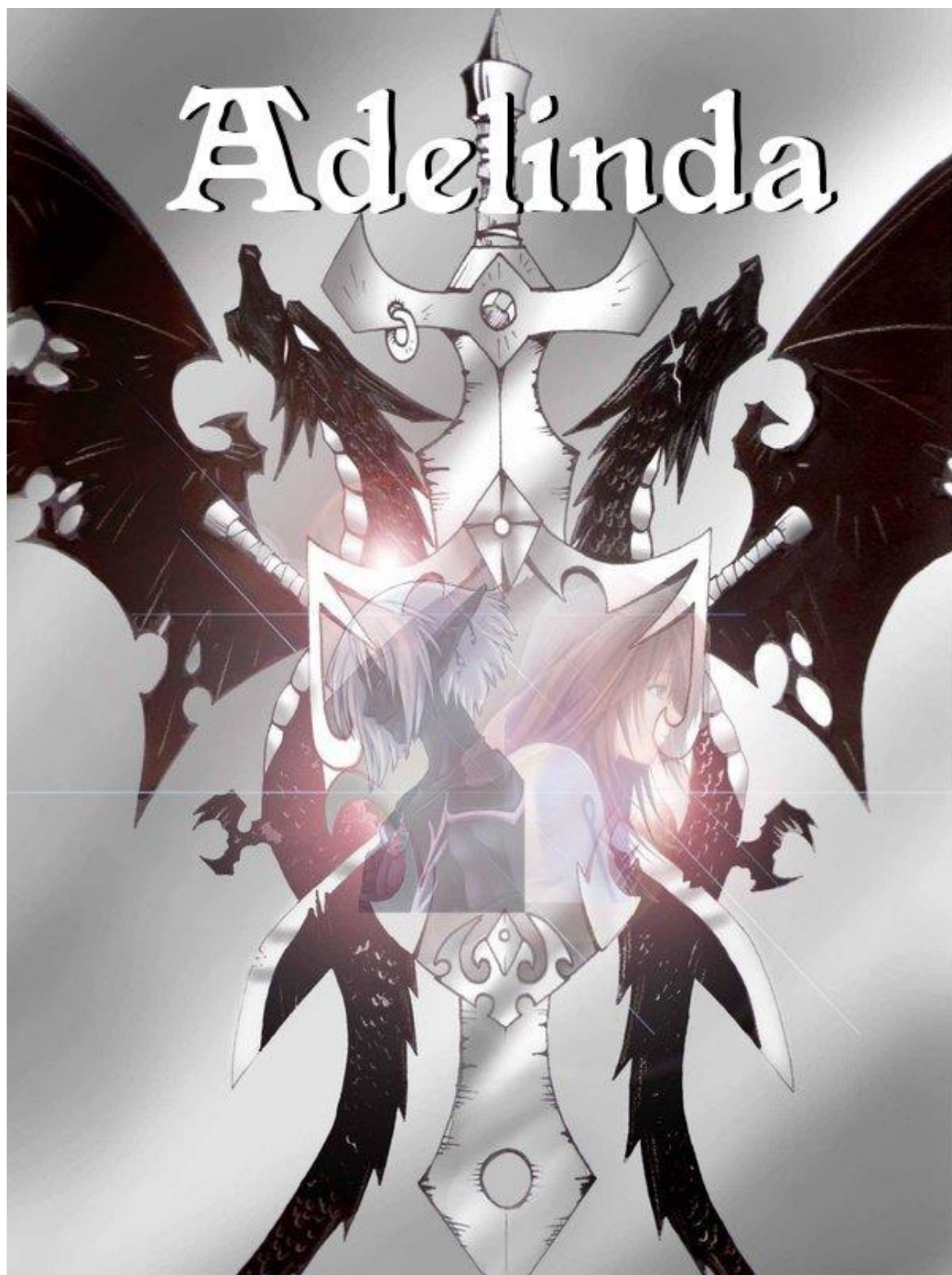


# Adelinda



**FOR MY MOTHER.**

**SHE'S BEEN MY CONSTANT SUPPORT THROUGH  
ALL THESE YEARS AND TO HER  
I OWE EVERYTHING.**

I was seven when I lost everything. My family, my home, all of it was gone. Yet, some would consider me lucky. I didn't remember a thing.

# Chapter 1

SEPTEMBER 12

"Raelyn!"

I almost jumped out of my seat at the sound of my name and quickly hid my phone underneath my school desk. Had one of the teachers caught me texting?

"We have a visitor who just moved here and wants to tour the high school, but the person he was supposed to shadow is out sick today. Would you mind showing him around?" Mrs. Marson, a short woman with wiry brown hair and big glasses, explained to me.

I let out a mental sigh of relief. How stupid of me to think I had been caught. Nobody had ever caught me with my phone out. Nobody had ever caught me doing anything for that matter...

"Yes, Mrs. Marson, of course." I answered, walking forward with a polite smile on my face.

"Thank you, Raelyn." She stepped off to the side so I could get a better look at the kid next to her who was leaning against the door frame.

He was tall, but then again, everybody was tall to me since I was barely over five feet tall. His skin was pale, like that of a red head, but he didn't have all the freckles. His hair was long, for a guy at least. It fell into his eyes but didn't touch his collar. It was short enough to be in dress code and make him look clean cut, but it was long enough to be stylish. It was jet black, but it wasn't the dyed black one usually saw amongst teenagers. It seemed natural, but certain ways the light hit it there almost seemed to be an unnatural hint of blue. His hair hid the only part of him that was out of dress code, his circular spike earrings. His eyes were narrow and uncaring. It was obvious he wasn't thrilled to be here. He wore black jeans with a skin tight black t-shirt. It was plain and simple, but it made a statement. He was relaxed, and his posture was casual but there just seemed to be an aura about him that screamed power and mystery.

"This is Roy." Mrs. Marson explained. "His first day is going to be next week, but we suggested that he come in and shadow so he knows what to expect."

I smiled at Mrs. Marson and turned to Roy who was staring at the wall. "It's nice to meet you. I'm Raelyn Murray, but everybody calls me Rae."

He blinked, and when he opened his eyes again, he was staring at me. He didn't show any emotion on his face, but his eyes were dark and untrusting. He simply gave me a nod, acknowledging I was there, and went back to staring at the wall.

Realizing the awkwardness, Mrs. Marson raised her eyebrows and folded her hands. Before walking off, she said to me, "Well, good luck!"

I nodded slowly. *This is going to be a long day...*

"Rae!" Christian, walking into homeroom five minutes late as usual, called to me. "Who is this?"

"This is Roy. He's my shadow for the day."

Christian shifted the books he was carrying to his left hand and extended his right to Roy. "Hi Roy. I'm Christian. Welcome to Grant High School in the small town of Kissimmee, Florida!"

Roy turned his attention to Christian but kept his arms firmly crossed over his chest.

"Right..." Christian dropped his hand. "Well, if you'll excuse me, I have some homework that is a week late calling my name."

I rolled my eyes. Christian was not the greatest student. He always turned his homework in late, if he even turned it in at all. School was not one of his top priorities. He was more the class clown, always getting himself into trouble. All the teachers hated him, but they never ceased to be amazed when he got perfect scores on all of their tests. At one point, the teachers were so convinced he was cheating that, during one of his tests, they took him into a separate room and watched his every move.

They found no evidence of cheating and he aced the tests. He was probably the smartest kid in the school, other than maybe me, but the fact that he never turned in his homework brought his grades down.

Christian and I were complete opposites, but we were best friends. We were both orphans and we grew up together. We always had each other's backs. He was the only person who really knew me. He was like my brother. As far as everybody else was concerned, we were siblings. Christian had an older brother, Dustin, and when Dustin grew out of the foster care system, he got a job and a house. He then took Christian and me out of the foster care system. According to the paper work, Dustin is my legal guardian, but he doesn't act like it. Sure, he takes care of me, but I'm free to come and go as I please. With us having the same last name and living under the same roof and all, Christian and I tell everybody we're siblings. We looked enough alike for it to be believable. Yet, there was one big difference in our DNA...

I was a freak, a mutant. I didn't know what to classify myself as, but I certainly knew that I didn't fit in with Christian and the rest of the kids who surrounded me in the classroom. Ever since I was little, I could do things others couldn't, like moving an object without even touching it, and I was stronger than most kids. It started when I met Christian. I had been new to the foster care system and some other kids were picking on him. I went over and confronted the kids but they weren't too happy about it. The kid, who seemed to be the instigator of it all, punched me. I didn't cry like most little kids would have. I punched him back and he went flying into the wall across the room, almost twenty yards away. Instead of running away screaming like most witnesses would, Christian thought it was the coolest thing ever. We'd been friends ever since and he was the only one who knew my secret. Not even his brother Dustin knew...

I didn't realize it, but I must have been staring at Christian during my moment of nostalgia, because he looked up from his homework to give me a funny look. "Can I help you?"

"Sorry, I was jus... never mind." I turned to my shadow who was still staring at the wall with his arms folded across his chest as he leaned on the door frame. "You can take my seat next to Christian. I'll pull up a chair."

Without saying a word, Roy shoved off from the doorframe and took a seat in the empty desk next to Christian. I forced myself not to sigh as I walked to the empty classroom next door. I was not known for my people skills, and now I was stuck taking this Roy kid on a tour. Of course, he wasn't going to make it easy either. I had yet to hear him utter a single word. *Why me?*

When I couldn't find an extra chair, I returned and settled for sitting cross-legged on the floor in between the desks of Christian and Roy. I put my elbow on my knee and rested my head on my fist. *How else can this day get worse?*

I really shouldn't have asked, because that's when my heightened sense of sound picked up Jackie's voice, the most popular girl in the class. "I don't know who he is, but he is by far the hottest guy I have ever laid eyes on."

This time I couldn't hold back the sigh. *Wonderful. Now I have Jackie to deal with as well...*

There wasn't a teacher in the school who hated me, but compared to me, Jackie was a total suck up. All the teachers thought she was a perfect little angel, when in truth she was the most ruthless girl in the school. She thought she was so cool because she'd dated every decent looking guy in our grade, and even some in the grade above and below us. She thought that if you didn't dress like a slut, be so outgoing that you're obnoxious, and be obsessed with the latest gossip then you were beneath her. Even if you were all the things listed above, you would still be beneath her. You were just a step up from everybody else. One of these days I would knock her and all of the other preppy girls in her posse off their high horses, but until that special day came, I would smile politely and be as courteous as I could. It was better than getting into a fight and creating a whole lot of unwanted drama.

"What's he doing with Raelyn?" Her whisper drifted to my ears.

Some days were harder than others... Oh why couldn't that special day be today?

In the blink of an eye, Jackie was standing before us. "Hi Rae! Who's your friend?"

I smiled, scrunching my eyes to make it look like I was genuinely pleased that Jackie was talking to me, and answered, "This is Roy. He's my shadow for the day."

"Oh, that's so cool! How did you get picked to have a shadow?"

I wasn't oblivious like most people. Her voice was genuine, but I knew what she was thinking: *I'm so much better than her. How did she get picked and I didn't?*

I shrugged like I was totally blind to the underlying message, and said, "I don't know. Mrs. Marson just called me over."

"Uhuh," Jackie mumbled half-heartedly. As I expected, she immediately turned her attention to Roy. She probably hadn't even heard my response. "So, Roy, where are you from?"

Roy didn't move an inch. If he was gray, I would swear he was a statue. His eyes hadn't even moved to acknowledge that he had been addressed. He had looked at Christian, and even given me a nod, but it was like Jackie was completely invisible to him.

I had to use my hand to cover my gaping mouth. It was obvious Jackie had never been snubbed like that before, because for once she was at a complete loss for words. When I managed to recover, I tried to salvage the situation. I shrugged and told Jackie, "Don't worry. I can't get him to speak either."

"Um, Roy?"

His eyes slid over to where Jackie was standing. Even he couldn't avoid when he was being directly addressed. Jackie resumed her usual conversation starters, "I only asked because you don't look like you're from around here. I know Raelyn was appointed to show you around the school, but if you ever need help finding something, in school or just around town, let me know, and I'll be glad to help you." She looked as if she was going to continue, but she was interrupted by the bell. With a sigh, she sadly walked away to go get her stuff.

Roy had been saved by the bell. That lucky bastard...

~

I slowed in my walk as I realized things around the room had changes slightly. Scientific posters still hung on the walls around the room, but all of the teacher's personal effects were gone. The stuffed frog our science teacher, Mrs. Cerett always kept on her desk was gone, as was the list of classroom rules she had posted on the board our first day of class. A little confused, I quietly took my seat and waited for an explanation.

"Hello class!"

A man who looked to be between his mid and late twenties walked through the door and made his way to the front of the room. He had golden blond hair that was spiked on the top but laid flat on the sides. His eyebrows were dark and he had a firm jaw, but his eyes were bright and he wore a smile.

Christian and I exchanged looks. Who was the new guy? If it was the beginning of the school year, I could understand having a new teacher on staff, but we were already a few weeks into the year. Mrs. Cerett, our original science teacher had been pregnant, but she wasn't due for a little while, otherwise she never would have come to school to begin with. Why bring in a new teacher after school had already been in session for two weeks?

We didn't have to wonder long because he introduced himself right away. "Your original science teacher, Mrs. Cerett, was having complications with her pregnancy. I will be your substitute until she is able to return. My name is Mr. Lioces."

I leaned back in my seat and put my feet up on the supports of the table. *My day just keeps getting more and more interesting...*

Mr. Lioces went around to the front of his desk and plopped down, putting his feet up on the empty student desk in front of him. “Since it’s my first day, we’re going to do a little exercise that has nothing to do with science. I’m going to give you options, and you’re going to guess which ones apply to me. I figured it would make it a little more interesting than me just spending the entire class talking about myself. Did I mention that whoever gets it all right gets a candy bar?” Mr. Lioces reached around his desk and pulled out a supersized candy bar from his drawer.

The corner of my lips turned up into a smile. So far, this guy seemed pretty cool. I caught Christian’s eye who just shrugged. That meant a lot coming from Christian. Christian didn’t like many teachers, so the fact that he didn’t mind Mr. Lioces meant that he was pretty cool.

I was secretly glad that we were focusing on Mr. Lioces and not the rest of the classmates. With me having to be so secretive, I hated having to talk about myself, not to mention that my life wasn’t all that interesting. I had arrived at the orphanage when I was seven, and I had no memory of anything before that. I grew up in foster care with Christian and his brother. Once Dustin took us in, he pulled us out of the violence ridden school we had been stuck in and transferred us to a new school. Once we graduated from there, we came to Grant High School. If the teacher were to ask us to go around and introduce ourselves, there wouldn’t much more for me to talk about since I didn’t know much about who I was or where I had come from.

Mr. Lioces slid off his desk and walked over to the chalk board. He wrote:

FAV COLOR	PET PEEVE	BIRTH CITY	HOBBY	FIRST CAR
Green	Clutter	New York City	Building Models	Pontiac Grand Am
White	Late homework	Boston	Photography	Chevy S-10 Truck
Blue	Tardiness	Philadelphia	Collect Shark Teeth	Ford Explorer

“The words in capital letters are the categories and the ones underneath are your options. We’ll go around the room and each person will pick one from each category that you think describes me. Whoever gets them all right gets the candy bar, but the catch is that I won’t tell you which categories you got right. That would be way too easy.” He winked.

My eyes narrowed at the board. There were over a hundred different ways you could pair the answers together, but there were only thirty kids. Since he wasn’t going to tell us which ones we guessed correct, it would be almost impossible to make any sort of educated guess. Either he knew there was a possibility that nobody would get the candy bar and he would just keep it, or there was a catch to this. We had just met him. Did he really expect us to blindly guess?

Sadly, he started on the opposite side of the room. It hadn’t taken me long to figure out the key to the game, but I wouldn’t be surprised if Christian had also figured it out, and Mr. Lioces would get to Christian before me. *Darn, and I really wanted that candy bar...*

Surprise, surprise, Christian got it right. His favorite color was white and his pet peeve was clutter. He was born in New York. His hobby was collecting shark teeth and his first car was a Chevy Truck.

“Is there a reason why you picked the answers you did, or did you just randomly guess?” Mr. Lioces questioned.

Christian rocked on the back legs of his chair. “When it comes to the few personal affects you have brought to Mrs. Cerett’s room, everything is white. There isn’t a speck of green or blue anywhere. As for your personal pet peeves, I walked in tardy, and five minutes ago I turned in homework that was due last week, but you didn’t say a single word. Everything on your desk is perfect, absolutely no clutter anywhere. Also, there is a New York Yankees ball cap hanging on the coat hanger in the corner of the room and a necklace of shark teeth hanging on the door knob. Lastly, you have a picture of a truck as your computer screensaver.”

"Very good," Mr. Lioces congratulated as he tossed the candy bar to Christian. "I know I said this wasn't science related, but there is something I want you to pull from it. Scientists need to be aware of what's going on. Everything in science begins with an observation. It is a good skill to have when working in the lab."

I didn't get to hear the rest of his explanation because Jackie, who unfortunately sat in front of me, once again turned around and tried to get Roy's attention. "He really should have given you first guess since you're the shadow. But I guess that would be no fun because you would have gotten it right away, wouldn't you Roy?"

When Roy once again remained silent, I spoke up. "Well, he is a new teacher. I don't think he's aware that Grant High School even allows shadows. It's not something most schools do."

Jackie's face contorted in annoyance that I had answered instead of Roy, but it was gone almost immediately. More than likely, she hadn't even realized she made that emotion. Most people were too oblivious to catch the small things that showed what people really thought of you. I, on the other hand, seemed to absorb everything that went on around me. After mentioning it out loud a few times, Christian seemed to pick up on detecting the subtle things that gave away what people were truly thinking. At first he thought I was paranoid, but after pointing it out, he began noticing it too. Now, he was almost as observant as I was. My abilities and heightened senses came natural, but it seemed that, with a little time and training, humans could pick up a few things too. It was the reason Christian and I were able to figure out Mr. Lioces's game so quickly.

When the bell rang and we walked out of class, Christian opened the candy bar and offered it to me. "Want a piece?"

"Sure." I took the piece of candy he held out to me.

"Roy?"

Roy simply held his hand out, denying the candy.

"He actually gave an answer!" I teased.

"But he didn't talk." Christian argued as he put a piece of candy in his mouth.

I waved my hand, dismissing his remark. "Hey. It's a start."

Christian leaned forward so he could look around me at Roy. "Are you mute?"

"Christian! Don't be rude!" I snapped at him.

Christian completely ignored me and continued talking. "All you have to do is nod yes."

If looks could kill, Christian would have been dead on the spot. Roy's glare was ice cold, and it may not have killed Christian, but it was powerful enough to stop him in his tracks, stunned. It was quite scary, and I was thankful I wasn't the one he was glaring at.

I didn't get it at all. Roy didn't react like he had been offended at all. Actually, he seemed more annoyed than anything. Yet, if he hadn't been offended, then why give Christian a look that could bring a man to his knees? Roy was definitely a mystery...

### **\*\*\* Unknown Perspective\*\*\***

"How was your first day of school?" Karexon teased Roy as he walked through the door to their safe house.

"Actually, his first day of school isn't until next week." Kian walked in the door behind Roy, keeping up the light mood.

"Of course you would know, Kian. Or should I call you Mr. Lioces?" Karexon teased.

Kian shook his head as he set his brief case down by the door. "I don't know how long that is going to last. Earth is more advanced than we are. I don't understand half of the things I am supposed to be teaching. Our schools are nothing like these. These students have to take all sorts of different subjects even though they may never use them again in their future."



"Kian, you must not confuse the schools of our society with the academy we went to." Myron answered, joining the conversation as he rounded the corner to enter the small, mostly bare living room they had gathered in. "We went to an academy that specializes in combat. The schools of our society teach all sorts of things just as the schools here do, but as you mentioned, Earth has things that we do not."

"Why is that?" Kian questioned.

Myron leaned against the wall before beginning his explanation. "They are not overall more advanced than us, only in some areas, but there are some areas where we are more advanced than them. It kind of balances itself out. They are more advanced than us in technology. They have developed machines that do incredible things. We don't have that technology because we have no use for them. For example, they have machines that somebody can be hooked up to when they are injured or sick, but we have Healers who can do the same thing."

"They're an arrogant race." Roy finally spoke up as he joined Karexon at the wooden table in the center of the room.

"I take it your day did not go well?" Myron shifted his attention to Roy.

"This is pointless. I can't believe we got assigned to do this. We're supposedly the most elite Riora."

"Warriors. We're supposedly the most elite *Warriors*." Myron corrected. "We may speak English, but a few of our terms don't transfer over."

Roy continued as if he hadn't been interrupted. "Why do we have to deal with these pathetic little humans? This is a job for the wimpy newbies."

"Lose the attitude, Royce." Myron snapped, using Roy's full name.

Knowing arguing was pointless, Roy didn't make another comment. He simply got up and walked to the door, "I'll be outside training."

"I can understand why Roy would be frustrated." Kian spoke up after the door closed behind Roy. "I'm a teacher, but I still couldn't believe the amount of disrespect they showed me and each other. Roy is talented and is used to being treated as such. No doubt he is going through culture shock."

"Yes, but this will be a good challenge for him. Although he is not as new to this team as you are, Kian, he needs to understand that a good Warrior must be able to adapt to unfamiliar situations. Roy has always had a bit of an attitude, but if he continues at this rate, we will never be able to gather the required information, and if we do not act quickly, our only hope will be snatched from us."

"What is so special about this particular Warrior?" Karexon speculated.

Myron shrugged. "I'm not sure, but our job is not to question orders. It is to follow them."

Karexon nodded in understanding and decided to drop the questions.

Myron shifted his attention to Kian. "We know how Roy's day went, but how was yours?"

"I discovered one person of interest. His name is Christian Murray. He was the only one who was able to figure out my puzzle without purely guessing. According to his file, his IQ level is over 140, which is extremely high according to human standards."

"He is definitely somebody to keep an eye on." Karexon commented.

"Agreed, but keep your eye open for any other persons of interest. I don't want us to be so focused on one possibility that we completely miss other clues." Myron reminded.

"Understood."

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

"What do you make of Roy?" Christian asked as he unlocked the door to our house and let us in.

"I don't know." I shrugged as we took off our shoes. "He's different."

"He's weird!" Christian corrected as he tossed his book bag on the floor and took a seat on the couch.

"Jackie doesn't seem to think so." I commented as I joined him on the couch.

Christian turned and looked back at me, his eye brows raised in utter amazement. "What did you just say?"

I smiled. "I mean, I don't think he's weird. I just think he's interesting."

Christian's expression of amazement turned to suspicion as he narrowed his eyes at me. "You think he's cute."

I put my hands on my hips. "You're right, he is cute, but that wasn't my point. I just feel like there's more to him than the cold glares he gives to anybody who looks at him."

"No, you think his mysterious aura is sexy." Christian teased.

I raised my eye brows, challenging him. "You want to fight with me?"

"No," He scrunched in on himself. "I'd prefer not to die today, thank you."

I sighed. "Well that's no fun..."

Christian rolled his eyes. "I'm sorry my desire to stay alive ruins your day."

I laughed. "Does this mean you're not going to watch me train today?"

He raised one eyebrow at me, looking at me like I had asked a stupid question, "Since when have I ever missed a day of your training? Besides, what would you do if I wasn't there when you passed out from exhaustion?"

"It's not like you actually help me when I do pass out." I argued.

"Well, when most people pass out from exhaustion, they're out of commission for a couple of days. Yet, every day you train until you drop. What do you expect me to do other than just wait for you to get back up?"

I shrugged. He had a point.

"Why do you train so hard?" Christian asked, suddenly turning serious.

I took a deep breath. "Growing up in a foster home, you and I both know what it feels like when you work as hard as you can for something, and you don't make the cut just because the other person was rich or knew somebody important. I don't ever want to get somewhere just because I'm not human. I want to have worked for it."

"But what are you working for?" Christian questioned.

I took a minute, trying to figure out how to answer. "I'm working towards being normal. The American dream is that through hard work, you can be successful in life. With my abilities, I could be anything I wanted just by lifting my finger. I don't ever want to forget that feeling of being beaten by somebody who was rich or important. Training is my way of reminding myself that I need to work hard, so when I finally figure out what I want to do, I will know that I worked hard to get there, and I didn't get it just because of my abilities."

Christian crossed his arms over his chest, glaring at me. "Why do you always have to be so noble?"

I laughed and took hold of his ear. "Come on, doofus."

# Chapter 2

SEPTEMBER 19

*Why does no school ever make good lunch food?* I mentally complained as I pushed the food around on my plate. However, I stopped when I felt somebody staring at me. Without moving, I let my eyes drift around the room, and found that instead of another student staring at me, it was the janitor. He was young compared to many of the other janitors that worked at the school, and had died green hair that clashed with his blue janitor outfit. However, as soon as I had noticed him staring, he had immediately gone back to emptying one of the trash bins.

My thoughts were pulled from the janitor when Roy sat down across from me at the lunch table, leaving me stunned. It was his first official day of school and, as I had expected, he hadn't uttered a single word to anybody. So far he had gone from class to class minding his own business, even though many of the girls had tried to strike up a conversation with him. It seemed like the more he blew them off, the more and more interested they became in him. He had spent all of the morning by himself. I had just assumed that he would spend lunch alone too.

"Roy!" Christian exclaimed when he reached our lunch table with a tray of food in hand and took a seat. He was just as much surprised as I was, if not more so, to see Roy sitting with us.

"I trust your day has been going smoothly?" I asked Roy. He looked up at me from his food for a minute and then went back to eating. Well, he hadn't glared at me so I took it as a yes.

We were interrupted by a girl who was a grade below us and whose name escaped me at the moment, walking over. "Hey, do you mind if I sit with you guys?"

As usual, Roy didn't even twitch. He didn't acknowledge that he had even been spoken to. However, this girl seemed to be expecting it. She took his silence as saying that he didn't object, and sat down, not even bothering to take Christian and I into consideration. Almost immediately she started talking away.

"I heard that you were new here, so I just wanted to come introduce myself. My name is Kristen and I'm on student council here. I know several people have probably said this to you already, but on behalf of the entire student body, I wanted to welcome you to Grant High School. If you ever have any questions, feel free to stop me and ask. Even if you don't have any questions, feel free to just say hi. I'm always up for making new friends. You can also come to me if you're struggling with any of your classes. Since I'm in advanced placement classes, I also offering tutoring for everybody else."

I couldn't help smiling to myself. Most girls had tried to get him to talk by asking him questions about himself. This girl wasn't even bothering to ask questions. She was talking about herself. I gave her credit. Her words sounded natural, but the fact that she didn't pause even once made me think she was talking from memory. She had rehearsed this.

"Kristen!"

The girl stopped talking when her name was called by a group of girls standing a little ways off. They were huddled together, and, judging by their giggles, I'd say they were dying to quiz their friend on her thoughts of Roy. With a sigh the girl stood up to walk away, "Sorry, I have to go. It was nice talking to you!"

When the girl was out of hearing range, Christian stood up. "She's finally gone! Thank the universe. Now, if you'll excuse me, I believe there is another plate at the food counter calling my name."

I shook my head as he walked away. That boy's stomach was like a bottomless pit. It never ceased to amaze me how much he could eat. Yet, I had to agree with him. I didn't know how much longer I would have been able to handle her pointless chatter.

"How many people know you're two faced?"

I jumped about five feet in the air, banging my knees on the table in the process. It was a voice I'd never heard before. It was deep and rough, but it seemed to ring with power and mystery. It fit Roy perfectly.

I forced myself to get over the initial shock and focus on what he had said. I sighed, and poked at the food on my plate. "Christian is the only one who knows what I truly think about girls like her, and apparently you do to. I don't mean to be two-faced, really. Yet, I'm not like you. I can't snub somebody without creating a bunch of drama. The girls here think of you as a challenge. If I did half the things you did, I would have every girl in the school hating me. It's not that I care if they hate me. I just find it less stressful if they don't." I paused thinking of what being two-faced really meant. "Then again, it's not like I'm pretending to be their best friend who absolutely adores them, and then turning around and backstabbing them. If somebody bothers me, I just hold my tongue and deal with it."

Roy didn't respond. He just returned to eating his food, staring at nothing in particular.

"Since I have you talking for once," I began hesitantly, unsure of how Roy would react. "May I ask why you remain so quiet?"

Roy didn't look up, and when he didn't answer right away, I began to believe that he wasn't going to answer. I was about to go back to my food when Roy spoke, "I don't like answering stupid questions. Actually, I don't like dealing with pathetic people in general."

I was left stunned while Roy went back to eating. My original assumption of him not wanting to be here had been correct, but I had just thought he was like every other kid who didn't want to be here. It was school. Who actually wanted to be here? Yet, there was more than that. He didn't want to be here because he thought he was better than everybody. He thought we were "pathetic". I wasn't a big fan of most of the people in the school. To be blunt, most of them annoyed me. I knew I would never be "normal," but I had spent most of my life wishing I could be on equal footing with everybody. I just wanted to be like everybody else, and here Roy thought he was above us all.

What surprised me the most was just how much Roy's comment had bothered me. I had thought that there might have been more to him than his slick appearance, but I had been wrong. He was just like all the other arrogant guys who thought they were Mr. Cool.

I had the sudden urge to punch him, but by this time Christian had returned. He seemed to notice the tense atmosphere and sat down slowly and cautiously, as if any sudden movement might cause a bomb to go off.

The rest of lunch was filled with awkward silence, and when that bell finally rang, I practically bolted from the lunch room.

~

"So, what was up with you and Roy at lunch today?" Christian asked when we got home from school and I had picked up my training. He tried to make the comment seem like a stray thought, but I could tell he had been begging to ask the question all day.

I pulled the throwing knives from the target that was set up deep in the woods behind our house and walked back to the throwing line forty yards away. As I slid them back into their holster, I spoke, "Roy spoke to me for the first time."

"Really? So he isn't mute!"

"No, he's just arrogant." I replied with a slight sting in my voice as I threw the first knife.

"What?"

"He thinks he's too good for everybody there. That's why he doesn't talk to anybody." I explained, letting the second knife fly.

"You never cease to amaze me." Christian commented.

His change in subject made me pause before throwing the third knife. "What?"

"The average distance for knife throwing is twenty yards, thirty yards if you're really good. Yet, you're throwing from forty yards away and you get a dead bull's eye every time!"

I rolled my eyes at him, "Yes, but I'm not your average knife thrower am I?"

"No, but you'd think after all these years I would get used to all the different things you can do, but I'm always surprised every time I see you do them."

"Well, you must have gotten at least slightly used to it because you used to absolutely flip every time I did something unusual."

He laughed and then fell silent so I went back to throwing the knives. A minute later he resumed our original conversation. "Roy doesn't look like he'd be the kind of person to pull the Mr. Cool act."

"What do you mean?" I asked as I walked to retrieve the knives once again.

"Usually the guys who think that they're better than everybody else act like it. They're obnoxious and make rude comments. They'll make sure that you know you're beneath them. They're also usually pretty big with the girls. Sure Roy already has a pretty big fan club, but he doesn't give them the time of day, and it's not like he fits any of the other usual characteristics."

I put my hands on my hips and raised my eye brows at him. "Do you realize how stereotypical you're being?"

He smiled, realizing I had a point, but continued to argue. "I'm just making an observation."

"Okay," I agreed, "But I specifically remember you calling Roy weird. Now you intend to defend him?"

"He sat with us at lunch today, and most people consider us outsiders." Christian reasoned. "I think your original assumption was right. There is more to him than meets the eye."

"Fine." I agreed. "I won't criticize him just yet. We'll wait to see how things play out."

Christian smiled. "You got it."

~

## ***OCTOBER 1***

School had always annoyed me. I found it to be a complete waste of my time. It wasn't like I was going to use any of this in my future career. However, unlike Christian, I couldn't afford to just ace all the tests. As long as I paid attention in class, I never had to study for any of the tests. I could get every single question right without having even opened the text book, but that was just it. I couldn't afford to have the teachers watching my every move, like they did Christian. I purposely missed questions and didn't raise my hand, just so I wouldn't draw attention to myself. I was just your average student who got average grades.

I had gotten to the point where I almost couldn't stand to even be around Roy. He constantly had girls following him with drool hanging out of their mouths. I wanted nothing more than to slap them upside the head and yell at them to get a life. Yet, what bothered me the most was that my original assumption was right. It was hard to spot, but I could see it now that I was looking for it. I gave Roy credit. He wore a better mask than I did, but it was the little things that gave him away. He definitely thought he was Mr. Cool. He had an attitude that said *I'm too good for this*.

What made things worse was that Christian actually seemed to get along with him. Roy still didn't talk much. Actually, Christian and I were the only ones who had ever heard him speak, but he really seemed to be interested in Christian's life and how he grew up being an orphan. Had I been the jealous type, I would have made an off-hand comment about how I was also an orphan just to get his attention, but that was just it. I wasn't jealous. Christian could have Roy. I wanted nothing to do with him.

Mr. Lioces, the other newbie, also seemed to be quite popular. His teaching style was extremely different from what we were used to, but it was fun. He quickly made his way up to the favorite teacher spot for many students. Even those who absolutely hated school couldn't find a reason to dislike Mr. Lioces. A lot of people were going to be sad when Mrs. Cerett got back from maternity leave. Speaking of Mrs. Cerett...

~

"Oh sorry." Somebody apologized as they bumped into me. "Raelyn?"

I'd been walking around the mall, not really paying attention to where I was going. I was more focused on the sound reverberations that bounced around on the walls, created by the people walking around. It was a way for me to practice using my hearing, but most of the time I used it more of a stress reliever. I had to use all of my focus to decipher the sounds I heard and it prevented me from thinking of anything else. Yet, the sound of my name made me look up. "Mrs. Cerett?"

"How are you?"

I was having trouble bringing my mind from the sound reverberations to the conversation in front of me, so I simply gave the reply of habit, "I'm good. How are you?"

"I'm doing well, thank you."

I finally managed to gather myself but only ended up confused. Mrs. Cerett was standing in front of me and she was still pregnant. "Mrs. Cerett, if you don't mind me asking, why are you on maternity leave when you're still pregnant?"

Her lips parted slightly and her eyes widened, almost as if she had said something she hadn't meant to. She recovered almost immediately but it was too late. It had been subtle, but I had noticed the stunned look on her face. I found myself questioning the excuse she gave me, "I was having complications so the school told me I could go on leave early."

"I hope everything is okay?" I went along with it.

"Yes, thank you for asking. However, I must be going. It was nice running into you, Raelyn."

I gave her a polite nod before watching her walk away. Yet, it was a little fast to be considered casual walking. Either she was late for something, or she wanted to get away from me as fast as possible. Something was definitely up. I needed to find Christian...

~

"Aren't you jumping to conclusions?" Christian commented after I told him about my encounter with Mrs. Cerett.

"I haven't made any conclusions yet." I argued as I put my pencil down, realizing that I wouldn't be getting any homework done at this point. "I'm simply stating something that seems odd to me and asking for your opinion on it."

Christian, who didn't even bother to bring books home with him and had removed the word homework from his vocabulary, stopped to consider what I said about Mrs. Cerett. "Do you think it's possible that she made that expression because it only just then occurred to her that she had forgotten something? What if, in the course of your conversation, she realized she had completely forgotten about a meeting and was rushing to get to it?"

I sighed. He had a point, as usual, but something still seemed off. If she had been running late for something, why would she have stopped as if she were going to start a conversation with me?

"Speaking of observations and conclusions," Christian switched the subject, "What did you ever decide about Roy?"

I snorted. Christian knew my thoughts on Roy. He was asking just to bug me.

"Come on, he's not as bad as you think he is." Christian persisted.

"Oh, is that why almost all the guys in the school hate him?" I argued.

"They're just jealous because Roy actually has a fan club."

I looked up from the homework I had been working on to really look at Christian. We almost never argued. If we did, it was only a few minutes before we came to some sort of compromise. Yet, this time Christian seemed pretty adamant about what he was talking about. "You seem to think pretty highly of Roy."

Christian shrugged, "So he's a little cold, and more than just a little proud, but he's nice once you get to know him."

"How well do you know him?" I challenged. "What's his favorite color? What kind of music does he listen to? What's his favorite subject? What does he like to do? Do you know anything about him?"

"So he doesn't like to talk about himself." Christian continued to debate with me. "You don't either. If you haven't noticed, you seem to avoid the same questions when anybody else asks you."

"I have good reason to be guarded." I snapped at him.

"Rae, I understand that." Christian tried to be reasonable. "Well, maybe I don't understand it fully but I get the gist of it. I keep your secret, and I worry about somebody finding out about you. I can't imagine the kind of worry you live with every day. All I'm saying is that he might have a good reason to be guarded too."

I sighed. "You're right. I'm sorry."

"Wait, can you say that again?" Christian teased as he pulled out his phone and turned on the voice recorder.

"Nope." I slapped the phone out of his hand, "Too late."

He turned around in his chair at the table to look at his phone lying on the other side of the room. "Go get it." He pouted.

"Why would I do that?"

"You're the one who hit it over there!"

"So?" I raised my eyebrows at him.

He scrunched his face up and made his voice like a little kid's. "You're so annoying."

I couldn't help but laugh. That was one of the things I liked most about Christian. Despite how I often felt like a freak, Christian had a way of making me feel like I was just a normal teenage girl.

I looked around the room, quickly making sure that Dustin was nowhere to be found, and stretched out my hand in the direction of his phone. Closing my eyes, I focused on the phone and my hand alone, putting all other things from my mind. I could feel the energy running through me. I once heard somebody call this feeling the unbendable arm. Even when using sheer strength to keep your arm straight, somebody who is stronger than you will be able to bend your arm. However, if you imagined a line running through your arm and continuing straight, pointing from your fingertips, the other person would only be able to bend your arm slightly, if at all. I imaged that the same invisible line attaching itself to the phone and becoming shorter and shorter until the phone was eventually at my feet. It was hard work. I could only get the phone to move an inch at a time since it was so far away, but as it got closer, I could move it farther and farther. When it eventually came to my feet, I lifted my hand in the air like I was playing with a yoyo. The phone was the actual yoyo, the invisible line in my arm being the string of the yoyo that would be attached to my finger. I smiled when the phone popped into the air, but it didn't come as far up as I had expected. Christian had to almost jump out of his seat to catch it before it fell to the ground again.

"You didn't screw anything up did you?" He frowned at his phone.

"Thank you very much Rae for getting my phone. Oh, no problem Christian." I imitated.

"Well how am I supposed to know what kind of side effects that telekinesis stuff might have on my phone?"

"It's not telekinesis, not like you're thinking at least. I'm using my energy as a string to move it. I can't just use my mind and stare at it."

"Telekinesis, energy, what's the difference?"

I sighed and put my head on the table. "You're hopeless."



# Chapter 3

*OCTOBER 2*

Christian had a point about Mrs. Cerett, but I was still curious as to why she went on leave early. I asked some of the teachers, but they gave me the vague answer Mrs. Cerett had. She was having complications and left early, but everything was better now. Nobody seemed to know what the complications had been. I also asked about Mr. Lioces. Usually when a teacher went on maternity leave, the teacher who was going to substitute came in and was introduced to the class before the original teacher left. Mr. Lioces seemed to have popped up out of nowhere.

"I'll catch up to you later." I told Christian after school one day, knowing that if I told him where I was going, he was sure to make some smart comment.

"Okay, see you later!" He called as he walked away.

When Christian was out of sight, I doubled back and headed for Mr. Lioces's room. I was about to knock on his office door, but I stopped when I heard voices. It sounded like Roy was talking to Mr. Lioces, but they were speaking in a language I didn't recognize. However, the conversation didn't sound pleasant. Their voices weren't exactly raised, but they were tense, like they were trying to avoid going into a full blown argument.

Not wanting to interrupt, I walked away, but I was left with a lot of questions. Roy may not have told anybody where he was from, but Mr. Lioces said he had spent all of his life in the United States. Yes it was possible to learn a foreign language without living in that country, but it was almost impossible to become truly fluent without going someplace where that language is spoken. If I didn't know any better, I'd say that whatever language they were speaking was their first language.

I decided not to mention any of this to Christian. He seemed to have taken a liking to Roy, and for Christian to get along with anybody other than me was pretty rare. Yet, it was hard keeping it from him. Christian and I had always told each other everything. I'd be sitting on the couch thinking about what I overheard between Roy and Mr. Lioces and I would go to make a comment to Christian or ask for his opinion, and I would have to catch myself. Without Christian to keep me thinking rationally, my curiosity turned into suspicion, and I decided to go back to Mr. Lioces's room, but I would do it when he wasn't there.

~

I got my first chance the next day after school. Mr. Lioces had gone to a meeting, but he had left his door open for student who had stayed a few minutes late finishing up a test. When the student turned in her test and walked out, I managed to stick my foot in the door before it was able to close all the way. Making sure no teachers were around, I slipped into his room.

I started at his desk, going through everything he had. There were pictures of places that he told us he had been to, but no pictures of family. The computer didn't have anything other than school stuff on it, but I hadn't expected it to. The teachers were very limited as to what they could keep on the school computers. I went through his filing cabinets next. The teachers were required to keep a copy of their teaching certification with them in case there was a surprise inspection. I figured that might give me some information on him.

However, there was absolutely nothing. I went through everything and the only thing I managed to find were the answers to our upcoming test. I couldn't find anything about him at all. I wasn't looking for anything incriminating. I just wanted to know more about him in general, but there wasn't even that

much. I was making sure everything was back in its place and getting ready to leave when Mr. Lioces walked in the door.

"Raelyn! What are you doing in here?"

"I'm sorry." I quickly apologized, scrambling for some excuse. "I was just turning in some of Christian's late work."

Mr. Lioces smiled. "He's really smart. I just don't get why he doesn't do his homework."

I smiled too but it wasn't for the same reason Mr. Lioces had. I was smiling because he had believed me. The best lies were always half-truths. They were vague enough so that if people started asking questions you had room to work with, but they were believable enough, such as Christian turning in late work, that most people didn't ask questions.

"I've given up trying to find an answer to that question." I replied, shrugging my shoulders, and opened the door. "I'll see you tomorrow Mr. Lioces."

He gave a curt nod in response and held the door for me. Yet, when he had taken the door, his hand had brushed mine. I avoided contact with people for a reason. When people came into contact with my skin, they could often feel the power and energy that flowed through me. They didn't know what it was, but it made them feel funny and they often gave me strange looks. This time, it was I who got the funny feeling. His skin had only brushed mine, but it gave me an electrifying feeling. Unexpectedly, it was painful. It felt like somebody had taken a nail and shoved it through the back of my skull.

"Raelyn, are you okay?"

"What? Yeah, I'm fine." I quickly told him before walking out. I didn't make it far. The nail felt like it was being driven in further and further. The pain was making me dizzy, and I couldn't walk straight. The lights hurt my eyes, and the echo of my footsteps sounded like somebody was blowing an air horn in my ear. I kept one eye open as I walked forward, the other closed tight against the pain.

"Raelyn?"

I struggled to look out at the sound of what seemed like somebody screaming in my ear. I was greeted by the green haired school janitor. He was very shy and didn't talk to the students as many of the janitors did. I only knew his name was Colton because of the nametag he wore. However, he talked to me now.

"Are you okay?" He looked down at me compassionately.

"Uh...." I tried to get myself to think straight enough to give a response. "Migraine."

"Well, I hope you feel better."

I nodded and did my best not to run away from him, the pain getting worse the further I went. I made it to the mini hallway that led to the girls bathroom before collapsing in pain and passing out.

*"Close your eyes and hold out your hands." He told me, looking down at me with a smile. I did as I was told, trying to hold still. I'd always loved surprises, especially when it was Dakim giving the surprise. He was the coolest thing ever. I was so proud to call him my brother.*

*"Okay, you can open them."*

*I opened my eyes to see a little origami bird sitting in my hands. "Oh, that's so cool!"*

*"Watch this." He bent forward over the bird and whispered to it, "Fly."*

*It was like the bird had come to life. The origami bird began to flap its wings and took off, flying around in one spot. "How did you do that?!" I exclaimed.*

*Dakim smiled and plucked the bird from the air, causing it to be still once more. He then proceeded to unfold the origami. "Watch closely, okay?"*

*I nodded and watched with excitement as he showed me how to fold the simple piece of paper into the complex bird that was origami. "You can write a letter and fold it into this bird. If you write the name of the person you want to send it to on the wing and put your energy, called Miutho, into it, it will fly until it reaches its destination or is destroyed. If you can master this, we can talk even if I'm away on a job."*

*"But I thought you couldn't get things when you were on jobs because it might jeopardize you and your comrades." I reminded him.*

*"This," he held out the bird for me to see, "Is something special that only members of our family can do. I will know immediately if somebody has tried to copy one of these birds, therefore it won't put us in jeopardy."*

*With a huge grin on my five year old face, I took the bird from him, closed my eyes, and whispered on the bird, "Fly." I opened my eyes to find, to my disappointment, that the bird hadn't moved. I frowned, but Dakim burst out laughing. After a few more tries and a little guidance from Dakim, I managed to get the bird into the air.*

*"Yeah! Now when you go on out on jobs, it will be like you're still here!"*

*"Rae, look at me."*

*I looked at him expectantly but my face dropped when I realized Dakim had turned serious. "The jobs I go on are dangerous and there is always the possibility that I won't make it back from one of the jobs I go on. I want you to know that, no matter what happens, I will never truly leave you. When you see one of these birds, I want you to remember that. Okay?"*

*"Okay big brother!"*

~

*"Hello, Luke." My mom didn't look up from the dishes she was washing when the door opened.*

*"Hello Mrs. Adelinda." Luke responded as he flipped his red hair out of his eyes. He went over to where I was sitting at the table practicing the origami bird and tousled my hair, just like Dakim always did, "Hey, squirt."*

*I went to swat his hand away, but he pulled away out of reach. He was Dakim's best friend and had picked up quite a few tricks from him. I didn't have a chance at hitting him, but it didn't stop me from yelling at him. "Why do you and Dakim always do that?"*

*He squatted down, his green eyes looking directly at me, and gave me a devious smile, "Because we can."*

~

*"Mommy, what's going on?" I cried as she picked me up in her arms, and we went upstairs.*

*"Hush, Raelyn, don't worry." She set me down on the ground and then folded her hands, closing her eyes. She sat there unmoving while the sounds from downstairs grew louder. Her eye brows knitted together at the sound of a wail that came from my father, but otherwise kept her focus.*

*I began to cringe at the sound of footsteps on the stairwell, but just then, my mom opened her eyes, the rims of her eyelids filled with tears. "I love you Raelyn."*

*Before I could do anything, my mother had pressed her hand to my forehead and everything went black...*

### **\*\*\* Christian \*\***

Christian walked down the hallway, turning his head left and right, hoping to catch a glimpse of Rae. She had said she would catch up with him later, but it had been almost an hour, and he wanted to go home. *Where is she?*

He froze when he happened to see Rae sitting in the hallway that led to the girl's restroom. He was a little hesitant to enter, but she was sitting on the floor with her knees to her chest and her head buried in her arms. He almost didn't recognize her. Not only was she a complete mess, but somehow her hair was a darker shade of brown and there were blue highlights.

"Rae!" He went over and got down on his knees next to her. She lifted her head to look at him, and for the first time in a long time, he saw that she was crying. Rae was always tough, never letting anything get to her. For tears to be in her eyes, something had to be seriously wrong. "What happened?"

"I'm not a freak."

Christian had to pause a minute before responding. That hadn't been what he had expecting. "What?"

"I finally remembered my past."

Christian had to take a double look at Raelyn. She wasn't crying tears of happiness. "Isn't that supposed to be a good thing?"

She bit her lip, looking anywhere but directly at Christian, trying to get control of herself. "My older brother is a mass murderer. Then, the families of all the people he killed took revenge by coming after our parents. My father was killed by them, and I was spared only because my mom used all of her energy, which apparently is called Miutho, to send me here to earth, essentially killing herself."

Not being able to comprehend in the slightest what she was telling him, he simply pulled her into a hug where she started crying all over again.

~

#### *OCTOBER 4*

"Raelyn! Stop hogging the bathroom! You've been in there forever!"

I ignored Christian at the door and continued to stare in the mirror. When my mom had sent me to Earth, she had concealed any traits of mine that might have revealed who I really was. Yet, it seemed that now the seal had been broken. I could conceal the tribal dragon tattoo that had appeared in between my shoulder blades on my back, I could dye my hair to a color that was close to what it had been before or at least hide the highlights by pulling my hair back into a ponytail, and I could even get colored contacts to hide the startling shade of blue my eyes had become, the same shade as the blue in my hair. However, I couldn't conceal that, what used to be a jolt only when I came into skin contact with somebody, had turned into a jolt if the person was just in the vicinity of me. My power had increased at least ten-fold.

"Finally!" Christian exclaimed when I eventually opened the door to the bathroom. However, his attitude changed when he saw my solemn expression. "What's up?"

"Christian, this isn't dye." I held out some of my blue highlights for him to see. "I've washed my hair again and again and it won't come out. My eyes are a completely different color. I can't go to school like this!"

"Rae, what if this is permanent? Are you just going to drop out of school altogether?"

I sighed. "No, if it's permanent then I'll figure out something else to do. I just don't want to go to school today. Ever since yesterday I've felt different, more powerful. I'm too scared to even train, but what I'm feeling now, it's totally different. I have this absolutely horrible feeling, and I don't even know how to being to describe it."

He took a deep breath. "It's okay, I understand. You've been through a lot. You should take the day to rest."

I shook my head, "How can you say it is okay?"

The corner of his lips turned up into a smile as he placed his hands on my shoulders. "We've been through everything together. Every time you discover something new about yourself, we've gotten

through it together. This may be a little more extreme than some of your other discoveries, but it doesn't mean that we won't be able to work through it just like every other time."

"Christian... Thank you."

**\*\*\* Christian \*\*\***

Christian stopped short of the doorway to Mr. Lioces's room. It could have been a coincidence that it was when Rae came into contact with him that all this began. Yet, there were enough coincidences surrounding Mr. Lioces already.

"Is something wrong, Christian?" Mr. Lioces questioned, noticing that Christian was standing outside the door.

"No." Christian mumbled and took his seat.

He was never one to pay attention in class, but years of training with Rae had taught him how to multi-task. He could absorb the information being taught in class while still doing what he wanted to do. Yet, today, he wasn't even able to focus on the lesson. He was too busy watching Mr. Lioces for any signs of abnormalities, but it was hard because he wasn't exactly sure what he was looking for. Rae was better at spotting things than he was.

"Christian, can I talk to you for a minute?" Mr. Lioces asked after the bell had rung and everybody was leaving.

Christian faltered a step at the request, but otherwise kept a straight face as he walked back to where Mr. Lioces was perched on his desk. "Yeah?"

"Are you okay? You seemed a little out of it in class today... well, more than usual at least."

Usually, Christian would have smiled at a remark like that, but he was too uptight, too tense. Instead, he stuck to Rae's useful trick of telling half-truths when lies were needed. "I'm just worried about Rae."

"Yes, she didn't seem too well when she stopped by to drop off some of your late homework." Mr. Lioces commented.

Christian smiled to himself. Of course she would use that as an excuse. "She will be okay. She just has a migraine."

"Are you sure that is the only thing?" Mr. Lioces commented. "She looked more like how a human would react after getting hit with Miutho."

Christian's heart skipped a beat. Miutho. It was what Raelyn had called the energy that ran through her. He remembered the first time he'd been hit by one of Raelyn's energy attacks in their training sessions. It hadn't been pretty. Fortunately for him, Rae hadn't been as powerful then as she was now.

Christian narrowed his eyes at Mr. Lioces. "How do you know about Miutho?"

"I know about it, because I possess it, and so does Roy. We know you do too. We were sent here to find you."

"Whoa," Christian put his hands in the air like somebody was pointing a gun at him, and stepped backwards, "You have the wrong guy."

"Look, Christian, you don't have to be scared. We're here to help you." Mr. Lioces walked forward, extending his hand to Christian.

"I swear, I'm perfectly human," Christian insisted.

"What?" Mr. Lioces snapped, obviously taken by surprise. "That's not possible. You are observant, talented, and unlike any human here. I've watched you ever since I came here. You can pick up on things nobody else can. You fit the description of a Warrior perfectly. The only other way you could possess those traits is if you grew up with..." Dawning came over his face. "It's Raelyn."

"Look, you're insane, so I'm just going to leave now." Christian turned, hoping that the subject would just be dropped and he could walk out. He had no idea who this Mr. Lioces guy was, but he wasn't about to give up Rae's secret just because he seemed to know a little more than most people.

Christian jumped five feet in the air when Roy materialized out of nowhere. "I came to warn you that we've picked up some disturbances in the dimension, but it seems you have already taken precautions." Roy commented, looking Christian up and down.

"No, we were wrong. Christian isn't who we're looking for. It's Raelyn."

"Impossible. Christian is the one who has beaten all of your challenges during class and he has the IQ to support it. Raelyn doesn't even have a perfect GPA."

"Think about it, Roy. When I did the first challenge, I didn't get through the entire room, meaning I never got to Raelyn. After that, I started focusing on Christian, not even giving Raelyn a chance. Myron's going to kill me because he specifically warned us about that. Besides, she may not get all the answers right because she doesn't want to stand out. She seems to be just another average student. She wants to be easily forgotten. She doesn't want anybody to notice her because she is scared that they will notice she is different. We assumed that because this Warrior grew up on Earth, they wouldn't be as capable as the rest of the Warriors, that they would be lacking, but it seems that we have underestimated her."

Roy turned to Christian. "Raelyn's not here today. Where is she?"

When Christian didn't answer right away, Mr. Lioces added, "Her life is in danger. I know you want to protect her, but by not telling us you are assuring her death."

Christian crossed his arms over his chest. "Rae can handle herself."

"She isn't up against some pathetic human." Roy snapped. "She's up against trained killers who have abilities just like she does."

A little more softly than Roy, Mr. Lioces added, "We are the only ones who can save her."

Christian gritted his teeth, hating himself. "She's at our house."

Mr. Lioces jumped down from his desk. "The address is on file. Let's go."

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

I put my hair back in a ponytail, careful to hide the blue. I could do without the constant reminder. Now as long as I didn't catch a glimpse of my eyes in a mirror, I would be fine. With a sigh, I walked into the kitchen and grabbed an apple. I leaned on the counter as I took a bite into the apple and let my mind wander, thinking about all that I had learned. I had grown up in a dimension completely different than this one. I'd had a completely normal life, at least by their standards. My family had been perfect. I'd had loving parents and a brother that made the best role model. Yet, that changed when Dakim killed scores of people with no explanation at all. I couldn't blame the families of the victims for wanting revenge, but killing my brother wasn't satisfying enough for them. They wanted to make him suffer the way they had, so they went after his family instead. The look on my mother's face when she knew my father had fallen continuously swam before my eyes. She had sacrificed herself to save me, removing any knowledge I had of my family life, where I had come from, even language.

I was pulled from my thoughts when I noticed how silent it was. We lived next to a forest, so there was always some sort of noise coming from a critter running through the trees and such. However, it was completely silent now. Nothing was stirring. I managed not to scream at the sound of tree branches suddenly being broken. Still too scared to use my abilities, I grabbed a big knife from the set that sat on the counter and stepped outside. Yet, I knew as soon as I saw who had arrived in the backyard that the knife would be useless. Standing in front of me were several men, all equipped with combat knives, and they were all significantly taller and stronger than me. Judging by their postures, these were not people I wanted to pick a fight with.

I turned to go back into the house but found my pathway blocked by another man. He hadn't been there a moment ago. *No... That means they have abilities like I do. I'm done for...*

The man blocking the door grabbed me, but I wasn't going to go down without a fight. I elbowed him in the stomach, causing him to double over, and then head butted him in the face, causing him to drop me. However, he had managed to take the knife from me and now I was without a weapon.

I took a few steps back, taking in the situation. There were five guys if I counted the man I had recently elbowed, and they were equally spread out across the backyard. They were maybe my age or a few years older, surprisingly young to be sent as attackers. Then again, it was five against one and I barely had any control over my abilities, especially since my blackout at school. As long as these guys had better control than me over their abilities, it didn't matter how old they were. Yet, if they thought it would be an easy fight, they were wrong.

I quickly ran to the side, making it so they would have to come at me one at a time. The guy who had originally attacked me, charged first. He was big and undoubtedly strong, but he was clumsy, and I used that to my advantage. I stepped out of his path at the last second, letting him run past me and took the opportunity to strike him from behind and knock him to the ground. However, when I turned back to face everybody else, I turned right into one of the men's fists, and stumbled backwards. It hurt more than I had expected. I had trained almost all of my life and sparred with Christian countless times, but this was the first time I had ever truly been in a fight, at least since my first day at the orphanage. I had always known that getting punched at full force would hurt, but I hadn't been expecting to hurt quite that much.

I managed to step back in time to avoid a foot to my face, but I was left off balance and had to catch myself on the gate that surrounded the yard. However, I barely had time to regain my balance before having to dodge another attack. The man's punch barely missed my face and went through the gate. While he struggled to get his hand free, I punched him in the stomach, causing him to double over, and then kneed him in the face, knocking him unconscious.

That took care of this guy, but the first man who had attacked me was getting back to his fist and three others still remained. Feeling like I was getting backed into a corner, I went to dash off to the side, but one of the men stepped in my way and shoved me to the ground. I started to get up slowly, but then quickly took off running to the other side of the yard before the man could knock me back down. When I felt like I was in a better position, I turned back around to face them, but they all had smug smiles on their faces. One spoke up, "There is nowhere for you to run."

"Then that leaves only one other option," I gritted my teeth and ran forward, punching the guy who had spoken in the face. I felt his nose give way under my fist and a nasty crunching noise accompanied it. He stumbled backwards in surprise while holding his nose, and almost immediately I could see the blood running down his face.

"You little brat!" He yelled before running at me.

He hit me square in the chest, knocking the wind out of me, and I went flying backwards. I leaned on the side of the house, using it to push myself up into a standing position while trying to catch my breath.

"You just don't know when to give up." The man sneered down at me.

"I'm fighting for my life. Why in the hell would I just give up?" I snorted.

"Because it would be much less painful!" The guy shouted as he knocked me down once more.

"You picked the wrong girl to bully."

I lifted my head to see Roy standing a few feet in front of me looking ferocious. This wasn't the same Roy I had gone to school with. He was different, more powerful. *How did he get here? Did he really think he stood a chance against them?*

"I don't know who you are little boy but you better butt out unless you have a death wish."

The corner of Roy's lips turned up into a menacing smile. "I'd like to see you try."

"Just remember, you asked for it!" The man charged once again but froze when a knife was suddenly at his throat held by a man I didn't recognize.

"That doesn't fly too well with me."

It was then that I noticed two other people who had also appeared in the area. *Wait! Is that Mr. Lioces?*

"Kian, get her out of here." The new guy with the knife spoke to Mr. Lioces.

To my astonishment, Mr. Lioces walked over to where I was as I managed to get to my feet. I looked at him suspiciously. "What's going on?"

"I will explain later, or at least one of us will, but right now, please forgive me for what I am about to do."

"What—" I began but Mr. Lioces struck me in the back of the neck and everything went black.



## Chapter 4

I slowly opened my eyes to find myself in a bare bedroom. The bed I laid in was stiff and the bland red covers were rough and uncomfortable. A dresser made of dark wood was on the other side of the room next to a closet whose door was slightly ajar. Only a few outfits hung inside, and the dark clothes seemed to blend in with the darkness of the closet. Not a single decoration hung on the walls. Even Roy, who was off to the side leaning against the wall mindlessly twirling a knife in his hand, didn't give any color or warmth to the room. *What's going on? Where am I?*

I bolted upright as everything came back to me. "What? Where are those guys?"

"They've been taken care of." Roy simply responded, not looking up from his knife.

"You mean you killed them." My eyes narrowed at him accusingly. I had absolutely no idea who he was, and I was thinking the worst about him.

"I saved your life." Roy spat, turning to look at me for the first time since I had woken up.

I was surprised at how sharp his tone was. At school he had given people the cold shoulder but now he just seemed to be cold in general. One time I had said that I was glad it wasn't me he was glaring at. Now, he wasn't just glaring at me. He was talking down to me, like the very sight of me disgusted him.

Yet, what surprised me most was not his tone, but his eyes. I had considered getting colored contacts to hide the fact that my eyes had changed color. Yet, it seemed like I wasn't the only one who needed to hide my eye color. My eyes had changed to the same shade of blue that was in my hair. It was unnaturally bright for a human but at least it was a natural color. Roy's weren't even close. His eyes were like the red light of a traffic signal in the dead of night with no street lights. However, words could never capture the full beauty of them.

If I had never met Roy and was told to picture a guy with red eyes dressed in few black, the first thing I would picture is a demon. Yet, that's not what I thought of when I looked at Roy. His features were smooth. He had this sense of calm, cool, and collected, despite his arrogant attitude. His red, undeniably beautiful eyes, gave a piercing feeling, like he could see through anything, like he was more perceptive than you wanted him to be.

The guy who had originally held the knife to my attacker walked in. He had an unnatural shade of red hair. It wasn't the orange color most people thought of when somebody was described as a red head. His hair was true red, like the color of Roy's eyes except not as bright. He was average height for a guy, and compared to Roy, seemed relatively laid back. He wore a plain red shirt that matched his hair with khaki pants. When he walked, his shoulders were perfectly square, showing his discipline, but his hands were shoved in his pockets, showing his casual nature. When he spoke next, I was surprised at how soothing it was, for his voice had a beautiful ring to it, "Roy, I will take it from here."

Roy didn't say a word or even show a single emotion as he set the knife he was holding on the dresser and walked out. When the door was shut behind him, the new guy pulled up a chair and sat on it backwards with his arms resting on the back of the chair. "Can I get you anything?"

"No, I'm fine." I answered but it came out barely above a whisper.

He nodded, moving on. "My name is Myron. I and the rest of my team are here to help you."

"I don't know. Roy looks more like he wants to kill me." I commented, my voice still no more than a whisper.

Myron smiled slightly, "Yes, Roy is a scary one, but he has to follow my orders. I've ordered for you to be safe and well cared for so you have nothing to worry about."

"Who are you?" I asked, my voice getting a little stronger.

"I am Commander Myron Masters, and I have the ability to manipulate sounds. I am a member of a group known as Ellipsis and I'm the leader of this team. Here on Earth I guess we would be considered to be a combination of the military and police force except a little more high ranking."

"So, you are not from Earth?" I concluded, but it was more like a question.

"No, and neither are you. You're not even human."

I smiled shyly. "Yes, I kind of figured that out already. I guess what I want to know is, why are you here?"

"Our job was to find you."

"To find me? Why?"

He smiled, but it was devious. "In my line of work, you learn not to question orders. We were simply told that there was a Warrior on Earth whose life might be in danger. We were to protect him or her, and, if he or she would like, take him or her back with us."

"Wait, what did you call me?"

"The real term is Riora, but I think the closest thing it would translate to in your language is Warrior."

"That's right. I forgot that English wasn't your guys' first language." I commented, more to myself.

However, Myron seemed to be taken off guard. "You knew that already?"

"Yeah, um, I overheard Mr. Lioces —"

"Kian." Myron corrected.

"I heard Kian and Roy talking one day. I had never managed to get Roy to tell me where he was from, and Roy and Mr. L-Kian both have a slight, almost undetectable, accent so it didn't surprise me that English wasn't their first language. I guess I just never imagined that the language didn't originate on Earth."

Myron didn't seem to find it as amusing as I did, and his voice was harder than the comforting tone it had been. "Did anybody else hear them?"

As strange as things were right then, Kian had helped me and had been good to me. I didn't want to get him in trouble. I couldn't say the same for Roy, but he was tossed in there with Kian. I found myself making an excuse for them. "No. By that time I had already had my suspicions about Kian. I stopped by long after students were supposed to have left."

Myron's eyes narrowed but otherwise he switched the subject, his voice returning to his usual compassionate tone. "If you're up for it, I'd like to ask you a few questions."

I bit my lip. "I will try."

Myron raised his eyebrows at me. "Are you always this shy?"

I chuckled a little. His question was not what I had been expecting. "No. I guess you could say I'm a little out of my element."

He nodded. "Can you tell me about your time here on Earth?"

"The first thing I remember is being at the orphanage. I had just arrived when I met..." My voice trailed off as my mind went into overdrive. "Dustin. He was in the house when I was attacked. Where is he?"

"Don't worry." Myron stopped the panic attack that had been quickly rising. "He's asleep in the other room. Roy knocked him out like Kian did you, but Roy has a little better knack for it. He'll probably be out for several more hours."

"Where's —"

"Christian is also fine." Myron answered before I could finish the question. "He's in with his brother, but as soon as I'm done I'll let him know you're awake."

I sighed with relief, glad to know that they were okay. *Why had it taken me so long to remember them?*

"Raelyn, can you continue?"

"Oh, yes, sorry. When I arrived, the first thing I saw was a little kid being bullied. I stood up for him and the other guy ended up going flying across the room. That little kid was Christian." I shook my head. "He was so small then, always shorter than everybody else our age, and to think, he's taller than me now. Anyway, Christian and I have been best friends ever since then. Suffice to say, after that nobody ever dared pick on Christian again. He became like a brother to me and supported me every time I discovered something new I could do or when hiding who I was became too much for me to handle. When Dustin, Christian's older brother, was old enough, he moved out of the foster care system and went out on his own. Once he got a decent job and was able to settle down, the first thing he did was take Christian and I out of foster care.

"Before I met them, Christian had always been getting into trouble and was always being picked on, but after we met, I was there to protect him, and he was there to support me. My life has always been hard, living in constant fear of being discovered, but my biggest fear was myself. I didn't know what I was. Yet, Christian and Dustin made it bearable. With them around, I knew everything was going to be alright. They were my family. Then Roy and Kian showed up at our school and things started getting interesting. About a month after they had come to Grant High School, I ran into the teacher who Kian had replaced. She had supposedly gone on maternity leave which is why Kian was brought in, but when I saw her, she was still pregnant. After that, I started becoming suspicious of Kian. Like I said before, I went by after everybody else had left and that was when I heard Kian and Roy talking. I went back later to search his office to see if I could learn anything about him, but I came up empty handed. I was just leaving when Kian walked in. I made some excuse about turning in some of Christian's late homework and went to walk out. However, when I came into skin contact with him, I got a major headache. It kept getting worse and worse until I eventually collapsed in the bathroom. When I woke up again, my hair and eyes were a different color. Yet, the biggest difference is that it feels like my abilities have increased substantially. I was scared to do anything, afraid that I might accidentally expose myself or hurt someone, so I stayed home from school. That was when they attacked."

Myron leaned forward slightly. "How old were you when you arrived at the orphanage?"

"Seven."

"Can you remember anything before that?"

The breath caught in my throat as the vision of my brother putting the origami bird in my hands appeared before my eyes. He'd been so nice to me. I wasn't ready to condemn him as a murderer quite yet. "No. If I did, then I doubt I would have lived in so much fear."

Myron seemed to accept my answer without thinking too much of it. Instead he moved on to his next question. "Before you came into contact with Kian and things changed, what could you do?"

"My accuracy is dead on. I've never missed unless it was on purpose. I can also hear a lot more of what is going on around me than a human can. It helps when I use my energy, my Miutho."

Myron's eyebrows came together as he fidgeted in his chair. "How do you use your Miutho?"

It was my turn to be confused. "What do you mean?"

"You said you use your Miutho. How do you use it? Do you use it to manipulate the air around you? Can you put your hand in the fire and not be burnt? How do you use it?"

I was at a complete loss of words. I got the gist of what he was asking, but I wasn't sure how I was supposed to answer.

Seeing my trouble, Myron suggested, "If it's easier, you can just show me."

I nodded, trying to get a hold of myself enough to be able to control my energy. Taking deep breaths, I looked around the room for something small and light. My eyes fell on the knife that was lying on the dresser on other side of the room. It was the knife Roy had been playing with earlier. I closed my eyes, focusing on the energy that was flowing through me. It was erratic, bouncing everywhere with my

emotions, but I forced it to run smooth enough. I opened my eyes, sending my energy flying out towards the knife, and then brought it back.

I immediately realized my mistake as soon as I had pulled it back. I had forgotten that my power had increased. I had only wanted to bring the knife back up use, but I had become so used to using all of my concentration just to get something to move an inch that it never even occurred to me that I might not have to do that anymore. Much faster than I had expected, the knife came flying at me.

Faster than my eyes could follow, Myron snatched the speeding knife right out of thin air. "What in the heck do you think you're doing?" He snapped at me.

Still stunned that I could have seriously injured myself, I stuttered, "I-I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."

It only seemed to have just occurred to Myron what had happened. He looked down at the knife in amazement. He'd caught it on instinct. It hadn't occurred to him how the knife had gotten into motion until now.

"Do it again." Myron ordered, all traces of anger gone from his voice. "Except don't bring the knife towards you. I'm going to set up a target and I want you to send it across the room. Can you do that?"

I nodded slowly, still a little hesitant of Myron. His moods seemed to swing with every new realization, and I was a little scared of what emotion might come next. "I'm a little jumpy, so I can't promise that my aim will be perfect, but yes, I can do it."

I watched as he grabbed a marker from the dresser drawer and literally began to draw circles on the wall. *Was he never taught as a kid not to draw on the walls?*

When he finished, he stepped back out of the way and signaled for me to go ahead. Once again I took a deep breath, trying to steady the flow of energy. I held my arm out in front of me over the knife, a slight bend in my arm. Careful not to use as much power this time, I attached my energy to the knife like strings, the knife being my puppet. I raised my hand up, causing the knife to also rise into the air. It rocked back and forth, as I was having trouble keeping it steady, but it was off the ground. Switching my attention to the target, I focused on the dead center and thrust my arm forward, causing the knife to go flying. To my satisfaction, the knife hit the wall, right in the center of the circles he had drawn.

I looked over at Myron, sure he would be pleased, but my face dropped when I saw him. He was trying to hide his shock but failing. "Kian!"

Not a second later, the door opened and Kian walked in. He frowned at the knife protruding from the wall but otherwise turned his attention to Myron. "Yes?"

"Stay with her until I return." Myron said abruptly. "There is something I need to do."

"Can I see Christian?" I interrupted. Myron had said that I could see him when he was done here, and it was obvious that he was leaving.

"Hm? Oh, yes." He answered, not really thinking about what he was saying. It was obvious that his mind was elsewhere. All of the sudden there was a cloud of smoke, and he was gone.

Kian looked at me with an incredulous look, but there was a smile on his face. "What did you do? I may be new to the team but I have never seen Myron react like that before."

"Can I see Christian?" I repeated, dodging his comment. I had no idea why he had reacted like that. He had asked to see what I could do so I showed him. What was the big deal?

"Yes, right." Kian opened the door and stepped outside. A few seconds later Christian entered and pulled me into a hug.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine." I mumbled into his shoulder.

Christian pulled back so he could look at me but kept his hands on my shoulders, "What's going on?"

"To be honest, I have no clue."

**\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

"I'm sorry Lord Masters, but Lady Vanek has asked to not be disturbed." Their leader's assistant, Sheila, tried to stop him.

"Bullshit." Myron replied as he sidestepped her and went through the door.

"Still have an issue with obeying rules I see." Lady Vanek commented without looking up from her desk.

"Who is she?"

"Excuse me?" Lady Vanek looked up at Myron.

"You said that our mission was to guard and possibly bring back a Warrior that was on Earth. Now, usually I'm not one to question orders, but you cannot expect me to be able to complete a mission when you have not given me all of the information."

"What has led you to believe that I have been less than honest with you?"

"I know better than to say you lied, because you didn't. However, the people who came after the Riora we were assigned to guard would have been a match for any decent Riora. I knew we would be up against powerful opponents, otherwise you wouldn't have asked Ellipsis to do this. The shocking thing is, this Riora we were assigned to protect is a girl not much younger than Roy, and she was able to hold her own against them. Had she been better prepared, she might have actually won. She can't even be called talented. She's way beyond that. So, I ask again, who is she?"

"Then it's true..." Lady Vanek leaned back in her chair with a sigh. "I have heard rumors, but I cannot confirm any of it. Your report has confirmed a few of them. This mission is of great importance, and it is because this is so important that I wish to withhold from you the rumors I have heard. After we have gathered more information then I will decide whether or not to disclose to you the information. Just know that under no circumstance can this girl die. Be ready for anything."

"Yes, Lady Vanek." Myron nodded, accepting her restrictions, and then disappeared.

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

"Myron!" Kian exclaimed as he suddenly reappeared in the room. Christian had gone to sit in with his brother who was still out cold. I had moved to the living room, trying to come to grips with everything that had happened. Kian was with me since I wasn't supposed to be by myself.

"Get your stuff. We're leaving."

"What?" I snapped.

"I will explain on the way, but right now we need to keep moving. We are facing a stronger enemy than we originally anticipated. It won't be long before they track our location." Myron's words had been directed towards everybody in the room, but now he turned to me, his voice sorrowful. "Where we are going is not a place for humans. I will make sure Christian and Dustin are safe where our attackers can't get to them, but they can't come with us."

His words dealt a worse wound than any of the attackers had given me combined. "After everything Christian and Dustin have done for me, you expect me to just abandon them?"

Myron sighed. "I expect you to think about their wellbeing. Even the best human trained in all the martial arts could never stand a chance against a Riora. They are in danger every moment they spend with us and would be a hindrance to us."

I dropped my head into my hands. He was right, and I knew it. That didn't mean that leaving them would be any easier.

The one man on the team who I had yet to be introduced to stepped out into of the hallway. He had brown hair and two bright pink scars ran over his left eye. He wore a brown pair of pants with a

deep blue shirt and a blue headband. He had a very sophisticated air to him, but it was ruined by the goofy grin on his face. He paused when he saw me huddled on the couch, but then spoke to Myron. "He's waking up."

Myron took a deep breath. "Make a list of anything you want from your house. We won't take any clothing or anything like that, just sentimental stuff. Get Christian and Dustin to make a list as well. Kian will sneak into the house and grab what you want, but, for right now, go see your friend."

Still stunned, I walked down the hallway to where Dustin was. The unfamiliar man stepped out of the way, allowing me to walk through the door to find Dustin in an upright position and Christian sitting on the floor. I stepped in, and the man shut the door behind me.

"What happened?" Dustin asked, rubbing his head.

Christian and I exchanged glances, and then he began to fill Dustin in. I had never told Dustin about my secret. He had already done so much for me. I hadn't wanted to burden him with the knowledge. It hurt to see the way his eyes widened with every new piece of information, and he looked at me with wonder as Christian continued talking. I felt like a little kid who was crying into their parents shoulder because they knew they had done something wrong.

Knowing that I would probably never see Christian or Dustin again, I looked at them with new eyes. For being brothers, they looked nothing alike. Dustin was a ginger and had the pale skin full of freckles that was usually associated with it. He was wearing his favorite green polo that made his hair stand out. He loved his hair. He would be so mad if he looked in the mirror right now and saw how badly his hair had been messed up. You would never know he had grown up in the foster care system. If I had to pick one word to describe him, I would chose personable. He was outgoing, caring, and easy to talk to.

Christian may not have looked like his brother with his dark brown, curly hair and his darker skin tone, but their personalities were very similar. He was generally a very cheerful person. With his bright eyes and soft smile, he was usually big among the ladies, but he never really seemed interested. He'd rather be shooting his bow and arrow in the back yard. He loved challenges and was always trying to beat me at something, even though he knew he would never win. Most of all, he and his brother would help anybody in need, no matter who they were.

"Raelyn?" Christian pulled me from my thoughts.

"Yeah?"

"Did you even hear what Dustin asked?" Christian frowned.

"No, I'm sorry. My mind was elsewhere."

I turned to Dustin, curious of his reaction. He seemed to be having trouble wrapping his head around it all. "Is all of this true?"

"Do you remember when you were fixing the light in the kitchen and you accidentally dropped the light bulb? It was a ten foot drop, and the floor wasn't carpeted. For the life of you, you couldn't figure out why it hadn't broken."

"That was you're doing!" Dustin exclaimed. "And when I could have sworn you had left your keys in the house, they appeared in your hand!"

He stared at me, seeming to realize all of the little things that should have been hints but he had completely missed. Then, his eyes closed and he dropped his head. I couldn't see his face, his reaction, and that scared me. I wanted to know what he was thinking, and I suddenly wished I was telepathic.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Dustin suddenly raised his head, but his eyes seemed to be full of pity. It hadn't been what I was expecting.

I shuffled my feet and looked down at the floor. "You've been so good to me. You didn't have to take me out of the foster care system, but you did. Knowing my secret isn't easy. You constantly have to be guarded. After everything you've done for me, I wasn't about to burden you with it. The only reason Christian knows is because the day we met, he saw me send a guy flying across the room, farther than any human seven year old girl could."

I looked up when Dustin stood up from the bed and walked over to where I stood. Then to my utter shock, he pulled me into a hug. It really shouldn't have surprised me. Christian and Dustin never judged anybody. I could have purple skin with green hair, and they wouldn't care at all.

As if to confirm my purple skin and green hair statement, Dustin whispered into my ear. "Just because I know something new about you, doesn't change who you are, or who you have been. You will always be the sweet little girl who stood up for my brother. Nothing will ever change that."

I held onto Dustin knowing that it would probably be one of the last hugs I ever gave him. It was time for me to tell them...

## Chapter 5

"No!" Christian exclaimed when I told him that I would be leaving and they would be taken to a secure location. "You expect us to just walk away from everything that has happened?"

I shook my head. "I can't ask you to come with me. Look at everything I can do, and I still can't handle the guys who came after me. If I can't take care of myself, then how can I protect you?"

"I can handle myself." Christian argued.

"But that's just it," I argued back. "You can't handle yourself. If you had ten humans the size of professional football players coming after you, then yeah, I would say have at it. After training with me, you better be able to handle yourself, but you are only human, and we aren't facing humans. They are out of your league. They're out of *my* league."

"They *were* out of your league, but now Myron and the rest of his team are here."

"Are you even listening to yourself? Myron and his team risked their lives to save me. I will forever be grateful to them for that. I will not ask them to put their lives on the line again just so I can bring my buddy with me. I will not be that selfish."

Christian started. "I-I'm sorry. It never occurred to me..."

"Oh Christian," I walked forward and pulled him into a hug. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to be that harsh. This may be the last time I ever see you guys. I really don't want to leave knowing that we had been fighting."

Christian wrapped his arms around me, and Dustin came over and put his arms around both of our shoulders. "What am I going to do without you?" Christian breathed.

"What are you going to do?" I asked incredulously. "What am I going to do?"

Dustin burst out laughing, and we let each other go.

"Um, Myron wants us to make a list of anything we want from the house. We can't go back because it's more than likely under surveillance. However, Kian is going to see if he can sneak back into the house and grab anything we want. Stuff like clothing can be replaced. He's only going to grab sentimental stuff. We need to write down what we want and where it is in the house."

Christian nodded slowly, still trying to come to grips with what was happening. Dustin seemed okay, but his mind had already been blown. No doubt he was willing to go along with anything at this point.

Christian, Dustin, and I sat down on the bed with a pad of paper and a pen. People always say, if you were stuck on an island and you could only bring one thing with you, what would you bring? Yet, nobody ever expects to have to make that decision in reality. They joke around saying that they'd bring a big wad of cash, or a television and a gaming system. However, when it really comes down to it, you're not going to bring any of that. That stuff can be replaced. It's going to be the things like pictures and other sentimental things that will save you. A gaming system isn't going to save your life when you've been thrust onto an island. It will be the sentimental stuff that will keep you alive. It is the only thing that will keep you from going completely insane.

~

### OCTOBER 5

I clung to Christian and Dustin, not wanting to let them go. Roy practically had to rip me from them, but I said my goodbyes, and we were on our way. I was in the Jeep with Myron while Kian was boarding an airplane with Christian and Dustin, on their way to a safe house. Roy was acting as a decoy to mislead our attackers with the other member of the team I still had yet to be officially introduced to.



I pulled my feet up onto the passenger seat, drawing into myself, as I stared up at the sky through the window. When I wasn't working my butt off training, I loved to just lay and watch the clouds drift by. Of course, by the time I usually got done training, the stars had come out. Christian never could understand why I enjoyed it so much. I would get so caught up and stressed out because of my secret. Yet, looking at the stars reminded me that, although I may not have the same DNA, I wasn't any more important than anybody else. We were all the same people on the same planet in the ever expanding universe.

As we drove along, my mind drifted through past memories.

Dustin would take Christian and me out to eat at our favorite restaurant a few times a month. However, Christian and I were always annoyed about how long it took for them to bring us our food. We would complain that we were absolutely starving, so we would eat the little jelly packets that were offered on the table with the salt, pepper, and other condiments. Dustin just looked at us like we were crazy. He never could understand how we could eat plain jelly like that.

The orphanage wasn't always a lot of fun. The kids were mean and ruthless, but we made the best of it. Christian and I would take chairs and find all the blankets we could to make a fort. Then Dustin would come around and beat on the sides, practically scaring us to death. There was also this one room at the orphanage that had this odd, bright red carpet. We would pretend it was lava, and the only way we could cross it was by throwing pillows, which we pretended were rocks, on the ground and jumping to each one. It kept us out of trouble.

After Christian and I moved in with Dustin, life improved. We were transferred to a better school, and suddenly we weren't surrounded by so much violence anymore. We had people who actually cared about our wellbeing. As we grew older, we heard names of kids we had known at the orphanage on the television. Not a single one of them had made the news for a good reason, and I couldn't help but wonder if Christian would have turned out the same way if things had gone differently.

To combat the violence we had been exposed to at the foster system, Dustin used to force Christian and I to volunteer every weekend with the Special Olympics where he worked. We always hated it because we thought it was the most boring thing in the world. Now, it was what I missed the most. I still remembered the motto.

"Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

"Strong words. Do they have a purpose?"

I jumped. I hadn't realized that I had said them aloud. "Not really. Dustin worked with mentally handicapped people so Christian and I would volunteer on the weekends. Every summer all the counties in the state would get together and compete. That is the oath that they say before every game."

"They are good words to live by." Myron commented. He took his eyes off the road long enough to glance over at me, looking for my expression.

I didn't reply. Instead, I returned to looking out the window.

"If you could go anywhere, where would you go?"

I shifted in my seat uncomfortably. His words brought up more memories. "When I came to the orphanage, it wasn't just that I didn't have any memories. I had no knowledge of language. I picked up English almost immediately. It wasn't hard given that I was immersed in it, but Christian also helped me learn other languages. I was hoping that one of them would seem familiar to me, that I might be able to figure out where it came from. I've never felt home here, I always wondered if maybe somewhere else would. Overall, I think just a change of setting would be helpful."

He sighed. "Raelyn, the next move is up to you. Our job is to protect you. That can be accomplished by two ways. One, we can train you so that you will be able to handle yourself and no longer require our protection."

I shook my head. "No. I will not live my life constantly looking over my shoulder. That's not an option."

"Then you're only other choice is to come back with us."

"Go back where?" I couldn't help but snapping at him. "You guys showed up out of the blue. Other than your names and your 'mission', I hardly know anything about you."

Myron lowered his head, seeming to understand my frustration. "There are two known dimensions, the one we are in now, and the one where we come from. The one we come from is known as Kusnik. Usually these two dimensions remain completely separate. However, there are certain points in the dimension where the two dimensions are closer together than most places. Just as the universe is constantly expanding, the dimensions are constantly shifting. When the dimensions shift in just the right way, the two touch and it becomes possible to transfer dimensions."

"That's how you got here." I concluded.

Myron rocked back and forth, "Not exactly. When the two dimensions touch, anybody can cross. Well, anybody who is from our dimension can. Humans aren't strong enough to survive the journey. However, some of the stronger Riora can manipulate the shift of the dimensions, so they can transfer back and forth between the dimensions at their own leisure. I and Karexon can travel whenever we like. However, Roy and Kian aren't quite there yet."

"You and who?" I questioned.

"Karexon. He's the only person on my team that you haven't met yet."

"Can you repeat that one more time?"

"Karexon," Myron laughed. "If it helps you to remember, think of him as Mr. White Out."

"Huh?"

Myron chuckled to himself. "It was a joke he made some time ago because his name sounds so much like *correction*. Nobody actually calls him Mr. White Out, but it still helps people remember."

Another thing occurred to me. "If you speak a language that isn't found on Earth, why do you have an English name?"

He smiled, and then answered my question, "A long time ago, the countries in our dimension went to war. At the time, our language, Thaivo, was the only language spoken in that dimension. However, when war broke out, people didn't want the enemy to understand what they were saying, so the different villages and towns adopted different languages from Earth in hopes of confusing the enemy. Our village adopted English. Then, there was a period during the war where there was a huge fear of possible spies. I guess the equivalent in the United States would be like the Red Scare. Everybody started speaking English to rat out any possible spies who didn't know English. After that, English became more common than our own native tongue. We still learn Thaivo first, which is why we speak English with a slight accent, but otherwise the only time our native tongue is used is when we need to communicate with other villages. Nowadays, everything isn't quite as secretive, but knowledge of languages outside of your own village is pretty rare, so it is still used for things like codes and secret messages."

"That's interesting." I commented, not sure how else to describe it.

Myron nodded and then took a deep breath. "So, then do you agree to come back with us?"

"I have no other choice," I sighed. "When do we leave?"

"I may be able to influence the shift in the dimensions, but I cannot bring somebody else with me. We will have to wait for a shift in the dimensions to happen on its own."

"When will that be?"

"My best guess is about a month, but if we're lucky then maybe a couple of weeks."

I paused. It was longer than I expected. "What will we do until then?"

"We'll lay low and do our best to stay off the radar. We will continue to guard you but, we will also begin to train you. Even though you have decided to come back with us so you don't always have to be on guard, you will still need to know how to defend yourself."

I shook my head. "So, basically I'll be locked inside under constant watch except for the little time I'll spend training?"

Myron raised his eyebrows and looked over at me. "Are you always this negative?"

"You know I'm right." I challenged.

"You're only right if you want to think of it as a cage. Instead, you can think of it as spending some quality time with us. You know, there a lot of people who would kill to get to spend an entire month with an Ellipsis team."

Despite the fact that I still wasn't quite sure what Ellipsis was, I couldn't help letting out a chuckle. I gave Myron credit. To get me to smile at a time like this, he was good.

~

I stood in the hallway, staring at the little apartment that would be my home for the next month. It was small, even for an apartment. It only had two rooms total: the main room and the bath room. There wasn't even a separate bedroom, although there was a door in the living room that led to a balcony outside. The kitchen was attached to the main room, and I'll admit the main room was bigger than the average living room, but I didn't get how Roy, Kian, Myron, Karexon, and I were going to stay in this small apartment. Not to mention it would be a little awkward since I was the only girl out of all of them.

"It's really not as bad as it looks." Myron explained as he walked in ahead of me. "We'll keep guard in shifts. Meanwhile, the rest of us will be gathering as much information as we can. During the day it will only be you and one other person in the apartment. Sleeping will be the only time it will seem crowded, and even then one person will always be out on guard, so there will only be four people sleeping at one time."

"Where did you guys stay before here?" I asked as I walked to the middle of the main room and spun in a circle.

"We stayed in the house you were just in." Myron explained as he set my suit case down, "When we came, we were given money in order to buy food and other essentials, but just enough to get us set up. We weren't prepared for having to change locations, so when Kian went for the things you guys requested, he also picked up a little extra money."

"You mean he stole it." I read the hidden meaning in his words.

"Borrowed," Myron corrected. "Lady Vanek will pay it back."

"Lady Vanek?" I questioned.

"Yes, she is the leader of our village, Vriknir, and the head of all their Riora. Our leaders are based on strength, so it is not too often that you hear of assassination attempts. However, our leaders are not chosen based on strength alone. Only the strongest can become candidates, but it is ultimately up to the previous leader and the council to decide who the next leader will be. This happens because the strongest isn't always the wisest, and without a wise leader, our village will fail. Almost all of the power is held by the leader, so the successor must be a good one. However, the council I mentioned before makes sure that the leader does not over-step his or her bounds.

"Like I said in the beginning, Lady Vanek is the head of all our Riora. The planet we live on is much smaller than Earth, consisting of only one continent. On this continent are several different countries, and in these countries are countless numbers of towns and villages. However, just like you can't become a lawyer by going to just any college, you can't become a Riora by living in just any village. There are few villages that are actually equipped to train Riora. The rest of the villages remain vulnerable. Their only defenses are those who can control Miutho, but haven't had the training of a Riora. I told you once before that Riora were kind of a mixture of Earth's military and police. We can also

be considered mercenaries because other villages without Riora can hire our Riora to do different jobs, such as eliminating some ruthless bandits or serving as security guards.”

“So, you were hired as a security guard?” I concluded.

“Not exactly,” Myron responded. “Ellipsis consists of the most elite Riora in our village, Vriknir. It is our job to keep the peace between villages and ensure the safety of our village. Talented Riora who are not members of Ellipsis are used for intelligence gathering. Those who have just recently become Riora serve as security guards until they get more experience, and those with experience would be the ones sent to deal with bandits and the like.

“Ellipsis probably receives most of the work because not only do we have to keep the peace between nations, but also we also have to keep the peace between towns and villages. Although our continent is divided into four different countries, they are not political boundaries like the countries of Earth. Ours would be considered cultural boundaries. Each country has a Riora village associated with it. I guess you would refer to it as a capital. We are responsible for the other villages in our country. There is usually a certain theme or characteristic of people’s abilities that classifies the Riora village, and therefore the country. For example, one country might specialize in mental abilities, so the Riora would have abilities dealing with things like telekinesis, telepathy, illusions, and so on. Because our countries are divided like this, there is no central government. Each village or town has their own form of government.”

I couldn’t help noticing that he had given an explanation without actually giving me an answer to my original question, “But if you’re a member of Ellipsis, then why are you here guarding me?”

“Like I said before, I don’t question orders.”

I crossed my arms over my chest, frustrated. I wanted answers, but it was obvious Myron either couldn’t or wouldn’t give them to me. I would have to drop it, for now at least.

I sat on the couch and pulled my knees up to my chest. Feeling slightly claustrophobic in the small apartment, I found that I was already missing Dustin and Christian. Over the years I had become good at adapting quickly. I could get used to living in a small apartment, and I could deal with not going to school anymore. It wasn’t like I was leaving much behind. With my abilities, I’d always been scared to hope for a future. Yet, not constantly having Christian or Dustin around, that was something I was going to have to get used to.

My thoughts were interrupted by Myron’s question, “What size clothing do you where?”

“What?” I tried to focus on what he had asked.

“We need to get you new clothes but you can’t go out shopping.” Myron explained.

I groaned and let my head drop back. “The cage begins.”

Myron smiled, knowingly. “Sorry.”

I sighed. “Just let me shop online. It’ll be easier.”

“No internet connection. No cell phones.”

“Ah, that’s right.” I rolled my eyes. “What about the library?”

“You can’t leave, remember?” He was almost taunting.

“I know, but *you* can once somebody else gets back. With all of your skills, I’m sure it wouldn’t be hard to log onto somebody else’s library account and print out a clothing catalogue.”

Myron stared at me blankly for a moment, “What’s the big deal about what clothing you wear? It’s not like you’re going to be going out anywhere.”

I glared at him. He was reminding me on purpose now, trying to be funny. “I need something to look forward to. Besides, what else am I going to do all day?”

Myron chuckled. “Don’t think you’re getting off that easy. Trust me. You’ll have plenty to do during the day.”

I raised my eyebrows at him, “Such as?”

"You may not be in school anymore, but you still have a lot to learn. First of all, you need to learn our language, even if it isn't the common tongue. You also need to begin your training. You were able to do pretty well when you went up against your attackers, but doing well isn't going to cut it. You have to win. The alternative isn't a pleasant one."

"When do I begin?"

"Tomorrow, once everything has gotten settled."

"Then what am I supposed to do today?" I argued.

Myron pointed outside to the setting sun. "Today is over."

I scrunched my nose up. "The sun sets early in the fall but that doesn't mean that today is over. Today isn't over until midnight."

"In our culture it is. Our days do not revolve around the hours, but the sun. Riora don't usually go to bed when the sun goes down, there is too much work, but everybody else, all the villagers, they get up at the crack of dawn and go to bed at sunset."

I crossed my arms over my chest. "Obviously their teenagers aren't like ours, because we go to bed about dawn and get up at noon."

Myron chuckled once again, "Well, that's just something you're going to have to get used to. Besides, you've had a busy day. You need to rest."

I shook my head and lowered my eyes. "There's no way I'll be able to sleep."

Myron took a deep breath and sat down next to me. "You don't have to go to sleep. Just lie down and let your muscles relax. I think once you release all the tension that's built up, you'd be surprised how tired you really are." When I still didn't move he added, "I'll be right here. You have nothing to fear."

I bit my lip, turning over his words. Eventually I gave in and nodded. He moved out of my way and I stretched out on the couch. The pillows were a little scratchy, but they weren't uncomfortable. Myron found a few blankets in the closet and laid them over me. As soon as my eyes closed, I was asleep.

# Chapter 6

*OCTOBER 6*

I winced as light started to shine on my face and I rolled over, hoping to block my eyes. Instead, I rolled right onto the floor and a room full of laughter filled my ears.

"It's a couch, not a bed. You don't have quite as much room." I didn't recognize the voice, and since Karexon was the only person I really hadn't met, then it had to be his.

"What time is it?" I asked, rubbing my head where it had hit the floor.

"A little after seven," Kian answered, and I immediately looked out the only window in the room. The sun was just beginning to rise, and the rays coming through were what had woken me.

"I slept for thirteen hours?" I exclaimed in bewilderment.

"I told you that you'd had a busy day." Myron answered.

I turned my gaze to where Myron was. He was standing in the kitchen area along with Kian and Karexon. Roy was nowhere to be seen. Myron was sipping a cup of coffee as he casually leaned against the counter. Today he was jeans and a blue sweater, adding to his casual appearance. The other two were eating bowls of cereal. At school Kian had his blond hair brushed forward so that he was in dress code, but now he had it spiked. He wore a teal shirt and jeans, which also wouldn't have been in dress code. Yet, despite that he no longer in dress code with a teacher, I still couldn't help but think of him as one. He may have only been posing as a teacher when I had him, but he had been one of the best teachers I had ever had. Karexon interested me the most, only because I hadn't seen much of him. He was slightly turned away from me, so I could no longer see the small scars over his eye, but even from this angle I could tell that he was wearing the same goofy grin as before. Today, he wore jeans like everybody else, and had matched it with a white shirt and black jacket.

"Want some breakfast?" Kian offered.

"What is there?" I asked as I got up, throwing my blankets on the couch in the process.

Karexon turned around and opened a cupboard. "Cereal, cereal, and... cereal."

"I'll have cereal."

"Good choice." Karexon smiled and pulled down one of the boxes of cereal.

"I didn't even hear you guys come in." I commented.

Karexon put his hands on his hips. "Do you really think we don't know how to walk in quietly?" I laughed, "Guess not."

Myron set his coffee down, "Even if they hadn't walked in quietly, I doubt you would have woken. You were pretty tired."

I poured a bowl of cereal and then went and sat on the couch, "Where's Roy?"

I looked up at the sound of the door opening, and Karexon muttered under his breath, "Speak of the devil."

I stood there watching Roy. As soon as he had walked in, he had immediately walked into the bathroom to remove his contacts. A second later, he stepped out and those piercing red eyes were back. They were mesmerizing to look at. He was the odd one out of the bunch, in personality and clothing. Myron, Kian, and Karexon, seemed relatively at ease. They were alert, but not exactly worried. Roy, on the other hand, always looked tense and stiff, as if something were going to jump out at him at any moment. He was also the only one wearing black jeans, instead of the typical blue, and wore a nice, long sleeved, black shirt. I wouldn't consider him to be dressed up, but he definitely looked fancier than the others.

