

## Chapter 6



As soon as you emerge from the forest, your two cats come running towards you. You squeal, as they brush up against your leg, your heart raising with excitement and cuteness overload. “Hiii!” you say as you bend down to pet them. “I’ve missed you so much!” They move over to Mira and sniff her. Mira lets them, but she doesn’t bend down to pet them. “Cute,” she says, looking down at them. “I assume these are the cats you’ve talked about?” You nod as you look at the cats. How rude of them to lose their interest in you so quickly. But it’s okay, it doesn’t take long until they’re back with you again.

After spending a little more time reuniting with your cats, you make your way towards the tea shop. The day is nearing the end, and the sky is darkening. The two of you walk in silence as you take in all the emotions going through you. Longing. Nostalgia. You are home. You walk past familiar houses and farm buildings, greeting your neighbours briefly as you meet them. Then finally, you reach the tea shop. It’s an old-looking house standing at the bottom of a hill.

The bell over the door rings as you open the door. It doesn’t seem too busy in there today, but here are a few patrons drinking tea and eating pastries. There’s a delicious mix of smells: cinnamon, herbal tea, fruit tea, chocolate pastries and in general the familiar scent of home. There’s an unfamiliar girl behind the register. She’s wearing an apron, and her brown hair is slicked back in a ponytail. She greets you with a smile, and you smile back as you walk further into the shop. You walk past the register, intending to walk into the kitchen in the back, when the girl stops you.

“Sorry, that room is for personnel only. If you are looking for the bathroom, it is over there,” she points towards a door at the other end of the shop. You know exactly where the bathroom is of course. You grew up here after all. Who does this girl think she is?

“Oh, no I’m here to see my grandmother,” you say smiling. “But thank you.”

The girl looks at you curiously. “Your grandmother? So you must be Pernille!” she beams at you. “Your grandmother has told me so much about you! She’s very proud of you, you know. I’m Dana, it’s very nice to meet you.”

Damn it, you wanted to dislike this strange girl your grandmother has hired in your stead, but she seems nice. “I haven’t seen you around here before,” you smile, but you remain a bit suspicious. You don’t have the best experience with friends in this village, considering your childhood best friend turned out to be working for the evil king.

She shakes her head. “No, I’m the niece of Eliza Dunnings who lives down the road. I had to move in with her due to some... unfortunate circumstances.” There’s a hint of sadness in her eyes, and you almost feel bad for her.

“I’m sorry to hear that. Can you tell me what happened? Where did you live before?” you ask, mostly because your curious about what happened where.

“Vignette,” her eyes are distant, as if lost in thought. “I don’t want to talk about it, if that’s alright with you. But the whole place is basically just dead. I hope you never have to go there.”

You nod, not wanting to probe any further if she doesn’t want to talk about it. “I understand. Well, it was nice to meet you,” you smile and head into the kitchen.

Inside the kitchen, you see the familiar figure of your grandmother. Her hair was tied up in a neat bun, her glasses are resting on the tip of her nose and her apron is placed over her light blue dress. She’s kneading some dough when you enter, and she turns to you as she hears your footsteps. You beam at her and go straight in for a hug. Her eyes widen in surprise and she hugs you back tightly. “Oh it’s so good to see you,” she pulls back from the hug but keeps her hands on your arms as she takes you in. “Are you doing well? Is the royal life treating you nicely?”

You chuckle. “Yeah, people are nice, but I miss this. I miss you,” you try to blink back the tears forming in your eyes. You look around at all the dough and batter and pastry around the kitchen. “You’re working hard as always, I see.”

“Yes, I have a major order I need to finish by the end of the day.” She finally notices that you’re not alone. “And who’s this?”

“This is Mira. She’s a pain in my ass,” you say, giving Mira a knowing look. Mira smirks.

“Good,” your grandmother says, looking at Mira approvingly. “That means you will not get too used to getting coddled by everyone else.”

Mira laughs. “I like you.” She walks further in, looking at the finished pastries on the counter.

“Do you need any help with your order?” you ask, mostly hoping to spend some quality time with your grandmother and baking like you used to do.

“Oh, it’s alright, I’m sure you have important royal duties to do,” she says dismissively.

“No, please. I want to help.”

And so, the three of you get to making the rest of the baked goods. Well, the two of you. Mira has appointed herself as the taste-tester, so she doesn’t do much. As you bake together, you catch your grandmother up on everything that has happened since you left.

“Do you have time to bake here with me then? I assure you I can manage. Lifting the curse is more important than helping your old grandmother do some baking,” your grandmother fixes you with a stern look.

“Grandmother, we have been travelling all day. We were going to end it here for today anyway.”

“And where do you intend to stay?” she asks, her gaze not wavering.

“Well, I was hoping we could stay at my old room.”

Your grandmother turns back to her baking. “I am sorry, I have turned that into a storage room.”

“No, please tell me your joking!” you say, trying to hide your disappointment. It hasn’t been that long since you left, surely she hasn’t done that already.

Your grandmother laughs. “I am only teasing, dear. Of course you may stay there.”

You nudge her, pretending to be annoyed before you laugh too.

After you finish with all the baked goods you had to make, you drag Mira with you up that familiar hill. You want to show her your favourite resting spot, and soon enough you see the tall tree standing on top of the hill overlooking the ocean. “It’s a shame it’s all cloudy. It’s so pretty when the ocean reflects the stars.” You say thoughtfully as you stare out. Your cats have joined you out on this little trip as well. “Really I wanted to show you the sunset from up here. It’s gorgeous. But it’s too cloudy and now it’s too late anyway.” And it really has gotten dark now. You sit down and lean against the trunk of the tree. Mira sits down next to you, not saying anything. She seems lost in thought too. One of your cats nestle up against Mira and she pets him absentmindedly. Your other cat has found her way into your lap.

You think back on this eventful day. The curse, the people you have met, the poor person trapped in a mutated body. “I’m assuming the tendrils restraining the bird-person was your doing?” Mira nods. “If you could do that, why didn’t you just do it from the start? Before it started attacking Dwite?”

“Because I wanted to see what he’d do if I pushed him,” she responds. That’s probably part of the reason. She is extremely petty and stubborn, and she doesn’t take lightly to getting orders from strangers. Actually, she doesn’t take lightly to getting orders from anyone. But you’re not convinced that’s the whole reason. You turn your head to look at her, urging her to keep talking.

Mira notices you looking at her and sighs. “He didn’t need to see what I can do. Shit, I shouldn’t have used my powers at all,” she says, shaking her head.

“You mean with your curse?” you ask and recall her telling you that she got cursed with these powers and that they would consume and corrupt her the more she uses them.

“So, do you miss this? Do you ever wish you never went out in the first place?” she asks, completely changing the subject. And not very subtly either. You let her.

“Yeah, I do.” You stare out at the ocean again, lost in thought. “It’s all so much, and I miss my grandmother and my cats and the simple life.”

Mira nods, but she doesn’t reply.

“Come on,” you say, lifting your cat from your lap and stand up. Your cat looks up at you, offended that you dared move. If she’s trying to guilt trip you, it’s definitely working. You brush off any grass or dirt from your pants, then reach out a hand to Mira to help her up. “We should head back and get some sleep.”