his warm skin.

"You'll find out soon enough." The feeling of him pressing his hardness against me

had me licking my lips as I imagined everything I wanted to do to him. But I needed to

stay in control. If I let him take what he wanted tonight, there would be no guarantee

that he would still be interested in the morning.

"I think it is time for me to be the one who set some rules then,"

My fingers moved up

his neck and to his hair. The soft strands slid between my fingers as I balled them into

fists.

Tobias looked intrigued, smirking with raised eyebrows as he waited for my demands.

"You can touch me," I whispered, licking my lips before boldly grabbing his bottom one

with my teeth and pulling it softly before releasing it. Tobias groaned, placing his forearm on the wall next to my head as he leaned into me further.

“You can taste me,” My tongue flicked out, teasing his lips. I turned my head, giving him my cheek as he moved forward for a kiss. The growl of disapproval he let out made my toes curl in excitement.

“But you cannot fuck me. Not yet.”

Tobias pulled back, looking between my eyes, but he appeared amused. “I agree to your rules. But know that by the time I am done with you tonight, you will be begging to have me inside you. When I say no, I want you to remember this moment, sweetheart.”

Well. Fuck me.

I had no doubt that he would stay true to his word.

When his lips pressed to mine, I was lost. Tobias was addicting.

He kissed me like I

was something loved, something precious. I had never felt like that before. I never felt as wanted as I did at that moment.

His hand on my hip moved to my lower back, holding me tightly as if he wanted to

enjoy being close, but I could feel how tense he was. His muscles were coiled

beneath his skin, and his erection was pressed firmly against me.

I would never let it happen, especially in front of him. Still, the relief that the man I

loved was holding me so close and kissing me so tenderly made me want to cry. But I didn't. I refused to.

That would be seen as me being weak, and I already had enough

of other people and myself questioning my strength. It was bullshit to cry with excitement. To me, tears were reserved for grief, and I was celebrating. Not even when I had been stabbed did I cry. Yet, Tobias was my weakness through and through. I could accept that, though. He was worth it.

My eyes fluttered open when he broke the kiss, trailing his lips down my throat. "Tell me, sweetheart. Did you let him touch you when I wasn't there? ■ His teeth scraped against my throat, and my hands gripped his hair tighter, holding him to me. It was my sweet spot, and I moaned loudly as he sucked on the skin for a moment as I whispered my answer.

"No. No, he hasn't touched me since dinner last night." It was a silent beg, a plea for him to believe I had been good. I wanted my reward.

"Did you touch him?" Tobias's finger hooked under the strap of my dress, and I felt a thrill rush through me when it snapped back against my skin. The delicious warning of what would happen if I broke his rules made me curious, and I knew I would be breaking his rules soon if it meant more time alone with him.

"No."

His lips curled into a smile, and he pressed a long, firm kiss to mine before whispering against them. "Good fucking girl."

Tobias grabbed the bottom of my dress, pulling the fabric up and over my head in a swift movement, leaving me in nothing but my thong. I hadn't bothered to wear a bra as my dress didn't allow one, and the pained noise of approval he

let out as he looked  
me over told me he was happy with my choice.

“Get on the bed.”

I obeyed, trying to hide my eagerness as I stepped away from  
him. The loss of his  
body heat instantly made me want to shiver, but I resisted. I knew  
he would already be  
able to see the goosebumps along my skin.

My fingers trailed over the bedding as I looked as seductively as  
possible at him over

my shoulder. My ponytail brushed my back, and I smiled when I  
found his eyes on my

face instead of my naked body. He would get his chance to  
explore that later. For now,

he looked happy as we made eye contact.

As I climbed onto my knees on the mattress, I wondered how  
many other women had

been in this same bed, how many women he was about to  
compare me to, and

whether or not he would find me wanting. The thought was  
frustrating, and I did my

best to push it to the back of my mind.

It was hard enough knowing that I would never look like them, not  
with the lines on my

body and the lack of color in my eyes and hair.

“On your back.”

I laid back, unable to stop myself from turning my head when I  
smelled Tobias on the

pillow. It smelled incredible.

I bit my lip as he collected himself, taking his shirt off over his  
head but leaving his

jeans on as he walked to the foot of the bed. My knees were bent,  
my heels digging

into the blanket. Tobias grabbed my right foot, carefully undoing  
the strap that held my

shoe on before placing my foot back down and doing the same to the other.

It was sweet and thoughtful, something I hadn't had anyone else do for me.

His rough and calloused hands began their journey, massaging my calves to my thighs. I knew Tobias was aware that I was wet and ready for him.

I was positive that as he worked his way up my thighs and I spread them, he could see the evidence of my desire on the fabric there.

I held my breath as I looked down the valley of my breasts, expecting him to continue his journey up my body. Instead, He stopped, moved back to my knees, and replaced

his hands with his lips. The small kisses and love bites he trailed across my flesh were euphoric, and I couldn't take my eyes away. I could barely breathe properly.

Never in my life has I wanted someone this badly, and I moaned when he kissed the insides of my thighs.

"Do you know how long I have dreamed of tasting you, Josie?"