"How did it go?" Myron asked as when he stepped out of the bathroom.

"It was a dead end."

Myron sighed and picked his coffee back up, swirling it around in the cup. "I figured as much."  
"It seems as if maybe it was Hunters who had attacked her. They specialize in tracking Miutho, so that was probably how they found her."

Before taking another bite of my cereal, I asked, "Are Hunters different from Riora?"

Myron nodded, "Hunters specialize in tracking people down, hence their name. However, they also act kind of like border police. Travel to Earth is strictly forbidden, and Hunters track down anybody who breaks that rule. They're independent from any Riora village. They have their own leaders." Myron paused in his speech and then turned to the members of his team, "We tried starting at the house and retracing their steps, but Roy has reported that it is a dead end. Their trail disappears in the woods. Instead, let's focus on how they found her. We were the ones who crossed the border, so if anything it should have been us they came after. See if you can find how Rae ended up on their radar. I'll take first guard."

Karexon and Kian nodded while Roy's face was blank. When they had finished their breakfast, they left to fulfill their orders, and it was just Myron and I once again. I stared at the closed door they had left through.

"How is it that Roy's eyes are red?"

Myron came and sat down next to me on the couch. "Actually, red eyes really aren't all that uncommon for us. As you know, our DNA is slightly different than humans. It is close enough that we resemble them, but there are differences. The biggest difference, of course, is our ability to manipulate the Miutho in and around us. However, there are other small differences. We have a little bit more variety than humans when it comes to things like eye and hair color. The natural blue highlights in your hair are an example of that. Actually, not only does Roy have what *you* would consider an unnatural eye color, but Kian, Karexon, and I do as well. You do too if you've seen a mirror lately. Your eyes are a shade of blue that even colored contacts couldn't achieve. We all wear contacts and Karexon and I even had to dye our hair so that we may blend in.

"My eyes are a teal green color, and, while my hair is close to the same red color I have now, I had natural white highlights. Karexon's hair is more of a midnight blue color and he has deep gray eyes. While Kian's blond hair is natural, his eyes are a dark shade of green. We all wear contacts to blend in, and Roy does too when he has to. However, Roy has a special ability located in his eyes called the Skayikon. It is what makes his eyes so unnaturally bright, even by our standards. He doesn't like to wear the contacts because it hinders his ability."

"Roy has an ability in his eyes...?"

"I mentioned before that our countries are divided by abilities. Every Riora can control Miutho, which means that there are certain things that everybody can do depending on their skill level. However, most of what people can do depends on their DNA. That is why each country is known for their particular families. For example, Karexon comes from the Radev family which is known for their ability to manipulate shadows. However, each individual in the family has their own technique, meaning they can manipulate the shadows in different ways. Kian is from the Dalca family. They are known for their swordsmanship. Kian and his brother Hiram in particular are known as the Blade Brothers."

"Wait," I commented. "You said the countries were based on abilities of the Riora villages. How do shadows and swordsmanship go together?"

He smiled. "Our country is the exception. Basically, if you don't classify under any other country, you fall under our country. Anyway, to get back to your original question, Roy's ability is something his whole family could do. As for what that ability is, I think it would be better for you to see it in action."

His air of mystery brought a smile to my face, but I chose not to pursue it. When I didn't say anything, he stood up. "Well, shall we begin with your training?"

I sighed and stood up as well. "So what are we doing?"

He grabbed my wrist and I was surprised by how strong his grip was. "Break free."

I just looked at him. "You're not going to tell me how?"

"I'm training you, but I also need to figure out how much you know. The more you know, the faster we can move through your training. If I tell you how to break free, then I wouldn't be figuring out how much you know."

I stared down at my wrist with a blank face. I had sparred with Christian before and I had held my own against the men who had attacked me at the house, but I had never actually had to break out of a wrist grab before. I had seen it done on television, but I had no clue how to physically break out. *Well, time to improvise...*

I brought my right foot up and did a side kick. Since I was kicking on the same side that he was grabbing me, he would have a hard time stopping my kick. He'd either have to let go or take the kick. However, he surprised me by using his grip to pull me forward, knocking me off balance. However, I used to momentum to go into a back kick. This time he had to let go of my wrist to dodge, and I took the opportunity to reset myself.

I kept myself turned sideways so that less of me was exposed and brought my guard up. Myron was taller, heavier, and overall stronger than I was. It wouldn't take much for him to push me over. I bent my knees a little more so that I would have better balance. Myron also stepped back in a fighting stance, but I lunged forward before he could really prepare himself. I stepped forward with my left foot, but punch with my right, knowing the twisting of my hip would give me more power behind my punch, despite my small size. He dodged my punch with ease, but I kept up with the moment and turned and did an elbow jab. However, Myron spun at the same time, stepping out of the way of my elbow. As he did so, he kicked my right foot. Thanks to the bend in my knees, I was stable and able to prevent myself from falling, but it still knocked me off my balance. I threw my arms out, trying to regain my balance, but that had meant I had opened up my guard and Myron took the opportunity to tap me in the stomach. He didn't hit me hard. It was just enough to know that I had made a mistake.

I gritted my teeth and reset myself. Myron did a roundhouse kick to my head, but I blocked it and immediately went into a spin kick. This caused Myron to lean backward. When I came out of my spin kick, I meant to follow up with a front kick, but I found that I hadn't been fast enough. The second I had come out of the spin Myron had tapped me in the stomach. However, I didn't let that deter me and went into a front kick anyway. Once again he blocked it with ease, but instead of dropping my foot after, I immediately went into a side kick. He side stepped my kick so I quickly dropped my foot and sent a punch at his face. However, he grabbed my wrist and pulled me forward, giving me more momentum than I had expected and I fell forward. Thankfully I managed to catch myself with my hands before I did a face plant.

"You're too heavy." Myron told me as he helped me back up.

I wiped the sweat from my forehead. "I'm barely taller than five foot, and I don't weigh much more than a hundred pounds. You're saying that I'm too heavy?"

He chuckled, "No, I mean that you're too heavy on your feet. You have decent fighting skills, and you're right. Despite being small, you have nice solid stances that will prevent you from being knocked over by your enemy. I was surprised when I kicked your foot earlier that you didn't fall. However, you are a little too solid. It seems like your movements are loaded with muscle power. Actually," Myron also stood up, "Let's end here today. Tomorrow I want you to watch Roy train. He specializes in hand to hand combat. Roy's not much for teaching, but I think you would learn a lot just by watching him."

I shrugged. "Okay."

~

**OCTOBER 7**



Kian and Karexon went out to do as Myron had ordered, just like they had the day before, except this time, Roy stayed behind. I sat down out of the way and didn't say a word, not wanting to disrupt Myron and Roy. After a minute, they both stepped back into a fighting stance. My senses weren't up to Riora standards, so, had they been fighting at full strength, they would be moving so fast that my eyes wouldn't be able to follow. They were taking it slow for me, but what I saw still amazed me.

When Roy activated his eyes, I was shocked to discover that it seemed like his irises actually moved, like a robot analyzing something. Also, weird markings appeared beneath his eyes. It kind of reminded me of the marking on my back, but they weren't the same.

Roy was so fluid in his movements, almost like he was dancing. Not a single move was wasted. He was strong, but it wasn't the big buff kind of strength. He had core strength. He also had speed. I may not have seen the full extent of their speed, but I'd bet that if they were really going at it, Myron would have trouble keeping up, blocking Roy's attacks at the last possible second. Roy also had a solid base with good stances which gave his techniques power. Most of all, he had balance. Roy could walk on his hands like it was no different than walking on his feet. When Myron caught one of his kicks, Roy dropped down to his hands, spun around, and then did a sweep with his free leg. Every movement he made was perfectly controlled. As they fought, Roy's eyes seemed to analyze everything, every little shift, every breath that Myron took. It almost seemed like Roy knew Myron's next move before Myron did.

"So what did you think?" Myron asked as he sat down next to me, a water bottle in his hand.

"It's... unreal. I see what you mean about Roy's eyes."

Myron smiled and took a drink of water. "Other than giving him great analytical skills, his eyes allow him to see the nervous system and muscle structure in a person's body. He can also see the Miutho that flows through a person. It is a complicated system, but in every person there are critical Miutho points. Roy doesn't need to be full of muscle to be effective. He just needs to get inside their guard so he can hit a critical point. Roy would never allow it, but if you were to give him a nickname other than Roy, his enemies would call him the Paralyzer. He puts Miutho in his hands and then hits a critical point in his opponent's nervous system, temporarily paralyzing his opponent's arm, leg, or whatever limb he chooses. He essentially cripples his enemy, leaving them unable to guard themselves. If you're really unlucky, he'll hit you in the spinal cord, and not only will you be unable to defend yourself, but you'll also be permanently paralyzed. It's not something you can recover from. He can also hit a critical point in your Miutho system, preventing you from being able to use Miutho." When he noticed Roy heading for the door, Myron called out. "Roy, wait up!"

Roy stopped, ready to walk out the door. He turned back to face Myron, his face void of emotion as usual. He was simply waiting because he had been ordered to.

"I want you to do a sparring match with Raelyn. I think it will help her grasp the concept a little better."

Roy closed the door and walked back to the center of the room. A little hesitantly, I stood up and walked over to where he stood. When I was ready, Myron spoke nonchalantly, "Begin."

I stepped into a fighting stance, and when Roy didn't move at all, I decided to take the offensive. I charged at him, but he suddenly put his slightly bent finger to my forehead, causing me to pause. Then, he straightened out his finger, shoving me backwards, and I landed on my butt. Still whirling from how I had ended up on the ground, I looked up at Roy in confusion.

"Don't waste my time." He glared down at me, gave one last look at Myron, and then walked out the door.

"Don't take it personally." Myron comforted as he helped me to my feet.

"I don't get it. Why does he shut himself down like?"

I had meant it as a rhetorical question but Myron answered anyway, "I heard a saying once, 'Anybody can break down. It takes a man not to.' Maybe that's what Roy thinks."

I shook my head. "It's not healthy."

"Maybe, but it's effective. Sure, Roy is talented, but what makes him so good at this job is his ability to shut his emotions down. He doesn't feel regret or anything else that might hinder his abilities. He is ruthless and a terror to see in battle."

"If you say so," I shook my head.

"Sorry, it's the best explanation I've got. Roy isn't someone who can easily be described by words."

~

I interlaced my fingers behind my head as I stared at the ceiling and listened to the rain pound against the sliding door that led to the balcony. It reminded me of my first night out of foster care. Christian and I were staying at the apartment Dustin had been renting for the first time. It was also the first time I had slept anywhere other than the foster care place. I had been slightly uncomfortable and was having trouble sleeping.

*I squinted as a car drove down the streets and their headlights shown through the giant window. Who would be out this late at night?*

*My next thought came out of nowhere. I still have homework I have to do. It was an annoying thought, and stressful. My schedule was jammed pack for tomorrow even though Sunday was supposed to be a day of rest. How was I supposed to fit homework in there?*

*My mind was interrupted before it could come up with an answer. All was quiet. Not even a cricket was chirping. If it had been, I never would have heard the small "squeak" of a door opening. Is somebody in the house? My breathing sped up as this thought raced through my mind. I tried to calm myself down. No, I could hear the door unlock when Dustin came home earlier today. I would have heard if somebody had picked the lock or broken in. The thought was rational and made sense but my body was still full of fear. I could hear footsteps as somebody walked down the hall.*

*There was the sound of something being bumped into the wall and a mumbled cuss word. I smiled, my fear gone. Dustin had bumped into the small table in the hallway. When he walked into my line of view, I whispered, "Do you not know your own house well enough to navigate it at night?"*

*From what I could see, the corner of his mouth turned up into a smile. "I guess not. I'm sorry if I woke you."*

I froze at the sound of movement in the apartment. This time, I couldn't comfort myself with the thought of a lock being picked. This was the big leagues now. I wouldn't be surprised if somebody was able to get in without making a single sound. I held my breath staying silent, trying to listen. It was a shuffling noise and I forced myself to remain calm, trying to figure out what it was.

I exhaled when someone suddenly bolted upright into a sitting position from where he was sleeping on the floor. It was only Roy. Déjà vu much?

On closer examination, I realized that Roy was breathing hard and was drenched in sweat. Careful not to give away that I was awake, I watched him. He interlaced his fingers behind his head and put his head in between his legs, obviously trying to get a hold of himself. After a minute, he stood up and walked over to the kitchen to get a glass of water. Now that he was in the small light of the kitchen lamp that was always left on, I could see just how pale he was. Well, paler than usual. With his glass of water, he walked over to the sliding door and looked out at the pouring rain. A flash of lightening lit up his face, and I was surprised to see the pure hatred that filled his beautiful red eyes. I had thought I had seen him angry before, but that hadn't even come close to now. The rest of his face was completely blank, but in that quick flash, I had seen the almost murderous glint in his eyes.

*Was this the same Roy I had gone to school with and who had put me on the ground today? What could possibly shake him up this badly?*

When Roy had finished his water, he put his glass in the sink in the kitchen and lay back down. When I was satisfied he had gone back to sleep, I rolled over and closed my eyes. I fell asleep with a new mystery in my head.

~

## ***OCTOBER 8***

"Raelyn, are you okay? You've been staring at Roy pretty much all day. You're not starting to get a crush on him, are you?" Karexon, my guard for the day, teased. Myron had gone out with Kian, leaving Karexon and Roy with me.

I ignored the last part of his comment and, when I made sure Roy was out of earshot, I commented, "I couldn't sleep last night, and I saw Roy bolt upright like he had just woken up from a bad dream. He was drenched in sweat and was shaking like crazy. I've never seen him without his cool composure, but I can't work up the courage to ask him about it."

"I don't suggest it. His reaction won't be pretty."

I looked up at him. "So you know about it?"

With a sigh he sat down next to me. "There is a man named Dakim Adelinda who is said to be one of the best Riora to have ever lived. At nineteen, Roy is the youngest person in history to ever be admitted to Ellipsis, and he was eighteen when he joined. Dakim came from a village called Ikicnie, but, had Dakim lived in Vriknir, he would have beaten Roy by a long shot. His power and abilities are unparalleled.

"Ten years ago, Dakim went rogue and killed scores of our villagers. Roy lost both of his parents and his older sister that day. Roy blames himself. He's talented, and he knows it. He thinks that if he had been stronger he would have been able to stop Dakim. Before Dakim went rogue, the villagers used to call Roy the Dakim of Vriknir. That day has haunted Roy ever since. It pushes him to train non-stop. He wants revenge."

I looked at Roy with new eyes. He had been holding onto his hatred for ten years now. It was no wonder Roy was so cold to everybody. Karexon had said Roy would react badly if I had brought it up. I couldn't even begin to imagine how he would react if he discovered that Dakim was my brother.

I couldn't help feeling bad for Roy. He had lost everything. I couldn't blame him for being angry at the man who had taken it all away from him. It made me frustrated. The image of Dakim laughing at my attempt with the origami bird and the image of Dakim being a mass murder were not clicking. There was something between the two events that I was missing. There had to be.

"Thanks for the insight." I thanked Karexon before standing up and walking into the restroom. I locked the door and pulled out a piece of paper and a pen from underneath the sink. I didn't know why there was paper under the sink, but at that point I wasn't in the mood to question it and began writing.

*Dear Dakim,*

*For the longest time, the oldest memory I could recall was when I was seven. I had just arrived at an orphanage and a boy about my age was being picked on. I stood up for the boy and*

*the kid who was picking on him went flying across the room. I discovered that I wasn't like everybody else, and from then on, I asked myself, "Who am I? What am I?"*

*I found my answer when, for the first time, I came into contact with somebody else who wasn't human. All it took was the slightest skin contact, and whatever barrier that had been holding everything back shattered. The abilities I had been struggling to control increased tenfold, and all the memories came flooding back.*

*That was about a week ago. I've been hunted ever since for who knows why. Thankfully, I have some nice people looking out for me. One of those people happens to be Royce Adimari. His whole family was killed... by you.*

*When I got my memories back, the one that stuck the most was that summer day when we sat under the tree, and you taught me how to make these origami birds. I still remember the smile on your face. I thought you were the coolest thing in the world. I was so proud to call you my brother.*

*I feel like two different people have been described to me. I thought that when I got my memories back, all my questions would be answered. I couldn't have been more naive. I have more questions now than I did then. I guess my question to you is: Are you the big brother I remember who loved to make me laugh and ruffle my hair? Or are you the man who causes people to tremble at the mention of your name?*

*It was a little harsh but how would you address a brother you haven't talked to in ten years and supposedly was a mass murderer?*

# Chapter 7

*OCTOBER 9*

Writing the letter was easy. Getting it sent was a different story. I was watched like a hawk, but even if I asked for a little bit of privacy, it would be hard for them to give it to me. With the apartment being so small, it was impossible for them to give me space without leaving me unprotected.

I stepped out on the balcony, even though I had been advised not to. With the origami bird in my hand, I crossed my arms and rested them on the railing, the bird hidden out of sight.

It wasn't too long afterward that Kian, my guard for the day, stepped outside. "You know, you're a sitting duck for anybody who would want to kill you. Well, I guess right now you'd be a standing duck."

I sighed. "I know, but I've been cooped up in here for a week. I'm not usually claustrophobic, but it's starting to get to me. I had to get a breath of fresh air before I went insane."

"Insanity can be cured once we get out of this mess. You can't be cured if you're killed here on the balcony."

I rolled my eyes. "Fine. After you."

I held my hand out, and he stepped through the door. While he had his back to me, I let go of the origami bird, letting it fall over the side of the railing and take off, and then I walked in after him.

~

When the sun began to set, I walked over to the door and looked out. I still hadn't gotten a reply and I began to wonder whether I would ever receive a reply. Could a little origami bird travel to the other dimension? Did this little trick actually work? Even if the bird did make it to my brother, would he write back?

As I looked out the door, I caught sight of the night sky. The stars were brighter here than they had been where I was staying with Dustin and Christian. It made me wonder if Christian was looking at the stars right now. We used to fall asleep sitting outside just staring at the stars. I clenched my teeth, suddenly knowing that never again would I be able to do that.

"Rae, please. The door..."

I sighed and took a few steps back. Kian was obviously getting tired of reminding me. I was careful not to step on any of the other sleeping Ellipsis members as I made my way back to the couch. I always thought they were so strange. I was still getting used to going to sleep so early, so I would often stay up and talk with whoever was on security for the night. We could talk at normal levels and everybody else would remain asleep. Yet, the slightest hint of danger and they were on their feet, wide awake, faster than eyes could follow.

I stretched out on the couch, but laid in the opposite direction from what I usually did so I could see out the door from where I was laying. I fell asleep trying to picture Christian and Dustin's faces in the stars.

~

My training continued and, to Roy's obvious annoyance, Myron continued to ask him to train with me. They had hit a dead end on their search for information on my attackers. In the end, they had just come to the conclusion that when Myron's team crossed the border, it alerted the Hunters. Once the Hunters were alerted, they started looking for anybody who was using Miutho, and since Myron's

team hadn't used Miutho since coming to Earth, I had been the only one the Hunters were able to detect. They had come after me thinking I was the rule breaker.

Since they were no longer out gathering information, I saw a lot more of Myron's team, which meant that I spent a lot more time doing sparring matches. Sparring was the core of my training. Like Myron mentioned before, every family had their own specialty. Myron said that since "I didn't know" my family, I'd end up discovering the techniques on my own. It was just too early on in my training to know what those were. I wasn't ready to tell him that I actually did know my family. After what Karexon said about Roy, I wasn't sure if I was ever going to tell them. However, this meant that they would never know that I already knew my specialty. Dakim was known for his ability to control the pure form of Miutho. It was why he was so powerful.

Every Riora could manipulate Miutho. How one manipulates it is how different techniques are performed. However, one is usually limited in the way they can manipulate it. It was kind of like how one human might be talented at drawing, but horrible at playing sports. A Riora might be talented at manipulating Miutho in a certain way in order to achieve a technique. However, it would be practically impossible for them to manipulate it any other way. It was whatever came naturally.

The Adelinda family was the exception. Our family didn't have limitations like that. We weren't restricted to just one type of technique. Our only restriction was how long it took to learn and master the technique. I could learn to control shadows like Karexon or manipulate sound like Myron. The only thing stopping me was the fact that it would give away my relation to Dakim. For now, I was stuck with the basics.

I groaned as I ended up on the ground once again by one of Roy's flicks to the forehead. "Why do you keep doing that?" I shouted up at him in frustration.

He squatted so he could glare down at me, "Because you keep giving me the opportunity."

I threw a punch from where I was on the ground, but it was no use. He caught it like I hadn't done more than tossed a ball to him. "You are too focused on offense, and not at all on defense. You can't hope to hit somebody if you're leaving yourself wide open to their attack."

"I know that!" I growled and got back to my feet.

Roy grabbed my wrist and forced me to look into his beautiful bright red eyes, except now that Skayikon was activated, there were lines of black in his red eyes. "I'm telling you, because you don't know. If there is even the smallest hole in your defense, the enemy is going to find it and exploit it. This isn't a video game. You don't get a second chance if you die the first time."

I lowered my eyes embarrassed. "I'm sorry."

"Never apologize." He ordered and let go of my wrist as he stood up. "Only ever ask for forgiveness."

"But isn't that the same thing?"

"No, an apology is saying that you are sorry for doing something. When you are asking for forgiveness, you are asking for somebody to not be angry with you for a past action. It doesn't necessarily mean that you are sorry for the action."

"But why?" I continued to question.

"Being sorry means that you regret something. Regretting something leads you to second guess yourself. When you second guess yourself, you hesitate, and when you hesitate, you die."

I frowned. "That's a little extreme, don't you think?"

He didn't answer. His only reply was, "I'm done for today."

Still frustrated, I grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge and watched as Roy walked out the door. I shook my head and undid the lid on the bottle as I sat down on the couch. I was frustrated, but it was aimed more at myself than at Roy.

My opinion of him was slowly changing. I wasn't usually one who was quick to judge, but now I realized I had judged him right off the bat. I'd thought he was a stuck up snob without getting to know

the full story. It seemed like the more I learned about him, the more I realized how completely wrong my first impression was. He was still cold and harsh, but it could be a lot worse considering the tragedy he had been through. With the loss of his parents and sister, no doubt he felt all alone. With no emotional ties to anybody, it was easy for him to completely shut down his emotions as Myron had described. Roy was talented, and he knew it, but it wasn't something he advertised. I had originally thought Roy remained quiet because he thought he was better than everybody else. I thought he was proud and looked down at everybody else. It turned out that he just didn't like dealing with people when they did idiotic things. The constant flick to my forehead was testament to that. Of course, high school students were constantly saying and doing idiotic things so it was no wonder he had hated it so much.

In an odd way, I almost respected him. He didn't put up with bullshit, and he didn't take no for an answer. He was smart, but he never let his knowledge interfere with logic. He pushed me hard in training, and he frustrated me beyond belief, but he knew how to push just the right buttons to get me to really focus on what I needed to learn. If one could manage to overlook the often cold shoulder and closed off personality, he really wasn't a bad guy. All he really needed was somebody to warm up that shoulder of his.

~

## *OCTOBER 12*

When almost a week had passed, I began to lose hope that I would ever get a response to my letter. Instead, I started counting down the days until we could leave.

"What are you doing?" Karexon asked me one evening after the team had returned from making sure the security measures and traps they had set up were still in place. Myron sat sharpening one of his knives while Karexon and Kian stood in the kitchen talking. Roy stood over by the window, watching what was going on outside.

I stopped banging my head on the wall and opened my eyes to glare at him. "I've been stuck in this stupid, little apartment for almost two weeks! I want out!"

Karexon raised an eyebrow at me. "And you think banging your head on the wall is going to help?"

I rolled my eyes and folded my arms across my chest, "No."

"Just checking," He teased. "You never know what spending ten years with humans might do to your common sense."

"Ten years..." Myron muttered.

I crinkled my nose, "Yeah, what of it?"

Myron looked at me, puzzled, "So then, your first memory is when you were seven years old?"

Well, it wasn't my first memory anymore, but I wasn't going to say that. "Yeah, it was my first day at the orphanage."

He continued to stare at me with a puzzled expression, and of course Karexon's curiosity peaked. "I've seen that expression before. You have a theory."

"Not quite." Myron smiled and returned to sharpening the knife in his hand. "I was trying to think of some history. I thought that maybe by running through past events we might have some clue as to who you are or how you ended up on Earth. The only thing I can think of that happened ten years ago is..." His voice trailed off, and from the corner of my eye I could see Roy stiffen. "Anyway, I only know the history of Vriknir. It is very possible that you came from a region I am unfamiliar with, which means that there events I don't know about."

"Why is that?"

"Hm?" Myron looked up at me from his knife.

"When I was in school, we had to learn history every year. There were times when I would swear that we were learning the same history over and over again, and we weren't just learning about the history of the United States either. Sure most of it revolved around the United States since that's where I lived, but I still had a few classes like Global Studies. I've learned some of the major events in other major countries."

"You're right," Myron nodded, "and the average humans who live in the United States go to school for thirteen years, maybe more if they attend preschool or go to college. There is a big focus on education in this country, and other countries here for that matter. However, in Vriknir, there isn't such a big deal about education, not like there is here. Here, kids go to school, and it isn't usually until the high school or college level that they decide what they really want to do with their life. Therefore, they receive a well-rounded education. However, a person knows from very early on if they're going to be a Riora. Then, they can focus on learning the things that are necessary for them to succeed. They do not have to waste time learning things that they will never use."

"Well, obviously you need to know the history of other places." I joked.

Myron chuckled. "I didn't say it was perfect."

Everybody looked up at the sound of a small tapping noise. Outside, a little, origami bird was flying into the window.

"What is that?" Karexon commented.

"Oh, it found its way back." I quickly lied, trying to keep my voice level even though my heart was racing, and got up to open the door.

"No, Raelyn don't!" Kian shouted. "We don't know what it will do."

"Calm down." I smiled and opened the door, plucking the animated bird from the air and it became still. "I made it."

"What?"

"I made it." I explained, sitting down on the couch as I unfolded the bird. I held it up for him to behold, careful not to show the writing that was written on the other side. "See, nothing is going to happen."

"You made it?" Myron repeated.

I searched for the right words. In the countless years I had spent hiding my secret, I had learned to lie pretty well. I learned that the best lies were actually half-truths. You threw in enough facts to make it believable without actually giving them any information.

"It was something I saw in a dream, so I decided to try it out."

Karexon spoke to Myron, "You know, I think I heard once about a family who could make inanimate objects come to life."

Myron nodded. "It would make sense. It explains why she was able to throw the knife without touching it. It's worth looking into."

To my relief, that was the last said on the subject. I folded up the paper and stuck it in my pocket. If I read it now, they would know it had been sent by somebody else. I would have to wait to read it.

~

Night couldn't come fast enough. Finally, everybody went to sleep, except for Karexon who was on the night shift. I waited a few minutes, and then got up and walked into the restroom. Even though a locked door wouldn't be able to stop somebody who was determined to get in, knowing that it was locked made me feel better so I pushed in the little round button on the door handle. Confident that I was alone, I pulled out the paper from earlier.



*If you enter the forest behind the apartment and walk for a quarter of a mile, you will come upon a clearing.  
Meet me there at midnight.*

I smiled. I had forgotten just how neat Dakim's handwriting was. Our parents had always made a big deal about our handwriting. They had said that neat handwriting made you seem more professional than if you just scrawled something out. I used to have neat handwriting as well, but in the years I had spent on Earth, it had become sloppy.

Then it dawned on me exactly what the note said. Midnight! That wasn't too long from now. At first I hesitated. What if it was actually from my attackers and they were just trying to trick me.

*"This," he held out the bird for me to see, "Is something special that only members of our family can do. I will know immediately if somebody has tried to copy one of these birds, therefore it won't put us in jeopardy."*

I truly hoped he had been right.

**\*\*\* Karexon \*\*\***

Karexon noticed right away when Raelyn slipped out. He quickly went over and woke Myron.

"Hm?" Myron mumbled, still sleepy.

"Rae has decided to slip out on us. Should I bring her back?"

Myron sat up thoughtfully. "No. Wake the others. We're going to follow her, make sure nothing happens to her. She's been getting restless lately. Hopefully all she needs is a little space. I'd prefer to calm her down and convince her to come back voluntarily. I'd like to avoid bringing her back here kicking and screaming if possible. It's been rough on her, and I don't want her to feel like we're the bad guys. If we drag her back, she'll think of this place as a cage, which will only encourage her to escape more. No, she needs to come back on her own. We'll be there just to make sure nothing happens to her."

"Understood."

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

I looked down at my watch. It was a little before midnight, and Dakim wasn't to be seen. While I waited, I frowned at my watch. Watches weren't usually my style. However, after I had been forced to give up my phone so we wouldn't be tracked, I found myself constantly reaching for it to check what time it was. I never knew how much I used time until I couldn't check it.

"Rae?"

I looked up at the sound of Myron's voice and quickly realized that the whole team was here. I should have known getting away wouldn't have been that easy. I needed to get them out of here before Dakim showed up.

"Raelyn..."

I spun to see Dakim a few yards away. His hair was a slightly darker shade of brown than mine, and instead of having blue highlights, the tips of his hair were blue. His eyes shone the same bright blue as mine, and seemed even brighter here in the dark. I could see them as if I were standing right in front of him even though I was on the other side of the clearing. He obviously had inherited the height genes, for he was almost a full foot taller than me. He wore a black sleeveless shirt, but with it he wore black arm sleeves and fingerless gloves. He also wore a black cape like that of a medieval knight. Not only his clothes, but also his body language screamed power and danger. His posture was perfect, but he stood slightly sideways and kept his head lowered as to keep himself hidden. I didn't know how he had

suddenly appeared, but at that point, I didn't care. At the first sight of him, Myron and the rest of the team had drawn weapons. This was quickly turning into my worst nightmare.

"No!" I shouted, willing them to let me explain but it was no good. With bloodlust in his eyes, Roy charged forward. Registering the threat, Dakim slowly pulled out a throwing knife and then brought it back in preparation.

I let out a sharp gasp at the pain as Dakim's knife dug into my hand, but I had succeeded. I had gotten everybody to stop. Even Roy stood still, in shock that I had blocked his knife with the back of my bare hand.

Dakim looked down at me, but surprised all of us by smiling. "I'd been hoping that you wouldn't take after me, and here you are more reckless than I ever was. You're lucky that it is the point on a throwing knife that is sharp, not the edge." Everybody, even Roy, watched, too shocked to move, as Dakim put the knife away and got down on his knees so he was more my level. He examined the wound on my hand before looking up at me. "It would seem I have come at a bad time. You have my apologies. I hope this helps clear up some of your confusion," He pressed his lips to my wound and before I realized what was going on, everything had gone black. Then, a picture appeared before my eyes.

*Dakim walked into the office of the leader of Ikicnie and then got down on one knee. He waited patiently to be addressed.*

*"You may rise." The leader told him.*

*Dakim did and stood with his feet shoulder width apart, his hands clasped behind his back. He was the image of discipline. "You requested my presence, sir?"*

*"I have a mission for you." The leader held out a folder to Dakim. "These men are part of an organized crime ring known as the Naeku. We've managed to shut down a majority of the organization, but these few in particular have continued to elude capture. Bring them in if you can, but if that seems impossible, do not hesitate to kill them. I want these men taken care of one way or another. We just received a tip that they're hiding out in a Teysas village known as Dersnag.*

*Dakim flipped through the folder, committing to memory the pictures of the men, their leader in particular. He was a big man, even taller than Dakim, and was much more muscular. He had long, rust red, slightly curly hair that was tied back with a pony tail. In this picture, his eyes looked almost black. Barely visible was a pendant that hung around his neck. It was a sword being driven through a dragon's head. "I've heard of Dersnag. It's one of the biggest Teysas villages in all of Kusnik."*

*The leader nodded, "But I don't know how long they will be there, so I want you to leave now. I'll send you with some money so you can pick up whatever you need along the way instead of going home to pack."*

*"Yes, sir." Dakim bowed before walking out of the leader's office. As he walked, he pulled out the notebook and pen he always kept with him.*

*Rae,*

*I've just received a mission that is very time sensitive, so I will be leaving immediately. I'm sorry I won't be able to stop by home before I go. Please tell Mom and Dad. I'll try to be home soon.*

*Dakim*

*He ripped out the paper he had written on and proceeded to fold it into the origami bird. He tossed the bird into the air and watched with a smile on his face as it began to flap around and eventually take off in the direction of his house. Once it was out of sight, he continued down the path towards the village gates.*

*"Dakim!"*

*He had just stepped out of the gates when he stopped at the sound of his name. He turned and found Rae running as fast as her little seven year old legs could carry her, the paper bird in her hand. "Rae?"*

*She wrapped her arms around his waist the best that she could, "How dare you leave without saying goodbye!"*

*"I'll be back before you even notice I was gone." He chuckled and tousled her hair, "Goodbye, Rae."*

*A big smile on her face, she called after him, "Bye, Dakim!"*

That image faded away, and another appeared before me.

*Dakim took his seat at the counter in one of the most popular bars in the Teyzas village. He turned when a young, blond woman approached him, "Aren't you a little young to be in a place like this?"*

*He rested his elbows on the counter behind him as he cast an illusion on himself to make him look older and casually lied, "On the contrary, I believe I'm older than you are."*

*"Is that so?" She giggled and sat down next to him. "Then you wouldn't mind buying us some drinks."*

*He pointed to the Ikicnie emblem on his uniform, "I'm here on business."*

*"Nothing says you can't have a little fun along the way," She winked at him, and then motioned for the bartender. After they received their drinks, she looked at him and cocked her head to the side, "So what business could a Riora from Ikicnie possibly have here?"*

*"I'm looking for a criminal group known as the Naeku." Dakim told her, and then decided to turn on the charm, "but you already know who the Naeku are, don't you?"*

*She rested her cheek on her hand and smiled up at him, "Now what could possibly lead you to think that?"*

*"Intuition goes a long way for a Riora." Dakim told her mysteriously.*

*"And what is your intuition telling you now?" She looked at him playfully.*

*He leaned in close to her, "That you're going to be the person that allows me to finally catch up with these bastards."*

*She laughed as she leaned back from him, "That's probably true, but you'll have to get quite a few more drinks in me first."*

*He raised an eyebrow at her, "That can be done."*

*She smiled at him, "I refuse to drink alone."*

*"Very well then," Dakim smiled as well and then turned to the bartender. "I'd like to start a tab."*

*She extended her hand to him, "My name is Ursula."*

*He smiled and took her hand, "Dakim."*

*"So tell me about yourself," She asked when the bartender brought them another round of drinks.*

*Dakim chuckled as he took a sip of his drink. "Aren't I supposed to be the one asking questions?"*

*The girl shrugged. "Why should you get all the fun?"*

*He decided to play along, "There isn't much to tell. I became a Riora when I was twelve, and that has been my life ever since."*

*"But doesn't that get lonely?"*

*"My parents are Riora, and I'm sure my younger sister will become a Riora soon enough, so we're all in it together." He explained and then winked at her, "Besides, I'm not lonely now, am I?"*

*She blushed slightly and then spoke, "I bet your sister really looks up to you. I know I really look up to my brother."*

*Dakim smiled down at his drink, "She gets on my nerves sometimes, but I don't know what I'd do without her."*

*"She's lucky to have such a good older brother." She blushed again and looked down at her own drink, "I wish I could meet a guy who said the same about me."*

*"Well, you're on your way."*

*She brightened up at his comment, but when the next song came on, her eyes lit up and she jumped to her feet and took Dakim by the hand. "This is my favorite song! Come dance with me!"*

*She led him to the dance floor before he could say a word. Dakim wasn't much for dancing, but he didn't put up much resistance. The alcohol had kicked in and he was having a good time. He wasn't about to argue with anything she wanted to do. They laughed while Dakim spun her around till the song faded out and to his surprise, she kissed him. Then when she pulled back, she smiled and whispered, "Let's get out of here."*

*Dakim only smiled before leading her towards the door. Once they were outside and could talk without having to shout over the music, Dakim struck up a conversation, "So, how does a cute girl like you know anything about a dark group like the Naeku."*

*Ursula's good mood dropped slightly, "My brother happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and he was killed by the Naeku. Since then, I moved here to their base of operations so I could keep tabs on what they were doing. Yet, I'm just one person. I can't take on a whole organization by myself, so when I saw you wearing the symbol of a Riora village, I thought maybe you would be able to help me, but then you said you were already hunting them down. It was perfect! I couldn't believe my luck, so you must forgive me if I've been a little forward today."*

*"You said their base of operations is here?"*

*She came to a stop when they'd reached the doorstep of her house and turned back to face him, "Yes, but as far as I can tell, the head honchos are setting out for Vriknir."*

*"Thank you for the info." Dakim nodded and began to step back. "I think it best that I be going now."*

*She took Dakim's hand and smiled up at him, "Why don't you come inside?"*

*Dakim shook his head, "If the Naeku are heading to Vriknir, I want to be able to meet them there."*

*Her eyes were playful, "I'm sure that can wait till morning."*

*"I think it time that your brother finally found peace." Dakim insisted, but he kissed her hand, "Goodnight, Ursula."*

*That image also faded away, but before the next one appeared, Dakim's voice drifted through my head, "I didn't know it at the time, but Ursula had been the younger sister of the Naeku's leader. Yet, I was drunk at the time, so when she told me the Naeku were heading to Vriknir, I didn't think to verify that the information was credible..."*

*Dakim slowly walked down the streets of Vriknir, his senses on high alert. Yet, it wasn't good enough. Out of nowhere, the next thing he knew, there was a big bang and he was being sent backwards by a giant heat wave. When he managed to get to his feet again, he found that several of the houses had been destroyed. People began to run away screaming, but he rushed right into the center of it all. He managed to catch a glimpse of a shadow through a slightly ajar door. Not hesitating, he burst through the door of the house and found the leader of the Naeku standing in the middle of the room, holding a knife covered in blood. The body of little boy a few years younger than Rae lay lifeless at his feet, and not too far away was a woman, who he assumed to be the boy's mother, barely clinging to life. Dakim stared at the sight in horror, but the leader of the Naeku smiled evilly as he licked the blood from the knife before letting it drop to the ground.*

*Enraged, Dakim lunged at the Naeku leader, but he vanished just before Dakim could reach him. Furious, Dakim punched the wall, created a huge hole in the side of the house. However, the sound of a feeble cough reminded him of the woman who lay dying on the floor. He quickly removed his shirt and*

*used it to apply pressure to the deep knife wound she had received to the stomach. However, the look in her eyes told him that she knew it was already too late. Yet, she wasn't afraid. She smiled, her eyes sparkling, and she whispered, "Don't blame yourself for this."*

*Then the sparkle faded from her eyes, and she was gone...*

*Dakim sat back, feeling completely helpless. He'd walked right into their trap, and now several citizens of Vriknir were dead. However, his sorrow quickly turned to anger as he stood and picked up the dagger the Naeku leader had left behind. He would avenge the people of Vriknir, and he would slay the Naeku with their own weapon.*

*Vriknir's Riora burst through the door, and when they saw the knife in his hand, they immediately prepared for battle, "Freeze!"*

*In Dakim's mind, the Riora who had just burst through the door didn't exist. The only thing filling his mind was the sound of building collapsing from the fire that continued to burn through the city and the sounds of the people screaming. Dakim took one last look and the woman and her son, and then disappeared.*

*Dakim reappeared just outside of the city border at the top of one of the many trees. He looked out over the forest, looking for any sign of disturbance. When nothing stuck out right away, Dakim closed his eyes and extended his senses. Yet there was no trace of the Naeku anywhere. He had been so close, and they had slipped through his grasp. They had even attacked a Riora village to throw him off, but he would not let this slow him down. He would not let them get away with this, and he would kill them with the very dagger they had used to hurt so many people.*

*That image also faded away, and the next one was from several days later. Dakim stopped outside one of the bars that was a known Naeku hang out when a little origami bird came flapping up to him.*

*Dakim,*

*We hope that you are in good health when this reaches you. Word of the attack on Vriknir has spread like wildfire, and Vriknir has pointed the finger at you. We believe that you are innocent, but Vriknir's evidence is overwhelming. Many of them are calling for war. Please, be careful.*

*Mom and Dad*

*Dakim crushed the paper bird in his hand. The situation was escalating quickly. He was running out of time to catch the Naeku. It would be the only way he could clear his name and stop this quickly approaching war. He cast the now crumpled bird away and kicked down the door to the bar, causing all the customers to go running. Only the Naeku sat unmoving, looking at him intently. Dakim pulled out the knife the Naeku leader had used to kill the woman and child and pointed it at the Naeku leader. "This ends here."*

*Thankfully Dakim didn't show me the actual fight, but I could only imagine how bloody it was. Instead, he skipped ahead to after the battle was over. Dakim picked up the body of the Naeku leader by his shirt collar and then vanished in a cloud of smoke, reappearing at Vriknir's city gates. The guards sent off alarms the second he had appeared, and it wasn't long before the entire city stood before him. He took in all their faces, but his eyes lingered on a young boy with bright red eyes. He wasn't much older than Rae, but he was kicking and screaming, trying to go charging at Dakim. However, the boy was being held back by a young man with red hair and white highlights. Seeing the little boy reminded him of the little boy and woman he had failed to rescue from the Naeku and it broke his heart. With a sigh, he set down the body of the Naeku leader and opened his mouth to explain, but stopped when an order suddenly rang out.*

*“Bring him down!”*

*Dakim went on the defensive as the entire village suddenly began attacking him. He couldn't harm any more people from Vriknir, so his only option was to run. He burst back through the city gates, dodging attacks from the Riora as he went. Once he cleared the city border, he immediately teleported back to Ikicnie. He took a few deep breaths, trying to get his adrenaline rush under control, and then began walking home. He was too lost in thought, trying to process everything that had happened, to notice anything around him. However, he came to a stop when the smell of something burning reached his nose. He took off at a full sprint but froze in his tracks when he saw his home completely engulfed in flames.*

*“Rae! Father! Mother!” Dakim screamed and began to run forward in the direction of the smoke cloud, but Luke came running up to him and held him back.*

*“No, Dakim, you can't! They're already gone. There is nothing you can do. If you run in there, you'll only die too. We have to get out of here.*

*Dakim dropped to his knees, tears filling his eyes for the first time since he was a kid. Why did this have to happen? Why?*

*“Dakim,” Luke put a comforting hand on his shoulder. “We can't stay here.”*

*“No, I can't stay here.” Dakim corrected, but his voice was detached. He wiped away his tears and stood up to look Luke in the eye. “I can't ask you to come with me.”*

*Luke smiled and put both his hands on Dakim's shoulders, “You don't have to ask. I'll have your back every step of the way.”*

When the last image faded away and I came to, he removed his lips from my hand, revealing that the deep cut had healed so much that it was only a little scratch. Yet, even as small as it was, he took out a bandage and began wrapping my hand. Afterwards he gave me a sad smile and then disappeared. However, his voice lingered. “I look forward to your next letter.”

I dropped to my knees, just staring at my hand, too shocked to do anything else. Roy recovered first and marched over to where I was. He grabbed me by the shoulder and shoved me against the tree. “You've been working with that traitor this whole time! How do you know him? Tell me!”

I continued to stare at my hand, still in shock. I didn't even recognize my own voice as I answered his question. “He's my brother...”

## Chapter 8

"I don't believe it!" Roy shouted, shoving me again.

"Roy!" Myron shouted and pulled him away from me.

I dropped to my knees, my voice seemingly detached as I explained, "Dakim didn't kill all those people."

"Liar!" Roy shouted and lunged at me again, but Myron held him back allowing me to continue.

"There was a group of Riora known as the Naeku. They were high ranked criminals who would receive the death penalty immediately if they were to ever get caught. When they continued to elude capture, my brother was sent to find them. Because of their high status, my brother was given permission to use deadly force.

"The Naeku knew this. They knew that if Dakim ever caught up to them, they were done for, so they devised a plan. They... Roy, I'm so sorry... They killed all those people, and then pinned it on my brother. When my brother finally caught up, everybody was already dead. There was nothing he could do. He walked right into their trap. The only thing left for him to do was complete his mission. It was successful, but the damage had already been done. Dakim returned the bodies of the dead men from the Naeku to Vriknir, hoping to clear his name, but the families of those who had been killed were too full of rage to listen to reason. The finger had been pointed at Dakim, and the dead bodies he brought back were seen as prizes of his kills. It just made the people angrier." I was in tears by the time I finished.

"You expect me to believe that bullshit!" Roy shouted at me. I stared up at him, truly scared. I'd never seen Roy lose his composure, and he wasn't just angry, he was furious.

Myron shook his head, "Roy, she's telling the truth."

"What?!" Roy turned on Myron.

"Listen," Myron's voice turned firm. "Her explanation makes sense. Until now, we have never known why Dakim would kill all those people, and then bring back the bodies of more people. She has given a logical explanation. Separate your emotions from the situation like you are so good at doing. We have to make decisions based on the information we are given. Her argument has a basis, and right now I am inclined to believe her. Besides, just because we have learned something new about her, that does not mean our mission has changed. Dakim's sister or not, we still have to bring her back to Vriknir."

Roy growled, freed himself from Myron's grip, and then vanished.

Kian moved to go after him, but Myron held up his hand. "Let him be."

"But Myron..."

Myron turned to Kian, "Imagine for a moment that I killed Hiram, your brother. You would hate me with every single cell in your body. You would never be the same again. Then, several years later, you discover that it wasn't me who killed your brother, but somebody else, somebody you've never even heard of before. Would you believe it just like that, in the blink of an eye?"

Kian lowered his eyes. "No."

Kian shifted his gaze to me, and I realized that all three of them were staring at me. I shied away from Kian's and Karexon's gaze. It wasn't that they were glaring at me. Actually, their faces were almost completely blank of emotion, but I felt like they were studying me. I was something foreign and unusual. Instead, I looked to Myron. His face didn't show any emotion either, but his eyes were full of compassion.

"Come on," Myron stepped forward and helped me to my feet. "Let's get you back before our enemy catches on to us, and you can get cleaned up."

I walked next to Myron while Kian and Karexon walked in front. Roy still had not come back. Nobody said a word, and I kept my head down with my arms wrapped around my stomach. We made it back to the apartment, and Myron brought me a wet rag to wash my face.

"Thank you." I muttered.

"If you don't mind," Myron spoke hesitantly as he squatted down in front of me, "I'd like to see what Dakim showed you."

"You're not serious!" Kian exclaimed. "Awebu is something the more advanced Riora can do. It is usually used to transfer thoughts that you don't usually want the enemy to hear, and requires extreme precision in the control of Miutho. She's only a few weeks into her training. There's no way she would be able to perform something so complicated!"

Myron smiled and there was a glint in his eye. "I get the feeling that she's been holding back during training. No doubt she is a lot more powerful than what we thought."

"What do I have to do?" I asked anxiously. I was willing to try anything if it meant I could get them to trust me again.

Myron held his hand out like he wanted to give me a high-five. "Put your hand to mine, and then close your eyes. Focus on my Miutho and yours. Picture it if you have to. Imagine it connecting. Once it's connected, just replay through your mind what Dakim showed you and I'll be able to see it."

I nodded and put my hand to his, and couldn't help but smile at how small mine was compared to his. I closed my eyes. I could picture his hand and mine, and I could feel our Miutho. It was like an aura that surrounded our hands. Everything looked gray except for the auras. Mine was blue while Myron's was white. They mixed to make a baby blue color. We were connected. I took a deep breath and went back through everything Dakim had shown me.

When it ended, I rested my head on the back of the couch, breathing hard. I opened my eyes to see Myron still squatting on the ground, but Karexon and Kian had come up behind him and placed their hands on Myron's shoulders.

Myron slowly opened his eyes and then looked outside at the rising sun. "Thank you Rae. Why don't you see if you can get some more sleep?"

I wasn't in the mood to argue. I lay down, and Myron threw the blanket over me. I was asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

### **\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

Myron stepped out onto the balcony and leaned heavily on the railing. He couldn't control the shaking that ran through his entire body and his chest felt like it was being constricted, making it hard for him to breathe.

"Myron, are you alright?" Kian asked as he and Karexon also stepped out into the balcony, out of hearing range of Rae, despite the fact that she had fallen asleep.

"T-The woman that Dakim tried to save..." Myron stuttered. "That was Rose."

Karexon and Kian lowered their heads in sorrow. After a moment, Karexon spoke, "Is there anything we can do for you?"

"Just... give me a minute." Myron breathed and rested his head on the railing, appreciating the cool of the metal. He took a few deep breaths, trying to clear his mind and regain control. After a few moments, he lifted his head and turned back to Kian and Karexon, "Alright."

"What do you think?" Kian asked.

"She, at least, isn't lying." Myron explained. "What she doesn't realize about that kind of connection is that, not only does it transfer thoughts, but it also transfers feelings as well. She's telling the truth."

"But is what Dakim showed her the truth?" Kian brought up.

"Would Dakim lie to his sister?" Karexon questioned.

Myron took a deep breath. "I believe them. It seems like the more I think it over, the more it all seems to make sense. What do you two think?"



Karexon stared at the cement ground. “ *‘It would seem I have come at a bad time. You have my apologies. I hope this helps clear up some of your confusion.’* The look on his face when he said that... Nobody could imitate that sincerity. I think he’s telling the truth.”

Kian looked out at the rising sun. “Can you imagine what kind of uproar this news is going to make?”

“I don’t really want to.” Myron muttered as he also looked out into the sunrise, causing Kian and Karexon to look at him. “This isn’t just a new piece of information. This is earth-shattering.” He shook his head. “There are so many different ways the public could react. It hurts just to consider them all. Yet, that isn’t our job. It is Lady Vanek’s. Our job is simply just to bring her the information.”

Kian nodded. “I understand.”

Myron brought his attention back to Karexon and Kian. “Let me warn you two. I can see that you’re excited,” Kian shuffled his feet knowing Myron was speaking about him, “but there is the possibility that this could go seriously wrong. Our mission has just gotten a whole lot more dangerous. We have to be ready for anything. I talked to Lady Vanek not long after we first discovered Rae. She said that it was of great importance, but wouldn’t tell me why. I see now why she withheld the information from me. Under no circumstance is anything allowed to happen to Rae, understand?”

“Yes, Myron.”

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

### ***OCTOBER 13***

I rolled over, careful not to fall off the couch this time, and looked out at the clear blue sky. It was probably about noon. I couldn’t bring myself to get up. The events of last night went through my mind like a video recorder set to playback.

Myron seemed to notice that I had awoken and placed a bowl of cereal on the table in front of me without saying a word. A few minutes later, I sat up with my knees pulled up to my chest, closing myself off, and started eating the cereal. Even after all the events stopped playing before my eyes, Dakim’s voice continued to linger in my mind. *I look forward to your next letter.*

I sighed and placed my empty cereal bowl down on the table. While Myron’s team didn’t know every single detail about me, they knew enough. It would be a lot harder to send a second letter. I barely looked up when Myron picked up my empty bowl, but had to do a double take when I noticed he placed a piece of paper down in the bowl’s place.

He shrugged slightly. “I heard once that the Adelinda family likes to use origami when they’re... stressed.” I didn’t miss his hesitation, something Roy always yelled at me for. “I thought this might help.”

He gave me a soft smile, and as he walked away, a pen fell out of his back pocket. I couldn’t help but smile as I discreetly extended my fingers and attached Miutho strings to the pen, pulling it closer to me. Myron and his team knew the truth, but Dakim was still considered an outlaw. Myron could not help me contact Dakim, openly at least. When there was no need for secrecy when talking about Dakim, I would have to remember to thank him.

I folded the paper up and hid it in my pocket along with the pen. A few minutes later, I casually got up and walked into the bathroom. Once safely inside, I pulled out the paper and pen and began writing.

*I apologize for how harsh my first letter was. I was angry and frustrated.*

I paused when I realized I had just apologized, another thing Roy had yelled at me for doing. Yet, I didn't have another piece of paper, and I felt crossing it out would be rude, so I left it as it was.

*I am at a complete loss for words. What am I supposed to say to my innocent, long lost brother, "Hey, how are you doing?" Yet, I want you to know that I'm glad I am able to send this letter in the first place. Myron, Karexon, and Kian, the Ellipsis members who are with me, believe that you are innocent. Roy... well, I don't know about him. He disappeared after he discovered that I was your sister, and I haven't seen him since.*

*Myron, Karexon, and Kian might believe that you're innocent but until they can get back and inform Lady Vanek, you're still considered a criminal. Until then, we'll just have to stick to letters, because Myron and his team will be required to report any other contact you have with me.*

*I wish it didn't have to be this way. I'm stuck in this cramped, little apartment when I'd rather be hanging out with you like the day you first taught me origami. I want to sit and listen to you tell me all about how things have been since I left. I miss you big brother. Rae.*

So the first letter was harsh and this one was cheesy and sounded like the wish of a little seven year old girl, but oh well. I'd been through a lot. My emotions were allowed to be everywhere.

The day passed slowly. The team had hit a dead end on gathering information about the people who had come after me, so instead the team resorted to increasing my security. Roy still hadn't returned, so it was just Myron, Kian, and Karexon who took shifts. I had been excused from training for the day so I was left to entertain myself.

After a few hours, I worked up the courage to ask Myron a favor, "Um, Myron? Would it be possible for you to do something for me?"

"That depends on what it is." Myron answered casually, not looking away from the window where he had been standing for almost an hour.

"I want a book from the library."

He finally turned away from the window to face me. "Well, you can't use your library card, but I can pick it up from a bookstore."

"That would be nice. Thank you."

"What's the name of the book?" Myron asked as he got ready for his departure.

"It's called Spanish Conjugation. I figured since I'm sitting around here I could be practicing."

"I know you said you experimented with other languages when you came to Earth, but you can actually speak them?"

"I'm not fluent in any of them, but I know most of them well enough to be able to hold my own if I was talking to a foreigner. A lot of languages are simply just memorization, which I seem to be good at. Yet, if you don't use them very often, you start forgetting. That's why I want that book, so I can keep practicing."

Myron shrugged, "Fair enough."

He walked out the door, and, almost half an hour later, he returned and tossed the book to me.

"Thank you." I told him before opening the stiff cover and breathing in the new book smell.

"You probably should have picked up more of those." Kian commented. "We don't have reference books like those back home."

"Why not?" I asked, looking up from the book.

"Technically, we're not even supposed to be here." Karexon answered. "Travel between the dimensions is strictly forbidden."

"Why?" I asked, looking between the three of them.

Myron spoke, "Humans are close-minded, but they'd do almost anything to further their quest for knowledge. They fear the unknown, so they seek for things to be known to them. If they ever found out about us, there is no telling what they'd do. It was agreed that if the humans were to discover our existence, it might prove extremely dangerous. By nature, we are more powerful than them, but they have proved time and again that sheer power does not guarantee a victory. The American revolution is proof of that."

I narrowed my eyes at Myron. "For somebody who doesn't know very much history about other countries, you sure seem to know a lot about the United States."

"It was a necessity." Kian spoke up. "Our assignment to come find you was off the books. Nobody other than Lady Vanek and Jerome know that we are here."

"Wait," I interrupted, "Who is Jerome?"

"He is the head of Ellipsis and one of the strongest in Vriknir, next to Lady Vanek, but you will no doubt meet him. Anyway, before we could come to earth, we had to make sure that we would be able to blend in. We spent hours learning the history, the culture, and technology."

"Our technology?" I questioned. They had already proved that they were naturally smarter than humans. How was it that the technology on Earth was different from theirs? If anything, I would expect that their technology to be advanced than on Earth.

"Actually, we don't have much need for technology." Karexon told me matter-of-factly. "I think Myron told you before how each of the countries in our dimension has their own specialty. Well, that's kind of like here on Earth. Here, each country has their own industries and such, and they trade with other countries to gain stuff that they can't make in their own country. We get what we need from other countries. Also, we don't have cars. First of all, for us Riora, it is quite difficult to be able to defend yourself when you are stuck inside a car. If you need to get someplace, then you learn to teleport or you walk. We also don't have cell phones. Riora can transfer thoughts through skin contact, but Ikicnie, the Country of Mind, has developed something that allows you to directly transfer your thoughts to your comrades."

Another question occurred to me, "This may sound like a stupid question, but here on Earth we have different ethnicities, you know, like Caucasian, African-American, Asian, and so on. Do you have that as well?"

It was Myron's turn to answer. "To an extent we do. You've only ever heard us mention Riora because the village of Vriknir consists mostly of Riora, but there are others. There is Niasha, the Riora village for the Country of Shapeshifters. They speak French and are our closest allies. They cannot manipulate Miutho, at least not in the way Riora can, but they are just as powerful as Riora. Their society is a little more rigid than ours and is built on a hierarchy. The Dragons, the Adelinda family, were considered the most powerful, but as you know, few remain. Hawks, Snakes, and Wolves are considered the second most powerful. Foxes are less powerful, but what they lack in strength they make up for in cunning. Cats are also not as powerful, but they are known for their speed, agility, and stealth. You can tell a Shapeshifter by the markings on their bodies that sort of look like tattoos."

"The other two countries are the Country of Mind and the Country of Elements, and I am sure you can guess what most the Riora's abilities are based off. Ikicnie is the Riora village for the Country of Mind and they speak Japanese. Mekusc is the Riora village for the Country of Elements, and they speak

Arabic. The Riora from Ikicnie and Mekusc are much more similar to the Riora from Vriknir than the Shapeshifters, although the Riora from Mekusc typically have a much, much darker skin tone than us.

"The term Riora in general can be misleading. The word 'Riora' technically only refers to those who have officially been employed by a country or village. However, it is often used to describe anybody who can manipulate Miutho, and since there are so few people who can do it, most who can manipulate it become Riora. Although Miutho is what gives Shapeshifters their ability to transform, they cannot release it into a physical attack the way most Riora can. However, they are still referred to as Riora because in a sense, they do manipulate Miutho and they are employed by their government.

"Then there are the Teysas. They are what you would call the common people. Although they have the body physic and mental capacity of a Riora, they lack the ability to manipulate Miutho. They are probably the most similar to humans. Teysas villages are found all over Kusnik, but the appearances and languages of the people very greatly depending on which country the people belong to."

I massaged my temples with my fingers as I tried to comprehend everything he was saying, "So, let me get this straight. There are the Shapeshifters who use Miutho to transform but that is the extent of their use of Miutho. Riora technically refers to anybody who is employed by the government but usually refers to anybody who can manipulate Miutho, and the Teysas are the common people."

Kian nodded, "That's about it in a nutshell."

"A very small nutshell," Karexon commented.

Myron smiled, "Yes, our societies and customs are much more complicated than what you have just described."

"Oh wonderful," I rolled my eyes sarcastically and tried to put my nose back in the book.

Before I could get too focused on the conjugations, Myron spoke up, "I asked once before about how much you remembered. If you don't mind, I'd like a more truthful answer this time."

I nodded, glad I could finally be honest with Myron, "I lived in Kusnik for the first seven years of my life, but I remember very little of it. I only remember that we lived in Ikicnie. It was me, my brother, our father, and mother. Dakim was a Riora for Ikicnie and, as you know, was known far and wide for his abilities. He held one of the highest ranking positions until "the incident". I can remember the yard of our house where I spent most of my time, and every once in a while I get flashes of what the house looked like, but that's about the extent of my memory. I can't remember what the surrounding area was like, or the technology. Actually, I don't remember hardly anything of the other dimension. Even Thaivo I remember very little of, despite that I spoke it for the first seven years of my life."

Karexon shrugged, "Like you said earlier, if you don't use or practice a language, you forget it. You haven't spoken Thaivo for ten years. It's no surprise you can't remember Thaivo or much else from Kusnik, especially given that you've spent over half of your life here on Earth."

Myron smiled at me, "I wouldn't beat yourself up over it too much. Even I can't remember much of when I was seven."

I smiled at him, grateful for the way Myron always seemed to make me feel better. "Anyway, I know I have the ability to control the pure form of Miutho which allows me to learn almost every ability that exists, but I have no clue where I would even begin with that."

Myron nodded. "That will come with time."

A few minutes later, Kian walked to the window and commented, "It's getting dark out, and Roy isn't back yet. Do you think something has happened to him?"

"No, Roy would not be stupid enough to get himself into trouble. I trust he is fine, physically at least."

"And mentally?" Karexon did not miss Myron's inference.

Myron simply shook his head, dismissing the subject. "We should get ready for bed. I doubt Roy will return until we are ready to leave."

**\*\*\*Myron\*\*\***

"Myron, back again so soon?" Lady Vanek commented as Myron once again walked into her office with no prior warning.

"I understand now."

Lady Vanek leaned back in her chair. "What do you understand?"

"Raelyn is Dakim Adelinda's sister."

"Have you confirmed this?" Lady Vanek inquired.

Myron nodded. "I saw Dakim with my own eyes. We all did. He stood right in front of us."

Lady Vanek looked at him in shock. "At yet you don't even have a scratch on you!"

Myron shook his head. "Rae managed to keep it from coming to a fight. She even got Roy to stop dead in his tracks, and I didn't think anybody would ever be able to stop Roy from going after Dakim."

"I see. Then the rumors are true." Lady Vanek nodded. "I trust you know how important it is that she remains safe? There are a lot of people who would kill her if it meant getting back at Dakim."

"I understand. Although I must ask, wouldn't it be safer for her on Earth? You told us that we were to protect this Riora and we could do that in two ways, train her so she can defend herself, or bring her here to Kusnik. However, she would be at much more risk if we were to bring her back here."

Lady Vanek shook her head. "The plan was always to bring her here. The only thing that could be decided on was where her training took place."

"But why?" Myron, uncharacteristically continued to question.

"I had you retrieve Raelyn because I believe there is a man by the name of Raven plotting an attack on Vriknir. We don't have too many details, but if the rumors are true, then he is even more powerful than I am."

"But Lady Vanek, few people in Kusnik are stronger than you. How is it that this man could be more powerful than you, but we know nothing about him?"

"There are more people than you would think that could best me in battle, and many of them prefer to stick to the shadows, off our radar. If these rumors are true, then we will need Raelyn if we intend on winning. I only hope that she is at least half as skilled as her brother, for she will be our trump card. However, she is also a teenage girl who just got thrown into a completely different world, so for now I don't want you telling her about Raven."

"Rae is a smart girl. We will not be able to deceive her forever."

"I understand that, but I don't want you to tell her unless you absolutely have to. I want you to make sure that she enjoys herself."

"I see," Myron nodded, "Oh, and one more thing."

"What is it?" Lady Vanek asked almost impatiently.

"I don't think Dakim is responsible for the death of our people. I believe he was set up."

"Excuse me?" Lady Vanek squawked. "Where is this coming from?"

"The night I saw Dakim, he shared with Rae his point of view of the events of that day. In turn, Rae shared them with me. Dakim walked right into a trap."

Lady Vanek shook her head angrily. "Stop with these lies and get back to your job!"

"Forgive me." Myron lowered his eyes, ashamed, and disappeared.

# Chapter 9

OCTOBER 16

*You cannot even begin to understand the pure joy I feel upon discovering that my sister is still alive. Although your body was never found, I had just assumed that, when our parents were killed, you had also been killed. When I received your letter, I thought it was impossible. I told myself it was a fake, even though I knew it wasn't.*

*I don't know how much you remember of our parents. Our mother's name was Patriona. You have her figure, small and slim. Our father's name was Asher. He was away most of the time, so you may not remember him too well, but you have his piercing, ice blue eyes, and your blue highlights are the same color as his hair. He was always teased that he would never be able to hide effectively because his hair stuck out like a sore thumb. You also have his compassion. He never saw evil in anybody. You have been so open to me, even though I may not deserve it.*

*As for the Ellipsis members you speak of, I am grateful that they have taken such good care of you. I have heard good things of Commander Myron Masters. I'm sure you will be safe as long as you are in his care, but know that just because you don't see me doesn't mean that I am not near. I look forward to your discussion with Vriknir's leader, Lady Janek. I too wish it didn't have to be like this. I would very much like to see you again.*

I reread Dakim's letter several times. His writing was so formal, but just the fact that he wished to see me again was enough to make me want to scream. Dakim was this powerful and respectable person, even if most people didn't see it, and I was this ill-mannered girl with fantasies of the joyful brother she once knew.

Things continued as if nothing had changed. Myron picked up my training where Roy had left off, although he was not as hard on me as Roy had been. Myron seemed to be completely at ease working with me, but it seemed to take Kian and Karexon a little while to grow accustomed to the fact that I was actually Dakim's sister and Dakim was not the mass murderer that everybody made him out to be. Yet, they too eventually became relaxed and didn't seem to mind.

It wasn't until we were packing and getting ready to leave that Roy finally returned. He didn't say a word when he walked through the door, and Myron, Kian, and Karexon didn't ask him any questions when he did. As for me, it was like I wasn't even there. He wouldn't even look at me. When I spoke, it was like I hadn't even said a word. It was like I didn't even exist. I think that was the worst part. If he were angry at me and looked down at me, then I would be angry right back. Yet, when he didn't even acknowledge me, I tried to be angry, but I was just hurt. I couldn't understand it. I used to think so poorly of Roy, but now all I wanted was for him to accept me. When he was training me, I thought we had even begun to become friends. I got him to smile, even if it was only for a brief moment, and I realized that my original assumption was right. There was much more to him than meets the eye.

"Is this everything?" Myron asked as he lifted my small makeshift suitcase.

"Yes, thank you." I nodded.

Myron. He was another person I had begun to look up to. He was the commander of this group, but he certainly didn't act like it. It sounded weird, but I actually enjoyed watching him. When I saw him, two words came to mind, 'peaceful confidence.' Myron wasn't somebody who went around bragging

about his strength as an Ellipsis commander. Actually, he seemed like he was a very laid back person. It the way he moved, the posture with which he held himself that allowed one to see that he was truly powerful. Most of all, he was understanding and always seemed to say exactly what I needed to hear. He was somebody I felt I could trust.

We were careful not to leave anything behind in the apartment and headed out to a nearby forest. It was still pretty dark out when we left. The sun was only just beginning to rise. I was more than just a little nervous. This was it. I was leaving Earth behind, more than likely never to return again. In the suitcase Myron was carrying for me was a photo album that held all the pictures I could stuff and a few other things, but that would be all I had left.

Myron gently placed his hand on my shoulder, "Are you ready?"

I bit my lip, "Not really, but do I have much of a choice?"

Myron set the suitcase on the ground and put both hands on my shoulders, looking me straight in the eye. "All of this is your choice. You can walk away right now."

"And spend the rest of my life always looking over my shoulder? I don't think so. Besides, I want to clear my brother's name." I took a deep breath and picked up the suitcase. "Let's do this, before I change my mind again."

Myron sighed, "As you wish."

"What do I have to do?"

"Close your eyes and then take a deep breath."

"Then what?"

"Then, you fall."

Before I could ask what he meant, Myron gave me a small nudge and suddenly everything went black. It was then that I knew why he had told me to take a deep breath. It was like all the oxygen had been sucked from the air. The pressure was also very heavy, crushing down on me like a weight that wanted to flatten me. Yet, at the same time, it was like I was being ripped into hundreds of millions of pieces and then being put back together again. I wanted to scream, but instead I just gasped for oxygen and my lungs began to burn.

Then, it was all gone. I was on the ground, dirt in my mouth, but I was alive.

"Rae. Raelyn!"

It was only then that I realized I had been screaming and quickly closed my lips. Myron helped me to my feet, and I wiped the dirt from my mouth. When I was on my feet, I looked around. We were standing in the middle of an open field where the grass came up to my knees. Intermingled with the grass were flowers of all colors. All types of trees grew around us, and blue mushrooms glowed in the shadows of the leaves. In the distance, I could see the tips of a mountain range. Behind the mountains were two absolutely beautiful moons. One was big and red and seemed to be covered in swirls. The other was much smaller and a shade of blue that reminded me of the ocean. Here, everything was green, just like back on Earth, but it was greener, like it was more alive. I could actually feel the energy that flowed through the grass and plants. I felt heavier, the gravity was stronger, and I could breathe, truly breathe, without inhaling all the pollution I had been accustomed to from living in the city. Yet, there was something else...

"Something is off."

"What do you mean?" Kian questioned.

I glanced between Myron, Kian, Karexon, and Roy. They didn't seem to sense anything at all, but I had this constant chill running down my spine. "I don't know. Something just isn't right."

Karexon chuckled. "Of course it isn't. You're not on Earth anymore!"

I closed my eyes, trying to get rid of the gut feeling that something was about to go seriously wrong. I had four Ellipsis members with me. If they said things were safe, then they were. There was no question about it.

We were getting ready to set off, but I froze as a dagger suddenly hit the ground at Roy's feet. Suddenly, several men dropped into the clearing, and they certainly weren't a welcoming committee. They looked similar to the people who had shown up at my house the first day I had met Myron, but these people were much stronger. They had learned from their last encounter, and they didn't come to chat either. They immediately began to charge at us. Karexon was hit from behind and knocked to the ground while Kian had pulled out his sword to defend himself from an oncoming attack. Myron had been fast enough to strike his opponent first, but two more just came charging. One of the men grabbed Roy, locking his arms behind his back while another charged at him, but Roy used his feet to toss the original dagger that had been thrown at him into the air and caught it in his mouth, driving it into the guy who was charging at him. I shut my eyes against the image. Myron hadn't been kidding when he said Roy was ruthless.

Roy then took a step forward and did a back flip over the man who had grabbed him, locking the attacker's hands behind him. Roy then placed his foot in between the attacker's shoulder blades, dislocating both of the man's shoulders. Another man jumped down from the trees at Roy, but he bent over backwards so his hands were on the ground and kicked upwards, catching the man under the chin. He stayed on his hands for a moment, and the enemy seemed confused on how to go about attacking him. Taking advantage of their confusion, he spun on his hands, kicking two of the men in the face. It was amazing to watch him in action. I had seen a little of what he could do in training, but he had been holding back then. Yet, even under the pressure of battle, all of his movements were fluid and precise. Everything was calculated and nothing was wasted.

Everybody else was just as amazing to watch. It was almost impossible to watch Karexon. He literally dissolved into a shadow that slid along the ground. Then, when the enemy wasn't expecting it, he would emerge from the ground behind them, knocking them unconscious before they even knew what was happening. Kian was almost just as impossible to watch. One moment he would be standing still with his sword at the ready, and the next moment he would be gone. The next time I would manage to catch sight of him, we would be on the other side of the field, using his lightning fast reflexes to block a throwing knife. Myron did not move as fast or have the ability to disappear, but he didn't need to. Nobody could lay a hand on him. The second anybody got close to him, Myron would send out a concentrated sound wave that made the attackers ear drums burst.

I had been so absorbed in admiring everybody else's skills that I didn't notice an enemy sneaking up on me until it was too late. He dropped down in front of me, and I grunted as I took a blow to the stomach, causing me to stumble backwards and fall to the ground. I tried to get up, but it was too late. My enemy had thrown a knife, and it was coming straight towards me. I had let my guard down, and now I was going to pay for it. How could I have been so stupid?

I closed my eyes and turned away, expecting the pain, but it didn't come. My eyes flew open at the sound of a gasp of pain, and I looked up to see Roy standing over me. He'd taken the knife in shoulder, which caused him to drop to his knees, but he fought past the pain and, from where he was on the ground, attacked points in the guy's legs, also causing him to fall.

"Why are you just sitting there? Damn it, get moving!" Roy snapped at me.

Before I could get up, he grabbed me by the shoulders and threw me back to the ground. Roy was above me, his eyes squeezed shut in pain, a second knife protruding from his back. Not even a second later, the man who had put the knife in Roy's back was taken out by one of Myron's throwing knives.

Roy's body shook as he tried to get himself to move. His eyes slowly opened, and they glared down at me. "What the hell have you been doing all this time? You were supposed to be training!"

His words dealt a sharper blow than any physical one could. He was right. What had I been doing all this time? Everybody else had been taking on two or three people at once and I hadn't even



been able to handle one. Ever since Roy had found out that Dakim was my brother and started shunning me, I had wanted nothing more than to prove myself to him. I had failed.

When the rest of our attackers had been taken care of, Kian walked over and helped Roy to his feet while Myron started giving orders. "Go ahead with Roy. You shouldn't have to worry about traps or being ambushed. It's Rae they want. He needs to get to a hospital, and we'll only slow you down."

"Understood." Kian said, and put Roy, who was close to passing out, over his shoulder. Kian glanced at Myron, Karexon, and I, and then took off.

When he was out of sight, Myron glanced around. "We need to get out of this clearing. It's a tactical nightmare. The forest should provide us enough cover to make it to Vriknir."

Karexon nodded, but right when we went to start moving, I got the feeling I was being watched and turned back. I could see the faint outline of my brother at the edge of the clearing. It looked like it was taking every ounce of his self-control to stay where he was and not come rushing out to me. I gave him a reassuring smile to show him that I was alright, and then joined Myron where he was waiting for me. I was shaken after our recent encounter. It had showed that, although the Ellipsis members had been able to protect me, things were not as safe as I had thought they were. Yet, knowing that my brother was here watching out for me was reassuring.

The rest of the journey was rather uneventful, other than tripping over a tree root here and there. Before today, I couldn't remember having ever tripped, but after being attacked and seeing Roy hurt, my nerves were on edge. I felt that in every shadow was an enemy just waiting to attack. The only thing that kept me calm was knowing that Karexon was a few feet ahead making sure we weren't going to be ambushed, Myron was walking next to me every step of the way, and my brother was watching my back.

Myron was the biggest comfort, mostly because he was the one standing next to me. It was comforting to know that Karexon and Dakim were there, but Myron was the one who I could physically see, and the one to catch me every time I stumbled. I was surprised at how patient he was. We were being hunted, and every second we remained outside of Vriknir's borders we were at risk. Yet, although Myron was alert, he didn't seem stiff or worried. He didn't hurry me along or remind me how important it was that we get to Vriknir as soon as possible. He made it seem like there was absolutely nothing to worry about, and that was what allowed me to keep going.

I felt much better when we reached the city border, and I was safely inside its walls. I wasn't sure what to expect, but I was still surprised by what I saw. The houses nearest the border were simple cabins and spread out from one another. Each house had a yard, and in many of them I could see little children running around. It was like the suburban communities back home. As we walked, the houses got nicer and nicer. The ones by the gate had been simple log cabins, but these were made out of wood and stone and had many glass windows. Eventually, I stopped being able to call them houses. One particular area we passed had houses that were more like mansions.

As we got closer to the center of the city, the houses faded away and I felt like I had walked into Central Park in New York City, except instead peaceful paths to walk on, this place was one big market. Everywhere I looked I saw another merchant, and it seemed as if all of them were selling different merchandise. Some sold weapons, others sold food, and even others sold the daily essential items. Everything I could ever possibly need to buy was right here in this market.

I could tell when we hit the central part of the village, because the market had faded into buildings. At first the buildings were simple, and the signs told me that they were training academies, blacksmith shops, and the like. Then the buildings became bigger and more complex, and that was really when I felt as if I had stepped into New York City. I was surrounded by skyscrapers and the building that was the dead center of the city was the tallest. It was the Ellipsis headquarters, and on the very top floor was Lady Vanek's office.

Karexon didn't accompany us to Lady Vanek's office. He disappeared as soon as we arrived without another word, but Myron didn't make a big deal out of it so I didn't ask any questions. Actually, I remained silent the whole way, too awestruck by the city to be able to form any words. It wasn't until we were in the elevator to Lady Vanek's office that Myron spoke.

"What are you thinking?"

The corner of my lips turned up into a small smile. "I have so many different thoughts running through my head that I couldn't give an honest answer to that question, but I guess if I had to give some sort of answer, I would say that I'm about to have a whole new future. I was a senior in high school. With my knack for absorbing information, I could have been anything I ever wanted. I could have been President if I really wanted, even though I hate politics. I could have mapped out my entire future. Now I can't even map out tomorrow."

The elevator dinged, signaling that we had arrived at our floor. The door opened, and Myron held his arm out to prevent it from closing. "Wait till after you're done talking to Lady Vanek to say that. You may find that tomorrow isn't as mysterious as you think."

"Welcome back Myron." A woman approached us as we stepped out of the elevator. "And you must be Raelyn."

"Rae." I told her as I shook her hand.

"I'm Sheila Ryder, Lady Vanek's assistant. It is nice to make your acquaintance. Let me inform Lady Vanek that you have arrived, and then you can head on in."

"Thank you." I responded politely.

Sheila was only gone for a moment before she reappeared, holding the door for us. I walked into the room almost hesitantly and found a woman in her early forties sitting at a glass desk. Her hair was a dark black and her dark eyeliner accented her hazel eyes. It was obvious that she was the one in charge, for her attitude was that of an aggressive lawyer. Plus, she was tall for a woman, adding to her intimidation. The entire wall behind her wasn't a wall, but a row of windows that looked out over the entire city. The rest of the walls were decorated with awards for different feats by different people. A few portraits of who I assumed to be her predecessors also hung on the walls.

"Raelyn."

"Rae." I politely corrected once more. Obviously she already knew who I was.

"I am glad to see you have made it here safely. I'm sure you have a lot of questions, but you have had a long journey and right now I think it would be better for you to rest and leave the questions for tomorrow. What we need to discuss is where you are going to stay until we can find a permanent residence for you."

"She is welcome at my place." Myron quickly spoke up, and I was a little surprised at how willing he was to open up his home to me.

"Then it is settled."

"Ma'am, if I may..." I began and waited to see if she would object. When she didn't, I continued. "I'd like to discuss my brother."

She leaned back in her chair, her welcoming attitude suddenly disappearing. "What about your brother?"

"I know I just arrived here, but I know about the attack that happened, and I can tell you that my brother is innocent."

"Raelyn—"

"Rae." I corrected again, the politeness gone.

"Rae," She repeated, "No doubt you have fond memories of your brother from when you are younger, but people can change. He's not the loving older brother anymore. He's a mass murderer and you'd be disillusioned to believe anything else."

"But she's right," Myron argued, but unlike mine and Lady Vanek's voice had been, his was even, and it made her pause. It was obvious that he was highly respected, and if he said something, then there had to be some sort of truth to it.

She sighed and shook her head, "I'm sorry, but without any sort of proof, I have no cause for looking into the matter. My hands are tied. Also, you are not allowed to mention this to anybody else. All it would do is cause confusion and sow discord. That's an order."

"Yes, Lady Vanek." Myron answered. I hadn't been willing to give up on my brother's freedom so easily, but given Myron's reaction, there wasn't much else I could say. It was like he had known this was going to be Lady Vanek's response. He hadn't even argued with her.

"Good, then you are dismissed. Raelyn, you can stop by tomorrow morning and I will have somebody give you a tour of the city."

Disappointed with the way things had gone, I turned to leave but stopped when Myron didn't follow. "Is there something else, Myron?" Lady Vanek questioned.

"Around here, just the name Dakim Adelinda is something to be feared. This city might be Rae's home for the rest of her life. If people were to find out that Dakim is her brother, she would never be accepted."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"I say that she use the name she was going by on Earth, Raelyn Murray, and that we introduce her as one of our informants in Ikicnie. She had been compromised and it was our job to extract her before any harm befell her. We were able to get to her in time, but not before her memory was wiped of ever having been in Ikicnie. This way she has an excuse not to answer people's questions by saying it was confidential or simply that she can't remember. Also, it would be a good reason for why she knows more than one language."

She turned to me with new interest. "You speak more than one language?"

"The only one I know fluently is English, but I know quite a bit of Spanish and Japanese, and I know enough of Arabic, Chinese, German, Russian, and Korean to get the gist of what people mean."

"Really," Lady Vanek smiled at this new revelation, "That is good to know. I could use a good translator." She seemed to come back to her senses, "But we can deal with that tomorrow. Why don't you get settled in at Myron's place?"

I smiled in response, and then followed Myron out of the room. When we were back in the elevator I spoke, "I want to go see Roy."

"I have things I need to take care of."

"I don't mind staying by myself." I insisted.

The doors opened but Myron didn't move. Instead he stared at me, trying to come to some sort of decision. Eventually he sighed and stepped out, "Alright, I will take you there. When you're ready to leave, just have one of the nurses fetch for me."

I smiled. "Sure."

# Chapter 10

\*\*\* Myron \*\*\*

"This is an odd place to meet." Myron commented as the guard shut the door behind him. The room was bigger than he expected, but still small given how much had been packed into it. The only thing on the first floor was a rectangular table with several chairs. Several staircases led up to the different floors. Each floor was divided into small sections by the pillars and all of the floors had a metal railing that allowed somebody to look down at the first floor. He had never seen so many bookshelves in his life.

Lady Vanek ignored his comment and asked, "Is somebody with Raelyn?"

"She's at the hospital visiting Roy with instructions to send for me when she is ready to leave."

"Then let's get started," Lady Vanek stated as she walked up to the second floor, letting her hand trail over the thousands of folders that were stored on bookshelves. "This is where we keep all the information we've ever gathered since Vriknir was created. We keep physical copies of these files because anything electronic is too easily hacked. The only way to way to get in here is a full body Miutho scan. The system is impossible to beat."

Myron nodded. "I am fully aware of the security."

"And you are also fully aware that we have a file on every person who has ever entered Vriknir's borders, even if it was only for only five minutes. We believe that Raven lived here for half of his life. Yet, I don't have a file on him."

"That's impossible!"

"That is what I originally thought, but I have been through every file in this library, and Raven's file isn't here. The only people with access to this room are Jerome and I, but somehow somebody else must have gotten in and removed the file. Yet, the only way somebody would be able to get through the security is if they were able to manipulate their own Miutho to match mine or Jerome's and deceive the sensors."

"You think Dakim did it." Myron concluded.

Lady Vanek shook her head, "I don't know what to think. Nothing like this has ever happened before."

"You know I believe that Dakim is innocent, so why did you bring me here?"

"Because I am biased," She answered. "When I discovered the file was missing, Dakim was the first person I thought of, and I am sure it will be for anybody else who discovers it is missing. I do not trust myself to stay clearheaded to look into every angle of this case. You would look into something I might just toss to the side. That is why I brought you here."

"Lady Vanek, I understand the importance of this security issue, but shouldn't we be focusing more on gathering information on Raven, especially if we will have to start from scratch?"

"If this place can be tampered with, then there is no safe place to could keep any information we manage to gather on Raven. Besides, if we manage to find who got in here, we may be able to get information out of him or her on Raven, and then we won't have to start from scratch."

"If you don't mind me asking, how do we even know about the possible attack on Vriknir? You said that his file was missing which means that we have absolutely no information on him."

"I had an informant in the crime ring. There are whispers going around about the attack, but my informant wasn't able to report much. There are a lot of whispers, but nobody seems to have any concrete information about it."

"Since when did we take rumors seriously?"

"Since the informant turned up dead not long after she started looking into it," Lady Vanek spoke solemnly. "The fact that Raven's file is missing leads me to believe that this attack is very possible."

"So then what do we know about Raven?"

"Only that he used to be a resident of Vriknir until about ten years ago and since then he has become even more powerful than Jerome and I. The informant managed to learn about Raelyn's existence and suggested that she would be the only one capable enough to stop him. I need her to be ready if and when he decides to attack."

"Ten years ago, that was about the same time Vriknir was attacked, allegedly by Dakim."

Lady Vanek frowned at his use of the word allegedly but didn't comment on it. "It is possible that the two are connected, but why is he only coming after Vriknir? Dakim is the one who attacked the village. Why isn't he targeting Dakim as well?"

"Maybe it is because he knows that Dakim didn't do it." Myron pointed out, and Lady Vanek frowned.

"I won't be sending you on any other missions. Right now I want you to focus on training Raelyn and finding whoever managed to get in here. If, in the process of hunting down the thief, you manage to find any information on Raven, all the better. However, as I said before, don't push Raelyn too hard. I don't want her to get suspicious. The last thing we need right now is for the entire village to erupt in panic."

"I understand. She's visiting with Roy right now."

Lady Vanek nodded, "Then take this opportunity get started. We don't know when this attack is going to happen so every minute counts."

"Yes, Lady Vanek."

~

Myron had meant to go for a walk to clear his head, but as usual, he had ended up in the village's cemetery. He knelt down in front of the stone memorial and ran his fingers over their names. It had been ten years since that fateful day. He'd long since moved on with his life. He could think back on them and smile. He could remember all the happy moments with them and forget all the pain that came from losing them. The hole left in his life by their absence had slowly begun to heal, but this whole experience had ripped that wound wide open again. Yet, he found himself smiling. Even in death Rose didn't care for herself. It was like she saw what would come from what had happened, and she used her dying breath to comfort the man that would be wrongly accused of it all.

He would have sat there staring at the stone for hours, losing all track of time as he always did when he came here, but the sun was getting low in the sky and he still had Rae to worry about. After a while he let out a sigh and got to his feet. However, before he walked away, he ran his finger over the stone one last time, "Rose, you were so strong. I beg of you, lend me some of that strength..."

~

"Karexon!" Myron called and Karexon, who had been walking down the city's main streets, stopped mid-step.

"Yeah?"

"Have you seen Rae?"

"No, is everything alright?" Karexon managed to keep the alarm out of his voice, just as he had been trained to do, but the worry still showed in his eyes.

"She wanted to visit Roy, but I had things I had to tend to so she convinced me to just drop her off."

"She convinced you? That's got to be a first."

He ignored Karexon's comment and continued, "I told her to call me when she was ready to leave. I dropped her off several hours ago, and I still haven't heard anything. I thought maybe she would have sent for you or Kian."

"I just left Kian, and neither of us have heard from her. Do you think something has happened to her?"

"I doubt it. The hospital is too crowded for anybody to come after her there, and she isn't stupid enough to go wandering around when she doesn't know her way."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Thanks, Karexon, but I think I have a pretty good idea of where she is. I will see you tomorrow."

Karexon nodded, and then Myron closed his eyes, focusing on the flow of the dimension, pulling a string here or there. When he opened his eyes again, he was standing in front of the hospital.

"Hello, Rae." Myron greeted when he located Roy's room and walked in to find her sitting in one of the chairs. Roy was fast asleep, but she was still sitting there. No doubt Roy had been asleep the entire time, and yet she had stayed. She had also brought some flowers. From the looks of it, she had picked them from the garden in the front of the hospital.

She looked up at him when he entered, but then went back to staring at the wall. He sat down next to her, "Something on your mind?"

She took an unsure breath. "I froze, *twice*. Roy could have died because I just sat there."

Myron shook his head and smiled down at her. "It takes a lot more to kill Roy than just a couple of knife wounds. He's received wounds that would have kept men down for months, and he was still able to keep fighting. The enemy was convinced that Roy was immortal because he kept getting up."

His words seemed to cheer her up, and her face lifted a little. He glanced over at Roy, the smile fading from his own face. *However, that was before he lost his purpose. He was able to keep getting up because he had convinced himself that he couldn't die without having killed Dakim first. He no longer has that incentive to keep going. He lost his family, and now he has lost his purpose. He has truly lost everything...*

"If he's going to be alright," She interrupted his thoughts, "Then why is visiting restricted to his comrades only?"

An amused smile came over Myron's face. "Roy has a bit of a fan club. It seems like every girl in the city wants to visit him. The nurses can't handle it all so they put restrictions on visitors."

I snorted, "Roy may not be as bad as I thought on first impression, but are those girls blind?"

Myron shrugged. "I guess you'll have to ask them that. You've been here a while. Do you want anything from the cafeteria?"

"Actually, I think I'll get it. I need to stretch my legs. Want me to get you anything while I'm down there?"

"No, I'm good, but thank you."

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

I walked out of the room, following the signs that said cafeteria.

"But she was allowed to see Roy!"

I stopped as a girl talking to the secretary pointed angrily at me. I could see the secretary's shoulders drop in a sigh. "She was part of his last assignment and is therefore considered a comrade. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have work I need to get done."

The girl walked angrily to where her friend was waiting for her. Acting on impulse, I walked over to where they stood. The girl who had been arguing with the secretary had wavy brown hair and perfectly tan skin. She wore a black tube top that had the silver outline of a butterfly cut into the side. She was the picture of what every girl wanted to look like. Her friend was a little shorter than she was and her bleached blonde hair made her face look pale. However, her faded green, lace shirt and brown belt buckle made her big emerald eyes stand out. She stood with her hands clasped in front of her, giving her an innocent look. However, the pendant of a sword being driven through a dragon's head that she wore around her neck took away from that innocent look, but only slightly. Myron had probably been joking when he told me to ask them about Roy but I figured, why not?

"Excuse me, but if you don't mind me asking, what's the big deal about Roy?"

The girl who had been talking to the secretary sneered down at me, "You honestly don't know?"

"The secretary had said she was part of Roy's last assignment. More than likely she's not from around here." Her friend chimed in.

"Still," The first girl continued to sneer down at me. "It should be obvious just by looking at him. Not only is he the sexiest man alive, but he broke the record for being the youngest person to ever join Ellipsis, not to mention the fact that he's rich. All the Ellipsis members are."

"Joc, she probably doesn't know what Ellipsis is."

"I've managed to figure that much out, but thank you." I told her friend. I had to say, I liked her friend a lot more than I liked her.

"Now if you're done asking me stupid questions, I have to go pick up some flowers for Roy." She began to walk away but turned back and glared at me. "I don't know who you are, but stay away from Roy. He's mine."

*Aa, sou desu ka?\* Then why is it that you can't get in to visit him?*

*\*Is that so?\**

I shook my head, brushing off her comment. I couldn't help but think of Jackie from school as I watched her walk away.

"Don't mind her." Her friend apologized. "She gets a little touchy when it comes to Roy. However, she should know better than to get him flowers."

"What do you mean?" I asked, thinking of the flower I had set next to his bed for when he woke up.

"The first time Roy was in the hospital, too many people wanted to see him so they restricted visiting. The second time, everybody knew they weren't allowed in so they sent flowers. Roy got annoyed by all of them so he told the nurses to give all the flowers he received to the rest of the patients in the hospital. Considering it is Roy we're talking about, it was actually pretty sweet. She should know that if she sends him flowers, it's only going to go to another patient."

I smiled. "Well, might as well let her. It'll brighten up somebody's day."

She laughed and then held her hand out to me. "I'm Charisse Castell."

"Raelyn Murray, but I go by Rae." I took her hand.

"It's nice to meet you Rae." She pointed to the girl I had just encountered. "That's Joc but I don't recommend calling her that. She'll probably throw a fit, so for now I would call her Jocelyn."

"I'll make sure to remember that. Well, I have to go down to the cafeteria. Maybe I'll see you around."

She gave me a polite nod, and then I continued on down to the cafeteria.

**\*\*\* Roy \*\*\***

Roy stirred as the nurse inserted a new I.V. His eyes slowly opened and rested on the Geranium flowers by the bed. "I thought I said no flowers."

"It was left by the girl you were traveling with. I thought you might actually want to keep these."

Roy opened his mouth to argue, but then thought better of it and closed it. He stared up at the ceiling but after a minute looked back to the flowers sitting on the table. He stared at it, debating with himself, and eventually gave up. Using the arm the nurse wasn't fooling with, he reached out and grabbed the vase. Wrapped around the glass was a red ribbon with a little card attached.

*I know a flower doesn't even begin to make up for saving my life, but I thought it at least might make you feel better. I know you'll want to get better as soon as you can so you can come flick me on the forehead for being so stupid. Raelyn.*

He smiled, put some of the water from his cup that was sitting next to his bed into the vase, and set it back on the table.

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

I walked around the hospital for a few minutes before returning to Roy's room. It felt good just to be moving. When I returned, I found that Roy had woken up, and Myron was nowhere in sight. Roy looked away as I entered the room. Obviously he was still upset with me, so I didn't come in all the way. Instead, I lingered by the doorway, and for a while it was silent.

"Why did you do it?" I eventually found my voice. Roy finally shifted his gaze to where I stood and I shook my head, "I don't get it. If you honestly believe that my brother killed all those people, why would you risk your life to save me?"

"I don't know." Roy chuckled with a hint of hysteria. "I *hated* you. Saving your life wasn't something I thought about. It was just something my body did."

I closed my eyes, fighting the new wave of pain his words brought on. Not wanting to hear any more, I walked out of the room.

"He's lying, you know."

I stopped to see Myron leaning on the wall outside of Roy's room, "What?"

Myron shoved off the wall and walked with me down the hallway. "He'd never admit it, but it's not you he hates. He's angry with the universe in general. It has done nothing but screw him over. Actually, I think he's quite fond of you."

"He has a funny way of showing it." I mumbled.

"Did you notice the flower you left him was still there?"

I had, but I wasn't about to admit it. I was still too hurt to give in.

"And, even though Christian was the main person of interest in our mission, you were the first person on Earth that he spoke to." When I didn't say anything, Myron smiled knowingly and continued, "Kian, Karexon, and I do our best, but I think that Roy still feels all alone. Outside of his little fan club, most people resent him. Roy started giving people the cold shoulder after he lost his family. People who normally would have helped him were offended by it and left him alone. You're the first person who has really tried to get past the wall he's put up. When he flicked you on the forehead for the first time, and when he shunned you because of your relation to Dakim, most people would have walked away from him. You keep coming back, and he doesn't know how to react."

"Thanks for the psychology lesson." I brushed off Myron's explanation, but in reality, it made me feel a lot better. It almost made me feel bad for him. The only thing that was stopping me was that I couldn't figure out whether or not he still wanted to kill my brother. Myron, Kian, and Karexon seemed to believe in Dakim's innocence, but did Roy?



I was in a better state of mind on our walk to Myron's house than I had been earlier so Myron took the time to explain a few things.

"Kusnik is very similar to Earth, but it has its differences. We don't have some of the technology that Earth does. As we mentioned before, we don't have cell phones. Ikicnie has developed their own technology that allows for communication over long distances and they sell it to other countries. It is convenient, but is not overly secure. We can use it to simply keep in contact with others, but I wouldn't say anything that you would have to worry about others overhearing. We also don't have hospitals in how you would think of a hospital. We have clinics that have basic medicines and tools, but none of the complex machines that hospitals do. We have no need for them. Here, there are many people with the ability to heal others. They are limited in the extent that they can heal someone, but there is very little that they cannot do. We also don't have cars, buses, trains, or airplanes. I guess you could call the people of Kusnik claustrophobic. For a Riora in particular, it's a little hard to fight from within an enclosed vehicle. Besides, Kusnik is small enough that it doesn't take too long to get to the next city. However, there are a few things still in development that may make travel a little faster. We also don't have televisions, but we have our own form of music players and entertainment. Lastly, we don't have guns, but traditional bullets wouldn't be able to kill us anyway. Physically, our bodies are much more stable than a humans, which is why humans can't survive the transfer between dimensions. Besides, I would say our abilities trump most weapons of Earth. When you look at it over all, I would say that we are about equal with Earth. We are behind in some areas, but more advanced in others. The only reason I would consider us to be better than humans is because we can survive a lot more than they can, but I wouldn't be surprised if they managed to create some sort of armor that made them as strong as we are."

I jumped when a man suddenly appeared out of nowhere in the middle of the street and then just casually walked up to one of the nearby buildings as if suddenly appearing out of nowhere was an everyday occurrence. Myron, who had laughed at my reaction, smiled down at me "There are definitely some things you'll have to get used to."

I turned my attention away from the man and back to Myron. "Everybody has their own special way of manipulating Miutho, which is why people only have one ability, right?"

"Well, that's true for most people," He winked at me.

I smiled, knowing that my brother and I were the exclusions to that rule, but otherwise continued, "You mentioned once before that you and Karexon could manipulate the shift in the dimension, but I thought you controlled sound?"

Myron nodded. "First, you should know that there is more than one type of teleportation. The man you saw back there was Carmichael Wallace. His ability is teleportation. He can literally break himself down and reassemble himself in a differently location almost instantaneously. However, he's limited in that he has to be somewhere he's been before and knows how to get to from where he is. When I mention Karexon and I teleporting, we don't break ourselves down like that. We can shift our dimension and create a sort of wrinkle in it that allows us to step into a different location. Willfully shifting the dimension is no easy task, but is something most upper ranking Riora can do. However, shifting our dimension in order for it to touch Earth's dimension is something very few Riora are capable of doing."

