“Jayce, you weren’t in the woods this evening just to track that demon horde, were you? You had another reason to be there.”

The silence between them was heavy, the only sounds were the soft inhales and exhales of those in the room, and the ticking of a clock on the wall steadily counting off the seconds between her query and his response. Jayce's silvery gaze remained focused on her as he confirmed, "That's correct, Rayne. I was also there to find you."

Rayne's heart raced as the weight of Jayce's words settled around her, suffocating and undeniable. She felt the eyes of the room on her, but her focus remained locked with Jayce's unwavering stare like a moth drawn to a flame.

Gasps filled the room, and Lena leaned forward, her amber eyes narrowing. "Explain."

“I’ll explain what I know for certain, but there’s honestly a lot that we’re still trying to piece together.” Jayce took a deep breath, lacing his fingers together in his lap. “Adrian and I have been gathering information about the demon lord by tracking his minions and their movements. Over the last few months, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of human settlements that have been attacked, which didn’t make much sense to us at the time since we’ve been piecing together the theory that it’s the paranormal sects that are the demon lord’s targets. However, a couple of weeks ago, we found a small group of demons and Shades on the Northern side of Whiskeytown Lake that had three human captives in their camp. Long story short, we managed to free the prisoners and ask them some questions about what happened to their encampment and about their captivity, since that too, is a new development. Their account of the assault on their homes matched some of what Adrian and I had already noted regarding the severity of these attacks.” Jayce paused, turning his attention to Lena. “I can explain more about that in depth with you, but I think it would be insensitive to continue any further into some of what we uncovered with our present company. With your permission, I’ll skip to what’s most relevant about those prisoners we freed.”

Lena nodded emphatically. “Yes, please,” she said, eyeing Quinn and Rayne warily.

“All three prisoners had developed some sort of unexplainable powers,” Jayce refocused on Rayne intently. “Adrian and I believe they were to be taken to the demon lord to help him gain some sort of advantage over the paranormal groups.”

Rayne’s eyes blazed as she pursed her lips together tightly; her jaw muscle formed a visible knot in her cheek that twitched slightly, but she made no other move to respond.

Lena frowned, clearly troubled by the implications of this new development. "But what does this have to do with Rayne? And why were you looking for her?"

Jayce’s expression softened. “I should clarify a bit. I wasn’t looking for Rayne specifically. One of the things we discovered when we questioned those three humans was that Adrian can sense their type of powers. See, when they first mentioned these powers, we were skeptical; so, they gave us a small demonstration of what they could do. Adrian later told me that he had a reaction to the energy that was like magnetism. He had been the one leading us all day before we found them, and I remembered later that he had urged me to move faster for no reason. I’d actually said a few choice words since we seemed to be wandering aimlessly without any dangers around us,” Jayce chuckled at the memory. “But after finding those prisoners, it made sense that he must have been drawn to them without even understanding what was actually happening. He has since been more attuned with those magnetic-type reactions; I’ve been more patient with his sudden changes of direction.”

Lena's sharp gaze flickered between Jayce and Rayne, her alpha instincts on high alert. "What kind of powers are we talking about here?" Her tone was cautious, a reflection of the concern etched on her features.

Jayce exhaled slowly, his gaze never leaving Rayne. "The prisoners displayed abilities that aren’t unlike angelic gifts and seemed to be just as varied; however, the powers are definitely different from our own. It wasn't just enhanced strength or speed; it was something deeper, something more primal. Two of them had elemental gifts, but all three had some form of telepathic abilities. The female even said that the youngest of them, a boy of about 9 or 10 years of age, had healed some of her wounds just by touching them.”

Lena sat back in her seat, her arms crossed over her chest. “Killion, you mentioned a rumor about humans like he’s describing, right? Do you remember anything that you heard that might be helpful?”

Killion’s brow furrowed for a minute or two. “I don’t recall very much since I dismissed it as a joke. I included it in my report that day because I had to, and I thought Lena might get a laugh. The Ozborough Pack would be able to tell you more than we can about it. A couple of their shifters ran into us hunting the borderlands and told us about two humans, one that could control the wind and another that made a puddle freeze over.”

“Do you remember how long ago you heard about them?” Jayce asked.

“A few nights ago,” Killion shrugged. “They didn’t say when they met those humans though. And since I didn’t take it very seriously, I didn’t ask.”

“Thanks, Killion,” Jayce said. “I’ll try following up with the Ozboroughs if we have time.”

“Jayce, you still haven’t explained how any of this relates to Rayne,” Lena said impatiently.

“I think I’m beginning to understand fully,” Rayne said slowly. “I was on the deer path on my way back when I got the feeling I was being watched. I spotted Jayce between the trees, he warned me about the demons and when he told me they were headed to Quinn’s encampment, I did everything I could to get there to warn him. The battle had already started when we got there, Jayce and I ended up fighting off a few demons. And then Quinn was in trouble with a demon on his heels. I just remember screaming and the next thing I knew, the demon had blown up and my whole body was on fire, but I wasn’t being burned by it,” she blurted. Her speech pattern had matched the increasing intensity of the story so that towards the end of her diatribe, words were spilling out so rapidly that she was left breathless at the end of it all. Her cheeks blazed a shade that rivaled her ringlets as she glanced around the room, noting the varying degrees of everyone’s reactions, from slightly confused to downright gob smacked. She pressed her lips together and scooted back on the leather couch, her brow furrowed as though she was lost in thought.

Quinn sat up a little straighter. “So that wasn’t just in my head then? I wasn’t just hysterical or losing it?”

Rayne shook her head, her long red curls brushing her shoulders. “No,” she sighed steadily, “but I have a sinking feeling that I’m going to wish we were both hallucinating.”