His words caused his hot breath to hit the sensitive skin where my panty line started, and my hips wiggled as I silently pleaded for him to put me out of my misery.

His hands slid up my thighs, and I gasped as he ripped the fabric from my hips. My

hands grabbed the back of his head instinctively as he leaned in and licked me,

getting his first taste at my entrance before moving up to my clit.

His groan turned me on even more, and my back arched off the bed as he licked and

sucked on the small bundle of nerves between my legs. Waves of

pleasure rushed through me, building me closer with every second. "Fuck," I moaned, my right hand pulling free from his hair to slide up my stomach and grab my breast. My nipple sat between my fingers as I pinched it while holding Tobias to me with my other hand.

The orgasm rocked through me quickly as Tobias continued to eat me out, his mouth going back down to my entrance before he thrust his tongue into me. I had never felt anything like it before.

"Mh, Tobias," I cried, but he didn't stop. He knew exactly what he was doing and what he wanted.

One of his arms was under my thigh and over my stomach, but his other hand moved from my ass to join his tongue at my core. As he went back to my oversensitive and throbbing clit, his fingers circled my pussy a few times before he shoved two of them in me. I cried out in ecstasy, forcing my hand away from his head to grip the blanket.

"Yes!"

Tobias pulled his mouth away, using the palm of his hand to rub against my clit as he moved up my body and kissed me deeply. I could taste myself on his tongue, but more so, I could taste him. The added sensation had me rocking my hips even harder against this hand.

"The sounds you make when you're cumming for me are so much sweeter than I had ever imagined." He kissed me again, and I knew he was right about his statement

earlier. We had only been enjoying each other for a few minutes, and I was already willing to throw the rules away and beg him to fuck me. “More,” I gasped, needing any and everything more that he was willing to offer me. “Don’t worry, sweetheart. Your night is just getting started. I am going to continue to fuck you with my tongue and fingers until you lose your voice from screaming my name. Your pussy will be mine before the sun comes up tomorrow. Then, the next time I have you in my bed, I will fuck you so deep that you can never get my scent out of you, and everyone will know that you are mine.’

Eighteen: Joselin

Joselin’s P.O.V.

The feeling of a hand trailing over my hip, pushing the blanket down a tiny bit, made me stir. I rolled onto my back with my eyes closed, knowing by how dark it was that it was still either nighttime or very early. Either way, I needed way more sleep to recover from last night.

The bed moved as Tobias shifted his weight, and an uncontrollable smile spread across my lips. Happy. This was what it felt like to be happy. His hand trailed down further, pulling the blanket away from my body. I bit my lip, keeping my eyes closed even though I knew he could see and hear that I was awake.

The stubble on his jaw slid up the inside of my thigh, and I gasped at the sensation.

“Good Morning,” He whispered against my skin before licking up my slit, giving my clit

an extra stroke of attention.

“It is a good morning,” I whispered with a laugh as he turned his head and left an

open-mouthed kiss on my thigh. “Have you not had your fill?”

“Never.” He growled,

focusing back on my clit with his warm tongue and skilled fingers teasing my entrance.

I fought the need to keep my eyes closed as he enjoyed his breakfast.

Instead, I forced them open, glancing down at the most sensual sight of my life.

My nipples were pebbled, and down the valley of my breasts, I watched as Tobias

enjoyed himself. The little groans and sounds he made in response to my taste and

the way he responded to my moans, and the rocking of my hips against his lips drove

me crazy.

His fingers curled inside me as he thrust them firmly and quickly, and I cried out as he

brought me to my climax. My head fell back against the pillow, and my legs and hips

trembled as my energy had been stolen from my body.

Small sighs left my lips with each breath as he worked his way up my stomach, taking

one of my nipples in his mouth before holding himself over me with his lips gently

touching mine.

“You are breathtaking.” He whispered before stealing a kiss, and I leaned up, following

him when he pulled away. My eyes fluttered open, surprised to see the brown eyes I

loved. It wasn't his beast influencing his words. They came from him.

“I can't believe this is real.” My reply was met with a goofy grin,

making my heart flip.

“Believe it, sweetheart.” He kissed me once more, a deep, punishing kiss that sent a thrill to my core. I wanted to wrap my legs around him and pull him deep into me. But he had stayed firm even though he had been right. I had begged him to fuck me, to slide in and fill me with his cock. But he refused with a smile each time. The closest he had allowed himself to get was to slide his shaft in the

wetness between my lips, brushing my clit with every stroke.

“I was called in, but I’ll see you later.” He whispered, rubbing his thumb over my

bottom lip. His eyes flickered over my face before he forced himself up and promptly

pulled the blankets back up around me. “Get some more rest.”

I couldn’t resist watching him get dressed. My smile was unavoidable as he walked

over and kissed my head before hurrying to leave the room.

Tobias leaving me here in his house, trusting me completely, made me feel giddy.

I woke up a few hours later when the sun was high in the sky. The disappointment that

Tobias had not returned yet was in the back of my mind, but I was too happy to dwell

on it. He had a job to do, and so did I. Soon, I needed to talk to Aurora about being my

pledge to join the council and teleporting, but she was still away. She and Henry had

taken a vacation, wanting to reconnect. Based on how tense things were between

them before they left, I would say they probably hadn’t even left the bedroom on their trip.