"So, if I wasn't here, then would you have simply teleported home from the hospital?"

"I doubt it," he shook his head, "but mostly because I enjoy walking. I find it relaxing. Shifting the dimension takes a great deal of concentration, and it's not something that can be done fast. I would never use it in the heat of battle."

"Let's say I was strong enough to shift the dimension. Would I be able to shift the dimension and suddenly appear in my home town?"

Myron shook his head, "There are two reasons that wouldn't be possible. First of all, that would be much too far. If I wanted to teleport to Lady Vanek's office from here, it would only take me a moment to shift the dimension to the point needed, but Lady Vanek's office is relatively close to here. In theory, it would take me more than twenty-four hours of pure concentration in order for me to be able to shift the dimension enough to go to Ikicnie, and I can concentrate for a long time, but not that long. Secondly, there is something known as Shifting Rights. Imagine several locks being put throughout the dimension and you have to have the key in order to turn the lock. Generally, the dimension is locked and you can't shift the dimension. However, Riora are often given a sort of key that allows them to shift the dimension within their own village. I can teleport anywhere within Vriknir, but I cannot teleport outside of Vriknir. The exception to that is that I cannot teleport into somebody's house. I can only teleport to their doorstep."

I was confused, "Why put a lock on the dimension?"

"It is a security measure. We don't want just anybody showing up into our village. If we didn't have restrictions on teleportation, then what would be the point of having walls?" Myron paused as if something had occurred to him. "Although, there may be loopholes to the rules put on the teleportation. Speaking metaphorically, I guess it would be possible to pick those locks if somebody was experienced enough." He chuckled, "I'll have to look into that and get back to you on that. I'll admit, you've spike my curiosity. For now though, let's get you settled in."

I stopped in my tracks as Myron opened the gate to the gigantic house standing in front of us. I hadn't realized it, but we had been making our way back to the border where all the mansions had been.

"Is something the matter?" He asked, looking back at me.

*"Is something the matter?"* I repeated. "I can't believe this is your house!"

Myron simply smiled and stepped through the gate. A smooth stone pathway led to the front of the house. The base of the house and the pillars were made out of big, noticeable stones, but the top half of the house was made out of much smaller stones that seemed to blend together. There were several windows and balconies at all different heights and on all sides of the house. There were also several lamps on the outside of the house that made it glow in the setting sun.

Once we were inside, he gave me a small tour of the house, only really showing me some of the main rooms. I didn't even try to cover my gaping mouth as we stepped inside. All of his furniture was modern, and everything was either black or white. There was hardly any color, if any at all. Also, much of the furniture was generally box shaped. The one exception was the random spiral staircase in the middle of his living room. Well, I should say, *main* living room.

His reading room had black carpet and two black couches that faced each other. Above the couches were black, square, hanging lights. At one end of the couches were two chairs, and on the other end were two foot rests, completing the box shape. In the middle of the box was a white table with the current books he was reading sitting on top. On the side of the room with the two chairs was a big window that allowed you to see the forest edge.

His entertainment room had a white floor and white walls. There was a white couch with black pillows. To the left of the couch was a black bookshelf. Even all the books on the shelf were either black or white. Next to the book shelf was an entertainment center. The background was black but the cabinets were white. A shiny black stereo sat in the middle, or at least that's what I assumed it to be. It didn't look like any stereo I was accustomed to.

His kitchen was so sparkling clean that it was almost painful to look at. The floor was white, as were the table and chairs in the middle. The cabinets on the ground and above were black with shiny silver handles. The oven, microwave, and refrigerator were what made it painful. They were silver, but it looked like they had been cleaned so thoroughly that I almost had to wear sunglasses just to look at them. I was surprised to find that his appliances actually looked pretty similar to the ones on Earth. The

counter was silver with the cabinets underneath also being black. Hanging above the counter was a black lamp that emitted a surprising amount of light for having such a dark lamp shade.

Myron's bedroom was probably the coolest room in the house. It was like there were two layers to it. The outside edge was black tile and on the white walls hung black and white photographs. Then you could walk down five black steps to the center part of his room that had white carpet. His bed was white but the frame it stood on was black. Next to his bed was a black nightstand, and opposite the bed was a black dresser.

I was staying in one of the many guest bedrooms. The floors and walls were white, but painted on one of the walls were beautiful black birds. The bed was like a bunk bed, except without the bottom bunk. Instead, it had a desk below it. The desk was white, but the portion of the wall in front of it was black. The chair was also black. The stairs leading up to the bed looked more like an art sculpture than actual steps. They were white, but they also had black drawers in them. It was very confusing. Sitting on the ground, leaning against the desk, was the only thing in the room that wasn't black or white, and that was my small suitcase.

"I'll leave you to get settled in." Myron told me before walking out of the room.

I opened the suitcase and picked up the pictures of Christian and Dustin that were lying on top. Seeing their pictures just made me feel homesick. Kusnik was so different from Earth. I set the two picture frames on the desk and then picked up the scrap book. I had spent almost all of my time on Earth training, but I did spend a few hours doing other things. Most people would say that scrapbooking wasn't exactly my style, and I would agree, but I had grown up with no knowledge of my life before I was seven. I never wanted that to happen again and I had figured that the best way to prevent that was to record events in my life. For that very reason I also kept a journal. I didn't write in it much anymore because everything I would have to say would be dangerous if it fell in the wrong hands, but it was nice to reread everything I had already written. Underneath the scrapbook I found more books than I expected to find. When Kian had said that it was probably a good idea to pick up more reference books, I hadn't realized he was being serious. Yet, sitting in front of me were reference books for all the languages I had even the slightest knowledge of. I would have some serious studying to do.

I put the dictionaries on the bookshelf, hoping Myron wouldn't yell at me for ruining his black and white theme, and then walked over to the window. I knew the star patterns by heart and where the different stars would be during different times of the year. Yet, I didn't see any constellations I recognized. Then it occurred to me that I was in a completely different dimension. Of course the stars would be different. I had thought that knowing Christian and I could still look at the stars together, even if we weren't sitting together, would bring me comfort, but this was just another disappointment. Feeling like I had swallowed a brick, I turned away from the window and went to bed.

# Chapter 11

OCTOBER 17

I slowly sat, up but immediately regretted it when I hit my head on the ceiling. *For having such a big house, you would think that the designer would have at least made the ceiling a little higher. I'm considered short. I can't even imagine a taller person trying to sleep here.*

I shook my head in annoyance and carefully climbed down from the bed. Groggily, I wandered my way through the house, trying to find Myron. It proved to be challenging since I got lost once or twice, but after I made my way through every room and still couldn't find Myron, I began to worry.

"Myron!" I began to shout.

"Out back!" A muffled reply drifted in through the windows.

I managed to find my way back to the kitchen and step through the doors that led out to the backyard. I wrapped my arms around me, feeling the chill of autumn, and made my way to where Myron was sitting by the lake. Although he wasn't wearing the full Ellipsis uniform, he wore the official Ellipsis cape. In the middle of the black cape was the white Ellipsis symbol. The symbol was a fancy 'V' and attached to the right hand side of the 'V' was three legs, making an 'E'. Just above the last leg of the 'E' was three dots, symbolizing where the name was derived from. In place of the uniform, he wore a simple red tunic that matched his hair with black pants and black boots. He was sitting perfectly still, so I approached as quietly as I could and stayed a few steps back, waiting for him to address me.

"You can sit." He offered, and I sat down cross-legged next to him. When he saw me with my arms wrapped around myself, he asked, "Are you cold?"

"Myron, I lived in Florida. The leaves don't even change there, or at least, not like they do here." I commented as I stared at the beautifully colored trees. "I'm not used to the colder temperatures."

"If you think it is cold now, just wait till winter hits."

"Shouldn't you be giving me incentives to stay, because right now all you're doing is convincing me to leave."

"Homesick already?"

"I was homesick before I even left home." I mumbled and rested my chin on my knees.

Myron turned his body so he was actually facing me. "You don't remember much of your home in Ikicnie with Dakim?"

I shook my head. "I remember faces, my parents, Dakim, family friends, but I can't remember what any of the scenery looked like. I can't even remember our house. None of this should feel new to me, but it does."

"Well, Ikicnie's weather is similar to Florida's, so I can't blame you for not being used to the cold weather. As for the rest of it, it may come in time. You never know what random object can spark a memory."

"Yeah, maybe I'll meet this completely random person, and then all of my memories will come flooding back to me." I joked, thinking of Kian.

"One can hope." Myron smiled and then stood up. "So are you ready to start your training for the day?"

"What?" I exclaimed. "I thought I had been training so I could defend myself. Am I still in danger?"

"No, no, you're safe here." Myron quickly reassured me. "I guess I had just assumed that you would want to become an official Riora for Vriknir."

"Do you think I should?" I asked, also standing.

"It's not a decision I can make for you. As a Riora, you put your life on the line every day. It's your life, your decision. If anything, it's a decision that needs to be made with family."

"You didn't answer my question." I pointed out.

"Rae, I'm a commander of an Ellipsis team so I'm going to be biased. I look at the tactical advantages. You're a dragon with the ability to do almost anything you set your mind to. When you ask me that question, all I think about is how you would be a great asset to Vriknir."

"So then you think I should do it?"

"Now you're twisting my words."

"Only because you're not giving me a straight answer," I continued to argue.

Our conversation was interrupted by a little paper bird that arrived. Watching it brought a smile to my face, and I couldn't bring myself to pluck it from the air and make it still once more. That is, until it started flying into my face repeatedly.

"Ow! Okay. Okay!" I shouted and pulled it from the air, mumbling, "Jeez, I got the point the first time."

I unfolded the bird, and Myron took a few steps back, just far enough so that he couldn't see what was written. It wasn't like there was anything to see. Only two words had been written.

*Do it.*

I shook my head. *'A man of few words' is an understatement.*

After reading it once more, I sighed and looked up at Myron, "Do we have to start training today?"

Myron's smile grew. "No, I guess you can have today off, but we start bright and early tomorrow."

"Fine." I rolled my eyes, but then my smile returned.

Myron began making his way back toward the house, but I stayed a minute, my eyes drifting over the lake and trees. It was comforting to know that Dakim was so close by, but it was also kind of creepy that he could hear our conversation.

"Just because you're my big brother doesn't mean you have to be Big Brother." I whispered, wondering what his hearing range really was. I waited a few minutes, but when no flying bird attacked my face, I headed back for the house.

I stepped inside and once more had to look around. My eyes just didn't want to believe what was right in front of me. "How in the world do you have time to keep this house almost obsessively clean?"

Myron chuckled, "I don't. I have a maid who comes in."

"But how does she do it?" I spun around, taking everything in. "It's unreal."

"Her ability deals with cleaning. It would take any normal person hours to clean this house, but she can do it in a few minutes."

I turned to him, "I know that Vriknir is sort of a place for 'other' abilities, but isn't that sort of an odd ability, even from Vriknir?"

"Vriknir is made up mostly of half-breeds. When two people with, for example, Mind abilities come together, their offspring will have some sort of Mind ability, even if it isn't the exact same as his or her parents. However, when two different abilities come together, such as a Mind and an Element, there are unlimited possibilities as to what ability their offspring will have."

"I guess it never occurred to me that Riora from different villages would intermingle."

Myron nodded. "For the longest time, Ikicnie had been one of Vriknir's allies. Yet, after Dakim supposedly attacked Vriknir, people began to think that Dakim had been ordered by Ikicnie, and for the

longest time the two villages had been on the brink of war. Thankfully it never came to that, but since then relations have been less than peaceful. Niasha has been our ally for as long as people can remember, and still is our ally. You'll find a lot of Riora around here that are half Shapeshifter. Mekusc isn't our ally, but there isn't any tension between the two villages. Actually, Mekusc is very isolated. It doesn't get involved in world affairs or anything of the like. If they weren't on a map, I bet most people would forget they even existed. It also doesn't allow outsiders, so little is actually known about the country."

He was interrupted from his explanation when the doorbell rang. A slight expression of confusion crossed his face, but it was gone in the blink of an eye, and he went to get the door. When I rounded the corner, Myron stepped out of the way to reveal Charisse standing on the doorstep.

"Well, I have things to do today. I will let you two have your fun." Myron looked between the two of us and then headed upstairs.

"Raelyn?"

"Rae," I corrected politely and stepped back, allowing her to come all the way into the house.

Her eyes drifted around the house, the same expressions of amazement and shock that were going across her face were no doubt the same as the ones that had gone over mine. Finally her eyes landed on me. "I really don't want to overstep any boundaries, but if you intend to stick around here, then you really need to go shopping."

I smiled at her offer and then looked down at my clothes. "Yeah, Myron said he would get new clothes for me when we got here, but with everything that has happened I guess that kind of got put on the back burner."

"You're going to let Myron buy you clothes? Really? I swear that man is wearing the same thing every time I see him. You're already going to get comments for being new. If you want to lessen the blow, you might want to let me take you shopping."

I nodded, "I would like that."

"When are you free?"

"Well, I start training tomorrow, so I know this is short notice, but my only free time is probably right now."

"Well okay," She perked up. "Then let's go."

A little surprised I replied, "Um, okay, sure. Let me just go tell Myron."

I found my way upstairs and eventually located Myron. "Um, Charisse was wondering if I wanted to go shopping with her."

"That's fine." He sighed in relief. "I have to say taking you shopping was not something I was looking forward to. However, there are some things you need to know before you go. There is one section in our stores that is not found in yours. It is a section for what you would call battle outfits, or Thaeshen. The clothing is specifically designed to be comfortable and not get in the way when you are fighting. It also carries our village's insignia and identifies you if you step outside our borders. You're going to need several of those. Also, anybody who moves here and offers their skills as a Riora to Vriknir will be considered an honorary guest because they are fighting for a country that is not his or her own. As an honorary guest, you will be asked to attend formal dinners and ceremonies so you'll need some nice evening gowns. Here," He went over to a cabinet, grabbed something from inside, and then held it out to me.

"Myron, I can't accept this," I stuttered. Vriknir's form of money was different from U.S. currency, but I had learned it well enough to know that Myron was handing me a small fortune.

Myron chuckled. "Ellipsis members make very good money. Those who hold the position of Commander make even more. I have donated to every charity that I am aware of, not just once but several times, and I still have so much money that I don't know what to do with it. I am glad to help out."

I took the money a little hesitantly. I wasn't usually the one to accept charity. Just Myron opening up his beautiful home to me was enough to make me feel uncomfortable.

"Look, if you really feel that bad about it, I'll have Lady Vanek reimburse me."

I frowned at him. "For being a Commander in Ellipsis, I would have expected you to be a better liar."

"Oh, shut it." He snapped and I smiled. "Now, you better not bring me back any change."

"But..." I argued.

"You're not buying just a new top or anything like that. You need a full wardrobe."

"Myron, thank you."

"Don't worry about it. Also, I may not be home when you get back. I have a few things I need to take care of. I leave the door unlocked so you won't have to worry about getting in, but if it makes you feel better you can lock the door after you get home. You'll just have to unlock it when I get back."

"You don't lock your door?" I asked as I followed him back down the steps.

"Nobody is stupid enough to rob the house of an Ellipsis Commander, and if somebody is really coming after me, a locked door isn't going to stop them."

"Fair enough." I shrugged and then went back over to where Charisse was waiting for me. "I'll see you later, Myron!"

I stepped out of the house and closed the door behind me. Charisse gave me a nervous smile and then led the way. An awkward silence filled the air as we both tried to find something to say.

"So, you live with Commander Masters?"

"Just until Lady Vanek can set something else up for me," I answered.

"You're so lucky. There are so many people who would love to be able to spend just one day with an Ellipsis member, let alone live with them for a while."

"Really? I guess I knew that they were considered above the rest, but I never knew that they were that big."

"Most people never even make it into Ellipsis in their lifetime. Just being talented won't get you in. You have to be exceptionally good to make it. Three years ago, Karexon held the record for being the youngest person to get accepted into Ellipsis. He was twenty nine at the time. Then, about a year ago, Roy shattered that record, being accepted at eighteen. It was unheard of. If Roy hadn't come along, Kian would have been considered youngest. He was just accepted a few months ago and is twenty six."

"You seem to know a lot about this."

She blushed. "Growing up, it's every kid's dream to be an Ellipsis member. It's like kids wanting to be a super hero. Sure Ellipsis members don't run around in tights saving damsels in distress – although they do get to wear these awesome looking capes – but they're a group that people can look up to. Becoming a member is something everybody in Vriknir strives for."

As we reached the edge of downtown, I switched the subject, "So, what is there to do around here? I mean, Myron kind of gave me a tour, but he didn't really talk about what there was to do. Is there any sort of entertainment or sightseeing?"

"That's no surprise. Most of the Ellipsis members are so busy that they don't really think much about things like entertainment" Charisse chuckled. "We have bonfires every Friday night. Almost every teenager and young adult in the city goes. We have a local band that almost always plays. Then of course we have the usual shopping malls, recreation centers, and whatever else. I have to admit, though, we don't have a wide selection. Commander Masters may have told you this already, but most of the population here in Vriknir is Riora, so many people spend their time training, not looking for something to do."

"What's this place?" I asked, pointing to a building that reminded me of a pyramid. It was shaped like a triangle, but the triangle shape came from several layers of squares. It had caught my eye simply because its creative architecture was such a sharp contrast to the plain buildings around it.

"That's the Litna Museum. It has the entire history of Vriknir inside there. It's actually a really cool place." She stopped in front of a different building, "And this is the mall."

She looked at me, a big smile breaking out on her face. "Let's go."

**\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

Myron casually strolled into Lady Vanek's office, ignoring the usual futile attempts Sheila, Lady Vanek's assistant, made at stopping him. Instead of sitting at her desk as usual, she was standing, looking out the window, lost in thought. Myron took a seat in one of the chairs and patiently waited for her to say something.

"Tell me, Myron. What is the point of an assistant if you blatantly ignore her?"

Myron burst out laughing, but instead of answering her questions, he just smiled at her mischievously.

She sighed, knowing she would probably never get an answer to that question, and took a seat at her desk. "Have you discovered anything about the missing file?"

Myron nodded and leaned forward, "I have a few theories, but I need your help to test them."

"What do you need?"

"First, I need some information. I know knowledge of how Shifting Rights works is restricted to the leaders of the Riora villages, but I want to know, is it possible that somebody other than you or Jerome would know the Shifting Rights of Vriknir? Is it possible that somebody could have gotten around the full scan by directly teleporting into the vault?"

Lady Vanek thought for a moment. "Jerome or I give shifting rights to a person once they become a Riora. This allows them to teleport along the city streets of Vriknir, but they cannot teleport inside of a building. Even Jerome and I cannot teleport to the inside of the building. The best we can do is the building's doorstep."

"Is there any way around that?" Myron insisted. "Are you sure there aren't any loopholes that would allow somebody to bypass the scanner?"

Lady Vanek shook her head, "I don't think so, but it's worth looking into."

"Also," Myron began, "I know that room is top secret, and technically even I wasn't supposed to have been in there, but I want to see if somebody like Carmichael, who has the natural ability to teleport, could break in."

Lady Vanek shook her head, "Natural teleporters can only teleport to the places they've been before, places they know how to get to. They can't teleport someplace blind."

"I'd still like to rule that out as a possibility." Myron insisted.

"Fair enough," Lady Vanek agreed, "but I don't want him breaking into our secure vault. I'll have another room like it set up for you to test your theories on."

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

Shopping with Charisse was more fun than I thought it was going to be. I had been a little distrustful of her first, only because I had been hunted for the past month, but the longer we spent together, the more I seemed to relax around her. We didn't exactly have the same tastes in clothing, but that was what made it fun. She seemed to like blues and pinks, and a lot of the clothing had simple designs. I could see her as being the type of girl who loved to wear sun dresses and walk alongside the beach. I, on the other hand, liked things that were a little more outgoing. A lot of the things I picked out were black or blue and matched the blue highlights in my hair. If it wasn't black or blue, it was plaid, lots and lots of plaid. Most of them had some sort of graphic design on them. The nicer outfits that didn't have any graphic designs had some sort of unusual cut or style that made them stand out.



The Thaeshen I bought were nothing fancy. One outfit consisted of a black pair of pants and attached to it was a blue skirt that was extremely short in the front but came down to my ankles in the back. Matched with it was a white shirt and blue long sleeved jacket. The second outfit consisted of brown leather pants, an off white shirt, and short-cut, long sleeved, brown leather jacket. Then, just to add a little color and style, I paired it with a long, red scarf. The third consisted of knee high black boots, black shorts, and a long, flowing, off the shoulder blue shirt. The last outfit consisted of black shoes, black leather pants and a black and bright blue tank top. Paired with it was a bright blue sash and a bright blue ribbon for my hair. Overall, they didn't look much different from the rest of the clothing in the store, but they had small traces of Miutho infused in them that allowed them to conform to my body and allow me to move without restriction. I was glad that Thaeshen looked at least somewhat stylish, given I would probably be wearing them more than regular clothing.

Through the course of conversation with Charisse, I also learned that Jocelyn liked extravagant clothing, but not quite like my tastes. She liked clothing that was sparkly or silky and that generally showed a little more skin. It reminded me of the kind of clothing a model would wear, and I had to admit she certainly looked like she could be a model.

I was a little surprised when I got home and found that Myron wasn't home. I knew he had said that he had a few things to take care of, but I had been out shopping for a really long time, so I guess I had just expected that he would be home already. I took the several shopping bags I had up to my room and started putting things away in the closet. Little by little I was adding color to Myron's black and white room. I was about halfway through when there was a knock at the door. If somebody had come to kill me, they wouldn't have taken the time to knock, so I decided to head downstairs and see who it was.

I opened the door and looked around to see two guys standing on the doorstep. The one had dark brown hair and a dragon tattoo that started on his cheek, trailed down his neck, and disappeared into the collar of his shirt, but he didn't look to be older than fourteen. The other was... he...

"I know you!" I exclaimed, opening the door all the way.

"I wondered if you would remember."

"How could I forget?" I smiled, looking him up and down. He really hadn't changed much in the ten years since I had seen him. Actually, he looked exactly the same except he had lost his boyish features. He had bulked up and turned into a man. I held my hand out to him. "It's nice to see you again, Luke."

"You two know each other?" The fourteen year old boy looked back and forth between Luke and me.

"Yes," Luke chuckled. "I've been Dakim's best friend for eighteen years. Of course I've met his sister. I was at the hospital when she was born."

The fourteen year old boy recoiled in surprise. "Wow, this is news to me."

His reaction brought a smile to my face. It was exactly the way Christian would have reacted. I also extended my hand to him. "I'm Raelyn."

"I'm Vic." He took my hand a little hesitantly, looking me up and down.

I stepped outside. "Let's go for a walk. Myron will be home any minute."

When we were out of sight of the house, I spoke, "So, if you don't mind me asking, I remember Luke, but I don't remember you."

"I'd be worried if you did." Vic answered.

Luke smiled and explained, "After your family was killed, Dakim fled Ikicnie, and I went with him. We traveled from place to place, never really staying in one place. Vic was just somebody we picked up along the way."

"No offense Vic, but Dakim doesn't seem like the kind of person to just pick up friends along the way."

Vic frowned, and Luke lowered his head, brushing his hand against mine. I could feel his Miutho connect to mine, and then his thoughts ran through my mind, *Vic wasn't exactly welcome in the town he was staying in. He's fourteen now, but he was seven when we met him. I think Dakim reasoned that since he couldn't save you, then maybe he would be able to save this boy.*

I nodded slowly and then asked, "Luke, if I remember correctly, you have the ability to render people unconscious just by touching their skin."

Luke nodded, "It's not instantaneous, but I can knock people out pretty quick."

I turned to Vic next, "What can you do?"

"I can manipulate metal, and through it technology. I can bend and shape metal at my will. That is simple enough. How I manipulate technology, I can't really explain. It's like I can talk to computers, like I speak in a foreign language with them. I simply ask them to do what I want. Even our mutual friend really can't explain how I do what I do."

"Fair enough," I laughed and then asked, "So what may I do you guys the pleasure?"

Luke walked beside me with Vic on the other side of him. "Dakim can't exactly come and go as he pleases."

"So, you're here to keep an eye on me." I concluded.

He paused and turned to face me, his arms crossed over his chest. "What is with you and your brother always jumping to conclusions?"

"You know I'm right." I argued.

"His exact words were: I can't be there as often as I'd like so I want you to look after her. Don't let her slack off either. That pathetic leader of Ellipsis Jerome has ordered her commander to start her off with the basics. I don't want her to get too comfortable."

I rolled my eyes. "That sounds like Dakim. So, you guys will be sticking around?"

"Nobody around here knows our connection to Dakim, so we shouldn't have any problems moving here. We were thinking about getting a small apartment not far from here. However, we're not going to become Riora here. We're going to pose as citizens that way you'll be able to be seen with us without anybody raising questions."

"You're going to be seen with me now?" I joked.

"I highly doubt it." Vic chimed in. "You're only supposed to be learning the basics. Nobody can know that we're teaching you advanced stuff, which means we'll have to train where nobody can see us. Besides, if people see us training you, our cover might come into question."

I raised my eyebrows at him. "Then where exactly do you expect us to train?"

Luke shrugged. "We'll figure something out."

# Chapter 12

*OCTOBER 18*

I knew better this time than to sit up when I woke. I was careful not to hit my head on the ceiling when getting out of bed. I didn't bother to get dressed since I had no idea what I had in store for me today, but I made sure I looked at least somewhat presentable when I walked out the door.

Once again, Myron was nowhere to be found, so I headed for the lake. Just like yesterday he sat cross-legged by the lake side, not moving. However, today he wasn't wearing the Ellipsis cape. He wore a red V-neck t-shirt under a short-sleeved jacket with a different pair of black pants and black boots. His jacket was predominantly black, but the collar face was red and there was a red stripe along the shoulders, the sleeves, and up the sides. I approached quietly, but didn't wait for him to tell me to sit down.

"You slept late." Myron commented.

"What can I say? Yesterday wore me out." I shrugged. It fell silent, and once more I let my eyes drift over the trees, wondering if Dakim was close by. "Do you always come out here?"

"When I'm not out on a mission, yes."

"Why?"

He opened his eyes for the first time since I had been talking to him and blinked a few times in the sunlight. "It's peaceful, calming, relaxing."

"I'm sure with your heightened hearing it sounds really cool in the morning."

"You're right, it does, but that is not the main purpose for coming out here. I sit here, and I relax every muscle in my body. Then, I stretch my mind out, feeling connected to every little thing in the area. Once you get really good, you can connect to things everywhere without even thinking about it. It allows you to be aware of your surroundings and gives you a heads up about what is coming."

"It sounds complicated."

Myron chuckled, "Yes, but I'm sure it would be much easier for you than it would for me, given your abilities. Speaking of abilities, as a dragon you can do almost anything, but if you intend to blend in, you're going to have to just stick with one."

"Well, my cover is that I was an informant in Ikicnie, right? Then why don't I just go with being telekinetic? Plus, it seems to be what I am best at."

Myron shrugged, "Sounds good to me. In the morning, you'll be working with Karexon, Kian, Roy, and I. You may be posing as somebody who is telekinetic, but you never know when knowing another ability might save your life. Nobody else has that luxury, but I say that you should learn whatever you can if it might save your life."

"That's fine, but for the record, there was no need for the long-winded explanation. You've protected me, and if you think learning other abilities will help protect me, then I'm up for it. You don't need to explain yourself." I smiled and got up to go back to the house.

Myron followed me a little bit later, and I jumped when there was a loud bang. Myron had dropped a book on the table.

"What's this?" I asked, picking it up.

"Thaivo may not be spoken around here much, but if you ever leave the country for any reason, you're going to need to know it to communicate with people. It shouldn't be a problem for you right?"

I glared at his taunting of me. I could remember a handful of Thaivo words, but if he was expecting that I would be able to learn it instantly just because I was good with languages then he had another thing coming. It took me years to learn as much of the languages as I did. What made it simple

was that a lot of them were Latin based, meaning that there were a lot of similarities between them. Learning Thaivo wasn't going to be as easy.

I picked up the book and looked it over. It was a big book. "So, what exactly are my days going to consist of?"

"Well, for starters I won't let you sleep in as long as you did today. I only allowed it this time because I knew you didn't sleep too well the night before. When you get up in the morning, before you do anything else, you will join me down by the lake and we'll work on expanding your senses. Then, you'll work on Thaivo for about an hour or so. The rest of the morning you'll spend working with me, Kian, Karexon, or Roy, but if we are out on a mission, then you will have the rest of the morning as free time. The afternoons you'll spend with me at the public training ground where we will work on the basics of fighting and your telekinetic skills. If I'm not mistaken, you'll need time to train with the friends who stopped by yesterday, and then the evenings you'll have to yourself."

"How did you know about Luke and Vic?"

"So, that's their names, eh? As I mentioned before, you can stretch your senses to have a heads up when things are happening. I felt that people had come by the house yesterday, but when you left voluntarily, I didn't make a big deal out of it. Care to tell me about them?"

"Vic is fourteen but Luke picked him up when he was seven. He had pretty much been alone when Luke came around." I explained, leaving out Dakim's involvement. "Luke is nine years older than me, but he was a close friend of our family. I don't remember much of my life before Earth, but of the memories I still have, Luke is in all of them."

"You seem very fond of him." Myron commented. "Maybe I can meet him one day."

I chuckled, "One day might be sooner than you think. He's thinking about moving here with Vic, assuming he can find a house of course."

"Why wouldn't he be able to find a house?" Myron questioned.

My eyebrows knitted together, "I thought there weren't any houses open and that's why I was staying with you."

Myron smiled at my misunderstanding. "There aren't any houses in your price range. Until you get some sort of job here, the government would be paying for your housing. There are houses on the market, but most of them are out of the government's price range. That is why you are staying with me."

"Oh, that makes more sense."

"Just a little bit," His smile grew. "Now, go get ready. We're going to start out at the training ground today."

~

Myron explained Riora ranks as we walked to the training grounds, "Most people become a Riora around the age of twelve or so and are considered a beginning Riora, or Verneski. It is usually around eighteen or nineteen that a person will test for the next rank Ukemek, or intermediate Riora. Then, around the late twenty's, a person tests for Skekaek, or expert Riora. A person has to be exceptionally talented to make it into Ellipsis. Those that don't make it usually retire around their mid-forties."

I nodded in understanding, "Yeah, Charisse mentioned yesterday how hard it was to get into Ellipsis."

"How much did she say about Ellipsis?"

I shook my head, "Not much other than just how people really look up to Ellipsis."

"Ellipsis is something that is unique to Vriknir and it is considered a great honor to be part of Ellipsis. In other villages, exceptionally talented Riora are known as Kedar, or master Riora."

We paused in our conversation when we reached the training grounds and Myron held the gate open for me to enter. The training ground was a lot bigger than I expected it to be. I had been expecting a big open field, but it was actually an entire forest.

"Certain areas of the training grounds are restricted depending on your rank as a Riora. This is because certain areas of the training grounds are more dangerous than others. For example, the training grounds for Ellipsis members are full of dangerous monsters, impassable chasms, and huge mountains. There's more to it than that, but those are the high points.

I had been partially right in my expectations of the training grounds. Myron took me to the area for Verneski, and it was nothing more than a wide open field. The only thing I had to be careful about was that certain parts of the field had hidden traps, and if I stepped on them, my foot would get caught in these metal spikes. It reminded me a lot of the animal traps back on Earth. The traps were moved every day so I would never know where they were going to be. Thankfully, only half of the field was full of those painful looking traps, and Myron took me to the part that was trap free, but we were close to the edge. If I wasn't careful about how far I drifted, I would end up surrounded by traps.

Myron stood facing me, his hands on his hips. "Before we start, there is something you need to understand. Like I said before, we are similar to your military in some aspects, and just like how you don't join the military so you can go around shooting people, you don't become a Riora so that you can brag about being a Riora and show off all your skills. This is a position that is to be respected and taken seriously."

"Do you think I won't take this seriously?" I asked, trying not to show that I had been offended.

"No, no," He quickly reassured me, "All new Riora are required to hear this speech. It's nothing personal."

I nodded, "Forgive me for interrupting."

Myron shook his head, "Anyway, it's something we take pride in. We're like a family. We train hard, but we never seriously injure our partner. To an outsider it might seem that Ellipsis members are just trained assassins, but there is a philosophy behind what we do. We don't go around killing people for any reason. Actually, we never kill unless we are attacked first. Our goal is to settle disputes without violence. It sounds like we're this noble group of people, but in reality we're just trying to keep the peace."

"It *sounds* like I have a lot to live up to."

"It's not as hard as it seems. We don't expect a twelve year old to follow our code to the letter. It's something you grow into. When you're surrounded by people who live with discipline and respect, it's easier for you to follow it yourself. You're not as lucky. You have about five years of learning to catch up on, but that doesn't mean we're expecting you to be perfect. We just expect you to *try*."

"Of course."

He smiled at my eagerness and then shuffled his feet, "You must forgive me if I've forgotten anything else I was supposed to mention. It's been a few years since I've had to give one of these speeches. It is extremely rare that an Ellipsis member trains a new Riora, and practically unheard of that a Commander does the training. I have a couple of books at home that you can read whenever you have nothing better to do, and I'm sure it will cover anything I've missed."

I raised my eyebrows, "More reading to do?"

"You're gaining five years of experience in the matter of a couple of weeks, so yes, more reading."

"Then let's get going. The faster we're done here the faster I can start on the reading."

Myron grinned. "Then show me what you got."

"What?" I looked at him.

He brought his left leg back in preparation, putting his guard up, "You've already had some training, even if it was self-taught, and we taught you basic self-defense at the apartment. Yet, I need to see how you can do as a real fighter."

"And you think that having me fight you will show you what you want to know?" If my face permitted it, my eyebrows would probably have raised right off my face. "The only thing that this is going to accomplish is proving to you how incompetent I am. Besides, what about the weeks we spent on hand-to-hand combat? Didn't you see me as *a real fighter* then?"

I looked around the field. We were gathering an audience. It was obvious that it wasn't very often people got to see a fight between an Ellipsis member and a new Riora. "Are you sure we couldn't have just done this at your house?"

"The more time you spend complaining, the more time it will take before you can get started on your reading."

I rolled my eyes and then got into a fighting stance that mimicked his. We began to circle and I took the chance to examine his posture, his stance, anything that might give me information about what he might do. When he didn't make a move, I decided to be the first to strike. Yet, as soon as I took a step forward, he lifted his hand slightly in a sweeping motion, and I was blasted by a sound wave that sent me to the ground. I slowly got to my feet, prepared if Myron decided to make another move. However, it seemed that Myron wasn't interested in attacking me. He didn't make a move towards me at all. The only time he ever made a move was when he was defending himself. It took me a few attempts, but I realized he was doing the same thing I was doing. He was reading my body language to predict what I would do next, except he was a lot better at it than I was. If I shifted my weight it would seem that he would shift in almost the same moment.

Well, he said we came out here to work on my telekinetic abilities...

I relaxed my hands, undoing my fists, and let my fingers feel out for anything that was moveable and big enough to do some damage if it went hurling through the air. The only things I could find were the animal traps, but those would do more damage than what I wanted, so I made sure to spring the trap before sending it flying at Myron. Yet, it was to no avail.

He was still reading me. He was watching my fingers, and he knew exactly where the trap would be coming from. I grunted and made my hands back into fists so he wouldn't be to figure out where the next one was coming from. The only problem was that I had enough trouble moving items when I was able to use my hands. My powers had gotten stronger since I had regained my memories, but I still had little control over them. I didn't even know if I was going to be able to move something without using my hands. I took a deep breath and imagined Miutho extending from within me and attaching to the trap. At first I couldn't get it to move at all, but after I kept trying, it slowly began to move, and with a hard tug, I managed to get it to go hurling through the air. Yet, Myron just squatted down and watched the trap go flying over him with a smug smile on his face.

"How?" I finally exclaimed in frustration.

He stood up, his grin turning into a soft smile, "When you're in a fight, your enemy isn't going to tell you how to defeat him or her. You can't be told how to do everything. You're going to have to figure it out for yourself."

I gritted my teeth and got back into a fighting stance. Even though I knew it was useless, I continued to throw traps at Myron, giving me time to think of something new. *There has to be something I'm missing...*

Getting more and more frustrated, I got ready to throw the next trap but stopped when I realized he had already shifted in preparation to avoid it. He knew it was coming before it even happened. *He's still reading me! But how? I haven't shifted my body weight, and I'm not using my hands. What am I doing that he's able to read me? ...That was when I saw his eyebrow twitch... He's reading my face! I have to really focus to get the trap to move and he can see it on my face!*

I took a deep breath, relaxing all the muscles in my face so my expression was completely stoic, and Myron narrowed his eyes at me. I made sure to stare exactly at Myron, letting nothing else cross my face, but I wasn't focused on what I was looking at. I was thinking about the trap that was sitting a few feet behind him. It took me much longer to move this one, but eventually I succeeded. Yet, Myron smiled, stood up out of his stance, and caught the trap mid-air.

"Very good." He congratulated. "That was the first time I had to use my senses instead of reading your movements."

Out of breath, I plopped down on the ground, careful not to sit on any of the traps. Sending so many traps through the air had worn me out, and my mind was completely wiped after having to focus so hard. "If you can read all my movements, what's the point of hand to hand combat?"

"When facing an opponent who is equal to or better than you, it's not always possible to read their movements. Besides, even if you can read their movements, it doesn't mean you'll be fast enough to stop them. Plus, there is a lot of physics involved that I won't bore you with right now."

"Wonderful, more learning," I commented.

"Sorry to disappoint, but you'll never stop learning. You could be the best Riora in the world, but you would still have things to learn. Until you are perfect, which I can promise you will never be, there will always be something to learn from life."

I looked up at him, "Being perfect would be a lot easier."

He chuckled and then helped me to my feet. "We'll stop here for today. You did well. The fact that you managed to figure out how to move objects without using your hands, and then the fact that you figured out how to do it without giving away what you're doing is astounding. What you did today might take somebody else a year to figure out. You're a fast learner."

Not used to receiving complements, I lowered my eyes, feeling my face turn red, and I mumbled, "Thanks."

"Now, let's get some lunch." Myron suggested. He held open the gate for me once again, but I stopped when Roy, wearing a long sleeved red shirt and black pants, suddenly rounded the corner. The only reason I hadn't run into him was because he had managed to sidestep at the last possible moment. Our eyes met for an instant, and I found that his eyes were full of surprise, like he didn't know how to react. Yet, it was gone almost instantly and his cold, hard gaze returned. He simply stepped around me and continued into the training grounds without a word. Obviously, he was still upset with me.

"Roy!" Myron called after him, and I cringed. All I wanted was to get out of there as soon as possible. Thankfully, Myron kept it short and sweet, "Take it easy today, and don't push yourself too hard. I don't need you back in the clinic."

Roy simply nodded and walked away.

For lunch we went to a small little coffee shop and sat at a table outside. For being a little chilly, the sun felt nice and warm. It was such a pleasant day.

"Tell me about yourself." I declared after we had ordered our food.

"What?" He looked up from his cup of coffee. My question had caught him off guard.

"Tell me about yourself. I've spent over a month with you and your team, but the only thing I've learned is that you can manipulate sound, and I know that your entire house is black and white. I know almost nothing about Kian and Karexon. I know a little bit about Roy but I'm sure I don't have the full story."

"You have to understand that most Riora are not very trusting people. You must forgive us if we are not eager to tell you everything about ourselves."

"No," I quickly interrupted. "I'm not looking to know every single detail of your personal life. I'd just like to know something other than your ability and what your house looks like."

Myron took another sip of his coffee. "What do you want to know?"

I rolled my eyes. "I don't know. If you weren't a Riora, what would you be?"

Myron stirred his coffee as he pondered the question. "I'd be an architect, or maybe a singer."  
"Really? I never would have guessed that."

He nodded. "I like to design and build things. After Vriknir was attacked, I was put in charge of the reconstruction."

"You weren't out there trying to catch Dakim?" I questioned.

Myron shook his head. "Lady Vanek had her reasons for keeping me from the investigation, but even though at the time I had not yet become an Ellipsis member, she saw my leadership abilities. When she told me that I was being put in charge, she said she was doing it because 'people seem to naturally follow you. You will be able to provide stability in this chaos'."

"How old were you when you became an Ellipsis member?"

"Twenty-eight. I held the record before Karexon beat me by a few months."

"How old were you when you became a commander?"

"Thirty-two, and I still hold the record for being the youngest commander." He boasted.

"You have a talented team." I commented. "It seems like everybody on your team has had, or in Kian's case, would have held the record for being the youngest."

Myron nodded. "It was done on purpose. Most people don't make Ellipsis until their early thirties. My team was sort of like an experiment to see if the younger members could handle it. There are a lot of critics who think people like Roy should be made to wait before they are allowed to join."

"What about Karexon and Kian? Tell me about them"

"As I said before, Kian Dalca and his brother Hiram, who is also an Ellipsis member under a different commander, are known as the Blade Brothers. If we had bullets here on Kusnik, I have no doubt that they would be able to slice it in half. Their speed is nothing short of amazing. If he wasn't an Ellipsis member, I could see him being a merchant and running a business with his brother. He's really close to his brother and they are incredible when they fight together, so everybody was surprised when Jerome put them on separate teams. Karexon Radev has the ability to manipulate shadows and can even become one himself. He's the ultimate spy. However, if he wasn't an Ellipsis member, I'd guess that he'd be a cook."

"I can picture Karexon being a cook." I laughed as the waitress brought our food. "Thank you."

The waitress didn't acknowledge that I had said anything. Actually, she looked like she was in a daze, and when she put the plate down in front of me, I could see that her hands were shaking. I gave Myron a funny look, and we watched her walk away, then Myron got up. "Don't eat that." He pointed to my plate before jogging after the waitress.

"Don't touch me!" The waitress screamed when Myron reached for her wrist.

Myron immediately put his hands in the air, but continued to walk toward her. Then he mumbled, "You're the sister."

"Whose sister?" I asked as I walked over to where they were, but Myron put his hand out, preventing me from coming any closer.

"Who are you?" The waitress continued to scream in hysterics. "Where am I? How do you know me?"

"My name is Myron Masters. I'm with Ellipsis." Myron approached cautiously now.

"What's Ellipsis?" She didn't scream it this time, but she was still in hysterics.

Her question made him pause, but then he said, "I want to help you, but you need to trust me." She nodded slowly, "Okay."

"Rae, do you know how to get home from here?"

I nodded, but then realized that Myron had his back to me so I said, "Yes."

"Okay, go there and start working on Thaivo. We'll start your afternoon training tomorrow."

"Sure thing," I answered and watched as he escorted the woman away. I waited until they had walked a little ways down the road until I started off in the direction of Myron's house. I really wanted



to let my mind wander and think about everything that had just happened, but I couldn't afford to let myself do that. I was still having issues trying to find how to get places, and if I stopped paying attention to where I was going, then I would more than likely end up lost.

I was just passing the training grounds, when I noticed Roy getting ready to leave, making me pause. His red shirt was tattered and torn, revealing the bandages that were still wrapped around his chest. He seemed to be having trouble breathing and was leaning on the gate post for support. By the way he was gripping his shoulder, I would guess that he had ignored Myron's suggestion to take it easy, and not doubt he had ripped open his wound again.

After a minute of resting, Roy let go of the post and stepped forward. However, he only made it one step before he let out a grunt and dropped to his knees. My body lunged forward to help him, but I stopped when his words rang through my head. I hated you... Myron had said he was lying, but in that moment, I didn't care if Roy really did hate me. I had been useless when we were attacked, but I refused to be useless now.

I ran over to where Roy had fallen and got down on my knees next to him. I reached into one of the pouches on my utility belt and pulled out a roll of bandages. When Roy realized who it was and what I was doing, he pushed me away and growled, "I don't need your help!"

His bright red eyes were full of anger, and his black hair fell into his sweaty face. Normally, I feared the angry glares he gave out to people, but for the first time, I instead of being afraid, I found that I pitied him. Myron was right about one thing. Roy always got back up, but I couldn't help but wonder, had anybody ever helped him stand? Or had he always had to get up on his own?

"You're the great Royce Adimari. Of course you don't *need* anybody's help." I smiled at him, despite the glare he was giving me, and held out the bandages. "Sometimes in life, there are a lot of things that we don't need but accept anyway."

Roy took the bandages in one hand, but then flicked me in the forehead with the other, "And what the hell am I supposed to do with these?"

I went to yell at him for flicking me in the forehead, but stopped when I saw him wince once again. So instead I sighed and answered, "You ripped your wound open again. You need to change your bandages again so it will stop bleeding. I understand if you don't want my help, but please at least go back to the clinic and let them take a look at your wound."

When Roy looked at me again, his eyes weren't exactly full of anger, but they were far from happy, "Why are you willing to help me?"

I lowered my eyes, remembering just how he had gotten the knife wounds in the first place, "You've had enough pain already. I just don't want to see you in anymore."

Roy's eyes widened slightly but then they were back to normal, and he looked away. "Myron would not be happy if he found out I ended up back in the clinic."

I nodded and took the bandages from him. He lifted his shirt but could only get it half way before he couldn't lift his arms any higher without being in pain. I lifted his shirt off, careful to do it slowly so I didn't cause him any extra pain, and then began removing the ruined bandages. His knife wounds had healed enough that, even though he had slightly ripped it open again, it hadn't been too severe. I wrapped the new bandages around him, doing my best not to blush when I had to wrap my arms around him to bring the bandages around to the other side. I was just thankful that lunchtime was over, so there weren't any girls like Jocelyn to walk by and flip out. Roy remained silent the whole time, but as soon as I was done, he got back to his feet. I tried to help him, but he only swatted me away. He picked up his red shirt that lay on the ground and walked away without a single word to me.

\*\*\* Myron \*\*\*

"I found something that may be of interest to you." Myron commented as he walked into Lady Vanek's office. "I was at a cafe with Rae when I realized that our waitress was the sister of the informant you lost to Raven. She seemed to be in a daze until I approached her, and then she had a mental break down and couldn't remember who or where she was. She didn't know what Ellipsis was either. I took her to a healer, but the healer said she received a lot of brain damage. There's a good chance she won't ever regain her memory."

Lady Vanek sighed and leaned back in her chair. "Our informant was killed before she was able to send us any information about Raven. When her sister went missing at the same time, we sent out an investigation team, but it was assumed that she had been killed as well. Why would they kill one but leave the other alive?"

"I think she'd be the perfect person to put a bug on to spy on Vriknir. Then he erased her memory so she wouldn't be able to give us any information," Myron answered.

"It's a theory." Lady Vanek agreed. "We'll search her house for bugs and keep her under surveillance."

"The only thing I can't figure out is why she showed up at the cafe." Myron commented.

Lady Vanek nodded. "You can add questioning the cafe owners to your to-do list. If I remember correctly, it's run by a mother and daughter from the Castell family."

"Castell?" Myron repeated.

"Yes, why?"

"I may have just found our link. Charisse Castell took Rae shopping yesterday."

"But the only people who know about Raelyn's existence are your team, me, and Jerome." Lady Vanek reminded him. "Charisse had no idea who Raelyn was."

"Then we just went back to having no leads." Myron pointed out.

"Fine, go check it out and then get back to me."

"Yes, Lady Vanek." Myron turned to leave.

"Oh, and Myron," Lady Vanek called after him, making him stop and turn back. "Her name is *Raelyn*. I know that you are fond of this girl, but don't get too attached. Don't forget your mission and most of all don't forget who her brother is."

He didn't say 'Yes, Lady Vanek,' or even nod his head, because if he had, it would mean that he would follow her orders not to get too attached. Yet, it was already too late for that. Instead he simply closed his eyes walked out the door without another word.

# Chapter 13

OCTOBER 19

I stopped short when I stepped out into the backyard and realized that Myron wasn't sitting in his usual spot by the lake. When he didn't come home last night, I hadn't been too worried. I had just figured he was busy dealing with the waitress. Fear began to set in and I quickly went back in the house. "Myron!"

"In the Entertainment Room!" His voice drifted out from down the hall, and I began to relax.

I made my way to where he was, but stopped short for the second in ten minutes when I realized there was color in the room. Myron had pushed the furniture back and set up a wooden dance floor in the middle of the room, "What's going on?" I asked as I cautiously walked in.

"Your first celebration is coming up. They're giving an award to Roy for his heroic actions in saving you and welcoming you to Vriknir. It is custom for whoever is being honored to have the first dance so you might want to start thinking about who you're going to bring as your date."

"Uh..." I was still getting settled. I barely knew anybody, and now I was expected to have a date?

"You'll also be expected to do the traditional dance, so we'll be spending the next couple of mornings teaching you how to dance. Until you find another dance partner, I'll fill in for now."

"I'm going to warn you now. I'm really bad at dancing."

Myron smiled, "Then it looks like I have my work cut out for me."

That was how we spent the morning. He played some music on his funky looking radio and he taught me the steps. It seemed similar to the different ballroom dances I had seen on televised competitions, but there wasn't any particular dance I could associate it with. When I had told Myron that I was bad at dancing, I wasn't just being humble. I was being honest when I said that, but I found that, even though I did horrible, I had enjoyed myself. Myron didn't yell or scold me when I did something wrong. Instead, we laughed about it. It was a great start to the morning.

"What do you want for lunch?" He asked as he walked into the kitchen and started going through the cupboards.

"Actually, Charisse was wondering if I wanted to go out to lunch."

He closed the last cupboard and then slowly turned to me. "Just do me a favor and make sure you stay in a public area where there are a lot of people around."

A little confused by his request, I nodded, "Yeah, sure."

~

I met Charisse at the same cafe I had went to with Myron the day before only because that was the only place I knew how to get to without getting lost. Yet, almost as soon as we sat down, Jocelyn sat down excitedly next to Charisse, completely ignoring the fact that I was also sitting at the table. "I heard Roy stopped by here yesterday."

She nodded, "Yeah, but I didn't get to see him. He came to question my mom about some waitress that went all wacko."

"Wait, your mom owns this cafe?" I questioned.

"Yeah, sorry I didn't mention it before." She apologized. "It just never came up in the course of our conversation when we went shopping."

"You took her shopping?" Jocelyn whispered angrily to Charisse.

I didn't listen to the rest of their conversation. Instead, my mind was full of questions. *I thought Myron had only escorted that waitress because he had been the one to find her, but if Roy had questioned*

*Charisse's mom, then that meant Ellipsis was involved. If Ellipsis was involved then there was a lot more to it than just a waitress going crazy, and what had Myron meant when he said, "'You're the sister'?"*

"Rae?" Charisse pulled me from my thoughts.

"What?"

Jocelyn rolled her eyes, but Charisse repeated her question, "You only just came to Vriknir, right? I had just been wondering what you did before you came here."

"I lived in Ikicnie but I worked as an informant for Vriknir."

"Oh, I heard Ikicnie is such a cool place. What's it like?" Charisse's voice was full of excitement and wonder.

I shook my head. "I wouldn't know. My cover was blown, so I was captured and my memory was erased, or so I was told. I'm only alive because Ellipsis managed to rescue me, which is how I met Roy." I addressed the last part to Jocelyn. "I can't remember anything about Ikicnie. I'm telekinetic but I can't even remember how to do that, so I've been working with Myron on relearning how to use my ability."

I felt bad lying to them, well at least to Charisse. I couldn't care less about Jocelyn. It wasn't how I wanted to start out the friendship. Charisse had been so kind to me, and this was how I was repaying her. I tried to put the thought from my mind, but I only managed to push it to the back of my mind where it continued to bug me for the rest of lunch. To my disappointment, Jocelyn also remained for lunch and spent much of the time talking about how great she thought Roy was. It was just another painful reminder to me that Roy still wasn't talking to me and his words lingered in my mind, *I hated you...*

In short, lunch was a bust.

Once I said my goodbyes to Charisse and Jocelyn, I was off to work on my telekinesis. I walked through the training ground, careful not to step on any of the traps. I'd gotten pretty good at spotting them, but when I got to the same spot I had been at yesterday, I found Roy leaning on a nearby tree. He wore a black, red, and gray, sleeveless, collared shirt and black pants that disappeared into his black boots. Despite the fact that his slick black hair was covering some of his face, I could still see the piercing red eyes staring at me, and it caught me by surprise, causing me to stop paying attention to where I was walking. When I heard a click, I pulled my foot back right away, and thankfully the trap only caught the bottom of my shoe instead of my leg. Standing on the foot that hadn't been attacked, I brought the other one up so I could undo the trap. Yet, I was having trouble keeping my balance so I hopped around a little bit and nearly sprung a second trap. Eventually I gave up and hopped to the nearby by fence to lean on while I undid the trap.

"Having some issues?" Myron asked, walking over.

*When had he gotten here?*

"Nope." I managed to pull the trap off and held it up triumphantly for him to see.

"Roy, what are you doing here?" Myron commented when he noticed Roy under the tree. "I'll admit I've missed having you as a sparring partner for Rae, but your knife wounds still aren't fully healed. You're in no condition to train."

Roy didn't say a word. He only slid down the tree and sat on the ground with no obvious intention to get up any time soon.

*Oh great, now I get to have him watching me.*

I tried to push it from my mind and ignore that he was even there. I got into a fighting stance, thankful that, now that I knew what to do, it wouldn't be nearly as frustrating as yesterday had been. I watched as Myron also got prepared, but I had already started focusing on the nearest trap. Yet, I lost my focus when I felt a sudden pain below my rib cage and I dropped to my knees with the wind knocked out of me.

"Your enemy isn't going to wait for you to do something. They are going to try to eliminate you as soon as possible."

I gritted my teeth as I got back to my feet and struggled to get air back in my lungs. However, as soon as I had, Myron sent another punch my way. My hand to hand combat had improved greatly in the past month, but I still had to focus on what I was doing. As soon as I started focusing on one of the traps, Myron sent another punch my way, and I lost my concentration.

Getting frustrated once more, I blocked Myron's next punch and used my free hand to thrust forward, throwing my Miutho at Myron's chest as hard as I could. Yet, that didn't work either. Myron simply put the arm I had used to block him in an arm bar, managing to redirect my blast in the process.

"It wasn't what I was expecting but it's a start." Myron said, releasing me. "Using your ability should be like second nature, that way you don't think about it, and you can focus on your opponent. Whenever you have a moment, maybe when you're waiting in line somewhere or just sitting at home, try to practice."

I nodded, too out of breath from the work out to say anything.

Myron looked as if he was preparing to come at me again, but stopped when a young boy cautiously approached Myron with his head down. He greeted Myron and Roy, "Good afternoon, Commander Masters, Lord Adimari, Miss Murray."

*Lord Adimari, eh? That was new.* I thought and then I smiled to myself. *And he addressed me as Miss Murray. That will take some getting used to.*

"Yes?" Myron answered.

"Excuse me for interrupting, but Lady Vanek wishes to speak with Commander Masters." The boy informed.

"Yes, thank you." Myron nodded and then turned to me, "We didn't get to spend nearly as much time practicing as I would have liked, but we'll have to stop here for today. Why don't you go home and work on lifting objects around the house. Maybe you can levitate your Thaivo book while you're reading it?"

I rolled my eyes. Leave it to Myron to think of a creative way for me to practice more than just one thing at a time. I sighed and went to make a smart comment, but then, from the corner of my eye I noticed Roy still staring at me. His face was completely blank of emotion, and it bothered me that I couldn't tell what he was thinking. It made me uncomfortable knowing that he was staring so intently at me, and I found that I had completely forgotten what I was going to say to Myron.

"Can you escort Raelyn back to my house before returning to the office? She still has a little trouble finding her way around." Myron told the little messenger. The little boy bowed, and I realized that was also my cue to leave. I turned away, trying to forget that Roy had even been there.

### **\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

He smiled when Rae turned and walked away, and Lady Vanek's messenger had to run to catch up with her. He then turned to see Roy, who was still sitting in the same spot on the ground, also watching her leave. There was a small, slightly amused smile on his face, but it was gone when he realized that Myron was staring at him. Roy frowned, "What?"

Myron smirked, "Did something happen?"

Roy growled, "No."

Myron bent over slightly and raised an eyebrow at him. "Why so defensive?"

Roy frowned deeper and then looked away, but Myron hadn't missed the small blush that had risen to his face. With his arms crossed over his chest, Roy said pointedly, "Don't you have a meeting to get too? Lady Vanek doesn't like to be kept waiting."

Myron sighed. Unfortunately Roy had a point. Lady Vanek did not like to be kept waiting, meaning that he didn't have the time to walk to her office as he would prefer to do. He closed his eyes

and focused on the floor of the dimension. Then with just a little tug, he found himself halfway across town.

"It was a dead end." Myron informed as he walked back into Lady Vanek's office. "Roy talked to Ms. Castell who said that the woman had showed up at her cafe completely distraught, so Ms. Castell decided to help her out by offering her a job at the cafe. Witnesses confirm her story. Also, the Castell family doesn't have the ability to tamper with memory, nor do they have any connections to somebody who does."

"So the cafe is out." Lady Vanek concluded.

"I talked to the healers as well and they are unable to give an exact time as to when her memory was wiped so she could have been wandering around for days before she stumbled upon the Castell Cafe."

"It still bothers me that they would kill one and not the other. Even if that waitress had had something to trade, I doubt Raven would have allowed her to live. There would always be the risk that she would one day regain her memory." Lady Vanek tapped her fingers on her desk. *Thump, thump, thump, thump*. Then she sat forward in her seat. "What if they left her alive because her sister had sent her something? They tried to search her mind to see what she had left behind, which is why she suffered so much brain damage. Eventually her capturers went too far which caused her to lose her memory all together. Then, they decided to let her go, hoping that her memory might heal and she would be able to lead them right to whatever her sister had left behind."

Myron just stood there, waiting for Lady Vanek to finish with her theory and give him an order. When Myron said nothing about her theory, Lady Vanek, ordered, "Go search her house. See if you can find anything useful."

"I've already searched her house." Myron reminded.

"No, you searched for bugs. When people are looking for something specific, they tend to miss other things that are sitting right in front of them."

"Yes, Lady Vanek." Myron nodded and then was out the door.

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

I looked up as Myron walked through the door but he didn't seem to even notice that I was still up. Then again, it was Myron we were talking about it. If he failed to realize I was there, then I would be extremely concerned. I followed him as he walked into his room and sat down on his bed. He looked completely beat.

"Long day?" I asked, leaning on the door post.

"Something like that," He answered as he began unhooking the belts that held his gear.

"Whatever happened to the waitress from the other day?" I prodded.

"We're looking into it," was his vague reply.

"Why is Ellipsis looking into it? Isn't that a little below your pay grade?"

"Raelyn, just drop it." He snapped and I jumped. I knew I had been bugging him, but I hadn't been expecting his foul mood. However, it seemed to pass almost immediately, and he started acting more his usual compassionate self. I looked around his room, trying to think of something to get rid of the last bit of tension that remained in the air.

"So what's up with Roy being called Lord Adimari?"

"Ellipsis members receive special titles. The regular members are addressed as Lord or Lady while the leaders of the team are addressed as Commander. Jerome is addressed as General because he is the head of Ellipsis. When you are addressing a team leader who is not an Ellipsis member or somebody in general who is above you in rank, you only use their last name. Addressing somebody by

their first name is reserved for friends and those who are the same rank as you or below you.” Myron explained, but his tone had a bit of an edge.

“You have a guitar?” I noticed, trying to keep conversation going.

“I got it as a present a while ago.”

“Can I play?”

“Go ahead.”

I picked up the guitar from the stand and sat down on the edge of his bed. I let my fingers run across the frets and noticed something written on it, but it had been worn over the years. It looked like it said Rose, but I couldn’t be sure.

“Do you know how?” He asked

“I tried to teach myself once, and I learned a few songs, but I lost interest and never seemed to have time to practice.”

“Here,” He sat down next to me and took the guitar. He fooled with some of the knobs, putting it back into tune, and then began to play. He sang in Thaivo so I didn’t understand the words, but it sounded like country music. His voice was so pure, but what else should I expect from somebody who could manipulate sound?

“You like country?” I questioned after he finished.

“I like all types of music, but country is my favorite.” He answered, but his voice was soft and his eyes were unfocused, like his mind wasn’t here in the room. He ran his fingers down the neck of the guitar, lost in thought. After a minute he spoke, “It’s been years since I’ve played this.”

“Why?” I exclaimed. “You’re so good! It’s like a crime to deprive the world of its beauty!”

He gave me a funny look and then burst out laughing. It was the first time I had heard him truly laugh and it was cool to listen to. It was such an unusual laugh.

“Alright, I’m going to bed.” I announced once it seemed like all the tension between us was gone.

“Goodnight.” He told me as I walked out. I closed the door behind me but stopped to listen when I could hear the guitar being strummed. It brought a smile to my face. It may have been a long time since he played, but at least he was playing once more.

### \*\*\* Karexon \*\*\*

As Karexon and Roy approached the waitress’s house, Karexon put his hand on Roy’s shoulder and let themselves sink into the ground, becoming a shadow. They slipped through the crack between the door and the ground and made their way into the house. Once he made sure they were the only people in the house, they emerged from the ground and proceeded to search the house. Yet, after searching for several hours, they found nothing of importance, and as the sun was beginning to rise, they decided to call it a night. They were getting ready to leave through a crack in the window when Karexon realized that there was a small space where one of the walls met the floor, like the wall wasn’t the original wall that had been built with the house. Curious, they turned back into a shadow and slid through the small space to find that there was actually an entire room that had been sealed off. On the far side was a desk and in the top drawer Karexon found part of a letter. However, ink had been spilled over it.

Karexon handed the letter to Roy, “Is there any way you can read this?”

“My eyes let me analyze things, not see through things.” Roy sharply reminded.

Karexon rolled his eyes with his goofy grin, “At least give it a try.”

Roy frowned but otherwise activated his Skayikon and took a look at the letter. He wasn’t able to read through the ink, but his eyes were able to see even the smallest of details on the paper, such as

the indents her pen had made. From the impressions on the paper, he was able to make out what she had written.

*Dear sister,*

*I am so sorry that I have gotten you involved in all of this, but I had nowhere else to turn. I fear that Raven has discovered me to be a traitor, so I am going to try and escape here as soon as I finish writing this. I will have to stay off the radar, so this may be my last letter to you for a while. I hope to send a report to Lady Vanek soon after I leave here, but in case something happens, I want to tell you as well.*

*Unfortunately I still have not been able to learn much about Raven. I haven't even been able to learn his last name. However, I have learned that Raven is one of the people who lost his family the day Vriknir was attacked. With help from an outside organization, he managed to kill Dakim's parents, but I overheard him ranting about how his younger sister managed to survive and that they have not been able to locate her. Since then, Raven has set his sights on Vriknir. He blames its leaders and the people for not being strong enough to defend itself against one man. He wants to bring Vriknir to the ground and rebuild it with him as its sole leader. I believe -*

"It stops there." Roy informed as he turned the paper over, seeing if there was anything else it could tell him.

"Do you think she was attacked while she was in the middle of writing this?" Karexon speculated.

"It could be." Roy agreed. "It would explain why ink was spilled all over it."

Karexon looked at the light that was spilling in from the crack they had entered through, "It looks like the sun is beginning to rise. We should get this back to Myron."

Roy folded up the letter and put it in his pocket. "Let's go."

**\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

**OCTOBER 20**

I sat on a tree stump in what seemed like the middle of nowhere. It was my new training area until Luke could find a more permanent one for us. I was already bad with directions so I had left early to so I had time to get lost. However, I hadn't gotten lost, so I was almost a half an hour early. Since I had a spare moment, I took Myron's advice and decided to practice my telekinesis. I picked up a pine cone from the ground and acted like it was a yo-yo. I threw it out and then used my telekinesis to bring it back. I hadn't been to the Riora training ground with Myron for a while. Yet, I found that playing with my newfound yo-yo was easier than I thought it would be.

*I should be training with Myron right now, but no, he's off on some mission that probably has to do with that waitress from a few days ago. I had told Myron that he didn't have to explain himself and that was the truth. I just wish he wouldn't make it so obvious that he was lying to me.*



"You're early!"

I jumped at the sound of Luke's voice, and my toy pinecone dropped to the ground. As I turned around to face Luke, I mentally scolded myself for being so lost in my own thoughts. He never should have been able to sneak up on me that easily.

"Where's Vic?" I asked when I didn't seem him behind Luke.

"He's guarding the perimeter so that we don't have to worry about anybody seeing us."

"Okay, but before we begin, I have a favor to ask." I said as I hopped down from the tree stump. Luke raised his eyebrows at me but otherwise didn't say anything so I continued. "Vriknir is holding this celebration thing and I need a date."

"Don't you think I'm a little old for you?" Luke teased. I opened my mouth to argue but I couldn't find anything to say that would convince him. Then he chuckled, "Don't worry. I'll go."

"Then, I have one more favor to ask..."

"Now what?" He joked.

"Myron's been trying to teach me the dances I'll have to do, but it would be much better if he didn't have to be my partner while he was teaching."

"You want me to practice with you." He concluded.

"Maybe," I twiddle my fingers but then looked up at him accusingly, "And you yell at Dakim and I for cutting people off and jumping to conclusions."

"What can I say? After spending eighteen years with him, he's begun to rub off on me."

"How did you ever survive eighteen whole years?" I joked.

He looked at me then laughed, "Good question."

"How would he ever survive without me?"

Dakim's voice had been monotone, but it still had been enough to scare me. Luke, however, casually turned around as if Dakim's voice coming from out of nowhere was an everyday occurrence.

"That's an even better question." Luke tried to save himself.

I turned to face my brother, seeing him for the first time since that night in the clearing. It was lighter now and I could see more of his features. The tips of his hair, which were the stunning shade of blue that seemed to run in the Adelinda family, glowed in the sunlight. It was a wonder, really, that nobody had recognized me to be an Adelinda just by my appearance. He had a narrow face with sharp features and the same blue eyes as me. His posture was perfect, the same as Myron, yet, there was a different air to it. Myron's posture showed his leadership and command. Dakim's showed his status. Just one look at him and you would know that he is someone who is to be respected and revered. Myron had authority. Dakim had power.

"So, what are we doing today?" I asked, eager to get started.

Dakim gestured towards the stump, "Sit down with your legs crossed." I quickly did as I was told as he continued speaking, "It's my understanding that the past couple of days you've been working on mediation with Myron. This is the same concept, but instead of extending your senses outward, you're going to focus inward. Focus on your Miutho. Feel it flowing through you. Bring it to your fingertips, and twist it, turn it."

"How?" I looked up at him.

"However it feels comfortable. People have abilities because they can manipulate Miutho in a certain way. We can manipulate it however we want. Our problem is figuring out how to manipulate it to achieve the desired effect. The best way is to just start experimenting."

"I-I can't." I stuttered.

Dakim bent down in front of me, and his bright blue eyes looked directly into mine. "Rae, you're not on Earth anymore. Riora, people like us, we're welcome here. People look up to what we can do. You don't have to live in fear anymore. You don't have to hide. Here, you are free."

A smile broke out on my face. He was right. Back on Earth, I had been mad at Roy because he had thought he was better than everybody else when I had wanted to be like everybody else. I had wanted to be “normal,” but here I was normal. Sure, I had trained non-stop in my combat skills, but I rarely practiced using my abilities. I had been afraid of my abilities because it was something that nobody else had. It was time for me to stop being afraid of what I could do, and finally start embracing it.

I closed my eyes, trying to focus. I could feel my Miutho flowing through my veins and it was the same blue color that I had seen when I connected with Myron. I held my hands out in front of me, like I was holding a ball, and imagined my Miutho flowing down to my fingertips. I let it gather in my grasp, and just as it got too big to fit inside my hands, I twisted it as hard as I could, and jumped when a spark jumped from my hand and burned my fingertips.

Luke chuckled while Dakim cracked a smile saying, “You might want to point your hands away from yourself.”

“You could have told me that beforehand.” I growled as I turned my hands so my palms were facing a tree.

Dakim placed his hand on my shoulder and I looked up at him. “You can experiment with this later since my time here is limited. I’ve spent years experimenting, trying to find new abilities. Lucky for you, you don’t have to spend all of those years because I can just teach it to you myself. Stand up.”

I did as I was told, holding back a smart remark about having to sit down and then get back up again. I just couldn’t see a comment like that going over well, not with Dakim at least.

“Follow my movements exactly.” Dakim instructed and then proceeded to do a sequence of movements that reminded me of forms practiced by martial artists. Once we had gone through it once, Dakim stood up out of his stance. “Good. Now that you have a feel for the movements, I want you to close your eyes. Use what Myron taught you and extend your senses until you can feel my Miutho. Follow it, letting your Miutho copy mine. It will get you used to moving your Miutho in unusual ways and it will make it easier for you to pick up new abilities. Whenever I can, I’ll come by and I can work on teaching you new abilities.”

I nodded and then tried to work up the courage to say what I had been thinking ever since he showed up today. He seemed to notice and patiently waited for me to speak. It brought a smile to my face and made me feel more comfortable. “I know you have to be careful, but I don’t want you to only sneak in when we need to train. You’re the only family I have left.”

He smiled slightly and ruffled my hair, simply because he knew I hated it. “Don’t worry. I’ll be back later tonight and then we can catch up all you want, but right now, I need to be going. I’ll see you later.”

## Chapter 14

"Tell me about our family." I asked Dakim. I sat on a boulder on the opposite side of the lake from Myron's house, the part that Myron didn't own, and Dakim stood next to me.

"You don't remember?"

"You weren't listening when I told Myron?"

"As I said before, I can't always be around. That's why Luke and Vice are here."

"Ah, yes, to make sure I don't slack off, right?" I smiled and then looked out over the lake.

"Before our mom sent me to earth, she wiped my memory in hopes that I could live a relatively normal life without having to deal with the tragedies that have happened to our family. While I've regained most of my memory, there is a lot that is still fuzzy. I can remember faces and a couple of events, like when you taught me the origami birds and a few times when Luke came over, but I don't remember much else."

Dakim nodded. "There is a reason our last name is Adelinda. It means 'noble serpent'. Legend has it that our ability to control the pure form of Miutho came from dragons. Not only that, but we also have some physical characteristics of a dragon. The mark between your shoulder blades is proof of that. We also have the ability to turn our nails into claws that are harder than any metal that can be found on Earth and the ability to change our skin into the same armor of the dragons.

"Since we supposedly descended from dragons, we are often associated with the shapeshifters from Niasha. However, we were different from the other Shapeshifters. You can always tell a Shapeshifter by their markings. Most Shapeshifters have what looks like designs tattooed all over their body. However, the only marking we have is the one between our shoulder blades. Also, the Shapeshifters can actually shift into the animal they have descended from. We can bring out the nails and the armor of dragons, but we can't actually shift into dragons. Also, we can actually control Miutho, giving us an ability, several abilities actually, and Shapeshifters can't.

"Dragons were persecuted, always have been, so our parents decided to move to Ikicnie where they were able to pass as normal citizens, and I was born soon after. That was where we met Luke Espie. He was the annoying boy next door who wouldn't leave me alone. He was good, but I was better, and he hated me for it. He was always complaining about how everything came so easily to me and that it was unfair that the Adelindas were naturally so powerful. Yet, after I saved his life a few times, he stopped whining so much."

I smiled at his attempt at a joke. Then my eyes narrowed. "I don't get it. If we're so high and mighty because we get our abilities from dragons, then how come our parents were killed so easily?"

Dakim sighed and looked up at the starry sky. "It wasn't just one person our father was battling against. It was several, but don't let that make you think any less of them. Our father was a talented Riora and highly decorated for his services."

I looked at him thoughtfully. "After you ran with Luke, what did you do?"

Dakim closed his eyes and leaned back against the bolder. "Rae, I'm not the big brother you remember. I've done things I'm not proud of."

"You'll always be my brother." I insisted.

"So naïve," Dakim chuckled. "Rae, I may not have killed the people Vriknir accuses me of, but I'm still a criminal. Breaking laws has become second-nature to me, and I've killed more people than I can count. The Dakim you knew died a long time ago."

"I refuse to believe that," I glared at him.

He pretended not to notice and decided to answer my original question. "After we ran, Luke and I drifted between Teysas villages, all the while keeping an ear open for any information I could get my hands on. I knew the bodies of our parents had been found, but I had never heard anything about you. I

went everywhere, hoping to get just a sliver of information that could tell me something about what had happened to you. Luke and I, and eventually Vic too, even learned the different languages, hoping it would lead to more information.”

I giggled, “So that’s how you speak English so well, despite growing up speaking Japanese in Ikcinie.”

Dakim nodded and continued, “I eventually became a mercenary, doing whatever people requested of me as long as the price was right. Yet, after a few years, the pain became too much. I couldn’t stand being on Kusnik anymore, so I spent a few years on Earth, and developed almost as many contacts there as I had here. After that, I drifted between Kusnik and Earth on a regular basis, using loopholes in the Shifting Rights that allowed me to get around the rule that prevented travel to Earth.”

I hung my head, thinking of all the pain Dakim and Roy been through. Eventually I mumbled, “Why would anybody ever want to become a Riora?”

Dakim’s eyebrows knit together and he walked around to the front of the boulder so I would still have to look at him even though I was looking at the ground. “What makes you say that?”

“Roy lost his parents and sister. We lost almost everybody in our family. It’s like everywhere you turn there’s nothing but death.”

“Actually, I think you have it a little backwards.”

My head snapped up at his words. What was that supposed to mean?

Dakim took a breath. “Stop and think about it for a minute. Ten years ago, Roy wasn’t a Riora. He didn’t become a Riora until after his family was killed, and he only became a Riora because he wanted revenge. I became a Riora because I wanted to follow in our father’s footsteps, but it wasn’t until after he died that I truly became serious about it. So, you see, I don’t think death follows a Riora. I think death causes a Riora to emerge. Think of a United States soldier back on Earth. They don’t sign up for the military because they want to die. They join because they want to defend their country and fight so that others may be free and safe. Roy fights for his family, and I fight for my mine. It isn’t something to mourn. It’s something to be proud of.”

I pulled the second origami bird he had sent me out of my pocket for him to see. “Why did you want me to become a Riora? I enjoy learning different abilities and how to fight, but I’m not cut out for the life of a soldier.”

He shook his head. “Adelindas are still persecuted, especially now that everybody thinks I’m a mass murderer. You need to know how to defend yourself if somebody decides to come after you. Our family learned that the hard way.”

“Oh, I thought it might have been for something else.”

Dakim cocked his head to the side, obviously confused.

I took a deep breath. “It just seems like Myron has been pushing me a lot harder than everybody else. I’m training from sun up to sun down, and even after. It’s like I’m doing double what the regular training would be. There’s something else going on, something we’re missing...”

Dakim’s eyes narrowed and he looked out over the lake towards Myron’s house. I could almost see the gears turning in Dakim’s mind as he ran through all the different possible scenarios. Eventually he sighed and turned back to me, an amused smile on his face and his eyes reflected the moonlight, “I should have known getting my sister back would never be this easy.”

~

**OCTOBER 24**

The award ceremony snuck up on me and was here before I ever realized it. I spent so much time working with Myron, whether it was dancing or training, that I lost track of time altogether. He was

easy to talk to and I got along well with him. He made adjusting to life here on Kusnik a lot easier. He made sure to train me hard enough that I passed out as soon as my head hit the pillow at night. I still thought of Christian and Dustin often, but he kept me busy enough that I didn't have time to miss Earth. Besides, I was actually enjoying myself.

Luke offered me his arm and escorted me to the building where the award ceremony was being held. He looked nice in his white tuxedo, which went well with my black and white satin dress. I was sure to keep my head up with a smile on my face as we stepped through the door, but on the inside, I was a nervous wreck. Manners had never been one of my strong suits and I was bound to mess something up.

I stopped in the entrance and took in the elegant room. I had never seen a ceiling so high. Arched windows ran along all sides of the room and the pillars were a gold marble. In front of each pillar was a golden statue depicting famous Riora. The walls were white, but gold designs covered most of the walls and reflected the low light from the glass chandeliers that hung low from the ceiling. Tables ran along the edges of the room. The table clothes were white with gold trim, and the chairs were also white. Gold candlesticks were also spaced out throughout the room, their light giving warmth to the evening mood that had been created.

I took my place at the head table and waited for everybody else to arrive. As my date, Luke was also allowed to sit at the head table. Roy would also sit at the head table, since he was being honored along with me, with whoever his date was. I had to admit, I was extremely curious to see who would arrive with Roy. Lady Vanek, and the infamous Jerome, who I had yet to meet, would also be joining us at the table. At the front of the room sat all the Ellipsis members. Myron, Kian, and Karexon were at the table closest to ours. Myron wore a slick black tuxedo. His jacket was unbuttoned, revealing the metallic red vest and tie underneath. Karexon also wore a black tuxedo, but he wore a teal vest and bowtie. Kian wore his black tuxedo buttoned up, so all that could be seen was his green tie.

"Hello, Commander Masters." Luke greeted them and, as was custom, they stood when we approached.

"Good to see you again, Luke." Myron shook his hand with a smile. Myron had enjoyed having Luke as my dancing partner and they seemed to get along well. Their personalities seemed very similar. Myron then gestured to Kian and Karexon, "This is Karexon Radev and Kian Dalca. They are members of my team."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Lord Radev, Lord Dalca." Luke shook their hands.

Kian smiled at him, "The pleasure is ours."

There wasn't much more time for pleasantries because, at that moment, Lady Vanek had arrived. We all turned to face the entrance, and it was then that I spotted Roy. He was standing back in the corner by himself. *If he didn't arrive with a date, then who is he going to dance with?*

The question was pushed from my mind as I caught sight of Lady Vanek entering with whom I assumed to be Jerome. He had long black hair that came down to his waist and was maybe just a tad lighter in shade than Roy's. However, unlike most men with long hair, his hair still had its shine. He was about the same age as Lady Vanek, but his sharp gray suit made him look younger. His eyes were what struck me most. They were the yellow eyes of a snake. *Vriknir is made up mostly of half-breeds...* Myron's words from earlier ran through my mind. *Yeah, and I'd bet my life that he's half snake.*

"His appearance takes some getting used to." Myron explained when noticed me studying Jerome. "It's even more unsettling when he smiles. You can see his fangs."

"Why is he like that?"

"He's half snake," Myron confirmed my earlier suspicions. "Because he's not a full snake, he remains in the half shifted form. Other than just appearances, he has a lot of the characteristics of the snakes. His speed rivals that of the Blade Brothers, Kian and Hiram. He strikes before his enemies even realize what is happening."

"Who is stronger, Jerome or Lady Vanek?"

"First of all, in public you want to address Jerome as General Hadi. As for your question, I'd say that they're about equal in physical strength, but in a fight I think Lady Vanek would be able to outwit Jerome."

I crossed my arms over my chest. "How come you get to call him by his first name?"

"Because I am an Ellipsis member and I get perks," Myron responded.

I giggled. "Great perks."

We took our seats and dinner was served. I was a picky eater, and I didn't really like much of what was served to us, but I didn't want to be rude so I ate it anyway.

"Raelyn, it is a pleasure to finally meet you." Jerome struck up conversation right away, and I immediately noticed the way he hissed when he spoke.

"The pleasure is mine." I imitated Myron's manners from earlier.

"And who are you?" Jerome turned to Luke.

"I am Luke Espie. I was a friend of Raelyn's while she was an informant in Ikicnie. It's an honor to meet you, General Hadi."

Jerome seemed to catch on right away that he was a friend of the Adelindas, and his voice was less than pleasant when he responded with, "Likewisse."

Noticing the tension, Lady Vanek intervened. "So, Raelyn, how are you liking Vriknir?"

The small talk continued, although Roy remained relatively quiet. We were talking more because it was a pleasantry than because we actually wanted to talk. What made it really unsettling was that I found Roy staring at me every now and then. I wanted nothing more than to yell at him and demand for him to explain why he found it so amusing to stare at me. I was so thankful when dinner was finally over and the dance portion began. The ones being honored danced first. Luke escorted me to the dance floor, and I was surprised to see Roy escort Lady Vanek to the dance floor. I almost laughed. Leave it to Roy to get around having to have a date.

"Calm down." Luke smiled. He was obviously referring to my speeding heartbeat. "We've been through this. Just pretend we're back at Myron's house."

"At Myron's house we didn't have two hundred eyes on us."

"Don't worry. At least half of those eyes are on Roy, wishing that it was them out there on the dance floor with him instead of Lady Vanek." Myron's voice came to my ears as if he was standing right next to me, despite that he was actually standing off to the side of the room with all the other spectators.

I could feel Luke's Miutho connect with mine and his voice ran through my head, *Apparently Dakim isn't the only one who likes to listen in on conversations.*

I giggled as we took up the starting position. Once the music began, Luke began to flawlessly lead me through the dance steps. I was careful to keep my focus entirely on him and not the people around us.

"I never would have pegged you as someone who is afraid to get up in front of an audience." Luke started a conversation, trying to keep my mind on him.

"I can give a speech in front of an audience and be perfectly fine. Performing is something entirely different. I'm good at talking my way out of any situation, but performing actually requires physical skill."

"My best friend is the opposite." Luke obviously referred to Dakim. "He's talented, and methodical – don't ever try to beat him at chess because I can promise you will lose – but if you ever manage to catch him off guard, which is a rarity in itself, I doubt he'd be able to talk his way out of it."

"This friend of yours, he actually has a weakness?" I joked. "He seems so perfect."

Luke chuckled. "Everybody has a weakness, but that doesn't mean you'll be able to expose it."

I enjoyed dancing with Luke, but I was grateful when my big role in the ceremony was over. I took a seat at the table, glad I no longer had to worry about being in the spotlight, or so I thought.

"Thank you."

I looked up in surprise as Roy sat down next to me. "For what?"

"The flower you left."

"You actually kept that?" I laughed nervously, watching the people dancing, and then lowered my eyes to the floor. "I was told that you usually gave the flowers you received to the other patients. I didn't expect you to keep it, especially since it was from me."

He sighed and also looked out to the dance floor. "The way I've been treating you has been less than welcoming."

When he didn't say anymore, I smiled to myself. It was the best apology I was going to get.

*"Being sorry means that you regret something. Regretting something leads you to second guess yourself. When you second guess yourself, you hesitate, and when you hesitate, you get killed."* Normally I would have been a little annoyed, but I was just happy that he was speaking to me. I admired him and just knowing that he no longer hated me was a sigh of relief.

"Care to dance?"

"What?" I snapped back to reality.

He simply stood and offered his hand to me.

"I don't know how. Myron only had time to teach me the one dance. I haven't learned any of the others."

"Then we'll do the one you have learned." His eyes seemed to come on fire as he spoke.

I took his hand and let him lead me to the dance floor. I could feel the glares of the other girls in the room as I placed my left hand on his shoulder and my right hand in his left. If he noticed how nervous I was, he didn't mention it, and, although he tried to hide it, I didn't miss his slight wince when he moved his right shoulder. His knife wounds hadn't fully healed yet. There was quite a bit of space between us, even more than there had been when he danced with Lady Vanek, but that didn't prevent the girls from being jealous.

"Wonderful," I muttered. "I haven't even been here two full weeks and I've already committed social suicide."

His eyes narrowed thoughtfully, "Is that why you were two faced?"

"Again with the two-faced thing?" I giggled. "I told you before, if I'm two-faced, I don't mean to be. I just try to be courteous and not cause problems, even if it means I have to be nice to somebody I don't like."

He snorted. "Courtesy is overrated."

I raised my eyebrows at him. "Oh, is that why you danced with Lady Vanek?"

His jaw hardened. "This dance is tradition."

I rolled my eyes. "It started as a courtesy."

He stared at me thoughtfully with those piercing red eyes of his, and I couldn't help but shy away. He wasn't looking at me the way Karexon and Kian had, like I might be some foreign invader. He looked at me like I was something new to him, like he couldn't understand any of my reactions. It was also like he didn't know what to make of me. Obviously he had gotten over Dakim, but now he didn't know how to treat me. Either way, it made me forget all about what we had just been arguing about.

"You're not used to Earth girls, are you?" I whispered and smiled up at him jokingly.

"You're not exactly from Earth."

"You know what I meant."

He didn't answer, but that wasn't any surprise. This was the most I had ever gotten him to talk to me. As I had told Christian, it was a start.

We were silent the rest of the time and when the song ended, Myron walked over to where we were. "I'm glad to see that you two are on speaking terms again. However, Roy, I'm kicking you out. It's my turn to dance with her."

Once again, the corners of Roy's lips turned up in a smile and he gave me a small nod before walking away. When he disappeared into the sea of people, I turned back to Myron. "Why is it that everybody wants me to dance when I only know one dance?"

Myron chuckled. "I guess I should have taught you more dances instead of just focusing on the one."

"Well, I've gotten really good at the one you did teach me." I joked as I put my left hand on his shoulder and my right hand in his left, just as I had done with Roy, except I wasn't nearly as nervous this time.

"I talked to Lady Vanek about getting you a place to live." Myron explained as we began to dance. "The only thing they have available is a rundown shack—"

"When will it be ready?"

Myron shook his head. "There is no way I'm going to let you live in a dump."

I raised my eye brows at him. "You bought me an entire wardrobe and now you're going to buy me a nice house?"

"If I have to," Myron argued. "Don't feel like you have to get this house because you are overstaying your welcome. You will always be welcome to stay at my house."

"Myron, I thank you for the offer and I will remember it, but, to be honest, it makes me uncomfortable."

It was Myron's turn to raise his eyebrows at me. "Living in a big house and being able to buy whatever you want makes you uncomfortable?"

I smiled. "Dustin may have provided for me, but I pretty much took care of myself. I'm not used to having somebody take care of me. I'd prefer to be out on my own."

Myron sighed. "Then at least let me do some work on the house, make it a little bit nicer."

"You would do work on it?"

"You didn't know? I'm a Commander in Ellipsis by day, but by night I'm secretly the best handyman you'll ever meet." Myron puffed out his chest and I laughed. Then he turned serious, "No, but honestly, let me do some work on it. There isn't anything I can't fix. The least I can do is a few repairs on the house."

I nodded. "I would like that."

### **\*\*\* Lady Vanek \*\*\***

"First impression of Raelyn?" Lady Vanek spoke to Jerome after the ceremony had ended and they were back in her office.

"Ssshe isss trusssting, caring, and weak. Ssshe ssspent mosst of the night conccerned about what otherssss would think of her. Ssshe cannot do what needsss to be done. Ssshe isss easssily offended and inssecure, wanting nothing more than to be accepted."

"You don't think she can do this."

"Not only that, but I think her inssecuritiesss will be here downfall."

### **\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

## ***OCTOBER 28***

I moved into the new house right away, and Myron hadn't been kidding when he said it was run down. However, we went from room to room and I explained to Myron exactly what I wanted it to look like. Unlike Myron's house, I wanted my house to be full of color. I also decided to go with an oriental



theme. I stayed up late into the night flipping through furniture catalogs, even though I often regretted it the next morning.

My room was going to be white with red cabinet that held my clothing. The bed was also white with a red headboard, and red and black pillows. On the cabinet and headboard would be Japanese Kanji, or Japanese symbols that were based off of the Chinese language. Behind the bed would be the Asian style windows. All the windows in the house were like that. Also, there wasn't a regular door in the house. All of them were Shoji, or the common paper sliding doors.

My living room would have a wooden floor and a stone fire place. The couches would be white and in front of them would be the radio. The particular wall the radio was against was red and would have Kanji painted on it. To the left of the radio would be the wooden book case. In front of the book case would be the table that was only a few inches from the floor. Around it were cushions for sitting on.

The family room would also have a wooden floor and in this room all the walls were red. There would be a red floor carpet in one corner of the room that had a coffee table and had couches on two of its sides. On the other side of the room, would be a regular table surrounded by four chairs. Behind the table would be another shelf. Miniature cherry blossoms would be placed throughout the room as well. A flower would also be painted on the walls so they wouldn't look so plain.

"So, now where are we going to train? Our last training spot is on the other side of the city." I asked Luke when he showed up at my house a few weeks after the award ceremony.

"We'll train here."

My eyebrows furrowed as I took in my small house. "What?"

"Vic can manipulate metal and do anything you could possibly think of when it comes to technology," Luke explained. "With your permission, we'd like to do some renovating to your house and install our own little training room."

"Do I really have any choice?" I asked, thinking of what Dakim would do if I said no.

Luke smiled, "Not really."

I shrugged. "Then go for it. However, I'm going to warn you, Myron has been doing some other work on the house. It was in pretty bad shape when I first moved in so he offered to fix it up. You'll have to be careful not to leave behind any evidence of what you're doing."

Luke just looked at me. "Come on, after spending all of these years with Dakim, do you really think he wouldn't have taught us how to be discrete?"

I put my hands up in the air, "I'm just giving you a heads up."

~

# Chapter 15

*NOVEMBER 15*

I was surprised at how quickly time passed. I was always so busy but I was enjoying myself. I now knew why Myron sat at the lake-side every morning. It was a moment in our busy lives to just stop. That was why I still went to his house in the morning. My house was too close to the center of town to be truly peaceful. Also, I was getting better at Thaivo. Whenever I could, I would speak to him in Thaivo, even if it was about the most random things, and he would give me corrections. I was also surprised at how much of a family Myron's team was. Every weekend they'd get together at Myron's house and eat dinner. Roy even started coming over, which apparently he never did, the past couple of weeks.

Myron also had me start learning the abilities of the other team members and several other people. When Myron, Kian, and Karexon used their abilities, they couldn't explain exactly how to do what they did. It just came naturally to them. They would be able to teach somebody else who had the same ability as them, but they weren't able to teach me how I needed to manipulate my own Miutho in order to use their type of ability. Thankfully, Roy was able to be the bridge between us. He used his Skayikon to analyze another person's Miutho when he or she used an ability, and then he would use Awebu to show me what he had seen. He then would help me practice, telling me how far off my Miutho was from the person's I was trying to mimic.

Since I needed Roy to learn other people's abilities, I saw him on a daily basis. When Roy wasn't on a mission, he was at the training grounds or with Kian or Karexon, memorizing people's Miutho. Then, he came to Myron's house in the morning where he helped me learn how to change my Miutho into the ones he had memorized. After, he would often join us at the training field where I worked on telekinesis. He was still closed off, but ever since the award ceremony, he seemed more comfortable around me. I would dare to say that we had even become friends.

"Ow! Would you stop that!" I shouted at Roy when he had once again flicked me on the forehead. Myron, who was sitting on his porch steps watching us, chuckled at my frustrated.

"You're not following me." Roy growled. "Now let's go through it again."

I took a deep breath, trying not to let myself get too frustrated and walked back to our starting position. Today Roy was helping me learn Myron's ability to manipulate sound, and it was surprisingly difficult. Sound was made by vibrating air molecules, but it took incredible focus for me to be able to sense those vibrations and manipulate them. I would get so focused on the air and sound that I would stop paying attention to Roy, ultimately leading to me getting flicked in the forehead.

I took up my position directly across from Roy so that I could see him the entire time and nodded when I was ready. We both stepped forward, outstretching out our arms and taking deep breaths. The deep breaths we took as we moved helped me stay focused on the air and vibrations around me, and the movements we went through allowed my Miutho to flow in a way that was natural to those who could manipulate sound. I exhaled as I brought my arms back to me, still intently watching Roy. I focused on the air around Roy, listening to how the long sleeves of his simple black shirt, which had a red stripe along the seam lines, rustled when it slid along his smooth skin. I listened to the way he breathed and how it made the air particles around him vibrate. I copied him as he moved to the next movement, but lost my focus when he suddenly said, "Stop."

"What?" I asked as I stood up from my stance.

"No, go back." He told me as he walked over to where I was, and I tried not to roll my eyes as I went back to the last position I had been in. He came up behind me and put his hands on my shoulders. I was surprised by how gentle his touch was, especially after seeing the terror he could be in battle.

“Relax. You have too much tension build up in your shoulders. It’s preventing your Miutho from flowing fluidly.”

I nodded and tried to focus on the flow of my Miutho instead of how close he was to me. I lowered my arms slightly, releasing some of the tension in my arms, and Roy stepped back so he was out of my way. I closed my eyes, recalling the movements and analysis of Myron’s Miutho that Roy had showed me. I let myself forget about everything else, and slowly went through the motions. When I came to the last movement, I opened my eyes and thrust my arm forward. To my surprise, I succeeded in creating a large sound wave that went flying at Myron. He smiled in satisfaction, and, without even moving, sent the sound wave flying back at me. It had taken me several moments to create the sound wave. With the split seconds I had before the redirected the sound wave would hit me, there was no way I’d be able to redirect it. My only option was to avoid it. I managed to step out of the way at the last possible second, but lost my balance as I did so and stumbled backwards. However, Roy managed to catch me by the arm before I could fall to the ground.

My eyes met his, and I found that his eyes were filled with surprise, just as they had been when I had seen him at the training grounds the first day and he’d done some fancy footwork to avoid running into me. Yet, just like the first time, it was gone in the blink of an eye. He looked away as he helped me regain my balance and told me sharply, “Think on your feet, not as your falling.”

I smiled at him, “I’m surprised you didn’t just let me fall.”

He looked me in the eye once more and told me, “I’m the only one who is allowed to sweep you off your feet.”

His words made my breath catch. *Did he really mean that?*

I took in the way his arms were folded across his chest and his eyes were narrowed at me. *No, the people here know English, but they don’t know some of our common phrases. Roy must not know that sweeping a girl off her feet is considered romantic.*

I was pulled from my thoughts when Roy suddenly did a low spin kick, literally sweeping me off my feet, and I landed on my butt with a loud thud. He followed that up with a good flick to the forehead. I let out a groan and Roy and Myron burst out laughing. *So that was what Roy had meant by sweeping me off my feet...*

Myron walked over and helped me to my feet, “You did well today. You’ve earned a break. Take a minute to catch your breath before we head over to the training grounds to work on your telekinesis.”

I nodded and watched as Myron walked over to talk to Roy about whose ability I would practice next. The sun was high in the sky, making it a nice day for being mid-November. Roy leaned on the post of Myron’s balcony with his arms crossed over his chest while he listened to Myron. His eyes seemed to sparkle in the sunlight, and once again I found myself amazed by their beauty. They also seemed to be warmer than I remembered. When I first met Roy, he had been so cold to everybody, and his eyes were always narrow and uncaring. That wasn’t the case now. He was still closed off, but he wasn’t cold to me anymore. He would smile and laugh, and that made me happy. I found myself wishing that he really would sweep me off my feet.

~

## **NOVEMBER 22**

I watched as Luke slowly walked around the newly finished training room, inspecting it. Overall, the renovations had taken about a month to complete. Compared to Roy and Dakim, I would never have considered Luke to be “the quiet one” but he was definitely perceptive. He could spot anything, the hidden meaning behind words, the look in your eye that said you were lying, and even the best concealed traps. Growing up, Dakim was always trying to trick Luke, but he was never truly successful.

Eventually he just gave up. It brought a smile to my face to know that, after everything that had happened with Dakim, Luke was still the same.

I'd gotten good at telekinesis. It was nearing the end of November, and I could lift every single dead leaf in the training field without even thinking about it, so it wasn't too often that I went out there to train with Myron. Instead, I spent most of the afternoons training with Luke and Vic. Also, whenever Dakim could sneak past the guards, which wasn't very hard for him, he would join us. He worked with me on discovering new abilities and I found that, along with telekinesis, electricity seemed to come naturally to me. The other abilities I had to work a little harder for. Recently, he also started teaching me things that were exclusive to the Adelinda family.

"There's even more we can do?" I asked in amazement.

Dakim nodded. "We can use any ability as long as we know which way to manipulate the Miutho. However, we can also control the pure form of it, which is much more powerful than any of the abilities." He held his arms out like he was holding a stick, and I watched as rainbow colored Miutho began to emerge from Dakim's hand and form itself into the shape of a pole. Then, he changed the position of his hands and the pole transformed into a sword. He then casually swung the sword at the wall, not putting much power into it, but it left a gigantic dent in the wall. Vic was not going to be happy. I couldn't imagine what would have happened if Dakim had really swung as hard as he could. "Go ahead and try it."

It took me a minute to get the pure form to emerge, but eventually I managed to make a little bit and shifted it into the form of a dagger. Making it solid was the hard part. When I hit it against the wall, it was like jello and just bounced off. Once I got that down, I shifted it into a throwing dagger.

Dakim shook his head. "When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

I put my hands on my hips, looking at him like he was insane. "What the heck is that supposed to me?"

"In short, I'm telling you not to be so single minded. When it comes to Miutho, the only thing that limits you is your imagination."

"You want imagination?" I shifted the Miutho and pointed the newly created gun right at Dakim. He smiled and used his Miutho to create a shield. "You're on."

Dakim and I went at it for hours, using whatever we could think of to go at each other with. Yet, he always seemed one step ahead of me. I created every possible weapon I could possibly think of but Dakim always managed to out think me, coming up with a sort of weapon that didn't even exist in reality, and it was always better than the weapons I had. It was the most fun I'd had in a long time.

It was awesome to see Dakim in action, even if he was holding back. He was extremely agile and flexible for a guy. He was swift and light in all of his movements and I would bet that he could move through an entire forest without making a single sound. Actually, his movements reminded me a lot of Myron's and Roy's. They were swift and fast like Roy's but they had power like Myron's. He was light, fast, and active like a snake, but cautious like a feline.

"Dakim, it's getting late. The guards will be shifting soon." Vic stepped into the room and stopped when he noticed the dents in the wall. He shook his head and went back upstairs. "Great."

I chuckled and looked to Dakim, but he wasn't as cheerful as he had been earlier. He knew it was time to leave. With a sigh, he ruffled my hair and then followed Vic up the stairs.

~

## ***NOVEMBER 28***

"How is Dakim?" Myron asked, sitting down next to me at the lakeside a week later.

"I wouldn't know. I haven't seen him."

Myron smiled and nodded. "Well, how was he the last time you saw him?"

I also smiled. It was so easy to read between the lines of our words, but it could never be used against us because we never actually admitted to anything. Yet, the smile didn't last. "Had I seen him recently, I would say that he is extremely grateful that I am alive. However, he's been living in isolation for ten years. It's made him cold. Around me, he is the same big brother I remember him to be. Yet, if I leave the room, it is like his happiness is walking out of the room with me. He may not have committed the crimes he has been accused of, but that doesn't mean he hasn't committed crimes. If somebody annoyed him the way Jocelyn annoyed me, I don't think he'd hesitate to kill them. I think the only thing that would stop him is the knowledge that I wouldn't like it. I'm all he has left and he isn't willing to do anything that might jeopardize that."

Myron nodded. "I understand."

Somehow I felt that Myron really could understand Dakim's pain. There was just something in the way that he had said it...

"Meet me in the training field today." Myron switched the subject.

"More telekinesis work?"

He smiled, "I think you have telekinesis down pretty well. No, I have something else in mind for today."

My eyes narrowed at him but he only gave me a mischievous smile and refused to speak any more.

~

I walked out to the open field where Myron was waiting. Roy was there as well but that was nothing unusual. He was a little ways away, leaning on his usual tree. As I came to the clearing, I noticed a dress hanging on a tree branch and several pairs of stilettos at the base.

"Uh, Myron?"

"Hm?" He walked over to where I was standing. Roy followed a few feet behind him.

"What is this?"

"That's what you'll be wearing during training. Today is all running."

"You expect me to run wearing that?"

He shrugged. "What if we were at one of the banquets and it was attacked? You need to be able to maneuver even if you're wearing restrictive clothing."

"Somebody would be foolish to attack a banquet full of Riora. Besides, there will be other people there. If I can't maneuver then I'll just leave the heavy duty stuff to everybody else."

"Don't forget that all the other women will be wearing dresses and heels as well."

"There are men there." I continued to argue. "Besides, this whole scenario is one really farfetched hypothetical."

"Rae." His voice turned stern.

"Fine." I sighed and took the dress down from the tree. "Pink? Really? Is there anything in my wardrobe that is pink?"

"How was I supposed to know?" Myron defended himself. "It's not like I go digging through your closet. You should have seen me at the department store shopping for a dress."

I just rolled my eyes and walked off to get changed. A few minutes later, I came stumbling back to where Myron and Roy were standing. I could do okay in three or four inch heels, but the stilettos were a little new to me, and I was having trouble keeping my balance on the skinny heel. Roy snickered when I had to catch myself on a nearby tree to prevent myself from falling.

"Okay, start running. I'll give you a twenty second head start before I send Roy after you."

"Roy's going to be chasing me?" I exclaimed. "Running is bad enough, but now I'm going to have a pursuer?"

"Come on, Rae, if somebody attacks at the banquet, they're not going to just let you run away without chasing you." Myron reasoned.

I just shook my head, "Well, I hope you have several pairs of shoes, because I have a really bad feeling the heels are going to break more than once before today is over."

Myron ignored my comment and instead turned to Roy. "Take it easy. The doctors may have given you permission to train again, but I don't want you over exerting yourself."

Roy didn't respond. Instead, he turned back to me, ready to give chase as soon as he was given the word. A devious smile broke out on his face. He was going to enjoy this.

"Ready? Go!"

I took off running and before I knew it, Roy was coming after me. *There is no way that was twenty seconds!* I tried to run harder, but the heel on my right foot broke right as Roy caught up to me and I was on the ground. He burst out laughing as I fell face first into a pile of mud.

Grunting, I got back on my feet, and Myron handed me a new pair of shoes. "Again."

Once, I put the new shoes on, I took off running once more, but I didn't get very far before Roy was after me again. I had gotten much faster in the month that I had been here, but the shoes and dress were a real hindrance. Roy caught up to me before long, but instead of letting him push me into a pile of mud like I knew he was itching to do, I turned around to take him on hand-to-hand.

He smiled in anticipation and brought his guard up. I managed to block his first few attacks but I wasn't stable and he was easily able to knock me off balance. It wasn't long before he had me disarmed and pinned to a tree.

"Hey, at least I didn't break a heel this time." I argued as Myron approached.

"No, but you still would have been dead." Roy whispered in my ear.

I scrunched my nose up at him and tried to swat him away. He simply chuckled and let me go.

"Go again." Myron ordered.

We were out there for hours, and by the end of it I was having more issues getting air into my lungs than running in the shoes and dress. Even after Myron had left, Roy continued to chase after me.

"Would you stop retreating and get back here?" Roy called after me when I had once again chosen to run away even after he had caught up to me.

"I'm not retreating," I argued, "I'm simply advancing in the wrong direction."

He flicked me on the forehead, knocking me to the ground. Frustrated, I stood up once more, took off the heels, and ripped the sides of the dress, giving me more room to move. However, the mud from earlier had dried making the dress stiff and hard to move.

"Bye!" I smiled before taking off barefooted, heading away from the training grounds and towards the main part of the city.

"Damn it, Raelyn!" Roy shouted angrily.

*He used my full name. Crap, that means I'm really in for it... but he'll have to catch me first!*

I ran harder, a big grin on my face, but Roy wasn't far behind.

"Come on Royce. I thought you were better than this!" I taunted. It was really a stupid thing to do on my part because Roy was already naturally faster than me, and the taunt only made him run faster.

*That's okay. All I have to do is reach my house and then I'm home free. Just a little bit further...*

**\*\*\* Roy \*\*\***

*When did she get so fast?* He asked himself as he closed in on Rae. They'd reached the front lawn of her house. Realizing this might be his only chance, he dove and grabbed her legs, bringing her to the

ground. Yet, it didn't keep her down for long. She managed to slip from his grasp and jump up. She was off again before he could get up. He chased after her, but it only resulted in him getting the door slammed in his face.

With a sigh, he sat down with his back leaning on the door. *I don't get it. I've been at all of her training sessions. Myron has only been doing the basics with her and she acts like she's never done them before. Yet, if she's never even done the basics, than how is she this good?*

His thoughts were interrupted by his support suddenly disappearing and the next thing he knew, he was falling.

### \*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

I opened the door just to have Roy fall backwards, ending up sprawled all over the floor of the hallway. Obviously, he hadn't been expecting me to open the door again. I couldn't help but smile. I remembered when Roy was so cold and never let his guard down. Had this still been the same Roy, he never would have allowed himself to fall. Roy was still cold and reserved, but he was beginning to relax and open up a little.

"Next time you want to lean on something, you might want to use a wall or something less moveable." I teased and set a glass of water down by him. Roy was good, but there was no way he wasn't at least a little thirsty after running all afternoon.

I watched with my hands on my hips as he got to his feet and reached down to get the glass of water. However, he stood up faster than I had expected, and, the next thing I knew, I was covered in water.

*I can't believe he just did that!* I wiped the water from my eyes and looked up at him. His jaw was set and his eyes were hard, saying, 'that's what you get for making fun of me'.

"You punk!" I teased, not even bothering to wipe the water off my face before I grabbed him by the shirt and shoved him against the wall.

I didn't mean to get as close to him as I had, and it caught me off guard. I could feel his warm breath on my face and his abs under his shirt. It made me blush and I quickly lowered my eyes, hoping he hadn't seen.

I froze when he suddenly pushed me backwards and pinned me against the opposite wall. His hand touched my cheek and his finger slid down to my chin. He forced me to lift my head, and I expecting him to make some smart comment. Instead he surprised me by swiftly pressing his lips to mine.

It only lasted a second before he pulled back, his eyes full of shock, like he couldn't believe what he had just done and stuttered, "That... That was out of line."

"No." I didn't want it to end. I wanted more. I went up on my tip toes, and I kissed him.

He inhaled sharply, and at first I thought he was going to be really angry. Then, his strong arms wrapped around me, pulling me closer to him and he began to kiss back. His first kiss had been hesitant, but he was more passionate now. It made my heart race, and I couldn't think straight. I could feel his heart beating and his Miutho running through his veins. It was red and full of fiery passion. I could actually feel it mixing with my own and burning deep inside of me.

I was brought back to my senses at the sound of my own door being opened, and I broke the kiss. Both of us were out of breath. I tried to gather my thoughts enough to figure out was going on and Roy had slipped out one of his knives as we waited to see who had entered.

"Rae! Are you here?"

I let my head fall back with a frustrated sigh. Of course Jocelyn would have to come now, and how dare she walk into my house without even knocking first!

"I better go." Roy muttered.

"Wait!" I called after him, but he had already disappeared.

"Oh! There you are Rae!" Jocelyn exclaimed as she rounded the corner. After taking in my appearance she commented, "Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine." I managed to say. I was still breathing hard.

"But you're all wet and your face is red," Jocelyn prodded. She didn't even bother mentioning the muddy dress.

"You don't want to know." I brushed it off. *Yeah, because if she did know, she'd hate me for life...*

She frowned but otherwise dropped the subject. Then she really seemed to get frustrated, as if she hated what she had to say next, "I don't know why, but Charisse has invited you to her party. She put me in charge of invitations so I got stuck telling you this. It starts at seven so don't be a loser and show up late. Don't come in those rags you call clothes either."

Before I could reply, Jocelyn had turned her back to me and was heading out the door.

"I don't get why you just don't let me kill her."

I spun around to find Dakim sitting in one of the recliners twirling a knife around in his hand.

"Don't you dare!" I snapped at him.

"Fine." He smiled evilly. "You don't have to yell."

I was about to ask how he had gotten in, but decided against it. Dakim would always be a mystery. "Want anything?" I offered.

He was still playing with the knife as he answered. "I'd ask for a glass of water, but it seems like that didn't go too well the first time around."

I froze. Had he been here that long?

He smiled once again as he looked up at me from his knife. "I can't say I'm keen on the idea of you dating a guy who spent most of his life trying to kill me."

"Well that pretty much eliminates every guy I know, because I'm sure if anybody knew where you were, they'd want to kill you so they could get the reward."

"Exactly!" He exclaimed, pointing the knife at me as if to prove his point. When, I only rolled my eyes, Dakim switched the subject, "Are you ready?"

"Not really, but do I have a choice?"

"Nope." Dakim answered before throwing back the rug on the section of the floor that led to the hidden training room. "Go get changed."

I was grateful at least that I was able to change clothes before beginning my training session with Dakim. However, I would have liked a little break in between working with him and Myron. Once downstairs, Vic set the room to a typical virtual open field with a few boulders, and then training began.

"So, what are we doing today?" I asked as I sat cross legged on the ground across from Dakim.

Dakim held his hand out and I watched in amazement as his nails grew longer and turned silver. "This is called a bloodline trait. It is an ability that is unique to a certain family. It is said that being able to control the pure form of Miutho removes any barriers that may otherwise block you from being able to perform a technique. However, that is not completely true. We will never be able to use the bloodline trait of another family. Roy's Skayikon, for instance, is something we will never be able to do. These nails are also something that cannot be copied. They can cut through anything, even diamonds, and never need to be sharpened."

I took his hand, turning it over to examine his nails. "You've got to teach me how to do this."

In a teasing and adoring voice said, "Watch closely, okay?"

"I'm not a kid anymore." I punched him in the shoulder.

Dakim smiled but then turned serious. "I'm going to put one restriction on this. People know how powerful our family is because of our ability to control the pure form of Miutho. However, you won't be able to use these in battle. People will know right away that you are an Adelinda. I don't want



you telling anybody. Over the next few months, I will be teaching you these abilities. The only time I want you to use these is if all else has failed and your life depends on it. It is a last resort."

I nodded. "I understand."

"That means you can't tell Roy and Myron," Dakim emphasized.

"I get it." I reassured him.

His eyes narrowed at me but otherwise he didn't argue. Instead, he held his hand out for me to see. "Once you do it the first time, you'll be surprised at how easily it comes to you. You'll actually have to consciously think about not bringing out your claws when you get in a fight. As I've mentioned before, these nails come from the dragon within us. Feel the Miutho at your fingertips. Let it be an extension of your fingers."

I closed my eyes, my hands resting on my knees, and tried to imagine what he was telling me. I was surprised when I opened my eyes once more and saw the same silver nails that Dakim had showed me. It had been a lot easier than I thought it would be. Smiling, I lifted my hand and clicked my nails together, watching in satisfaction when it emitted a spark.

"Always be aware of your nails, because they are very sharp." He warned as he brought his finger to one of my nails. It didn't even look as if he had touched the nail, but when he took his finger away, there was a little drop of blood making its way down his finger.

"Geez!" I exclaimed.

He put his finger to his lips, wiping away the blood. "Now, I know I just spent the past half hour warning you about these claws and how dangerous they are, but they can be quite useful, especially for someone like you who is naturally talented at close range combat. You just have to know what you're doing."

I nodded, thinking of my skills in hand-to-hand combat. I had worked on it while I was on Earth, but it was mostly because of Roy that I had gotten so good at it. Roy...

"Rae?" Dakim's voice brought me back to reality.

"Yeah?" I looked up at him.

He looked me in the eyes and then he stood up. "I think we'll end training here for today."

"But we only just started," I argued as I stood up too.

He shook his head, "You're obviously distracted. Besides, you could use the break. You've been going nonstop."

"Why is that?"

"Why what?" He was confused.

"Why am I being worked so hard? Charisse, Jocelyn, they don't train nearly as often or as hard as I do. I get up in the morning and I work on learning how to extend my senses. Then I work on learning the language. I spend the rest of the morning working with somebody from Myron's team, learning their abilities. In the afternoon, Myron teaches me things like survival skills so I can become an official Riora. When I'm not with Myron, I'm with you, Luke, or Vic working with the pure form of Miutho. Plus, whenever I have a spare moment I'm expected to be practicing previous things that I've learned. That's more than a twelve hour day, whereas Charisse and Jocelyn might only have a six or eight hour day."

"Well then they're just lucky they don't have me for a brother." He winked and started heading for the steps. "I'll see you in the next couple of days."

I smiled as I watched him leave, but it was gone as soon as he was out of sight. He was right, Jocelyn and Charisse didn't have Dakim for a brother, but that wasn't the reason I was being pushed so hard. There was something else going on, and Dakim knew it.

I found myself lying awake in bed, despite the fact that the sun had gone down long ago. I did some sort of training or practice from sun up to sun down every day. Most days I fell asleep the second I got home. Sometimes I didn't even make it to my bed upstairs, choosing instead to simply pass out on the couch. Thanks to how hard I was being worked, I had adjusted to the Riora lifestyle of getting up at dawn and going to bed at dusk. Yet, tonight I found that I couldn't sleep. My mind was running at high speed.

Roy had actually kissed me today. Where had that even come from? Sure, Roy treated me better than a lot of the other people in town, but I found it hard to believe that he liked me enough to kiss me. I was far from being the prettiest girl in town. As much as Jocelyn annoyed me, to describe her as anything less than beautiful would be a lie. Charisse was beautiful in her own innocent way, and I had seen enough of the other girls here to know that if Vriknir held a beauty contest, I wouldn't even be in the running. I wasn't the smartest either. The constant flicks to the forehead from Roy were proof that I had done or said something stupid. It couldn't have been my talent as a Riora that had grabbed his attention either. Most of my talent came from the fact that I came from the Adelinda family and had countless abilities at my disposal. Yet, right now I was limited to one ability, and I was severely behind everybody else our age. I was extremely small, being just tall enough to not be considered a legal dwarf, and I often complained about how much hard work I had to put into a day. So what was it that Roy saw in me?

Was it possible that he didn't see anything in me at all? When I had visited Roy in the hospital the first day I came to Kusnik, he had said that he hated me. Did he still hate me? Did he still think that Dakim killed his family? Was he just using me to get to my brother? No, that doesn't make sense. If Roy was trying to get to my brother, why wasn't he treating me like a queen? Roy purposely got on my nerves, and he seemed to love frustrating me. If he wanted to get information out of me, then he wouldn't purposely make me angry at him, right? Besides, he hadn't mentioned a single thing about my brother since the day he told me that he hated me, and even then he had never directly mentioned Dakim.

I closed my eyes, remembering the way he had wrapped his arms around me in a warm embrace and the way his lips had moved against mine. If he really didn't like me, then he was an impressive liar. Yet, after the first time he had kissed me, he had pulled back as if he thought I was going to be angry at him. Could it be that he was just as surprised as I am?

I opened my eyes again to look at the picture of Christian and Dustin I had taped to my ceiling. It was times like these that I missed them. Christian and I used to stay up late into the night talking about different mysteries that puzzled us. Unsurprisingly, most of our talks had been about my different abilities, but we'd also stay up talking about the future and the other mysterious of life. Here, I had just been presented with one of the greatest mysteries of my life, and Christian wasn't here to help me solve it.

I sighed and rolled over. *It looks like I'll have to solve this mystery on my own.*

# Chapter 16

NOVEMBER 29

\*\*\*Roy\*\*\*

"Is Rae here?" Roy asked the second he joined Myron at his private lake.

"No, she left for the training grounds already. I'll be meeting her there shortly, but I wanted to speak with you first. That is why I called you here."

Roy stiffened at Myron's words. He knew that Rae and Myron were close, but what had she told him?

"Is something wrong, Roy?" Myron questioned.

"No, please continue." Roy nodded.

"Lady Vanek has identified a Riora with the ability to change their appearance. We believe that he may have broken into one of our vaults. In order to get into this vault, he would have had to go through a full-body Miutho scan. We want you to use your Skayikon to analyze him and see if it would be possible for him to change his Miutho as well as his appearance."

"That kind of surveillance could take days." Roy argued.

"Is there a problem with that?" Myron raised his eyebrow at Roy, "Tell me, what is going on?"

Roy looked away, "There is no problem. Where can I find this person?"

Myron crossed his arms over his chest, "I am not giving you this folder until you give me a straight answer."

Roy opened his mouth a few times to say something but close it each time, not able to come up with a good excuse. Finally Roy decided to give in and tell Myron, but a slight blush came to his face and he couldn't look directly at Myron, "I kissed Rae yesterday."

Myron broke into a smile, "That's all you're going to say?"

"There is nothing else to say," Roy rolled his eyes. "Jocelyn interrupted and I wasn't sure what to do, so I ran."

"You ran?" Myron repeated, but then chuckled as he handed the folder to Roy, "Lucky for you, the Riora you're looking for is hanging out in a trading village on the outskirts of Vriknir. You are not to confront him in any way. Your mission is to simply answer whether or not he would be able to deceive a full body Miutho scan. Assuming all goes well, you should only be gone for a few hours, meaning that you should still get back in time to talk to Rae today."

Roy nodded as he took the folder from Myron, "I understand."

Myron got up from his spot at the lake to go meet Rae at the training grounds, but stopped at the gate of his house, "Oh, and Roy? I overheard Rae talking about how she wants to go to the Litna Museum, but you never heard that from me."

Roy smiled slightly, "Thanks, Myron."

~

\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\*

"Rae, are you coming to my party tonight?" Charisse asked me when I ran into her a few hours before her party was to begin.

I didn't mind Charisse, and I would feel bad if I missed her party, but I wasn't sure whether or not I could handle a whole night with Jocelyn, especially since I knew she was going to ask why I had

been muddy the day before. Yet, it was not like I could think of an excuse not to come. Thankfully, I didn't have to.

"She's already spoken for."

I turned to see Roy walking up, and I gave him a confused look. He was wearing his Ellipsis uniform, meaning that he had just come back from some sort of mission. Was something wrong?

"More top secret stuff with Ellipsis?" Charisse joked. She was always kidding with me about how I got special treatment from the Ellipsis members. Behind her, Jocelyn was casually working her way closer to us.

"Not exactly." Roy answered, the corner of his lips turning up into a smile ever so slightly.

"I bet it's something cool." Charisse commented as Jocelyn finally joined the group. She noticed Roy's smile right away.

"I feel like we're missing something." Jocelyn put her hands on her hips, staring at Roy accusingly, but her eyes were playful.

Roy turned to Jocelyn, the smile no longer on his face. "You act as if that were a surprise to you."

Jocelyn's face fell like she had just been punched, and I had to bite my tongue to stop myself from laughing. Jocelyn seemed like she was stumbling to come up with some sort of response but Roy turned to leave before she could.

Now I was the frustrated one. He had kissed me yesterday and then disappeared before anything could be said. I hadn't seen him all day today since he never showed up at my training with Myron like he usually did. Now he appeared out of the blue, told me I couldn't go to Charisse's party because I was busy, and then went to leave without even telling me why I was busy.

"What exactly have I been spoken for?" I chased after him and grabbed his arm, forcing him to stop.

He looked back at where Jocelyn and Charisse were standing. Satisfied that they were out of hearing range, he whispered. "I heard that you've been talking about visiting the Litna Museum. If you still wish to go, I was going to take you."

"Take me... like, on a date?" I raised my eyebrows at him.

"I was hoping so." The smile returned to his lips once again as he took my hand and brought it to his lips. As he turned to walk away, he called over his shoulder, "I'll be there at seven."

I was practically jumping out of my skin that I was going on a date with Roy, but at the moment I was more stunned that he had kissed me right there in front of everybody, even if it was only my hand. For the first time, I was actually scared to face Jocelyn.

~

It was quiet as we walked to Litna Museum, but it wasn't an uncomfortable silence. I was too excited to be able to hold a coherent conversation anyway. Roy was wearing the same black, red, and gray outfit he had worn the first day he watched my training, and I'd never admit it aloud, but he looked absolutely fantastic. I couldn't help but blush when I looked at him. I was glad when we reached the museum, and Roy held the door open for me.

When we stepped inside, we found ourselves in a wide open hall full of archways. The floor was ceramic and was a golden brown color, while the bottom half of the walls were red and the top half was white. Sky lights covered the ceiling, rendering the lights that hung on the walls useless.

A welcome desk stood in front of us, and the secretary greeted, "Roy, it's been a while."

I looked back and forth between Roy and the secretary. He actually came often enough that the secretary called him by his first name?

A woman walked up to where we were standing. "Hi, my name is Dorothy and I'll be your tour guide."

"That won't be necessary." Roy responded a little harshly.

In shock, the tour guide looked to the secretary, hoping for a hint of how she was supposed to respond.

When the secretary nodded, the tour guide stepped out of our way, her eyebrows raised in disbelief. "I hope you enjoy yourselves."

Roy led me forward, and we rounded the corner to the first part of the museum. "This is Camus Wyklige." Roy said, stopping in front of one of the paintings. It depicted a blond haired man with deep brown eyes. He wore a black dress coat with gold trim, but plated armor leggings, also gold and black, were visible underneath. A long spear was in his right hand. "He was the founder of Vriknir. According to legend, he never intended to start the great village that Vriknir is today. Camus was the son of a rich man, but he was generous and kind. He wandered the continent, and when he saw kids who were living on the street, he took them in, using his father's money to take care of them. He trained them, and they grew up to be the heads of the best families in Vriknir."

I followed Roy as he walked on to the next painting. This one also depicted Camus, except he was much older. Standing all around him were men and women of all ages, maybe twelve in all, not counting Camus. "These were the first of Vriknir. They laid the foundation for what was to come."

We walked on and passed several more paintings. Roy let me set the pace, allowing me to spend as much time as I wanted to look at the paintings, but he didn't say anything. They were pretty self-explanatory. This whole section of the museum was a timeline of how the village had progressed. At first it was just a few houses for the twelve I had seen in the picture before, but as time went on, the twelve had families, and others seeking shelter moved to the area, until a village was born.

"The village had just gotten on its feet when the first war happened." Roy explained when we came to a painting of many thugs running through the village streets, setting houses ablaze. "One of the people who came to Vriknir was a runaway. He had been a slave to a thug who ran his own gang. The slave's master tracked him all the way to Vriknir, but the gang didn't just come to drag him back. They decided that, because it was a small village and was just beginning out, it would be easy to invade and then they would be able to take more slaves. They severely underestimated Vriknir. The village fought back with Camus in the lead and the big twelve at his heels."

Roy walked to the next painting, not pausing in his speech. It showed a crowd of people, dressed in black, standing around a grave. "By this time, Camus had grown quite old. He fought valiantly in the war and other than a few scratches, didn't receive any injuries. However, it took a great toll on his body. He fell ill not long after the war ended and died in his sleep."

The next exhibit we came to wasn't a painting, but a glass case, and inside was the same black dress coat and armor lined with gold that I had seen in the previous paintings. I couldn't believe just how nice it was. I couldn't even tell where the coat had been ripped in battle. The intricate design of the gold was breathtaking. I couldn't imagine how much time had gone into making it. The armor was polished to shine. It looked brand new.

The next painting showed the same twelve men and women from before, except much older, sitting around a table. "This was when the first council was formed. They needed a way of choosing a new leader and this was what they came up with."

We continued on, and the next paintings we came to showed the reconstruction of the village and how it continued to expand. Roy didn't say much about them. I'm sure there was a lot more history that a tour guide would have droned on and on about, but Roy seemed to just be hitting the highlights. We stopped when we came to the exhibit that described the day "Dakim" attacked and killed several of the village members.

Roy paused before walking into the room. "It's been months since I've been in here."

I walked up beside him and cautiously put my hand in his. Roy had opened up a lot lately, but I knew he was still touchy. Yet, I wanted to comfort him the best way possible. He looked down at me, his face full of shock at first, but then his eyes softened and he gave me a small smile.

He led me into the room, still holding onto my hand, and we stopped in front of one of the pictures. It was of a young man, not much older than Roy was now.

"This was my father. He was getting ready to leave for a mission when this picture was taken."

I could definitely see the resemblance. The man in the picture had long, pitch black hair, tied back with a simple red ribbon. They had the same bright, beautiful, red eyes. Also, they seemed to have the same pale skin which made their eyes stand out even more. His armor was silver with a deep blue cape. He also wore a metal headband that reminded me of someone who specialized in flight.

"That's my father!" I exclaimed when I noticed a painting a little ways away. "What's his picture doing in here?"

I walked over to the painting and took in the blue eyes and ice blue hair he was so famous for. He wore tan clothing with royal blue and gold armor on top. A simple throwing spear was in his right hand. His eyes were serious, like he was ready for battle, but they were never hard. He stood tall and erect, showing his pride.

Roy walked over to where I stood and looked up at the painting. "At the time of the second war, Ikicnie was our ally. Your father led his men into what most people considered to be a suicide mission. They came out successful, but it's not the success he's remembered for. He's remembered because he was willing to give up his life to protect a village that wasn't even his own. His picture was hung here so that people would remember him for his courageous actions, not that he was the father of Dakim.

"I used to stand here for hours staring at these two paintings, wondering how Dakim, the son of such a courageous man, could kill my father, a man who was almost as well respected as his own father. I guess now I have my answer."

Not knowing what to say, I simply gave his hand a little squeeze. We made our way through the rest of the museum, but there wasn't much else of interest to me. Vriknir was still young in comparison to other Riora villages, but that didn't make it any less weak. It just meant that history was yet to be made.

"I guess this really wasn't much of a date." Roy commented as we walked out of the museum.

"It isn't your typical first date," I agreed, "but that didn't mean it was any less fun. Besides, I think this is the most I've ever heard you talk."

I frowned when Roy stared straight ahead. I stopped and crossed my arms over my chest. "You're not even going to smile at that?"

He stopped and looked back at me, his face completely void of emotion. He simply stared at me with his piercing eyes. I walked over to where he was and began poking him in the stomach, trying to get him to laugh. "Come on, you know that was funny."

He looked away, biting his lip, and I knew he was fighting a smile. I continued poking him, my own smile growing bigger and bigger as I watched his lip sliding out from under his teeth, his cheeks trying to pull back in a smile. Eventually he broke out laughing and I threw my hands up in the air in celebration. "Yes!"

All of the sudden, the cheer was gone as Roy grabbed my wrist. With the force he grabbed me, I thought for sure he was going to be angry, but when I looked at him, his eyes had softened just like they had right before he kissed me last time. For the first time, I saw Roy hesitate.

I didn't hesitate. I closed the little distance there was between us and pressed my lips to his. It was brief, but it was enough to give me that same high feeling I had felt the first time he had kissed me.

"Don't ever do that again." I warned him.

He seemed taken aback. I had been the one who kissed him after all. "Do what?"

"Second guess yourself."

His shocked expression turned to one of understanding, and he offered his arm to me. "I don't think Myron or your brother would appreciate it too much if I let you walk home by yourself."

I laughed and gladly took his arm. So, walking around a museum wasn't exactly an ideal first date, but that didn't matter. I'd had the most amazing time with Roy and if I could go back, there wasn't a single moment I would have changed.

I said goodnight to Roy and closed the door behind me. Yet, even after I had closed the door, I could still feel him on the other side. I waited until he finally walked away, and then sank to the floor, ready to scream. The past few days felt like a dream, but if it was, then I was in no hurry to wake up. I had never been interested in the guys on Earth simply because most of them were immature. Besides, I knew that most of them would never have accepted me for who I was. Roy had been the first guy I had ever been interested in. Sure, he wasn't perfect. He was insecure, and often very rude, but I admired his strength and passion. Then again, so did every other girl in the village. Yet, they failed to realize his imperfections. He was nothing more than a dream guy to them, whereas to me, he was a real person. Myron had been right. I had been the first person to actually attempt to get over the wall he had put up. Now, I had not only gotten over that wall, but I was also beginning to tear it down.

~

### ***NOVEMBER 30***

I knocked on Lady Vanek's door and waited for her response, "Come in!"

I stepped into her office and bowed, as was custom, before waiting to be addressed. She finished some paperwork before she turned her attention to me, "What may I do the pleasure?"

I held out a paper to her, "I've come to turn my application in for becoming an official Riora."

Lady Vanek took the paper from me and reclined in her chair as she looked it over. After a minute she noted, "Myron's been working hard to catch you up to where you should be."

"Yes, ma'am."

She nodded. "Congratulations, you are now an official Riora of Vriknir, level Verneski, or beginning Riora. Normally you would be assigned to a team where you would gain experience doing jobs, but in order to catch you up to where the rest of the kids your age are, I'm going to have you tag along with other teams instead of being assigned to your own team. This way we'll be able to maximize the number of jobs you go on and we can move you up much quicker."

"Thank you, Lady Vanek."

She held out a folder to me. "This is a list of all the Skekaek, or expert Riora, who are currently supervising teams. You'll be under their command when you go on jobs so you should introduce yourself when you get the chance. This early in the morning, you'll be able to find most of them at the training grounds."

"Ma'am, it is my understanding that whoever supervises the team you are assigned to will be the one who runs your training. If I am going on jobs will all of the supervisors, then will they all lead my training?"

"No, for now Myron will continue your training. It is just easier to have one person be in control than trying to stay organized between several people. I believe it will be the most beneficial for you."

"Thank you, ma'am."

She nodded. "Dismissed."

I took the folder and walked out of her office to find Roy leaning against the wall, waiting for me. I smiled when I saw him, and he walked next to me as I made my way down the hallway. I handed the folder to him for him to look over. "They'll be taking me on my missions so I have to introduce myself."

"Not all of these Skekaek lead Verneski teams. Some of these are leaders of Ukemek, or intermediate Riora, teams. Lady Vanek must think pretty highly of you if she is willing to send you, a Verneski, with an Ukemek team."

I shrugged, "If you say so. I just do what I'm told. I do need your help though. I still get lost trying to get to the training grounds from here."

He shook his head and handed the folder back to me. "You have a horrible sense of direction."

I smiled, "Yup, but that's what you're here for."

He just rolled his eyes and led me to the training grounds. I was surprised at how busy it was. When I went with Myron, we usually went later in the day when most teams had finished their training. Yet, it was early morning and the place was packed.

"Rae!"

I scanned the training field to find Charisse towards the back of the field, and I headed for her first. When we drew near, her supervisor greeted Roy. I recognized him to be the man who had scared me by materializing in the middle of the street when I first came to Vriknir. "Ah, Lord Adimari, this is a surprise."

"Carmichael," Roy greeted, "I want to introduce you to my girlfriend, Raelyn."

I faltered a bit when Roy used the term 'girlfriend', and Jocelyn had let out a squawk, but otherwise I offered my hand to him right away, "It is nice to meet you, sir."

"And the same to you," He shook my hand. "I'm Carmichael Wallace."

"She recently moved here from Ikicnie and just became an official Riora." Roy explained. "Lady Vanek wishes her to tag along on some of your missions that way she can catch up to where she needs to be."

"I see." He said and then turned to his team. "I see you have already met Charisse, but this is Jocelyn Graebner and Lance Demetriou."

I briefly shook hands with Lance while Charisse stared at me with a gaping mouth and Jocelyn looked as if she were about to kill me.

*And I used to be scared of Roy's glares...*

Wanting to get away from Jocelyn as soon as possible, I turned back to Carmichael. "It was a pleasure meeting you, and I look forward to working with you and your team," I outright lied, "But if you'll excuse me, I still need to introduce myself to the rest of the supervisors."

"Yes, I look forward to seeing Roy's girlfriend in action." He smiled at me and then gave Roy a curious look.

I gave him a polite nod, hoping he wasn't taking offense to how short I was being, and then walked away, doing my best not to break into a run. Roy easily kept up with my fast pace. When we were a little ways away, Roy stopped me, "You're upset that I referred to you as my girlfriend."

I smiled, "No, I actually kind of like it. I just felt uncomfortable standing there when Jocelyn looked as if she was going to tackle me right then and there."

"You have nothing to worry about. What's the saying? She's all bite with no bark?"

"All bark with no bite." I corrected with a smile.

He waved it away. "Same point."

I opened my mouth to argue but then decided against it and closed it again. Despite having to learn how to blend in on Earth, our idioms were something he had never picked up on. Roy was watching me his deep red eyes and it made me squeamish. "Would you stop that?"

The corner of his mouth turned up in a smile and he took the folder from me once more. As he flipped through it, he teased, "Geez, so sensitive."

I rolled my eyes and walked away but Roy called after me, "You don't know who to talk to without this folder."



With a sigh, I went back over to where he was, took the folder from his hands, and turned away. When he simply laughed and followed after me, I commented, "You know, you're really lucky that you're hot. Otherwise I'd be really annoyed with you."

"Trust me. Luck has nothing to do with it."

I stopped in my tracks, staring at him, open mouthed. He raised his eyebrows at me, a cocky grin on his face. I shook my head at him, "I think I liked to cold and silent Roy better. He at least wasn't so arrogant."

He grinned at me. "You have no idea."

# Chapter 17

"When were you going to tell me that you were dating Roy?" Charisse shoved me in the shoulder when she caught up to me after her training was over.

"I didn't even know we were officially together until this morning, okay?"

"So, when Roy said you were spoken for last night...?" She prodded.

"Yes, we were on a date."

"Ah!" She squealed. "Where did you guys go?"

"The Litna Museum."

"Oh." Her excitement dropped. "A museum? Really?"

"It wasn't as bad you would think." I defended.

"You know Joc is furious, right?"

"Are you kidding me? When Roy introduced me as his girlfriend this morning I thought Jocelyn was going to kill me right there in front of everybody. I'm still not totally convinced that she won't sneak into my house at night and kill me in my sleep."

"Joc isn't your only worry. No doubt the entire village is going to know by the end of the day and then you'll have every girl in the area hating your guts."

I rolled my eyes. "Thanks for the vote of confidence."

"Have you guys had your first kiss yet?" She asked, and when I did answer right away, she gasped. "You did! What was it like?"

"Who are you and what have you done with Charisse?"

It had been a joke but she apparently missed the sarcasm. "Rae, what are you talking about? It's me."

I chuckled. "Calm down. I was just kidding. Usually you're all quiet and shy. This is like a whole other side of you."

"Well, I'm excited for you." She tried to reason.

"I know. Like I said, I was only kidding."

She shook her head. "I still can't believe you and Roy are dating. This is mind blowing."

"I still can't believe it, and I'm the one who is dating him!" I exclaimed. We looked at each other and then dissolved into giggles.

We forced ourselves to regain our composure as somebody who was walking on the same path as us approached. It was a girl, maybe a year older than Roy. I politely smiled when she walked by, as I did to all people I passed, but she simply snorted and turned her nose up at me. I watched her walk away with raised eyebrows.

Charisse leaned close to me, "And so your exile begins."

~

"You're the talk of the town." Myron commented as he walked in my door. I had told him long ago that he didn't even need to knock. All he had to do was shout so that I knew who it was.

"So I've noticed," I commented, thinking of the girl from earlier.

"Who knew you were such a heartbreaker?" He teased.

"As long as I don't break Roy's heart, I really don't care."

"Sorry, but I don't have any more advice. You're in uncharted waters now." He plopped down on the couch next to me.

"Darn, just when I needed you most." I joked.

"How does it feel to be an official Riora?" He switched the subject.

I shook my head, "It hasn't sunk in yet."

"It will after your first mission."

"When do you think that will be?"

He shrugged. "It all depends on how busy we are. There are times when I get home from a mission in the morning and by that evening I'm leaving on another mission. At other times I can go weeks without having a mission."

I sighed and leaned my head back on couch. "Way to ruin the excitement."

He chuckled then stood up. "Well, I just came by to say congratulations."

"Thanks, Myron."

He walked out, and when the door shut behind him, Dakim rounded the corner, walking in from the kitchen. I jumped when I saw him. I hadn't been expecting to see anybody, especially when I hadn't heard the door.

"Out of all the guys you could have picked, you had to choose the one who spent the past ten years with only one thing on his mind: killing me."

"No, he spent the past ten years wanting to avenge his family. There's a difference." I turned to my brother, being serious, "Do you really not like him?"

Dakim rolled his eyes and took the seat Myron had recently vacated. "I want you to be happy. When he found out who you were, he acted like you didn't even exist. Treating you like dirt would have been better. At least then he would be acknowledging your existence."

"But you haven't seen how far he's come." I argued.

"Rae, I don't want to offend you, but did it ever occur to you that he might only be doing this to get information about me?"

I nodded, "The thought has crossed my mind. The day when Roy first kissed me, I laid awake for hours wondering, why me? There are plenty of prettier girls here in the village. I mean, I have small lips, small eyes, and chubby cheeks. I've worn my hair in a ponytail or braid every day of my life, and I never wear makeup. I'm far from what people imagine as the ideal woman, so why me? Yet, if he wanted information on you, then he would be professing his undying love to me. However, he never even officially asked me to be his girlfriend. Besides, he's never even mentioned you once. It's a little hard to get answers if he never even asks questions."

Dakim looked me right in the eyes, "You really believe in him?"

"He deserves a chance."

~

## ***DECEMBER 1***

I was walking out the door, heading to Myron's house, when I was approached by the same young boy who had approached Myron the day we were in the training field. "Miss Murray, Lady Vanek wants to see you."

"Okay," I smiled, trying to hold my excitement. *I have my first missions already!*

I made my way to Lady Vanek's office and slowly stepped in the door, "Yes, Lady Vanek?"

Before Lady Vanek could respond to my greeting, a high pitched squeak rang out. It was Jocelyn. "She's our replacement?"

Lady Vanek sighed. "She is not replacing Lance. She's just filling in while he's out sick."

Jocelyn rolled her eyes, ending in a glare at me. Thankfully, Charisse was also in the room and she gave me a comforting smile.

"Why does it have to be her? I thought she was some special person to Ellipsis?" Jocelyn continued to complain.

Lady Vanek was obviously becoming frustrated. "First of all, that is classified. Second of all, just because she has connections to Ellipsis doesn't mean that she gets special treatment. She needs to get mission experience. She's still new to everything. That is why, Jocelyn, I am appointing you as team leader." It took every ounce of my strength not to baulk at her words. She had a point though. I was Dakim's sister, and I was training with Myron, an Ellipsis commander, and Roy, one of their most promising members. Yet, it didn't change the fact that I was new. Thankfully, her next words gave me a little comfort, "However, Myron will be coming along to make sure things run smoothly."

"Myron! As is Myron Masters, one of the Ellipsis commanders? An Ellipsis commander is going to be accompanying us?"

Lady Vanek simply glared at Jocelyn. Nothing irritated her more than having to repeat herself. "Ultimately all the decisions will be yours, even if they are the wrong ones. Myron won't step in even if the decisions you make aren't the best ones."

"Then what is he coming along for?" Jocelyn snapped.

One other thing Lady Vanek hated, being interrupted. "As I was saying, Myron won't overturn any of your calls. He's there to ensure the safety of you three in case one of your decisions causes you, or one of your comrades, to be put in danger. It is not to say you are unable to effectively lead a squad. It's just an insurance policy. However, don't rely on it. Myron may be good, but he's not invincible. There are some things you can't recover from. The only thing that comes before the completion of your job is the safety of your comrades. Do you understand?"

Jocelyn nodded, becoming serious, understanding the big responsibility she has been given. "Yes, Lady Vanek."

With that, we were dismissed from her office.

### **\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

Myron slid down from the roof onto the window ledge of Lady Vanek's office once Rae, Charisse, and Jocelyn had left her office. "Carmichael may not be my student anymore, but I should still scold him for not teaching her better manners."

She ignored his comment and instead asked, "Do you know you're mission?"

"It's a test for Jocelyn to see if she puts the safety of the team first, even though she despises Rae, especially now that Rae and Roy are dating. If she treats Rae any more harshly than she does Charisse, then she fails."

Lady Vanek nodded and finally spun in her chair to address Myron directly. "It is a test to see if she can put her emotions aside and be a good leader. However, this is also a test for Raelyn. You're not always going to like your commanding officers. The Adelindas are known for their issues with authority. Also, Raelyn seems to be taking after somebody else I know." Lady Vanek gave Myron a firm stare and Myron squirmed uncomfortably. "I want to see if she's willing to follow orders even if they seem harsh or unfair. Plus, since this is Raelyn's first mission. I want to see if she can handle the stress. She's only a Verneski and this is an Ukemek level assignment. Also, I want to see if she is still willing to be a Riora even if she has had a bad experience with her team leader on her first mission."

Myron smiled knowingly. "You're purposely pitting them against each other."

"It's the best way to get their true character to emerge," Lady Vanek leaned back in her chair, feeling satisfied with herself. Then she turned serious, "However, if that was all there was to this then I would have Carmichael lead this mission. I'm sending you with them because I want to see if Raelyn will be targeting once she steps outside our borders. It may be that Raelyn was being attacked because going between dimensions is forbidden. It's possible that when the Hunters attacked, they had no clue who Raelyn was. However, if she is attacked now, when she hasn't been transferring between dimensions, then we will know that somebody is specifically targeting her. If somebody really is

targeting her, then I want Roy, Kian, and Karexon there as well for backup, but don't let Charisse, Jocelyn, or Raelyn see them. As far as everybody else is concerned, this is Jocelyn's mission and Charisse and Raelyn are under her command."

"Yes, Lady Vanek."

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

"So, what's the mission?" I asked as we walked out. It was the duty of the mission leader to debrief the other members.

Jocelyn rolled her eyes at me, "We're security guards. The museum is transferring some expensive art. Our job is to make sure it arrives at its destination safely, and that nobody tries to steal it."

Charisse nodded, "Sounds simple enough."

"This isn't just, the bad guys show up, we kick their butts, and the art is safe." I pointed out. "If somebody comes after the artwork, they're going to be white collar. They're not going to use brute force. No doubt some sort of deception will be their main tactic. We'll have to be sharp."

"What's white collar?" Charisse asked.

I shook my head, scolding myself for using phrases from Earth, and began to explain, "Where I come from, there are white collar and blue collar criminals. White collar generally refers to managers and business people, while blue collar generally refers to the workers or the labor force. When it comes to crime, white collar would be con men, while blue collar would be murderers and the like."

"Where is the art going to?" Charisse asked.

"A museum just on the inside of Ikicnie," Jocelyn replied. "If we set a good pace, we should be able to make it there by evening."

I looked around, "So, where is the art?"

"Right here," Myron approached, a long slender tube slung across his back. He took it off and held it out to Jocelyn, "Your mission, your package."

"Alright then, let's get going."

The first few miles of the trip were pretty quiet. Vriknir was completely surrounded by forest, making it hard to navigate if I didn't know where I was going. Plus, the forest here wasn't like the forest on Earth. Although the forestry on Earth was beautiful, the one here was much more exciting. I loved the forests on earth, but after a while it all seemed to look the same, just a bunch of trees and grass. Going through the forests on Kusnik, I would hazard a guess and say that I never saw the same plant twice. I'd been in the forest before when I was training with Luke and Vic, but I had never gone quite this deep before. Thankfully, I didn't have as much trouble making my way through the forest as the first day I had arrived. Yet, there was another reason it was quiet. Jocelyn was still sour about Roy, and I guess I could understand her pain. We got along, simply because we knew that if we wanted to succeed, then we needed to work together, or at least not get in each other's way.

What made the trip even more interesting was Charisse's ability to interact with nature. I had always thought the phrase, "The forest is alive" was more theoretical, but Charisse made it a reality. She made a game of trying to trip me and Jocelyn by moving tree roots and plant vines. She tried Myron once, but he simply stepped over it like it had been there the whole time.

"Wait," Charisse stopped as we were neared the edge of the forest and the border between Vriknir and Ikicnie. "Somebody is coming, a couple of people actually. Judging by the way they're moving through the forest, I'd say they know this area pretty well."

"Border control," Jocelyn concluded.

"This isn't going to be pleasant. Relations with Ikicnie over the past ten years have been less than peaceful." Charisse reminded.

We approached cautiously and stopped when our path was blocked by three men. I could sense four more hidden in the trees. "Who are you and why are you here?"

"We're Riora from Vriknir." Jocelyn stepped forward. "We came to deliver this painting."

"I'm sorry, but we cannot permit you to enter. If you give the painting to us, we'll make sure it gets to its destination."

"That's fine. We'll just need to see some identification first."

*So, Jocelyn noticed too...* All official Riora were required to wear the emblem of their city when they were on a job. The men standing in front of us wore Ikicnie style Thaeshen, or uniforms, but they weren't wearing the emblem. These men were fakes.

The man in the center took a few steps forward as he pulled a wallet from his pocket. He kept his distance, instead choosing to toss the wallet. It landed a few feet in front of Jocelyn. She stepped forward and bent over to pick it up. Realizing her mistake, I jolted forward, pulling a knife from my hip holster, and managed to block the aerial attack from the men in the trees just in time. Realizing the trap, Jocelyn quickly kicked the wallet away, right before it exploded.

Charisse quickly turned to the trees, searching for the four hidden men. She used the vines like whips and bound any of the men she could get a hold of. Jocelyn, who had the ability to phase through even the most solid of things, quickly hid inside a tree. She used the tree's strong trunk as a shield while throwing knives from within. With her in the trunk, I was forced to be the distraction. It was me against the three guys since Myron had mysteriously disappeared as soon as the conflict had begun. I rotated the knife in my hand to an offensive position and extended my left hand a little in front of me, ready to use my Miutho.

The three spread out, trying to surround me. I swung my left arm out, creating a blast of Miutho that sent them flying backwards. To my disappointment, Jocelyn had thrown a knife at the same time, but because I had sent them flying backwards, her knife had missed. So, our teamwork needed a little work.

I watched as they got to their feet once more, and I tried to get my fight or flight response under control. Was I ready to take somebody's life if I had to?

When I heard a clink next to my head, I quickly turned to find Jocelyn at my back. She had deflected a knife thrown by one of the guys in the trees. I had been so absorbed by the three guys in front of me that I had lost track of the men in the forest.

That moment made my decision. They were coming after us to kill us. I wasn't just fighting for my life. I was fighting for the lives of Charisse and Jocelyn too. Myron, not so much. If I didn't do something then we were all going to die, and I wasn't going to let that happen.

I put my knife back in its holster, that way I had both hands available to me. Throwing knives seemed to be the main weapon of choice in this battle, and there were a lot of them going around. I extended my senses, letting it connect to every throwing knife in the area. I lifted my hands, lifting the knives as well and gathered them so they were ready. The men on the ground paused in their advance, ready for me to throw the knives at any moment. Yet, they were so focused on my knives that they forgot all about Jocelyn disappearing back into a tree. She sent one flying and the guy on the right fell to the ground.

Unlike them, I had learned from my mistakes, and I was not only aware of the two men in front of me, but also the one in the trees ready to jump Charisse from behind. I turned quickly and sent one of the seven knives flying toward the man in the tree. One of the two remaining men on the ground thought he would take the opportunity to go after me while my back was turned, but a knife from Jocelyn brought him to the ground.

I turned my attention back to the one remaining man in front of me, and he gave me a devious smile. All of the sudden, the forest around me disappeared. It was like I was in a haunted house full of fun mirrors. *He's an illusionist...*

I closed my eyes, relying instead on my senses. His Miutho illusion surrounded me like a web, and I had trouble getting through it to sense the rest of what was around me. Knowing that I was vulnerable, I let my Miutho surround me, creating a telekinetic shield. I flinched when a knife hit the shield and deflected off, but at least I knew the shield was effective.

When I felt the illusion web beginning to fade away, I opened my eyes and dropped the telekinetic shield to find Jocelyn and Charisse standing in front of me. Myron had also reappeared. We had won the battle, but it didn't feel like a victory. The stench of so much blood made my stomach churn, and the images before me would forever be burned into my memory.

Myron placed his hand on my shoulder, "Come on. We should get moving."

### \*\*\*Dakim\*\*\*

He came to a stop when he sensed a presence ahead. Rae and the other two girls must have also noticed, for they too came to a stop. Before the girls could notice, Myron slowly stepped backwards and disappeared into the trees. Realizing that Myron was heading straight in his direction, Dakim turned back around so he would be completely hidden by the tree. He did his best to keep his heart rate down and breathe quiet and slow. Myron was the master of sound. If he let his breathing or heart rate get out of control, then suddenly the painting would be the least of Myron's worries.

Thankfully, Myron changed directions slightly, and Dakim let out a small sigh of relief. However, his curiosity was spiked when he noticed that Myron was talking to three other people. *His whole team is here...*

Dakim looked back around the tree to see how Rae was doing. She had gathered all the throwing knives at her fingertips and held them in the air at the ready. He had come along on her first mission to ensure her safety, but he had been foolish for worrying. She was an Adelinda after all.

No longer worried about Rae, Dakim turned back to look at Myron and his team. Myron was the one who had been training her. Myron would know better than he exactly what Rae could do. If Dakim was standing here scolding himself for worrying, then Myron should have known full well that Rae would be able to handle herself without a problem on this mission. Even if she were to get in a bind, Commander Myron Masters would be more than capable of taking care of the situation. If the girls could handle these attackers, Myron probably could have taken on them by himself and not even broken a sweat. So why did he bring his whole team with him? Dakim clenched his jaw. *There is something I am missing.*

When the remaining attackers turned to flee, Dakim waited patiently behind the tree for Myron to continue with the girls to Ikicnie. Once they had gone, he dropped to the ground and headed in the direction their attackers had fled. Not too far from the battle sight, Dakim found the survivors sitting together on the ground, treating each other's wounds. He was about to reveal himself in hopes of scaring information out of them, but stopped when he felt a presence above him. A moment later, Roy dropped from the trees in front of the men.

Roy had his back to Dakim, but he could guess the look on his face by the menacing tone of his voice, "Attacking those girls was a foolish thing to do."

The leader stood and walked towards Roy with a smug smile on his face, "No, coming here by yourself was a foolish thing to do."

Roy wasn't fazed by his threat and returned one of his own. "I will give you one chance to tell me why you attacked them."

"You think you can show up here wearing your fancy Ellipsis uniform hoping to scare us?" The leader sneered down at Roy. "You're an even worse liar than we are if you expect us to believe that somebody as young as you was accepted into Ellipsis."

"Boss," Another man stepped forward a little hesitantly. "I've heard rumors of a guy with piercing red eyes in Ellipsis. I think this guy is the real deal."

"Fool! Know your place!" The boss snapped, causing the man to cower in fear. He then turned to Roy and snarled, "I don't care who the hell you are. I'm not telling you a damned thing!"

"Good," Roy leaned in close to the boss, but spoke loud enough for everybody to hear. "That means I get to pay you back a thousand times over for attacking my girlfriend."

Furious, the boss went to punch Roy, but he wasn't fast enough. Roy filled his hand with Miutho and struck the boss in the solar plexus, paralyzing his diaphragm, and the boss dropped to his knees with his arms around his chest, trying to get air back into his lungs. The rest of his men didn't hesitate to attack. Roy caught one of the knives that had been thrown at him in mid-air and immediately rotated it in his hand to strike another man who had charged at him. One of the men managed to grab Roy from behind while another went at him straight at him, but Roy literally walked up the man who had charged at him and used that moment to flip over the man who had grabbed him from behind and put him in an arm bar. Roy then pushed the man forward into another man, and they fell to the ground. One of the men jumped over the other men on the ground and brought his leg down, trying to strike Roy from above, but Roy caught the man by the leg and used the moment to go into a spin, and let the man go flying in the direction of one of the other men.

Dakim chuckled. He'd heard of Royce Adimari long before Rae had ever come to Vriknir. Long ago he had removed himself from the world, but he never removed the world from him. He still kept up on important information, and he had heard of a talented boy shattering records by being accepted into Ellipsis. He had also learned of what drove him forward. He always figured he would meet Royce Adimari one day, but he expected Roy to track him down and challenge him. He had never given it much thought, because as it stood, Royce had yet to prove to be a threat to him. Now that Roy had shown an interest in his sister, he had paid more attention to Royce. Watching him single handedly take down this group of men without even breaking a sweat made him realize that he had underestimated Royce, although he still had a long way to go before he could challenge him. Yet, it made him feel at least slightly better to know that Roy was no pushover and would not take kindly to somebody hurting Rae, even if nobody was around to see him stand up for her.

"Answer me!" Roy shouted as he slammed the leader into a tree once more after all the other men had been defeated. Roy pressed his hand to the man's intercostal muscles, using his own Miutho to disable it. Normally that wouldn't cause too many issues breathing, but with his diaphragm already paralyzed, it would be practically impossible for him to breathe.

Fear filled the leader's eyes, and with the last bit of air he had, whispered, "I'll tell you."

Satisfied, Roy removed his hand from the man's chest, allowing him to breathe again, but kept him firmly pinned to a tree. "Start talking, or I'll make sure you never talk again."

The leader, gasping for breath, managed to choke out, "We were... order to... scare... her. Our job... was to make sure... she didn't want... to be a Riora... anymore."

"So your job wasn't to kill her?"

The leader smiled evilly, "Why scare her when we can kill her. She can't be a Riora if she's dead!"

Furious, Roy punched the man in the face, immediately knocking him unconscious. "That's for Rae, you piece of shit."

Myron and the rest of the team approached where Roy stood over the unconscious men, and Kian commented, "Was all this really necessary?"

Roy smiled at Kian, "On the contrary, I think I let them off too easy."

Myron looked around at all the unconscious soldiers. "I think you let them off before we could get all the information that we could. Raven doesn't know about Rae, so who sent them?"

"We are Riora of Ikicnie! Identify yourselves!" A group of men ran up.



"Time to go!" Karexon joked, and they took off running.

Dakim leaned back against the tree so Myron's team wouldn't spot him when they ran by. With the Ikicnie Riora arriving to the scene, he'd missed any chance of questioning the attackers. He'd have to find some other way to get information.

### \*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\*

When we reached the border, we were escorted by Ikicnie's Riora all the way to the museum where Jocelyn personally handed the art to the museum's director. Thankfully, the Riora from Ikicnie also gave us new clothes and discarded the blood covered ones we had arrived in. We were then escorted back to the border. By then it had gotten late, way past sundown. We decided to camp at the border for the night before leaving for Vriknir early the following morning. Yet, I didn't sleep much. Every time I closed my eyes, the events from the day all came rushing back and made me sick to my stomach. In the end, I decided just not to sleep. Instead, I settled for looking up at the stars, wondering what Christian and Dustin had been up to. I was so relieved when we made it back to Vriknir.

"Congratulations, Rae, on your first successful mission." Myron told me once we reached the gate.

Charisse took my hands excitedly, "We should celebrate!"

"Well, I was going to go with Roy—"

"Then bring him along."

I could see she really wanted to do this so I agreed. "Alright, I'll talk to him."

She was almost jumping down with anticipation as she said, "There's a party tonight at the training grounds. It's a bonfire so it starts at nine. I'll see you there!"

I glanced down at my watch to see that it was only a half an hour before nine. However, when I looked up from my watch to argue with her, I found that she was already gone.

"A celebration, eh?"

I turned around to see Roy leaning against a nearby building, even though he hadn't been there a split second ago, and a smile broke out on my face just at the sight of him. Instead of wearing his typical training clothing, he was wearing his nice, expensive Ellipsis uniform. I gave him a hug, and at first he stiffened up. Then he tried to relax, but only managed to awkwardly put his arm around me. I giggled and pulled back, "Sorry I'm busy tonight, but maybe we can together tomorrow and do something."

He raised his eyebrows, "I specifically remember Charisse inviting me tonight."

I raised my eyebrows right back at him. "You're actually willing to go to the party?" When he didn't respond, I shrugged. "Okay."

"I'll need to change clothes."

"I'll meet you there then." I nodded and turned to walk away. He then took my hand and began leading me down the street in the opposite direction. I blushed slightly and mumbled, "Or I'll just go with you..."

"It will only take me a minute," He explained.

When we got to his house, he went into the bathroom right away, and I was free to explore. I would never have guessed he was an Ellipsis member judging by his house. It was only half the size of Myron's, and very plain. It looked like a typical family home, and the fact that there were three bedrooms in the house, even though Roy lived by himself, made me think that this was the house his family had lived in.

The style of the house was plain, but that didn't mean that it was bare of any decorations. There were pictures of his family everywhere. His sister had been absolutely beautiful. She had the same long, black hair, pale skin, and red eyes as the rest of the family. Yet, she just seemed to glow. If she was on

Earth, she would be a model in a heartbeat. Out of all the pictures, she showed up the most. I already knew what his father looked like, but he looked much older in these pictures than the one in the Litna Museum. He looked tired, worn out, but contempt. His mother was the odd ball of the family. She had the typical red eyes, but her hair was light brown, and, although her skin was light, it wasn't as pale as everybody else's.

"Wait, don't go in—" Roy began, his voice suddenly coming from behind me, but it was too late.

I had stepped through the door into Roy's room, and I realized right away why he hadn't wanted me to enter. In dark, red paint, lyrics from a song in Thaivo had been splattered on the wall in capital letters. I definitely wasn't fluent in Thaivo, but I knew enough to get the gist of what it was saying.

For everybody else  
The world is still turning  
Yet, my world is standing still  
And I can't start it again  
I'm here all alone  
In this sea filled with hurt  
But I am happy  
Here in the silence  
It reminds me of  
My only purpose left in living

I could feel Roy walk up behind me, standing so close to me that I could feel his hot breath on the back of my neck. I closed my eyes, taking in a deep breath. *He's going to be furious...*

Yet, he surprised me by taking my hands in his and whispering, "I did that about a month after my family was killed. Everybody was rebuilding, putting their lives back together, but with every day that passed, my life was falling apart."

I turned so I was facing him and kissed him. It was the first time he had truly been open with me, and I couldn't believe just how much pain he had been in, and still was. It was no wonder he was so closed off from everybody.

He broke the kiss, then smiled, "Come on. You don't want to be late for the party."

~

I tried to ignore the stares as we walked to the camp fire, the first snow crunching beneath our feet. Yet, the closer I got, the more I realized that it wasn't me they were staring at. It was Roy. Obviously it wasn't too often that Ellipsis members made guest appearances at events like this.

The chatter quieted to whispers as I sat on one of the logs and Roy sat next to me. After a minute, people seemed to get over the shock of Roy's presence and things began to return to normal, but every once in a while I would notice one of the girls shooting me a dirty look.

I watched with a smile as the band began to play and people jumped to their feet. I was surprised to find that, even though the formal dances here on Kusnik were completely different from Earth's, their casual dances, like this one, were exactly the same. I could go out there and dance and jump up and down just like I did back on Earth. On Earth, I had listened to a wide range of genres of music and loved discovering new artists, but I had stuck mostly to country, pop, alternative, and post-hardcore. It all depending on my mood. This particular band seemed to be closest to the post-hardcore genre, but every now and then, they played different kinds of songs just to switch it up and keep the audience interested.

When the band slowed it down a bit, I turned to Roy, "Is there any way I could get you to dance with me?"

"Not even if you begged me."

"But you danced with me at the banquet," I argued.

"It's not the same thing."

"I think it is."

"Then you think wrong."

"I have the right to my opinion." I was purposefully bugging him now.

"Yes, you have the right to your opinion, and I have the right to think you're wrong." Roy was adamant.

Not able to think of a good response, I went back to watching the dancers. A few moments later, Lance walked over to where we were sitting. "Excuse me, milady," he bowed but looked up at me with a smile. "May I have the next dance?"

I couldn't help but chuckle and turned to Roy, "Do you mind?"

He shook his head. "Go for it."

"Really?" I raised my eyebrows. I had a hard time believing that he really didn't mind.

When Roy didn't respond, I let Lance take me by the hand and lead me to the dance floor.

### \*\*\* Jocelyn \*\*\*

"I can't believe you actually allowed Lance to dance with her." Jocelyn commented as she sat down where Raelyn had been a minute ago.

"Just because I don't dance doesn't mean that she should be stuck here next to me when she could be out there having fun."

Surprised that Roy had actually responded her, she took the opportunity to keep talking, "If she didn't want to sit on the sidelines, she shouldn't have dragged you along. I can't even believe you let her drag you here in the first place."

"I asked to come." Roy informed her, leaving her at a loss for words.

After a minute, Jocelyn stood and walked away, fuming. *Who is this girl that she can talk to Roy so easily? Who is she that Roy wants to come to these get-togethers just so he can spend time with her? Who is she that I am not?*

### \*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

"I heard you were my replacement." Lance commented once we made it to the dance floor. "I haven't been briefed yet on how the mission went, but let me apologize in advance for Jocelyn's behavior."

I shrugged. "It comes with the territory. I need mission experience so I can't be picky about where get it."

"You know, she's really not as bad as she seems. You just happen to be on her hate list."

I rolled my eyes. "Wonderful."

"So, should I be expecting to be killed in my sleep for stealing Roy's girl?" He joked.

"First of all, you're not stealing me. You're borrowing me. Second, if he doesn't want to dance with me, then it's his own fault if I go and dance with somebody else."

"That still doesn't answer whether or not I'm going to wake up tomorrow."

I rolled my eyes, "You'll be fine."

"So how did the mission go?" Lance brought the conversation back to the original point.

"It wasn't easy, that's for sure. I was a Riora when I was an informant in Ikicnie, so going shouldn't feel new to me, but it does. It's so frustrating knowing that none of this should feel strange to me."

"Well, given how much you're in the training fields with the Ellipsis members, I'm sure it won't be long till you're up to where you should be." Lance comforted and then asked, "How are you liking Vriknir?"

"I hate the cold weather!" I exclaimed, making Lance chuckle, but then continued, "but I do really like it here. Everybody has been so welcoming to me."

He raised his eye brows at me, "Everybody?"

I giggled, "Fine, most people."

Lance smiled as he spun me in a circle and before speaking again, "We're like family here and we always love to have new people join our family."

"Thank you. It means a lot to me." I smiled up at him.

"If you ever wanted a training partner, I'd love to test my skills against you." Lance offered.

"I'm sure I'll take you up on that offer."

He bowed to me once more as the song ended, "Milady."

I walked back to Roy just in time to see Jocelyn walk away, seething. I tried to hide the smile as I sat down next to him. I was going to make a comment about Jocelyn, but stopped when I noticed this buzzing feeling.

"Rae?"

Somewhere in the back of my mind it registered that Roy was calling my name, but the buzzing was filling my mind. It was like I was drowning in it. However, it wasn't a physical sound. It was a feeling that ran through my entire body. It reminded me of when I was sensing somebody's Miutho, except this time it was much more profound, meaning that whatever Miutho I was sensing was in its pure form. However, that wasn't a big deal. What made it a problem was that the Miutho was unstable, like it hadn't been extracted right, which was creating the buzzing sensation, and it prevented me from thinking straight. I tried to force my way through the sea of buzzing so I could warn everybody. "Run."

"Too late." Roy's reflexes kicked in and he shoved me to the ground, shielding me from the blast that came next.

Roy was immediately back on his feet, running in the direction the blast had come from. Being able to think straight again, I also got to my feet and looked around. Most of the people had been able to take cover, and the few that hadn't weren't seriously injured. Other than creating a big bang, the blast really hadn't done much damage, but I hadn't expected it to, not with the Miutho being as unstable as it was.

Roy returned a few minutes later, "By the looks of it, the person teleported right after the shot was fired. Whoever it was is long gone."

# Chapter 18

*DECEMBER 3*

"Have you seen Myron?" I asked Karexon. "He wasn't at his house this morning, and he didn't show up for my training."

"What happened to you?" Karexon exclaimed when he saw the dark circles under my eyes, completely ignoring my original question.

"I'm fine. Where's Myron?"

He gave me a funny look but otherwise answered my question, "Given what happened last night, I would guess that he's at the cemetery."

I was confused, "But I didn't think anybody was seriously injured."

Karexon nodded, "They weren't. Why don't you go fetch him? He's probably lost all track of time. Once you get there, you'll understand."

There was only one cemetery in the village, so with a map it was easy to find where to go. It was a pretty open place, and I could see only one person in the entire area.

"Myron?" I spoke, since he obviously hadn't heard me approach, a rarity for him.

"Hm? Oh, hello Rae."

He gave me a confused look when he also noticed the bags under my eyes, but I just shook my head, and he didn't ask any questions. I went and stood next to him, examining what he had been staring at. It was a stone that had been smoothed out and polished with a bunch of names engraved in it. "What is this?"

"It's a memorial for the all the Riora who were killed in action."

I looked back at it, feeling my chest tighten. I had been to the Vietnam and Korean War memorials when I went on a field trip to Washington D.C. with my school, but they were nothing like this one. Sure I had felt sad when I looked at them, but at the time I hadn't known what it was like to be a soldier. I never knew what their sacrifice had really meant. Now, I was a Riora, and seeing this memorial really struck home.

"Would you believe that I used to have a wife and son?"

"What?" I looked at him in shock.

He smiled like he was amused at my reaction, but his face was still solemn. "Her name was Rose."

Realization hit me, "So the guitar in your room..."

He nodded, "Yes, it was hers. She was easily the most talented and beautiful woman I had ever met, but I was young and arrogant. Believe it or not, I was even more arrogant than Roy is. I was the top Riora of my generation, and I made sure everybody knew it." He smiled to himself. "I tried showing off to her. I thought if she saw how good I was, then she would like me. I was way off. It only made her more annoyed with me."

"We were on a mission one day when something went seriously wrong. She saved my hide in battle, essentially knocking me off my high horse. Once I stopped acting like a fool, she actually started giving me the time of day. It's really quite funny. I look back, and I can't help but think of you and Roy."

His words brought a slight blush to my face, but he didn't seem to notice, too lost in time.

"We got married at eighteen and eventually had a son named Blaine. He was so cute, but he was a ferocious little thing."

When it seemed Myron had finished talking, I asked, "What happened?"

"Roy wasn't the only person who lost his family the day Vriknir was attacked. We lived on the opposite side of the city from where the attack was, but Rose had a sister in that part of town. She had

taken Blaine with her to go visit. I wasn't able to go because I was still wrapping up some loose ends with my previous mission. They almost didn't go. They thought about waiting until I was able to go with them, but I managed to convince them to go without me." He shook his head. "I live everyday with the knowledge that I convinced my wife and son to go to their deaths."

I opened my mouth, looking for words of comfort. Yet, comfort wasn't what I was known for. Instead, I said, "I won't insult you by saying I know what it feels like, but don't ever blame yourself. When Roy first found out who my brother was, you told him that on a job you make a decision based on the information you're given. You made the decision to convince your wife and son to go based on the knowledge that they could either wait around for you to finish your job or they could go without you."

Myron smiled. "Roy is starting to rub off on you. He loves to throw people's words back in their faces."

I also smiled, "Yes, I noticed, but that wasn't my point. I know you were a good husband and a good father. Want to know how I know?"

He raised his eye brows and looked down at me, "Because you're trying to cheer me up over something that I have already moved on from?"

I smiled once again. "Maybe, but it doesn't change the fact that you didn't just allow me to become a member of the team. You've been like a father to me."

Myron sighed and shuffled his feet. "Rae, I was told to do that. I was told to make your life the best possible because things could get real hard, real fast."

I nodded, taking in this new piece of information. "That doesn't change my opinion of you. Anybody can be told to take care of me, but taking care of me could just mean making sure I have food, clothing, and a roof over my head. You have gone above and beyond the call of duty. I want to thank you for that."

"What can I say?" Myron brightened up and used my shoulder as an arm rest. "If the great Royce Adimari fell to your charm, then how was I supposed to stand a chance?"

I laughed and looked back down at the memorial. Myron said he had moved on, and I believed him. Yet, I knew that every time he looked at this memorial or there was an attack like last night, he would be filled with sorrow. This was what Karexon had meant. Innocent people had been killed that day. Innocent people could have been killed last night, but they had been lucky.

A thought struck me. "You lost your wife and son that day, and Roy lost his family as well. How is it that you were ready to accept that my brother was innocent when Roy spent most of his life devoted to killing him?"

Myron took a deep breath. "Like I said, I had some loose ends to tie up on my previous job. I wasn't too far from the area when I was notified of what had happened, so I was, as you would say, one of the first on the scene. There were some inconsistencies that I noticed, but when the investigation team announced it was your brother, I was so riled up that I was ready for any explanation, even if it was the wrong one. By the time I finally calmed down and got my head straight, I'd lost any chance I'd had to dig deeper. If you had simply told me that Dakim was innocent, I would have been inclined to believe you, but after showing me what you did, I know without a doubt that Dakim is innocent."

My eyebrows came together in confusion, "Why does that make a difference?"

Myron bent over and ran his finger along Rose and Blaine's names, "Because the woman Dakim tried to save was Rose. He has my deepest gratitude."

### **\*\*\* Lady Vanek \*\*\***

Lady Vanek sat at her desk flipping through papers in a folder, and didn't bother looking up when Jerome walked in. He stood feet shoulder with apart, hands clasped behind his back, waiting for her to speak.

"I thought you might want to know that Raelyn was able to follow through on her first mission. She was able to take the enemy's life." Lady Vanek informed him.

"Yesss, I am aware."

She stopped what she was doing and looked up at him, "You have nothing to say about it?"

"Ssshe wasss able to do it, but not without sssevere conssequencceesss. Have you ssseen her yet today? By the looksss of it, ssshe did not sssleep at all lassst night. Even when ssshe knowsss ssshe killed in ssself defenssse, it isss dessstroying her."

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

Karexon and Myron may have dismissed my appearance, but Roy refused to let it go when I met up with him later at one of the indoor training facilities. The facility was huge, but otherwise it reminded me of any other gym. There was a track that wound around the entire building and several sets of weights had been stacked off to the side. The biggest difference between this place and the gyms back home were the several obstacle courses and jungle gyms that had been set up for parkour training.

When Roy reached the end of one of the obstacle courses, he joined me on the bleachers, "When was the last time you slept?"

I shook my head as I pulled my knees up to my chest. "I've tried, but every time I close my eyes, I can still see that guy from Ikicnie dropping to the ground, lifeless. I still hear the grunt he let out in the split second he knew he was going to die, and that awful stench of blood refuses to go away. It all makes me want to hurl."

"Rae, look at me."

When I didn't move, he grabbed my chin and forced me to look him in the eyes, "You can't dwell on it."

"You think I want to dwell on it?" I snapped.

He pursed his lip as he stared down at me, "Everybody thinks that I'm so good at what I do because I can shut down my emotions, but they're wrong. I use my emotions to my advantage. They came after you with the intent to kill. If you didn't do something, then what was to stop them from going after somebody else with the intent to kill, somebody who didn't have the training to fight back? What if an innocent person was killed because you didn't have the guts to stop him? Right now you have blood on your hands, but you would have innocent blood on your hands if you had let him slip through your grasp. You are fighting for a good cause. If you don't believe in what you are fighting for, you might as well quit now."

His words cut deep, and although they weren't exactly comforting, they made me feel better. I didn't like what I had done, but he helped me come to accept it. "Thanks, Roy."

He gave me a smile and then noticed the clock that was on the wall behind me. With a sigh, he stood up and grabbed his coat. "See you later."

"Bye." I called after him.

~

"You were right." I muttered as I walked in the door of my house and found Dakim sitting in one of the chairs, a bowl of ice cream in his hands.

"Of course I was." He stood up and followed me down the hallway, taking his bowl of ice cream with him. "What was I right about?"

"I was talking to Myron earlier today. He said that he was told to make my life the best possible because 'things could get real hard, real fast'."

"It doesn't do us much good. It only confirms what we had already guessed. They're preparing you for something." Dakim took another bite of ice cream and let it melt in his mouth before continuing. "What we need to know is why."

"You're the talented one. Why don't you figure it out?" I pouted.

Dakim paused with his spoon raised in the air to take another bite of ice cream. He smiled and put the spoon back down in the bowl. "It's not that simple. There are an unlimited number of reasons that Ellipsis is continuing to train you instead of having you go through the traditional form of training. It's possible that they see your potential and want you to become a member of Ellipsis. Your skills would be a great asset. Or..."

"Or, what?" I prodded.

Dakim put his bowl in the sink, then walked over and tousled my hair. "I'll see you later!"

"Dakim!" I called after him, but he had already disappeared.

~

## ***DECEMBER 5***

"Are you ready for a second mission?" Lady Vanek questioned. "It's my understanding that you didn't handle your first one to well."

I nodded. "You're right. The mission didn't sit well with me at first, but then I talked with Roy. When I was a freshman in high school on Earth, I was in a restaurant when somebody with a gun broke in and tried to rob the place. One of the customers manage to single handedly disarm the robber, and then he tied the robber up for the cops to find. That was when I decided that I wanted to keep people safe, just like that man had done. With my abilities, I can do that better than anyone. It wasn't until I talked to Roy that I realized that, by being a Riora, I am doing exactly that. I am protecting the people of Vriknir."

Lady Vanek smiled, "Then I think you'll like this next mission. You'll be working security. We have an ambassador from Ikicnie who is arriving tonight for a conference tomorrow. As you are aware, our relations with Ikicnie are very tense, and there are a lot of people who would like to see this ambassador in the ground. Your job is to make sure that doesn't happen. He needs to stay alive. You'll meet him at the entrance to the city when he arrives, and you won't leave his side until you are back at the entrance when he leaves. You'll be working with a different Ukemek team than your first mission, but it will be led by Carmichael."

"I thought Carmichael was the supervisor of Charisse's group?" I questioned.

She nodded. "Yes, he is. However, the team supervisors are still Riora and are still needed for missions. The original leader of the team you will be with was sent on a mission, so Carmichael is filling in until the original leader returns. Plus, I figured it might be easier for you if you went with somebody you were more familiar with."

"Thank you, Lady Vanek."

~

The team I was working with was nothing special. They didn't seem too welcoming, so I decided to stay out of their way. I guess I couldn't blame them. Their team had been together for a couple of years. They were used to working with each other, and I was just a third wheel, or in this case a fourth.

We met the Ikicnie ambassador at the gate as Lady Vanek had told us. He was a grumpy, unpleasant man, not somebody I would picture to be an ambassador. The journey to the hotel the ambassador would be staying in was relatively quiet. Yet, that wasn't to say it was uneventful.



We were almost to the hotel when a man jumped out from behind a building we had passed and went directly at the ambassador from behind. One of my teammates turned around and knocked him to the ground in one smooth motion. In all honesty, it had been a pretty pathetic attempt at an assassination. However, when that same teammate went to arrest the man, the man grabbed a woman standing on the side of the street and put a knife to her throat. The would-be assassin wasn't very talented, but he had already proved that he had the instinct to kill. There was nothing stopping him from killing that lady if it meant he would get away.

"You don't want to do that." Carmichael tried to persuade him.

The assassin looked at each of us before shoving the woman at Carmichael and taking off running.

"Raelyn, escort the ambassador and this woman to the hotel for safe keeping. The rest of us will hunt him down. There is no way we're letting him escape."

Normally, I would never have been told to escort them on my own, but we were only a few feet from the hotel and there were plenty of witnesses. I quickly ushered the Ikicnie ambassador and the woman upstairs and into the secured hotel room. Mumbling about the team's inability to keep him safe, the ambassador set his brief case down and got in the shower. Not sure what else to do, I sat down with the woman, who was extremely shaken up, on the couch. She had strawberry colored hair and big round eyes, but small lips. She reminded me of Charisse with how soft and innocent she looked. They even had the same necklace of a dragon's head with a sword through it.

"What's your name?"

"Irene."

"Irene, it's nice to meet you."

She just looked at me, and I could see the horror in my eyes. "They're going to catch that man, right?"

I nodded. "Yup, the rest of my team is hunting him down right now. Do you have a friend or relative you can stay with for now?"

"Oh please, don't leave me. I'm a witness. There's nothing to stop that man from killing me and whoever I stay with."

I took her hand, "Don't worry, you're perfectly safe. The only thing you have to worry about here is the ambassador's bad manners."

She chuckled nervously, "Thank you. I owe you and your team my life."

I shook my head, "It's all part of the job."

**\*\*\* Carmichael \*\*\***

Carmichael watched as one of the team members tackled the would-be assassin to the ground. They had caught up to him in no time, yet something wasn't setting right with him. This had been too easy. The ambassador was a high risk target. If somebody was going to try and kill him, there would be no holder back. The assassin would be much more skilled than this guy.

Carmichael looked around for the rest of the team, "Forget him. He's a decoy. We need to get to the hotel, now!"

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

"Where are you going?" The woman frantically stopped me at the door.

I gave her a comforting smile. "I'm only going down the hall to find somebody from housekeeping. The ambassador is complaining about the towels. Don't worry. You are safe. I'll know immediately if anybody other than my team comes within a foot of this room."

She nodded and then slowly stepped out of the way so I could shut the door. I made my way down the hallway, careful to keep my Miutho extended. I could sense every single thing in that room. I would feel it if anything other than the woman or the ambassador were in the room.

I was just walking back with the towels when Carmichael burst through the door leading to the steps with the rest of the team. "Carmichael?"

"Where is the woman?" He shouted.

A little unsure as to what was going on, I answered, "In the room with the ambassador."

The team members immediately tore down the hallway towards the hotel room while Carmichael jogged after them. I dropped the towel and followed them to the room. When I walked in, I found the woman pinned to the wall by one of the team members with a knife in her hand, while another team member was with the ambassador, who had a small cut on his throat. The woman glanced at me as I entered, her eyes full of anger, completely opposite of the innocent, helpless eyes she had given me right before I walked out of the room.

I was stunned to the point where I couldn't even control my limbs. I stumbled backwards until I hit the wall of the hallway. *How could I have been so stupid?* I watched in a daze as Carmichael arrested the woman and escorted her out of the building, but the rest of the team remained. They didn't say anything, but they didn't have to. The glances they threw my way, said it all.

~

I stood outside the door to Lady Vanek's office, trying to figure out how to word my apology. Sorry, I missed what was so obviously in front of my face? Not being able to figure out what to say, I simply shook my head and stepped through the door. Yet, I paused when I noticed that Jerome was also in the room.

"I should have known Myron wouldn't have taught you to ask before entering my office." Lady Vanek scolded.

"I came to apologize for my performance during the mission. She managed to deceive me—"

"You are naive." Jerome cut me off.

"I'm new." I defended.

"No, you are foolissshly optimisstic. You sssee the world assss thisss perfect placce and it blindsss you to the truth. You are not cut out for thisss life. Go back to your perfect little life on earth."

I stepped forward angrily, ready to argue. I didn't care if he was the head of Ellipsis. I wasn't about to let him speak down to me like that. However, Lady Vanek spoke before I could, "Raelyn, you are dismissed."

I gave one last angry look to Jerome before walking out and slamming the door behind me. The one thing I hated most was being told "You can't". It made me want to show them "I can". Besides, who did Jerome think was, telling me to go back to my "perfect" life on earth? He didn't know a single thing about me.

**\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

"How did the mission go?" Myron asked when he entered Lady Vanek's office not long after Jerome left.

"It was successful, no thanks to Raelyn. Her job was to protect the ambassador, but she was too busy comforting a helpless woman, who turned out to be the real assassin."

"She is trusting." Myron sat in the chair with a sigh.

"It is her worst trait."

"And her best one," Myron snapped. Lady Vanek simply raised her eyebrows at him and he lowered his head, "Forgive me, Lady Vanek. I forgot to whom I was speaking."

"Don't let it happen again."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Dismissed."

# Chapter 19

*DECEMBER 7*

"We need to talk, now." Dakim grabbed my arm and led me towards the hidden entrance to the training room. "Are Luke and Vic already down there?"

"Yes. Dakim, what's going on?"

"I'll explain once we get down there." Dakim answered as he threw back the rug.

I anxiously followed him down below where Luke and Vic greeted us. When we were all standing in the middle of the room, Dakim began speaking. "A few days ago something occurred to me, and I started doing some research. Lady Vanek may not have given Myron's team any information on who Rae was, but she knew exactly where to find Rae. Until Rae sent me that letter, even I wasn't aware that she was alive. How was it that Lady Vanek knew? The only people who would know that my sister had survived would be the ones who went after my family. Out of those people, only one of them was actually powerful enough to take out my family. His name is Raven Faulkner. I talked to a few of the informants I still have in the crime ring, and rumor has it that Raven is planning an attack on Vriknir."

"Wait, he's still alive?" Vic exclaimed. When all our eyes turned to him, he shrunk away, ashamed of his outburst. A little softer he added, "I just assumed that you would have killed Raven because he killed your parents."

"I'm accused of killing dozens of people. The family members of those people got revenge by killing my family. Until recently, Roy was set on killing me out of revenge. What if I had killed Raven? Then what remains of his family will simply kill what remains of my family. It's a cycle of bloodshed I do not wish to continue."

"You said Raven was planning an attack on Vriknir," I commented, bringing us back to the original topic, "Why would he do that?"

Dakim sighed. "When something precious has been taken from you, the blame never falls directly on one person or thing. It's my understanding that when Roy's family was killed, although most of the blame fell on me, he was also angry with himself for not being stronger, for not being able to stop it from happening. Raven was angry with me, and he and several others got their revenge by killing my family, so the only theory that I can come up with is that Raven also blames Vriknir for not being strong enough to prevent it from happening."

"We still don't have an answer to the original question." Luke pointed out. "Raven may have known that Rae was still alive, but that doesn't answer how Lady Vanek knew."

"Myron told me that he was commanded to make my life the best possible because things could get real hard, real fast." I reminded. "It sounds like they know about the possible attack on Vriknir."

"And the only way they'd know that is if they had an inside man." Vic concluded.

"Luke, Vic, I want you two to find out who their informant is and see if you can convince them to tell you what they told Lady Vanek." Dakim instructed but then turned to me, "I want you to ask Myron about this, see what information you can get from him, but be careful not to reveal stuff you shouldn't know. You can tell them that he killed our parents, but don't tell them anything more than that. Otherwise they'll start questioning how you know all this, and you won't be able to answer without mentioning me."

"I understand." I said solemnly, hating that I would have to lie to more people.

Luke smiled and then tousled my hair, "Don't worry, squirt. We'll get this all figured out."

I watched everybody as they moved about Myron's house. The whole team always ate together on the weekends. Even though Myron was always the host, Karexon was the cook. It was always funny to see him standing over the stove with a goofy grin on his face and a chef's hat on his head. I also noticed that, even though the guys almost always kept the same hair style at the same length, the dyed hair from when they had gone to earth had grown out. The white highlights in Myron's hair could be seen just as easily as the blue highlights in mine, and Karexon's hair was now the midnight blue color that Myron had described to me. Roy and Kian were the boring ones who hadn't changed. They hadn't had to dye their hair when they went to Earth.

I decided to wait until everybody had taken their seats and gotten their food to start the conversation. "So, when were you planning on telling me about Raven?"

Every single person around the dinner table froze. Kian was even midway of bringing a spoonful of soup to his mouth when he stopped moving. It was so quiet that even somebody without heightened hearing would be able to hear a pin drop.

They all exchanged glances, shifting uncomfortably in their seats, and Kian put his spoon back on his plate. Eventually, Myron spoke up, "How long have you known?"

"Only since this morning," I replied.

"How much do you know?" He rephrased his question.

"I have some friends with connections. I know that Raven is one of the people who lost loved ones the day Vriknir was attacked. He was also the only one powerful enough out of the survivors to actually kill my family. He wanted my brother to know what it felt like to lose the only thing he cared about. Yet, that didn't give him satisfaction. He also blamed Vriknir for not being able to stop the attack in the first place. He wants to show us Vriknir's weaknesses by destroying it. I'm assuming I was brought here to help in the battle with Raven. What I want to know is, how did Lady Vanek even know I was alive? The only way she would have known that I was alive was if she had an informant with Raven."

"Rae, Lady Vanek didn't bring you in to help us. She brought you in to save us. In the past ten years, Raven has grown stronger than you could even imagine." Myron spoke.

"You didn't answer my question," I sharply reminded him.

He pushed his food away and rested his elbows on the table, looking directly at me. "We used to have an informant under Raven."

"Used to?"

He nodded. "She was killed. Her sister was that waitress from the Castell Cafe."

*So that was why Ellipsis had remained involved...* "What all do we know?"

"Unfortunately, not much. We're not even sure of his last name." Kian answered, and I bit my lip, hating that I couldn't tell them that I knew Raven's last name. If I did, I'd have to tell them that I had learned it from Dakim.

Myron then explained further, "His file was removed from the archives, something that has never been done before. Lady Vanek knew of your existence because the informant overheard Raven ranting one day about Dakim's sister managing to get away. Yet, even though we don't have much information on him, we do have one advantage. Our informant was discovered and killed, but we don't believe that Raven has discovered that she told us about you. You are our secret weapon. However, we also believe that Raven is building a secret weapon of his own."

"That Miutho attack at the bonfire..."

He nodded once more, "Luckily for us, their first attempt did relatively low damage. Other than the fact that it failed, we know absolutely nothing about it."

"Well, I can tell you that the Miutho was unstable. That's why it didn't do much damage. Yet, I have never seen Miutho that unstable. I can't even think of something that is capable of doing what it did."

"Whatever they are developing, they must be in the early stages. That means we still have time, but Raven is good. As you can see, we have almost no information on him and haven't been able to find any. We're in the dark."

"Then where do we go from here?"

Myron sighed, "It's hard to do anything without creating widespread panic among the public. The rest of Ellipsis has been focused on gathering information. Our job is to prepare you."

I nodded, "That is why it seems like my training is so much more rigorous than everybody else's."

"We were lucky to find out about Raven so early. If we're correct, he won't be launching his attack until a year from now. Right now he's still gathering troops and supplies. However, it's not like we can stop him. If we intercept him now, he might decide not to wait and attack now. If he attacks now, it would be like lambs to the slaughter. We're not ready. That's why we want to use the time we have to gather what information we can and prepare as much as possible, prepare *you* as much as possible. You and your brother are the only ones powerful enough to stop him, and with everybody thinking the worst of your brother, you are our only solution."

"No pressure," Karexon added with a smile.

I took a deep breath and gently pushed my plate away from me, no longer hungry. The sudden pressure had made me lose my appetite. "Now I know why you guys were keeping me in the dark."

Karexon shrugged, "Just think of it as another mission, except instead of it being your life at stake, it's the whole village."

I picked up a bread roll and threw it at him. "Thanks."

He threw it back at me, but I leaned back out of the way, and it hit Kian in the side of the head.

"Oh, it's on now." Kian picked up the roll and threw it back at Karexon.

Roy excused himself from the table as things quickly developed into an all-out food fight.

*So much for dinner... Well, at least the food didn't go to waste.*

### \*\*\* Myron \*\*\*

"She knows." Myron announced as he walked into Lady Vanek's office. "She knows about Raven."

Lady Vanek took in a deep breath and put away the paper work she had been working on. She didn't feel like scolding him once again for barging in, so instead she addressed Myron's announcement, "I guess we knew this would happen sooner or later. At least now you'll be able to train her without her asking questions as to why she is being pushed so hard. It would be best if she had access to all of Ellipsis' resources, but we can't induct her without the people beginning to ask questions. We're going to have to go through the traditional process, but I want her moved up the ranks as quickly as possible. I want her applying to Ellipsis by the beginning of February, understood?"

"Yes, ma'am."

### \*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\*

"You can have Luke and Vic stop their search." I told Dakim when I got home from dinner and found him still in the training room. Judging by the shape the training room was in, he had obviously been doing some serious training. There were dents and blast marks all over the room. Vic was not going to be happy.

Dakim turned when I entered, slightly out of breath, "Why?"

"I talked to Myron at dinner. He said that his informant was killed by Raven."

He sighed and then headed for the steps, "Let's go sit upstairs."

When we were upstairs, Dakim grabbed a bottle of water and then took a seat at the couch. When he seemed to be all settled, I took a seat on the floor at his feet and asked, "Now what?"

Dakim smiled, meaning he knew the answer, but of course he wasn't going to give it to me. He would make me figure it out. "What do we know so far?"

I took a deep breath, trying not to already get frustrated with Dakim, "We know that you were blamed for the attack on Vriknir. Wanting revenge, some of the loved ones of the people who died that day, Raven in particular, came after our family. They killed our father, and our mother sacrificed herself to send me to Earth hoping I could live a normal life. That means that the only people who would have known I'm alive are the ones who attacked our family. Not satisfied, Raven is now planning an attack on Vriknir, and developing a weapon that would allow him to do so. However, the weapon is still in its early stages and does a relatively low amount of damage."

Dakim nodded as he took another swig of water, "And how do we know most of this information on Raven?"

"Lady Vanek's informant," I answered. "She overheard Raven ranting about how I survived, but we don't believe that Raven knows she told Lady Vanek about me."

"And what happened to her?"

I rolled my eyes, "Raven killed her. I just told you that."

"What does that mean for us?"

I paused. Dakim's question had been abstract, and I wasn't quite sure how to answer. When I continued to draw a blank, Dakim finally answered, "It means that we no longer have a stream of information. We're in the dark."

"So we need to find a new way of getting information," I concluded.

Dakim nodded. "When it comes to developing something such as weapons, it is not something cannot be done by just one person. It takes a team. Raven will be almost impossible to get to. He's been planning this for several years. However, the people he is communicating with, his team, may not be so hard to get to."

"Then we switch our efforts to figuring out who Raven is using to develop his weapon."

Dakim didn't reply to my comment, choosing instead to finish off his water bottle. After, he said, "There is one other thing you should know. It wasn't just Myron who tagged along on your first mission. The whole Ellipsis team was there."

I was stunned. "How do you know?"

"I was there. You think I trust that Ellipsis Commander to keep you safe?" Dakim smiled down at me. "I think you'd also be glad to know that Roy gave those men hell for attacking you."

I giggled, "Thanks, Dakim."

"I'm telling you this because those men were targeting you. Their job was to scare you. They wanted you to give up on being a Riora." His smile faded as he got up to pace about the room. "The men who attacked you at your house on Earth and the men who attacked you when you came here to Kusnik were Hunters. They were only doing their job and aren't apart of this. I doubt they even know who you are. However, Raven isn't supposed to know about you either, so why would you have men coming after you, trying to dissuade you from becoming a Riora?"

"Unless somebody else knows about me?" I suggested.

Dakim nodded, "Which means that it is very else possible that there is another player in the game, a player we know nothing about."

"You think this player is working with Raven? Or do we have a whole other group to fear?"

Dakim shook his head, "I don't know."

"So, we're even more in the dark than we realized?"

Dakim tousled my hair, "Try not to worry about it. Whoever this player is didn't want you dead, only to scare you. It was the mercenaries who had disobeyed orders and tried to kill you. For now, I want to focus on Raven. We'll deal with this other player as we go."

### ***DECEMBER 23***

I thought my training had been intense before, but it became ten times harder, not to mention that I was still being sent on missions. None of my following missions were as bad as my experiences from my first two missions, but I was being sent on a lot of them. Since I could be bounced around teams, as soon as anybody received a mission, I was going. I didn't have to wait for my particular team to be given a mission. I could go on all of them, and, to everybody else's surprise, a member from Myron's team was almost always sent with me. That combined with the endless training really took a toll on me...

My eyes snapped open as soon as I realized I had been asleep. I wasn't in the middle of the field we had been training in, but I wasn't in my room either. It was dark, but, had I been in my room, I still would've been able to see the pictures of Christian and Dustin I had taped to the ceiling of my room. I shot up into an upright position, the fear of an unfamiliar place coursing through me, but immediately regretted it when my head started pounding. It took a second, but my eyes managed to adjust, and I quickly noticed the lyrics on the wall. *Why am I in Roy's room?*

*I'm still in my training clothes...* I noticed as I pulled the sheets back. I swung my feet over the edge of the bed, going slowly as not to cause my headache to get worse than it already was. *What in the heck happened?*

I made my way down the hallway, taking it one step at a time, but cringed when I stepped around the corner and into the sunlight. My headache suddenly jumped to a migraine. *What time is it?*

"Well, look who finally decided to wake up." Roy commented as he stepped into the room wearing only his black pants. His hair was wet like he had just run his head under water and sweat ran down his bare chest.

"Um," I scrambled, fighting the blush that was quickly rising, and tried to get my thoughts back in order. "What happened?"

"You passed out training last night."

*Of course I did...* It had been a few months now since I had come to Vriknir, but I still couldn't keep up with everybody else. I passed out from exhaustion way before any of the team ever quit for the day. It frustrated me beyond belief, but I didn't let it get to me right then.