I wanted that in my life. I wanted to stay in Tobias’s bed for as

long as possible and enjoy him. Everything about Tobias's room was neat and organized. I chuckled when I thought about my tower back at the castle. Compared to him, I was a hoarder with all my supplies and books. I wondered if it would bother him to always have my things around.

My hands tightened on the blanket as I immediately stopped that train of thought. Too fast and too soon. Things were going great, and I needed to enjoy what we had before jumping into something more.

I slid my black dress on, leaving my panties on the floor for him to find later, and made my way down the stairs and out the door. I had become more confident in traveling through the darkness, but it was the last thing I wanted to do today. I didn't want that creature to ruin my good mood.

I was also excited to walk through the pack lands covered in Tobias's scent, to have everyone know that he was mine.

Several heads turned to watch as I passed them, but most avoided me just as any good neighbor should. I highly doubted they were friends with Tobias. So, that just made them nosy and irritating.

The city was more crowded than usual as I reached the shops, and the large number of visitors to the city meant I had to be on alert at all times. It was probably why Tobias had been called in so early.

Killian had been talking about testing other alternatives to The Offering. After what

happened with his mother, he didn't want to be responsible for any other woman being put in that same position. She had been chosen as a breeder for the previous king and was raped to produce an heir. It was something no one should ever have to go through or even be worried about. After the war, his first change was to eliminate the option of choosing breeders.

It was a fated mate or a mutual mating. Everything else was forbidden.

After that, Natalie had the idea to invite all willing, unmated wolves to the mating mixers each quarter.

I hadn't believed many would show up, but after fighting side by side with the Lycans, the wolves were more open to attending social gatherings with them.

I was ecstatic that I didn't have to attend any of their mating mixers.

Witches didn't have mates, so I didn't need to waste my time dressing up and mingling with people who didn't want me there.

It would just make everyone uneasy if I were to be there. At least, looking like this, it would.

It wasn't a long trek to the castle and back to my tower. I had been hoping to run into Natalie and Tobias on the way but didn't.

Instead, I was greeted by one pissed-off redhead arguing quietly with Aisha. I could barely hear them mention the word pledge, and I knew Rona was trying to make the council revolt against me since she wanted the selection for the empty seats to be

filled immediately.

The two women stopped talking when they noticed me. Aisha sent me a knowing smirk while Rona scoffed with disgust as she glanced me over. “Well, if it isn’t the talk of the castle. Going out on a date with one man and ditching him for another...how scandalous.” Her fingers tapped against her biceps as she crossed her arms. “Seems your reputation is still intact, Josie. It must be so nice not to care what other people think. You keep going from bed to bed, regardless of what will be said about you the next day.”

I licked my lips with a smile as I tilted my head. “I see green is still not your color. It’s fitting for you, though. Nothing green survives in the heat of Hell, but you’ll find that out for yourself soon enough.”

Aisha’s eyes widened, taking a subtle step away from us but watching on in amusement.

“For someone who just got laid, I’m surprised you’re so bitchy this morning. Was it something I did, or did Tobias already dump you.” Rona’s feigned innocence made my

lip curl in disgust, but she wasn’t making it easy to remain civil. I wanted to light her on

fire and watch her burn. “You don’t really think he would want someone who looks like

you, do you?” “Were you born with your horns upside down, or did your mom just drop

you on your head too many times?” I moved past her, walking in a calm and confident

stride, not wanting her to see that she had any effect on me.

I didn’t bother to listen for her comeback, but I knew she had one.

She would never leave a conversation without the last word. The next time I saw Killian, I would ask his permission to kill her. Even if I had no evidence that she had broken any laws, she needed to go. I tried not to dwell on it for the rest of the day. I couldn't reach Tobias without tracking him down in person while he was working to clear the air, but that was crossing the line. So, I waited patiently until the mating mixer was in full swing downstairs to leave. There was no need for either of us to be at the mixer, and I had hoped for another night alone with Tobias. The night before had been perfect, but it was my turn to tease and taste him. I pulled on my sexiest underwear and a cotton, black three-quarter sleeve dress that left my shoulders exposed and fell to my mid-thigh. He would lose his mind when he saw it on me, and I felt giddy at the idea of him taking it off of me. The kitchen was catering the mating mixer as usual, and I loved going down during these events to steal a serving of finger foods for myself, even though I wasn't participating in the event. The staff didn't seem to mind, but I did receive raised eyebrows this time when I packed enough for four people to ensure Tobias would be satisfied. I had just popped a bacon-wrapped cheese ball in my mouth when one of the servers pushed through the swinging door to refill their tray. His head of brown hair stuck out

to me right away among the crowd, and I stepped to the side as another server opened the door again, allowing me to see him more clearly. He held a water bottle in one hand, the other adjusting his suit jacket as a woman spoke to him very animatedly. She was beautiful, with her caramelcolored hair falling just below her collarbone and flawless skin. Rona's reminder of my appearance popped back into my mind, but my main focus was on why the man who claimed I was his was here.