He didn't say it, but I knew there was more to it than that I had just passed out. I had been pushing myself beyond all limits. For me to wake up and feel this bad, I had truly over exerted myself. He didn't have a key to my house so he could take me home, and I'd ring his neck if he broke in simply because I feared he would find something about Dakim that he'd be obligated to report. He could have taken me to the clinic, but there wasn't much healers could do for exhaustion. Instead, he had brought me back here where I would be comfortable. The blankets on the couch meant that he had given up his own comfort for me. It brought a smile to my face. He didn't buy me flowers or surprise me with romantic dinners, but that didn't mean he didn't care about me. He just had a different way of showing it.

"Thank you." I smiled at him, hoping my eyes would show how truly grateful I was.

His eyes softened, but otherwise he didn't say any more about it. Instead, he said, "Want some lunch?"

"Lunch! What time is it?" I exclaimed, trying to look outside at the sun, but my migraine prevented it.

"Almost noon," He answered as he walked into the kitchen. "I figured you needed the rest."



"Crap, I'm late." I looked around the room, trying to find my gear, meanwhile mumbling, "I am so dead."

"Table," Roy answered, knowing exactly what I was looking for. "What are you late for? I thought Myron gave you the day off since you've been working nonstop. You could use the rest."

"It's better if you don't know." I replied, snapping on my utility belt.

Roy paused in what he was doing, and I didn't miss the small smile. Nobody had seen Dakim, or even found any evidence that he had been around, but when we were back on earth they had all heard Dakim say that he expected my next letter. They had their suspicions that he was around, but they also knew what Dakim meant to me. They purposely kept their noses clean of it. As long as we were careful not leave any evidence that they would be obliged to report, they wouldn't ask any questions.

Yet, before walking out the door, I went over to where Roy was in the kitchen and kissed him on the cheek. "I said thank you, right?"

His small smile grew bigger. "I think you may have mentioned it."

I laughed and headed for the door. "See you later!"

~

"You're late." Dakim scolded, looking down at me from the virtual bolder he was resting on.

"Forgive me," I apologized, still trying to catch my breath after sprinting from Roy's house to mine. I plopped down on the virtual grass of the training room and looked up at him expectantly. "So, what do I get to learn today?"

Dakim sighed, obviously still annoyed that I had come late, but otherwise answered my question. "You may have only recently become a Riora, but you've been practicing your hand to hand combat for several years. Out of everything, it is definitely your strongest area. The Dragon Claws are by far your greatest weapon. However, if you come up against an opponent who specializes in long range attacks, you will be caught in a bind. I'm going to teach you a defensive move that will help protect you from long range attacks."

He jumped down from the bolder and landed behind me. I was careful not to move. Dakim was unpredictable, and if I moved in an unexpected way, it could be costly to my health. He bent down to where I was sitting and poked me between the shoulder blades, right where the Shapeshifter mark was. "This is your best defense."

"What? How is a mark my best defense?"

I may not have been able to see him, but I knew him well enough to know that he would be rolling his eyes. "I was getting to that."

"Right," I nodded and shut my mouth.

"Turn around. I think it would be better if I just showed you."

Obediently, I spun around to face him. I watched in pure amazement as Dakim's skin began to change before my eyes. His skin was turning black, and although it wasn't actually scales, it appeared to have a scale-like quality. It seemed to originate from the mark on his back and spread across the rest of his skin, covering his arms, legs, face, everything. His ears elongated to look like an elf's, and even his hair grew and changed color. It wasn't just bleached. It was snow white. He even grew a tail that was similar to a dragon's, except much smaller. In all honesty, it was really quite horrifying.

Dakim lowered his eyes. "I know it is a lot to take in at once, but it's not so bad once you get used to it."

I slowly stood and ran my finger down his exposed arm, feeling the skin. It wasn't slimy like a person expects a lizard to be. It was smooth just like a scale would be, and it almost sparkled in the virtual sunlight. He was right. Once I got over the initial shock, I realized just how beautiful it was.

"It originates from the mark on your back. Once activated, it spreads across your entire body, literally fusing with your cells. It is a slow process and cannot be used if you need a quick shield to block an attack. It is more like armor than a shield. It is called the Ultimate Defense because it is just as hard as the Dragon Claws. Nothing can penetrate it. However, it is not infallible. As I said before, it literally fuses to your cells, and it takes just as long to retract as it takes to come out. The one exception to that is if you receive a blow to the point of origin. If this occurs, the armor will be ripped from you instantaneously, ripping every muscle in your body as it does so. You will live, but it is described as leaving you in so much pain that you wish you would have died. As useful as it is, use it with extreme caution, because the consequences of it failing are severe."

I nodded slowly, taking his words to heart. In the meantime, I watched Dakim as he walked around the room. It was now that I realized why I had used a snake and a feline to describe Dakim the first time I trained with him. With the Ultimate Defense activated, his ears rotated back and forth with every sound they picked up. His canines were also elongated, like the fangs of a vampire. His tail gave him extra balance and was what allowed him to be so light on his feet. It was thick and could do some serious damage if he spun it around, but it wasn't awkward to him in the slightest. However, it was definitely the hardest thing to get used to when looking at him. With the black skin, white hair, and tail, it was hard to believe that he was actually flesh and blood.

He walked over to the window, using it to see his reflection. Then, he shifted his gaze so he could see me in the window. "Normally I wouldn't have taught you this until you had mastered everything else. This is by far the hardest thing to master and will not come to you nearly as quick as everything else. Yet, with Raven's impending attack, I figured it would be better to start teaching it to you now as it will be the most useful."

"Why is this all coming down to me?" I pouted, "You're more powerful than he is. Why can't you stop all of this right now?"

"Even if I did manage to locate him, he has an army. I wouldn't even make it pass the entrance. I would need an army behind me, and I promise that Vriknir's soldiers would never be willing to follow my command." He turned away from the window so he could look at me directly, "Rae, nothing says that you have to do this. You abhor violence, so nobody is going to force you to participate in this approaching battle. You can leave and become a Riora elsewhere. You can walk away."

"Dakim, I could never do that. These people are my friends. Myron has been like a father to me, and I love Roy. Even if I didn't have personal connections to them, I could never just walk away from somebody who needed me."

Dakim nodded, "If this is your decision —"

"It is."

"— Then Luke, Vic, and I will be with you every step of the way. You're not in this alone. We've got your back."

~

## ***DECEMBER 25***

I slowly opened my eyes, waiting for myself to wake up, but when I noticed the sun shining brightly through my window, I immediately jumped up. *What time was it? Why didn't I wake up? I always wake up when the first few rays come in.*

I shook my head, extremely frustrated, and rushed to get ready. This was not a good start to my day, not to mention that it was the second time this week that I had woken up late. With an annoyed sigh, I walked out of my bedroom to go into the kitchen and completely froze.

"There is a tree in my living room. Why is there a tree in my living room?" I said aloud to an empty room.

"If you take a few steps forward, you'll notice that there are presents underneath."

I jumped five feet in the air when Roy's voice seemed to come out of nowhere. I took deep breaths, trying to slow my fast-beating heart, as Roy came up behind me.

My heart began racing once again as a new fearful thought ran through my head. "How did you pull this off without waking me? Am I really that vulnerable?"

Luke appeared from around the corner. "I may have, possibly, spiked your drink last night when we had dinner."

"You did what?" I snapped.

"I said 'may have'." Luke clarified.

I rolled my eyes but couldn't help the laughter that came next. With a smile, I took Roy's hand and walked over to the tree. "I can't believe you did this. I thought you guys didn't celebrate Christmas."

"We don't," Roy told me matter-of-factly, "but we do celebrate birthdays. Were you even going to tell me that today was also your birthday?"

I glared at Luke, knowing that he was the only one who would have known it was my birthday, and then answered Roy's question, "With everything that's been going on with Raven, my birthday just took the back seat."

Luke squinted at me, "How do you forget your own birthday?"

Ignoring his comment, I gave Roy a hug and then walked over to give Luke one. "Thank you guys."

"Well, are you going to open up your gifts or not?" Luke prodded.

My smile grew, and I sat down on the ground next to the tree. There were gifts from Myron, Kian, Karexon, Vic, Luke, Roy, and even Charisse. I couldn't believe how many people Roy had gotten involved in this, and he had done it all right under my nose. I paused when I noticed Luke's name twice, but then I quickly realized that one of them was in my brother's handwriting.

I opened Roy's first, simply because I had no idea what to expect, and I was curious. I slowly opened the box to find a glass bowl shaped like a seashell filled with sand. Roy gently took it from me, pressed a button, and then handed it back to me. At first I couldn't figure out what he had done, but then it began to play soothing sounds of the ocean. He shuffled his feet, slightly embarrassed, "I know Christian and Dustin probably would have taken you out surfing or something similar for your birthday, but since it's snowing outside I figured I'd bring the beach to you."

I jumped to my feet and pulled him into a hug, although it probably looked more like I had tackled him. I didn't care if he stiffened up. He had put so much thought into the gift, and it was absolutely perfect. "Thank you."

He only nodded, and I went back to my presents. Luke got me a decorative, red Asian scroll with Hope written in Japanese. No doubt he'd had to go back to Ikicnie to get it. Charisse got me a beautiful silver hair piece decorated with a vine and leaves, that way every time I wore it, I would think of her. Kian got me several reference books for different languages, and Myron got me a wind up musical figurine that played recorded versions of Myron playing the guitar. Vic didn't buy me anything. Instead he designed something of his own. It reminded me of a ripstick, a sort of skateboard I had used all the time on Earth, except this one hovered instead of using wheels and was solar powered. Karexon's present was the most interesting, but what else would you expect from him? He got me a spatula and attached a note that read:

*Next time you decide to start a food fight, you can do it with the food you made. Happy Birthday*

Last was Dakim's gift. I unwrapped the tissue paper and discovered a black and silver pendant of two intertwined dragons. In the center was the family crest. Lucky for me, the chain was just long enough that I'd be able to wear it without anybody noticing. I slipped it over my head and tucked it underneath my shirt. The metal was cool against my skin and a shiver ran down my back. It was heavier than I thought it'd be, like it somehow contained the weight of our entire family history.

# Chapter 20

*JANUARY 6*

Dakim sat with me at the dining room table, watching as I worked on my electricity. It was really unnerving, and I found myself getting zapped on more than one occasion. As Dakim had said before, hand to hand combat combined with the Dragon Claws were definitely my best area. Telekinesis and electricity were my second best. They were what came naturally. The Ultimate Defense, on the other hand, was definitely my weakest area. It had been two weeks and I still couldn't get it to spread more than a couple of inches from the point of origin. The four main elements, fire, wind, earth, and water, also seemed to be giving me trouble.

"So, Myron has finally moved you past the basics?" Dakim finally spoke.

"Yeah, now that I know the real reason as to why I'm being trained, he doesn't have to hold back any more."

Dakim nodded, "Then I think it is time for you to show him the training room."

"What? Ow!" I exclaimed when I accidentally shocked myself once more, but immediately turned back to Dakim, "I thought you didn't trust him. Now you want me to allow him into our training room?"

Dakim sighed, "I still don't trust him, but I agree with the fact that you need to advance in your training as quickly as possible. If Myron is going to be of any use to you in training, he's going to need our resources, at least until you get access to Ellipsis' resources. Most of all, he needs to know all that dragons are capable of."

"And how do I explain it to him without mentioning you?"

"I don't know. That's your job." He stood up. "See you tomorrow."

~

*JANUARY 7*

I stopped at the edge of the carpet, and Myron walked up behind me, obviously confused. "Rae?"

"I've been..." I tried to find the right words so I wouldn't give away anything about Dakim, "*experimenting*. I've... *discovered* some abilities exclusive to the Adelinda family that most have long forgotten about." I threw the carpet back and lifted one of the loose boards. As I did so, a metal box rose from the ground. Already on my knees, it was easy to reach up under the table and grab one of the several weapons I had hidden around the house.

"Raelyn!" Myron shouted when I ran the edge of the blade across my thumb.

I held my hand up, stopping him from speaking any further. I made sure it bled a little and then wiped it on the scanner of the metal box. It scanned the blood, and then the floor boards next to it suddenly popped up slightly. I propped open the door before it automatically sealed again, and then wiped the blood off the scanner. "It's a special scanner that will only open if it detects the blood of the Adelinda family. There is no way to replicate the blood, so as long as I remember to wipe it off, there's no way anybody is getting in unless I want them to."

I wiped off the knife and hid it back under the table before walking down the newly revealed steps. Myron followed after me, looking around in amazement, and closed the door behind us. His eyes took in the sound-proof walls that came no shorter than being missile proof, especially since Vic had

been forced to remodel some after Dakim had last trained. On the other side of the room, which was even bigger than the size of an apartment, was a glass window and a fully sealed door. Behind the window was a super computer that ran all of the simulations for training.

"I don't believe it." Myron's eyes gave the place another go around. "I worked on this house for months. How did all of this happen?"

"For arguments sake, let's say that you were stuck in a friend's house, and you couldn't go outside because the minute you did you would be attacked. When you're stuck inside, you would find things to do to entertain yourself. One of those things just might be building a training site where nobody would be able to observe your training."

We reached the bottom of the steps and looked up when the only other door in the room suddenly opened. Vic, staring at what looked like a piece of plain glass, except way more high-tech, walked out, but froze when he spotted us. He looked at me in astonishment. "What is he doing here?"

"Don't worry..." I paused, catching myself. I had almost said Dakim's name. The training room had always felt safe to me, a place where I didn't always have to be guarded with what I said. It didn't even occur to me that that wasn't the case anymore. "I asked him to come down here. He is the commander of an Ellipsis team and has been assigned to train me. He can't effectively train me unless he knows everything."

His eyes narrowed at Myron, but otherwise he didn't say anything. "You want the typical training ground simulation?"

I bit my lip. Dakim had always told him what simulation to set up for our training. I really didn't know what was best. "Um, no, let's keep it the way it is. Let me show him everything first and then we'll figure out what to do."

He nodded, gave another nasty look to Myron, and then walked back through the door he just walked out. "Just let me know when you're ready."

I sighed and turned back to Myron. "That's Victor but most people just call him Vic. As you can see, he specializes in anything to do with technology. He also has the handy ability of being able to manipulate metal. This is what the room really looks like, but he uses a program to simulate different training areas. He can basically create any situation you can think of, and it's not an illusion."

"You mentioned he came with Luke, correct?" Myron whispered, taking in Vic's appearance through the window. He studied Vic's shaggy brown hair and the dragon tattoo that started on his cheek, trailed down under the black leather dog collar around his neck, and disappeared under the red button up shirt that hung open to reveal his black wife beater.

"There's no point in whispering." Vic's voice came over the speakers in the room. "In this room, I can hear a piece of dust fall to the ground."

Myron shut his mouth, but I answered his question. "My *family* found him out on the street when he was seven. He lived in an isolated village that didn't understand Riora. Seeing what poor condition he was in, my family offered for Vic to join us. We would give Vic food and shelter in return for the use of his abilities. The dragon tattoo he has is similar to the ones my brother and I have on our backs, and it shows proof of his loyalty."

"How does this room work?"

"In the back room there is this *thing*. I used to think it was like a computer, but it's actually completely different. It's a machine that was based off the Ikicnie ability to create illusions. However, there is one major difference. The Ikicnie ability only makes you think that there is something, I don't know, such as a chair in front of you. However, nothing is actually there. When the machine does create the simulation, it is less like an illusion and more like a virtual reality.

"Aside from all of that, the main reason I brought you here is to show you this." I held out my hand and was amused by the astonishment on Myron's face as he watched the Dragon Claws emerge. I finally understood why Dakim found it so funny when he taught me.

He slowly took my hand and turned it over, examining the claws. His fingertips ran over the claws slowly as not to cut himself. "These are downright scary."

"If you guys are done being all touchy, cuddly, and crap," Vic's voice came over the speaker, "We might be having some company."

"First of all," I turned on Vic, glaring at him through the glass, "Ew! He's like twice my age. Second of all, if you had these claws in front of you, you would be even more careful than he's being as not to cut yourself. Trust me, their sharper than they look, but I don't have to tell you that. You've seen them in action."

"Something I don't intend to see twice," Vic commented, spinning around in his chair.

I turned back to Myron, "You can't tell anybody about this, not Lady Vanek, not Jerome, not Roy, nobody."

"Not even Roy?" Myron questioned.

I sighed. "I want to tell him, I really do. It's not that I don't trust him, because I trust him with my life. However, you know Roy. He can't disobey a direct order. If another Ellipsis commander asks him about me, he will be forced to answer. The only way I can be sure he won't tell anybody is for him not to know in the first place."

"Then why are you telling me?"

"Unlike Roy who has to answer to every Ellipsis team commander, you only have to answer to Jerome and Lady Vanek, both of whom know about me. This way we don't have to worry about anybody else finding out who I really am."

Myron nodded. "I will keep this in mind when I plan your next training session."

"Actually, there is more that I can do. I've been working on Karexon, Kian, and your abilities, but I've also been working on several others. I've been learning Luke and Vic's abilities, but I've also discovered some on my own. I've been practicing electricity and the four main elements. Now that I know about Raven, I figured it was time to show you just all that we had at our disposal."

"This room will be very helpful in the next month, but hopefully by the end of February we won't need it because you'll have access to Ellipsis resources. You'll be able to use the training grounds and borrow several of our reference books that will help you master other abilities."

"That quickly?" I exclaimed in shock.

He nodded, "You were promoted to Ukemek the day after you found out about Raven, and you'll be promoted to Skekaek in a little under a week. Lady Vanek wants you to be applying to Ellipsis by the beginning of February."

"I thought it took years to go through the ranks."

"Normally yes, but this is an exception."

"Roy's going to be furious when I break the record."

Myron chuckled, "Well, I don't want to be rude by forcing your other *guests* to wait."

I smiled and called after him as he began walking back up the steps. "Thank you, Myron."

He stopped, looking back at me, "Anytime."

~

"You showed Myron the training room?" Dakim asked later in the evening when he, Luke, and Vic joined me for dinner.

I nodded as I set the food on the table, "But he said that he wanted me applying for Ellipsis by the end of February."

"It looks like they're pulling out all the stops." Luke commented before reaching for the mashed potatoes.

"But we're still no closer to Raven," Vic reminded.

Dakim shook his head, "Don't remind me of the incompetence of Ellipsis."

I angrily set my spoon down on my plate, "That was uncalled for!"

"Oh, calm down," Dakim brushed me off. "No need to defend your friends. It's not them I'm insulting. Vriknir's biggest weakness is their inability to gather information. Ellipsis consists of soldiers, not spies. If it comes to a fight, they're some of the best in all of Kusnik. I will give them that much. However, they are not trained in information gathering. I think it's time that I start taking things into my own hands."

~

\*\*\*Dakim\*\*\*

**JANUARY 10**

Dakim came to a stop in a tree not too far from the main path that led out of Dersnag. He had never needed a weapons smith, but his informants had told him that Ace was the best weapons smith in all of Kusnik. He was either directly involved with Raven, or he would know who was.

Dakim waited patiently until he saw Ace walking down the path, meaning he was on his way home for the night. Once Ace was gone, Dakim snuck into the city and went right for the building where Ace held his operations. For being in a Teyzas city, the building was extremely nice. The first floor reminded him of a hotel lobby. However, instead of a secretary behind the desk, there were three security guards. Dakim paused outside the doors, trying to figure out his best plan of action. *I can't just bust through the door. Raven already holds a grudge against me and my family. If he finds out I broke into this place, he may come after Rae before she is ready.*

Dakim smiled as he dug out a crowbar from a shed that stood behind a nearby building. He then cast an illusion on himself so he was the spitting image of Ursula, the girl he had met at the bar right here in Dersnag all those years go. *I really hope this brings her all sorts of hell...*

He burst through the front doors and strut down the hall screaming, "Where is he? Where is that cheating bastard?"

"Ma'am, I think you're confused," One of the security guards stepped forward.

"I know Ace is here!" He continued to shout. "Where is he?"

When the security guard continued to step forward, he took the crowbar and hit the guard upside the head, knocking him out cold. Before the other two could react, he spun in a circle, also knocking them out with the crowbar.

Knowing it was only a matter of time before other guards would figure out what happened, he began sprinting down the hallway. Once he hit the elevator, he immediately went to the very top floor. The second the doors were open, Dakim stepped into Ace's office and immediately ran to his desk. He scrambled through the many papers that were scattered on the desk. Most of them had to do with the business Ace used as a front for his weapons business. However, after digging through one of the locked drawers, Dakim found a letter addressed to Raven. It was written in several different languages, so it took him a second to process it, but it wasn't unreadable.

*Lord Raven,*

*You'll be pleased to hear that the development of the weapon is all going according to plan. The weapon is still not perfect, but we have managed to increase its damage output and is ready to be manufactured. We have found a small Teyzas city called A/sentra where we will be able to manufacture the weapon without any*



interruptions. Many of the Teyssas there are very poor and were all too excited that a new factory would be opening in their town. We are paying them less than even the lowest paying job here in Persnag, and they fought over working positions like animals.

The building just finished construction yesterday and operations began today. I can assure you that the building has the highest security and we have guards posted throughout, not only to keep the weapons safe, but to also make sure that the workers don't slack off. Within a few days we'll have production at a maximum and it won't be long before we have all of your soldiers outfitted with one of these guns.

The money I am saving through hiring cheap workers I have invested in other weapons smiths. I have given them huge sums of money to try and perfect the weapon, and offered a reward for whoever manages to perfect it first. They have been given good incentive, so I'm sure that it won't be long before we have the best weapon possible.

Dakim stopped reading when the sound of footsteps in the hallway reached his ears. Thinking on his feet, he quickly tucked the letter into his jacket pocket and also picked up a few other random papers, for if Ace's letter to Raven were the only thing missing, it would look highly suspicious. Once he had stuff all the papers he could find into his pockets, he picked up the crowbar again. When the guards finally reached the office, they found Dakim slamming the crowbar into the tables and filing cabinets that filled the office while screaming, "This is what you deserve, you lying piece of shit!" However, when the guards moved forward, Dakim turned his attention on the guards and started swinging his crowbar wildly, "You want a piece of me too!"

Dakim threw the crowbar at the guards, causing them to step out of the way, and he took his opportunity to burst through the middle of them and make a break for it down the hall, all the while calling over his shoulder, "You'll never catch me alive!"

The guards chased after him, so Dakim made a split second decision to step into a side passageway. Before the guards could also round the corner, he changed his illusion to make him look like one of the guards. When the other guards caught up, he shouted, "She ran that way! Quickly!"

They blindly ran in the direction he had pointed, and once they were gone, Dakim ran back in the other direction. He made his way back to the office and opened one of the many windows. Once it was wide enough that he could get out, he used pure Miutho to create a grappling hook gun. He fired it into the nearby apartment building and then was out the window. He appreciated the slight rush of adrenaline that came from flying through the air so wildly, but it wasn't long until he landed on one of the many balconies that covered the side of the building. Once he had safely landed, he let the gun and rope dissolve away and then closed his eyes, focusing on the open window. The window was some distance now, but with enough concentration, he could use telekinesis to close the window so that nobody would know that was how he had escaped. Once the window was closed, Dakim quickly made his way down the fire escape and disappeared into the shadows of the city.

Dakim didn't stop moving until he had reached the opposite side of the city, and once he did, he stopped into one of the city's less popular hotels. Once again, he cast an illusion on himself, but this time he used Luke's appearance. When he approached, the men at the desk greeted him, "Well, you sure are getting in late, sir. Would you like a room?"

Dakim smiled politely, "Yes, I would appreciate that."

"Right this way," The man nodded and led Dakim up to one of the many rooms. Once the hotel worker had left, Dakim sat down on the bed, and he pulled out the letter from his pocket.

*Alsentra, eh? That's not too far from Vriknir, but right now I'm on the opposite side of Kusnik. There are still weapon smiths here in Dersnag that may have a connection to Raven. I can't do both.*

He stared at the letter, trying to decide which would be more beneficial in the long run, hunting down more weapons smiths, or checking out the factory in Alsentra. A light bulb seemed to go off in his head, and he went over to the night table, the only piece of furniture in the room other than the bed. He started digging through the drawers, and it wasn't long before Dakim found a piece of paper and a pen. He transcribed the paragraphs about the factory in Alsentra, but left out the parts of the letter that mentioned other weapons smiths here in Dersnag. Once he was satisfied with his work, he put the original letter back in his pocket and then folded up the letter he had written. Now came the hard part. How would he get his version of the letter to Vriknir without them discovering where it came from?

Dakim tapped his pen against his fingers, however, when no ideas came to mind, he put the pen back in the desk drawer and lay back on the bed. He wouldn't be able to think clearly if he was frustrated, so he took deep breaths and traced the cracks in the ceilings with his eyes. He smiled to himself when he noticed one of the cracks looked like a bird.

*I can barely remember the day I taught Rae to make origami. It feels like a whole other lifetime...*

Dakim suddenly bolted upright. The woman who had showed up in Vriknir with no memories had been the informant's sister. She was still being watched like a hawk by Ellipsis. He could have one of Ace's assistants send it to her! Even the pitiful Ellipsis would be able to intercept that message.

Satisfied with the way all seemed to be working out, Dakim lay back on the bed and was instantly asleep.

\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\*

**JANUARY 14**

There was a knock on the door, and I set down the dishes I had been cleaning. After drying my hands, I went and opened the door to see a man standing in front of me. I didn't know him by name, but I had seen him around before. He was a member of Ellipsis.

"Lady Vanek needs to see you, now."

"Um, yes, of course, sir." I answered, stepping outside and closing the door behind me. I had to admit, he had peaked my curiosity. This wasn't the usual little boy who served as Lady Vanek's messenger. The man took off at a sprint, much faster than we usually traveled, and I followed after him.

When we arrived, the man held open the door, and I walked into Lady Vanek's office to find Jerome and a few other Ellipsis members I didn't recognize standing in her office. I walked in hesitantly and nodded to those who were above me in rank, which was just about everybody who was there.

"Lady Vanek, what is going on?"

"We intercepted a message that we believe is from Raven, but it's written in a combination of languages. It is my understanding that you have an interest in languages and have even begun to learn several of them."

"Yes, ma'am. I'll admit I was able to catch on much faster than most. However, I am far from fluent. I can try and translate whatever you need, but I make no promises."

She handed me a folder that was a little thicker than I would have expected for being an intercepted message. "Do your best. You're the only person with enough knowledge of different languages to have a chance at it."

"Lady Vanek, I understand how important this is. I thank you for trusting me with such an important task, and I will begin on it right away." I told her as I opened the folder to skim through it, but

froze when I saw the first page. The letter was in Dakim's handwriting! Yet, the panic that had been rising in me quickly flooded away. Dakim knew that I would be the only one in Vriknir with enough knowledge to translate this message. No doubt he had intended this letter to be intercepted. Then a question occurred to me so I quickly spoke, "However, if you don't mind, may I ask a question?"

"Quickly," She snapped.

I lowered my eyes, feeling the stares of the other people in the room, "Why don't you have more people who can translate this? One would think that being able to understand the enemy's speech would be essential for defending one's self."

"We have resources like Spanish to English dictionaries, and others who know both English and Thaivo have made dictionaries, but we do not have the resources necessary to learn another language. We have had to adapt to gathering info in other manners."

"But if we have dictionaries like that, why do we need her to translate?" The messenger who had come for me spoke up, but he immediately regretted it when Lady Vanek gave him a hard glare. I was also slightly angry. I hadn't missed the hidden meaning. He didn't care who translated it, as long as it wasn't me. He didn't want somebody who had only been here for a couple months and wasn't even an Ellipsis member to know about Raven, and possibly find out secrets of Vriknir.

Lady Vanek answered his question anyway, "Just because you know the vocabulary doesn't mean that you know the language. Just using a dictionary could lead us to mistranslate and a mistranslation could prove costly. Raelyn is the only one who knows how the grammar works, and although she is not fluent, she knows the language much more thoroughly than any of us."

The messenger lowered his head, realizing his ignorance, and I nodded to Lady Vanek, "Thank you. I think I understand a little better now. I will begin on this right away."

"We are counting on you."

~

"Rae!" Charisse shouted as she jogged up next to me when I was on my way back home from Lady Vanek's office. "I never see you anymore! How are you?"

I smiled in greeting. I got along well with Myron's team and Dakim's group, but it was nice to have a friend who wasn't always focused on training and improving. The best thing was that she allowed me to be a true teenage girl. She was a welcomed break from all the guys who constantly surrounded me. "I know. I'm sorry. I've been so busy with training and missions lately that I haven't had much time for anything else."

"If you don't slow down, you're going to be an Ellipsis member come next month!" She joked.

*If only she knew how true that statement was...*

"So what *have* you been doing lately? You've been so secretive." Charisse giggled.

I looked anywhere but at Charisse. I had gotten pretty good at lying over the years, but it was much harder to lie to the people I considered friends, "Like I said, I've just been training and going on missions."

"But why?" Charisse continued to question. "You're more than caught up. You've even surpassed Jocelyn! You were promoted to Skekaek yesterday while she was held back at Ukemek!"

"I'm sorry Charisse," I shook my head, "I just can't tell you."

She stopped walking and crossed her arms over her chest. She pouted, "I thought we were friends, and friends don't keep secrets from each other!"

I took her hands in mine, "We are friends, and I want to tell you everything, but I just can't."

"You can't tell me *anything*?"

"There is something Ellipsis needs me for, but that's all I can tell you. Everything else is classified."

She took a deep breath, but didn't continue arguing. Instead she suggested, "I think you should take a break from all that rigorous training and come hang out with us tonight. A bunch of us are going ice skating."

I shook my head. Raven's attack was coming, and I was nowhere near ready. I couldn't go out with them knowing that I could be preparing. I'd just make an excuse, "No offense, Charisse, but Jocelyn already hates me because I'm dating Roy. With me passing her up in rank, she's bound to hate me even more. I just can't see myself having a good time. Maybe we can get together some other time."

"Not *maybe*. We *are*. I'm going to hold you to that."

I smiled and watched as she walked away. I technically hadn't lied. I enjoyed hanging out with Charisse, and I was as honest with her as I could be without giving anything away. She was right. We would get together sometime. Maybe after everything with Raven was over...

~

"Shouldn't you be training?" Luke commented when he saw me sitting at the dining room table.

"Lady Vanek asked me to translate these." I held up the papers for him to see. "I know English, Spanish, Japanese, Arabic, Korean, Chinese, German, Russian, and Thaivo, but out of all of those, the only one I am truly fluently in, is English. Plus, there are some languages on here that I don't recognize."

"Let me see," Luke commented as he sat down next to me at the table, and I slid the papers his way. Without even reading it, he suddenly exclaimed, "This is in Dakim's handwriting!"

I nodded, "but I don't think they're Dakim's words. It doesn't sound like him. I think he rewrote somebody else's letter. Yet, I can't be sure because I don't understand all the languages."

Luke picked up the first one and studied it for a second, "Okay, well this is French."

I looked at him in amazement. "How do you know?"

He smiled and handed the paper back to me, "Dakim is a criminal, which means that he's not even supposed to be in the area. Therefore, he, Vic, and I spent a lot of time in other cities where other languages are spoken. There are only four countries on this continent, so I don't know as many languages as you do, but I'm still pretty good at the ones I do know."

We sat at that table for hours deciphering it bit by bit. It seemed like the language being used was constantly switching. A few of the words in the sentence would be French, while others would be in Arabic, but Japanese grammar rules were being used, meaning we constantly had to refer to our dictionaries. It was tedious and time consuming, but we eventually finished it.

I stood up with a sense of urgency. "I'm going to alert Lady Vanek."

It was really dark out by the time I finally arrived at Lady Vanek's office. She was just locking up as I approached and handed her the file. "There's a city, Alsentra, about two days from here. From the sound of it, Raven has allies there. Most of the message consisted of them discussing some sort of weapon. I think it's the same thing that was used to attack the bonfire about a month ago. That city is sitting on top of a deposit of Kunettium, a type of metal that can only be found here on Kusnik, and that's what they're using to make the weapon. If I didn't know any better, I'd say that Alsentra is the main base for manufacturing. If we hit that, we might be able to do some serious damage to Raven's plans."

Lady Vanek thought it over, "Yet, by doing so we would be alerting Raven that we are on to him."

"If I may Lady Vanek, didn't Raven find out that we were on to him when he discovered your informant. Even without the informant, we knew something was up the second he attacked the bonfire."

"Raelyn, thank you for this," She nodded, and I turned to walk away, but then she spoke, "Oh, and Raelyn, go hang out with Charisse."

"Excuse me?" Her question had caught me off guard, and I couldn't understand her reasoning.

"Keeping up appearances is every bit as important as your training. If you suddenly stop showing up and become like a ghost to society, people are going to start getting curious. We can't have people asking questions and causing a panic. Go hang out with Charisse, and don't do it just because I told you to. Enjoy yourself."

I smiled, "Yes, Lady Vanek."

She stared at me like something had just confused her and then shook her head. "You need to stop spending so much time with Myron. You're starting to sound like him."

# Chapter 21

*JANUARY 15*

I casually approached where Charisse was standing with Lance, Jocelyn, and a few other kids my age. "Hey, Charisse."

"Rae!" She exclaimed excitedly as she walked over to me.

I smiled, "I have some free time later, so I thought I might take you up on that offer to hang out."

"Okay," Her voice squeaked in excitement, "And you can invite Roy too."

I chuckled, "Well, I don't know about him, but you can definitely count me in."

**\*\*\* Lady Vanek \*\*\***

"Get your gear. You're going to Alsentra." Lady Vanek instructed and then briefed Myron on what Raelyn had discovered. "You're going to hit the manufacturing sight, but I want to make sure that it is impossible to tell that Ellipsis was behind it. Make it look like a robbery by bandits and take the Kunettium deposits, or something of the like. Assemble your team and meet Jerome at the gate as soon as the sun sets."

"Yes, Lady Vanek."

"Take Raelyn with you." Lady Vanek added as an afterthought.

Myron tried to hide his shock, but some still managed to come through in his voice, "Do you think she is ready for this kind of mission?"

"Skekaek are permitted to accompany Ellipsis teams on missions." She reminded him.

"That doesn't mean that she is ready." Myron argued.

"If you've been training her like you were supposed to, she should be."

"Her training has been going according to schedule, but I still don't think she is ready."

Lady Vanek leaned forward in her chair, her eyes narrowing at him. "Why do you have such strong objections to Raelyn being involved in this?"

Myron kept the anger from his voice, "She's already been through one tragedy, and yet she's managed to hold onto her innocence. She's optimistic and believes in people. She is an overall happy person. Getting her involved in this war will ruin her. I can already see it tearing at her."

"It is a necessary evil."

"Are you even listening to yourself?" Myron snapped, not even bothering to hold back his rage. "You sound like a tyrant."

"And you sound like a traitor." Lady Vanek returned, equally angry. "What happened to Commander Myron Masters who followed orders to the letter without questions?"

Her words seemed to strike Myron, and his voice was much quieter when he responded, but it was no less powerful. "I will follow your orders, but you need to understand that I'm going to keep Rae, not Raelyn, *Rae*, from this as much as possible. My team has a better moral when she is around. I heard Roy laugh for the first time in the year and a half that I have been working with him. I'm in no hurry to change that. I will not let this ruin her. If I see that she is about to break, I will take her and run without looking back."

She jumped to her feet in anger, knocking her chair over in the process. "You would abandon Vriknir?"

"No! I would not! I would fight for the people of Vriknir, and right now I am fighting for Rae." He took a deep breath and got down on one knee. "I believe in you. Lady Vanek, when I first became a

Riora, you were the person I looked up to you. Even today I still look up to you, but you have forgotten what it is like to be a teenage girl. Rae is driven by an invincible will power that will allow her to accomplish anything that she sets her mind to, and she can push past any physical pain, but she is still a kid who needs love, comfort, and a steady life. You are relying on Rae to save the people of Vriknir, but she can't save an entire people if she herself is broken."

Lady Vanek sighed, and then breathed in deeply. After a minute she exhaled and then righted her chair, "Myron, if you were in my shoes, what would you do?"

Myron took a moment, thinking it over, "Stop reminding her of how important this really is. She puts enough pressure on herself without having everybody else putting pressure on her. She knows the seriousness of the situation. I agree that she should be moved into Ellipsis so that she can have access to the resources, and if you want her to come on this mission, then I will not argue, but stop bearing down on her. Stop trying to force her into this position and let her come to terms with it on her own. It is the only way she will truly come to accept what is expected of her."

A tired smile slowly appeared on Lady Vanek's face, "I know Blaine was young when you lost him, but surely as a parent you know how hard it is to let go, so you must forgive me if I have overstepped some boundaries with Raelyn. I have been the protector of Vriknir for so long. It is hard for me to just step back and let Raelyn do as she pleases, but I will do my best to so as you ask."

He smiled, "Thank you, Lady Vanek."

### **\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

"So, he decided to come after all." Charisse commented as I approached with Roy. I nodded and then looked up at the hill with apprehension. "We're going to be going down that?"

"Yup," She smiled and then tossed Roy and I snowboards. "We better get going. Everybody else is already up there, and it's a long walk."

"I'll see you up there." Roy commented before teleporting.

"Cheater!" I yelled after him even though he was already gone.

Charisse chuckled. "I'll race you up there."

Not even bothering to answer, I took off running.

"Now who's the cheater?" She called as she took off after me.

When we both reached the top, we were too out of breath to care who had won. We were just glad that we had arrived. Lance came over and greeted me, as did some of the other kids who were there, but Jocelyn and her group of friends were too busy trying to get Roy's attention.

"Why is it so cold out here?" Jocelyn complained.

"Because it's January," Roy responded curtly.

I only shook my head and mumbled, "Piensa antes de hablar."

"What did you just say?" She glared at me.

"Think. Before. You. Speak." I spoke slow and loud so that even she could understand.

"Why you —"

Lance pulled her back before she could do anything. Instead, she sneered at me and then took off down the hill. When she was out of sight, I put my snowboard on the ground and held onto a nearby tree while I put my feet in. Roy and Charisse did the same.

"I've never done this before." I told Charisse once I was all set.

"Easy. You just go." Roy shoved me on the shoulder, and suddenly the board was sliding down the hill. I waved my arms around like a mad person as I did my best to keep my balance, but every time I leaned forwards or backwards, the board would turn left or right. I couldn't find a happy medium, and it wasn't too long before I ended on my butt, not even half way down the hill.

Roy's laughter came from behind me as he skidded to a stop. A smile still on his face, he extended his hand out to me.

"No," I swatted it away. "I don't trust you."

"Suit it yourself." He shrugged and then took back off down the hill.

I tried to get back to my feet, but every time I did, the board started sliding down the hill before I was fully on my feet. Then I tried turning the board sideways like Roy had it when he was stopped. It helped, but as soon as I was fully up, I fell forward and only just managed to use my hands to catch myself before I did a face plant.

"Roy didn't help you?" Charisse asked as she came up.

"No, I yelled at him to go away."

"Uh, okay." She giggled before helping me up. "You're freaking out over this. You feel like you're about to fall so you lean way back, and then you start falling the other way. Stand with your knees slightly bent to keep you steady. To turn, lean only slightly. Lean any more than that and you'll fall."

I rolled my eyes. "Easier said than done."

"Well, of course it is," She smiled at me. "Are you ready?"

"I think so."

"Then off you go," She let go of me, and my board was sliding down the hill once again.

Snowboarding was obviously not my forte. Even by the end of the day I couldn't make it all the way down the hill without falling at least once. I was probably on the ground more than I was actually on the board. However, I'd gotten really good at standing back up. Eventually, Charisse and I decided to call it quits and sat by the fire. We warmed up, and then watched everybody else who was still out there. Roy was a natural, but that wasn't surprising given his impeccable balance. Lance was just as good as, and possibly even better than, Roy. Lance could manipulate ice, so he would often make jumps that weren't originally part of the course, and he would do different tricks when he went off of them. Jocelyn was by far the most entertaining to watch. She kept trying to impress everybody, but ended up on the ground almost as often as I had.

"Thanks for hanging out with me today." Charisse commented, looking up from the fire.

"Of course! Why wouldn't I?"

She took a deep breath as she looked back out to the snowboarders and spoke hesitantly, "There was this time when Joc got a boyfriend, hoping to make Roy jealous. Any time I had a get-together, he came along, and, unlike Roy, I hadn't invited him. Joc brought him along without even asking me. She hung all over him and spent most of the time making out with him. It was like she was trying to prove something. You and Roy tease each other and have fun. I know Roy only comes because you're here and doesn't really talk to anybody, but *you* actually spend time with everybody else who is here. You guys don't even hold hands very often, in public at least, and there are times when I actually have to remind myself that you guys are dating. You don't make a big show out of it. You and Roy are like best friends, and *that* proves something."

"Thank you," A slight blush of embarrassment came to my cheeks, and I hurried to change the subject, "But yeah, Roy's not the touchy, feely kind of person. He won't stand there and profess his undying love for me, and you were right when you said that we hardly hold hands. Most of the time I can't even get him to give me a proper hug."

"But it's obvious that he cares for you," Charisse pointed out, "Because I doubt seriously that he would have come today if he didn't."

"I know." I smiled at her, and then watched as Roy went off one of the jumps and spun in the air. "Thank you for today, Charisse. I really enjoyed myself."

"What are you thanking me for?" She chuckled. "You almost died out there today."

"Well, other than that," I giggled.

"Rae?" Myron approached.



Charisse gave me a knowing smile, "Well, I guess that's my cue to leave. We'll definitely have to do this again some time."

"Definitely."

She waved goodbye to me and then left with her snowboard. When she was out of hearing range, Myron spoke, "Get your stuff. You have a new mission. Tell Roy as well and then meet us at the gate at sunset."

With that he walked away, and I watched him go. That was it? He wasn't even going to tell me what the mission was? Plus, he wanted Roy to go on this mission. What was this mission that Myron *and* Roy would be accompanying me?

~

I slowed in my approach when I saw Jerome, Myron, Kian, and Karexon all standing at the gate, waiting for Roy and I. "What's going on?"

"We're going to Alsentra." Myron informed me.

"The city from the message?" I asked as I closed the distance to where they were.

Myron nodded. "We're going to destroy the facility that is being used to produce Raven's weapon. However, we're going to make it look like bandits. If Raven isn't already aware that we are on to him, we want to keep it that way."

"We get to wear funny make-up and run rampage through the streets. It shouldn't be too hard." Karexon joked.

Myron opened his mouth to speak, paused as a smile broke out on his face, and then continued, "We're going to steal the Kunettium deposits that the factory sits on. It's worth a lot on the black market. We're also going to hit some of the richer people in the town, just to keep up appearances. We won't take enough to completely ruin the people, but we'll take a good chunk of it. If need be, we'll bail out anybody who was injured after the situation with Raven is over."

I felt bad stealing from people who had absolutely nothing to do with Raven, but I felt better knowing that we would only be stealing from the rich who really wouldn't miss anything that we took. Enough lives were already being affected by Raven. We didn't need to make that count any higher than it already was.

Roy brought my attention back to the present. "Jerome, you will be leading this?"

I had almost forgotten that Jerome was there. Hanging out with Myron's team made this feel like any other day, but Jerome's presence was a reminder that this mission was bigger than any of the ones I had been on before. The stakes were much higher, and failing with not an option.

"Let'sss go." Jerome shoved off from the wall he was leaning on and stepped through the gate.

When we were finally on the road, Kian started giving me more details. "As Myron mentioned, we're going to pose as bandits. No offense to you Raelyn, but for the past several months we've been training you how to fight properly. However, a bandit's fighting style is far from proper. Jerome doesn't think you'd be able to pull off a bandit's fighting style, so you'll be partaking in the rampage."

Kian had said no offense, but that didn't mean that it didn't offend me. Yet, it wasn't Kian that I was mad at. It was Jerome who had given the order. I rolled my eyes, but decided not to get into it with Jerome right now.

"When we hit the Kunettium deposit, we're going to be loud, which should bring whoever is in the factory outside. While we have them distracted, you're going to sneak into the factory and destroy it."

I nodded, "Sounds easy enough."

Karexon shook his head, "You're underestimating Raven. He's going to have this place locked down. Just because we distract some of the guards doesn't mean that all are going to leave, and there

are going to be a lot more security measures than just guards. Getting into the place shouldn't be too hard, but us few bandits against a whole security team is going to make this mission damn near impossible."

"Thanks for the words of encouragement." I glared at him.

He gave me a goofy grin, "Anytime."

~

"Is everybody ready?" Myron asked, his gaze shifting to each person. The men had changed clothes and picked up the typical axes of bandits. Their original clothing and gear were hidden in a nearby tree. I, on the other hand, was in full black so it would be harder to spot me in the cover of the night.

"Light us up!" Karexon exclaimed excitedly, but was careful to keep his voice to a whisper as he extended the unlit torch towards me. The elements had still given me trouble, but I managed to create enough fire to light Karexon's torch, who lighted everybody else's. When everybody's torch had been lit, Karexon turned towards the gate to the city, "Charge!"

The men broke through the gate and tore down the city streets. Karexon slammed his ax into a nearby house door and a woman's scream filled the air. Other screams soon joined it as the men made their way through the city. When they had managed to create a decent amount of confusion and a lot of noise, I turned into a shadow, as Karexon had taught me, and made my way into the city.

Finding the factory wasn't hard. It was the only building that didn't match the rest of the town. However, it wasn't suspicious in the slightest. The locals probably had no idea what even went on inside. Karexon hadn't been kidding when he said this place had major security. It had motion detectors that picked up the slightest of motions, even that of a shadow. It also had heat and Miutho sensors. Alarms would go off the second an unauthorized person stepped inside. *Well then, I'm just going to have to get authorization...*

I stepped back outside and found one of the factory workers who had responded to the initial bandit alerted. He was on the ground, unconscious. By the looks of it, he had been hit in one of the critical points by Roy. I searched his pockets until I found the clear plastic card that gave him access, and then made my way back to the factory.

I was almost there when I heard shouts and quickly ducked into a nearby alley. A group of men rushed past the alley, heading in the direction of Roy and everybody else. When they were out of sight, I slipped back out into the street and stuck to the walls as I made my way back to the factory. *I need to hurry. If any more reinforcements arrive, it could prove costly for Roy and the team.*

As a shadow, I slipped through the outside gate that surrounded the factory. That part didn't have much security other than the typical video cameras. Anything more and it would have aroused the suspicion of the residents. Inside was where it got a lot harder.

I slid the access card over the sensor and stepped through the door. The first room was empty. The access card had temporarily disabled the sensors and whatever guards that had been in the room had left when the *bandits* had arrived. I went around the desk and sat down in front of the clear, plastic screen. It turned on as soon as I sat down, and I began searching for schematics of the building. It took me longer than I would have liked to find them. Vic's ability wasn't something I had gotten a complete handle on, so I had resorted to searching the database the manual way.

Once I found where I needed to go, I made my way through the hallways as quickly as I was able to without drawing any attention. I knew immediately when I had reached the room that contained the lab. The door was made out of the same Kunettium and was practically impenetrable. I slid the access card over the sensor, and I could hear the locks slowly retracting. I had made a mistake. The door wasn't

even open a centimeter before I was blasted by the same buzzing feeling I had felt at the bonfire. I lost control of my Miutho, and it triggered the alarms.

Not being able to cope, I dropped to my knees, my hands over my ears as if that might help me. The buzzing was all-consuming, filling every cell in my body. It was like it was ripping me apart. There had only been a small amount of the unstable Miutho the night of the bonfire, but this entire room was filled with it. I couldn't think, couldn't move. I curled up in ball, not able to do anything else, and just prayed that I could die so I would no longer have to deal with the agony.

### \*\*\* Roy \*\*\*

Roy turned at the sound of the factory alarm. How was that possible? The hardest part of the mission was supposed to be distracting the security guards, five bandits against a whole security team. With Raelyn's multiple abilities, the factory was supposed to be the easy part. It was supposed to be, get in, destroy the weapon, get out. Realization hit him like a brick. *The weapon... No!*

Roy bolted back towards the factory, completely abandoning his cover. He didn't even slow his pace when security guards tried to step in his way. He took them out as he was running. The alarms had already been set off so he had no trouble getting into the factory. He made his way down the hallways, knocking out any guards that he came across in the process, still not slowing down. When he finally reached the weapons room, he found that several guards had pinned Raelyn to a wall and were beating her for information. However, she didn't seem to be aware what was going on. She was conscious, but it was like she was lost in herself, the same way she had been the night of the bonfire. Using his rage, he quickly took out the guards who were surrounding her. They hadn't been expecting a second intruder.

"Roy..." She mumbled.

"Shh, it's going to be alright." He picked her up in his arms and then made his way back towards the exit. He burst out of the gate to the factory, but when the sound of approaching footsteps greeted him, he slid down one of the alleys. With nowhere else to hide, he burst into one of the houses.

Children screaming immediately greeted him as he stepped into the house. A man and woman huddled their two children into the corner. Ignoring the family, Roy quickly set his ax down in the corner, and laid Raelyn on the nearby couch. He made her as comfortable as possible in his rush, and then turned to the family. They cowered in the corner and flinched when he approached, but Roy forced the father to look at him. In Thaivo he spoke, *"Take care of her."*

Roy left the house and searched for Myron and the rest of the team. He was taking a big risk leaving her with the family, but right then it was his best option. Now that she was away from the factory, she was no longer in pain, but she was still clearly out of it. She wouldn't be able to handle herself in battle. No, she was safer with the family, even if they were complete strangers.

"Roy!" Myron approached Roy, the concern plain on his face, "What happened?"

"This whole thing is blown. We need to get out of here. Now."

### \*\*\* The family \*\*\*

"Rafael, get away from her!" The woman snapped when her husband approached Raelyn, who was out cold on their couch.

He shook his head, "You didn't see the way that man looked at me when he asked me to take care of her. It was exactly the way I would have looked if something had happened to you, Gloria. He truly cared about this woman. That man was no bandit."

### \*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

I slowly opened my eyes, but bolted up when I was in an unfamiliar room, and this time it wasn't Roy's.

"Reice."

\*Stop\*

A woman's soothing voice comforted me, and her gentle hand pushed me back down on the couch. "Becac avouchi enakku."

\*You need your rest\*

I tried to resist her. "Where am I? Who are you?"

It was only then that I realized that she probably didn't understand English, but there was the sound of a door opening and Jerome walked in. Before I could do anything, he grabbed me by the shoulder and forced me to look him directly in the eye. "Thiss wasss your fault!"

"How was I supposed to know?" I shouted back at him.

He simply growled as he let me go, and turned away. At the same time, Roy walked in and I let out a relieved sigh. I didn't care if it was uncomfortable for him. I went over and gave him a big hug. Behind him, Myron, Karexon, and Kian walked in. This house was quickly getting crowded.

From over my shoulder, Roy addressed the family of the house, "Ecicu Becac."

Ecicu Becac, that much I knew. It meant thank you.

"Who are you? You're obviously not bandits." Rafael asked in Thaivo.

Myron looked to Jerome, and then spoke, "*We're mercenaries. That factory has hurt many good people, so we were hired to eliminate it. We disguised ourselves as bandits to not reveal our employer.*"

"That doesn't surprise me." Gloria commented. "*The place seemed to spring up overnight. I knew it was no good. Rafael, show them what you have.*"

Rafael went over and moved a painting to reveal a hidden safe. He turned the knob, and once again, I was met with the buzzing noise. It wasn't nearly as strong as it had been at the factory, but it was stronger than the night at the bonfire only because it was closer. I was still weak from my encounter with it at the factory and it made my knees give out. Thankfully, Myron was next to me and caught me before I hit the ground.

"Close it." Myron ordered.

"No," I interjected. "*No, I alright.*"

Rafael opened the safe all the way and pulled out what looked like a gun, except the top part of it was clear and inside was the unstable Miutho I had been sensing for so long. Everybody else could tell it was unstable simply because it was constantly changing colors and it made them feel uncomfortable. Yet, it didn't affect them nearly as bad as it did me. I had to hold onto Myron's arm just to remain upright.

Roy walked over to the safe, activating this Skayikon. "*Can I see the weapon?*"

Rafael handed the weapon to Roy, and Roy put the weapon in the safe and closed it. "Rae, can you still sense the weapon?"

I shook my head, "No."

Roy looked the safe over. "This safe is made out of Kunettium."

"So was the door to the factory!" I remembered. "I didn't collapse until the door started opening."

Roy cracked open the safe and pulled the gun back out again. Rafael was obviously disturbed by how easily Roy was able to get his safe open, but he didn't say anything. Roy continued to look over the gun, but he stopped when I asked, "May I see it?"

"Raelyn, are you sure that's a good idea?" Roy asked, concerned.

"Let me see it." I repeated with a strong voice, despite how weak I felt.

With Myron's help, I stumbled over to where Roy was holding the blaster and placed my hand on it. I watched in satisfaction as the colors mixed into one, and the Miutho became the sparkling rainbow substance it was supposed to be when in its pure form.

"Foolisssh girl." Jerome grabbed me and pulled me back. "Did you even think of the consequences of doing that? You could have just blown your cover!"

*"You are like me?"* Rafael asked with raised eyebrows.

*"What?"*

*"A chemist,"* Rafael clarified.

I turned to Myron, giving him a confused look. He answered for me, *"Yes, she is."*

*"What's a chemist?"*

*"Basically, they defy the natural laws of sciences. They can physically change the properties of substances, creating brand new substances."* Kian answered.

*"They gave this to me, hoping that I would be able to make it more effective. I knew that nothing good would come of it so I just put it in the safe and never opened it again."* Rafael explained.

*"May we take this with us?"* Roy asked.

He shrugged. *"I have no use for it."*

*"I don't think we're going to be going anywhere anytime soon."* Karexon commented, looking out the window. *"They have guards patrolling the streets now. There is no way we'd be able to make it out undetected."*

*"You can stay with us."* Gloria offered.

*"I thank you greatly, and maybe if it were just you and your husband than I would take you up on that offer"* Myron explain, *"but if my senses are correct, you have two children sleeping upstairs. I will not put them at risk. We will find some other way out of here."*

*"Karexon, you're up."* Jerome ordered.

He nodded and slipped out of the house. With Karexon's shadow ability, it would be easy for him to sneak around undetected. He'd be able to scout the area and then we could figure out what to do.

While we waited, I sat on the couch, doing my best to get some rest, and looked about the house. The house was simple and a little small, but cozy. The living room was barely big enough to fit all of us, and there were only a couple of seats, but none of us minded. It was bigger than the apartment we had stayed in back on Earth. However, unlike the apartment, this house felt much more like a home than a cage. Here, pictures of the family hung around the walls, and even some of the children's artwork. However, I quickly noticed how they all seemed to be wearing the same of what could barely be called clothes. They looked more like rags, and it broke my heart to see. I knew that Riora villages were much better off than many Teyas communities, but I didn't realize just how poorly many of the people lived.

Kian and Myron made small talk with Gloria and Rafael while Jerome stood by the window, still upset by how the mission had went. Roy sat in the chair on the opposite side of the room from me and continued to look the gun over.

I looked up when Gloria sat down next to me. I hadn't realized that she had stopped talking with Myron and Kian. She looked at me with kind eyes, and I realized that she probably wasn't much older than Myron. Then she looked to Roy, and it was only then that I realized that I had been staring at him. *"He is a nice young man. If only you could have seen how upset he was when he brought you in."*

Her words brought a smile to my face. *"I lucky to have."*

*"Would you like anything to eat or drink?"* She offered.

*"I good, thank you."*

She gave me one last smile before getting up, and I went back to watching Roy. Gloria had said that he had looked completely distraught when he brought me in, but it was hard to believe. It wasn't

too often that I got him to physically express his feelings for me. I could get him to hold my hand every now and then, and if I was really lucky I could steal a kiss, but that was about it. I'd admit there were times when I began to doubt Roy's true feelings for me, but knowing that he completely lost control of his emotions, something Roy was famous for never doing, when I was hurt made me feel better. It let me know that, even though Roy seemed to be off in his little bubble most of the time, he truly did care for me.

## Chapter 22

The room went still when there was a slight tapping on the window. When I realized what it was, I took a deep breath, trying to calm my fast beating heart. *Dakim, I'm going to kill you...*

I went over to the window and opened it just enough to allow the bird to fly through. I plucked it from the air and unfolded it.

*You're welcome*

"For what?" I accidentally said aloud, and everybody in the room gave me a funny look.

Not a second later, Karexon walked through the door. "I found a way out. The guards couldn't have been dumber. It was like a perfect path has been carved for us."

I looked back down at the note and smiled. So maybe I wouldn't kill him just yet. He was proving to be very helpful.

"We need to go, now." Jerome reinforced.

Myron turned to Gloria and Rafael who stood in the corner of the house, out of everybody's way. "I am truly grateful for what you have done for us. I only hope that one day I may repay the favor."

Rafael gave Myron a firm handshake. "Hopefully we are never in the situation where I may need you to repay the favor."

Myron smiled and gave the two one last look before we were out the door.

Karexon was sent ahead as a shadow to be a scout. I was going to go ahead as well, but Jerome was convinced that, since I had already messed up the mission, I would only mess up our escape. Any other time I would have argued with him, but I knew my brother. We wouldn't have any trouble getting out of here. The scout was only a precaution.

To be honest, I wasn't as mad at Jerome as I was at myself. I was mad at Jerome for not believing in me, but I couldn't help feeling that it was well deserved. It was because of me that the mission had failed.

Myron put his hand on my shoulder when we had safely exited the city, "Stop beating yourself up. There was no way you could have known that would happen when you opened the door."

"But that's just it. I should have known. I knew how the unstable Miutho impaired me from the night at the bonfire. I knew that we were going after the same weapon. Why didn't it occur to me that the same effect might happen?"

"Because you have only been a Riora for a couple of months," Myron comforted. "Rae, you are the most capable young woman I have ever met, but talent can never replace experience. You are expecting too much of yourself."

"Can you blame me?" I couldn't help but snap. I didn't usually mentioned Raven much, but I was getting so frustrated that it was all bubbling to the top. "I am expected to save an entire village. I am expected to defeat a man who is even more powerful than Jerome and Lady Vanek, and I am expected to do it with only a couple of months of training, when everybody else has had a lifetime."

"No, I do not blame you. I admire your bravery. You are taking on a huge challenge for a place that isn't even your home, risking your life for a people that are not your own. You are every bit as honorable as your father was, maybe even more so. I bet he's looking down on you right now, jealous that you are stealing his spotlight."

His words brought a smile to my face. He always knew just what to say.

"We won't be able to make it all the way back to Vriknir without getting sssome ressst." Jerome interrupted us. "We will camp here and begin again in the morning."

**\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

***JANUARY 16***

"I warned you that she was not ready." Myron debated with Lady Vanek when they had returned to Vriknir.

"There is no way we could have known—"

"But there was," Myron cut her off even though he knew she hated it. "Rae knew that something could possibly have gone wrong, but she missed it because of her inexperience."

"We have been through this before, Myron." She raised her voice. "I agreed that from now on I would go along with your suggestions. However, you must understand my reasoning for sending her. If she is to be the one to go against Raven, then she needs all the experience she can get when it comes to dealing with him. I thought that this might be the perfect opportunity."

Myron nodded, knowing that she was right. "The mission wasn't a total fail. We did fail to destroy the factory, but we learned a lot about the weapon Raven is creating." Myron took the gun Roy had taken from Rafael out of his pocket and laid it on the desk for her to see. "It is based after Earth's guns. However, the Miutho they are using as ammo is unstable and is ineffective when fired, as we witnessed when the bonfire was attacked. We have also discovered that the unstable Miutho sends Rae's senses out of control. She can't cope and is completely impaired when she is exposed to it in large amounts. When Roy found her, she was on the floor, curled up in a ball, unable to move."

"It could prove dangerous if our enemies discovered this." Lady Vanek commented.

"However, we also discovered that Kunettium blocks the Miutho."

"It could be a useful shield."

Myron nodded in agreement. "We also discovered that Rae is able to purify the unstable Miutho."

Dawning came across Lady Vanek's face, "We could use it as our own weapon."

"The only problem is that we have absolutely no knowledge of how it was made, so we would have no idea on how to replicate it. We just have the one."

Lady Vanek sat back in her chair with frustration. "Well, it is better than what they have."

"There is a person who recently moved here to Vriknir. His name is Victor Dymock. He may be able to help."

She slid the gun across the desk to Myron. "I pray that he can help."

~

"Victor!" Myron called when he walked into Rae's house and caught a glimpse of Vic rounding the corner.

"Vic," He corrected, not even bothering to look up from the plastic screen he held in his hands.

"I need a favor."

He completely ignored Myron's comment. "Does Rae know you're here?"

"It has to deal with Raven." Myron pushed. Vic paused and finally turned back to Myron, waiting for him to explain more. Myron took the gun out and handed it to Vic. "I think this is the weapon Raven is creating. I figured it would be right up your alley."

Vic took the gun from Myron and turned it over exactly as Roy had. He then shook his head, "This is made out of Kunettium. It is resistant to Miutho and is the only metal I cannot manipulate. I am afraid that I cannot help you, but may I take this? I think I may know somebody who can."

Myron smiled, knowing very well who Vic was thinking about. "Thank you, Vic."

He barely nodded, acknowledging Myron's gratefulness and walked away.



\*\*\* Dakim \*\*\*

"Check it out." Vic tossed the gun to Dakim.

Confused, Dakim examined it. "Where did you get this?"

"Myron gave it to me to examine. It's the weapon Raven is developing. Myron wants me to examine it and tell him all I can about it."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I couldn't tell him anything about it."

"And what can you tell me?"

"Not much more," Vic sighed. "As I told Myron, Kunettium is resistant to Miutho and is the only metal I can't manipulate. However, I do know that even shaping and forming Kunettium by hand is not an easy process. There aren't many people who can accomplish it, which should make narrowing down whoever is working for Raven a lot simpler."

"Have you told Myron of this?"

Vic shook his head, "Not yet. I figured you would want the first crack at it without having to worry about Ellipsis."

Dakim tucked the gun away in his pocket. "Good work."

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

"Where is Dakim? I thought he was going to be training me?" I asked as I walked down into the training room and found Luke sitting in the middle of the floor."

"I don't know. He simply said that he was leaving to chase down some of his own leads and said that he might not be back for a couple of weeks."

I simply shook my head, walked back upstairs, and took out a pen and piece of paper.

*You at least could have said goodbye.*

I sat in the chair and waited for his reply.

*I got a new lead and I wanted to chase it down before it got cold.*

*And you're not even going to explain yourself?*

*I'm using some of my own contacts to gain information and getting Ellipsis involved might prove dangerous. For now I think it is better for you to be in the dark.*

I grunted in frustration, curled Dakim's letter into a ball, and threw it in the trash. *He knew better than to leave without saying goodbye...*

~

**FEBRUARY 2**

"Having second thoughts?"

I looked up from the Ellipsis application I was holding in my hands as Myron walked down the hall that led to Lady Vanek's office. I then took a deep breath and looked at the door to Lady Vanek's office in front of me. "No, I guess I'm just scared."

He cocked his head to the side. "Scared of what?"

"The unknown."

Myron chuckled, "Yes, the unknown is a very frightful thing, but I assure you that Ellipsis is nothing to fear. It is the only rank you truly have to test for, but many people forget that they are even being tested. Basically, you and the other candidates will be sent on a mission and your behavior during the mission will determine whether or not you pass or fail. You'll also have to do a few combat exercises, along with a few other factors."

"How can one mission determine whether or not you get into one of the most renowned groups in Vriknir?"

He shook his head, "It doesn't. Your test began the day you became a Riora. Ellipsis keeps its eye on all Riora to find possible candidates. Putting in the application is only a formality. Believe it or not, there are some people who actually don't want to become members of Ellipsis. The test for entrance to Ellipsis is mostly to see if you can handle the pressure of knowing that your future relies on your ability to get the job done."

I looked back down at the paper, not able to figure out whether or not his words had been a comfort or whether they had just added more pressure.

He opened the door and shoved me forward, "Would you just get in there already?"

~

## ***FEBRUARY 7***

Patience was not one of my strong suits. Even after all of my training with Dakim and Myron, patience was just one thing they hadn't been able to drill into me. When I had turned my application in to Lady Vanek, she hadn't even looked at it before putting it off to the side of her desk, and now I was chomping at the bit. When my doorbell rang almost a week after I submitted the application, I rushed to get it.

When I opened the door, I found Roy on my doorstep, "A letter for Miss Raelyn. By chance is she at home?"

I rolled my eyes and snatched the envelope he had held out to me before stepping out of the way so he could come inside. I quickly tore at the envelope flap, trying to get it open. Opening envelopes was another thing I was bad at. I always seemed to rip it into tiny pieces before I actually got it open. Dustin had always said it was an operator problem.

I finally managed to get it open and hastily pulled out the letter inside. Roy read over my shoulder.

"I'm officially a candidate for Ellipsis," I breathed with relief, and then turned to Roy, "When do you think my actual test will be?"

"A lot of it depends on when a mission comes in that Jerome and the council thinks would be a good test. Once you've completed the mission and the combat exercises, it will take a couple of weeks for the process to finish and for Jerome to make his decision." He took the paper from my hands and read it over once more. "You'll be testing with the Keynes twins, Lynam and Liam."

"I never heard of them before."

"I have," He handed the letter back to me, "And it doesn't surprise me that they are candidates. They are a scary pair."

"What can they do?"

He gave me a mischievous smile. "I think it would be more interesting if you discovered it for yourself."

I took in a deep breath and let it out, ending in a smile as I sat down on the couch. I couldn't even work up the anger to be frustrated with Roy's vagueness.

Roy sat down across from me and stared at me in that uncomfortable way of his. After a minute he spoke, "You're relieved. You actually had doubts that you would be considered?"

"Jerome doesn't seem to have taken a liking to me."

"Most of the village doesn't seem to have taken a liking to you, but I can't imagine why." He winked.

"Oh, I don't know, maybe it's because I've managed to do in a couple months what would take most people years, or maybe it's just the fact that I'm dating you."

"Rae?" Roy looked me directly in the eye.

"Yeah?"

"Sarcasm."

"Oh..." My face turned red as I realized my stupidity. "Well who cares what the rest of the village thinks anyway. It's Jerome's opinion that counts."

"You're forgetting the council." Roy reminded. "Ultimately Jerome has the final say, but the council has a decent amount of influence."

"I've never seen the council. Do they even know who I am? Who my brother is?"

Roy shook his head, "I don't know."

I folded my arms across my chest, "You're no help."

He stood to leave as one of his cocky smiles broke out, "Of course I'm not. That would take all the fun out of it, and guess what else is fun?"

I just looked at him. I was never much of one for guessing.

"Now that you're a candidate, you're given access to the Ellipsis training grounds."

"Oh yes, because that was what I had been looking forward to all this time."

His cocky smile widened, "See you later."

~

Roy exaggeratedly opened the gate to the Ellipsis training ground and held it open for me to step through. I glared at him but otherwise stepped through the gate with Myron following behind. The Ellipsis training grounds didn't look much different than the others, just a bunch of trees. However, we only gone a little ways inside before we were greeted by a giant rock wall with no obvious way to get around it.

"Up."

"What?" I turned on Myron.

"Up." He simply repeated.

"But we don't have any gear or anything," I continued to argue.

Roy looked at me like I was stupid and then proceeded to climb the wall free hand.

"Screw this." I said, using my telekinetic abilities to lift me into the air.

"Not so fast," Myron grabbed me by the ankle and pulled me back to the ground. "We need to physically train just as much as we train our abilities mentally, and it wouldn't be training if you got to cheat. Now, up."

I looked up the wall with apprehension. Roy was already half way up, and he had one hand behind his back.

"You are insane." I made sure to tell him before I started looking for a hand hole. It was hard work, and it took a lot of back, leg, and finger strength. It was like I was trying to use the tips of my

fingers to hold my entire body. Thankfully, I was allowed to use both of my hands. What made it hard for me was my size. I couldn't always reach the next hand hole, simply because I couldn't stretch far enough. It was hard, and I had to really focus. I thought of one hand hole at a time. I looked for the next hand hole, made it, and only then did I look for the next one, and under no circumstance did I ever look down.

As I got towards the top, the hand holes got fewer and fewer, so I stealthily activated my Dragon Claws and began making my own. However, when I was almost there, I hit the rock a little too hard and the rock chipped away, causing me to lose my grip. I just barely managed to hang on with my one hand. Roy lay down on his chest, looking down at me over the cliff, and I thought he was going to help me up, but he just laid there, watching me with a smirk on his face.

"You're a jerk!" I yelled up at him and dug my hand back into the wall to create another hand hole.

He sighed, "Tell me something I don't know."

"Okay, how about: You're going to help me up."

"How about: No."

I sighed, and tried to forget about Roy, instead focusing on the rock in front of me. I slightly dug my fingertips into the rock where Roy wouldn't be able to see them, and then activated my dragon claws, giving me a better grip on the rock. When I removed my hand to climb up higher, I deactivated that hand, and then reactivated it once my fingers were back in the rock.

I was so thankful when I finally reached the top, and only then did Roy help me up. After he helped, I shoved him away, wanting nothing to do with him. He only smiled and followed after me. When I finally realized that I had no idea where I was going, I stopped and turned back to Myron who had come over the top of the cliff not even seconds after I had. He whispered in my ear, "Using your claws is still cheating, even if they do come naturally."

Myron led the way down the path, but the cliff we had just climbed up dropped off a few feet later. However, there was a bridge connecting this ledge with another one a little ways off. We were half way across when Myron stopped and looked over the edge at the logs that were floated down the river beneath us. "Do heights bother you?"

"They used to, but now that I can control my telekinesis better, it doesn't bother me so much anymore."

"Good," He commented, and then pushed me over the edge.

There is nothing like the fear of knowing that you're falling. Your heart skips a beat, and it's like everything freezes. It was only when I was towards the bottom that I realized that if I didn't do anything, then I was done for, and I managed to use my telekinesis to slow my descent. I managed to land on one of the logs that had been swept away by the rushing river, but the impact sent the log underwater and I found myself halfway submerged in water. Thankfully, I just barely managed to keep my balance and prevent the log from going flying out from under me. Myron and Roy were right behind me, but they managed to land on the logs with much more ease and didn't send them underwater. I just shook my head and turned my attention back to what was ahead of me. However, I immediately wished I hadn't, for before me was by far the biggest waterfall I had ever seen, even bigger than the ones on earth.

I watched in fear as we approached, the sound of the waterfall drowning out everything else. I bent my knees, preparing myself for what was to come. "You've got to be kidding me."

When I finally reached the edge, I took a gigantic leap out, so as not to be crushed by the pouring water, and the fear of falling took over me once more, except this time I was expecting it. As I quickly neared the water, I righted myself so I was feet first with my arms crossed over my chest. I hit the water much faster than I would have liked, the cold sending me into shock, and the water rushed up my nose. I hurried to break the surface and went into a coughing fit as soon as I did. I made my way over to the shore and collapsed, just glad to be alive.

Still breathing hard, I watched as Myron and Roy made their way over the waterfall. However, they managed to land on the log once more, and acted as if it was nothing special.

"That is suicide." I pointed at the waterfall, but I had been referring to the whole experience altogether.

"It's survival." Roy corrected.

"No, survival is knowing what berries to eat and which ones not to eat when you're stuck in the wilderness.

"What you're describing is Survival 101. This is Survival 5000." Roy taunted.

I rolled my eyes and laid back on the ground. "Of course it is."

# Chapter 23

*FEBRUARY 14*

I walked to Lady Vanek's office and was greeted by Myron at the entrance to the building, "What, no chocolates or flowers from Roy on Valentine's Day?"

"You guys don't celebrate Valentine's Day."

"No, but the gesture would have been nice."

I stopped and looked at Myron, "Are you and I thinking of the same Royce Adimari?"

He chuckled and held open the door for me, "No, I guess not."

When I walked into Lady Vanek's office, I found two similar looking men already there.

Obviously they were the Keynes twins Roy had spoken of. They looked to be about Karexon's age or maybe a year older. Lynam's hair was a dark shade of orange, and Liam's was metallic silver, but even more striking was their eyes. Lynam's left eye was silver and his right eye was orange while Liam's eyes were the other way around. Past that, they were truly identical with their thin lips, pointy noses, and triangle faces.

Also standing along the back window were all the Ellipsis Commanders, and Myron took his place among them. Roy was also there, standing off to the side.

"Welcome Raelyn. Now that the three of you are here, I can give you your mission. There is a city named Cettce that has fallen under attack. It is not a Riora city, but we do a lot of trade with them and our economy would take a serious hit if the city were to fall. It will be your job to make sure that doesn't happen. Roy is going to be your team leader. However, the addition of three candidates for Ellipsis and Roy will not help much if this comes to full scale war. This is why I am sending a few of the Ellipsis commanders and their teams with you." Lady Vanek turned in her chair so she was facing the Commanders. "I will need two volunteers."

Unsurprisingly, Myron stepped forward, "I will go."

Then, a second commander stepped forward, and I realized it to be the commander of Kian's brother, Hiram. "I as well."

Lady Vanek nodded and turned back to us. "It is settled then. You will leave as soon as you are packed."

~

I arrived at the gate first simply because my house was the closest. Lynam and Liam arrived next. I went to give them a smile, but they only gave me dirty looks.

"Don't think that just because you date that son-of-a-bitch Roy you're guaranteed a spot in Ellipsis. Liam sneered at me.

"That's right." Lynam added. "The decision is made by the heads of Ellipsis, and they're actually less likely to give you a spot because they discourage relationships between their members. It clouds your judgment."

I took a step back, as if that would make me less threatening to them, and chose to look anywhere but directly at them. It had gotten really tense, really fast. Yet, I couldn't help the small smile. As I had told Christian, I would make it in life because I had worked hard, not because I got special privileges. However, they didn't understand that, so I was extremely grateful when everybody else arrived.

"You must be Hiram Dalca." I extended my hand to him with a smile when they had arrived at the gate.

"And you must be the famous Raelyn Murray that Kian talks so much about."

"He's exaggerating." Kian said and he came up and put his arm around his brother's shoulders.

I looked back and forth between the two of them. Kian was maybe just a few inches taller than Hiram, and although they didn't have the same hair color, their faces were the same shape. Hiram's hair was a dark shade of orange, but his eyes were chocolate brown, and I couldn't help but think of Halloween.

"Who is older?"

"He is," Kian spoke, "Even though I'm taller."

Hiram rolled his eyes. Obviously Kian's height was something he had never let Hiram live down. He then elaborated, "He's twenty-five and I'm twenty-six."

"If you two are done bickering about something you can't change, it is time for us to get going." Hiram's commander came over.

I was a little taken aback with the commander's curtness, and then Kian whispered, "You've gotten used to Myron, but most commanders actually aren't like Myron at all. Myron is kind of laid back and generally carefree, but most commanders are pretty strict and can be really tough. Don't worry," He added when he noticed my concerned expression, "Once you're accepted in Ellipsis, you'll continue with Myron only because Lady Vanek and Jerome don't want anybody else finding out about your heritage."

We started down the road with Hiram's commander and his team leading the way, and Myron and his team, minus Roy, brought up the rear. Once we were on our way, I turned to Roy, "So what do we know?"

"Our target is Kenyon Dedman."

*Well then, I guess it's a good thing I'm a woman...*

"Dedman was the one who launched the attack. He was a politician until recently when the people removed him from office. Dedman is weak and has never seen a day of battle in his life, but his body guard is much stronger. Rumor has it that his body guard is a mercenary from Ikicnie, but nobody seems to know exactly who he is."

"Do we know what his ability is?"

Roy didn't answer, so I took it to be a no.

We were greeted with a warm welcome when we arrived at the city. It was bigger than Alsentra and had more activity. The people of Alsentra were middle class and were used to working for their food. The people of this city were used to living more extravagantly and were unprepared for battle.

"We are at your command." Myron informed the leader of city.

"We are truly grateful for your help."

~

## ***FEBRUARY 21***

I sat atop the stone wall that surrounded the city as a sentry. Roy was next to me, and Lynam and Liam were a few feet away. The rest of Myron and Hiram's teams were also posted on random spots along the wall. It was the same thing we had done every night since we had arrived at Cettce a week ago, and I was beginning to wonder whether this attack was even going to happen. Yet, as soon as that thought ran across my mind, an unfamiliar feeling ran through me, but it was only for a second.

I sat up straight, looking out over the forestry that surrounded Cettce all around. If somebody was out there, they were concealing themselves well. I closed my eyes and tried to pretend that I was sitting by the lake with Myron. I extended my senses, focusing more on my hearing, and that was when I heard it. Tree branches were snapping, and it was too loud to be any animal. Yet, if there is somebody out there, then why wouldn't we have noticed it by now?

*Because the body guard is from Ikicnie! They could sneak up on us and we would never even realize it.*

I jumped to my feet. "Be ready!"

As soon as I sounded the alarm, several soldiers hidden in the forest suddenly revealed themselves to be much closer to the city than we would have liked. Roy quickly pulled out his throwing knives and activated his Skayikon to allow him to see the soldiers even through the trees. I outstretched my hands, letting the telekinetic energy flow through me. I reached out to the trees and then felt down to the roots. The trees were heavy and I had to focus on one root at a time, but I eventually managed to uproot one of the trees, causing it to fall over. I knocked the trees over one by one, creating a second wall of defense around the city.

"There!" Lynam pointed out towards the forest. "Dedman is fleeing."

"He must not have expected Ellipsis to come to Cettce's rescue." Liam added.

"Let's give chase." Roy commanded. "Without him, these soldiers are nothing."

"But everybody else –" I began.

"The Ellipsis members can handle themselves against the soldiers. We can't let Dedman escape."

I followed him as he went over the side of the wall, digging one of his knives into the wall to slow his descent. I didn't even bother. I simply jumped over the side and used my telekinesis to prevent me from hitting the ground too hard. *Maybe there really was a purpose to the hell Myron and Roy had put me through at the Ellipsis training grounds.*

We were quickly heading into the forest, and I suddenly wished that I could light a ball of fire in my hand, but I couldn't with Lynam and Liam so close. I was having a hard time seeing anything until it was right in front of me. Roy was having an easier time with his Skayikon, so I just did my best to mirror his movements. I followed close behind him as we flew through the forest, and Lynam and Liam followed close behind us.

Dedman weaved in and out of trees, but we were easily able to keep up. If he thought he could lose us that easily, he was obviously mistaken. We chased him through the forest until the trees died away revealing an old, abandoned, industrial building. Dedman burst through the front doors, and we followed him inside without hesitating. However, the second we stepped inside, the lights suddenly flew on, temporarily blinding us, and we found ourselves surrounded by several men all armed with weapons.

We only had mere moments to assess the new situation we found ourselves in before the men started attacking, but there were a few things that I noticed. Most of the men Dedman had hired were Teysas, meaning we would have the advantage, but I also knew better than to underestimate an opponent. Mixed in with the several Teysas were a few Riora, so we'd have to be careful that they didn't catch us off guard. The building we found ourselves in was full of support poles and railings, and several boxes and other containers were scattered about the room. Roy would have the advantage here, because he could use his agility to outmaneuver his opponents.

One of the men let out a wild yell as he ran forward at Roy with his ax held high above his head. The rest of the men followed suit. As soon as the men had started charging, Roy had taken off towards one of the piles of boxes. Some of the men tried climbing up after him, but the second he got to the very top, he took the crowbar used for opening the crates and did a backflip off, landing behind the men. Before they could turn around and figure out where he had gone, he struck two of them with the crowbar. He then threw the crowbar at one of the other men before taking off running again. He ran to the other side of the room, but then grabbed one of the support poles and used it to swing around and kick one of the men in the stomach, knocking him into another. However, one of the men took the opportunity to take a swing at Roy. Yet, he managed to avoid it by gripping the pole and flipping himself so that his face was towards the ground and his feet were dangling in the air. One of the men then swung



an ax at him, but he continued to climb up the pole, despite the way he was upside down. He then flipped himself and dropped to the ground, landing on the shoulders of one of the men. The force of the impact caused the man's knees to buckle, and he dropped to the ground. Yet, before Roy could fall with him, he jumped up and grabbed the metal mesh that made up the flooring of the second floor. He swung along as if he were on the monkey bars of a jungle gym, and then dropped behind some barrels, disappearing from the sight of the enemy. The men approached carefully, but the barrels suddenly went rolling to the ground, knocking over several of the men. Roy then jumped on top of one of the rolling barrels and knocked out a few of the men he rolled past. When the barrel hit the wall on the other side of the room, he jumped from the barrel and slid between two of the railing bars right before one of the Riora spit acid at the railing, melting the place his hand had just been. Roy then went charging at the Riora who could spit acid. The Riora tried spitting acid directly at Roy, but Roy hit the ground, sliding right between the Riora's legs. Roy then popped back up to his feet and struck the Riora in the spinal cord in one fluid motion.

While those men went after Roy, others went after me, Lynam, and Liam. I sidestepped as one lunged at me with a knife and elbowed him in the kidney with one arm while using the other to grab one of the knives in the holster. However, I only had the knife in my hand for a split second before I sent it flying at one of the men trying to sneak up on the twins. With my attention focused on the twins, I had stopped paying attention to the men around me and was greeted with a face to my fist. I fell to the ground from the impact, but managed to roll out of the way before he could stomp on me. I then used my telekinesis to propel me upwards, head-butting the man right under the chin. He stumbled backwards and another front kick to the chest by me sent him crashing into the boxes behind him.

I then used to my telekinesis to pick up one of the metal rods that was lying in the corner of the room and brought it flying across the room at one of the men. Roy grabbed onto the rod as it went flying passed him and let it pull him through the air, using the momentum to do a flying side kick into one of the men. One of the men then came at me with a sword, but Roy bent over so I could spin across his back to avoid it. As he bent over, he grabbed some metal cable that was lying on the ground, and once I had cleared his back, he used the cable to grab the wrist of the man who held the sword. He then used the cable to pull the men forward into the man's knee. However, instead of knocking him unconscious as Roy had expected it to, the man recovered and used the cord to send Roy flying through the air. Thankfully I was able to use my telekinesis to slow him down enough for him to right himself in the air and grab onto one of the second floor railings with his feet. The second he had grabbed onto the railing with his feet, I had start running towards him, and as I approached he held out his hands to me. I grabbed hold and he swung me forward so I could drive my feet into a man's chest. He managed to swing me backwards in time to avoid a jab from one of the men's lances and gave me enough momentum to do a backflip up to the second floor metal balcony.

Roy then flipped himself up to the second floor balcony and put his back to mine so we could take care of the four men who were coming at us from both sides. He reached around and pulled my belt from around my waist just in time to wrap it around the wrist of the man who had lunged at him with a knife. He then twisted the belt so the man's hand was pinned behind him and kicked him in the back so he fell over the railing. As he did so, I pulled a knife from the holster on Roy's side and sent it flying at the man who had been trying to attack him from behind. In the process, I had let down my own guard and one of the men had snuck up behind me. Yet, Roy grabbed me around the waist and spun me around him like a dancer while I used my feet to knock the man in the back, also sending him over the railing. Now there was only one man left on the second floor and he thrust his arm forward, using Miutho to send a red laser at us. I used my telekinesis to deflect it as Roy ran up the wall and flipped over him, hitting a Miutho point in his arm in the process. Before the man could recover, Roy did a sweep kick that dropped the man to the ground, and Roy hit the Miutho point in his other arm before he could hit the ground. Roy then hit the critical points in the man's legs, making him unable to get up

again. With his legs paralyzed and the Miutho blocked in his arms, he wouldn't pose a threat to us anymore.

I looked over the balcony at the first floor just in time to see Liam knock out the last remaining enemy. Lynam then pointed to something on the first floor that I couldn't see, "There! Dedman is fleeing."

"After him!" Roy commanded as he and I jumped over the balcony to follow the twins after Dedman back into the forest.

He didn't make it very far before Roy pulled out one of his knives and sent it flying at Dedman, striking him in the leg. Dedman fell to the ground, but tried to continue crawling away from us. However, a cliffside stopped him from going any further. Just when we thought we had him, I felt a second presence on top of the cliff. Roy looked up, also sensing him, and I could see his irises rotating as they focused in on the figure. He then quickly turned to Liam and Lynam. "One of you send for Myron."

"Too late." The man dropped to the ground, separating us from Dedman. It was still dark, but he was close enough for me to be able to see his features. His eyes were eerie white. He had no pupils at all, and scars surrounded his eye sockets. He was only about Roy's size, so he was smaller than even Lynam and Liam, but he had willingly dropped in front of a known Ellipsis member and three Ellipsis candidates. Plus, there was something about his face that screamed intimidation.

The man threw something we were unable to see, and before any of us were able to react, Lynam and Liam were tied to a nearby tree. He had the element of surprise on his side. We were still scrambling. Roy took up a fighting stance, but all of the sudden, he froze.

"Roy?" I called out but he didn't respond.

"My name is Zandar Ruya, but most people just call me the Nightmare Man." Zandar's deep, menacing voice came through the night.

As Zandar spoke, Roy dropped to his knees, holding his head, screaming. He was in terrible pain, that was obvious enough, but I had to fight the urge to go over to him. I needed to stay focused on the enemy in front of me. I was the only person left who hadn't been hindered in some way.

Zandar turned to me with an evil smile. "I wonder what your worst nightmare is."

His eyes then widened, and it was like I'd been hit with some invisible force, causing me to stumble backwards a few steps, but otherwise nothing happened.

"What?" Zandar exclaimed. "What is this?"

I smiled, standing up straight. "You can't show me my worst nightmare, because my worst nightmare is already happening. What scares me most is the idea of my comrades being hurt or captured. Look around. Lynam and Liam are trapped, and Roy is in excruciating pain. You can't show me anything that scares me more than that. Now, you're going to learn what happens when you hurt my friends."

I thrust my arm forward, sending Zandar flying backwards, and Dedman managed to duck just in time. While Zandar was on the ground, I took the opportunity to free Lynam and Liam. I chose to help them first because that was all I had time for. Roy was going to need much more help than what I could give in these few spare moments.

Liam and Lynam stepped forward, and I watched in amazement as they joined hands, fusing into one person. His hair was the two colors of Liam and Lynam, but he was taller and more buff. He wore Liam's jacket and Lynam's shirt. At thirty, Lynam and Liam had still looked soft, like they were younger than they really were, but this new combination of them was older, with a firm jaw and hard eyes. The only thing that gave away that he was actually a fusion was the fact that he had four arms instead of two. When he spoke, it was like a combination of the voices, "Take care of Lord Adimari. We'll handle Zandar."

*He still refers to himself as if he's two separate people. Okay...*

I shook my head as I turned my attention back to Roy, and got down on the ground next to him. He was drenched in sweat and still looked as if he were in serious pain.

"Roy?" I placed my hand on his shoulder. My touch seemed to bring him from whatever nightmare he was locked in, and he collapsed. I let him fall into me, supporting his weight. I felt so bad for him. I remembered when we were in the small apartment on Earth and I saw him wake up from the nightmare of his parents' and sister's death. He'd opened up so much since then. I thought he had finally been getting over it. For it to be brought back like that, I couldn't even begin to imagine how much it hurt.

As it became obvious that a fight was going to break out, Dedman tried to slip away unnoticed, but I caged him in a telekinetic box. Yet, that was no easy feat. Keeping the box in tact took almost all of my concentration, and the rest of my attention was devoted to making sure that nobody snuck up on Roy when he was down. Lynam and Liam would be on their own for this fight.

The fusion thrust their fist forward, despite the great distance between them and Zandar. Yet, to Zandar's surprise, it extended the distance between them and hit him square in the face. He stumbled backwards, holding his nose, which was now bleeding profusely. Becoming angry, Zandar widened his eyes at the fusion, but they just smiled and spoke, "We are two heads combined. You will have to do much better than that if you wish to penetrate our mind."

The fusion then thrust both their hands forward, trying to grab ahold of Zandar, but he dodged their grab and ran forward at the fusion, faster than their arms could retract. He took the opportunity to strike the fusion in their face, causing them to stumble backwards, but he didn't stop there. While the fusion was off balance, he struck them in the chest, causing them to fall to the ground. I watched in horror as Zandar quickly pulled a knife and brought it down on their stomach, but to my surprise, their body split slightly, creating a big hole where Zandar's knife would have struck them. Zandar recoiled in surprise, but the fusion smiled. Zandar had been confident and let his guard down. The fusion clasped their hands around Zandar, and their fingers fused together to create an inescapable bind. The fusion got to his feet, the hole in his stomach closing as he did so. They then extended their arms to raise Zandar way above their head, and threw him to the ground as hard as they could. There was a disgusting crack as Zandar landed on his right arm and snapped the bone.

Zandar quickly jumped to his feet and took a few steps back, acting as if the pain in his arm was nothing at all, despite how nasty the break was. He pulled out a knife with his left hand and ran back at the fusion, and I was surprised by how much his fighting style reminded me of Roy's. Roy reminded me of an assassin back on Earth, attacking with short and quick, but powerful movements. Zandar was fast and fluid, making him hard to hit. This allowed him to get inside the fusion's guard time and time again, yet the fusion had the ability to reshape their body, and it was what saved their life time and again. Their slow speed was an obvious weakness, but Zandar's weakness was also quite obvious. The one difference between Roy and Zandar was that Roy knew how to take a hit. Zandar could avoid most of the fusion's attacks, but all it took was one hit to knock Zandar to the ground.

The fusion split their shoulder in half to once again dodge one of Zandar's jabs and took the opening to knock Zandar to the ground. However, before Zandar could jump back to his feet again, the fusion changed their fist to the shape of a hammer and brought it down hard on Zandar's legs, causing him to yell out in pain. He wouldn't be getting up any time soon, possibly ever. The fusion had completely smashed his legs. Yet, Zandar continued to try and fight back despite how fruitless it was. He used his left hand to pull another knife and throw it at the fusion, but the fusion dodged it with ease and kicked Zandar in the face, knocking him unconscious.

The Lynam and Liam fusion took a deep breath, leaned their head back, and then began to split. When it was done, Lynam and Liam remained holding hands, just as they had started. Lynam walked over and picked up Roy while Liam took Dedman by the arm. While they did that, I walked over and examined the unconscious Zandar.

*Myron, Dakim, and Roy teach me to look at you as the enemy and nothing more, but I can't help but wonder what your story is. Your drive reminds me of the drive with which Roy fights, and you move just like him. You continued to fight even after they smashed your legs. What are you fighting for? Do you have somebody who loves you to pull you from the dark path you're walking down?*

"Rae, it's not safe here. We need to get Dedman back for questioning." The twins reminded me. With a sigh, I pulled my attention away from Zandar. I gave them a nod, and then we were off.

**\*\*\* Roy \*\*\***

## ***FEBRUARY 22***

Roy slowly opened his eyes to see a ceiling, the ceiling of the Ellipsis meeting room to be exact. *A ceiling? What happened to Zandar?*

He turned his head to realize that he was lying on a couch. Lynam and Liam were on the other side of the room, putting medicine on the wounds they had received from fighting Zandar. When they were fused together, whatever injuries the fusion sustained, both Lynam and Liam sustained as well. Rae was sitting on the floor in front of him. She had a thick book resting on her knees, using it to write on so she could fill out the paperwork for the mission.

"You put the assignment number on the wrong line."

She jumped at the sound of his voice and her pen shot upwards, making a huge line on the paper. She turned to him with a frown and pointed at the paper. "See what you made me do?"

He smiled and forced himself up into a sitting position. She put the paperwork on the table and stood up so he could put his feet on the ground. "How are you feeling?"

He ignored her question, and then, to everybody's surprise, he pulled her into a hug.

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

I froze as he stood and wrapped his arms around me, resting his chin on my head. "Please don't leave me."

It wasn't that I didn't enjoy the attention, but it was very uncharacteristic of him, "Um, Roy?"

He pressed his lips to my hair before speaking and his voice was shaky, "I didn't see the death of my family. My worst nightmare has changed."

This was news to me. The death of his family was tragic, especially for a nine year old. What could have happened to make that change?

He shakily ran his fingers through my hair. "I saw you getting beaten, stabbed, electrocuted, and any other form of torture you can think of until you died, and I was powerless to stop it. There was absolutely nothing I could do. The way you looked at me... It was like I had betrayed you because I didn't do anything to help."

He buried his face in my hair, and I realized that he was trying not to break down. It caught me by surprise. I had seen Roy lose control of his emotions when he was angry, but under no circumstance had I ever seen Roy lose control because he was afraid. I never even thought it was possible for him. He was always strong, never letting anything get to him. I couldn't believe just how badly Zandar had shattered that strength.

I pulled back so I could look him in the eyes. "Roy, I'm really flattered that you care for me that much, but that's never going to happen because I know you're going to beat the crap out of anybody who tries to hurt me."

He shook his head. "I'm not invincible. There are people out there who are stronger than me."

I lowered my voice so that Lynam and Liam wouldn't be able to hear. "One of those people happens to be my brother. I'm sure that between you and Dakim, nothing is ever going to happen to me okay?"

I stroked his cheek gently, trying to calm him down. He pressed his cheek to my hand as he closed his eyes, and a single tear rolled down his cheek. What surprised me more than his tear, was the fact that it was red. Yet, I shoved that phenomenon to the back of my mind and instead focused on Roy's pain. He opened his eyes and I wiped away his tear. The corner of his lips turned up in his attempt at a smile, and then he softly pressed his lips to mine.

When he broke the kiss, I smiled as well, and then folded my arms over my chest. "Now get back on that couch before Myron comes in and yells at me for letting you get up."

He chuckled and lay back down on the couch, but his voice still a little shaky when he next spoke, "Hand me that paperwork before you completely screw it up."

"I wasn't doing that badly!" I argued as I handed it to him.

He looked it over and then laughed. "Just get me a new form. It's not even worth scratching out everything on this one."

"I liked you better when you were asleep." I said, snatching the paperwork from him.

I went to grab another form but stopped when Roy grabbed my hand. I looked back to see him smiling up at me. He pressed his lips to my hand, and then let me go.

Slightly blushing, I walked down the hall to get a new form. I tossed the form I had written on in the trash and grabbed a new one from the tray. However, when I turned to go back, I found Lynam and Liam standing in front of me. "What can I do for you?"

They hung their heads, obviously having overheard most of my conversation with Roy. Liam spoke, "We wanted to apologize for our comment about Roy before. It was out of line."

Lynam spoke next, "Growing up, we were considered the talented ones, but then Roy was born, and he kind of stole the spotlight from us. I guess we've always just been jealous of him, especially since he could be so cold and still get everybody's attention. Yet, watching you two fight today was incredible. You didn't say a single word, but everything you did was perfectly in sync. It was like watching trapeze artists. We think that you are a very talented fighter, and that you deserve a spot in Ellipsis."

"Don't say that just yet," I giggled. "We still have to get through the sparring portion of our test."

"Please apologize to Roy for us." Liam added. "We misjudged him as a spoiled brat, and that was wrong of us."

"Don't feel too bad. I used to think the same thing of him." I told them, and they both looked up at me in shock. "Roy and I met when he was undercover. My first impression of him was that he was a snob. I wanted nothing to do with him, but after being forced to spend almost a month with him in close quarters, I saw that he wasn't the snob everybody makes him out to be."

Lynam smiled. "Thank you. I can see why Roy likes you so much. You are a very good person."

"Thank you." I blushed once again. "Well, I better get this paperwork to Roy."

They both nodded and stepped out of my way. I got two people to change their opinion of Roy and I had Roy confess his undying love for me, kind of. Plus, we saved Cettce from Dedman's attack. It was turning out to be a very good day.

# Chapter 24

*FEBRUARY 23*

"Have you ever seen Roy cry?" I asked Myron as I sat down next to him at the lakeside.

He paused, thinking it over, "Once, the day after the attack happened. Like I said before, I was in charge of the reconstruction, and I was on my way back home when I met Roy for the first time. He was crawled up in a ball in the corner of what remained of his house. Why do you ask?"

I completely ignored his question and instead asked, "So, if he was curled up in a ball, then you didn't actually see his tears?"

Myron nodded in understanding. "You're referring to the red tears."

"So you have seen them?"

"No, but I've heard about it. It comes from the pigmentation of the Skayikon. Because of this, it is impossible for an Adimari to activate their Skayikon while tears fill their eyes. It's the main reason that you'll more than likely never see an Adimari cry. How did you hear about it?"

"I didn't hear about it. I saw it."

"You saw Roy cry?" Myron exclaimed.

I shook my head, "Zandar really messed with him. He said that he saw me being tortured, but being a Riora I guess I just assumed he would have seen worse."

Myron smiled, "You still fail to realize just how much Roy loves you. He lost *everything* once. He became one of the best Riora, simply because he had nothing else to live for but revenge. You've brought happiness back into his life. If he were to lose you, I don't think he'd survive that kind of pain, not a second time."

~

*MARCH 1*

"You're nervous." Roy commented as we walked to Ellipsis arena. The only time the building was ever used was when candidates for Ellipsis were being tested on their combat.

"Just a little bit," I responded as I folded my hands, hoping that he wouldn't notice how bad they were shaking.

As he took my hands in his, he smiled down at me, and it caught me off guard. It was unusual for him, but I wasn't complaining. "You have nothing to worry about. You'll be in sparring matches, but it doesn't matter whether you win or lose. This is your opportunity to show Jerome just how skilled you are."

Comforted by his words, I continued walking to the Ellipsis arena. Once inside, I took my seat next to Lynam and Liam while Roy joined Karexon, Kian, and Myron up in the stands. Lynam and Liam went first and had to fight against one another. It didn't surprise me, really. Because they had been pitted against each other, they wouldn't be able to use their fusion technique, which meant they would be forced to think on their feet as to how to defeat their opponent. The match seemed about even, and for a while I thought it would never end. Yet, as it dragged on, it soon became clear that Liam had the better endurance, and that alone was the reason he won the match. Then it was my turn.

**\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

"Royccce, pleasse enter the arena."

Roy had flinched at the sound of his name, but otherwise did as he was told and stood to face Rae.

"It isss no sssecret that you two are dating. However, I want to make sssure that your feelingsss for each other will not cloud your judgment. I want to be abssolutely possitive that that will never happen, but there isss only one way to be abssolutely ccertain... Royccce, kill Raelyn."

*What?* Myron recoiled. Roy went numb and Rae looked at Jerome in shock.

"Are you insane?" Rae shouted at him.

"The only way I can be ccertain that your emotionsss for each other will not cloud your judgment isss if only one of you isss a member of Ellipssiss. Whoever leavesss this arena sstill alive will be in Ellipssiss.

Rae went to continue arguing, but her attention was brought back to the arena when Roy closed his eyes and dropped to his knees.

"Royccce! What are you doing?" Jerome snapped.

Roy lowered his head. "Forgive me, but I will not do it."

"You would dissobey an order?" Jerome sneered down at him.

Roy lowered his head. "I have been put in a hopeless situation. If I follow through with your orders and kill Rae, I will not live to see tomorrow. No doubt her brother will kill me before the sun rises again—"

Myron's ears didn't miss the Keynes twins discussing the new revelation that Raelyn had a brother.

"—If I am killed by her brother, Lady Vanek will have no choice but to pursue him and it will only lead to more bloodshed. So you see, either way, I am going to die. Since I am given the choice, I wish to prevent the bloodshed and save Rae's life by giving up my own. If I have to die, I would prefer it to be by her hand."

"I ssee." Jerome ran this information over. "If you are not willing to comply and follow ordersss, then I regret to inform you, Raelyn, that you have failed thiss tessst. You may reapply again in one year."

Rae and Roy both stared at him in shock as Jerome packed up his note book. Unable to comprehend what had just happened, Rae walked out of the room. In equal shock, Roy chased after her. Everybody was free to go, but Myron stayed and watched as Jerome began finalizing papers.

*When I alerted Ellipsis that I wished to be married, I also had to go through a test to prove that my judgment was still sound. Anybody in Ellipsis who wishes to be married or enter into a relationship has to go through that test. The test is switched every time so the candidate can't be warned by somebody who had already taken the test. Usually when you alert Ellipsis that you are to be married or whatever else, the test doesn't occur until a few months later. You never know when it is going to come, and it is never obvious that it's the test. For my test, Rose was kidnapped by what seemed to be Riora from a rival village. I had no clue that it was actually Ellipsis members who had taken her until the test was actually over. The test was never direct as it had been for Roy and Rae. It had never been so extreme either.*

Myron narrowed his eyes at Jerome. *Something's not right...*

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

"Rae!" Roy chased after me as I shoved my way through the door. "Raelyn!"

"What the hell was that?" I turned on him.

"I don't know. That has never happened before." He shook his head. Yet, when he tried to take my hands, I pulled away.

"All of my hard work to join Ellipsis, it's all been thrown out the window. I wasn't even given a chance!"

When Roy failed to come up with words, I just shook my head and walked away.

**\*\*\* Lady Vanek \*\*\***

"You denied Raelyn membership?" Lady Vanek shouted, outraged.

"Ssshe isss not ready. Ssshe isss too sssoft, too emotional. Ssshe wasss pussshed through the ranksss too quickly, and ssshe doesss not have the insstinct to kill." Jerome argued, "And I am beginning to wonder if Royccce ssshould ssstill be allowed memberssship. I doubt in their abilitiesss to think clearly if sssomething were to happen."

"She needs the resources of Ellipsis to continue her training!"

"Ssshe hasss no right to be in Ellipsssisss if ssshe cannot handle the ssstresss. Myron needsss to ssstop thinking of her ass hisss daughter and prepare for the inevitable war that isss on the itsss way."

Lady Vanek watched as Jerome walked out of her office. He had a point. Myron was too close to this. He thought too highly of Raelyn. He had said it himself. He would take her and run without looking back. Yet, Myron was right when he said that there would come a time when Raelyn's spirit would break, and that was something that they just couldn't afford. However, it wasn't like they could bring in somebody else to train Raelyn, somebody who wasn't as close to Raelyn, because she couldn't risk letting more people discover Raelyn's true identity. *Oh decisions, decisions...*

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

I lay down on my bed and stared up at the pictures of Dustin and Christian I had hung on the ceiling. I missed them so much, especially at times like this. Dustin would have pulled me into a hug, telling me how everything would be alright, and I would have had to hold Christian back from marching into Jerome's office and cussing him out.

A few minutes later, Luke appeared in the doorway to my room. He didn't say anything. Instead he just stood there. Sadly, his presence wasn't as comforting as Myron's always was.

"I want my brother back. I want him to tell me that Ellipsis is just a stupid group that isn't worth getting upset over. I want him to sit here and complain about the horrible job Ellipsis does and how crappy the leaders are. I finally got my brother back, and then he decides to leave again without even bothering to say goodbye and doesn't tell me when he's going to be back. It's been almost a month since he left.

"I want to see Dustin and Christian again," I continued on with my rant as I stood up and began to pace about the room. "I want to be able to walk around the village without having to worry about people finding out who I really am. I don't want to have to lie to Charisse, the one true friend that I've managed to make, and I don't want to have to keep secrets from Roy about everything that I can do. Most of all, I wish Raven would never have been born because without him, none of this shit would have ever happened!"

"Feel better?" Luke asked casually.

I collapsed on my bed again, "A little."

Luke sat down on the bed next to me, "You're training so that you can make Raven wish he had never been born. Also, if Charisse is the true friend you say she is, and if Roy cares for you as much as he claims to, they'll understand why you kept stuff from them. If they don't, then they never cared for you to begin with. As for your brother, I promise you he'll be back. I don't know when, but he'll be back. He cares for you too much." He gave me a smile, "See? Life isn't as grim as you make it out to be."



"Thanks Captain Optimism." I glared at him, hoping that he would notice that I had changed the typical earth saying.

"You're welcome Lieutenant Pessimism." He ruffled my hair, and then walked away.

I angrily tried to fix my hair, but then just gave up, and lay back on my bed. As frustrated as Luke had just made me, I prayed that he was right...

~

## **MARCH 2**

I sat on Roy's doorstep, waiting for him to come home. I had no idea where or he was or when he was coming back, but I figured he would have to come home some time. Thankfully, I didn't have to wait long.

Roy slowed in his approach when he saw me, and I stood up. With my head lowered, I walked over to him, but stopped a few paces away. "Forgive me. I blew off at you the other day when none of it was your fault."

Roy pursed his lips, "Come here."

"Why?" I looked up at him apprehensively.

He was fighting a smile, "Just come here."

"No, I think I'm content right where I am." His smile was contagious.

He only raised his eyes brows expectantly, and I slowly walked closer. He lifted his hand and flicked me in the forehead. Unlike in the apartment, I managed to stay on my feet this time, but I did stumble backwards. I put my hands on my hips. "Really?"

"Now we're even." He shrugged, but then a real smile broke out on his face as he took my hand and led me into the house. He never actually had said it, but I knew he had forgiven me.

~

## **MARCH 12**

I wasn't a member of Ellipsis, but luckily as a Skekaek I was still able to go on most of the missions with Myron. However, we didn't go on many. We spent most of the time training, getting prepared for Raven. The one positive to not being an Ellipsis member was that I didn't have to go through that death trap they called a training ground. Information about Raven didn't pop up very often, so much of my time was spent training, but whenever something did, we were on it right away.

"We finally managed to locate where that message we intercepted a few months ago originated from." Lady Vanek informed Roy and I when we were in her office. "It came from a small village on the outskirts of Ikicnie, so you will have to be careful when you enter as to not trespass onto Ikicnie soil. Your job is to capture Raven's informant and bring him back here for questioning. Understand?"

"Will there be a team accompanying us?" I questioned.

She shook her head. "It really shouldn't take more than one person to apprehend him, but we usually send two people just to be on the safe side. If you don't feel safe enough with just Roy, I can always pull Myron."

Roy snorted and for the first time I saw Lady Vanek smile. Had she just made a joke?

"Hurry back." She ordered.

"Yes, Lady Vanek." I gave a slight bow before Roy and I walked out.

~

**MARCH 14**

Out of all of the missions I had done since becoming a Riora, this was by far my favorite, simply because I got to go to the beach and enjoy the nice weather. Our target was a man in his late thirties who lived in one of the shacks that stood in the shadows of the extravagant beach houses. We had taken a few days to gather some information on him, and as far as I was concerned, he was the very definition of scum. When he wasn't stealing money from good people, he was partying at night clubs. He was far from handsome with his short, pudgy stature and black beady eyes. He only found himself surrounded by woman because he threw stolen money at them.

Now, Roy and I sat at a picnic table not far from the beach watching the informant's house. Roy wore only black beach shorts, which was definitely an unusual sight, but a pleasant one. His hair was dripping wet, for we had jumped in the ocean to help with our cover, and drops of water ran down his firm bare chest. In the sunlight, his skin looked even more pale than usual, making his red eyes stand out even more, and the drops of water that covered his body reflected the sunlight, making him glow. I wore white jean shorts and a see through t-shirt with my black bathing underneath. My hair, which was also dripping wet, had been pulled back into a braid. Instead of watching our target's house, as I should have been, I studied Roy's face. He glanced at me but did a double take when he realized I was openly staring at him. "What?"

"What are you thinking?"

He went back to watching the house just as our target stepped outside. "I'm thinking about ways to make our approach."

"Oh," I sat back, disappointed, "Is that the only reason we're still sitting here?"

"Why? You figured something out?"

I rolled my eyes, slipped my shirt off, revealing my black bikini top, and ripped the shirt. His eyes widened, and I couldn't help but smiling as I stood up. "Give me five minutes."

I chased after our target, "Excuse me, sir?"

He turned at the sound of my voice, an annoyed look on his face, but after looking me up and down, his expression became one of interest. "Can I help you?"

"I'm really sorry, but I got into a fight with my boyfriend," I held up my shirt for him to see. "He even ripped my shirt."

He looked concerned. "Are you alright?"

"Yes, I'm fine, thank you. I was just wondering if I you had some bandages, and possibly a shirt."

He smiled, "No problem. Why don't you come inside?"

I followed him back to his house, but before walking in the door, I turned to look back at Roy at the picnic table. He looked really angry that I had decided to do this completely solo. Yet, he also looked a little astonished that I had managed to get in so easily.

I closed the door behind me and turned to walk into the house but found a knife at my throat. "Who are you?" The target growled at me.

I sighed, grabbed the target's wrist, and put him in an arm bar before he could even blink. He was an informant, not a fighter. "My name is Raelyn, and I came to ask you some questions. I hadn't intended to get violent until you decided to be the dumb ass and pull a knife. I was nice enough to leave my friend outside since being gentle is not one of his strong suits. However, if you want to meet him, I'd be glad to call him in."

The man didn't respond, so I decided to let him go, and he immediately took a few steps away from me, massaging his wrist. "What do you want?"

"Basically, I want you to tell me everything you know about Raven."

"What could possible compel me to do that?" The man sneered.

I shrugged. "I just assumed you enjoyed breathing."

"Are you threatening to kill me?" He growled.

"No, I'm calling you foolish for thinking that Raven would ever let you live after he was through with you. Think about it. You're nothing but a loose end. Plus, once I make it known that I stopped by here today, it won't matter whether or not you actually gave any information to me. You're going to be a dead man."

"I'm not as foolish as you make me out to be. I'm calling your bluff. You won't make your presence here known because then you would be alerting Raven that you're on to him."

"Well, if I didn't want Raven to know that I was on to him, then I would have to kill you, so no matter how you look at it, you're still a dead man."

"So then why am I still breathing?"

"You're more useful to me alive than dead. Besides, killing you is more of a hassle than I really want to go through."

"What's to say you won't kill me once I tell you what you want to know?"

"What if I get you set up in a secure location where Raven won't be able to find you? Then, once you're safe, you can tell us all about Raven. If we find out that any information you gave us is false, then we'll simply put you out on the streets and make sure Raven doesn't have to look too hard to find you."

The man smiled evilly as he stepped closer to me. "Alright, I'll go with you, but only if you agree to stay with me at this new location you speak about."

He went to put his hands on my exposed stomach, so I decided to punch him in the face before he could. Yet, I found that Roy had already beaten me to it.

"If you ever try to lay one of your dirty little fingers on her again, I'll kill you myself."

"You might want to say that again after he regains consciousness." I suggested and then asked, "What are you even doing here? I was going to handle it."

"You said five minutes. It's been six."

I just shook my head, "Let's grab him and get out of here."

# Chapter 25

*MARCH 27*

"Did you ever get any information from the informant we apprehended?" I asked Lady Vanek when she called me into her office.

She shook her head. "It's a long process. You apprehended him pretty easily because he hasn't had any training in fighting, but he's had training in interrogation. It may take time."

"We don't have time." I argued. "We have no idea when Raven will attack. He could attack tomorrow for all we know."

"I do not need reminding." Lady Vanek snapped. She then sighed and then picked up a file. "In the meantime, I'm sending you on another mission. We have been alerted that several citizens of nearby cities have been captured and imprisoned for no reason whatsoever. An Ellipsis team will be taking care of the organization that is running this, but before they can do that, they need to make sure that no innocents will be in the way. That is where you will come in. You're going to be leading a jail break."

"I'm going to be the team leader?" I questioned. I had never been much of one for leadership positions. I was more contempt taking orders than giving them.

"You will need to get used to it if you intend to lead the battle against Raven. This will give you good experience. Because this is the first mission you are leading, I'm also going to allow you to pick your team, but they have to be Skekaek rank." She held a folder out to me. "This is a list of all available Skekaek."

I flipped through it, looking for two names in particular: Lance, who had recently been promoted to Skekaek and was now in charge of his own team, and Carmichael. After that, I chose one other woman named Priscilla whom I was vaguely familiar with.

She nodded, "I will brief the team you have chosen, and then you can be on your way."

I made my way back to my house so that I could pack the things that I would need. Yet, when I walked in the door, I found Dakim sitting on the couch with his feet up on the coffee table like he had never been gone.

A huge smile broke out on my face. "Welcome back."

"Just in time to see you off," Dakim smiled up at me. "This is your first mission as team leader, eh?"

I was about to ask how he knew that when I had only just found out moments ago, but thought better of it and instead walked over to where he was. I discretely pushed his feet off my coffee table as I kissed him on the cheek, "At least I'm saying goodbye."

"Are you ever going to let me live that down?"

"Nope," I smiled at him and then grabbed my gear. "I'll see you later!"

**\*\*\* Luke \*\*\***

Luke waited until Rae had walked out the door before walking around the corner to face Dakim. "You know, she had every right to be angry with you, because I know if you had been in her shoes, you would have been furious, but she welcomed you back with open arms."

"I'm aware." Dakim didn't turn when he answered. Instead he continued to stare at the door she had just walked out of.

"Are you even going to tell us why you left?" Luke prodded.

"Let me rest first" was Dakim vaguely responded before he put his feet back up on the table and fell asleep.

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

I chose the team I did for a reason, not just because I knew Lance and Carmichael. Carmichael was considered a teleporter, and unlike shifting the dimension, he could teleport anybody or anything he was touching, and he could do it in the blink of an eye, allowing him to teleport multiple times within the same second. He would be able to get us into the prison without any trouble, and we wouldn't have to worry about Shifting Rights. Priscilla could turn herself and anything she was touching invisible. She would allow us to sneak through the prison without being noticed. Lance had the ability to control and manipulate ice. He would be able to make short work of the locks to the prison cells.

When we had all met at the gate, Carmichael teleported us to the outskirts of the city we would be sneaking into. It saved us a lot of energy since we didn't have to walk all the way there. When we arrived, Priscilla snuck into the town hall to get the schematics of the prison the people were being held in. After she had retrieved them, we met a little ways from the city in an abandoned cabin. We spread the schematics out on the table and then gathered round.

"The prisoners are being held here." I pointed to one of the smallest rooms on the map. "The hallways are narrow, and even though we are invisible, if we bump into somebody, we won't phase through them. The guards will know we are there. At most we'll be able to fit two people. Any more than that and we'll never make it through there without being noticed. Carmichael, once you teleport us in, I want you to teleport back out and wait for us on the outside. You'll make sure to distract any guards who might come our way. Lance, I want you to freeze the locks on all of the cells of the normal prisoners and then break them. Release as many criminals as you can. That should give us enough of a distraction while Priscilla and I make our way to the cell where the civilians are being held. Priscilla will then escort the civilians out one by one while I remain in the cell to keep guard. When Priscilla gets the civilians out, Carmichael, it will be your job to take them back to Vriknir. If something goes wrong or we're not out in fifteen minutes, I want you to send for help."

The plan was made, but things were always easier said than done. Once we were ready, we took each other's hands and Priscilla made us invisible. Then Carmichael took us inside. Once we were safely inside, Carmichael whispered, "Good luck," and then was gone. I nodded to Lance who then took off down of the side hall while Priscilla and I continued straight ahead. We didn't run down the hall. Our footsteps would have made too much noise. Instead, I used my telekinesis to lift us off the ground. There were times when we had to completely flatten ourselves against the wall to avoid running into a guard, and there were times when Priscilla went right to avoid a guard, but I went left and we almost clotheslined the guard. Only after Lance started causing confusion and alarms went off did I put us back on the ground for us to run the rest of the way.

When we reached the cell where the citizens were being held, I took the lock in my free hand and closed my eyes, trying to focus on the little mechanisms inside. It took me a minute, but I finally managed to get the lock open and slid back the door. In shock, I let go of Priscilla's hand and stepped into the cell. This couldn't be right. The cell was empty!

*It was a trap!*

As soon as the thought ran through my mind, there was a sharp pain in the back of my head, and everything went black...

~

When I opened my eyes again, I found myself with my hands bound above my head, hanging from the ceiling. Lance was hanging next to me, and I had opened my eyes just in time to see them inject him with something. I tried to stop it, but I couldn't find the Miutho. Not only was I not able to use my telekinesis, but I also couldn't do any technique that required Miutho. *Whatever they just injected Lance with they must have injected me with as well...*

Priscilla was hanging on the other side of Lance, but she was still out cold. I was thankful that I didn't see Carmichael. It meant that he was still on the outside. He would be able to send for help.

The cell door opened and two guards walked in. I smiled evilly at them. "You're making a big mistake. I have powerful friends. They'll know that we're missing, and trust me, they'll do more to you than what you're doing to us."

"I doubt that." The guard smirked and then took out his whip. I heard the crack first. Then came the pain. When I looked down, I had a huge gash going across my stomach. "Open your mouth again and it will be two gashes."

Helpless, I watched as they took Priscilla down and walked out of the room with her. She had been unconscious when they took her down, but she was conscious now, and she was in pain. I didn't know where they had taken her, but her screams could be heard throughout the entire prison.

After what seemed like hours, even though it probably had been only a few minutes, the guards brought Priscilla back in. She was covered in cuts and gashes and her breathing was jagged. How she had survived their torture was beyond me. They didn't bind Priscilla again. Instead, they left her on the floor to die. Before walking out, the guard turned to me, "You're next."

When the door shut behind them, I leaned my head back with my eyes closed, fighting the sorrow. I hadn't been too worried because I knew Carmichael was on the outside, and he would send for help. Yet, I was quickly realizing that by the time Lady Vanek put a rescue team together, we would all be dead. I was the team leader, and I was responsible for my comrades, and here I was, leading them right into a trap. Now we all were going to die.

I thought of Christian and Dustin. They wouldn't even know I had died. Maybe that was for the best. Yet, Kian, Karexon, Myron, Roy... They would know, and it would destroy them. My name would just be one more for Myron to add to the Riora memorial that was never far from his mind. As for Roy, he wouldn't survive. He would die the second I did, on the inside at least. Only a shell of him would remain. I doubt even the kindest and most patient person alive would be able to rescue him from that kind of pain a second time. Dakim... He would wreak havoc on all of Vriknir for my death. And Vriknir had thought that Dakim was a mass murderer before...

I opened my eyes again, and my eyes landed on my nails.

*The only time I want you to use these is if all else has failed and your life depends on it. It is a last resort...*

Not only did my life depend on it, but the lives of my comrades did as well. Dakim was going to be furious, but it was my last resort. If I was correct, the Dragon Claws and Ultimate Defense didn't require Miutho. It came from my dragon heritage. There was only one way to find out.

I closed my eyes once more, focusing on the mark on my back, letting it spread across my skin. I wasn't even close to mastering the Ultimate Defense. I could only get it to cover my face and chest, but at this point, it was all I needed. Lance watched open mouthed as the armor spread across my skin, and I extended my nails, cutting my binds. I just barely managed to land on my feet. Without my ability to control my Miutho, my balance was off, and I had to really focus to stand. When I was stable, I cut Lance down and then he quickly picked up Priscilla. Once he had gotten her, I jammed my nail into the lock, essentially breaking it, and opened the door. I led the way as we made our way down the hallway, taking out any guards who stood in our way. The drug was beginning to wear off, and I was getting my balance back. We busted through the doors to the jail at a full sprint and ran back to the spot where I hoped Carmichael would be.

"Raelyn!" He exclaimed when we drew near, taking in my appearance. Then he saw Priscilla. "I sent word back to Vriknir. They have people on standby, ready to help."

"We need to get out of here! Now!"

Not being able to register anything that was happening, Carmichael took hold of us and teleported us back to Vriknir.

**\*\*\*Dakim\*\*\***

"Welcome back, Dakim." Vic greeted him when he walked down into the training room. Luke was close behind him. "How did things go?"

"I managed to turn one of Raven's assistants into an informant for us. It will be hard for her to send us information, but I'm sure she will be able to provide vital information in the days to come. In the meantime, I found out some interesting properties of Kunettium. Vic, before I left you mentioned that Kunettium was the only metal that you could not manipulate, so I went back to Alsentra to visit with a chemist named Rafael Winters."

"Isn't Rafael the man that Myron got the gun from?" Luke asked.

Dakim nodded and took the Miutho gun from out of his pocket, "The gun itself is made from Kunettium, but the canister on the top of the gun isn't covered by Kunettium. Before Rae purified the gun, she could sense the unstable Miutho coming from it. However, when it was in the Kunettium safe, she couldn't sense it. With the help of Rafael —"

"Wait," Vic cut him off despite the angry look Dakim gave him, "This Rafael guy helped you just like that?"

Dakim shrugged, "He knew who I was, but he's also a chemist. He was able to recognize the similarities between my Miutho and Rae's and came to the conclusion that I'm her brother. Rae must have made quite the impression on him for him to be able to overlook the fact that I'm a wanted man and help me."

"I think Rae has managed to do that with more than just one person." Luke commented off-handedly.

Dakim ignored him and brought the conversation back to the original point, "We managed to discover that Kunettium has many of the same properties as the Ultimate Defense. It's not physically as strong, but is able to resist Miutho, which is why Vic isn't able to manipulate it. However, it does not block all Miutho. Before Rae purified the gun, she could not sense it through a safe made out of Kunettium. Yet, when I put this purified gun back into Rafael's safe, I could sense it as if there was nothing separating it from me."

Luke tapped his fingers together in thought. "So, if Raven's weapon stays the way it is, then it will do relatively low damage because the Miutho is unstable. At first the unstable Miutho proved to be a weakness to you and Rae, but if Kunettium shares some of the same properties of the Ultimate Defense, then the Ultimate Defense should protect you from the effects of the unstable Miutho."

"Then this is good news." Vic stated the obvious.

Dakim turned the gun over in his hand, "Yes, but as it stands Rae cannot complete the Ultimate Defense, meaning that she is still vulnerable. I was also unable to track down the man who is smithing Kunettium for Raven. After an attack on the factory in Alsentra, pushing for information about a Kunettium smith might have started raising red flags, and I couldn't risk that. Plus, there is still a lot we don't know about this weapon. We know that most of the gun is made out of Kunettium, but what about the Miutho that acts as the ammo. Dragons are the only ones with the ability to manipulate the pure form of Miutho."

"Do you think it's possible that a dragon is helping Raven?" Vic exclaimed in shock.

Luke shook his head, "No, dragon's manipulate the pure form of Miutho. If a dragon was helping Raven make this weapon, then the Miutho never would have been unstable to begin with."

Dakim then added, "So, where are they getting the Miutho and why is it so unstable?"

"Think the informant you managed to establish will be able to give us more information...Dakim?"

Dakim's eyes became unfocused, and Luke quickly realized that Dakim was no longer listening. His mind was far from the room they were in. He could sense a disturbance, like something was making everybody else in the town uneasy. He quickly extended his senses out even further than usual until he found Myron and Roy.

Dakim's eyes suddenly became focused again, and for the first time since Dakim had lost his parents, Luke thought he saw fear in Dakim's eyes, but it was gone before he could truly be sure. Then Dakim let out a snarl and bolted for the door.

### \*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\*

I dropped to the ground, and when I stood once more, I found that there was a crowd of people waiting for us. Lance and Carmichael quickly took Priscilla to the hospital, but the crowd that had originally gathered to give assistance stood still and made no move to help them. My armor slowly began to retract as my eyes drifted from face to face, watching their expressions change from shock to rage. Then, from out of nowhere, Roy appeared and wrapped his arms around me, his body blocking me like a shield. I could no longer see the crowd, but I could hear their gasps, and it was only then that I realized Roy was hurt.

My mental state completely shattered. I had known people's fear of Dakim, but somewhere in the back of my mind I had been hoping that if people really came to know me, then they would just accept me like Myron's team had. Yet, as soon as the people saw I was an Adelinda, everything they knew about me, my character, flew out the window. They saw my abilities and, in the blink of an eye, they hated me. Somebody had tried to kill me, and he or she might have succeeded if it weren't for Roy. When I had been on Earth, I knew I would never be "normal." I had only wished to be accepted. When I came to Kusnik, I had thought that I would be among people who were like me, but even here I was an outsider. Now Roy had been hurt because of me. He had a knife in his back, in almost the same spot he'd received the last knife wound.

"Roy—"

"I'm fine." He grunted.

Karexon and Kian came over and helped Roy away, and I was left there in front of the crowd. Their glares were like daggers, and my mind flashed back to the pure hatred that had been in Roy's eyes when he'd first found out that Dakim was in my brother, except, this wasn't just one person. This was a whole crowd of people. That was when I truly snapped.

I launched forward at the crowd, but Myron grabbed my shirt and pulled me backward. I resisted him as hard as I could, but he locked my arms over my head, using all the strength he had just to keep me from going at the crowd of people. The crowd was equally angry, and the only thing that stopped them from charging back was Lady Vanek, who had recently arrived, ordering them to stand down.

"Rae..." Myron's voice was trying to soothe me.

"They hurt Roy. They hurt Roy!" My anger faded into hurt, and my body gave out on me. Now, instead of Myron holding me back, he was keeping me on my feet.

"He'll be fine. He's on his way to be treated right now. It's nothing he can't handle, but we need to get you home."



I was about to agree but stopped when I noticed Luke and Vic pushing their way to the front of the crowd. Vic seemed distracted as usual, but Luke had a worried look on his face, and I immediately thought of Dakim. I looked out towards the horizon, extending my senses, and cringed when I found him.

"I think it would be better if you went with Roy." I told Myron.

"There is no way I would let you walk back alone."

"I will have Luke and Vic watching over me."

Myron seemed to realize what I was getting at, "Fine, but I'll be over as soon as I'm done at the hospital."

I tried to smile, but it was only half-hearted. "Thanks Myron."

Once more, my eyes drifted over the crowd of people who remained, and I began to wish that Myron hadn't taught me how to manipulate sound, because I could hear every word that was whispered.

"Why did Roy protect her?"

"He knew she was an Adelinda?"

"He should have let her die."

"I though he swore to kill Dakim."

"Has she been a spy for Dakim the whole time?"

"Is Dakim going to attack again?"

"Rae..." I jumped as Luke placed his hand on my shoulder, "We should go."

We made our way through the crowd, but it wasn't hard. They readily parted as I approached. None of them wanted to be in the same vicinity as me. I walked back to my house in a daze with Luke and Vic on either side of me like security guards. When we got there, we immediately went down to the training room, the only place I felt truly safe. Not five minutes later, Dakim was charging down the steps.

"What the hell were you thinking showing up in front of a crowd of people wearing the armor? Under no circumstance were you to show that to anybody."

"Dakim, I'm sure she had a good reason." Luke quietly protested.

"My team would have died." I added.

With a sigh, Dakim asked. "Are you okay?"

"Ask me again later," I muttered.

"So what now?" Vic brought up.

"The people are in an uproar. Dakim, you really shouldn't be here." Luke reminded.

"Yes, I am aware, but I want to know if Rae should be here."

The room fell silent as everybody contemplated Dakim's comment. I watched as Luke and Vic, and then Luke and Dakim, exchanged glances and suddenly I knew, "I don't want to leave."

"Why?" Vic snapped before he could catch himself. Even after he did, his voice was still bitter. "You saw how quickly those people turned against you. Why would you want to stay with people who hate and despise you?"

"There are people here who care for me."

"Like Roy?" Vic returned. "Do you honestly believe that there isn't some small part of him that still believes Dakim killed his family, that you are just as bad as your brother?"

"Vic, that is enough!" Dakim snapped, causing Luke to flinch, despite the fact that he hadn't been the one yelled at. It was only then that Vic seemed to realized how harsh he had been and backed off.

"If nothing else, I trust Myron. If she wishes to stay, I have no doubt that he will protect her." Luke commented.

"You may, but I don't." Dakim growled.

"You trusted him enough to allow him in our training room and see the Adelinda abilities." I reminded.

"That was before this happened!" Dakim snapped and turned to Luke and Vic, "From now on, I want one of you down here in the training room every night."

"A body guard? Really?" I was getting tired of always having to be guarded.

Dakim did his best to be light-hearted, "Rae, you are good, but you're not that good. If somebody comes for you when you're asleep, they may be able to catch you off-guard."

"You're being overprotective." I argued.

"Maybe, but that's my job. Now, I must be going." He took one last long look at me and then made his way upstairs. By the time we got up there not even a minute later, he was already gone.

"You can have first watch tonight." Vic curtly told Luke before walking out the back, slamming the door behind him. In shock at Vic's abruptness, I simply stared at the door he had just walked out.

"Don't worry. He'll come around. They all do." Luke threw out nonchalantly as he sat down on the living room couch and put his feet up on the coffee table, even though I had told him a million times not to.

I didn't even bother to attempt a smile. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Luke did smile. "After your family was killed, your brother was hell to be around, but after he found out that you had survived, he seemed to be more like the best friend I used to run around with as a kid. Roy lived almost all of his life for revenge, and you've taught him how to love again. Myron lost his wife and son, but you've become like a daughter to him. You have found these people who seem like they have lost everything, and you've given them something to live for. It may not have been intentional, but you seem to have charmed your way into one of the most powerful positions in Vriknir."

"It's not my fault." I defended.

Luke chuckled, "I know it's not. It's just your personality. You're trustworthy, innocent, and caring. For people like Myron, Dakim, and Roy who have lived with nothing but pain and violence, you're a welcome change."

We both looked up when Myron walked in the door. Luke smiled as he stood up and went to greet Myron, "Speak of the devil."

Myron gave Luke a confused look but otherwise walked into the living room where I was. Luke seemed to have picked up on Earth's phrases, but Myron was obviously still lagging. I stood up, "How is Roy?"

"He is alright. This wound isn't near as bad as the ones he received a couple of months ago. He should be out of the hospital in no time."

It was Luke's turn to ask a question, "Has Lady Vanek said anything yet?"

Myron shook his head. "She is in with Jerome and the council, trying to figure out what their next move is. They know they cannot punish her for saving her comrades, and they need her if we intend to take on Raven, but the people are not reacting well to her presence here. I'm not sure what will happen."

Luke nodded, "Only time will tell."

"Until then, can I go see Roy?" I interrupted.

Myron nodded, his eyes still dazed like he had yet to come to fully grasp the situation. "Um, they already have him moved to a regular room."

Luke held open the door for me and I walked out, already hating having to have a body guard.

## Chapter 26

Roy winced as the nurse inserted a new IV, and a smile broke out on my face. "You've been stabbed twice in the past seven months, and yet, you're scared of needles?"

"Yeah, well..." He growled before turning his head to look at me.

I couldn't read the expression on his face, and I hated it. Vic's words were still running through my mind, and I couldn't help beginning to wonder if he had been right. Roy knew that Dakim was my brother, but now that he could truly see some of the dragon qualities, would he begin to have doubts? Would he still love me?

He looked away when everything outside suddenly quieted. Curious, I stood up and went out onto the balcony. Luke joined me a minute later. A crowd had gathered about a stage. On the stage stood Lady Vanek, Jerome, and the council members. Behind them stood the Ellipsis Commanders, but they were split off to the sides. Lady Vanek had stepped forward to the podium. The stage was a couple of blocks away, but I could hear everything as if I was standing right there among the crowd.

"By now I am sure many of you have learned that Raelyn Murray is actually Raelyn Adelinda, Dakim's sister. Many of you may be asking: how did she deceive us this long? The short answer is: she didn't. I was aware of Raelyn's identity the day she set foot in Vriknir. She came here seeking asylum, and I gave it to her. Why? I gave it to her because that is exactly what Camus would have done. He established this place as a safe haven for those who are persecuted elsewhere. To deny her would have been to deny the ideals Camus built this place on. We will continue to give her asylum until the day she proves that she doesn't deserve it. For now, she has my trust." Lady Vanek's eyes swept over the crowd one last time, and then she stepped away from the podium.

"She truly loves these people." Luke commented.

"Why do you say that?"

"There are a lot of people who will be grumpy about this decision. If they are unhappy enough, the people may motion to remove her from office. She may have just committed political suicide, but she has assured that you will remain in Vriknir so that you can continue training to fight Raven. It is not too often that someone will give up a position of power. That is why I say that she loves the people."

I shook my head and walked back into the hospital room, "I may be allowed to stay here, but that does not mean the people will welcome me."

Roy grabbed my hand and pulled me closer to his bed side. "This person will always welcome you."

I smiled down at him, instantly comforted by his words. Then he pulled his hand away and crossed his arms over his chest, closing his eyes, "Now go away. I'm tired."

Luke chuckled, "So much for always being welcome."

I rolled my eyes and headed for the door, "Yup. That's Roy."

~

### *MARCH 29*

I spent most of the time at home. All of my training was done in the room downstairs and Myron even came here in the morning for meditation. I wouldn't admit it, but I was actually scared to go outside.

I smiled when I saw Roy walk through the door. It was good to know that he was out of the hospital. My smile grew when he walked over and pulled me into a hug. When he went to pull away, I held on tight, "No, wait. Hug me some more."

He smiled, kissed me on the forehead and then tucked my head under his chin. I buried my face in his shirt, enjoying the moment. For the longest time I couldn't even get Roy to give me a proper hug. It seemed like ever since his encounter with Zandar, he had been a little more open to physically showing his emotions for me. He still wasn't a romantic, swooning me with words of velvet, but he was holding onto to me a lot tighter. Zandar had showed him that, for the first time in a long time, he had something to lose. The whole encounter had really shaken Roy up, but maybe it had been for the better.

"So, what did I miss while I was in the hospital?" Roy asked when he finally let go of me.

I turned away and started cleaning up the Thaivo textbook and papers I had spread out on the table. "I wouldn't know. I haven't been out."

"Why?"

"Because I figured if I was out of sight, I'd be out of mind." I answered, but it was more of an excuse, and Roy knew it.

He walked around and sat on the table, preventing me from finishing what I was doing and looked me right in the eyes. "You can't stay cooped up in here forever."

"I don't intend to." I answered like it had been a stupid question.

"Then let's go down to the dock." Roy suggested.

I stared at him as I turned it over, but I could never say no to Roy, so with a sigh I agreed. "Fine."

We made our way to the only other lake in the city besides Myron's. It was still chilly in the March air, so we sat on the edge of the dock and let our bare feet hang over. The dock stood a few feet above the water, and at this time of the year, the water was lower than usual, maybe only thigh deep. Well, for me it was thigh deep. For Roy or Myron it might only be knee deep.

"I've been meaning to ask you something." Roy brought up. "What's the mark you have on your back?"

"When did you see that?"

"When we went after Raven's informant a couple of weeks before," Roy answered. "Your bathing suit didn't quite cover it all."

I took a deep breath. I had been forbidden by Dakim to tell Roy about our dragon abilities, but now that the whole town had seen at least part of the Ultimate Defense, I saw no reason to keep anything from Roy anymore. "It's part of my heritage. You may know this already, but the Adelindas are originally from Niasha. We're dragons, but we can't shift into a full-fledged dragon. The closest we can come is the nails and armor. However, the armor everybody saw a few days ago, that wasn't the complete armor. I'm still having trouble mastering it, but when it is complete, my hair is snow white, my skin is black, my ears look like an elf and I have a tail."

"Y-you have a tail?" Roy stuttered.

"Yeah..." I nodded, not really sure what else to say.

It fell silent, and I tried to ignore the awkwardness that had risen. However, I screamed when Roy all of the sudden pushed me off the dock and into the water.

*He's going to pay for that...* I thought to myself before getting back up, but I put a smile on my face when I stood up. He wore his usual cocky grin as he also stood up on the edge of the dock. I tried to make eyes playful as I used the water to push me in the air so I was level with the deck. I was still horrible when it came to using the elements, but if I had to choose which I was best at, it would be water. It was fluid and generally peaceful like me, so that made it easier to work with. I got as close to Roy as I could, and just when he leaned in to kiss me, I grabbed him by the shirt and threw him into the water.

I couldn't help but laugh as I lowered myself back into the lake, and Roy got to his feet. His perfect hair was dripping wet, and he removed his soaking wet shirt. He glared at me, and then began advancing towards me. A little nervous, I began backing up, but I couldn't help the stupid smile on my

face. Suddenly, I bumped into something hard, and I realized I had hit one of the posts that held the dock up. I was stuck.

"You don't scare me." I told him when he had gotten closer.

"Oh really?" Roy raised his eyebrows as he towered over me, making it hard to breathe.

"Nope," I turned my nose up at him, and my eyes hardened, challenging him.

"You really shouldn't have done that." Roy threatened as he grabbed the belt loops of my pants and pulled me closer to him. My breath caught in my chest and my heart raced as he slowly lowered his head and kissed me. It was more passionate than usual, and his arms wrapped around me, pressing me to his firm chest. My hands slid to his face, and my fingers became knotted in his hair. Roy had become like my drug, except the addiction was stronger than even the most powerful drug could create. What made it worse was that, even though Roy and I spent a lot of time training together, we hardly ever were able to be like this. Yet, it made it all the more sweet.

It was pure ecstasy, but even that didn't prevent me from hearing the conversation of a man and a woman on the other side of the lake

"He really likes her..."

"Don't fool yourself. She just has her hooks in him. No doubt she's simply using him because he's the most promising Riora."

I broke the kiss and looked away, trying to recover from the wound their words had created. Roy turned to yell at them, but I grabbed his arm before he could. He growled and then turned back to me. "Don't listen to them. They're just arrogant fools who don't know what they're talking about."

I shook my head, "Even if they are, it doesn't change the fact that just being with me is ruining your reputation."

"Why should I care about my reputation?" He asked as he leaned in to kiss me once more.

"Because you'll be kicked out of Ellipsis," I snapped, pushing him away. "You'll be labeled as a traitor, and it would reflect badly on Vriknir if their 'most promising Riora' suddenly becomes a traitor just like my brother. I can just hear people now saying, 'when they called him the Dakim of Vriknir, they weren't too far off'."

"Rae, you're overreacting."

"No, I'm not." I argued. "I'm trying to prevent you from screwing yourself over in the future."

He shook his head, and then smiled like I didn't understand. "Let's go."

~

Roy stepped out the window and onto the roof. I didn't even blink when he sat down next to me. We sat in silence, and I continued to stare at the stars. Eventually he broke the silence. "You're still thinking about what that guy said earlier, aren't you?"

I didn't answer. It had been a rhetorical question. Roy didn't need to ask. It was just a way of bringing up the subject.

He was obviously frustrated by my silence. "What happened to the Rae who didn't care what people thought?"

I rolled my eyes and finally turned back to look at him, "You're right, I don't care what losers like Jocelyn think, but people who could decide whether you make it or break it in life, yeah, I care what they think."

Roy's eyebrows came together in anger. "Why do you always do that?"

"Do what?"

"You make it seem like anything bad that might ever happen will be because of you, because of who you are. Why won't you stop thinking of yourself as a plague and just accept the fact that I love you?" The first part of his words were full of anger, but the last part softened as he stroked my cheek.

I stood up, shaking my head as I made my way back into the house through the window, leaving Roy sitting there. It was then that I realized one major difference between us. Living in the United States, I had learned to look towards the future, towards a brighter tomorrow, but Roy's time in Ellipsis had taught him to live like there was no tomorrow. He was content spending every waking moment doing what he enjoyed, but he didn't even bother thinking about the future.

~

### ***MARCH 31***

"Rae!" Myron ran up onto my front porch as I was walking out the door. His hair was sopping wet from having run through the pouring rain.

"What's up?"

He took a deep breath. "I was just ordered to inform Roy that he's been suspended from Ellipsis."

"What?" I exclaimed. "What is the reasoning?"

Myron shook his head, water going everywhere. "Jerome said that Roy couldn't be trusted because of how close he was to you. He thinks that spending time with you is like spending time with Dakim."

"I knew this was going to happen." I threw my hands up in frustration and walked back into the house.

Myron chased after me, "Rae, this is not your fault."

"How can you say that?" I turned on him.

He grabbed my shoulders, forcing me to look at him, "Because you did nothing wrong."

"And neither did my brother," I snapped before going down into the training room and closing the door behind me so Myron couldn't follow.

I didn't even go all the way down. I sat down on the steps and put my head in my hands. Everything was falling apart. I needed to do something before everything got really out of hand...

~

### ***APRIL 1***

"Raelyn!"

I tried to pretend like I hadn't heard Roy and continued walking down the street with my arms folded across my chest, squinting against the rain.

"Your boyfriend is calling after you." A man on the side of the street sneered at me.

"I don't know what you're talking about." I did my best to glare at the man through the pouring rain. "Roy broke up with me."

Not only did the man I was speaking to squawk in surprise, but I could feel Roy, who had caught up to me by this time, stiffen behind me. I simply stepped around the man, my feet splashing in the puddles, with Roy chasing after.

When we were a few feet away from the man, Roy spun me around to face him, but whatever he was going to say didn't happen, because he stopped short when he saw my tears through the rain. Realization seemed to come over him, and it was as if a knife had been driven through his heart. He shook his head and reached out to me, "Rae, no. Please tell me that this is just a really cruel April fool's joke. Don't do this."

I avoided his hand, knowing that just feeling his touch would cause me to waver. "Too late," I told him before biting my lip and walking away.

\*\*\* Roy \*\*\*

He chased after Rae, "I'm not going to just let you walk away."

She came to a halt, and he recoiled in surprise when she suddenly disappeared. Out of nowhere, she suddenly reappeared behind him. Her breath was warm on his neck in contrast to the cold rain as she spoke. "You don't have a choice."

There was a sharp pain in the back of his neck, and his body suddenly went numb, causing him to fall forward.

*She's so strong... Could it be that she's surpassed me?*

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

"Rae! Damn it! Open the door!" Roy shouted as he pounded on the door to my house with his fist when he had regained his ability to move. It did him no good. I had used the time when he was knocked out to reinforce it with Miutho. There was no way he was getting in.

"Raelyn, *please!* Don't do this..." His voice was shaky and broke on the last few words. I didn't believe it. *Is he crying?*

"Rae, you are everything to me. Before I met you, I didn't care about anything except revenge. I was a son-of-a-bitch who didn't give a shit about anybody else. I'd lost everything, but then I met you, and you were the first person since the day I lost my family who had truly been kind to me. You cared about me even when I treated you badly, but that's just you. Your kind, and gentle, and loving, but you don't put up with bullshit either. You saw the best in me, and now I'm *nothing* without you. Rae, I love you. *Please*, don't leave me. Raelyn!"

I hated it. I wanted nothing more than to drop that barrier and for Roy to pull me into a hug. I wanted to feel his comforting touch and the way his warm lips moved against mine. I wanted him to kiss me as he had at the lake, like nothing else mattered but him and me. Most of all, I wanted him to tell me that everything was going to be okay. I didn't want to hear how the powerful, strong Roy I knew was breaking to pieces on my doorstep. I didn't want to hear the agony in his voice from the thought of losing me. I didn't want to hear how I had just ripped away the only thing he had left to live for... me. I bit my lip until it bled, focusing on the pain. It was the only thing that kept my emotions in check and stopped me from opening that door.

The next sound was different. It sounded more like a thud than a pounding. Roy had leaned against the door and slid to the ground, just like the first day we had kissed, except I wasn't opening the door for him to fall backwards this time. I could feel his Miutho, the way it raced with his breaking heart. The only thing that stood between his Miutho connecting with mine was this 3in thick door. I wanted so badly for his Miutho to connect with mine, to feel one with him. I could almost see his hair dripping wet just like the time when I had woken up at his house after passing out from exhaustion. I could see the pain in the beautiful red eyes of his as he looked up at the dark rain clouds, cursing the sky.

*No, don't think of that! Focus on the pain.* I bit my lip harder.

"Roy!"

I looked up at the sound of another voice on the other side of the door. It was Myron.

"I'm not leaving."

I choked a little. Roy's voice was so detached, as if he was in shock and couldn't come to grips with what had happened. The shell I had been so afraid of when I was locked in that cell had come to life. More like the spirit of Roy had just died...

"Roy! Get a hold of yourself!" Myron shouted. I don't know what he did, but he must have done something, because a few minutes later I could hear the sound of footsteps walking away.

I couldn't hold it any longer. I burst into tears. That was it. Everything that I had wanted a few seconds ago would be forever gone to me. They got further and further away with every step until eventually, the footsteps were heard no more.

**\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

"I don't get it." Kian whispered to Myron a little later as they observed Roy sitting on the couch in Myron's house with his head in his hands. He hadn't moved from that position for hours. "Why would Rae tell that man it was Roy who broke up with her, when it was really the other way around?"

"She's a smart girl." Myron replied. "If the story said that Rae broke up with Roy, people would just shrug it off saying that she used him, and then tossed him aside like a piece of trash, ultimately leading people to question Roy's judgment. However, by saying that Roy was the one who broke it off, he comes out looking like a hero."

"And the worst part is," Roy finally lifted his head, revealing the famous red tears. He obviously had heard their conversation, and his voice still sounded detached when he spoke, "She did it because she cared for me. You should have seen the tears in her eyes. She still loves me."

**\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\***

"You broke up with Roy." It wasn't a question. It was a statement. Dakim was standing off to the side of the training room, watching me as I worked on my target practice a few hours later.

"Yeah, what of it?" I snapped before I threw another knife. I stopped wondering long ago how Dakim received the information he did.

"Rae, stop—" He began but I cut him off.

"Dakim, please, just stay out of it." I pleaded and got ready to throw the next knife.

"I am sorry for all the trouble our blood relation has caused."

I paused at Dakim's words, and then growled, "It's not your fault the investigators were too stupid to realize you were being set up."

"And it's not Roy's fault that the rest of the people take out their fear of me on you."

He had a point, but it didn't change anything. "I know that, and I love Roy, but I'm not selfish enough to let himself sacrifice his future for me. He's only nineteen. He has a whole career with Ellipsis in front of him."

Dakim laughed. "You talk as if you're not eighteen, a year and a half *younger* than Roy, and, if I'm not mistaken, you've spent a good portion of your time also trying to become a member of Ellipsis. Rae, I admire your bravery and how you put others first, but don't ever forget that you also have a future, and your happiness is important too."

Frustrated, I threw the knife down where it stuck in the soft ground at my feet. "Then what do you expect me to do?"

When he couldn't come up with an answer, I picked the knife back up, "Exactly."

**\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

***APRIL 4***

Myron walked down the street, not thinking about anything particular, just letting his mind wander. He was on his way home from another day of fruitless investigation. It seemed like Raven was a



ghost. The informant that they had apprehended a while ago revealed that Raven was funding his weapons project through a fake company in Dersnag that was run by a known weapons dealer who went by the name Ace, and they had managed to secretly bankrupt the company, but it had gotten them no closer to Raven. He had taken the long way home, hoping to relax his mind before calling it a night. He was passing Rae's house when a tingle went through him. It was an unusual feeling, like the gravity had suddenly changed, making him feel much lighter.

Curious, he went over to Rae's house and walked around to the back where he found the rocks of Rae's Japanese stone garden levitating the air, along with every other generally light thing in the vicinity. Rae was on the roof top with her knees pulled up to her chest and her arms tightly wrapped around herself, silent tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Rae?" He whispered.

His voice seemed to bring her back to her senses, the levitating objects dropping to the ground, and she quickly wiped the tears from her eyes. He didn't say anything as he scaled the side of the house and sat down next to her. Instead, they just sat there in silence.

"Thank you." She told him.

"For what?"

"Just being here. Your presence means more than words could say." Her voice cracked on the final word, and he could tell she was fighting more tears. He sighed and put his arm around her. She rested her head on his shoulder and collapsed into tears.

It was at times like these that he was reminded that she was only eighteen. She was always so strong during training. *She should be out having the time of her life, not training to save the lives of everybody she loves...*

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

**APRIL 16**

I changed my whole routine. There were so many places that were full of memories, and seeing any one of them was another twist of the knife that I couldn't seem to pull free. What hurt the most was the feeling of isolation. Anywhere I went, the people would glare at me as I walked by. Mothers would yell at their children to come inside when I walked down the street and drag them away if I got near. It felt like ice running through my veins, chilling me to the bone. It was the worst feeling in the world knowing that nobody wanted me. I couldn't even comfort myself with the thought that Roy still wanted me, because that was just another twist of the knife.

Before, I'd spent a good deal of my time training while making sure to still keep my cover by going to public events, but now all I did was train. It was the only thing that managed to help. It didn't make the pain go away, but it took the edge off. Now, nobody would question if I stopped showing up to events. They would know why I wasn't there.

Although most of my training anymore went through Dakim, the one part of my routine that I didn't change was my training with Myron. He seemed to understand my reasoning for the break up, but I would expect nothing less of him. He moved our training sessions to my house so the other members of his group couldn't watch, without me even asking him to. I was good at hiding it, but he still saw my pain. I didn't bring it up, and he didn't ask. It was always one thing I had liked about Myron. He didn't need to give words of comfort. His actions said it all.

"How's Roy?" I slipped up a few weeks later.

Myron stopped and stood up out of his sparring stance, looking down at me with sorrow in his eyes. "Do you really want me to answer that question?"

I bit my lip, thinking it over for a minute. "I think it would do me good to hear that he was doing alright."

"Then I guess I won't be able to answer your question."

I couldn't help myself, "Please?"

Myron sighed. "He's be reinstated into Ellipsis. He trains, he gets the job done, but he's just going through the motions. He's just as closed off as he was before you came along, if not even more so. He also changed the lyrics on his wall to 'Life After You'."

"Don't tell me that." I complained and put my head in my hands. I would never forget the first time I walked into his room and saw the lyrics he had written on the wall. Normally, I would have been glad that he had gotten rid of them, but I knew that Thaivo song was one that Myron had played on his guitar on more than one occasion at our dinner get-togethers.

I found something I didn't know I was looking for  
But then I lost it once again  
I was so close, and now  
I'm further away than when I started  
I know you still love me, as much as I love you  
So where does that leave me?

# Chapter 27

\*\*\* Myron \*\*\*

*APRIL 19*

"Myron, can I speak to you for a moment?" Lady Vanek asked after Myron's team had been dismissed from her office.

"Yes, Lady Vanek?"

When the rest of the team had left and the door was closed behind them, she sat back in her chair, "It has only recently come to my attention that Roy and Rae have split. Why wasn't I made aware of this?"

Myron clenched his teeth. Before, she never would have questioned his judgment. "It hasn't affected the performance of either of them, so I didn't think it necessary. Roy is still able to complete his missions in a satisfactory manner, and Rae has continued with her training."

Lady Vanek leaned forward, putting her elbows on her desk. "It is not my right to get involved in matters of the heart, but I must admit I am curious. Why did they split?"

"Rae may be young, but she has a very good understanding of how the world works. She was painfully aware of the comments Roy was receiving because of her blood ties to Dakim. She was the one who broke it off, but she told everybody that it was Roy."

Lady Vanek closed her eyes, "She wants to save his reputation."

Myron nodded. "That's my understanding of it."

With a sigh, Lady Vanek spun her chair around so she could look out the window over the city. "It is said that love conquers all, but prejudice is not easily beaten. How cruel the world is that Rae must receive the consequences of her brother's actions."

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

*APRIL 27*

"Begin." Dakim spoke nonchalantly.

I immediately began to circle with Luke, studying his stance. I had the advantage since I had several abilities to choose from, but although I was good at close range combat, he had the advantage over me in hand-to-hand combat. He only needed to have a hold of me for three seconds before he would have me unconscious on the floor. I was stuck using long range attacks, which just happened to be my worst point.

I held my hand out to the side, letting pure Miutho emerge and shape into a double sided blade, but it didn't look like two swords. The two ends were sharp like swords, but they were shaped like wings and could also be used like a fan. I called it Wing Tip, and it was by far my favorite weapon.

I twirled it in my fingers and then swept my hands out, sending a wave of wind in Luke's direction. He put his arms up to block the wind, and I took the chance to charge forward. He blocked my swings with ease. He was faster than I was, but the momentum caused his knees to buckle, which left me towering above him. Luke was taller than me, but this left the playing field even. Yet, I had gotten too close to him. He outstretched his arm, grabbing a hold of my wrist, and I immediately felt myself slipping. I dropped Wing Tip and it dissolved before hitting the ground.

In my free hand, I formed a dagger and thrust it towards Luke. It didn't do anything to Luke, but it was enough to get him to let go of me. When he did, I stumbled backwards out of his reach, waiting

for my vision and senses to come back. As soon as I could see again, I found Luke right in front of me, and I just barely managed to avoid another of his grabs. I was barely keeping my balance now, using the wall to prevent me from falling to the ground. Knowing I wouldn't be able to dodge him much longer, I threw up a telekinetic barrier. Not being able to sense it was there, Luke went to grab my exposed skin, but when his hand hit the barrier, he went flying across the room. I dropped the barrier, using the time to regain my balance. Making a telekinetic barrier was not an easy task to do and was very energy consuming, but was a great way to reset the playing field.

There was some distance between us now, so this time I chose a different weapon. I held my hands out, letting semi-automatics loaded with Miutho form in my hands, and opened fire. Luke wasn't as fast as Kian and Hiram, but he didn't have to be. He could tell by where I was aiming the gun where the bullet would be going and was able to avoid it. Knowing it was pointless and that I was only wasting energy, I let the guns dissolve away.

I watched Luke carefully as we began circling once more. I had sparred with Luke countless times, but he still left me unconscious on the floor every time. I knew better than to try to find an opening in his defense. He had been Dakim's best friend for eighteen years. Of course he would be trained well. I needed some other factor to influence, one that Luke wouldn't be able to defend himself against. What could I control that Luke couldn't? I looked around the room, and then it hit me. *The playing field...*

I used telekinesis to lift me up off the floor until I was up to the ceiling. I raised my hand up, letting my fingertips brush against the ceiling. A smile broke out on my face as I let all my Miutho pour into the ceiling, which then filled the walls and floor. Once the entire room was filled, I gave the Miutho a hard twist, and the whole room suddenly became live. Dakim had seen what was coming and used telekinesis to lift him off the floor, but Luke didn't have a way to keep him suspended in the air. As soon as his foot hit the ground, the electricity made its way through his body, leaving him on the ground, unable to move.

I hadn't put enough electricity into the room to do Luke any serious damage, but I stopped the electricity the second I knew I had won. I wasn't going to prolong it any longer than I needed to. I slowly lowered myself back to the floor and walked over to help Luke back to his feet.

He stood up and then looked around the room, "You'll have to thank Vic for making this entire thing out of metal."

I turned to Dakim with a smile, "Wouldn't it just be so easy to electrocute the entire battle field, taking out all of Raven's soldiers at once?"

Dakim chuckled, "Too bad electricity doesn't move through the ground like it moves through metal."

I crossed my arms over my chest, "Well, it should. It would make life so much easier."

~

## ***MAY 2***

"Raelyn!" Dakim shouted, making an unusual amount of noise. Not only did he get my attention, but he also got the attention of Luke and Vic. Three of us made our way to my living room where Dakim was sitting on the couch, his forearms resting on his knees. He looked up when he entered.

"A couple of months ago, I left without a word. I left because I was doing some of own information gathering. Lady Vanek's tactics have proven ineffective. She had an informant under Raven, but that informant failed. I succeeded in establishing my own informant, somebody who was already part of Raven's organization."

My curiosity was suddenly spiked, and I sat down, ready to listen.

"My informant just contacted me. Raven will launch his attack by the end of the month."

I covered my mouth with my hand, and stood up again. With this kind of news, sitting was just not an option. "Dakim, I still can't get the Ultimate Defense to cover my entire body. I've managed to learn telekinesis, electricity, sound, and shadow, and I can somewhat use the elements and I few other random abilities, but I still have so many more to learn. I won't be ready by the end of this month."

"Rae, look at me." When I didn't, he stood up and grabbed my chin, "Look at me! You will be ready. I have no doubt about that." When he was satisfied that he had stopped my quickly rising panic attack, he continued, "Now, you need to tell Myron, and then alert Lady Vanek. They may be relying on you to take on Raven, but you'll need her army to back you up. They need to start preparing."

~

Lady Vanek starred at me in astonishment. "How did you come by this information?"

I lowered my eyes, knowing I couldn't answer that question without screwing over Dakim.

"Rae! How did you learn of this?"

"Why does it matter? Why can't you just accept that I know it?"

"What if it was an enemy who was feeding you false information? I understand why you might want to protect your source but—"

"No, you don't understand." I snapped.

She sighed. "I'm sorry but my hands are tied. I can't do anything unless I know who your source is."

I bit my lip and looked up at the ceiling. What to do? If I told her that I'd been in contact with my brother, she'd be force to call me a traitor and make me an outlaw. If I was an outlaw, I would be powerless to help and everything would be destroyed. Yet, if I didn't tell her, they wouldn't be able to prepare and then it would be like lambs to the slaughter.

Eventually I sighed and slowly lowered my head, giving in. "My brother told me."

"You've been talking to Dakim!?" She shouted at me.

*Uh, I already regret telling her...*

"He's my brother. What do you expect?" I snapped at her.

"He's one of the most wanted criminals! We can't trust anything he says to us."

*I already told her I'd been in contact with him, might as well tell her everything.*

"I have been talking to him for months. He's been to my house on several occasions and actually stays the night quite often. I think if he was really as bad as you all make him out to be, he would have tried something by now!"

"She has a point," Myron joined in. "I honestly believe that Dakim is innocent."

She turned on Myron, "You knew Dakim had been within our borders?"

Myron hurried to answer, "I had my suspicions."

"Why didn't you report it?" She yelled at him.

"There was no evidence, and I didn't want to put everybody on high alert if my suspicions turned out to be false." Myron explained. I secretly smiled to myself, suddenly thankful that the team had turned a blind eye and kept themselves out of it. It gave them a good alibi.

She pulled her lips back, almost as if she were going to growl at us. "Do you know what kind of position you two have put me in?"

"A bad one, yeah I get it, but would you rather have me remained silent and let the whole village get slaughtered? If you're going to outlaw me for working with the enemy, then at least outlaw Myron too that way I can continue my training and help out when the time comes."

"What makes you think I want to be an outlaw?" Myron jumped in, looking at me incredulously.

"Oh shut up." Lady Vanek snapped. "I'm not going to outlaw either of you. However, this can't go unpunished." She looked at me, trying to decide what to do.

"I'd rather be outlawed." I told her.

"What?" She stared back at me, in disbelief. "But being outlawed is worse than receiving some sort of punishment."

"You do me any other harm, even if it's just a scratch, and Dakim will rein hell down on this place. Then he'll really become the criminal everybody sees him as."

Lady Vanek groaned. "Fine, we will decide what to do for punishment later. Myron, do you believe her information is credible?"

"I do. The explanation given fits in perfectly with what we've already discovered. We have no reason to believe Dakim would lie to us. Actually, we should be inclined to believe him because even if he were a mass murderer, he would still want to protect his sister, and he can protect his sister by arming this village to fight back."

"Fine. Sheila!"

Sheila came scurrying in at her call. "Yes, Lady Vanek?"

"Get a hold of Jerome. Tell him I need to see him right away to discuss some new information. We have reason to believe that Dakim is within our borders. If he is, I want Ellipsis dispatched immediately to apprehend him."

"What?" I shouted and jumped out of my chair, but Myron grabbed my shoulder preventing me from doing anything else.

"Send as many possible." Lady Vanek continued as if she hadn't been interrupted. "Their only chance is to catch him off guard."

"Right away," She nodded and then hurried off to do as she had been told.

I squirmed out from under Myron's arm and stepped towards Lady Vanek. "What do you think you're doing?"

She glared down at me. "I think that I'm considering all possibilities and doing my best to prepare for them. By having Dakim in custody, we may be able to get more information out of him. I know you want to think he is innocent because he is your brother, but he's not. He killed people in cold blood. He's a murderer."

Myron stepped forward. "I disagree. I also advise against talking to Jerome. I question his loyalty."

"And I question yours." Lady Vanek snapped at Myron.

Myron was stunned into silence and I rubbed my temples. *This is not going well...*

### **\*\*\* Myron \*\*\***

Rae was rubbing her temples when she suddenly sighed and looked up at Lady Vanek. "Can I have some paper?"

Rae's question caught Lady Vanek off-guard. "What?"

"Paper?" Rae repeated. Her condescending tone was not one usually used when addressing Lady Vanek. Normally Lady Vanek would have snapped at whoever talked to her like that, but she was still off-guard, and Rae's tone didn't even register in her mind.

Rae sighed when Lady Vanek didn't respond. "It's not like I have anything to write with so I can't warn Dakim."

Lady Vanek frowned, "Then what do you want to paper for?"

"When I get really stressed out, the only way I'm able to calm down is if I have something to focus on. I found doing origami is the best solution."

Lady Vanek raised her eyebrows in disbelief but otherwise took a blank piece of paper from her desk and handed it to Rae. She thanked Lady Vanek and then sat down at the table. She stared at the paper intently and mumbled, "Hm, what do I want to make?"

At her words, Myron glanced over at her. He smiled. *How creative of her. She doesn't need a pen or pencil to write. She can write in Miutho. She already knew what she was going to make. Her words were only a distraction. She was warning Dakim after all.*

"What do you think?" Raelyn held up the finished origami bird for Lady Vanek to see.

Lady Vanek looked at Rae like she was insane, no doubt wondering how she could be making origami at a time like this. Then she shook her head and turned back to Myron. "Let's go with the assumption that what Dakim has told us is true and Raven will be on our doorstep in less than a month. Will she be ready?"

Myron walked about the room, taking Lady Vanek's attention with him, which gave Rae the opportunity to toss the bird out the opened window.

"How do you expect me to answer that? Raven is still like a ghost to us. She may be over prepared, or she may be nowhere near ready. I have no way of answering your question without knowing Raven's skill level. Dakim has established an informant under Raven. We could use his information."

"Once he is in custody we can interrogate him."

"You think you can break Dakim Adelinda just by interrogating him?"

"If he's as innocent as you claim him to be, then he should be willing to give us the information." Lady Vanek countered.

Rae sighed and rested her chin on her hands and Myron turned to the window. He knew Dakim wouldn't have any trouble evading the Ellipsis members as long as he got Rae's message in time, but would he receive it in time?

Several, very long minutes later, Jerome burst through the door, and Rae jumped to her feet. "He wasn't there."

Rae let out a sigh of relief and then turned to Lady Vanek, "May I leave now?"

"Fine," She growled and then turned to Myron, "I don't care how strong Raven is. Make sure she is ready."

Rae strode out the door, and Myron didn't miss the way Jerome glared at her when she walked past. That was when dawning came over him.

# Chapter 28

Myron stood in the doorway of Jerome's office, watching Jerome as he flipped through papers on his desk.

"Can I help you with sssomething?" Jerome tried to ask politely, but his impatience came through.

"Why?"

Jerome didn't look up from his papers. "Royce has already been reinstated. What more do you want from me?"

"That's not what I was referring to."

Jerome finally looked up from his papers and glared at Myron, waiting for him to explain.

"It's no secret that I believe in Dakim's innocence, but when I was asked to investigate the missing file from the vault last October, I had my suspicions of Dakim. He would be the only one capable enough to get past security. Yet, why would he break into the vault and steal Raven's file, without touching his own? If he wanted information on Raven, he had much more efficient ways than breaking into our vault. However, if Dakim didn't do it, then who did?"

"That investigation, along with several others, went cold because we didn't have any leads. Then, you denied Rae membership into Ellipsis. Yes, she is naive and compassionate, but it was Roy who refused to go through the test. There was no reason for failing Rae if Roy was the one at fault. You didn't remove Roy from Ellipsis until you were forced to by public opinion. In the beginning I could understand your frustrations with Rae, and at times I even agreed with you. She is not cut out for this lifestyle and was moved up the ranks way too quickly. Yet, when you denied her membership, but did nothing to punish Roy, I realized that there was something more. It wasn't until that I realized that you had a deep hatred for Raelyn. After that realization, all the other pieces began coming together. You stole that file. You sent the men to attack Rae on her first mission and discourage her from becoming a Riora. You were the reason Rae, Carmichael, Lance and Priscilla walked into that trap. You're working for Raven, and you would love nothing more than to see Rae fail."

"Of coursse I want her to fail!" He snapped. "I gave my *life* to Vriknir, and when the firsst rumorsss of Raven'sss attack emerged, I was fully prepared to put my life on the line to defend thisss cccity. Then, that bitch Vanek brought in the low life sssisster of the man who tore thisss cccity to pieccces to sssave us. I tried to eliminate Raelyn. It wasssn't Huntersss who attacked Raelyn at her housse on Earth. They were trained assassassinsss that I sent, but you foolsss got in the way. That wasss when I realized that Raven was right. I ussed to believe in this placce, in itsss assylum for thosse who are persssecuted. Yet, itsss leader can't even take care of thisss placce, instead relying on Raelyn, who iss no better than her brother. Thisss placce can no longer fulfill what it wasss dessigned to do. We need to tear down and begin again."

"You're a leader, Jerome. Since when are you content with bowing down at Raven's feet like a dog?"

"Becaussse the leaderssship I onccce ssstood for no longer exissstsss!"

Myron shook his head. "It ceased to exist the day you betrayed Vriknir."

An evil smile broke out on Jerome's face, "And what are you going to do about it, *Commander* Myron Masssterssss? Do you wisssh to take me on, or are you going to run off and tell Vanek? It iss your word againsst mine, and, given your recccent tenssionsss with her, I can make a pretty good guessssss ass to who will win."

Hating that he was right, Myron walked out, slamming the door behind him.

\*\*\* Jocelyn \*\*\*



Jocelyn stood with Charisse and Lance by the forest edge of the training field while they waited for Carmichael to finish speaking with Roy a little ways away. While they waited, Charisse struck up a conversation, "Thanks for training with us Lance, even though you're a Skekaek now."

"I may not officially be a part of this team anymore, but I will always have your backs." Lance gave the two girls a big smile. However, it faded as his eyes drifted across the training field, "but it's weird without Rae being here. She may not have trained with us much, but she was always here training with one person or another."

"Well, I'm glad she doesn't come around here anymore." Jocelyn sputtered. "Just looking at her made me sick."

Faster than anybody could follow, Roy, who had originally been some distance from Jocelyn, grabbed her by the shoulder and thrust her up against the nearest tree. "Say one bad thing about Rae, and I won't hesitate to kill you."

Scared out of her mind, Jocelyn simply nodded, and Roy let go of her where she dropped to her knees. Trying to get her fear under control, she watched as Roy walked away. She would admit, ever since Roy had split up with Rae, he'd gone back into his shell, but even before Rae had come around, he never would have laid a hand on another Riora out of anger, especially one who he knew was weaker than him. He would never stoop that low. What she didn't understand was, if he was the one who broke up with Rae, then why wasn't Rae the one who was sulking around? Yet, it was Roy who was upset, and nobody had seen Rae for weeks. No, there was something more than what was being let on...

A little later that day, Jocelyn walked over and knocked on Rae's door. It was a few minutes, but when Rae opened the door, the shock was written on her face. Of all the people to come knocking on her door, she hadn't expected it to be Jocelyn.

"Hey Rae, I was wondering what happened between you and Roy."

The shock immediately turned to anger and Rae slammed the door in Jocelyn's face.

*That's odd. Rae and I aren't exactly best friends, but slamming the door in my face is more something Roy would do.* Jocelyn pondered as she walked down the street. *Charisse is friends with Rae. Maybe she knows something.*

### \*\*\* Myron \*\*\*

"What's this?" Lady Vanek asked when Myron handed her a folder.

"My resignation from Ellipsis."

"What?" She threw the folder down on her desk. "Why?"

"Because the Ellipsis leader is no longer loyal to the city he serves."

"I'll admit that there have been tensions between Jerome and I, but he would never betray Vriknir."

"Then you are blind!"

"That may be true, but I am not as blind as you think I am." Lady Vanek interrupted. *"Do what you must to save Vriknir."*

His eyes widened as she spoke. Then he smiled as understanding came to him. She never showed it, but she was scared for her people. His threat to take Rae and run was still in the back of her mind, and she was desperate for him to help her. She needed him for the battle against Raven. She may not have believed in Dakim's innocence, but if it meant saving Vriknir, she was willing to do anything.

He nodded, "Yes, Lady Vanek."

### \*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

I sighed as there was another knock on my door a few hours later. "Go away, Jocelyn!"

"Rae, it's me." Charisse's voice came through the door.

With a sigh, I opened the door. "Forgive me."

"It's okay. However, Jocelyn told me what happened today. Rae, wait!" She called when I rolled my eyes and turned my back to the door. "After Jocelyn talked to me, I did some of my own investigating." She paused when I turned back and raised my eyebrows at her expectantly. "Roy didn't break up with you, did he? You broke up with him."

"Congratulations. You're a real Sherlock Holmes." I sneered.

"Who's Sherlock Holmes?"

I only shook my head and walked back into the house. To my dismay, she followed me inside. "Look, Rae, I know you're upset. I can't even begin to imagine the kind of pain you're in, but you can't stay holed up here. You haven't left this house at all. Please, just let me take you out somewhere." She begged.

"Go, Rae." Luke ordered as he rounded the corner and joined our conversation.

"But—"

"Go. You need this. This may be one of the last times you are able to go out and enjoy yourself. Just think of it as part of your training if you have to."

With a deep sigh, I turned back to Charisse, "Alright. I guess I'll go."

She broke out in a smile. "Let me run home and change real quick, and then we can go to the bonfire."

"The bonfire?" I hesitated.

"Don't worry, Roy stopped going."

I nodded and watched as Charisse walked out and then went upstairs to change.

### \*\*\* Dakim \*\*\*

Dakim casually entered Rae's house not long after she had left for the bonfire. It had taken a little more effort to get past the guards now that they had been alerted he was hanging around, but it was still relatively easy for him to get in. However, when he sensed an unfamiliar presence, he quickly turned to hide. Yet, before he could, a hand grabbed his arm. Deciding that it was too late to escape, Dakim instead turned on his attacker and pinned him to the wall.

"Myron Masters!" Dakim exclaimed in shock, but otherwise didn't relax the pin he had Myron in.

Myron smiled at him, not even bothering to attempt to get out of the pin, and his attitude was apparent in his tone when he spoke, "You come by here more often than I realized. I thought I was going to have to camp out here for a while before you would show up."

"You're either incredibly brave or incredibly stupid for thinking you could apprehend me by yourself."

Myron's cocky smile widened, "Well, I guess that makes me incredibly smart because I didn't come here to apprehend you."

### \*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

Most the time when people feel like everybody is staring at them, they're just being paranoid. Yet, I wasn't paranoid. Everybody was staring at me as I walked with Charisse into the clearing where the bonfire was being held.

"Thank you for even being willing to be seen with me in public," I whispered.

Charisse smiled, "No matter whether your last name is Murray or Adelinda, you're still Raelyn, and people need to realize that."

Her words lifted my spirit, and I couldn't help comparing her kindness to Dustin and Christian's compassion. I missed them so much...

"Forgive me for lying to you, Charisse. You've been so kind to me."

"There is nothing to forgive. Now that I see how people have reacted, I don't blame you for keeping it a secret."

"Thanks, Charisse, that means a lot to me."

She smiled but then shuffled her feet, "Since who you are isn't really a secret anymore, do you mind if I ask you some questions? My curiosity has been killing me!"

I giggled, "Sure, but let's step off to the side. Once the band starts playing, we won't be able to hear anything else."

We walked over to the side of the stage so we would be behind the speakers, and then I turned to her, "So, what do you want to know?"

"Were you really an informant in Ikie?"

I shook my head, "No."

"Then where were you before?"

"I grew up on Earth." I began, but then paused, "Th...That was where I met Roy."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Charisse quickly apologized. "We don't have to do this if it will bring up bad memories."

I closed my eyes as I took a deep breath, and despite how hard I fought it, the image of Roy leaning on the classroom doorframe the first day we met swam before my eyes. I had been the only person he had willingly acknowledged that day. I took another deep breath and opened my eyes, "Let's just move on to the next question."

She nodded, but let me take a few more deep breaths before she continued, "What were you doing on Earth?"

"After my brother was accused of attacking Vriknir, my family was attacked. My parents sealed away my abilities and sent me to Earth where I could live a normal life, giving up their lives in the process."

"You really have had a rough life." Charisse sympathized.

"It could have been harder," I noted. "When they sealed my abilities away, I didn't even know who I was until I met Kian and regained my memories."

She nodded and then asked, "What made you come here?"

"The seal my mother placed on me wasn't permanent. Even though I hadn't regained my memories, I was starting to regain some of my abilities. I didn't know why I had these abilities and was afraid of them. Eventually the Hunters picked up my trail and Myron and his team came to rescue me by offering to bring me back here." I explained with a smile. I had told her most of the truth. That was more than I had been able to do before.

"What all can you do? I mean, I know Adelindas are unique because that was how everybody knew you were related to Dakim when you showed up here half covered in scales, but what exactly was that?"

"Legend has it that the Adelindas descended from dragons. My nails can turn into dragon claws and my skin can turn to scales that are almost impenetrable. As for my ability, I can control the pure form of Miutho, which basically means I can use any ability that isn't a bloodline trait."

"So, basically you're all powerful?" Charisse joked.

"No, far from it. Everybody has their weak points," I reminded. "For example, my scales originate from a mark on my back and if I get hit there, I will be left in unmeasurable pain. Also, the Miutho from the night at the bonfire also seems to have a negative effect on me."

Charisse continued with her questions without pause, "What are you doing here in Vriknir?" I frowned at her, "Didn't I answer that already?"

She played with her necklace uncomfortably. "I thought maybe there was something else going on. I guess I would have expected you to try and find your brother. Isn't he the only family you have left?"

I nodded, "Yes, but Myron's team rescued me. I originally decided to stay here because I felt like I owed to them. I know everybody things that Ellipsis gave me special treatment, but they didn't. It was just that Myron played favorites. Myron knew who I was before we even set foot in Kusnik. He knew what my brother was capable of, and he knew that with a little training, I may be able to do the same. He pushed me through the ranks, hoping it would help me improve faster. He wanted me on his team. He gave me special treatment that was unfair to everybody else who has been working hard for years. I must apologize to you for that as well."

She shook her head, "I'll admit that I was surprised at how fast you surpassed me, but actually Commander Masters has always played favorites. When Commander Masters was first promoted to Commander, the first person he chose to be a member of his team was Lord Radev. I remember it so well because Lord Radev hadn't even been an Ellipsis member at the time. He was also the one who convinced the Dalca brothers to apply to Ellipsis and was disappointed when he didn't get both of them. I swear he sulked around here for weeks," She giggled. "As for Roy, I think Commander Masters had his eye on him since the day he lost his parents. He didn't push Roy through the ranks, but he offered what lessons and advice he could give. I guess I just didn't realize the extent to which he would go in order to get you on his team. You must really be talented."

I shook my head, "No, I'm really not all that great."

"Obviously everybody else sees your talent. Otherwise they wouldn't be so afraid of you."

Her words were just another reminder of the glares that were always being sent my way. The bonfire had already been lit, but most of the people were still gathered around the stage. Charisse had already said that Roy stopped going to the bonfires when I did, but I couldn't help scanning the crowd, looking for his beautiful red eyes, and I couldn't help being disappointed. Having yet to actually enjoy myself, I stood at the edge of the crowd watching the band play. To be honest, they weren't all that good, not like the band that had played the first time I had come to the bonfire with Roy and danced with Lance, and I began wondering whether or not I would be able to convince Myron to perform one day.

"Charisse! What are you doing?" I whispered as she started walking up on stage when the band had ended.

"Come on." She grabbed me by the arm.

She dragged me up on stage, and I immediately took in all the frowns and glares that were sent my way. Yet, my eyes were drawn to a figure hidden in the shadow of one of the trees. Roy had shown up after all.

I went to walk off the stage, but Charisse grabbed my arm, preventing me, and then spoke to the crowd. "I see all the glares you give her," Charisse spoke in the microphone. "What I want to know is, why? What is it that all you have against her?"

"She's a traitor!" Somebody shouted from the crowd.

"Why?" Charisse shouted back, "Because her brother is a murderer? So what? My brother was the class clown and has the record for the worst grades. Does that mean that I'm going to be a class clown too? No! I have the top grades in my class. What evidence do you have that she's a traitor other than her blood line?"

Charisse stared down every face in the crowd. No answer.

"With three-fourths of this village's population being Riora, you all are pretty ignorant. For weeks now everybody has been wondering what would have caused Rae and Roy to break up. It's

probably the biggest gossip this village has ever seen. Well I have an answer for you. It was because of you all that they broke up.”

“Charisse please—”

She ignored me. “Roy didn’t break it off. Rae did. She broke it off because she knew the way everybody looked at her, and she didn’t want it to reflect on Roy. She broke her own heart so that Roy would continue to be respected as a Riora. Do you want to know why he threw Jocelyn into a tree earlier today? He was frustrated that he can’t be with the only girl he has ever cared about because of all of you.”

“Charisse, that is enough!” I snapped before walking off the stage and shoving my way through the crowd.

“Rae!” She chased after me.

“I can’t believe you just did that!” I turned on her.

“Why not?” She argued.

“As much as I would like it, a petty little speech isn’t going to erase the prejudice that people have been festering in their hearts for years.”

“Maybe, but never again will my integrity be questioned.”

I froze at the sound of the voice I’d been longing to hear for weeks. Charisse simply smiled and walked away, leaving me alone with Roy. I turned slowly to see the beautiful red eyes that made my heart melt every time I saw them.

“Roy, I’m *sorry*.” I emphasized the word so he would know that I wasn’t just asking for forgiveness. “It was never my intention to hurt you.”

“Rae, I appreciate everything you’ve done for me, but I have to be honest. None of it would be worth it without you. I can’t promise that all the prejudice is going to be gone after that little speech, but I can promise that nobody is ever going to question why we’re together. That is, of course, as long as you want to get back together...”

I couldn’t hold back any longer. I went up on my tip toes, wrapping my arms around his neck, and pressed my lips to his. He smiled into the kiss as he wrapped his arms around me, squeezing me tight, and he spun me around in the air. I was on cloud nine, and I wasn’t coming back down again anytime soon. It was as if a twenty ton brick had been lifted my shoulders and the world had been set right once more. When he set me on my feet again, he took my face in his hands and kissed me ever so softly. It was like heaven. I took in the smell of his cologne as he pulled me into the tightest hug I had ever had.

“People are glaring at us.” I commented, feeling their stares on my back.

I could feel his firm chest vibrate as he chuckled. “I *really* don’t care.”

I smiled and breathed, “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

I lifted my head so I could look up at him, “Think I could convince you to stick around for a little while.”

Roy bit his lip as if he actually had to ponder it, “I don’t know. I might have to think about that one.”

I only rolled my eyes and dragged him over to the bonfire where everybody else had already taken their seats. I would never admit it, but his poor attempt at humor was one of the things I had missed most. I sat down on one of the logs, and Roy sat down next to me, but then he surprised me by pulling me into his lap and wrapping his arms around me. I rested my head on his shoulder and closed my eyes. It was hard to believe that this was the same Roy I had met back in September. I had been slowly chipping away at the wall he had put up, but it was a slow process. Then, Zandar showed him that, for the first time in a long time, he had something to lose. Yet, I don’t think he realized just what he had to lose until I was actually gone.

Roy wasn't the only one who had changed, either. I had always been a generally independent person. Even though Christian was older than me, it often seemed like I was the older sister always looking out for my little brother. I was always trying to be strong for him, and for Dustin. Even in training I was always trying to be strong for Dakim and Myron. For the first time I was actually looking to somebody else for strength, and I was only just now beginning to realize how much I needed it.

**\*\*\*Jocelyn\*\*\***

"By starring at them, you are only torturing yourself." Lance told Jocelyn as he sat down next to her.

Jocelyn made a weak attempt at a smile. "I...I am happy for them."

"Really?" Lance asked in disbelief.

Jocelyn finally turned away from Rae and Roy to face Lance. "We've all been training to be Riora together since we were toddlers. Yet, I can't remember what Roy was like before Vriknir was attacked. I've always known him as a cold, heartless boy, but he was proud and talented, so I found myself falling for him. I chased after him for years, but now I realize that I was only chasing what I imagined Roy to be. I did everything I could to get his attention, because I believed that if he just realized that I existed, then he would fall in love with me and no longer be such a cold-hearted person.

"Then, Raelyn came to town. You know, I've been an Ukemek for a few years, but I've watched Raelyn go from not even being a Riora to applying for Ellipsis. From day one she had received special treatment from Ellipsis, and she got Roy's attention without even batting an eyelash. I couldn't figure out what was so special about her.

"I got my answer when it was revealed that she is Dakim's sister. I didn't lose anybody when the village was attacked, but I was just as appalled as anybody else when she was still permitted to stay her. Out of everybody, I expected Roy to be the most upset because she lied to him for so long. I thought that was why he broke up with her. Yet, she broke up with him to save him. She destroyed herself so that he could have a future. I don't know if I could have done that. If somebody had walked up to me and told me that I could be with Roy tomorrow, but I had to give up everything else today, I wouldn't be able to do it. She gave up everything, knowing that she still wouldn't be with him, but it would be what was best for him. She may be Dakim's sister, but she obviously cares deeply for Roy, and in the several years I've known Roy, I've never seen him this happy."

Jocelyn looked away from Lance as the tears began to fill her eyes, "but if I am happy for them, then why does it still hurt so much."

Lance comfortably wrapped his arm around her as she began to cry into his shoulder, "I know it hurts, but I promise it'll get better. You have my word."

**\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

"Roy, Commander Masters wants you." Hiram, Kian's brother, spoke as he approached us, but stopped short when he realized that I was in Roy's lap. He immediately blushed and mumbled an apology.

"Damn it, get somebody else to do it." I growled, clinging to Roy's shirt.

"I don't know," Hiram joked. "I think you need to spend some time away from Roy. You're starting to talk like him."

I smiled but otherwise let his comment slide. However, when he didn't walk away, I looked up at him. "I wasn't kidding. Find somebody else."

Hiram rolled his eyes. "Commander Masters specifically requested Roy."

"Bullshit," I snapped.

Roy chuckled and moved me so he could get up. "Roy..." I begged.  
He smiled down at me, his eyes sparkling. "I'll be back in five minutes."  
"I'm going to hold you to that." I threatened, holding my watch up for him to see.  
He put his hand on my watch and then brushed his lips against mine. "I'll see you in five."  
I sighed as he walked away and then looked down at my watch, "Bastard."  
"What?" Charisse prodded.  
"He broke my watch."

\*\*\* Roy \*\*\*

"This better be good." Roy snapped as he walked into Myron's house, not even bothering to knock. "I was sitting at a bonfire with Rae in my arms, and you just pulled me away from that."

Myron looked up at Roy in surprise, and then a huge grin broke out on his face. "Well, that makes what I have to say a lot easier."

Roy simply raised his eyebrows at Myron, waiting for him to get to the point.

"We have a file on every person who has ever set foot in Vriknir. Raven grew up in Vriknir, but we don't have anything on him. His filing was missing, and Lady Vanek asked me to investigate."

"But that place is practically impossible to break into." Roy brought up.

Myron nodded and continued, "Then, when the sister of the informant showed up at the Castell Cafe, we were asked to look into it. We knew that Raven wanted her alive to keep an eye on her, but nobody new entered Vriknir around the time that she showed up.

"So whoever was keeping an eye on her had already been in Vriknir."

Myron nodded, satisfied that Roy was putting the pieces together so quickly.

"Finally, there was the informant that you and Rae apprehended. He wasn't very high on Raven's totem pole, so how it was that it took so long for us to discover him? How is it that Raven has remained like a ghost? Why is it that every investigation into Raven goes cold?"

Roy stared at Myron, knowing that he was missing some connection.

"Who are the only two people who have access to the vault with the files?" Myron prodded.

"Jerome and Lady Vanek."

"And who sent Rae on the mission that almost got her, Lance, and Priscilla killed?"

"Jerome," Roy answered, suddenly seeing where this was going, "But why? Why would he do it?"

"Because he felt betrayed. He was committed to defending this place until his dying breath, but Lady Vanek disgraced him by bringing in the sister of an alleged mass murderer. That was when he decided that this city wasn't worth saving. He's the reason none of our investigations are going anywhere. He denied Rae membership, not because she wasn't good enough, but because he was trying to hinder her training. He knew that he couldn't physically prevent Rae from training and getting stronger without raising some flags, but he could put up obstacles to slow her training down. He wanted to make sure that she wasn't ready. Also, he no doubt told Raven about Rae's existence. We just lost one of our advantages."

"What's our next move?"

"I spoke with Dakim and—"

"You spoke..."

Myron smiled, "Yes, I *spoke* with Dakim and I resigned from Ellipsis. Lady Vanek told me to save Vriknir whatever the cost. I know I am practically throwing away my Ellipsis career and essentially becoming a traitor, and I don't expect you to do the same—"

"I'm in." Roy interjected.

"But Roy—"

"I'm in."

~

He jogged back to clearing, knowing that he was fifty-five minutes late for meeting Raelyn. He was never going to hear the end of it, but suddenly that wasn't his biggest concern. He arrived in the clearing to find that the bonfire had been put out. Everybody was gone. The party was over.

He took off down the street again, hating himself. He finally got Rae back, and then he just left her there!

He slowed to a walk as he approached Rae's house. Taking a deep breath, he gently knocked on the door. A minute later, the door opened to reveal Vic. Before Roy even said anything, he spoke, "She's out back."

Roy nodded and then walked around to the back of the house. Luke was sitting at the table reading a book by the light of the mini fire they had set up, and Rae was asleep on the extended futon. When he approached, Luke quietly closed his book and went inside.

He carefully put his knee on the futon, hoping the extra weight wouldn't wake her, then slowly crawled up next to her. Yet, she awakened anyway. She turned slightly, so she was leaning against his chest, and looked up at him. He simply stared at her, marveling at her beauty, beauty that he never thought would be this close to again. He brushed a stray hair from her face and then caressed her cheek. She softly smiled up at him and then took his hand in hers and wrapped it around her before closing her eyes once more. He took one last long look at her, and then laid his head next to hers and fell asleep.

~

His eyes snapped open when his senses alerted him to the presence of another person behind him. Careful not to jostle Rae, he pulled out a knife and threw it in the direction of the person.

The person caught it with ease and then stepped out of the shadows. "I don't think Rae would be too pleased that you're throwing knives at her brother."

Roy stiffened, realizing his mistake, but spoke with a level voice, "Usually when someone is sneaking around at two in the morning, they're not friendly."

"You're right. I'm not friendly." Dakim walked around to the other side of the futon so Roy could look at him without having to strain himself while playing with the knife he had just caught. "Myron came to see me, and it is my understanding that you have decided to go along with him. Considering she's sleeping soundly, I'm guessing you have yet to tell her of your decision."

Roy's eyes narrowed at Dakim, picking up his negative tone. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means," Dakim snarled, squatting down next to him, "that she broke her own heart so that you could have a future here, and now you're throwing it away."

"Do you not see how happy she is?" Roy snarled back.

"Ignorance is bliss."

"Even if I hadn't decided to join you and I stayed here, I wouldn't have a future. Jerome is a traitor and he's manage to tie Lady Vanek's hands. Ellipsis is done for. By going with you, I get to fight for Vriknir and stay with Rae. Until the day she tells me that she doesn't love me anymore, I'm not leaving her."

Dakim sat back on his heels, looking at Roy with interest, "You're the first person who has stood up to me other than Rae. I respect you for that. I also understand that Rae has kept secrets from you because I asked her to, but that won't be happening anymore, so I expect you to be the one to tell her your decision."

Roy relaxed a little, "I understand."



“Stick around tomorrow. There is something you need to see.”

Roy nodded, and then Dakim was gone. With a sigh of relief, Roy rested his head back on the bed once more, and he smiled to himself. It was like the boy meeting the girl’s dad for the first time, and he had passed.

# Chapter 29

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

MAY 3

As the morning sun began to appear above the horizon, I opened my eyes to see Roy next to me, simply staring at me. "Hi," I whispered.

He lifted his head so he could press his lips to my forehead, "I love you." He then proceeded to kiss my cheek, "I love you." Then the other cheek, "I love you."

I put my hand on his chest, stopping him. "I think I got it the first time."

"Really? Because I don't think you did." He smiled and then pressed his lips to mine.

When he finally pulled back, I squinted at him, "You think you're so funny."

He rolled his eyes, "I don't think so. I know so."

"Pssh," I pushed him away from me, but when I went to get up, his arms snaked around me, pulling me back to him.

"How about we just go back to sleep?" He buried his face in my hair and breathed deeply.

Enjoying the moment, I closed my eyes and just laid there. Yet, the moment was ruined when thoughts from yesterday began running through my mind. I still felt so guilty.

I turned so I could look him in the eyes. "I'm sorry."

He took a deep breath and then let it out. "Let's just say we're even, because I have something to say that you're not going to want to hear."

A little apprehensive now, I slowly propped myself up on my elbow, waiting for him to explain. He took another deep breath and sat up, "I spoke to your brother last night."

"You did what?" I shouted, sitting up straight, just as my brother stepped through the back door to join us on the patio. I turned on him, "Dakim!"

He quickly threw his hands in the air, "It wasn't my decision."

I stood up and turned around to face Roy. "I gave up everything for you, and now you're just throwing it all away?"

All the happiness I had just felt with him turned to anger, and I turned to go into the house. Roy chased after me, bumping into the futon in his haste. He grabbed my shoulder and spun me around, "Don't even start this. We've been through this already."

"No, we've been over the fact that dating me didn't make you a traitor, this, *this*, makes you a traitor." I shouted.

"Rae," His voice was much softer than mine as he took my face in his hands. "For the longest time I couldn't believe you actually existed. Even after how horribly I had treated you, you chose to stick around. In the beginning, I didn't show you how much I cared for you because I figured that you would leave just like everybody else had. Then you did leave, but you didn't leave *because* of me. You left *for* me. You left so that I could have a future with Ellipsis, but Ellipsis is done for. Jerome is a traitor. If we don't do something, Vriknir will be done for. If Vriknir falls, then I won't have a future."

I knew he was trying to persuade me, and I hated to admit that it was working. I slowly turned back to Dakim, "Please tell me that there is good reason for this."

"Jerome is working for Raven and Lady Vanek cannot openly oppose him. Maybe if you were just going up against Raven you would be able to handle this, but you can't go up against Raven, Jerome, and the remaining Ellipsis members. If you want to save Vriknir we're going to need Myron and his team."

I sighed, giving in, and then looked back and forth between Roy and Dakim, "You two better play nice."

Luke stepped out of the house and gripped Dakim's shoulders, a grin on his face. "I'll keep him in line."

I heard the static first, and then Luke let out a little yelp when Dakim suddenly emitted a spark of electricity. Dakim glared at Luke as he walked back into the house, but when Dakim had his back turned, Luke gave us a wink.

"He reminds me of Karexon." Roy commented after the door closed behind Luke and Dakim.

"No, Karexon is actually funny. Luke just likes to bug people."

Roy put his arm on my shoulder, using me as an arm rest. "Oh, so he's like me?"

I looked at Roy and then at the door Luke had just walked through. "How am I ever going to survive?"

"Very carefully."

~

A little bit later I walked down to the training room with Roy, and Dakim showed him the full Ultimate Defense, as compared to the incomplete version I had showed the city. Roy's reaction wasn't nearly as amusing as Myron's had been when I first showed him the claws. Roy had always been better at controlling his emotions and keeping a straight face.

Myron, Karexon, and Kian arrived not long after. Myron acted as if Dakim's appearance hadn't changed at all, but Kian and Karexon looked uncomfortable, and they looked anywhere but directly at Dakim. Luke and Vic then emerged from the back room, completing the group.

"What now?" Myron asked Dakim, and I didn't miss the shocked expression on Kian's face. He couldn't believe that Myron was giving Dakim leadership.

"We prepare." Dakim answered and then began, "Raven came from the Faulkner family."

"He's a copy-cat." Myron concluded and Karexon let out a groan.

I turned to Luke, hoping for an explanation, and he didn't disappoint, "The Faulkner family can shift their Miutho to match that of anybody who is around them. They can use any ability, as long as somebody else with that particular ability is in the general vicinity."

"No doubt he has surrounded himself with some of the best abilities in Kusnik," Vic pointed out.

"Exactly," Dakim emphasized.

"But shouldn't that be a disadvantage?" Karexon asked.

When Dakim didn't answer, Myron did, "No, because if he surrounds himself with the best abilities, then we know exactly the kind of people who will be coming after us. Raven, on the other hand, has absolutely no idea what to expect from Rae."

"Wouldn't Jerome have told Raven?" Kian inquired.

Myron shook his head. "Jerome knows the overview of Rae's training, but he doesn't know everything that she can do."

"This doesn't change the fact that he's still going to be surrounded by the best." Vic, ever the pessimist, reminded.

"Yes, but nobody is perfect. Now that we know our enemy, we can start preparing for them, and maybe we'll even find a flaw to exploit." Dakim argued.

"Well, we know that Raven is driven by revenge. He is smart and cunning, but it has been ten years. No doubt he is growing impatient." Roy spoke up.

"Are you speaking from personal experience?" Vic taunted, but stopped after a hard thump to the back of the head by Dakim.

Roy let the comment bounce off him and continued as if he hadn't been interrupted, "The more impatient he is, the more likely it is that he will make a mistake."

"What's to stop if from just copying your ability?" Luke asked Dakim.

"His ability is similar to ours. The number of abilities he can learn is unlimited, but he still has to learn them. Even if he was surrounded by every ability that existed, he wouldn't magically be able to control them all. He is not all-powerful. He is limited just like we are. Copying the Adelinda ability won't do him any good if he hasn't had time to practice. No, the soldiers he will be bringing have no doubt been with him for a while." Dakim then turned from the crowd to Luke and Vic, "Vic, get a hold of our informant and see what she can tell us about the soldiers Raven has gathered. Luke, figure out what happened to the secret weapon Raven had been developing. The weapon proved to be ineffective because they couldn't stabilize the Miutho, but I can't image that he would give up that easily."

"Karexon, go with Luke." Myron ordered. "Help out however you can."

When the three of them had left, I spoke up for the first time since the conversation had begun. "Raven was one of the people who killed our family. You said before that he was one of the few people powerful enough to actually take out our family."

"Alone our father probably would have been able to handle Raven. Our father was brave and powerful, but there was a group of families who came after our parents that day. As I said before, I didn't kill the people who went after our parents only because it would be a never ending circle of bloodshed, but I kept them on my radar. However, as the years went on, most of them went back to their normal lives and were no longer a threat to me. After that, I paid them no mind." Dakim answered and then switched the subject, "Myron, if you don't mind, I'd like for you to show me everything you have been working on with Rae."

"Yes, of course."

Dakim, Myron, and Kian all went into the back room while Roy and I remained. Without Vic here, it took a minute for Dakim to figure out how to work the program, but he eventually got the room set up as the Skekaek training ground.

Roy's expression was blank as he took up a fighting stance. His eyes had the familiar dead look that meant that he had shut down all emotion and reason. He was in fight mode.

I also got ready, forcing myself to forget that he had brought back the mysterious aura I had first fallen in love with. As I did so, I activated the Ultimate Defense and Dragon Claws. I could get the Ultimate Defense to cover everything up to my elbows and knees, but my forearms and shins were still exposed. I was getting better, but it still wasn't complete. It was nice being able to fight Roy without holding back. I could use every ability in my arsenal.

I watched Roy carefully. I wouldn't be able to use the same electricity trick I had used with Luke. It took Luke at least three seconds to knock me unconscious. Because of that, I knew I had time to fill the entire room with Miutho. However, it didn't take Roy three seconds to put blocks in my Miutho. He could do it in a millisecond. With my Dragon Claws, I was literally a beast at close range combat, but Roy was still better. I'd have to be careful not to let him get any hits on me. It would be even better if I could keep him at a distance.

I held my hand out, creating Wing Tip, and spun it around. Roy watched me carefully. This was all new to him, and he was unsure as to everything I could do. I stepped forward and swung Wing Tip at Roy, careful not to activate its wind ability. I would let him think that he had learned everything there was to learn about my abilities, and then I would surprise him by whipping out a new one. He dodged my swipe with ease and made a half-hearted attempt to counter.

"You're not going soft on me, are you?" I taunted.

Roy's expression didn't change a bit. It was like my words had gone in one ear and out the other. Obviously getting him riled up wasn't going to work. Then again, I didn't think it would. He was always

known for being able to keep his emotions in check. I had just thought that maybe coming from me it might work. I was wrong.

Roy took a cautious step forward, and I prepared myself. Roy almost always did fakes before he made his real attack. It could be the very first move he made, or it could be the seventh. There was never the same amount of fakes before he made the real one. You just had to watch for the real one.

This time he made his attack after the third fake. He did a powerful roundhouse kick to my left shoulder. I had only managed to get out of the way because I was able to figure out that this wasn't a fake. Yet, I had been wrong. It was a fake. When I had moved to get out of the way, I had opened my entire body to him and he hit a critical point in my right shoulder. Wing Tip shattered in my grasp.

I stumbled backwards, getting out of Roy's reach, and he let me. The Ultimate Defense could defend me from any physical attack that was launched at me. I was bullet proof. Yet, it couldn't stop internal attacks. Roy's attacks were just as effective as if I wasn't wearing the armor at all. I held out my left hand, recreating Wing Tip. I was good with my left hand, but my right hand was dominant. I wouldn't be able to beat Roy hand to hand. I would have to keep it long distance.

I swung Wing Tip through the air, sending a powerful rush of wind at Roy. It knocked him against the wall, but he managed to remain on his feet. I swung once more, and Roy moved to avoid, but this time I hadn't sent wind. I had sent sound, and Roy dropped to his knees, covering his ears. With his guard dropped, I moved in close to strike him in the back, but he had just been playing it up. The sound hadn't hurt him as much as he had made it out to, and he jumped to his feet to counter. I just barely managed to knock him away.

I let Wing Tip dissolve and then let pure Miutho emerge from my left hand, forming a rope. I threw it out and managed to get a hold of Roy's left arm, his dominant one. Yet, Roy put his right hand to it and the rope broke.

Frowning, I took a few steps back. Not only can he block the Miutho points in my body, but he can block the Miutho when it is in its pure form. Anything I make out of pure Miutho he'll be able to destroy with just a single touch.

Roy took the offensive. He suddenly turned around, ran to the wall, and shoved off of it as hard as he could, doing a flip over me. As soon as I saw him go through the air, I had expected him to land behind me and strike my back, but I had been wrong. He had attacked in the air, hitting my left shoulder. Yet, his attacks didn't end there. When he landed on the ground, he immediately went into a sweep that I just barely managed to avoid. He continued to come after me, and the only reason I managed to keep him at bay was because he was scared of getting struck by my sharp claws. However, that wasn't to say that he didn't land a few punches. I managed to hit him with a back kick, sending him a few feet backwards, and tried to regain control of the situation.

I could physically move my arms, but I could no longer use my hands to manipulate my Miutho. If I wanted to use the elements at all, I would have to use my feet, and I wouldn't be able to use the pure form of Miutho at all. Roy didn't give me time to think of a new strategy. He was charging at me once more. I slid my foot forward, emitting a large flame, forcing him to stop. Yet, that didn't deter him. He was constantly going after me, not giving me a chance to stop and think about what to do next.

It was when I sent out a particular large amount of flame that I noticed Roy's shadow and got an idea. I sent out another flame more as a distraction, and before it cleared, I turned into a shadow. When the flame finally did clear and Roy noticed that I was no longer there, he did a slow turn about the room. He didn't realize that I had hidden in his own shadow. When he did a full three-sixty degree turn and didn't find me, he started to lower his guard, and that was when I took my chance. I emerged from shadow form, pulled a knife from his pocket, and held it to his throat. "Game over."

Dakim emerged from the back room a few seconds later, "Very good, Rae."

I released Roy and then handed the knife back to him. He took it without a word and put it away. He was obviously frustrated that he had lost, but his frustration was more than likely focused

toward himself than at me. It was something else I was beginning to notice about him. He blamed himself for not being strong enough to save his family, and then after we faced Zandar, he didn't think that he was strong enough to protect me. I stared at him thoughtfully. He needed a confidence booster.

"We'll end here today." Dakim's voice pulled me from my thoughts.

"Why?" I argued. "Raven is going to be here in less than a month. Why are we stopping early?"

"With your arms out of commission, there isn't much else we can do today. Besides, until we hear back from Vic, we don't know how best to prepare, and I don't want to waste time on something that might end up just being useless. Enjoy the rest while you can." Dakim instructed and then walked up the steps.

I turned to Myron and Kian who were still in the back room. "As soon as Jerome sees your resignation letters from Ellipsis, he's going to label you as traitors. I think it would be better if you guys just crashed here for the time being. You can sleep down here. The only people who can get in those of Adelinda descent. We'll be safe here."

"Do you have room for us all?" Kian asked, stepping out from the room.

Myron followed him, "We all slept in that small apartment on Earth."

"Yes, but this time we have Dakim, Luke, and Vic as well." Kian reminded.

"As it is now, it would never fit us all, but Vic can make it virtually any size. We'll have plenty of space." I explained and then started for the stairs.

When I got upstairs, Dakim was stretched out on the couch in the family room, starrng at the ceiling. It was what he always did when he was deep in thought, so I did my best not to disturb him. Roy had followed me upstairs and plopped down on the couch opposite to him. Myron and Kian remained down in the room to continue training. I joined Roy a few minutes later, careful to sit on his right. I had sat to the left of him once, and I wouldn't be doing that again anytime soon. I was right handed and he was left, so we had constantly been bumping elbows. After a while he had started bumping my elbow just to bug me.

Trying to cheer him up, I playfully bumped his elbow. He didn't respond, so I bumped him a little harder, and he fought a smile. I smiled as well, knowing that it was working. I went to bump him once more but he caught my elbow and poked me in the side, causing me to jump, and I burst out laughing. I wrapped my arms around his right arm and rested my cheek on his shoulder, "Do me a favor and get me a sandwich."

He just looked at me, "Why?"

"Because you love me," I smiled up at him.

He shook his head, "I don't love you that much."

"Jerk," I punched him in the arm and got up.

"Why not just use your telekinesis? You don't need your arms for that." He called after me.

"Actually, it would take more energy to use telekinesis to make a sandwich than it would to get up and make it by hand." I answered before walking into the kitchen. I walked back a few minutes later with my newly made sandwich on a plate, but when I sensed Karexon and Luke, I set the plate down on the table and went to greet them.

I opened the door and they stepped inside quicker than I expected them to. When the door had been safely shut behind them, I asked, "What's going on?"

Karexon hung his coat up as he spoke, "Jerome has issued arrest warrants for everybody, even Luke and Vic. It will be a lot harder for us to move around undetected, especially Dakim."

"Where is Dakim?" Luke switched the subject.

"In the living room," I answered, stepping out of their way.

I followed them as they made their way to the living room, and Myron and Kian joined us. Yet, I stopped when I saw Roy with his feet up on the coffee table, eating my sandwich. "That's not even funny."

He looked at the half-eaten sandwich, up at me, back down at the sandwich, and then held out what remained of the sandwich, "Want some? It's really good."

I nodded, "Yeah, I'm sure it is."

When I didn't take the sandwich, he just shrugged and took another bite.

I opened my mouth to respond, decided it wasn't worth arguing over, and then closed it. Instead I turned to Karexon, "Any news?"

"We went back to the factory in Alsentra. It was completely shut down."

Dakim still hadn't stirred, but his eyes suddenly became focused as they drifted about the room. Yet, his mind wasn't in the room. It was extended outward with his senses. "Everybody go back down to the training room. We have company."

His words had put everybody on high alert, and we quietly made our way down to the training room. Vic wasn't back yet, but he would be smart enough to stay away from the house if he noticed unwanted company hanging around23333333333. Even after Dakim shut the door behind us and we were locked in my missile and sound proof walls, we remained quiet. Luke rested his hand on Dakim's shoulder, using Awebu to see what he was sensing. Kian and Karexon were with Myron, and Roy was with me.

We observed as Jerome kicked down the front door and the rest of Ellipsis stormed the house. They went through every room of the house, obviously looking for us. Many of the Ellipsis members didn't hesitate about going over every inch of my house. They were just following orders without asking questions, as most Riora were trained to do. However, Hiram, Liam, Lynam, and the other Ellipsis members who knew us a little more personally were more uncomfortable. It was almost as if they were hoping not to find us.

"I'm sorry, sir. They're not here." One of the Ellipsis members reported to Jerome after the entire house had been searched.

Jerome hissed and threw one of my decorative fans across the room. "Then where are they?"

"They can't have gone far, sir." The Ellipsis member explained and handed Jerome the coat Karexon had just hung up.

"Find them." Jerome ordered.

I let out a sigh of relief when the last Ellipsis member left the house. I started for the steps, but Myron grabbed my arm, "Wait. They might have left, hoping that it would draw us out."

Frustrated, I folded my arms across my chest and sat on the ground. "He better pay for the damage he did to my house."

Dakim ignored my fit and turned to Luke, "What were you saying about Alsentra?"

"The factory was shut down, but when we went inside, everything was gone."

"They've moved." I concluded, quickly getting over my fit with Jerome.

"We need to find out where." Myron spoke up.

"But until then," Dakim headed for the back room, "I have seen what Rae and Roy are capable of, but I would like to see Myron, Kian, and Karexon in action."

Karexon and Kian looked to Myron who nodded and said, "We cannot plan without knowing all of the tools that are available to us."

"Kian and Karexon will go first. Then, Luke, you will face Myron." Dakim instructed.

Roy, Luke, Myron, and I walked into the back room, closing the door behind us. Dakim sat in the chair and, after a few failed attempts, got the training program running.

I watched intently as Karexon and Kian got ready. In my training, I had sparred with everybody. Yet, I had never seen anybody else spar with each other. Well, I had seen Roy and Myron spar in the apartment, that didn't count. I was looking forward to a true sparring match.

## Chapter 30

Kian and Karexon had barely taken up their starting positions before Karexon had turned into a shadow. It was a good thing too, for Kian had instantly dashed forward. In the blink of an eye, Kian had gone the entire length of the training room. If Karexon hadn't jumped the gun by turning into a shadow, it would have been a one-hit K.O. Karexon had the perfect defense, for he was unhittable when he was in his shadow form, but he still had to come out of his shadow form to attack. Karexon was never out of his shadow form for very long, but Kian only needed a split second.

I thought for sure that Kian would have the upper hand in this fight, but Karexon surprised me. His shadow split into ten different smaller ones and immediately began darting along the floor, walls, and ceiling of the training room. The shadows moved too fast for my eyes to follow, so I turned to Roy. His analytical Skayikon had no trouble keeping track of all ten shadows. I inquired, "Which shadow is the real one?"

"They're all real." Roy answered without taking his eyes off the shadows. "Each shadow contains a part of him."

As if to prove his point, one of the shadows partly raised from the ground and shaped itself into a leg and a foot and kicked at Kian. Kian used his sword to block it, but as he did so, one of the other shadows raised into a hand with a knife and sent the knife flying at Kian. Kian had almost noticed the knife too late, but his speed allowed him to dodge it without trouble. In that moment, Kian took the opportunity to take a swing at the hand and made a huge gash in the palm. The palm twitched as if it were in pain and quickly turned back into a shadow.

This continued on for a few minutes until suddenly, eight of the ten shadows emerged from the ground and prepared to launch at Kian. Kian took a deep breath as he closed his eyes and turned his sword slightly. Then, at lighting speeds, Kian struck all the shadows, and they disappeared. One of the last shadows materialized and came at Kian. He turned and slashed at it with a smile on his face, proud that Karexon had failed to catch him off guard. However, Kian had miscounted. There was still one shadow left and it slid up Kian's leg to his face and disappeared into his eyes. Kian's eyes instantly filled with black and he dropped his sword as he fell to his knees. Almost the second Kian had dropped, the shadow had left Kian's eyes and Karexon materialized in front of him, full of cuts and scrapes. He extended his hand to Kian, who was breathing heavily.

Confused, I turned to Myron, "What just happened?"

"It's a technique he calls Eternal Night, and it's something he rarely uses on comrades. He shuts down the target's ability to hear, smell, and feel, and he fills the target's sight with darkness. It causes a person's body to go into shock, which is why Kian fell. Being left in that state for too long can also cause insanity, which is why Karexon stopped it almost as soon as he began."

"If he doesn't normally use it on comrades, then why did he use it now?"

Myron glances at Dakim before answering, "Kian, Karexon, Roy, and I have worked together for a while now, but if we all intend to be able to effectively work as a team, then we need to know the full extent of everybody's abilities, as well as everybody's strengths and weaknesses."

Karexon and Kian stepped into the room and immediately sat down on the ground to relax. Without a word, Luke and Myron walked out to the training room. Dakim tried to start the program and growled when it didn't work right away. "This is Vic's job."

"Then move over." Vic's voice came from behind and we all turned around. I watched in amazement as the metal wall came apart piece by piece, revealing Vic, covered in dirt. He stepped into the room and the wall put itself back together piece by piece, closing the hole behind him. "Did you know that you have some unwanted visitors sitting outside?"

"Yeah, we're aware." Dakim growled as he got out of Vic's seat.



"How did you get in here?" I asked.

"Come on, do you think that this training room is the only security measure I installed in your house?"

I frowned at him, "And you were going to tell me this when?"

Vic shrugged as he brought up the virtual training ground for Myron and Luke with one sweep of his fingers across the keyboard, "Whenever I got around to it."

I rolled my eyes and turned my attention back to the training room where Luke and Myron had taken up fighting stances. Even with the house being surrounded by Ellipsis members, I couldn't help being excited for the upcoming sparring match. Myron was similar to Dakim because they both were good leaders, but Myron and Luke thought alike. They were logical and analytical. This would be an even match.

For a moment, neither of them moved. They stood perfectly still, examining each other. Then, almost as a test, Myron slid his foot forward slightly, sending out a small sound wave. However, Luke seemed to have been waiting for Myron to make the first move. He spun out of the way of then sound blast and quickly ran at Myron from the side.

Myron was absolutely incredible because he had incredible precision when using his ability, and defending one's self from sound attacks was damn near impossible without advance preparation. Yet, Luke seemed to have a plan and I'd hazard a guess that it was a good one. Myron was fantastic at fighting against people who specialized in close combat because he made it practically impossible for them to get close to him. However, Luke didn't seem fazed by that in the slightest, for he ran at Myron with incredible determination.

Myron lifted his arm, sending another, much stronger sound wave at Luke, but once again Luke spun out of the way and continued charging at Myron. Luke made a lunge for Myron's exposed wrist once he was in range, taking Myron by surprise. However, Myron quickly threw a sound wave that hit Luke square in the chest and sent him flying backwards across the training room. Myron took the short lapse in fighting to take a few breaths, trying to regain the senses he had started to lose in the split second Luke had gotten ahold of him.

Luke didn't give Myron much time to recover, for as soon as he was on his feet, he was running at Myron once more. Again, Myron would try sending sound waves at Luke to keep him at bay, but Luke always seemed to roll to the side. It was hard to completely avoid sound, but Luke seemed to be avoiding a majority of it. He would stumble a few steps if Myron managed to throw off his equilibrium, but he would never stop moving. A few times Luke even managed to get behind Myron, but Myron managed to fend him off every time. On more than one occasion Myron came close to losing consciousness, but Luke had also received quite a few hits from Myron. His ears had even begun to bleed.

The match had been going on for over seven minutes, which is extremely long for a sparring match, and it was still completely even. Both were extremely out of breath. This next trade would decide the winner.

Luke ran at Myron from the diagonal once more, but instead of making a grab at Myron like he had expected, Luke hit Myron square in the chest, knocking him backwards. Luke then used the momentum to put his hand on Myron's face and push him back into the wall. Myron tried to defend himself, but Luke managed to grab his wrist and redirect the sound blast. There was nothing left that Myron could do, and he soon slid to the floor, unconscious. However, to my surprise, Luke had used up too much of his Miutho. Almost immediately after Myron, Luke fell unconscious and dropped to the ground.

"I guess we're ending here today." Dakim cracked a smile. "Rae, why don't you get them comfortable."

"I want to hear what your informant had to say." Roy spoke up before I moved.

Vic sighed and turned his attention to the computer screen as he spoke, "Let's get settled in for the night, and then we can discuss it."

I only nodded and walked out the door to the training room just as Vic changed it to a bedroom. The walls of the bedroom were aqua blue and the floor was stone that sparkled. Each person had their own personal space that contained a bed, a couch, and two lamps with blue lamp shades that matched the wall.

"Not that I don't enjoy the tranquil water theme, but how long do you think we'll be down here?" I said aloud, not addressing any one person in particular.

"Hypothetically, we could leave now." Vic answered as he and Roy lifted Luke and gently laid him on one of the beds. Once they got him comfortable, Dakim went over and healed his ears. While Kian and Karexon were helping Myron, Vic continued speaking, "I was able to get in here without your buddies outside being the wiser. Yet, where would we go?"

Once Myron was all settled, Kian sat on the edge of one of the beds, "Vic, I think the information you are holding is going to be what decides our next move."

Vic nodded and took a seat on the bed closest to him. Everybody else followed suit. I sat on the bed across from Vic while Roy sat on the bed next to the one I had chosen. Dakim sat on the bed next to Vic's and Karexon sat on the floor just so he could be different from everybody else.

"I was right. Raven has surrounded himself by the best, but he has more than that. Not only does he have Ikicnie backing him, but somehow he's managed to persuade Mekusc from the Country of Elements, to join the battle on his side as well."

"Impossible!" Karexon burst out.

"They've remained politically neutral for as long as anybody can remember!" Kian exclaimed as well.

"Well they're not anymore." Vic mouthed off.

"This means that they will have more soldiers, but the people from Mekusc are not necessarily stronger than the people of Vriknir." Dakim spoke, obviously missing having Myron and Luke explain everything for him.

"But Mekusc isn't on the brink of civil war," I pointed out

"Mekusc isn't fighting for their home." Roy argued.

"Mekusc may have some talented Riora, but as Kian already pointed out, they have remained politically inactive for several years. Their Riora will be generally untrained for war." Dakim shook his head, "No, Mekusc does not concern me. If we can get rid of Raven, they'll fall apart."

"But Rae is right too," Karexon spoke. "With Ellipsis under Jerome's control, we might as well be in the middle of a civil war. The people are too divided to be able to truly face this oncoming attack."

"What about the Shapeshifters? Myron said that they were our allies." I offered.

"The Adelindas weren't welcome in Niasha long before I became an outlaw." Dakim responded.

"We don't have much of a choice." Roy's voice was firm. "If we intend to stand any chance, we need the backing of the Shapeshifters."

Dakim nodded, "We will discuss this further once Myron and Luke have awakened. I want to hear their opinions on the issue. Then I want the search for Raven's weapon to resume. Whether or not Raven has a functional weapon will be a key deciding factor as to who will win this battle."

It had been unspoken, but the end of Dakim's words had been the cue to go to bed. Everybody fell asleep on the bed they had already been sitting on, but Dakim walked over to where Roy was and made a dismissing gesture with his hand. "I get the bed next to my sister. You're sleeping on the other side of the room."

Roy smiled, gave me a long kiss just to bug my brother, and then plopped down on the bed farthest from me. It was lights out.

**MAY 4**

The next morning, I tiptoed over to where Roy was still sleeping. He stirred slightly when I forced my fingers underneath the edge of his mattress. He began to slowly open his eyes, but they flew open when I threw the mattress over, and he landed sprawled on the floor. Myron, Karexon, and I burst out laughing, and my brother even cracked a smile.

"That wasn't funny." He growled.

"No, *that* was payback for eating my sandwich." I looked down at Roy, and Karexon let out another laugh.

He glared at me as he got to his feet and then sent the pillow from his bed flying towards me. I caught it in the air with ease, causing a few feathers to fly out. It was a luxury bedroom. Of course it would have down pillows.

"It's on now." I shouted and threw the pillow back at Roy.

He broke out in a smile and grabbed two more pillows. We chased each other around the room, laughing the entire time. After he had knocked me over the head a few times, I ran behind Myron, using him as a human shield.

"No way, you're not dragging me into this." He stepped out of Roy's way.

I took off running again, but I wasn't quick enough and Roy grabbed me from behind. I screamed with laughter as he wrapped his arms around me and pulled me into a tight embrace.

"How are you feeling?" Kian turned the attention to Myron.

He smiled, "I'm a little stiff, but I'm good to go."

"Then let's go." Dakim ordered as Vic changed the bedroom to a meeting room with a round wooden table.

We all took our seats and Kian began filling in Luke and Myron. "Raven has turned this simple battle for revenge into a world war. He has managed to convince both Ikicnie and Mekusc to back him."

"Mekusc?" Myron repeated.

Dakim leaned forward, folding his hands and resting his elbows on the table. "It was suggested that we request Niasha's assistance."

I watched my brother with a smile on my face. It was the closest he had ever come to asking somebody for advice, and I was glad that he seemed to finally be trusting Myron.

Myron nodded. "Vriknir has a very strong alliance with Niasha. At the very least, I think we should speak with them. King Anselm is very reasonable, nothing like his father." Myron directed at Dakim, knowing that Dakim would be frustrated over our family's persecution.

"I know Niasha's leader is given the title king, and the council is known as aristocrats, but I thought that their positions were chosen by power. That's how it is for all Riora countries. How is it that the current king is the previous king's son?" I asked.

"Power tends to run in the family." Luke smiled at me and then glanced at Dakim. "Although leaders are chosen by power and leadership, it is quite rare for the power of the throne to change to a new family."

Dakim stood up, "Luke, I want you to continue the search for Raven's weapon. Karexon, you will stay with us this time. If we go to Niasha, I want as many of us to go as possible. We will leave tonight after the sun has gone down." Dakim paused when he took in the appearance of Myron's team. "You don't have your gear."

Kian shuffled his feet. "I know somebody who can get it for us."

\*\*\* Roy \*\*\*

"Kian!" Roy chased after Kian before he walked out of the training room and into the secret passage. Roy glanced back over his shoulder to make sure nobody else was in hearing range, or at least weren't paying attention. "If it's possible, I need your brother to pick up one extra thing for me."

"Yeah, sure."

"On the shelf in my living and between the two pictures of my parents, there should be a little black box, maybe the size of your palm."

Kian broke into knowing smile, "No problem."

~

### \*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

Dakim, Vic, Karexon, Roy, Myron, and I looked up at the sound of a knock on the wall. Luke had set out to track down raven's weapon the second our meeting had been over so there was only one person it could be. Vic opened up the wall for Kian to reenter, carrying everybody's gear.

"How did your brother react?" Myron asked as he took his stuff from Kian.

Kian shook his head, "He wasn't too happy to see me. He agreed to get our stuff, but he started shouting at me that we would be better off turning ourselves in."

Myron narrowed his eyes at Kian. There had been something unusual about Kian's tone as he spoke, so he prodded, "Is there more to that?"

"We're not just under arrest anymore. We're wanted dead or alive."

It fell silent as the gravity of the situation hit us all. Taking a deep breath, I stepped forward, took my utility belt from Kian, and snapped it around my waist. "I'm ready."

~

Once the sun had gone down, Vic opened up the wall of the training room, and we stepped into the dark, damp passageway. We went straight the entire time, moving forward by the light of the fireball in Dakim's hand. When we reached a dead end, Vic stepped forward and removed the wall that blocked our way. We stepped forward and found ourselves in the middle of the sewer system. I tried to ignore the smell as we made our way to the surface. We moved quickly through the city streets, sticking to the shadows, remaining undetected. So far, so good. Yet, when we reached the gate, we found a crowd of people waiting for us.

"Impossible! How did they know?" Karexon exclaimed as we came to a screeching halt.

Kian sighed and stepped from the shadows towards the group of people, "Because it's my brother."

We approached slowly and found Charisse, Lance, Carmichael, Liam, Lynam, and Hiram waiting for us. Dakim remained in the shadows. I looked at each of them, "What are you guys doing here?"

Charisse stepped forward, "Rae, after everything we have been through, I know that what Jerome has been saying about you isn't true. We want to help you however we can. We want to go with you."

Myron glanced at Dakim before stepping forward, "I appreciate you guys being willing to go with us. However, I think you guys will be more helpful to us here. It is good to know that we have people here in Vriknir that we can trust."

Hiram stepped forward and gripped Kian's hair, "You know I don't agree with this, and I'm going to kill you for it. However, I can't kill you if you're already dead. Come back alive, you hear?"

Kian nodded and pressed his forehead to his brother's. After a minute, Hiram let go of Kian and took a step back as he spoke, "I wish you all the best of luck."

"And the same to you all," Myron returned.

I watched as the six of them walked away, leaving the gate wide open. It meant the world to me to know that I had friends who were willing to back me up. Not to mention that it was good to know that we had people on the inside to take care of the village in our absence. I turned to my brother, a smile on my face, "Still think you can't trust people?"

~

## **MAY 7**

Niasha was a little further from Vriknir than Ikicnie was, so it took us two days to get there instead of just one. The journey to get there would have been really boring if it weren't for the urgency. I was thankful when we finally arrived.

"Welcome, Lord Masters." The shapeshifter guarding the gate spoke in Thaivo as she bowed. I was impressed that even a common Niashan foot soldier knew who Myron was, but obviously his status as an outlaw hadn't reached Niasha yet.

I had known what true shapeshifters looked like, but this was the first time I had ever seen one in person. She had gray, squinty eyes and a narrow chin. Her shapeshifter markings were simple lines on each side of her cheek. Her hair was a deep blue, while her wings were the black of a crow's. She wore the standard red uniform shirt and khaki pants, but had decorated the outfit with a green scarf.

"My companions and I wish to meet with the king."

"Your companions?" The girl looked around, not seeing anybody with Myron, but her eyes widened when Dakim rounded the corner. The rest of us followed.

"It's urgent." Myron pressured when the guard didn't move.

"I-I need to s-speak with m-my superior." The guard stuttered.

"We don't have time for you to go up the chain of command." Myron growled. "Send a messenger directly to King Anselm."

"Y-yes, sir."

The guard took off sprinting in the opposite direction, and, once she had reached her maximum speed, she made a great leap into the air. She became enveloped in this strange green fire and a large crow emerged. I marveled at the bird's beauty as it took off toward the king's court. I could use my telekinesis to lift me off the ground, but I couldn't get very high, and it was very tiring. I couldn't imagine the kind of freedom the bird shapeshifters must have been able to experience.

Almost half an hour later, the guard returned. As the bird lowered to the ground, it began to glow white and seemed to shatter. The guard in her regular two-legged form remained. "Forgive me for the delay. Please, follow me."

Niasha was beautiful. The city streets were all made out of beautiful cobblestone and we would often have to step out of the way for a house drawn carriage passing by. I actually would have preferred taking one of the carriages so we could give our feet a rest, but it made everybody else uneasy because it would be hard to defend ourselves, so I kept my mouth shut and kept walking.

Many of the houses were white with a wooden border that created a simple and peaceful atmosphere despite loud and busy city streets. The people wore simple clothes and smiles on their faces as they stopped to chat with friends. They had no clue of the impending danger to Vriknir. To them, all was right with the world.

As we walked, we saw more than just houses. We passed black smiths, carpenters, shoe makers, butchers, and all sorts of craftsmen. We also passed giant stone cathedrals with steeples that pointed high into the sky.

After crossing a small stone bridge, we found ourselves in front of the biggest castle I had ever seen. Directly in front of us was an archway three people high blocked by a metal gate. Two tall towers stood on each side of the door and a tower made up each corner of the castle. Higher up on the castler were a few windows. Once inside the castle, we were led down a series of hallways decorated with red carpet, several series of paintings, and all sorts of different light fixtures. However, the guard left us at the door to the throne room. she didn't want everybody to know that it was him who had led Dakim right to the king.

Gasps filled the air as we burst through the door into the king's mess hall and people took in Dakim's appearance. The throne room was where all the people had come to meet with the king and there were about thirty of them in all. They looked like aristocrats or lords and ladies from the medieval ages. Many of them even wore fancy armor, for when in their non-shifted forms, armor was their only form of defense. However, much like the pictures I had seen of Camus, Vriknir's founder, these people didn't wear a full suit of armor. They would wear the shoulder guards or leg plates along with a fancy coat or jewelry that showed their status. The girls wore elaborate high styles and the guys sported overly decorated hats. They stood with perfect posture and raised their heads so they would have to look down on us. They greeted us with smiles, but I had no doubt that they had sharp tongues hidden behind those pearly white teeth, ready to take advantage of any slip up in my speech.

The aristocrats were all crowded before a chair extravagantly decorated with red and gold. On each side of the throne were two smaller, less decorated chairs. Behind the two smaller chairs stood statues of half-shifted hawks. A white staircase covered in red and gold carpet led up to the platform where the throne rested. Two guards stood at the bottom of the steps to make sure nobody other than the king, his right hand man, and the general set foot on the steps.

Conrad, the King's right hand man, was on the shorter side, but his big muscle made up for his short stature. His black hair went down to his shoulders and black wolf ears poked out on the sides. He wore a surprisingly simple, sleeveless red shirt, which revealed the black lines that intertwined with each other as they made their way up his harms. It was the most extravagant shapeshifter markings I had ever scene. Around his neck he wore a bone tooth necklace and a black wolf's tail swung freely behind him.

General Dawn Lyon, the leader of Niasha's troops, was surprisingly petite for a General. She was maybe only a few inches taller than me and was just as skinny has me. She had black hair with white highlights and white cat ears. Her eyes were blue and she had the tail of a white tiger.

King Anselm was as tall as my brother, but much more buff. His eyes were light brown and were surprisingly soft given the rest of his hard appearance. His wings were the same light brown as his eyes, but his long shaggy hair was a much darker shade of brown. He wore a green button up jacket with an intricate gold design. It was similar to the one Camus was pictured in at the Litna Museum, except King Anselm's jacket was decorated with golden ropes and pins.

*"I must admit, you are the last person I expected to walk through those doors."* King Anselm addressed Dakim as he slowly stood up, his eyes sweeping over with us. *"You travel with powerful company. Commander Myron Masters. I guess it's just Myron Masters now that you have resigned from Ellipsis. To think, it was almost General Myron Masters if Jerome Hadi hadn't beaten you out for the top position."*

Myron lifted his head slightly, looking the king directly in the eye to show him that the comment did not bother him.

*General Myron Masters, eh?* I thought to myself. *Myron never told me that he was almost given leadership of all Ellipsis...*

*“Kian Dalca,”* The king continued, *“One of the legendary Blade Brothers, and Karexon Radev, Master of Shadows. There is Victor Dymock, the boy believed to be the one to bring us into a new age of technology. Then, of course, there is little Dakim, Royce Adimari. Your last names even sound similar.”* His eyes finally landed on me. *“Which means you must be Raelyn Adelinda, the savior of Vriknir.”*

*“I no save yet.”* My voice was firm even though my Thaivo was still broken.

*“You knew we were coming.”* Myron interjected.

King Anselm nodded, *“I have been made aware of the situation.”*

*“You no do anything?”* I stepped forward angrily.

King Anselm lifted his head, looking over us to the rest of the Shapeshifters in the room. He spoke something to them, too fast for me to recognize the language, and then they got up to leave. Only the king, General Lyon, and Conrad remained.

*“Vriknir ally! How you abandon them?”* I continued to shout.

*“He did no such thing!”* Conrad snapped at me in English, taking me by surprise.

A little more calmly, King Anselm added, also speaking English, *“Lady Vanek requested that I make no formal action until the time called for it. She feared that if I made my move too soon, it would force Raven to attack before the city was ready.”*

*“So then, you will permit us to stay here and give us shelter?”* Myron brought the conversation back to the original point.

*“It is more complicated than that. Just by allowing Dakim to enter my court I have broken the alliance with Vriknir.”*

*“Then you won’t help us?”* Myron insisted, obviously slightly frustrated that the king was not giving a straight answer.

King Anselm stared at my brother and me for a minute before turning back to Myron. *“My bond with Lady Vanek runs much deeper than a piece of paper. I will help you.”*

# Chapter 31

*MAY 8*

We stayed with King Anselm in his castle for the night and met with him again early the next morning. We met in one of his many dining rooms, and Myron explained the situation to King Anselm, General Lyon, and Conrad.

When Myron had finished, King Anselm nodded, "When Lady Vanek first contacted me, she never gave me all the details, but what you are telling me makes sense. Lady Vanek and I grew up together, and when we were eleven we were arranged to be married. It was thought that our union would bring our countries closer together. However, the council of Vriknir and the aristocrats here feared that this union would weaken their power. Vriknir found a better solution when Jerome was born. Being of Vriknir and Niasha descent, promoting him was like promoting the friendship between the countries."

With his next words, King Anselm addressed all of us, but he looked directly at Myron as he spoke, "Myron would never admit it, but he is every bit Jerome's equal in power. They were both candidates for the head of Ellipsis, and even though Myron was by far more qualified for the position than Jerome, the council gave Jerome the position.

"Jerome knew from day one that he would one day be the leader of Ellipsis, and although Lady Vanek was the leader of Vriknir, he thought of himself as its ruler, which is why he felt so betrayed when Lady Vanek brought in Raelyn."

"Did you guys have a specific plan when you came here?" Conrad asked.

"I have one in mind." My brother spoke cockily.

Myron sighed and explained, "There is one more member of the group, but right now he's tracking down a weapon we believe Raven is building. Until he returns, we wish to remain here and train. Back in Vriknir, Jerome has issued warrants for us, and we've been labeled as traitors. With targets on our back, we can't effectively prepare for Raven's oncoming attack."

King Anselm glanced at General Lyon and then nodded, "Yes, I see. I also think it would be a good idea for you to train with General Lyon and her soldiers. I would hate to think that anybody from my country would join that scum Raven, but I must be realistic. You need to be prepared to fight shapeshifters. When we're in our shifted forms, our strength more than doubles, and you'll find that your traditional forms of combat will be ineffective."

"There is also something we must prepare you for." I spoke up and everybody turned to look me. I hadn't spoken much since I had arrived at Niasha, simply because I hated all of the formalities, but I needed to warn them. "The last time I came into contact with the weapon Raven is developing, I was left crippled on the floor, curled into a little ball, just wishing to die. The Miutho that the weapon is made out of is completely unstable. I know the shapeshifters have an instinct for sensing Miutho, and I fear that it will affect you all as badly as it affected me."

"Is Raven aware that this completely crippled you?" General Lyon inquired.

"No, I don't believe so."

Dakim looked at me thoughtfully and then turned to Anselm. "Do you have any Kunettium deposits?"

"It is rare, but I do believe we have some."

"We should go there, now, and bring a blacksmith."



"Care to explain?" I asked when we had reached the edge of the cliff that overlooked the mine.

"In Alsentra, the family you were staying with had a safe made out of Kunettium and it blocked you from being able to sense the unstable Miutho." Dakim explained.

"How do you know that?" Kian exclaimed.

"He was there." Vic replied nonchalantly.

"How do you think Karexon found such an easy escape?" I added.

Myron chuckled, "He was around a lot more than we thought he was."

Dakim continued as if we hadn't gone off on our own side conversation, "The Ultimate Defense should save us from the effects of the unstable Miutho, but the shapeshifters don't have that option. However, there is the possibility that we could make armor for them out of Kunettium.

"We wouldn't have any way of testing it." Roy reminded. "Rae purified the one gun we did have."

"He's right, and if the armor doesn't work, then we just wasted resources." Karexon added.

Dakim didn't seem fazed. "How do you think that Raelyn and I are still able to sense Miutho when we have the Ultimate Defense activated, yet it blocks us from the unstable Miutho?"

Myron smiled, "Because Kunettium only blocks the negative effects of Miutho, the aspects meant to confuse an enemy. Kunettium would not only block the instability of the Miutho, but it would also protect people from things like illusions."

The light bulb above Kian's head went off. "That's the signature of Ikicnie. Every single one of the mind abilities uses the negative aspects of Miutho to twist reality, which gives them the ability to cast illusions or have telekinesis."

Dakim nodded, "And that is something we can test."

"If this turns out to be effective, then we should produce Kunettium armor for Vriknir soldiers as well. They may not be affected by unstable Miutho, but it will help guard them from Ikicnie's tricks." Myron added.

I nodded. "Agreed."

~

A few hours later, the blacksmith King Anselm had brought had crafted a helmet for Conrad. Conrad stepped forward and was enveloped in the same strange green flame I had seen when the guard had transformed. When it disappeared, a gigantic wolf, three times by size, remained. Most of his fur was black, but the tip of his tail and his paws were red. The shapeshifter markings on his forehead and around his neck were also red. The blacksmith stepped forward and gently placed the newly crafted helmet on Conrad's head. It was less like a helmet and more like a visor. It only covered his forehead, where the Miutho sensors were located in a shapeshifter's body. It came to a point between his eyes and spiked off near his ears.

When Conrad was all situated, Dakim took a step back and the rest of us took a couple of steps forward, getting ready. It wasn't simply, Dakim casts an illusion on Conrad to see if Conrad became impaired or not. It was possible for somebody to block an illusion through sheer concentration. If we wanted this test to be effective, we would have to make sure that Conrad's mind was focused on something else when Dakim casted the illusion. It was decided that the rest of us would all attack Conrad at once. If that didn't keep his mind off of Dakim, then nothing would.

Myron took a deep breath and then closed his eyes. I had expected him to open them soon after and begin launching an attack, but instead he remained perfectly still, keeping his eyes closed and breathing in deeply. However, my attention was drawn away from Myron when I caught a glimpse of something darting across the field. I had gotten caught up in my anticipation of what Myron was going to do that I hadn't even noticed that Karexon had turned into a shadow. Kian was no on the other side of the field, so he had probably be the blur I had seen dashing across the field.

Roy came up behind me and placed his hands on my shoulders, letting his Miutho connect to mine. *A shapeshifter's senses are naturally better than ours. A shapeshifter will have a better hearing range and sight than a Riora. Therefore, Myron can emit a frequency that throws Conrad off balance but doesn't affect us in the slightest. Conrad also has an easier time keeping track of Kian and Karexon although I am sure it still takes a great deal of focus. You and I will engage him head on which will require him to split his focus between us and them, which will hopefully pull his attention away from Dakim altogether.*

I nodded and went to jump forward at Conrad, but Roy held tight to my shoulders. *There is one more thing. It takes a great deal of meditation for us to learn how to extend our senses enough to sense another person's Miutho, but to a shapeshifter it comes naturally. If this visor works as planned, Conrad will only be blocked from the negative aspects of Miutho, meaning he'll still be able to sense any pure Miutho attack you try and throw at him.*

I nodded again and then starred at Conrad as I tried to come up with a new plan of attack. Kian, Karexon, and Myron were working as long distance distractions. My plan had been to get up close and in his face by putting Miutho in my hands and feet, but if he could sense Miutho as well as Roy said he could, then it would be simple for him to dodge my attacks. Instead, I took a deep breath and let my claws extend. I hadn't wanted to use my claws for such a simple exercise, but it would be the fastest way to grab his attention.

I lunged forward and took a swipe at Conrad, but he managed to roll out of the way just in time. However, some of his hairs weren't as lucky. Roy didn't give Conrad a chance to process the fact that he now had two more attackers, and instead went after Conrad the second he had recovered from his roll. Roy went after Conrad's legs, but Conrad had good reflexes, for he was able to jump out of the way in time to let Roy go sliding underneath him.

"We may be holding back quite a bit, but you don't have to make a fool out of yourself," I winked as I taunted down at Roy. Unsurprisingly, Roy chose to ignore my comment as he got back to his feet, but the slight twitch in the eyebrow of his normally expressionless face told me that the comment had gotten to him, even if it was just slightly.

I smiled to myself as I turned my attention back to Conrad. Now that Conrad had his attention drawn towards Roy and I, he was having a harder time keeping track of Kian and Karexon, and the constant buzz emitted by Myron was making him dizzy. However, we hadn't completely distracted him just yet, for every now and then he would throw a quick glance at Dakim.

*I won't give him time to glance at Dakim!*

I lunged forward at Conrad, swiping at him relentlessly. I wasn't giving him a chance to recover and was forcing him to retreat. Roy took the opportunity to attack from the side and go for his shoulder blade. Conrad managed to notice it in time and rolled out of the way while snapping at my ankles. Thankfully Kian rushed across the field and managed to pull me back out of the way before my leg became Conrad's chew toy.

Roy went to continued attacking Conrad, but suddenly stopped when his Skayikon picked up something new, and he quickly stepped back. Dakim had cast the illusion. I could feel it as soon as Dakim sent the Miutho Conrad's way, and I watched carefully to see if Conrad's actions changed at all, but he just starred at the rest of us. Even in his wolf form I could read the confusion on his face. He hadn't realized that the illusion had been cast. The helmet had been effective.

\*\*\* Roy \*\*\*

**MAY 13**

They continued to stay with Anselm in his castle, and if it weren't for the fact that Raven's attack was a constant source of fear, the stay would have been really enjoyable. Every morning Rae would

wake up and climb to the very top of the castle, just to look out as far as she could and feel the wind blow through her hair. It was her replacement for Myron's lake, and he loved to see the smile it brought to her face.

"Would you stop that?" She squirmed under his gaze. It was one of the many ways he was able to get her to make that cute annoyed expression.

He only smiled at her, and, after giving him a hard glare, she went back to staring out at the landscape. He pulled the small black box out of his pocket and turned it over. The whole place was absolutely beautiful. Now would be the perfect time. Yet, he hadn't had a chance to get her brother's blessing. He wanted to do this right.

"Are you alright?" She turned back around to face him, and he quickly put the box back in his pocket.

"Perfect." He smiled and wrapped his arm around her shoulders. It was hard for him to believe that such a simple gesture used to be so hard. Whoever said "You don't know what you have until it's gone" was right. Rae had left him once, and now that she was back, he was never letting go.

~

### \*\*\*Myron\*\*\*

Dakim walked over to where Myron was standing, leaning on the railing as he looked out over the training field. Vic was also leaning on the railing not too far away, but seemed more interested in his tablet than the sparring match. Below, Rae and Roy were locked in a tight sparring match.

Roy put his hands out and dissolved another of Rae's pure Miutho attacks. Rae clenched her teeth in frustration while Roy only wore his usual emotionless expression. Yet, Myron had no doubt that Roy was smiling on the inside. Anything he could do to irritate Rae would make him smile.

*I can understand Rae's frustration. Roy is keeping a good distance from her so that her claws are rendered useless to her. Manipulating the pure form of Miutho is what comes naturally to her when she is forced to fight from a distance. However, Roy can see the critical points in Miutho meaning that he can also render all of her pure Miutho attacks useless. He's forcing her to use other people's abilities, which limits her. She still knows a big handful of abilities, when fighting against just one can be troublesome. However, her pure Miutho attacks were only limited by her imagination, but Roy had taken away her imagination and her comfort. He's still at a disadvantage, but he is much better off than most people. Actually, out of everybody he's the only one who really stands a chance against her, other than of course her brother. It is why Dakim always asked him to be her sparring partner when he is busy meeting with King Anselm. When Roy isn't sparring with her, Dakim is. He is working her harder than I ever have, and I have to say, it's paying off.*

Myron smiled to himself as Rae appeared behind Roy and put her claws to his throat, officially ending the sparring match. However, his smile soon faded and he turned on Dakim, "Why do you insist on training her so hard? She can more than handle herself in battle. In this short time period, she's surpassed Roy, and I wouldn't be surprised if she was even better than me. It's like you're expecting her to fight Raven all by herself."

When Dakim didn't answer, Myron's eyes narrowed at him. "You know something." It wasn't a question. It was a statement.

"I know a lot of things." Dakim replied cryptically before walking away.

### \*\*\*Dakim\*\*\*

"Myron had a point." Vic commented later that night when they were alone.

Dakim sighed. It was easier to blow off Myron than it was Vic. "I have to prepare for the possibility that I may not be able to help in this battle against Raven. Most people still think I'm guilty of the crimes I'm accused of. Although Lady Vanek seems to be coming around, she still distrusts me. She only gave Myron's team the okay to leave with me was because she knew it was better than the alternative. With people not trusting me, my involvement in the fight will only create confusion and chaos. If I can't participate directly, then I want to make sure she's as ready as possible."

"You told Rae you would be with her every step of the way." Vic reminded him.

"And I will be, even if she can't see me." Dakim answered but then frowned at Vic. "Just because Luke is away doesn't mean you can take over being my conscience."

Vic just laughed and went back to his own little technology world.

~

\*\*\* Raelyn \*\*\*

**MAY 15**

"Rae!" Vic shouted, interrupting my training session with one of shapeshifter commanders.

A hiss sounded from behind me, and I realized that I had lowered my guard. I immediately dropped to the ground, just as the cat I was facing jumped over me. When I was in the clear, I got to my feet again and glared at Vic, "Really?"

He ignored my tone and continued, "Luke is back."

Completely ignoring the cat I had been sparring with, I took off towards the castle with Vic on my heels. We quickly made our way back to the mess hall where everybody else was already waiting. Luke was leaning against the wall, his clothes tattered and torn from his journey. His face was completely straight. I couldn't tell if his journey had been successful or not.

"I think that's everybody." Myron spoke. "Go ahead, Luke."

He reluctantly shoved off the wall, like it was taking all of his energy just not to fall asleep, and walked over to where everybody was sitting around the table as Vic and I took our seats. Luke placed his hands on the table, using it as support, and began, "Dakim was right when he said that Raven had continued with the weapon. He's getting closer to completing it. The Miutho is no longer as unstable as it used to be. When you first came across it in Alsentra, the Miutho was so unstable that it couldn't even hold a single color. It still isn't the rainbow, purified Miutho, but now it can still hold a single color, and I'd bet that it can do a lot more damage than what it originally did at the bonfire."

Myron rested his chin on his folded hands as he closed his eyes, letting the news roll over him.

Luke continued, "I found their base of operations. It's on Earth."

Myron opened his eyes again, surprised by Luke's words, and lifted his head, "Earth?"

Luke nodded. "From what I can gather, the Miutho in the guns is unstable because of the environment here on Kusnik. By producing the guns on Earth, the Miutho is more stable and then they can be brought here to Kusnik."

Kian leaned back in his chair, "Is this good news or bad news?"

Myron rested his forearms on the table, thinking over the information. "Neither, I guess. Even with Jerome pulling the strings, he can't get around the fact that travel to Earth is strictly forbidden no matter what country you're in. If we were to go to Earth, we wouldn't have to worry about Ellipsis chasing us, but we'd have to worry about the Hunters. We would need a place to lay low once we got to Earth."

"We have friends on Earth." I softly reminded.

"Have you told anybody that we are here?" Dakim addressed King Anselm and Conrad.

King Anselm shook his head, "No. The only people who know you are here are the guard you met on the first day, the commanders you have trained with, and Conrad and I."

Myron looked to Dakim, wanting to get the okay before speaking. When Dakim nodded, Myron addressed King Anselm, "Then let us take care of Raven's weapon. After we have left, I want you to make it known that you have denied us asylum. Make it look like we're traveling north, seeking asylum in one of the smaller, Teysas villages. Hopefully that will keep Raven's attention away from the factory. It will also make Raven think that we have fewer numbers than we really do."

"I understand." King Anselm stood as well.

"If you don't mind," Myron added, glancing at Luke, "We would like to stay one last night. I think we could use the rest before we set out."

King Anselm smiled. "Yes, of course."

~

## ***MAY 16***

I dropped to my knees, breathing heavily. I had known that this feeling was coming from the last time I transferred between dimensions, but it didn't make it any less bearable. Vic was trying not to show how heavily he was breathing, but the rest of the team seemed unaffected. This was the first time Roy, Kian, and I had managed to transfer between the dimensions on our own, but they didn't seem affected at all. I didn't scream this time like I had the last time I had transferred dimensions, but I was definitely out of breath. This was also Vic's first time transferring dimensions at all, and he had done it on his own, but he didn't seem to have expected the awful feeling of having the air sucked out of one's lungs and being ripped apart. When we managed to get our breathing under control, I looked to Kian for directions. After all, he had been the one to take Christian and Dustin to their new home.

"We're going to need a car." Kian concluded as he took in the surroundings. "It's too far to walk."

I turned to Dakim. "Think you could hotwire one?"

He turned his nose up at me. "I'm a thief, not a hijacker."

I sighed. I didn't have U.S. currency, which meant that we couldn't take a cab, and, although Dakim knew loopholes in the Shifting Rights rules that had allowed us to cross over to Earth without being detected by the Hunters, we wouldn't be able to use our Miutho without being tracked. I crossed my arms over my chest and turned back to Dakim, "Okay, thief, think you could pickpocket somebody's keys?"

"I can do better than that," he winked and then started walking down the street. He disappeared in a cloud of smoke, and came back a few seconds later with several sets of keys. He tossed the first key to Myron. It was to a blue Ssc Ultimate Aero. The second key he handed to Roy, a Suzuki Hayabusa motorcycle, and also handed him two helmets. The last key he kept. It went to a Koenigsegg Agera R. "The cars are just around the corner."

"These are some of the fastest vehicles in the world! How did you manage to get these?" I exclaimed when I saw them.

"Remember when I said I made quite a few contacts here on Earth?" Dakim smiled mischievously and playfully jingled the key he had kept, "They may be pathetic humans, but they still have their uses."

I raised an eyebrow at him, "You know these are going to attract a lot of attention."

"The hunters are the ones we need to avoid. Other than that, we can be as flashy as we want," Luke brushed away my concerns. I shook my head. Leave it to Luke to side with my brother.

"Luke and Vic are with me. Kian and Karexon, go with Myron." Dakim commanded and then pointed at Roy, "You better take care of my sister."

I rolled my eyes at Dakim and put on the helmet.

"Follow us." Kian instructed before getting in the car with Myron and Karexon, and then we were off.

I enjoyed the expensive vehicles, maybe a little bit too much. I was almost sad that it didn't take us very long to get to the house Christian and Dustin were in. Almost. When we arrived and everybody got out of the cars, I took a second to look around. We were in a quiet, picture perfect neighborhood. The houses weren't huge, but they were definitely far from small. Many of them were also surrounded by white picket fences and a dog could be heard from the other side of many of the fences. Christian and Dustin's house was no different. The bottom half was made out of a dark brick while the top half had white vinyl siding. There were several floor to ceiling windows that looked out over a beautiful yard full of trees and flowers that were just beginning to bloom.

"Getting cold feet?" Dakim walked over to me.

I chewed on my lip. "Christian and Dustin were like my family while I was here on Earth. Christian was my best friend. We were never separated. Dustin always said that if he ever needed to find Christian, all he had to do was look for me." I smiled. "Dustin... He's the nicest guy you'll ever meet. When he finally got himself a stable job and went to take Christian out of the foster care, he took me too. At the time, Christian was the only one who knew about what I could do. There were times when I lied right to Dustin's face just to keep my secret. Yet, when he found out about it, he wasn't angry. He gave me a hug."

Dakim's eyes widened slightly. When I was staying in the small apartment, nobody had ever said anything directly, but I could tell by everybody's reactions that there was a typical stereotype about humans. They believed humans to be ignorant, selfish and rude, but everything I had described about Dustin and Christian was the complete opposite of everything Dakim knew about humans, especially since the people Dakim had dealt with during his time on earth had probably been some of the lowest of the low.

"Just by knowing them, I put their lives in danger." I continued. "They'd been so good to me, and I forced them to relocate, leaving everything they knew behind. After all the trouble I've brought them, will they even want to see me?"

"Rae—" Dakim began but I continued.

"I snapped at Christian the day we parted for being selfish. Yet, I'm a walking target. Is my selfishness of wanting to see them putting their lives at risk?"

"Raelyn!"

I jumped as Dakim yelled my full name, pulling me from my rambling. He raised his eyebrows at me, and I knew I was thinking too much into this, but I couldn't help it. I was nervous and my mind was in overdrive.

"Come on," He said as he tousled my hair, "I'm anxious to meet the guys you speak so highly of. Besides, I want to thank them for taking such good care of my baby sister."

I smiled. Dakim knew I hated it when he tousled my hair, and he was doing it on purpose. He was trying to make me angry so I would forget my nerves. It had worked, somewhat.

Dakim slowly walked over to the sidewalk, and I followed behind him. The rest of the team remained at the cars. We were halfway to the house when the door opened, and Dustin stepped out, aroused by the sound of the cars. He froze when he saw us. "Rae..."

The familiar smile slowly crept up on his face, and he slowly walked towards me. That smile broke any restraints that had been keeping me back, and I ran forward and wrapped my arms around him. Dustin chuckled, and he took a slight step back under the impact.

Dakim was the best big brother any girl could ever hope for, and nobody could be a better mentor than Myron, but they just weren't Dustin and Christian. Sure Dakim and Myron were good at comforting me, but they weren't the greatest at making me comfortable. Dustin and Christian made me feel normal, like I was just another teenage girl.

"Dustin! What's going..." Christian's voice trailed off when he rounded the corner and caught sight of Dakim. He was unable to see me because Dustin was blocking me from view, but Christian could tell right away that Dakim was from Kusnik. Christian suddenly began shouting, "Who are you? What do you want?"

"As for who, he's my brother. As for what, we need a place to crash." I stepped out from behind Dustin and into Christian's view. The look on his face was absolutely priceless. If the bones and muscles in his face would have allowed it, his jaw would have hit the ground.

Out of nowhere, Christian suddenly burst forward and practically tackled me to the ground. "I can't believe you're here!"

While Christian gave me a bear hug, the rest of the team emerged from the cars, and Dustin walked over to Dakim and extended his hand, "I'm Dustin."

Even through Christian's unrelenting exclams of how exciting he was to see me, I was still able to hear their conversation.

"Dakim." He took Dustin's hand but only for a brief second. "It is my understanding that you've already met with most of the team. The other two are Vic and Luke."

"So, you are like Rae?" Dustin continued to question Dakim.

"Yes, and I must say, I am surprised that you are able to cope with this so easily."

Dustin sighed and launched into his life story. "Rae may have told you this already, but Christian and I were unfortunate enough to have known our parents before we were put into foster care. Our parents had lost everything and believed that they wouldn't be able to provide for us. They reasoned that we would have much better lives if we were given up for adoption. Yet, things aren't that easy. Babies and infants are adopted almost instantly, but by the time we had entered foster care, I was fifteen and Christian was six. Christian was devastated when we were forced to leave our parents. He was wild, always getting in trouble at school, and he was violent. I ended up having to home school him because he was expelled from every other school within a week of arriving there. Also, up until a few years ago, he was unnaturally short for his age, so he was always being picked on. This went on for almost a year until Rae arrived at the home. She became his first friend, and although Christian still had his issues, he didn't misbehave nearly as much when she was around. If Rae could get him to do a complete 180, then I knew she had to be special. I'll admit, I was definitely stunned when I found out what she could do, but, in a way, it all makes sense." Dustin then held the door to the house open, "Why don't you come inside? The rest of the team is welcome as well."

I looked around in amazement as I walked into their house with everybody else close behind. Kian definitely had made sure to compensate them for having to relocate. Their house wasn't huge, for anything flashy would have drawn attention, but the inside was absolutely beautiful.

The living room contained a matching brown leather corner sofa, recliner, and love seat. They were set up to face the flat screen television that was surrounded by a dark wood entertainment center. On the shelves were all the movies we had ever seen and all the music we had ever listened to.

The kitchen contained so many cabinets that I couldn't even think of enough things to put in all of them. The counters were all granite and all the appliances were a beautiful stainless steel. In the center of the kitchen was a small island surrounded by chairs.

The hallway had wooden floors but an intricate carpet covered a majority of it. At the end was a spiral staircase that led to the rest of the house. Along the sides of the hallway were different plants, closets, and pictures. I recognized many of the pictures that hung on the walls. I had been there for most

of them, but I had been edited out of all of them. I understood why they had to edit them, but it was still saddening to see.

"So, not that I don't enjoy seeing you," Christian began as he plopped down in the recliner, "But I thought we weren't ever going to meet again."

I sighed, sitting down on the couch, and Dakim joined me. Roy stood behind us and the rest of the team remained standing along the walls of the room. When everybody was settled, I began to explain, "When I left, I was completely lost with absolutely no idea of what was going on around me. Yet, I've learned a lot since then."

I began the long story of everything that had happened since I left them. I trusted Dustin and Christian, so I left absolutely nothing out. The whole explanation took a few hours, but finally, they were caught up with current events.

"So, you think Raven's weapon is here?" Dustin asked to make sure he understood correctly.

"Yes, and if you don't mind, we'd like to stay here while we search for it." I clarified.

"Of course!" Christian exclaimed.

"On one condition," Dustin added.

Christian's head snapped towards Dustin, an incredulous look on his face, "Condition! Are you saying there is a possibility we wouldn't help her?"

Dustin folded his arms over his chest. "The only way we'll help you is if you let Christian and I take you all out to dinner."

I jumped to my feet, suddenly angry. "I am extremely glad to be back and that I got to see you guys again, but I'm not here on a social call. People's lives are at stake. We need to find and destroy Raven's weapon!"

"Rae," Dakim spoke softly but firmly.

I turned on him, "I can't sit around a dinner table chatting and catching up while I could be doing something to find that weapon."

"Raelyn!"

I flinched at his harsh tone. Dakim was always strict and had a bad temper, but he was never harsh. Yet, twice now he'd had to use my full name to get my emotions back in check. If he was like that now, then I had crossed a line.

Dakim took a deep breath, letting his frustration flow by, and when he spoke again, his voice was still firm, but it was much softer. "I understand why you are in a hurry, but if we rush into this, we will make a mistake, a mistake we can't afford. Right now Anselm is making it look like we are hiding out in one of the Teyas countries, but if we rush into this, Raven will find out that we are here. There is nothing we can do until tomorrow morning."

I gritted my teeth. I knew Dakim was right, and I had gotten much better at keeping my cool in tough situations. Yet, the lives of the people of Vriknir were at stake. I shook my head, trying to shake the thoughts from my head. I knew better than this. If I couldn't keep my cool now, then I was nothing but a burden, and the last time I had been a burden, Roy had ended up in the hospital with two knife wounds. It was hard, but I gave in, "So where are we eating?"

Dustin smiled confidently, "It's a surprise."



## Chapter 32

I took my seat next to Roy and across from Christian at one of my favorite Italian restaurants. The restaurant was a small, family owned business, but the place was packed. There had been a line at the door, but we hadn't minded waiting. This was a chance for us to get some relaxation before things got really tough, so we were willing to be patient. Dakim sat on the other side of me while Myron and Dustin took a seat on either side of Christian. Everybody else then took seats on the ends.

After the waitress came over and took our orders, I struck up a conversation, "So, how have your lives been since I left?"

Christian shrugged and Dustin answered, "It's been a little odd. You may not be a blood relative, but you'll always been our sister. It definitely took a while to get used to you being gone."

Myron chuckled, "That's the only thing that took a while to get used to?"

Dustin smirked and Christian commented, "We definitely have had a new look on life."

I directed my next question to Christian, "How is senior year going? Have you thought about college?"

Christian didn't look at me when he answered, instead pushing the food around on his plate, "I think I'm going to go straight to work. Dustin has good job at a construction company, and they're willing to hire me once I finish high school."

I raised my eyebrows at him but smiled at the same time, "You say that like I'm going to be disappointed in you."

Christian smiled as he looked up at me, but it was a sad smile, "You're taking on the world. I've been working to get hired by a construction company. It just seems so insignificant next to what you've gone on to do."

"She hasn't done anything yet." Dakim reminded a little harshly, and I just glared at him.

I sighed, deciding not to argue with him, and instead turned back to Christian, "I'm just glad that you have been able to put your lives back together. Christian, I'm proud that you're working hard to get a job with your brother."

Christian smiled, feeling comforted by my words, and just then the waitress came over with our food. However, she seemed as if she was struggling to balance all the plates, so Dustin got to his feet, "Here, let me help you."

As he did so, another customer walked by, accidentally bumping into the waitress in the crowded room, and her tray, with all the food on it, was knocked from her hands. Myron, who had been closest to the waitress, went to catch it out of reflex, but to everyone's surprise, Dustin had caught it first. The waitress's face immediately turned bright red and mumbled, "I'm so sorry, Dusty."

"Don't worry about it," He smiled down at her as he handed out our food and then gave her the empty tray back.

Her face turned even redder under his gaze and, before bolting away, she mumbled, "Please let me know if you need anything else."

Dustin watched her with a smile as she walked away with her hands over her face and didn't take his seat again until after she had gone back to the kitchen. When he sat down, I gave him a mischievous smile, "Dusty, eh? What a cute nickname."

Dustin blushed only slightly, but with his pale skin, it was quite noticeable. However, it was Kian who spoke up, "Dusty is the name on his driver's license."

That's right. Christian and Dustin had not only relocated, but they also had been given new identities. Dustin and Christian Murray were now Dusty and Chris Holt.

I pretended as though I hadn't forgotten this and continued teasing Dustin, "You should ask her to dinner."

Dustin smiled as he twirled his pasta around on his fork. "I can't have a relationship with someone if I can't even tell her my name. Besides, I suppose I am content with how things are."

Dustin may have been smiling, but his words wiped the smile from mine. It wasn't completely my fault that Dustin and Christian had to relocate, but I still felt guilty. I was no longer afraid of who I was. I was proud to be an Adelinda, but I still couldn't help but think about how normal their lives would have been if they had never met me. Roy casually put his arm around the back of my chair and gently ran his fingers up and down the underside of my arm. I'd been careful not to show my emotions on my face, but he knew me well enough by now to know that I'd be feeling guilty. My brother chose to ignore the gesture, despite how annoyed he usually was by our public display of affection, but Christian had also caught the gesture, and was curiously staring at Roy's hand on my arm.

Myron's whispered words brought my attention back to the dinner table, "You two had to move because people were chasing Rae. Once this battle with Raven is over, you won't have to worry about people coming after you because they want to get to Rae. You'll be free to go back to your old lives. You can go by your real names and tell people all about yourselves. You can tell them about how you met Rae in the foster system and eventually took care of her. In all honesty, you could even tell people about what Rae could do, although I doubt they'd believe you. It won't be long before this is all over."

I nodded, setting aside my empty dinner plate. I was ready to go home, because the sooner I went home and went to bed, the sooner tomorrow would come, and the sooner I could finally start tracking down Raven's weapon.

~

"Rae?"

I slowly opened my eyes at the sound of my name. When I noticed Christian standing in the doorway, I turned on the lamp and sat up, a smile on my face. It reminded me of when we were kids. Whenever Christian got curious about something, which he often did, he would never be able to sleep until he got the answer. He would come into my room and we'd stay up for hours doing nothing but talking.

"Yeah, Christian?"

He walked over and sat on the corner of my bed. "So, your brother, he's um..."

"A complete opposite of yours?" I finished for him.

He nodded, "Those weren't exactly the words I was thinking of, but yours are probably better."

I chuckled. I could only imagine the words he had been thinking of. "It's true though. When I told Dustin about my secret, he welcomed me with open arms. If that ever happened to Dakim, welcoming the person with open arms would be the last thing running through his mind." The thought made me smile. "Yet, he wasn't always like that. He was really cool, still is, if you take the time to get to know him. Dakim was always skilled. Everybody always praised him for being able to get a job done, but he still knew how to have fun. When he was labeled an outlaw, it was as if that piece of fun was ripped from him. Luke says that ever since he figured out I was still alive, he brightened up a lot, but every once in a while I'll catch him starring off into the distance, and I'd give a lot to figure out what he's thinking."

Christian smiled, looking down at me as if I was a foolish little kid. "You supposedly come from this all powerful family, and you can't pull a few thoughts from his head?"

"You forget. Dakim comes from this all powerful family too."

"Ah," Christian nodded, realizing his mistake. It fell quiet, and I expected Christian to go back to bed. It was what usually happened once Christian had gotten his answer.

"So... You and Roy, eh?"

I bit my lip and lowered my eyes. This was no doubt what Christian had been leading up to, only starting with Dakim because he was trying to work up the courage to ask about Roy.

"I mean, when you were here on Earth, you and Roy weren't exactly what I would call friends." He added.

"No, we weren't," I laughed and shook my head. "After Kian took you guys to a safe place, I spent an entire month with Myron's team, Roy more than most because he was my main training partner. The more time I spent with him, the more I respected him. Then he found out that the person who supposedly killed his entire family was my brother. That didn't go over well. Yet, then he turned around and saved my life. I'd say that was the official start of our friendship."

Christian stared me directly in the eyes, almost as if he were searching for something. "I know I didn't know Roy very well, but you were right when you first said that he looks down on everybody. I don't know how I feel about you dating somebody like that."

I smiled, "Dakim said the same thing, except he said 'I can't say I'm keen on the idea of you dating a guy who spent most of his life wanting to kill me'."

Christian broke out in a smile, "Yes, I guess his concern would take precedence over mine."

I giggled once again, but then turned serious, "Christian, thank you for your concern. You've always had my back, but Roy is one person you don't have to worry about. He threw a girl into a tree just because she insulted me. He was willing to take on my brother, which *nobody* has ever done. He would take on an entire empire of soldiers simply because I asked him to. He is the best guy I have ever met."

Christian suddenly got defensive, "Even better than me?"

I opened my mouth to argue but quickly closed it. Nothing I said would turn out good in the long run. It was better to say nothing at all.

"You're a punk, you know that?" I gently punched him in the arm.

"I'm the punk?" Christian punched me back.

"That's right." I tried to push him off the bed, but he caught himself at the last moment.

"Hey now," Christian said in a funny voice.

"Get out of here." I shoved him once more.

He chuckled and stood up. "It's good to have you back."

I smiled, and as he walked towards the door I whispered, "Goodnight."

He stopped and turned back to face me. Even in the dark I could see the way his eyes were lit up. I got the feeling that having me back meant more to him than he was letting on. He smiled, his eyes crinkling, and then walked out.

~

## **MAY 17**

"Oh, you have got to be kidding me." I groaned when I walked into the living room to find Dakim's sleeping bag empty. I turned on Luke and Vic who were acting as if they had only just woken up. "Where is he?"

"I didn't even realize he was gone." Vic commented as he rubbed his eyes.

"Yeah, right," I shook my head and walked back into the guest room.

"What are you doing?" Christian questioned as he walked into the room and found me rummaging through the drawers.

"Looking for paper," I answered as I moved on to the next drawer.

"No! Don't look in—"

It was too late. I had already opened the drawer. It was empty, all except for a gun.

I slowly pulled it out and turned it over. "When did you start keeping a gun?"

"Actually, Dustin and I both do, and we don't just keep a gun. We have several hidden in the house."

"First of all, this," I pointed to the drawer, "isn't what I call hidden. Second of all, why?"

"Rae, you were attacked. We uprooted our lives and we were dropped off at some strange place by a person who pretended to be our science teacher for a whole month. Can you blame us for being a little paranoid?"

I looked back down at the gun, just hating the sight of it. After growing up in the foster care system and seeing just the kind of damage guns could do, we both had agreed never to touch them. Yet, here he was hiding them all around the house. I looked back up at Christian, hoping my eyes didn't betray how truly hurt I was. "When did you stop telling me your secrets?"

"When I realized you wouldn't be around to tell them to!"

"What's going on in here?" Dustin asked as he stepped through the door but stopped when he saw the gun in my hand.

I ignored Dustin's interruption because something else had just dawned on me. "You're not just into guns, but you've started martial arts as well, haven't you? When the waitress dropped her tray last night, Myron didn't even have to react. You're reflexes have improved immensely and so has your balance and posture. You've been learning how to fight."

Dustin sighed and stepped forward, seeming to have pieced together everything that had happened. "Rae, do you remember what I said to you after you told me what you could do?"

All the hurt that seemed to have been building up in my chest flowed away like a river when Dustin's words rang through my head. *"Just because I know something new about you, doesn't change who you are, or who you have been."*

Dustin slowly stepped forward and cautiously went to take the gun from my hand, but I pulled away. My mind had moved on to a new idea. "How much do you know about guns?"

"Enough," Dustin answered, cautiously reaching for the gun once more.

I rolled my eyes and handed it back to him, only because it would make him feel better. As soon as the gun was in his hand, he removed the ammo from the clip. "Think you know enough that you would be able to help us out with a gun from Kusnik?"

Dustin shrugged. "I can give it a shot."

A smile broke out on my face, and I turned back to Christian, "I really do need a piece of paper."  
"Yeah, of course."

**\*\*\*Dustin\*\*\***

Rae had sent a letter to Dakim explaining that she had an idea about something with guns, but it wasn't until a few hours later that he returned.

"The two seem to get along well." Dakim commented, appearing out of nowhere, and stood next to Dustin where he was watching Rae and Christian run around the yard from the house.

Dustin didn't even jump. He just continued to stare out the window, "We were devastated when she left with Myron's team, but it was worse for Christian. As I said before, Christian hadn't done too well in the foster care system, but Rae had made it bearable, for both of us. For a while it seemed like we were always being moved to a new home, never staying in one spot. She was the one constant in his life. It's no surprise that when she left, he went back to the same bad habits he had before she came along, except this time he got in much deeper." He looked out at Christian. "Seeing him how he is now, you would never know just how far he fell when she left. That's when he started getting into the guns and crime. He was arrested for assault and everything else. I managed to get him out of it, but only after promising that we would go to the gun range on a regular basis and sign up for martial arts classes. Sure, after nine months we're not exactly masters, and we wouldn't stand a chance if the same people who

were after Rae came after us, but it gave us a sense of security. Christian also began teaching me a few of the tricks Rae had taught him, such as being able to detect when something is out of place or if somebody is lying.”

“Sounds like she was a big part of your life.”

“She was, and she still is. Sometimes I feel like we are more a part of her world than we ever were ours.”

Dakim shifted uncomfortably. “Do you want to be in her world?”

Dustin looked up to the sky thoughtfully, “Now that I know the truth about the existence of Kusnik, I don’t think I would ever want to go back to being in the dark. I go through life every day, but I never really feel like I am a part of it. I feel so detached from it all, like I don’t belong.”

Dakim took a deep breath, “If I said I could bring you to the other dimension, would you?”

Dustin turned to Dakim, “But I thought a human’s body was too weak to survive the transfer.”

“A few years ago I discovered a way to make the body stronger, but it’s only temporary. An infusion of dragon blood is like magic. It will heal any injuries you might have and also make you stronger, but the strength only lasts for as long as the blood remains in your system.”

Dustin’s eyes narrowed at Dakim, “Forgive me if I’m a little paranoid, but I’ve learned that if something sounds too good to be true, it usually is.”

The corner of Dakim’s lips turned up into a smile. “Don’t flatter yourself. I’m not doing this for you. I’m doing this for Rae. Her main motive for coming here may have been to get information on Raven’s new weapon, but I could have handled that myself. No, I wanted to give her a much needed vacation. She has seen combat before, but she has never seen war. A battle like the one we are preparing for can scar people so badly that they never recover. I don’t want this for her, but she wants to save her home and her friends, and I’d do just about anything for her, even if it means getting involved in a war I have no part in. However, I don’t want this to completely ruin her. I want her to have something to hold onto, something like this.”

Dustin smiled, “Sounds good enough, but if you want me to do this for Rae, then you have to do something for me.”

Dakim paused for a minute and then slowly turned to Dustin, his eyebrow cocked, “I’m listening.”

“I’d like to think of Rae as part of our family, like Christian and I are the big brothers. Yet, it’s hard for us to strike the fear of God into a boy who could no doubt kill us in the blink of an eye.”

Dakim cracked a smile, “Don’t worry, I make sure to intimidate Roy every chance I get.”

Dustin smiled and then went back to watching Rae and Christian. “I’m glad to know that when I stopped being able to care for her, somebody else stepped up.”

Dakim was obviously uncomfortable with Dustin’s openness, so he went back to watching Christian and Rae. Christian was begging her to show him something, but she wasn’t budging.

“Please?”

“No.”

“Please?”

“No.”

“Please?”

“Sure.”

“Really?”

“No.”

Dakim smiled, and then forced himself to speak. “I’m not the only one who stepped up. I may strike the fear of God into Roy, but he loves Rae enough to have become the first person to ever truly stand up to me. Myron also seems to be willing to do just about anything for her, and Luke, Vic, Kian,

and Karexon aren't too far off. Just knowing her seems to make everything better in people's lives, and they are in no hurry to lose that."

Dustin nodded. "I know the feeling."

**\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

"You jerk!" I shouted at Dakim when I walked back into the house and found him sitting in the recliner with his feet up. "How long have you been here?"

He ignored me.

"Okay, different question, care to tell me why you just up and disappeared and didn't even respond to my letter?"

"Call everybody else in from outside. I don't want to have to explain twice."

I did as I was told, and a few minutes later, we all were sitting in Dustin's living room. I sat on the couch across from Dakim while Roy sat on the floor in front of me. Myron was next to me and Karexon was sitting on the arm rest on the other side of him. Kian was standing behind us with his arms crossed over his chest, and Dustin and Christian were sitting on the love seat. Vic was relaxing in the rocking chair while Luke had pulled up his own chair and sat next to Dakim. Now that everybody was present, Dakim began.

"I was thinking about the Hunters last night, and something occurred to me. There are loopholes in the dimension that allow people to transfer between Earth and Kusnik without being detected, so that would explain how Raven can transfer the weapon between here and Kusnik without any trouble. However, since the Hunters track people by their Miutho, why haven't they been able to sense Raven's weapon?"

"It's probably being blocked by Kunettium." Karexon offered.

"No, a Hunters ability to track Miutho doesn't come from just a few sensors in the brain like ours does. Their ability comes from a very complex system that something as simple as Kunettium wouldn't be able to block." Myron explained.

"Then what do you think it is?" I inquired.

Dakim tapped his finger on his chin, staring at nothing in particular, thinking it over. "I think the Hunters are turning a blind eye."

Vic sat forward, "You think the Hunters have betrayed Lady Vanek as well?"

"They were never hers to begin with." Kian spoke. "Travel to Earth was forbidden long before Vriknir was even founded."

"Then we have to assume that the Hunters are working under Raven's orders. We need to find that factory before they find us." Roy spoke.

A smile broke out on Dakim's face as he sat back in the chair, "No, I think we'll let them find us."

Myron also smiled, "You're one insane son of a bitch, but you're good."

## Chapter 33

"Anybody care to explain?" Christian looked back and forth between Dakim and Myron.

Myron was still smiling as he turned to Christian and Dustin. "If the Hunters are working for Raven, then they know exactly where the weapon is being built. They could lead us right to it. All we have to do is attract the Hunters' attention."

Luke rolled his eyes. "That should be simple enough."

"In the meantime," Dakim pulled out the purified gun we had gotten in Alsentra from his pocket and tossed it to Dustin, "I want to know as much about this as possible. You're good with guns, right?"

"I—" Dustin began, but Dakim cut him off.

"Good. Anybody like fireworks?" Dakim got to his feet and walked out of the room.

His eyes furrowed in confusion, Christian opened his mouth to speak, but I just shook my head and turned to Myron, "You seem to be the only one able to read his mind. Care to explain?"

Myron took a deep breath, "Basically, Dakim wants the Hunters to find us, because trying to chase somebody down while something else is chasing you is near impossible. Plus, if Dakim is right, we just may be able to get some information about Raven's weapon."

Roy leaned his head back, "I can only imagine how Dakim intends to get the Hunters attention."

I rubbed my temples, "What are the chances it has something to do with fireworks?"

Myron sighed and stood up, "I guess we better get ready then. Christian, Dustin, I think it would be safer for you two down in the basement. I don't want you in harm's way when the Hunters show up. Vic will remain with you just in case one slips past us."

"We can handle ourselves." Christian angrily stepped forward, but Dustin grabbed his arm.

"What? With this?" Vic held up one of the guns Christian and Dustin had hidden around the house. "I have news for you. The worst damage something like this would do to a Teysas is breaking a bone from the force of impact. It wouldn't even break skin, and you're not fighting Teysas. You're fighting Riora."

"Why don't you use this time to work with the gun Dakim gave you?" I volunteered. "Patience is not one of Dakim's virtues. He's going to want to know everything about that gun as soon as possible."

Christian rolled his eyes, pulled free of Dustin's grip, and then headed for the basement. Dustin silently followed, and Vic trudged after them. Once they were safely downstairs, the rest of us walked into the backyard where Dakim was waiting. I took deep breaths, preparing myself for the upcoming battle, and nervously ran my fingers over my utility belt, making sure everything was in place.

"We'll have to make this look like we're not expecting them." Luke instructed.

"You act like we're new at this." Karexon taunted.

I took Roy's hand, leading us over to the picket fence, and then perched myself on the top. Roy remained with his feet on the ground but leaned on the fence next to me. Luke and Myron lounged in the lawn chairs on the patio while Kian and Karexon sat on the edge of the patio. Then, the fireworks began.

I didn't have to pretend to enjoy them. My brother was talented, that was for sure. Myron had said that he would be a handy-man for a living if he wasn't a Riora. Well, my brother would make his living shooting off fireworks.

Fireworks result from a series of chemical reactions, but Dakim had control over those chemical reactions, so he had control over the fireworks. He could make absolutely anything he wanted. He started with the colors of Vriknir's flag. They sparkled down like waterfalls. Then, he made the design of the family crest in the sky, and I unconsciously fingered the talisman around my neck, something that I never took off.

"You're not watching anymore." Roy whispered, taking my hand away from the necklace, and then looked at the sky. I looked up just in time to see beautiful heart fade into the night sky. I smiled at Dakim, who winked at us, and then I turned back to Roy. I gently ran my fingers through his hair, and then kissed him.

Even though I knew the Hunters would be arriving any minute, I just took the time to enjoy the moment. Roy loved me, and somehow that just seemed to make everything better. I was here in his warm embrace with his lips slowly moving against mine, and for a split second, Raven didn't exist. In that moment, we all weren't outlaws with wanted dead or alive stamped on our foreheads. For the first time in a long time, I wasn't scared to face what was coming.

I was sad when he eventually broke the kiss, but it had to happen eventually. Yet, I didn't let go of him. I wrapped my arms around his neck. "I love you."

He placed his hands on mine and leaned against me, "I love you too."

Then, reality set in as I sensed the Hunters growing near. They had us surrounded. A smile broke out on Dakim's face, and he slowly lowered his arms as the Ultimate Defense began to cover his skin. "You guys are just in time for the finale."

Knowing that their cover was blown, one of the Hunters broke formation and launched at Dakim, but Dakim threw him aside without any effort. Dakim's smile turned into an evil one, revealing his canines. "You're going to have to do better than that."

*They will do better.* I thought to myself as I activated my own Ultimate Defense. I tried to stay focused even though I could feel the army of Hunters drawing near. I had never gotten the Ultimate Defense to cover my entire body, but this wasn't practice anymore. This was battle and I needed the Ultimate Defense.

*Come on, just a little bit further...*

I opened my eyes with surprise when I realized that it had worked. I had succeeded in using the Ultimate Defense, and just in time. I jumped down from the picket fence and pushed Roy to the ground, using the armor to deflect a knife that had been thrown our way. Roy smirked up at me, "This seems a little backwards, don't you think?"

I rolled my eyes and stood up, going into battle mode. Luke, Myron, Kian, and Karexon had also gone into battle mode. At least, I assumed Karexon had since I could no longer see him. Out of nowhere, hundreds of knives began pouring into the clearing, and they were coming from all directions. Yet, only a couple managed to come through before Dakim pulled pipes up from the ground and built a crude shelter for us.

"You can't stay in there forever." A voice drifted through the metal.

It was dark outside, and dark inside the small shelter, but there were cracks in the shelter which allowed enough light from the moon to come in and allow us to see. Roy's bright red eyes, intensified by the activated Skayikon, also brightened things up a bit. Myron quickly ran his hands along the walls, making it sound proof, allowing us to talk freely.

"There are almost fifty Hunters out there. That's thirty more than I expected." Roy growled. "There is no way we'll succeed in capturing one."

"You don't think we can handle it?" Dakim glared down at Roy.

"You intend to kill all of the Hunters we don't capture?" Karexon challenged.

Dakim shrugged it off, "If we have to."

I pulled on his arm. "They are innocent people."

"Are they really all that innocent?" Luke interjected.

"They're just doing their jobs." I argued.

"That doesn't make them innocent," Myron brought up.

I turned on Myron. "You agree with this?"



"They have chosen their side and we have chosen ours. I do not wish for it to come down to killing, but if they continue to attack, then they leave me no choice," He replied

I shook my head and burst out of the crude shelter. No Hunters were in sight, but I could feel them. I stepped forward and shouted, "I wish to speak to your commander."

"Be careful what you wish for." A man stepped out from behind the tree trunk and stepped out onto one of the limbs. He threw a dagger my way, and the rest of the Hunters in the area did the same. However, with a simple blink of an eye, I froze them all in mid-air. He only smirked at me and spoke, "Commander Colton Myska at your service."

"No, you be careful." I warned as I pointed the daggers back in the direction they had come from. "I don't think you know who you're dealing with. We don't wish you any harm. We just want to talk."

One of the other Hunters, who looked to be the second in command, chimed in, "Trust me, we know all too well who you and your brother are, and we have no intention of talking to you."

"Well, you're talking to me now, aren't you?" I taunted the other Hunter, causing Colton to frown. "I want to know about the weapon Raven is developing."

Colton dropped down from the tree limb so he was standing right in front of me. He looked to be about Dakim's height and age. His hair was a forest green color, and he had hard, dull gold eyes. He wore khaki pants with a brown belt and black shirt with a green and white short-cut jacket. I couldn't explain it, but there was just something that seemed familiar about him. He stood with his feet shoulder width apart and his hands on his hips, "And makes you think that I know anything about that?"

"Oh, I don't know, maybe just the fact that you're purposefully turning a blind eye to it." Karexon joined in.

"And why would we do that?"

"Because Jerome asked you to!" I shouted, getting frustrated, but Roy came up behind me and brushed his hand against mine.

*Stop talking. He's getting more answers out of you than you're getting out of him.*

The second in command burst out laughing. "The Hunters are loyal to nobody. If you want to go after his weapon, by all means, have at it. It's in one of the mountains of Japan. Good luck finding it."

With that, Colton turned to leave, but faster than I expected, Dakim grabbed him. "What makes you think we'd be even slightly inclined to believe that fool hidden in the trees?"

"Because you have nothing else to go on," The Colton smiled evilly, and then all of the sudden, he was gone. In the blink of an eye, he had just disappeared, and so had the other forty-nine.

Dakim clenched his fists and sent a ball of Miutho flying at the trees in anger. I lowered my eyes, knowing that his rage would pass. He was only frustrated that the hunter had managed to slip through his grasp so easily. Instead, I turned to Luke, "Do we believe him?"

"As much as I hate to admit it, he was right. We have nothing else to go on, and now that the Hunters know what we want, we won't be able to bring them back here so easily. Trying to capture one, liked we originally planned, will be impossible."

Karexon turned to me with a smile, "Well, it looks like we're going to Japan."

I shook my head. "The Hunter said that it's in one of the mountains of Japan, but almost seventy-five percent of Japan's geography is mountainous. That's a lot of ground to cover."

"We won't have to cover it all. If that factory is pumping out as much unstable Miutho as I think it is, we'll only have to be in the general vicinity before we're able to sense it." Dakim joined in, starting to calm down.

Roy looked around at everybody, "And what if this is a trap? We thought we could handle the Hunters, but they obviously can do more than what we originally thought."

"Trust me," Dakim growled, "They won't be getting away a second time."

**\*\*\*Colton\*\*\***

As the rest of the Hunters turned to leave, Vaughn Pryor, his second in command, came up to him and commented, "I'm surprised you revealed yourself to her."

"She didn't seem to recognize me."

"You took a big risk by doing so." Vaughn reminded.

"You are my only subordinate that knows about my connection to the Adelindas. If I didn't show my face, my subordinates will question why I didn't present myself and take command of the situation. I can't answer those questions truthfully, so I'd prefer not to answer them at all. However, if I don't give them an answer, if I avoid them, it may ultimately lead them to question my leadership."

"If she had recognized you, wouldn't she ask you questions that are just as difficult, maybe even harder to answer?"

Colton shook his head. "It was Asher and Catriona's wish that their children be left in the dark about their heritage. Even if Raelyn were to discover my connection to her parents, I could avoid answering her questions. Whether or not she has faith in me does not change my mission."

"Then you don't intend on telling her anything?"

"Raelyn and Dakim don't have what they would need to reach their true potential. That was lost long ago. Most people have forgotten what dragons are truly capable of, and that was what Asher and Catriona had wished for. I have no reason to dig up the past."

"What will you do now?"

"We've already hinted about the mountain, but otherwise we can't have any more direct involvement. I want you to use your ability to push thoughts into people's minds to help guide them to the right place."

Vaughn shook his head. "I can't push thoughts into any of the Riora, they would sense it instantly and perceive it as a threat."

"What about the humans? Can you put thoughts in their heads without alerting anybody else?"

"That shouldn't be a problem."

"Good. Then as far as I'm concerned, nothing has changed. We continue as planned"

**\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

We made our way back inside and Vic greeted us. His eyebrows came together when he saw us, "That was a lot quieter than I expected it to be."

"That's because nothing happened." Disappointed, Karexon collapsed into one of the recliners.

I added, "Other than a few knives being exchanged, there was no fighting. There were almost fifty Hunters out there."

"Fifty?" Vic looked from Dakim to Luke, "And they let you just walk away?"

"When they heard what we were after, they became friendlier, and even gave us a hint as to where Raven's developing his weapon." Luke answered.

"But why?"

"I don't know," Myron shook his head.

"Right now, that's not my main concern. We are running short on time. Where is Dustin with that gun?" Dakim snapped.

"He'll be up any minute." Vic quickly reassured Dakim. "He's just trying a couple last things."

Dakim growled once more but otherwise let it drop and walked into the dining room. Everybody else followed. I decided not to join them and instead sat down in the recliner, twirling one of the knives from earlier as I thought things over. What I hadn't realized was that Karexon had also remained.

"Something on your mind?" He sat down in the recliner across from me.

I playfully narrowed my eyes at him, "And what makes you think that I'm going to open up to you and tell you my inner thoughts and feelings when all you do is poke fun?"

He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "I can be serious you know."

I rolled me eyes. "Your tone says otherwise."

He crossed his arms over his chest, "Fine. Then don't tell me."

I smiled and then went back to twirling the knife in my hand. Karexon sat there patiently, watching me. Eventually I sighed and then looked over at him, "You know, I watch Roy and I think, wow, look at how far he's come. When I first met him, he looked at everything with such hatred, especially me because of who my brother is. He was a machine, going through life without feeling anything. He cares now, not only for me but for life in general. Yet, today I realized that he isn't the only one who has grown. Being back here with Christian and Dustin reminds me of the days when I had no clue what was going on. I had no idea why I had these abilities that nobody else did. It reminds me of how hard it was to do the simple things." I let go of the dagger and watched as it hovered in my palm. "Something like this would have taken all of my concentration, and I would have been completely wiped out after performing it. Now, I don't even have to think about it. For the longest time I had been so worried that I would fail, that I wouldn't be able to take on Raven. Yet, today that's changed. I know I'm ready."

"And what are you going to do to Raven?" Karexon raised his eyebrows at me.

I smiled evilly, "I'm going to rip his head off."

Karexon stood up and patted me on the back, "Good girl."

I chuckled and then looked up when there was the sound of somebody pounding up the steps. A moment later, Dustin emerged, followed by Christian. "I think we've got it."

Karexon and I walked into the dining room where everybody else had already gathered. Once we were all present, Dustin took the gun apart and set the pieces on the table for all of us to see. "This is designed just like a regular gun, except that whoever designed this took out the barrel of the gun and replaced it with what seems to be a canister of Miutho. What's truly ingenious is that it's rechargeable."

"You're supposed to be helping us, not admiring Raven's handiwork." Dakim chastised.

Christian took a deep breath and then gave further details, "A regular gun takes bullets, and when you run out of ammo, you have to reload. However, as soon as you fire this, it automatically begins reloading itself."

"But how is that possible?" Myron inquired.

"I heard a rumor once," Luke began, "that there is a flower that never dies. It can regenerate Miutho. The only way it can be killed is if there is no Miutho to regenerate from."

Dustin looked back over the pieces of the gun. "When I experimented with this, I shot it until the canister was completely empty, so there has to be some sort of original source that it recharges from."

Roy activated his Skayikon and looked over the pieces. After a minute, he picked one up. "Why didn't you take this apart?"

"It's not designed to come apart."

"This one is."

Dustin took the piece from Roy and turned it over. After some careful prying, he finally managed to open it, revealing a little glass container.

"Freeze!" Luke suddenly shouted and everybody in the room stood perfectly still. "Very slowly, put that back together, and no matter what, don't break that glass container."

Dustin did as he was told and, ever so carefully, put it back together. Once he finally put it back together and set it on the table, everybody let out a sigh of relief. Then, Dakim turned on Luke, "What the hell was that about?"

"Think about it, Dakim. When the Miutho regenerates, what stops it from continuously regenerating?" Luke paused even though it had been a rhetorical question. "The Miutho regenerates

until it fills the entire container it's in. Usually it would fill the entire flower, but in this case it fills the canister in the gun. If that glass container were to break, there would be nothing to stop it from continuing to regenerate, and it would spread everywhere. The canister looks as if it might be almost as hard as Dakim's armor, but that little glass container is just that, glass."

"Why would they put something so breakable and dangerous into the gun?" Karexon questioned.

"As I said before, it wasn't designed to be taken apart." Dustin reminded.

"Do you think you would be able to reproduce this?" Myron questioned.

Dustin shook his head, "I doubt it. This is made out of metals that aren't found on Earth. Even if I had access to the metals I needed, I don't know the characteristics of Miutho or how it works."

"If Dakim and I handle the Miutho aspect, and Vic gets you the metals, then would you two be able to do it?" Luke asked.

Christian looked at Dustin and then shrugged, "I don't see why not."

Dakim nodded, "Then make a list of the things you will need, and we will get them for you. Kian and Karexon, find any information you can on this regenerating flower. Myron and Roy, Raven may be manufacturing the weapon on Earth, but I doubt he is storing it here. I want you two to see if you can find out where he is storing the weapons on Kusnik. If the Hunters are telling the truth and won't interfere with us going after Raven, then Rae and I should be able to take care of the factory without any problems."

"And if the Hunters aren't telling the truth?" Roy questioned.

"Then Rae and I will hightail it out of there. We came here to find out what would could about Raven's weapon so we knew how to defend ourselves from it. Thanks to Dustin and Christian, we now know exactly what Raven's weapon is, how it works, and how we can reproduce it to use for ourselves. Destroying his factory is just a bonus."

Roy took a deep breath and stepped back. It was the best apology Dakim was going to get.

"We can all meet up in Spring Field just outside of Vriknir in four days. There is an abandoned shack there where we can lay low." Dakim instructed and then walked out of the house without another word.

Kian and Karexon nodded and then teleported back to the other dimension using the loophole Dakim had shown them. Luke and Vic immediately followed. I quickly stole a kiss from Roy and then he and Myron were off as well. Christian walked into the other room, off to do who knows what, so I was left standing there, not sure what to do next. Everybody had their jobs, but Dakim hadn't told me what we would be doing so I sat on the couch and watched as Dustin put the gun back together. It brought a smile to my face.

Dustin must have noticed it. "What's so funny?"

"Dustin, you are the nicest person I have ever met, and you have an unnaturally high pitched voice for a guy." I chuckled. His voice was always something I had bugged him about. "Seeing you work with guns just doesn't click in my mind."

Dustin smiled. "I know what you mean. A year ago, I never would have believed that I'd be able to take a gun apart and put it back together. I didn't even know the different types of guns."

I folded my hands in my lap. "When I first found Christian's gun, I was really upset. I never thought you might end up saving Vriknir. I guess I ought to thank you."

Dustin shook his head. "I only wish I could be more helpful. I'm not an expert. I still have a lot to learn."

"You may not know as much about guns as most people, but you know more than anybody from Kusnik. Plus, you know a lot more about Miutho than most humans. A regular human never would have been able to figure out as much as you have."

"So, if I'm not a regular human, then what am I?" He joked.

I got up and gave him a hug. "You're our savior."

"We need to talk." He squirmed out of my grip. "Christian, get in here."

"Yeah?" Christian walked in.

Dustin took a deep breath and then began. "I was talking to Dakim, and he has found a way for Christian and I to come to Kusnik."

"Are you kidding?" Christian exclaimed.

I shook my head, "Dustin, I know you said you wanted to help more, but I can't let you put yourselves in harm's way."

"Rae," Christian argued, "We won't be in harm's way. We'll be holed up in some abandoned warehouse manufacturing Miutho guns. Plus, I have a few ideas for other weapons we could make. We would never be directly part of the action."

I frowned at him. "Christian, you're making weapons. What do you think will be the first thing that Raven targets when he attacks? I don't mean to burst your bubble, but you're only human. A blast that wouldn't even make me stumble backwards could kill you instantly. I'm not willing to take that risk."

"But we are," Dustin stepped forward. "You can't deny that Vriknir needs these weapons, and we don't have the time to teach you how this all works. You need us."

"Oh come on," Christian wrapped his arm around my shoulders, "You know you want us around."

I tried not to smile, knowing that I needed to show them that I did not approve, but Christian was making it really hard. Eventually I couldn't help it, "Okay, fine."

"Yes!" Christian threw his first in the air.

The conversation was dropped as Dakim walked in the house. "Let's go."

Christian dropped his arm from my shoulders, "Where are we going?"

"Where do you think?" Dakim snapped.

"Can you teleport us all to Japan?" I asked.

Dakim shook his head, "Even if I wasn't teleporting you three, that would be way too far for me to teleport. We'll have to fly."

"Won't our passports be flagged?" Dustin questioned.

"Myron and his team represent the people of Vriknir and cannot do anything that might harm their good image. I don't have to be as careful."

I dropped my head back in a sigh. "Do I want to know what you have in mind?"

"I'm just going to convince some rich person to sneak us into the country on their private jet." He turned to Dustin and Christian and jokingly asked, "Know anybody who owns a private jet?"

For a second, Dustin paused, almost as if there was something else going on in his mind. However, it quickly passed and he offered, "We should go to Bloomfield Hills. It's one of the richest cities in the area."

"That's only forty minutes from here." Christian offered.

I just looked at Christian. "Have you seen the cars out front? We'll be there in twenty."

"I'll be there in ten." Dakim smiled and then walked out the door.

"If you intend to go back to Kusnik with us, then I suggest that you go pack your things." I told them. "More than likely you won't be coming back here. The same rules as last time apply. Only get sentimental things. Everything else can be replaced."

Cars like the Koenigsegg Agera R and the Ssc Ultimate Aero were not designed for carrying things like suitcases, but we managed to get all of Dustin's and Christian's things to fit in the cars, and then we were off. We left the Suzuki Hayabusa out in the street for people to see. I had no idea how Dakim had gotten the vehicles, but I knew that returning them was something more complicated than I wanted to get involved in. It would be picked up and returned to its owner eventually. Driving two of the

fastest vehicles in the world, was not an easy task, but Dakim and I picked up on it pretty quickly. We had faster reflexes than humans which made things a lot easier, and a little bit of telekinesis helped us keep the car in control.

We had only been on the road for a maximum of five minutes before I sensed an increase in Miutho. We had been surrounded by Riora. "Christian, get a hold of Dakim."

He nodded and then activated the Bluetooth.

"Dakim?"

"Yeah, I'm aware."

My eyes scanned the cars that shared the road with us. Our cars stood out like a sore thumb, but I couldn't figure out which cars contained the Riora who had surrounded us, at least without taking my focus away from the car. "Who do you think they are?"

"I'm not sure, but they're not Hunters. Their Miutho signature is different."

"That doesn't mean that the Hunters didn't sell us out." I reminded. "The Hunters no doubt saw our cars. They could have told them exactly what to look for."

"No, if the Hunters had told whoever these people are about our cars, then they would have known that the cars they're driving now don't have a chance at keeping up with us."

"I know you have a theory." I prodded Dakim as I changed lanes and slowly increased my speed.

"My guess is that they're Raven's lackeys. They probably caught up to us when they sensed my fireworks, but they couldn't do anything with the Hunters around. They waited for us to get into the cars where it would be much harder for us to defend ourselves."

I nodded, "Only they didn't count on us having these cars."

"These may be some of the fastest cars, but you'll never be able to reach those speeds with all this traffic." Christian did well at masking the worry in his voice, but I knew it was there. "Speed alone won't be able to get us out of this."

"Did he really just say that?" Dakim's voice was full of disbelief, and, as if to prove his point, he changed lanes, fitting into a space between two cars that was just barely big enough to fit the Agera, and several cars to laid on their horns. I chuckled when I heard Dustin stifle a gasp. Christian and Dustin were trying to remain calm and were failing miserably.

Once Dustin got his racing heart under control, he tried to speak, "These cars are equipped with navigation technology. As soon as we lose your friends, we'll need to stop some place and disable the GPS tracking system."

I stole a glance at Christian, "Can you guys handle that?"

Dakim chimed in as he changed lanes once more, causing another car to slam on its brakes.

"They're going to have to, because I don't know a damn thing about these cars."

I glanced in my rearview mirror when I sensed Raven's lackeys getting closer, and then glanced at Dakim's car. "Are you ready?"

"I was born ready."

## Chapter 34

I swerved into the left lane and brought my speed up as far as I dared in this heavy traffic. We had to go through Detroit to get to Bloomfield, and even though it was way past rush hour, there were still quite a few cars on the road.

We quickly came up to an intersection, and, seeing that the light was red, I let up on the acceleration, but I had no intention of stopping. The traffic going the other way was thick. Dakim and I would have to time it just right if we intended to make it through unscathed. As we neared the intersection, I focused on one of the cars going the opposite direction and used my telekinesis to slow it down, just enough to allow Dakim and I to make it through.

"No..." Christian muttered when he realized that I wasn't going to stop.

"Yes." I replied and floored it. We made it through four lanes of traffic, coming within centimeters of the other cars. Clearing the first lane of cars was easy, but when it was obvious that we weren't stopping, the other cars tried to swerve, and it took skill and precision to prevent us from hitting anything. Raven's men weren't as lucky. Two cars crashed, and one even flipped over. I watched it all in my rearview mirror and then made a sharp turn down a narrow alley. Dakim was right on my tail.

"Recalculating." The GPS voice made me jump.

"Get this thing to shut up." I snapped at Christian.

Had his face not been completely drained of color out of fear, he probably would have laughed at me, but as it was, he simply reached forward and turned off the volume.

I swerved around the bits of garbage and other miscellaneous items in the street with ease. Apartment buildings flew by so fast that I couldn't recognize where one building ended and the next began. Christian probably couldn't even recognize what we were passing. To him it would all be a blur.

We emerged from the dark alley into the bright sunlight, almost getting into another accident in the process. Yet, we didn't have time to stop. We had lost the three men who were originally following us, but others were obviously sitting in the area, because as soon as we exited the alley, two more were on us.

Making a split second decision, I made a sharp left turn and had to quickly steer back to the right in order to prevent the car from going into a spin. I had turned down a busy one way street, and was going the wrong way. Several cars laid on their horns, but I ignored them and continued down the street. Had it just been me, I probably would have been fine, but two cars trying to go the wrong way down a one way street at high speeds was causing too much confusion. Inexperienced drivers were swerving out of Dakim's way and into mine. Instead, I went off the road and onto the sidewalk. The only thing there I had to worry about were the occasional trees. For a moment Dakim continued fighting the traffic, but it was slowing him down, so he went onto the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street.

BOOM!

Christian screamed, and even I slightly jumped at the sound. The entire car shook and the temperature instantly became several degrees hotter. I quickly glanced in my rearview mirror, but the entire thing was a reddish-orange color, and I exclaimed. "I thought explosions like that only happened in movies!"

"They do." Christian found his voice. "Most cars have been specifically designed to prevent explosions like that from occurring. To get an explosion like that, there had to have been actually explosives in the car."

"But why would there be explosives in the cars?" Dustin brought up.

"Can we discuss this later?" Dakim snapped. "We're a little busy."

I cut across several lanes of traffic, swerving in and out of cars, until I was on the same side of the street as Dakim, and then we turned down a wide set up steps. These cars were sport cars, which meant that they were low to the ground. The stairs made for a very unpleasant ride.

When we finally reached the bottom, we found ourselves to be on some sort of college campus. We pulled off behind a building that didn't seem to be used anymore and parked the cars. Finally able to relax, I took a deep breath and forced myself to let go of the steering wheel. Christian was still ashen faced, and I unlocked the doors so he could get out and get some fresh air. I really didn't need him getting sick. Dustin also looked unsteady as he stepped out of the car, but seemed to at least be able to function.

We gave them a moment to calm down, but after that they immediately went to work on removing the GPS from the cars. In the meantime, Dakim and I casually strolled out into the campus. After asking directions from one of the night students, we managed to find a nearby campus market that was open twenty-four seven.

"Without the GPS, we'll need a map." I picked one up and handed it to Dakim.

He handed the map back to me. "Where do you think I would have learned to read one of these?"

I pushed it back towards him, "You may not know how to read one, but I'm sure Dustin does, and you'll need it to find your way if you guys get separated from us."

He frowned but otherwise took the map. Knowing that Dustin and Christian were still uneasy, I picked up a few snacks to settle their stomach, and Dakim went around the station, lifting wallets off of anybody who walked by him.

"Pick up a couple of cell phones too." I too low for any human to hear.

He took the money out of the wallets he lifted, paid for the things we needed, and then left the wallets in the grocery carts by the door as we left. Once we were safely out of the store, he handed me one of the phones he had picked up, and we exchanged numbers.

When we returned to where the cars were, the boys were hard at work so I set the snacks down where they could reach and then stayed out of the way. Instead, I went over to where Dakim was standing, keeping watch.

"So, what are the cell phones for?" Dakim inquired.

"It's not that hard to trace a cell phone. No doubt they had picked up the ones Dustin and Christian were using before." I then switched the subject. "Why do you think that car had explosives in it?"

He looked up at the sky, and I could almost see the gears turning in his head. After a minute, he shifted his weight and then looked down at me, "What was different between the first three cars that were chasing us and the two that caught up with us later?"

I closed my eyes, letting the scenario play through my head once more. Then I answered, "I could sense the Miutho of the people in the first three cars. There wasn't Miutho in the two cars that came after us later. They were human."

"And why would humans be after us?"

I gritted my teeth. I hated when Dakim made me put the pieces together. I would much rather that he outright told me the answer. "Most Riora don't know how to efficiently drive. They can get to point A from Point B well enough, but if it came to a car chase, a human precision driver would have had much better luck catching us. Yet, a skilled precision driver is rarely a skilled assassin as well. Guns can't hurt Riora, but explosives can, so explosives would have been the easiest way to kill us for somebody who wasn't a skilled assassin."

"But why use precision driving?" Dakim continued. "There would have been much simpler ways to catch us."

I shook my head. That was the one piece of the puzzle I still wasn't putting together.



Dakim gave me my missing piece, "The Hunters may be turning a blind eye to the development of Raven's weapon, but they're obviously still enforcing the ban against the transfer between dimensions, otherwise they wouldn't have confronted us. Raven probably brought over the few essential Riora that he needed and then just hired human mercenaries to do the rest of his dirt work."

Now it was all fitting. "That's good for us because that means that most of the security at Raven's factory will be human."

"That is good for us," Dakim agreed but then warned, "but we must not become overconfident. The security may consist of humans, but it will be humans with Miutho guns that are every bit as dangerous to us as a regular gun would be to a human." Dakim warned.

"I understand."

Dakim straightened up, his eyes scanning the area. "We have company."

"But we're not done!" Christian protested.

"It doesn't matter." I pressured. "Get back in the car. We need to get out of here."

"Freeze! Campus police! Identify yourselves!"

We all froze when two men in uniform suddenly appeared. When they noticed the extremely expensive sport cars, they drew their guns and repeated, "Identify yourselves!"

"Dakim, no!" I shouted, but it was already too late. Riora were faster than humans, but we weren't faster than a speeding bullet. Dakim had reached for one of his knives, and as soon as the officer had perceived a threat, he had fired. The bullet hit Dakim square in the chest, and he fell to the ground with a hard thud.

That alone was enough to make me freeze. Not once had I ever seen Dakim take a hit. I had surpassed Luke, Myron, and everybody else on the team, but in all of our sparring matches, not once had I ever landed a single blow on Dakim. Thankfully the worst bullets could do to us is break a bone, but for him to take a hit, especially from a human, was unbelievable.

I watched in stunned silence as Dakim took the now smashed bullet and threw it away from him. The guard watched in horror as Dakim got back to his feet. If there wasn't the small hole in Dakim's shirt as proof, the guard would have thought that he had completely missed Dakim. "W-What are you?"

"Your worst nightmare." Dakim growled before launching at the guards. Too terrified to move, the guards didn't retaliate this time, and in the blink of an eye the two guards were on the ground with broken necks.

"What the hell!?" I snapped at him. I knew Dakim's temper, but actually killing the guards was more than I had expected. He only brushed past me and got into the car without saying another word. Now I was angry. I got back into the car and sped off.

"Did he...?" Christian began once we had gotten off the road.

I bit my lip and slowly nodded. Christian closed his eyes, and lowered his head, but he jumped when I slammed my fist on the steering wheel. "I know Dakim didn't kill the people of Vriknir, but I'm beginning to wonder if he's really as innocent as I've been making him out to be. I convinced myself that he was this noble person who only killed when he absolutely had to."

"Rae, they shot him." Christian reminded.

"He didn't need to kill them." I emphasized. "Judging by the way Dakim got up, I'd say that he might have a cracked rib at most, but something like that could have happened in a regular sparring match. No, that wound didn't warrant killing those guards."

Christian looked over at me, "We're talking about Dakim, the man who has lived as a criminal for the past ten years of his life. What else would you expect?"

I shook my head, "I don't know. I guess it's just that these past few months I've seen what a great guy Dakim can be. Sure, he is still distant, but I rejected what people said about him being a mass murderer because I knew it wasn't true, but I think I started rejecting anything bad that people had to say about Dakim. It never occurred to me that what people were saying might actually be true."

"But that's not to say that the good things you see in him aren't also true." Christian continued to argue. "I don't agree with what Dakim just did, but I can understand why he did it. I was practically living as a criminal these past few months before Dustin pulled me out of it. It isn't just one or two bad things. It becomes like a lifestyle. I was only in for a few months, and it was extremely hard to pull myself from that form of thinking. Dakim's been in for years. Don't give up on him. I've seen the goodness he's capable of."

His words brought smile to my face. "Did I ever mention how much I missed having you and Dustin around?"

"Sorry, what was that? I didn't quite hear you." Christian joked.

I rolled my eyes as I took the new phone out of my pocket and handed it to Christian, "Call Dakim. His number should already be in there."

Christian did as he was told and then put it on speaker. After a couple of rings, Dakim answered. "What?"

"We're a little over half way there. Please tell me you have a plan for getting us a private jet."

"Awebu is what we use to transfer thoughts to one another. However, when it is used on humans, it works more like mind control. We can tell them to do whatever we want."

"Would that work on me?" Christian asked, worried.

"After all the training Rae has given you, I would hope not." Dakim sneered.

"Then how does it work?" Dustin's voice came through the phone.

"It only works on people who are weak minded and don't know what's happening. If you know enough to realize what is happening, you can guard yourself from it."

"And you think a person rich enough to own a private jet is going to be weak minded?" His plans never made any sense to me.

"All human minds are generally weak when it comes to Miutho. However, Christian and Dustin have worked with Miutho before. They know what it feels like. If somebody tried to use Awebu against them, they would sense it immediately and be able to push the person out. Humans who have never experienced Miutho before won't understand what is happening and won't be aware enough to push me out."

"Dustin, who in Bloomfield Hills is rich enough to own a private jet?" I asked.

There was a short pause before he responded. "There was a man in the paper the other day named Harvey Snyder. He's the CEO of some big automotive research company."

"How far from Bloomfield Hills is the airport?" I asked.

"Well, the closest international airport is almost another half an hour past Bloomfield Hills, but I think there is a private air strip right outside the city. That's probably where the jet is."

"Where did you learn all of this?" Christian joked.

Dustin laughed. "Come on, we moved to Lincoln Park right after Rae was attacked. Do you really think I wouldn't check out the area?"

I smiled. I was good to see Dustin and Christian acting more like themselves. If they were still scared, they weren't showing it. I was glad that they were beginning to fully trust us to take care of them.

~

## ***MAY 18***

We pulled up in front of Harvey Snyder's house just as the sun began to appear over the horizon. Dustin, Christian, and I remained in the cars out of sight while Dakim snuck past security to find Harvey. Lucky for us, Harvey had been planning to leave in his private jet today, only Dakim convinced

him to go to Japan instead of his original destination. It meant that we wouldn't have to wait around to get everything in order with the pilot. It made things much simpler.

Dakim told Harvey to introduce us to people as potential clients so nobody asked questions as to why we were with him. We rode with Harvey in his limo to the air strip. I hated to leave the sports cars behind. They were such fun little toys. I'd have to convince Vic to build me one once things got back to normal.

We boarded the plane without any hassle, and Dakim convinced Harvey to stay in the cockpit with the pilot so he'd be out of our way. The inside of the jet was simple. It had two really long couches along the walls, and in the center was a coffee table. At the end was a shelf with all different kinds of alcohol.

I sat on the couch and watched the rising sun out of the small window while Dakim went through the alcohol. A flight from Detroit to Tokyo was almost fourteen hours. The flight alone would waste a full day, and we only had till the twenty-first before we needed to return to Kusnik. Yet, what made things confusing was that Japan was fourteen hours ahead of Michigan. Noon on a Wednesday in Michigan would be two in the morning on Thursday in Japan. It would be the twenty-first in Japan before it would be the twenty-first in Michigan. In the end, I decided to keep my watch set to the time and date it had been in Michigan, because that was what we had been using when we first made the deadline. Changing my watch to Japan time, while trying to keep the deadline of four days, was just too complicated for me.

Watching the rising sun made me think of the campus police from last night. Now that daylight had come around, it wouldn't be long before the bodies were discovered. The student who would find them would probably be forever traumatized, and I pitied the homicide detective who had to inform the families of their loss. Just thinking about it made me boil with anger.

I went over to Dakim and stood there with my hands on my hips. "Why? Why did you do it?"

Dakim only brushed past me and poured himself another drink. Sensing that a fight was brewing, Dustin and Christian quietly excused themselves and made their way to the front of the cabin.

"What has gotten into you lately?" I snapped at him.

"You want to know what's got me all worked up?" He turned on me, and I could smell the alcohol on his breath. "My baby sister, the only family I have left, is about to take on the one man who was capable of killing our parents."

"I'm not in this alone." I reminded him. "I'll have you and everybody else fighting with me."

He shook his head, "Rae, I'll be there watching over you, but I can't have any direct involvement in this fight. It would be too risky. Lady Vanek is expecting you to bring Vriknir to victory, but the second I show up, people are going to doubt you. Not to mention the fact that it would cause extreme panic. The people might become more focused on destroying me than Raven, and then Raven would have a wide open shot at destroying Vriknir."

All the confidence I had felt earlier left me. The rest of the team would still be there to help me, but my brother wasn't going to be as much help as I thought. He would be there at the battle, and he would be there to intervene if things started going wrong, but even Dakim wasn't perfect. There was always the possibility that Dakim wouldn't be quick enough, and I could die.

Dakim sighed and sat down again. He absentmindedly stared at his drink. If the atmosphere weren't so tense, I probably would have laughed. The alcohol on Earth was much stronger than on Kusnik. Dakim had only put down two glasses, and he was already drunk, but as it was, I sat down across from him and remained quiet.

After a little bit he spoke, "The line has always been a little blurred to me, but I know I crossed it today. Forgive me for that. There is no excuse for what I did, but I know you still want an explanation." Dakim took another swig of his drink but remained silent, and I began to wonder if he was actually going to give me an explanation. I was just about to speak when he suddenly got to his feet and began pacing

back and forth, "Rae, you look up to me to be the strong one, the protector. When I first went at the guards, I had only intended to knock them out to prevent them from alerting the city police, but then when I was hit, I was reminded that I'm not invincible. Somebody could hurt me, and somebody could hurt you. I was angry, and my mind was doing everything in its power to reject that realization. Those guards just happened to be in my path when I exploded. It wasn't their fault."

I got up and pulled Dakim into a hug. I was still sad that the guards had died, but I was no longer angry with Dakim for doing it. I had always known that underneath the criminal Dakim had become was the big brother I had remembered. He just had to be drunk enough to show it.

The rest of the flight was rather uneventful. We slept most of it. We had been up most of the night, but I hadn't realized just how tired I was until I actually took the time to rest. Dustin woke me once we were getting ready to land. We were in Japan.

# Chapter 35

*MAY 19<sup>TH</sup>, 11:00 AM JAPAN – MAY 18<sup>TH</sup>, 9:00 PM MICHIGAN*

I knew as soon as we stepped off the plane that the Hunters hadn't been lying when they said that Raven's weapon was here. The feeling of unstable Miutho wasn't as crippling as it had been at the bonfire or when I had walked into the factory in Alsentra, but it was there nonetheless. Japan was 377,930 kilometers squared, or 145,920 square miles. If we could sense the unstable Miutho here in the outskirts of Tokyo, then we were either close to the factory, or the Miutho was so unstable and there was so much of it that we could sense it even though we were far away. I hoped for the first possibility.

I turned to Dakim, "What is our next move?"

Dakim looked out away from the private air strip we had landed on and towards the city. "We need to know who we are dealing with, but Rae and I can't risk walking into the city. If Raven has Riora there, we'll be detected immediately. However, I can't extend my senses far enough to cover the area."

"The Riora can't detect Christian and I," Dustin offered. "To them, we're just regular tourists."

"No, that is way too dangerous." I quickly shot him down.

However, Dakim asked him, "How would you be able to tell the difference between a Riora and a human?"

"I always knew there was something different about Rae," Dustin offered, "but it wasn't until after I learned what Rae can do and met Myron's team that I realized why she was different. Riora seem to emit a sort of aura. I suppose it's the reason you all can sense each other. When I stand next to Rae, I can feel that aura. I just never knew what it was until I learned about who she was."

"You want to stand next to one of Raven's men?" I exclaimed in disbelief.

"Rae, we'll be fine." Christian reassured. "We want to help you in whatever way we can."

I turned to Dakim, begging him to turn them down. At this point, I wouldn't even care if he called them pathetic humans if it meant that he would make them stay. However, Dakim shook his head, "We are short on time and I can't think of another way to learn what we're up against."

"We won't let you down." Christian puffed out his chest.

Dakim nodded and then began issuing instructions, "Go into town and try to get an approximation of how many Riora are in town. We also need to know what kind of people we're going against. Start off in the small shops and merchants along the streets. Then see if you can get into corporations and government building. We need to know what kind of influence Raven has here. Remember, you are tourists. Venture as far as you can, but don't go too far. You can always use the excuse that you're a curious tourist, but don't get yourself into something you can't talk your way out of."

Christian and Dustin nodded in understanding, so Dakim turned to me next, "You and I will stay here and see if we can locate the factory. As I said before, I can't get my senses to cover the entire area. However, I think if we combine our power, we'll be able to extend our senses further and hopefully be able to locate Raven's factory."

Dakim turned back to Dustin and Christian, "You two should take Harvey with you. He'll do whatever you say, so have him pay for whatever you need along the way."

They nodded, but before they set off, I gave them both a hug, "Be safe, alright?"

"We'll be back before you know it," Christian smiled at me and then walked off with his brother.

When they were out of sight, I turned back to Dakim. He had taken a seat on the ground and was breathing deeply. With a sigh, I sat down across from him and tried to clear my mind. We needed to be able to extend our senses further than we ever had, and that was going to take all of my

concentration. I was worried about Dustin and Christian, but I couldn't let myself think of that right now. I need to focus.

When I opened my eyes again, Dakim was staring at me, waiting for me to say that I was ready. I nodded and he held out his hands to me. I slid my hands into his and took another deep as I closed my eyes again. I could feel my Miutho connect to his, and it brought a smile to my face. I'd had to mimic his Miutho to learn new abilities and connect to him in order to exchange thoughts, but this was the first time that we had let our Miutho mix together. The only other person I had experienced it with was Roy. Having my Miutho mix with Roy was uplifting because I loved him. However, connecting with Dakim was uplifting in a different sense. I could feel his power fill me, and it made me feel like I could take on the world.

I let my senses extend, just as I would have if I was back at Myron's lake. I had gotten good enough that, if I used all of my concentration, I could extend my senses over half of Vriknir. However, being connected with Dakim would allow me to do that without even trying. I couldn't believe the amount of distance we were able to cover together.

Even if we hadn't been able to extend our senses very far, it wasn't hard to follow the trail of unstable Miutho. When I had first stepped off the plane, I had been able to sense the unstable Miutho. Now that I was connected with Dakim, I could see that it was like an aura radiating out. We just had to follow the aura to the point of origin. To my surprise, the factory was further than I had expected and it took us a great deal of time to follow the aura, and it was almost nightfall by the time we managed to locate the point of origin.

When we finally managed to get a good idea of where the unstable Miutho was coming from, we went over to the plane and pulled out a map of Japan. Dakim let his finger run across the map, recalling what we had sensed. After a minute, he concluded, "It looks like it's coming from the Okuchichibu Mountains."

I looked up from the map as a familiar feeling filled me. A smile broke out on my face and I ran from the plane to greet Christian and Dustin. "Welcome back!"

Dakim, who had followed behind me, got straight to the point, "How bad is it?"

"We're in deep shit." Christian summarized.

My eyes went wide, and I quickly turned to Dustin in hopes that Christian had been over exaggerating. Unfortunately, Dustin only confirmed Christian's statement, "Raven has not only infiltrated the small and middle class business, but also the government."

Dakim shook his head, "I shouldn't have waited four months to move on this. I should have done something as soon as I suspected that raven was continuing his weapon."

"Dakim," I spoke his name deliberately so he would be forced to look at me, "You can't change the past."

Dakim brushed off my comment and began planning, "We'll leave tomorrow morning. That will give us tomorrow and the next day to find the place. I want to hit it at night, because once we destroy it, we're going to have half of Tokyo after us. At least then we'll have the cover of night to protect us."

"Why can't we teleport to Kusnik the second we destroy the factory?" Christian asked.

"If I was just teleporting myself, then I would be out of there the instant the factory was destroyed," Dakim explained, "but I'm not only teleporting myself, but I'm also teleporting Dustin and Christian as well, and that will take me some time. I can't have any distractions."

"What about a natural shift in the dimension?" I inquired. "That was how I got to Kusnik the first time. Nobody on the team was powerful enough to teleport anybody but themselves."

Dakim shook his head, shooting me down, "You had to wait a month before a natural shift like that occurred. We don't have that kind of time. Besides, Christian and Dustin need to have our blood in their systems if they intend to survive the transfer."

I nodded. He was right. We would have to deal with whoever came after us before we could even hope to return to Kusnik. This wasn't going to be easy. We would have Riora and trained human assassins after us. Plus, with the government being under Raven's control, we would no doubt have Tokyo's form of police after us as well.

A scary thought popped into my head, "What if Raven is at the factory? I'm not ready to face him yet."

Dakim placed his hands on my shoulders and looked into my eyes just as he had done with Harvey.

*You are ready.*

His words filled my mind and the rush of emotion that came with it reassured me that he honestly believed that I was ready.

"Besides," Dakim added aloud. "He won't be there. He'll be busy outfitting his soldiers on Kusnik to make sure that they're prepared for the attack. Although, I almost wish he would be here at the factory. At least then I would be able to take him on myself."

Dakim had a point. I had no doubt that Dakim would be able to defeat Raven. Now I almost wished that Raven were here at the factory. I wanted this over with.

"Where are you going?" I shouted when I realized that Dakim was heading towards town.

"We need some place to stay tonight."

"You might want to pick up some hiking gear for the mountains as well," Dustin added.

Dakim just chuckled and continued walking. Christian folded his arms across his chest, "Are you guys too good for hiking gear or something?"

I giggled as well, "One day I'll show you the Ellipsis training ground, and then you'll realize exactly why we don't need any hiking gear."

~

***MAY 20<sup>TH</sup>, 11:00 AM JAPAN – MAY 19<sup>TH</sup>, 9:00 PM MICHIGAN***

"Stay here." Dakim told Dustin and Christian when we got ready to set out.

"What?" Christian snapped.

They all looked at me, waiting for my input on the discussion. I knew why Dakim wanted them to remain behind. Dustin and Christian had been training themselves for almost a full year now, but they would be no match for a room full of Riora and trained assassins. Yet, leaving them here wasn't exactly safe either. This city was full of Riora in disguise. They wouldn't be safe by themselves.

"How much do you distrust that Hunter Colton?" I mumbled. When Dakim didn't answer right away, I snuck a peek at him and regretted it. The look on his face said it all. "Oh come on Dakim, they were honest enough to tell us where Raven's weapon was. They want us out of their hair."

"They were honest enough to tell us the location, but they're not honest enough that I would trust them with Dustin and Christian's lives."

"Isn't something a little backwards?" Christian spoke up. "Shouldn't Dakim be suggested we stay with the Hunters and Rae arguing that the hunters can't be trusted with something as precious as our lives?"

Knowing Christian was right, Dakim folded his arms across his chest and looked down at me. "Care to explain?"

"Because the Hunters aren't our enemy," I tried to stress. "When I first asked you about the Hunters, you blew it off like it was nothing, and you were right. When I was with Myron's team, I didn't use my Miutho much. However, I used my Miutho a lot before I met Myron's team. The Hunters should

have picked me up long before Myron's team even came to Earth. If they wanted to harm us, they would have done so long ago."

"So, we can trust them?" Christian clarified.

Dakim was also unconvinced, "How can you be so sure?"

I shook my head. "I knew once Commander Myska showed up. He felt familiar, like this wasn't the first time I had met him. It was then that I realized that the Hunters have actually been keeping watch over me."

"Where have you met him before?" Dustin's curiosity was spiked.

I paused, thinking back, and wanted to smack myself in the forehead. Despite my observation skills, I had failed to miss what was right in front of me. "Do you remember freshman year when Christian and I were eating out and the restaurant was robbed at gun point?"

"Yeah, how could I forget? That was one of the scariest nights of my life."

"The robber was inexperienced. It looked as if he didn't even know how to work a gun. I was getting ready to disarm him, but somebody beat me to the punch. The person who disarmed the robber was Colton. By disarming the robber himself, Colton saved me from revealing my abilities to the public. He also worked as a janitor at Grant High School, and he's shown up at several other random moments."

Now convinced, Dakim took a deep breath, focusing on his Miutho. He started pushing it, making it flow through his body faster. It would raise his Miutho levels enough for a Hunter to sense him, but it wouldn't enough for regular Riora to sense. If I hadn't been standing only a few feet away, I probably wouldn't have been able to sense it either.

"Now what?" Colton snapped, appearing by himself out of nowhere.

Before anybody could do anything, I pulled Colton into a hug and whispered, "Thank you for watching out for me all of these years."

He stumbled backwards in surprise at first, but then smiled, "So you finally figured it out, eh?"

I stepped back and twiddled my fingers, "I know you've been doing nothing but watching out for me, but I need another favor. We're going after Raven's weapon, and I need to know that Christian and Dustin are safe."

Colton bit his lip thinking it over and then sighed. "Fine, but don't ever pull something like this again."

"Yes, yes, I know. Thank you so much."

"You're not listening to me." He grabbed my shoulders, forcing me to be still. "You can trust me, you know that, but not all Hunters can be. Remember that."

I nodded, "Yeah, sure."

He pulled out a piece of paper, wrote something on it, and then handed it to me. "Let me know when the job is done."

Colton laid his hands on Dustin's and Christian's shoulders, and then they were gone.

"That was eerie." I commented.

"Yes, but we have bigger issues to deal with right now." Dakim reminded. "Let's go."

**\*\*\*Colton\*\*\***

"She recognized you after all?" Vaughn asked as he approached the house.

"So it would seem," Colton answered nonchalantly. "That's why I called you here. She asked me to look after her friends --"

"And you agreed?" Vaughn cut him off. "You just can't tell them no, can you?"

"I swore loyalty to the Adelindas," Colton reminded. "Besides, when she realized who I was, she didn't yell at me demanding answers or bombard me with questions. She ran up to me and gave me a hug. I have a hard time believing that anybody would be able to tell her no."



“What about your job to protect her?” Vaughn countered. “You gave me permission to tell them about the mountain and to put knowledge into that human’s head in order to lead them in the right direction, but what if Raven is at the mountain?”

Colton let out a sigh, “I spent years training with dragons and could go toe-to-toe with them in battle. As it stands, I’m not sure if I could beat Dakim. I trust him to watch over his sister. If they are successful in exposing Raven’s factory, that will finally give us the evidence we need to take action against the hold Riora have in Japan right now. I want to prepare so that we can move out the second we have the required evidence, but I can’t do that in my current position. I am appointing you acting commander in my absence so that you can get our men prepared.”

“Commander Myska, why don’t you let one of the maggots watch over these humans and lead the preparations yourself?”

Colton smiled at Vaughn’s misunderstanding. “My loyalty to the Adelindas runs much deeper than my duty as a commander. If I was put in a position where I had to choose between doing something as small as babysitting for the Adelindas and keeping my title as commander, I would choose whatever task the Adelindas assigned me, no matter how small. Raelyn asked me to watch over her friends, and that is what I will do. However, I don’t want this opportunity in Japan to go to waste, so I am appointing you instead. Please, do your best.”

Still baffled by Colton’s response, Vaughn bowed, “I will not let you down.”

# Chapter 36

\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\*

Hiking through the mountains was more relaxing than I thought it would be. Normally I would have been in a big hurry to find the factory, but I wasn't. Finding it wasn't hard either. The closer we got, the more the unstable Miutho began to affect Dakim and I. Once we had gotten within a mile of the factory, we had to stop until nightfall. Yet, we welcomed the break. Dealing with the unstable Miutho was extremely tiring. Once the sun went down, Dakim and I could activate the Ultimate Defense and blend into the darkness, allowing us to go unseen by any other hikers and get a relief from the unstable Miutho.

The hidden entrance to the mine wasn't very original. It was a cave entrance behind a waterfall. However, that didn't mean it was easy to get to. The entrance was several hundred feet about the ground, and it was a straight drop down. It was impossible to climb up because the rocks were slippery from the waterfall and the pounding water was sure to knock us down. Instead, Dakim and I went in from over the top. We tied the ropes from Dustin and Christian's hiking gear to a well rooted tree, and then tied them around our waists'. Then came the fun part. We actually jumped over the edge of the waterfall and used the ropes to swing into the entrance to the cave. Once we were safely on our feet, we untied the ropes and then made our way into the tunnel.

Trying to navigate my way through a dark mine at midnight was not the easiest thing to do. I had my Ultimate Defense activated and my claws extended, but that didn't help my sight or balance at all. Even Dakim seemed to be having a little bit of an issue. Yet, we couldn't use fire to light the way, because that would give away that we were here. Instead, I settle on holding onto Dakim's sleeve, letting him lead the way.

Knowing my voice would echo on the cave walls, I used Awebu to talk to Dakim. *Is that a light up ahead?*

*Let's hope it's not a train.*

*Ha ha, very funny.*

*I thought it was hilarious.*

We slowed down, letting our eyes adjust to the light, and found two men leaning against the walls of the cave, acting as security.

*You want to deal with this?* Dakim's voice drifted through my head.

*Sure.* I stepped forward, took a minute to screw up my face, and then went running towards the two men. "Please, please, you have to help me!"

The men just stood there as I approached, too stunned by my appearance to do anything else. It took them a second to remember that they were supposed to be guards and that I might actually be a threat, but by then it was too late. I walked in between the two and pushed them into the cave walls. They were human, so it didn't take much to knock them out.

When they fell to the ground, Dakim jogged up and grabbed their security badges.

*Why are you taking the badges? We have the Ultimate Defense activated. You really think we'd be able to fool anybody with this appearance?*

*No, but you never know if there will be a locked door we will need access to.*

We picked up the lantern the two guards had been using and continued on down the cave. It wasn't very long before the cave opened up and we found ourselves in a huge dome shaped room. We had reached the manufacturing site for Raven's weapon. As soon as we reached the entrance, Dakim and I dug our claws into the wall and hurriedly climbed to the very top of the dome before anybody could notice us. Training at the Ellipsis training grounds had been horrible, but it definitely had had its

uses. Yet, just climbing the wall wasn't our only worry. The second we used our Miutho, any Riora in the area would know that we were there. Plus, our claws had an annoying habit of unearthing the stones as we climbed, and if any fell to the ground, it might cause people to look up, and then we would be stuck.

At the top of the dome, we could see the whole factory. It was divided into three different sections. One section was where the Miutho was being extracted and regenerated. In the corner was the rare flower the workers had used to extract Miutho from. After the initial extraction, the workers didn't need the flower anymore. They just waited for what they originally extracted to regenerate. However, it seemed as if scientists were still trying to figure out how to further purify the Miutho. Another section was where the parts of the gun were being made. By the looks of it, they were smelting Kunettium with other common metals found on Earth to create the incredibly durable gun and canister. The last section was where the gun was being assembled and the Miutho was being added.

We would hit the section of the factory where the Miutho was being regenerated first. It was the area where the most Riora were working, and was also the section that would weaken us if we didn't have the Ultimate Defense activated. I had been good at keeping it activated so far, but it was almost as tiring to keep activated as the unstable Miutho had been on the trip up the mountain. If it came to the point where I could no longer keep the Ultimate Defense activated, I needed to know that I would be able to deactivate it and not collapse to the floor in pain from the unstable Miutho. A glance from Dakim said that he agreed.

I took a deep breath, retracted my claws, and then felt myself begin to fall. I righted myself in the air and extended my claws once more as my feet hit the ground. Miutho was like energy. It could never be consumed, but it could be converted into something else. I began smashing the containers, releasing the unstable Miutho, and Dakim gathered it to convert it into some sort of attack, but he had to be fast to convert it, otherwise it would regenerate faster than we could use it.

Of course, the Riora factory workers had become aware of us as soon as we had dropped to the ground, and they all stopped what they were doing to come after us. Dakim was using the unstable Miutho to fend them off, but his attacks weren't as powerful as they would have been had the Miutho been pure. He was having trouble keeping the workers at bay, but I gave him credit just for being able to fend off that many Riora with unstable Miutho as his only weapon. The process was slower than we would have liked. Several times I had to turn my attention away from the canisters of Miutho to fend off some of the workers who had got around Dakim and gone after me.

Dakim stood with the unstable Miutho floating around him in a circle, and any time the workers tried to get past him to stop me, he sent the Miutho flying in that person's direction. He looked like a dancer as he fluidly moved around, converting the Miutho from water to fire to electricity in the blink of an eye. It was incredible watching him in action. All of his abilities came so naturally to him. Dakim gathered more unstable Miutho that I had spilled and immediately turned it to water. He used it to slam one of the factory workers into the wall where the water immediately turned to ice. While he was distracted, one of the factory workers tried to sneak up on him from behind, but Dakim simply wrapped his tail around the worker's leg and threw him into one of the shelves, spilling more Miutho. Dakim then converted the Miutho that had fallen onto the worker into electricity, shocking him severely. When Dakim drove his nails through another worker's chest, I was finally forced to look away.

I ran around this part of the factory, pushing over a shelf of unstable Miutho which in turn knocked over another shelf and another shelf. I also managed to knock down a few of the factory workers in the process. I ran towards the next row of shelves, faltered a step when a factory worker fired one of the completed Miutho guns at me, but I only caught the Miutho blast in my hand and sent it spinning back at the worker who had launched it at me.

"Ow!" I screamed, when I accidentally stepped in a puddle of the spilled, unstable Miutho. It actually burned me through the armor. "Dakim, don't let the unstable Miutho touch you! It burns!"

I finished destroying the containers of Miutho, careful now not to get any on me, and then started helping Dakim fend off the factory workers. Many of the Riora would have been Skekaek level had they been employed by any of the countries, and the humans had incredible skills with the guns, whether they were Miutho guns or just regular guns. There were times that I managed to stop a regular bullet with my telekinesis when it was within just inches of hitting me. Even though it couldn't kill me, it could still knock me to the ground, not to mention probably break a bone.

Now that the unstable Miutho had been used up, Dakim could resort to using his own Miutho attacks, and he started getting the upper hand over the workers. With him as a distraction, I made my way over to the last part of the factory where the completed guns were sitting, jumping over scraps of metal and any other random obstacles in my path as I went. At times I even used it to my advantage. Compared to Myron or Dakim, I was pretty weak when it came to physical strength, but my agility, flexibility, and reflexes made up for a lot. I could swing around a bar like a gymnast and spin around something at a moment's notice without slowing down. Roy was the only person who had me beat in both strength and grace. I had reached the completed guns, but I paused when the sounds of cars echoed off the cave walls. Reinforcements had arrived.

"Rae, we need to be leaving, now!" Dakim pressured.

"I know!" I snapped at him and used my telekinesis to lift all of the guns into the air. I focused on taking them apart, piece by piece until I got to the glass container that held the original Miutho. Once I had gotten that, I let the rest of the metal parts drop to the ground so only the Miutho in the barrels and the glass containers remained in the air. I emptied the Miutho out and hurriedly converted it into one big mass of fire that I sent hurling towards the smelting portion of the factory.

It exploded on impact, causing anybody who remained to be knocked to the ground, and it shook the entire cave. Cracks erupted in the ceiling and bits of rock began falling to the ground. The whole place was about to come crashing down.

I sprinted back to the first section of the factory and grabbed the never dying flower while Dakim grabbed grenades out of the belt of one of the dead humans. Before entering the small tunnel that we had first come through, Dakim pulled the pins on all five grenades and threw them into the dome building before we sprinted through the tunnel as fast our legs would carry us. Towards the end, we didn't even run. We used telekinesis to propel us forward. We didn't stop once we reached the end of the tunnel. We jumped out as far as we could and dove into the river below.

The current was strong, and at first I couldn't figure out which way was up, but I eventually broke the surface, gasping for air. We had escaped the explosion, but our victory was short lived. The cars we had heard earlier were government vehicles. They were at the top of the waterfall, and at the sight of us, the agents pulled out machine guns and open fired. I took a deep breath and dove back under the water. I couldn't hold the Ultimate Defense anymore. I had to let it retract, but now I was vulnerable.

Dakim hadn't gone underwater as I had. With his cracked rib, he was already having trouble breathing. Holding his breath under water as I was doing just wasn't an option for him. Instead, he lifted himself up so he was standing on the surface of the water and held his hands out, letting the Miutho gather in his fingertips. Even in the water I could feel the vibration of power. He brought his hands together as hard as he could, sending a sound wave up to the agents on the ridge. They all screamed out in pain as their eardrums ruptured and dropped their guns.

While they were disabled, I burst out of the water, and stood on top of the surface as Dakim had done. Together, we took off running on top of the lake. However, it wasn't long before more government agents were following us on top of the ridge.

"Wait!" Dakim suddenly grabbed my arm, bringing me to a stop, and pointed to an underwater cave. "Down here!"

"But Dakim —"

"I'll be fine. Go!"

I let myself fall back into the water and began swimming towards the underwater cave entrance. Dakim was right behind me. He was separating oxygen from the water to help him, but it was obvious that he was still uncomfortable. It didn't help that Earth naturally had less oxygen in the atmosphere than Kusnik. Thankfully the cave we had found went up high enough that it was above sea level and we could catch our breath. However, the ceiling was only high enough for us to get our head and shoulders out of the water. Dakim extended his claws and dug them into the ceiling so he wouldn't have to keep himself afloat, and I did the same.

"I think I kind of smashed the flower." I held it up out of the water for him to see.

He smiled and tried to respond, but it came in short gasps, "It will... look better... once we let it... sit out... for a while."

"Are you okay?"

"How many times do I have to tell you I'm fine?" He snapped at me, but the effect was ruined when he went into a coughing fit.

I started using Awebu so he wouldn't have to talk. *Do you think we lost them?*

*No, they saw us come down here. They're probably sitting outside, waiting for us to come out. If we don't come out soon, they'll probably send people in after us.*

*I'm going to see if I can find another way out of these caves.*

I removed my claws from the ceiling and dove back under the water. The cave seemed to go on forever, but I couldn't get very far before I lost the light and things got dark. I was getting ready to swim back but stopped when I noticed the slightest change in Miutho. It wasn't big enough to be a Riora, or even a human. No, it was some sort of animal. I almost screamed when I figured out what it was, but managed to contain myself. Fueled by fear, I used what energy I had left to create a telekinetic barrier around me and began swimming back towards Dakim as hard as I could. I didn't waste any time when I reached him.

"We need to get out of here. We're surrounded by habu kurage."

"Venomous jellyfish?" Dakim translated.

I nodded. "We're lucky we haven't been stung yet, and I'd rather not test whether or not our armor protects us against them."

"Our only other exit is blocked by the agents." Dakim reminded.

"Then we make an exit of our own." I reasoned and started using my claws to dig at the ceiling. I didn't have the Miutho left to muster up something more powerful.

"Move," He pushed me out of the way, built up Miutho in his fist, and then thrust it into the ceiling of the cave. I quickly closed my eyes against the dust and debris as Dakim continued to tear away at the ceiling. It only took a few hits before he had cleared away enough space for us to climb up and get out of the water. After we had gotten out, Dakim began punching at one of the walls, clearing a space so we could sit and catch our breath without having to cling to the ceiling.

*It's getting brighter in here. I observed.*

*The sun is beginning to rise.*

I pulled out the piece of paper Colton had given me to contact him. It was soaking wet, but I could still read the phone number written on it. We would have to find a functioning cell phone.

*Just try to relax. Dakim told me. We'll rest for a half an hour or until the agents come in after us and then we'll get moving again. We still have time.*

~

**MAY 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9:00 AM JAPAN – MAY 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7:00 PM MICHIGAN**

Making our own exit out of the cave was easier once we had gotten some of our strength back. We created a tunnel, leading us away from where all the agents were waiting for us. Once we were a decent ways away, we began tunneling up until we finally reached ground level. I was thankful to finally be out of caves and that I was able to breathe in some fresh air. We found ourselves not far from one of the emergency huts, so we made our way there and Dakim picked up a cell phone from one of the hikers as we passed.

Once inside the hut, I pulled out the map and told Colton where we were. While I did that, Dakim got out the first aid kit. It was well stocked, but wasn't intended for what we had in mind, so it didn't have all the supplies we needed. We had to make do.

Colton was fast, I'd give him that. Not five minutes after I called him, he showed up in the hut with Christian and Dustin.

"Were you successful?" He inquired.

I smiled. "Yes, we were. Thank you again for watching over Dustin and Christian."

His eyes drifted over the medical equipment. "Did something happen?"

"Dakim has a cracked rib, but other than that we're fine."

"Then what is all this for? Wait! Don't tell me." Colton exclaimed, causing all of us to stop.

"Sorry, it's just that the less I know, the better. Excuse me, I really need to be going."

He headed for the door, but stopped before leaving. With a sigh he took something out of his pocket and walked back to me. "Here," He held out to me what appeared to be a black stone. "It's a Racen. In English it's referred to as a summoning stone. No matter how far apart we are, even if we are in completely different dimensions, once this is activated, I will be able to sense it. Use it if you ever need me."

I turned the stone over in my hand, admiring the way it sparkled in the light, and I finally found the courage to ask the question that had been bugging me, "When Dakim sent off those fireworks to get your attention, why did you greet us so harshly?"

Colton lowered his head apologetically, "Forgive me, but the rest of my team does not know that I was watching over you. I couldn't have them asking questions."

"But why?" I pressured. "Why were you watching over me?"

"Unfortunately, that is a story that must be saved for another day. For now I must be going. I must deal with the remaining Riora in Japan and wipe the memories of the humans working with them, and you need to deal with Raven. Stay safe," He told me, and with that, he vanished.

"I still don't trust him." Dakim commented.

"He kept us safe." Dustin reminded.

Dakim didn't respond, so I switched the subject. "What did you guys do while you were with him?"

Christian shrugged, "We stayed at an empty lodge somewhere in the mountains, but he more or less left us alone. He stayed outside talking to some guy. By the patches on his uniform I would guess that he was some sort of second in command. Colton barely even said a word to us."

Now Dustin switched the subject, "So, what do we have to do?"

Dakim held out a small plastic sandwich bag and knife for me. "Under better circumstances, we would give you an infusion of our blood, but that obviously isn't going to happen. Rae and I are each going to give ourselves a small cut and let the blood run into the plastic bag. You're going to have to drink it."

Dustin made a funny face and Christian scrunched up his nose, but otherwise neither complained. I took the knife to my left hand and then let the blood drip down into the bag. Over the past couple months, I had gotten used to the sight of blood, but that didn't make this any less pleasant. When it was done, Dakim and I wrapped our hands and then handed the bags to Christian and Dustin.

Christian looked at the bag apprehensively. "This isn't going to turn me into a vampire or anything, is it?"

I slapped him upside the head. "Would you just drink it already?"

Christian took a deep breath and then looked at Dustin. At the same time, they put the blood in their mouths, threw their head back and swallowed.

## Chapter 37

Although I was breathing heavily, I smiled, proud of myself that this time I had managed to remain upright. Christian and Dustin, on the other hand, were a different story. They had both collapsed as soon as we had come to Kusnik. I helped them to their feet while Dakim stood there impatiently. Once they were steady, we set off towards the clearing where we were meeting everybody else.

We had only gone a few steps before there was a thud, and I turned to find Christian on the ground. "Did you just trip?"

He got to his feet and brushed himself off. "I didn't trip. I was just checking to make sure this place had gravity."

Dakim looked at Christian like he couldn't be more stupid, but I burst out laughing and took Christian's arm. The clearing was only maybe a football field's length away, but the journey there was a fun one. Everything was so new to Dustin and Christian, and I wondered if this was what I was like when I first came to Kusnik.

I had smiled the whole way, but my smile grew when I saw Roy and the rest of the team waiting for us on the side of the field. Roy also smiled when he spotted us and started our way.

"You made it just in time." He spoke when he had gotten closer. "We were getting ready to send out a search team for you."

"That's no way to greet me." I joked before kissing him.

"That's my way." He smiled and I rolled my eyes. It was then that he seemed to notice Dustin and Christian.

"I hope you don't mind, but I brought back a few friends. Now if you don't treat me right, not only will you have Dakim and Myron on your ass, but you'll also have Dustin and Christian."

"Well, if that was the only reason you brought them here, they're going to be pretty bored." He joked, and I laughed as he put his arm around my shoulders.

"I thought humans can't survive the transfer." Myron commented when he and the rest of the team finally made their way over to us.

Dakim took a deep breath. "We have a lot to talk about."

~

"Sounds like you guys had a busy couple of days." Karexon commented with a smile when we had gotten to our makeshift safe house. Roy looked like he was in pain, but he was just uncomfortable. He didn't like Colton for obvious reasons. It was kind of amusing really. I never would have pegged Roy as the jealous type.

"So that's what we were doing," I turned the attention away from Dakim and I and onto everybody else. "What did you all find out?"

Kian went first, "We knew that digging through Vriknir's files might raise some questions, so instead we went back to Niasha and used King Anselm's files. The flower can only be found in Mekusc —"

"Except for this one," I held up the flower we had managed to grab from the factory.

"— And is extremely rare. There are only a few left in existence due to its low reproduction rate."

"How did Raven even get clearance to enter Mekusc? They never let outsiders in." Roy asked.

"I've been in." Dakim commented.

"We couldn't find much more on it other than what Luke already told us. The entire flower is filled with Miutho. It survives off the Miutho and never dies because the Miutho never runs out. It can be completely destroyed but as long as there is at least the smallest drop of Miutho left to regenerate, it can fully recover. It's the only known organism that can regenerate Miutho."



Luke went next. "We gathered all of the items you requested and a little more. We figured that if you could make Miutho guns, then you could probably make all sorts of Miutho weapons. We grabbed anything that looked even remotely useful. It's all hidden out back."

Last was Myron. "Roy and I accompanied Kian and Karexon to Niasha. With Dawn's help, we managed to locate two of Raven's warehouses. She led some of Niasha's best soldiers into the warehouses and let's just say that I'm glad Dawn is on our side. We found evidence in the warehouses that Raven might have more than just the two we discovered, but so far we haven't been able to find any. Dawn is continuing to look into it."

Things fell silent around the table, and I suddenly got the feeling that there was one more thing to be told. It was obvious a touchy subject so I turned to Roy, knowing he'd be the easiest to get it out of.

He folded his hands and looked down at the table, refusing to look at me as he spoke. "Hiram informed us that Jerome had Lady Vanek removed from office. He planted evidence, and even though the evidence will never hold once a full investigation is conducted, it was enough to get her out of the office."

"But by the time the investigation is completed, Raven will have come and gone," Dakim sat back in his seat in frustration. "Where is she now?"

"She is being detained in an isolated cell in the jail until further investigation." Kian informed us.

"What does this mean for us?" Dustin joined the conversation for the first time.

"It means that Jerome will keep the public in the dark about Raven's upcoming attack and it will be like lambs to the slaughter." Vic answered.

"It means," Myron's tone was more positive than Vic's, "That we just need to make the evidence against Jerome worse than the evidence against Lady Vanek."

"That could take weeks," Vic continued to argue.

Myron smiled, "It's not as hard as you would think."

Luke took in a deep breath. "Where do we go from here?"

Myron looked to Dakim, and after a small nod, Myron explained his plan. "Rae will sneak back into Vriknir with Dustin and Christian that way they can get started making the weapons. We need them to get started right away. Once they have been safely set up, then Rae can free Lady Vanek."

"Why is this all falling down to Rae?" Christian questioned.

"Jerome has the city locked down tight." Luke picked up the explanation. "We'll be lucky to get just one person into the city without being detected. There is no way we'd get the entire team through. Dakim would have the best chance at making it into the city, but he wouldn't be able to free Lady Vanek without being spotted, and if somebody saw that it was Dakim freeing Lady Vanek, it would lead the public to doubt her even further. The people trust Rae. If she is spotted, there is a good chance that she won't be reported to Jerome. She has the best chance of doing this successfully."

"It still sounds a lot like chance." Roy commented.

I took his hand in mine. "I can do this."

"Once Jerome has been removed from power, Lady Vanek can lift the warrants for us and then we'll be able to enter the city again." Myron continued.

I nodded. "Tell me what I need to do."

~

## **MAY 22**

I set out with Dustin and Christian at dawn. Dakim knew the shift changes of the guards like the back of his hand, and he said dawn was when it would be easiest to get into the village. We waited for

the night shift guards to leave, and while the first shift guards were getting set up and were distracted, we made our way in. We were almost caught when one of the guards went back because they had forgotten something, but thankfully Charisse was there to distract the guard for us. I gave her a smile and then continued on.

We stuck the edge of the city where the sun had yet to reach. The house Myron had lived in before his family died was still vacant and would serve as the perfect hide out for Christian and Dustin. They wouldn't be bothered there.

### **\*\*\*Dakim\*\*\***

Dakim stood outside the small little hut they had gathered in with his feet shoulder width apart and his hands folded behind his back. He had his eyes closed so that he could focus on extended his senses and keep track of Raelyn. However, his eyes flew open when he detected something else, and he shouted, "Get out of here. This was a trap. Ellipsis members are on their way."

Everybody immediately ran out of the house and got into a fighting stance, but Dakim shouted, "No! Get out of here. If this was a trap then Raelyn might be in danger and Raven's men could be here any minute. I should be able to buy you guys some time, but you need to leave, now!"

Roy looked out into the distance, activating his Skayikon. "Dakim, we must have all of Ellipsis heading our way. Even you aren't that good."

"I don't intend to fight them. I'm just buying you enough time to get away."

"But Dakim—" Roy continued to argue, but Dakim cut him off.

"I am the only one who will be able to hold them off. We knew this might happen, and if Rae really is in trouble, then I need you guys to help her. Roy, you of all people should understand this."

Knowing he was right, Roy growled and left with the rest of the team. Rae was going to be furious at him for leaving Dakim behind.

### **\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

Getting Dustin and Christian settled was the easy part. Getting to Lady Vanek was going to be much harder. Liam and Lynam were accompanying me, and Hiram, Charisse, Carmichael, and Lance were ready to provide any sort of distraction that would give us more time.

Liam, Lynam, and I carefully approached the jail where Lady Vanek was being held. Only two guards were posted at the entrance and I recognized them to be Skekaek. It was easy for me to sneak up on them and use Luke's ability to knock them out. I couldn't take them down in three seconds as Luke could, but I got the job down. Once the guards were out of commission, Lynam, Liam, and I cautiously entered the building.

We soon found that our caution wasn't needed. Not a guard was in sight and all the prisoners looked as if they had been put to sleep. Confused, I slowly made my way down the hallway. Liam and Lynam were a couple of steps behind me. When I reached the end of the hallways and found that Lady Vanek wasn't here, I quickly turned to Liam and Lynam. "It's a trap!"

We turned to leave, but my warning was too late. Jerome was blocking the doorway with every single Ellipsis member standing behind him. Dakim was on knees, bound by ropes reinforced by Miutho. He was good, but even he couldn't take on all of Ellipsis.

"It looks like the saying 'There is honor among thieves' is true. He gave himself up so the rest of your merry little band could get away." Jerome taunted.

I glared at Dakim and spoke to him in Japanese, the language of Ikicnie, "*What the hell are you doing?*"

Dakim also responded in Japanese, *"I think that by allowing myself to be caught I have allowed Myron and the rest of the team to get away. If we all had been caught then Vriknir would be done for."*

Jerome sneered down at me, "Your little resistance group is done for. The only reason I am letting you leave is so you can tell the rest of your pathetic little followers to give up."

"If you think—"

"Raelyn!" Dakim snapped. "He is giving you your life. Take it."

I growled at Jerome, wanting nothing more than to rip his head off.

"Raelyn!" Dakim shouted once more, and I was forced to turn away. Careful to remain in control, I pushed passed them and stepped outside into the light. Liam and Lynam were right behind me. I quickly made my way down the streets until I found exactly who I was looking for.

"Traitor!" I shouted and shoved Hiram as hard as I could, ignoring Carmichael and Lance who were standing next to him.

Stunned, he stumbled backwards, "What are you talking about?"

"You told us lady Vanek was in that cell, but it was a trap!" I shoved him to the ground. "They have Dakim!"

He looked up at me pleadingly, "Rae, I didn't tell them anything. I didn't tell them about your brother."

"You wanted us to turn ourselves in! What did Jerome promise you, huh? Did he say that your life would be spared from this bloodshed?"

"Rae, I swear, I didn't say anything!"

"Liar!" I pulled back to punch him, but a voice stopped me.

"He's telling the truth. He didn't tell them about your brother... I did." Charisse's voice cut through the air like a knife. "I fed the team the false information that Lady Vanek was being held in that prison."

I let go of Hiram to look at Charisse, who was standing in front of me, "Charisse? It was you? ...Why?"

"Because Raven is my uncle!" She shouted. "I may not agree with what he is doing, but I will not let you harm him either."

"Your uncle?" My voice was almost a whisper, my mind still trying to wrap around this new revelation.

"Yes, my father, my aunt, and both of my cousins were all killed when Vriknir was attacked ten years ago. Raven, my mother, and I were the only ones who survived. After that, Raven became like a father to me, taking care of my mother and I. He was a good person, but the whole thing changed him. I know somewhere inside of him is the kind man I once knew, which is why I can't let you hurt him."

"So, all this time, you were lying to me. Everything you've ever said to me, was any of it true? Were you ever really my friend?"

She looked at me with cold hard eyes and shook her head. "No."

"So the waitress at the café, that was your doing?"

She nodded, her eyes cold.

"What about the time when you jumped on stage to defend me?"

She shook her head again. "I was the one person you trusted. You told me things that you wouldn't tell anybody else. When you broke up with Roy, you stopped talking even to me. I needed you two to get back together so you would start telling me things."

"No..." Every word she spoke was like another knife being driven into me, and all the pain suddenly turned to anger. I launched at her with everything I had. "NO!"

Carmichael was the only one who actually tried stopping me. "Raelyn, don't do this."

"Give me one good reason not to!" I turned on him, "Or are you a traitor too?"

"Rae, if you even lay a scratch on her, then any chance we have of rescuing Lady Vanek will be gone." Carmichael reminded. "Let her go."

Charisse stared at me with cold hard eyes as she walked away. The woman who got further and further away with every step was not the Charisse I had come to know and love. The Charisse I knew was shy, joyous, and caring. The woman before us was confident, cunning, and deceitful.

"Don't beat yourself up too much," Lance pulled me away. "She had us all fooled."

"We should talk to Myron." Lynam suggested.

I shook my head. "I don't know where they are. They fled when Dakim gave himself up."

"Rae," Carmichael forced me to look at him, "I know you're upset, but please just try to focus for one minute. Where would they have gone?"

I took a deep breath and then let it out, trying to pull myself together. "There's an abandoned hut not far from what we were originally using as a safe house. It's the only thing I can think of that would be big enough to hold everybody comfortably."

"Then that's where we'll go. Come on." Carmichael led the way, and Lynam, Liam, Lance, Hiram and I followed after.

I walked in a daze. My brother had been captured because my best friend had betrayed me. We had thought we had been clever by destroying his factory on Earth and his warehouses here in Kusnik. Yet, Raven had been one step ahead of us the whole time. He had somebody in the highest positions in Vriknir under his influence, as well as the best friend of the person who was supposed to save it.

"Hiram," I finally spoke once we were nearing the hut. "Forgive me for blaming you. I didn't even give you a chance to explain."

He nodded. "It's understandable. I forgive you."

"Raelyn," Roy came running forward when we approached the hut. "Are you okay?"

"Physically, I'm fine."

He lowered his eyes, "Forgive me for not being able to do something about your brother. I don't even understand how they found us."

I couldn't listen to it. I shoved past him and headed towards the hut. Somebody else could explain what had happened.

We walked into the house where Myron, Karexon, Kian, Luke, and Vic were anxiously waiting. They all looked at me expectantly when I walked in, but I only laid down on the couch and curled up into a ball. Once everybody else had come inside, Hiram began explaining to Myron what had happened.

Once Roy had heard everything, he knelt down in front of the couch. "Why are you just lying here?"

"Excuse me?" I snapped at him as I sat up straight.

Roy's voice was hard. "You should be doing something."

I stood up now, suddenly angry, "Raven has won. There is nothing we can do now."

Roy shoved me against the wall. "You are giving up."

"No, I'm not!" I yelled at him.

"You are!" He growled at me, his faces inches from mine. "This is not the girl I fell in love with. The girl I love always gets up no matter how many times I or anybody else knocks her down. She refuses to let anybody tell her no. She never gives up."

"Then what do you want me to do, huh?" I shouted. "I can't do this without my brother!"

Roy shook his head and let go of me. "Call me when my girlfriend comes back."

"Roy!" I called after him but he ignored me and walked out of the room.

"I hate to agree with Rae, but what else can we do?" Kian asked. "Charisse no doubt informed Jerome that we were trying to plant evidence and that's why Jerome went after Dakim. If we try to continue with the plan, he'll see it coming from a mile awhile."

“Bullshit, he will.” Myron suddenly stood up, grabbed a folder off the table and burst out the doors.

“I don’t believe it!” Karexon exclaimed. “Did he just act on impulse? He never acts on impulse!”

“Myron!” I chased after him. No way was I letting him walk out on me too. I continued to call his name but when it became apparent that there was nothing I could do to stop him, I just shut up and followed after him.

He burst through the gates that led into the city, sending a sound wave with it. Any guard within the area was immediately incapacitated. Myron continued like this all the way through town. Any person who deliberately got in his way was forcefully removed from his path. Even an Ellipsis member who stood in his way was tossed aside. It was shocking for me to see. Myron was always laid back. I had never seen him so angry, and his Miutho level reflected just how furious he really was.

When we reached the center of town, Myron threw open the doors that led to the council meeting room, causing everybody inside to go quiet. He stepped forward and threw the folder he had been carrying down on the desk for them all to see.

“That is the folder on Raven Faulkner, the file that was supposedly stolen from the vault. I found that in one of Raven’s warehouses where they are developing guns filled with Miutho. This file links Jerome to Raven.”

Every council member let out a sigh of relief, and the one at the end of the table stood up. “Myron, thank you so much for bringing this to us. We knew the accusations brought against Lady Vanek were false, but we were bound by the law to conduct a full investigation. This file proves those accusations to be false. Jerome is removed from his position and Lady Vanek is restored to hers, effective immediately.”

“One problem,” Myron growled. “Lady Vanek is missing.”

The council leader smiled, “She is not missing. She was just in hiding. I promise you, she is safe and is ready to resume her position.”

“She’s here, isn’t she?” I concluded.

“Come,” The council leader said and the rest of the council stood, “We must announce to the public the shift in power.”

An hour later, everybody in Vriknir had gathered in the center of the city. The council members sat on the stage while the leader of the council stood at the podium in front of the people. Jerome was standing a little ways off to the side. Myron, Lady Vanek, and I stood atop one of the buildings where we would be out of sight but still able to hear the speech.

“Citizens of Vriknir, we, the council, stood before you only a few days ago to bring you the sad news of the accusations brought against our great leader, Lady Vanek. I am happy to announce that these accusations have been proven to be false.”

“What?” Jerome exclaimed.

The council leader continued as if he hadn’t heard Jerome’s outburst. “Lady Vanek was accused of being involved with a man named Raven Faulkner, a man who wishes to destroy Vriknir.”

Gasps and whispers erupted in the crowd.

“We know Raven’s threat to be a real one, but we were wrong about who was involved with him. It is Jerome Hadi who is the traitor.”

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” Jerome jumped onto the stage. He knew that he had been revealed, and now he was trying to salvage as much as he could of the situation. “Do not believe the twisted words of the council. Do not forget that it was I who secured the capture of the traitor, Dakim Adelinda. I want nothing more than for the people I serve to live long and prosper, but that will not happen while the council and Lady Vanek remain in power. Raven is coming, that much is true, but who did Lady Vanek bring in to ‘save’ you? She brought in the traitor’s sister! Lady Vanek will not keep you safe! She will lead to your destruction. Your only hope is for you to come with me and join Raven!”

"No," I breathed. "I will not let him ruin this."

"Rae," Myron tried to stop me, but it was too late. I had already jumped over the edge of the building.

The crowd gasped when I landed on the stage, slightly cracking the wood on impact. I stood up straight and growled at Raven. "Get out of here! Go running back to your master like the dog that you are!"

Knowing that he could not win this fight, Jerome began to slowly back up, but he gave me a menacing smile. "There is nothing you can do. The battle has already been won."

I ignored his comment and turned to the crowd. "My name is Raelyn Adelinda and yes Dakim is my brother. I know it is for that very reason that many of you don't trust me. You are not happy I am here, but I was brought here nonetheless. I've made friends with many of the villagers, and I have even fallen in love with one of your village's most promising Riora. I have come to call this place my home. Yet, what most of you fail to realize is why I was brought here in the first place. I was brought here because I am probably the only person who can save this village, but this is no longer just a job for me. This has become personal. You can hate me because of my blood is the same blood that runs through Dakim, and you can hate me because *this*," I removed the necklace with the family crest from my neck and held it out for everyone to see, "is my heritage, but that doesn't make me any different from you. I am going to fight for the place I have come to know and love. I am going to fight for my home. Now, you can help me, or you can stay out of my way. Either way, I am going to out there to fight Raven because nobody threatens my home and gets away with it! I'm going to remind him why nobody has ever dared assault Vriknir before! Who's with me?"

The area was suddenly filled with deafening shouts as several of the people threw their fists into the air. Jerome had failed to gain the support of the people. They were going to fight for their home, and so was I. I was not going to give up. After everything I had been through, no way was I going to let Raven win. I was going to end this.

~

## ***MAY 23***

Vriknir became absolutely chaotic. Jerome had fled the city, taking the few followers he had gathered with him. Everybody else began preparations for Raven's attack. Most of the people of Vriknir were in its employment as Riora, but now everybody was getting ready to fight. I asked an older man I saw buying weapons why he was willing to fight instead of leaving the city. He simply replied, "You may retire, but you never stop being a Riora."

Christian and Dustin had moved from Myron's old house into a warehouse better suited for their needs, and it was no longer just them working on it. People who hadn't been employed with Vriknir as Riora had been assigned to work with Christian and Dustin to speed up production. Overall, Christian and Dustin had been put in charge of a total of two hundred workers. They worked on producing the Miutho guns, using the one I had purified to create more. Raven may have had several warehouses full of Miutho guns, but the Miutho in our guns would be completely purified. His would not. Christian and Dustin also worked on creating other Miutho weapons. Christian developed arrows that had been dipped in pure Miutho, and Dustin made throwing knives that were filled with Miutho on the inside. Along with weapons, they also worked on producing armor made out of Kunettium in hopes that it would work similar to Kevlar.

King Anselm, Conrad, and Dawn had also arrived with their troops, making free space in the city hard to come by. They worked closely with our troops, and I was happy to see that everybody got along

well. The last thing we needed was for our own people to be divided. Their help was greatly appreciated.

The warrants had also been lifted for everybody except Dakim. Unfortunately, Lady Vanek was refusing to release Dakim from jail. No official replacement for Jerome had been established, but Ellipsis seemed to have turned to Myron for leadership. The rest of the Riora fell under the command of Lance and Carmichael. Roy became like a drill sergeant and was put in charge of the troop's training. Vic worked with a few other men updating the city's security and Luke served as a mediator between the Vriknir and Niasha, for he was one of the few people who could communicate with both parties without having to rely on Thaivo.

"Commander Adelinda!"

I had been standing on a cliff edge that overlooked the city. The sun was only beginning to rise, but the people were already hard at work. I wore black pants that had several knives strapped to the thighs and a utility belt hung around my waste. With it I wore a short-cut, blue shirt and black arm guards. Over top of that was a long black cape held around my shoulders with a clasp that was the symbol of Vriknir. It displayed my status as Commander. *Commander... That will take some getting used to.*

"Commander Adelinda," The scout repeated. When he finally reached me, he bent over, breathing heavily. "Raven... He's... on his... way..."

"What?" I exclaimed. I took him by the shoulders and shoved him against the nearest tree. "What did you say?"

"Raven has made his move. He's two days out."

I let go of the scout and went back to the cliff edge. "Carmichael!"

Not even a split second later, Carmichael materialized next to me. "Yes, Commander?"

"Confirm that Raven is on the way."

"Yes, ma'am." He nodded and then disappeared once more.

I looked out over the city once more, trying to push back the panic that was quickly rising. We were supposed to have until the end of the month. Raven had come early.

"With all due respect, Commander," the scout from earlier stepped forward, "We are ready for Raven. We have spent all of our lives training. Now it is time for us to put it to good use."

I turned back to the scout with a smile, all my pride and confidence coming back. "You're damn right we're ready. Now alert Lady Vanek, King Anselm, and the rest of the team. Tell them to meet me in the council room."

"Yes, ma'am."

Carmichael returned a few minutes later. "Report confirmed. Mekusc soldiers approaching from the Northwest, Ikicnie soldiers approaching from the Northeast, and a group of Raven's followers approaching from the South. The ones in the Northwest are being led by Jerome Hadi, the Northeast by Charisse Castell, and the South by Raven himself."

"Thank you, Carmichael." I nodded. "Now let's go. We need to get to the council meeting house."

~

Thanks to Carmichael, we were the first to arrive at the meeting house. While we waited for everybody else to arrive, I spread out a map of Vriknir and the surrounding areas on the table and, with the help of Carmichael, marked the positions of Raven's men on the map. Once King Anselm, Conrad, Dawn, Luke, Vic, Myron, Roy, Karexon, Kian, Hiram Lynam, Liam, Lance, and Lady Vanek arrived, I explained what Carmichael had reported to me and then stepped out of the way, expecting Lady Vanek or King Anselm to take charge.

"Raelyn," Lady Vanek spoke, "You are the one who has spent the last eight months training for this. If anybody is qualified to lead this us against Raven, it is you. We are at your command."

My eyes slowly drifted over every person in this extremely crowded room, and their brief nods said that they felt the same. With a deep breath, I went back to the front of the room and looked at the map, taking in every bit of information that it gave me. I had always hated when Dakim made me put the pieces together instead of just telling me directly, but now I was glad that he had, because now I didn't have somebody to just tell me the answer. I had to figure the answer out myself and, thanks to Dakim's coaching, I was able to.

"They're approaching from here, here, and here. What does that tell us?"

"They're trying to surround us." Luke concluded.

I nodded, "And we're going to let them."

"Are you insane?" Dawn asked, outraged.

"It will lead them into a false sense of security." I explained.

"If they manage to surround us, I don't think their sense of security will be all that false." Vic doubted.

"You would think that after spending all of this time with my brother, you would be able to put the pieces together," I scolded him before turning back to the map. "Vriknir and Niasha are such good allies that at one point Lady Vanek and King Anselm were arranged to be married. If you watch the troops, you will see that they treat each other like brothers and sisters even though they are not even the same race. The people of Vriknir are fighting to protect their home, and the people of Niasha are fighting for their brothers and sisters. We are united, and we are fighting for a just cause. Lastly, there are sixteen people in this room, including me, and the people of Vriknir and Niasha look up to every single one of us. However, if things go wrong and we begin to fall, as long as one of us remains standing, the people will continue to fight.

"Raven's men are not united as we are. Mekusc has spent the last several years in isolation. I don't know how Raven convinced them to join this battle, but I do know that they have no connection, no sort of kinship to any of the other men. The men approaching from the south, they're all mercenaries and hired hands. They have no true incentive for fighting other than their greed. Lastly, the only thing that is connecting these three groups is one man, Raven."

Myron pulled the push pin that represented Raven off of the map. "You get rid of Raven, the whole thing falls apart."

"What do we do about Charisse and Jerome?" Lance brought up.

"I'll handle Charisse."

Everybody turned at the sound of Jocelyn's voice as she entered the room. She confidently stepped forward so she could look at everybody, but she addressed me, "That bitch was my best friend long before she was ever yours. If anybody takes her down, it's going to be me."

"I'll handle Jerome." Myron spoke up. "Nobody screws with Ellipsis and gets away with it."

I nodded. "Lady Vanek, I want you to lead our troops in the fight with the elementals in the Northwest. Luke, you'll be leading the troops in Northeast. Dawn, will take the South. King Anselm, I want you and the rest of the hawks to cause confusion by attacking the enemy from behind. Vic, where are we on the city's security?"

He shook his head, "It has improved, but when the walls were not built with war in mind. We'll have to meet the enemy outside the city gates."

"Then that's what we'll do. The foot soldiers will meet Raven's troops outside the city borders with gun men and archers will be posted on the city walls to cover them."

"We have two days, today and tomorrow," Dawn reminded. "Let's make them count."



Once more I glance at every person in the room, my eyes lasting on Roy and Myron slightly longer than everybody else. "I want to thank all of you. I may not have grown up here or spent all of my life training as you all have, but you are putting your lives in my hands. I will not let you down."

King Anselm stepped forward, "And we will not let you down."

"Let's do this."

~

I went to walk into the warehouse where the Miutho weapons were being developed, but stopped when Vic walked out. "Oh, Vic, I've been meaning to talk to you."

He stopped and looked at me expectantly. "What is it?"

I sighed, knowing he wasn't going to like what I was going to say, "I want you to stay out of this fight."

"Excuse me?" He snapped.

"Vic, you are fourteen!" I reminded.

"Are you saying that I'm not experience enough?" He retaliated. "I've been training with Dakim longer than you have! Yet, you're asking me to sit back and do nothing?"

"I wouldn't ask you to do that, because I know you wouldn't listen even if I did. I am saying that I want you out of immediate danger. I want you to stay in the village and help make sure our defenses stay tight. We need to make sure the children and elderly stay safe. I need to make sure that you stay safe. Vic, Dakim has taken a liking to you, and Dakim doesn't like anybody. Please, just stay out of the battle." I smiled at him and then ran my thumb over the dragon tattoo that ran down his cheek.

"Fine," he agreed as he swatted my hand away. With a final pout, Vic turned and walked away, so I continued with what I had originally come here for.

"Christian! Dustin!" I called when I walked into the warehouse. Thanks to my recent promotion to Commander, people were careful not to accidentally bump into me and clear out of my way, however, it didn't help me see through the chaos to find them.

After a minute, Dustin and Christian pushed their way to the front where I was standing. They looked completely stressed out as if they hadn't stopped going since I first brought them to Vriknir yesterday.

"You guys need to leave." I told them.

Christian gave me a funny look. "Why would we do that?"

"Raven is on his way, and when this all goes down, I don't want you two anywhere near here."

"No," Dustin crossed his arms over his chest. "We left once for our safety, and you saw how well that went over. You need us, and we're not leaving again."

"Come here," Christian took me by the arm and led me into a back room. It was made completely out of metal, and was no doubt put together by Vic. On one side of the room were several stands that faced a firing range. At the end of the firing range were several targets full of holes. The other side of the room had several targets shaped like Riora, and most of them had several cuts and dents. Lining the far wall were numerous metal cabinets.

"This is our weapons testing room," He explained as he went over to the cabinets and threw open several of the doors, "And these are our weapons."

I couldn't believe just how many different types of weapons they had stashed, all of which were capable of using Miutho in one way or another. They had all sorts of long range weapons such as hand guns, shotguns, machine guns, automatic rifles, compound bows, recurve bows, and longbows hanging on the doors. On the shelves were close range weapons, ancient and modern, such as brass knuckles, deer horn knives, fans such as the Korean Mubuchae and the Japanese Tessen, bagh nakh (which are

similar to brass knuckles except are claw shaped), and wind and fire wheels. Below the shelves were other melee weapons such as short swords, daggers, throwing spears, and war axes.

"This is our armor," Christian said as he forced the doors of a second cabinet to open. Inside were all different styles of armor such as the lorica segmentata, chainmail, plate armor, and brigandine made out of Kunettium.

Christian slowly turned to face me, "We're not leaving."

I looked over the weapons and armor once more before turning back to Dustin and Christian. "If Raven's men manage to get inside the city, this will be the first thing they hit."

I flinched when Dustin cocked one of the shotguns, "And we'll be ready for them."

~

# Chapter 38

*MAY 25*

I pretended not to hear the sound of Roy's footsteps and continued to look out over Myron's lake, watching the sun rise. If I ignored the rolling thunder and dark skies, it was quite beautiful, like the calm before the storm. Roy didn't say anything as he came and stood next to me, just as I had always done with Myron.

"Today's the day." Roy finally spoke.

Roy walked around to face me as he put his hands in his pockets. "Rae, I just want to tell you –"

I interrupted him by pressing my lips to his and then whispering, "Tell me after we make it through today."

He nodded and then stepped off to the side again. I looked out over the lake once more as Roy wrapped his arms around me, causing me to smile. "I came out here, because this was the one place where I was always able to relax. After coming here, I felt like I was able to face the day ahead of me."

"And what do you feel now?"

I smiled. "Had you asked me that a couple of hours ago, I would have said that I was scared to death and just wanted to rewind the clock. I would have said that I was angry with my brother for getting himself caught and leaving this all to me. Now... Now, I've come to accept it. I've come to accept that I am the one person who is capable of doing this, and that everybody is relying on me. I'm ready."

"Good, because everybody is waiting for you."

~

I walked out to the cliff edge and looked down at the thousands of soldiers below. "My father was Asher Adelinda, a man you hold in your hearts as a hero. He protected this city, and now I am here to do the same. Raven infiltrated our government. He threatened our security. He tore families apart, and he ruined lives. Will we stand for this? No! We will show him that his actions have consequences. We will show him that the people of Vriknir are not to be messed with. He attacks us because he believes us weak, but we will show him that we are strong! We will be victorious!"

**\*\*\*Soldier\*\*\***

The soldier tried to look out at the horizon without breaking formation. The soldiers were lined up and ready. Raven's men were also lined up and ready, standing directly across from them. Everything was quiet, but the tension was like a buzz in the air. They all waited for that one movement that told them that the battle had begun, the command that told them to charge forward.

All the soldiers leaned forward in anticipation when the enemy soldiers began to charge at them. They only needed the signal...

"What is she doing?" A whisper ran throughout the ranks.

Looking through the space between the men in front of him, the soldier watched as Commander Adelinda charged at the enemy ranks. When she was within range, the enemy began throwing things like knives and spears and even fired guns, but it all seemed to bounce off, as if she were surrounded by an invisible field.

"She never gave the signal." Another whisper ran throughout.

The soldier watched as Raelyn, already halfway to the enemy soldiers, raised her hand in the air, giving them the signal. Yet, she didn't stop. She pulled her hand back as she continued to charge forward

at the oncoming enemy, a ball of bright light in her hand. When she reached enemy lines, she thrust her arm forward, and a huge dome of Miutho erupted around her in an explosion, shaking the earth. It caused soldiers on both sides to pause.

*What power...* The soldier thought to himself and then smiled. *Victory is ours!*

### **\*\*\*King Anselm\*\*\***

King Anselm flew in circles high above the city with the rest of his men, looking down at everything. *Rae made a serious dent when she drove into enemy lines, but even with our combined army, Raven's men greatly outnumber us.* He pushed the thought from his mind. *That doesn't matter. The battle has begun. It is time for us to begin.*

He let out a loud screech, and his men split into three different groups. Anselm pulled his wings in and went into a dive, heading straight for enemy troops. The soldiers screamed when they finally noticed King Anselm approaching them at almost two hundred miles per hour. He opened his wings again right before he hit the soldiers, but the object hadn't been to cause damage. The soldiers had broken ranks and didn't know where to turn. They had caused confusion, and that did more than simple physical damage.

### **\*\*\*Karexon\*\*\***

"How do you hit something that isn't solid?" The soldier shouted in frustration when he swung at Karexon's shadow and missed once more.

"Well, isn't that the million dollar question?" Karexon appeared behind the soldier before taking him out. "Really, you all must be more creative."

He took the brief lapse in combat to really study his enemy. *These soldiers can't be higher ranked than Ukemek. They can't honestly expect to defeat us with such little skill...*

### **\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

I let a small ball of pure Miutho form in my hand and drove it through the guard of the next soldier who came at me. He fell to the ground, and I turned to the next soldier who was heading my way. However, when the sound of a knife cutting through the air came to my ear, I leaned back out of the way out of instinct. The sharp pain over my eye and warm liquid running down the side of my forehead told me that I hadn't quite been fast enough.

I looked around to see where the knife had come from and found the soldier I had just knocked to the ground on his feet. *Impossible! That kind of blow would have kept even Roy down, and Roy never lets anything keep him down!* It was then that I noticed the enemy soldiers around him. They all had serious wounds, but they didn't seem affected at all. *Their nervous systems have been disabled, so they don't feel pain. They're like robots who never stop coming. They're not even human anymore. Raven, you monster.*

I found Raven on top of a nearby cliff where was overlooking the battle. He had bleached blonde hair just like Chariss. It was straight as a board and came down to his shoulders. He even had the same green eyes as her, but his face was far from innocent looking. His jaw was set firm and his eyes were narrowed as if the Vriknir soldiers in front of his were nothing but a disgrace. Yet, at the same time, the corner of his lips seemed to be turned up slightly, giving away the fact that he was enjoying watching them fall. Just knowing that he was excited by the bloodshed made my blood boil.

Not wanting to look at his psychopathic expression anymore, I took in the rest of him. He was about average height for a guy, making him a great deal taller than I. He wore a chain vest that would

protect his vitals while giving him a good amount of movability. He also wore and let guards that would give him a little extra protection. Movability had obviously been his highest priority, but he hadn't left himself defenseless either. The only thing out of place was the necklace he proudly wore. It was a pendant of a sword being driven through a dragon's head. Charisse, the woman who attacked the ambassador, Raven...they all wore the same necklace. How had I been so blind?

"Cover me." I told Dawn before casting aside my cape so it would be out of my way. "I'm going to end this here and now."

Knowing that I would never be able to successfully sneak up on Raven, I charged up the cliff side, getting rid of anybody who stood in my way, until I stood face to face with Raven. He turned around slowly, but I didn't wait. I thrust my right arm forward, sending freezing water flying at Raven, encasing him in ice. However, Raven had been working closely with the people from Mekusc. It was no surprise when Raven began raising his body temperature to melt the ice. Actually, I had been counting on it.

When he was completely unfrozen, he gave me an evil grin, his eyes sparkling underneath his sopping wet hair. He went to make a move, but I thrust my left arm forward, sending him a bolt of electricity right at him. However, he easily caught it in the palm of his hand.

"You'll have to do much better than that if you intend to beat me." He sneered.

We continued to exchange blows, and I quickly realized that fighting Raven was a lot like fighting my brother. A Riora's fighting style usually revolved around the ability he or she had available. However, Raven had multiple fighting styles. I had to be ready for anything.

When we locked arms once more, he simply pushed me backwards, frustrated that he couldn't get through my guard. Raven was overall better at hand-to-hand combat than I was, and physically he was stronger than me, but I was faster. Plus, I could manipulate the pure form of Miutho, when he couldn't. I was keeping up with him.

I flinched when a loud explosion shook the ground and screams filled the air. Smoke was rising from what appeared to be the center of the city, right where the weapons were being manufactured.

Raven let out an evil laugh, "Oh my, I hope your friends weren't in there. That looked deadly, especially for those pathetic creatures you call humans."

I tried to swallow the lump that had risen in my throat. "No, they knew the risks."

"I doubt that."

Feeling the rage rising, I launched myself at Raven once more, and the battle continued.

### **\*\*\*Christian\*\*\***

He dove behind one of the cabinets just as the explosion went off. Rae had been right when she said that the factory was the first place the enemy would target. However, Dustin had also been right. They were ready.

Christian reached for the handle of the cabinet, but quickly pulled back when the metal burned his hand. Instead, he reached for the unfinished battle ax he had been working on. There was more than one way to get the cabinet open.

When he finally managed to get the cabinet open, he tossed the ax to the side and went for something more his style. He slung a recurve bow with arrows dipped in Miutho over his back and began stuffing the deer horn knives and the wind and fire wheels into the pouch of his utility belt. On his left hand he wore the brass knuckles, and in his right hand he held a high caliber hand gun. He was locked and loaded.

He lifted his head out from the cover of the cabinet and fired his hand gun at the nearest enemy soldier. He was forced to duck once more when the shot he fired created another small explosion. So the high caliber gun hadn't been the best idea...

"Christian!" Dustin called, sprinting across the open areas of the factory and sliding on the ground until he was behind the cover of the cabinet. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Here," Christian slightly moved back so Dustin could get into the cabinet and equip himself as well. As he did so, Christian asked, "How did they get in? I thought we had this place sealed tight."

"They came up through the ground." Dustin explained as he fit the bagh nakh onto his left hand and then picked up one of the fans. "Think you can fire that gun again?"

Christian nodded and then popped up from behind the cabinet, firing the gun once more. As soon as he did so, Dustin also popped up and swung the fan as hard as he could, creating a huge gust of wind that sent the explosion tumbling at the enemy like an avalanche.

The two knelt behind the cabinet once more, and Dustin turned to Christian, a satisfactory smile on his dirt covered face. "Those scums won't know what hit 'em."

\*\*\*Vic\*\*\*

He quickly grabbed hold of a nearby light post so the explosion wouldn't shake him to the ground. He turned away from the defense wall he had been repairing and towards the explosion. *I've been repairing these walls non-stop! How did they get in?*

He watched the elderly and children fleeing the houses and tried to come up with some sort of plan. Obviously the village walls weren't strong enough to keep the enemy out, and there was no place for non-combatants to escape to, for the village was surrounded. If there was only some sort of bunker they could hide in...

"Everybody follow me!" Vic shouted and then started running down the street towards Raelyn's house. Once he got there, he kicked down the door and immediately ran over to the rug that hid the entrance to Raelyn's training room. The scanner would only allow somebody of Adelinda's descent to enter the training room, but he had built the scanner. Of course he could override it.

He quickly reprogrammed the scanner and the door to the room popped open. He propped it open and then led the way down the steps to the training room. The elderly and children began filling the main room while Vic quickly stepped into the back room and sat down at the plastic screens he had set up. He quickly turned them on and ran a full scan of Vriknir's defenses.

This isn't possible! All the walls are reporting as being intact. So how did the enemy get inside?

Vic looked up from his screens when there was a knock on the window. There was a girl about his age with golden blond hair and green eyes staring at him. Her face was pleading, "My name is Mitzi, and I want to help. I can't sit here doing nothing while my parents are out there risking their lives!"

Vic sympathized with her, knowing exactly how she felt. "What can you do?"

"I manipulate ink." She responded almost before he'd even asked the question.

Vic nodded, thinking over the possibilities. "I need to get everybody else down here to safety. Can you send out a message only to the people of Vriknir, letting them know to come here if they need a place to hide?"

She nodded and quickly ran back up the steps. While she did so, he got up and walked back to the main room. *I can only virtually resize this so far. It won't be big enough to fit all the non-combatants. I'll have to open up the emergency tunnels to help create more space. If I remember, one of the tunnels is over here...*

Vic stood facing the far wall and began tearing away the metal in the middle until he had created a small doorway. *I'll have to stretch the metal to cover the tunnel, so it won't be as durable, but it will be better than nothing.*

Vic extended his hands, pushing the metal down the sides of the tunnel wall, but stopped when the tunnel walls came to a sudden stop. That was only a few feet. The tunnel should be longer than that...

Vic took some of the metal he had torn away from the wall and shifted it into a flashlight. It turned on with a satisfying click before stepping into the tunnel. He had only gone a few steps before the tunnel walls came to a stop. There were several rocks blocking the path. Did the tunnel collapse after the explosion?

He pushed on the rocks slightly, and was surprised to see that they moved. He started at the top, pushing the rocks down, and worked his way down, slowly clearing a path. Once he had cleared a small squeeze space, he crawled through the rocks to the other side. However, instead of landing in the small tunnel he had created, he found himself in a much bigger, foreign tunnel. After shining the flashlight around, he realized that the tunnel he had created continued on the other side, although a few stones blocked its path. It was as if somebody else had created their own tunnel, plowing right through his own.

*So that was how they got into the village. They didn't get through the village walls. They went under them...*

**\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

\*(Description of more fighting between Rae and Raven)\*

**\*\*\*Kian\*\*\***

\*(Show Kian and his brother Hiram fighting)\*

**\*\*\*Luke\*\*\***

\*(Show him knocking out the soldiers.)\*

**\*\*\*Lance\*\*\***

\*(Carmichael and Lance have teamed up. Carmichael would teleport Lance behind the enemy, and Lance would freeze the enemy into a block of ice)\*

**\*\*\*Lynam/Liam Fusion\*\*\***

\*(Show them fighting)\*

**\*\*\*Lady Vanek\*\*\***

\*(Lady Vanek is considered the strongest in Vriknir, so she kicks some serious butt)\*

**\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

\*(More fighting between Rae and Raven)\*

**\*\*\*Jocelyn\*\*\***

**\*(Show more battle between Charisse and Jocelyn)\***

She waited for an opening, and then tackled Charisse, pinning her to the ground. Charisse struggled, but it was to no avail. Jocelyn had always been the stronger of the two.

“What’s the matter Charisse? Did your little plant friends abandon you?” Jocelyn taunted and Charisse just glared at her. “You’re plants aren’t working, because there are no plants left! There is no green! This war destroyed the beautiful trees and plant life that we had, and they were destroyed because of you. Your plants left you because you sent them to their deaths. This is your fault! You caused all this pain in suffering!”

“I did?” Charisse fought to get back up, but Jocelyn pushed her back down.

“Yes, you! Raven may be leading this, but this is every bit as much your fault as it is his, because you were the one who could have done something. You were the one who could have stopped him. You could have prevented this bloodshed!”

Charisse finally mustered the strength to throw Jocelyn from here. “And what are you going to do about it?”

“This!” Jocelyn launched forward. Unable to do anything else, Charisse threw several knives at Jocelyn, but they all phased through her. Jocelyn drove her phased fist into Charisse and let it become solid, causing Charisse to gasp in pain. “The pathetic thing is, I’ll cry tonight. I’ll cry because even though you were the liar who caused all of this pain, I killed the one person I trusted with my life.”

“No!” Charisse shouted, but Jocelyn pulled her fist from Charisse, killing her instantly.

**\*\*\*Myron\*\*\***

**\*(Myron blasts out the eardrums of enemy soldiers, causing them to lose their balance and become unsteady. However, he stops when he notices Jerome.)\***

“Jerome!” Myron shouted, getting his attention.

A smile broke out on Jerome’s face, revealing his fangs, and he signaled for the rest of his men to stay back. “I’ll handle thisss.”

**\*(Fight between Myron and Jerome. After exchanging a few blows, Myron realizes that Jerome had been expecting him and wore sound proof earplugs as protection. Jerome taunts Myron, reminding Myron how Jerome has won every sparring match that they’d ever had. Jerome then states that this won’t be any different.**

Later in the match, when it becomes obvious that Myron has the upper hand, Myron states that, of course he let Jerome win all the sparring matches. How would it look if the General of Ellipsis, the person who is supposed to be the second strongest in the village, was beaten by one of his underlings? Myron then reminds Jerome that his appointment strengthened the ties between Niasha and Vriknir, and Myron states that he wasn’t going to ruin that for his own personal gain. Myron then reminds him that his is no longer the head of Ellipsis and that he can finally pay Jerome back for the all the pain he’d caused. Myron then goes on to win the fight, but is left severely injured.)\*

**\*\*\*Roy\*\*\***

**\*(Show Roy fluidly weaving between enemy soldiers, taking them out as he goes – Like the elves in The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug)\***

He hit the spine of another soldier and watched as he fell to the ground, no longer able to move. However, he took a step back when his eyes picked up something unusual with the ground. The ground was constantly shifting, like something was digging. He continued to scan the ground, and quickly discovered that people from Mekusc who could manipulate Earth were creating tunnels under the



ground. Raven wasn't planning on destroying Vriknir in a ball of flame. He was going to make the whole place collapse.

"Lady Vanek!" Roy shouted.

"I don't think so." I guy came up behind Roy, pinning his hands, and held a knife to his throat.

"You know, those eyes of yours are a little pain."

"And what are you going to do about it?" Roy growled.

The man chuckled and turned Roy so that he could see the battle between Rae and Raven. "I'm going to watch as your girlfriend sacrifices all of Vriknir to save your life."

**\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

I grunted when Raven threw me across the clearing and into a tree. I had had the upper hand against Raven, but just barely. However, he surprised me when he smiled. "I'll give you credit. You lasted longer than I thought you would."

I got back to my feet. "You talk as if you've already beaten me."

"That's because I already have." His smile grew, and he stepped off to the side, allowing me to see over the cliff edge. Below, Roy stood with his arms pinned and a knife to his throat.

"No," I gasped when I saw him.

"In your speech, you said that you were going to fight for what you have come to know and love, but I wonder what you love more, Royce or Vriknir?"

It was like the breath had been knocked out of me, and I stumbled closer to the cliff edge so I could get a better look at Roy. It was an impossible choice, but it was really no choice at all. I took a long hard look at Roy, committing his face to memory, the determined look in his eye that said that he already knew what I was going to choose and that he wasn't scared.

I lifted my head, bringing myself under control. "I won't fall for this. You're doing this because you know you can't defeat me."

"You would watch him die?" Raven snapped at me. I didn't answer. I just blinked away the tears. "Well that's too bad."

I screamed as Raven hit the mark on my back, and my armor was ripped from my body. I fell face first to the ground. Dakim had been right when he said that the pain was so bad that you wished you would have died. **\*(Description of the pain.)\*** However, the knowledge that every muscle in my body had been ripped and that I was unable to move hurt more than the actual physical pain. Jerome had told Raven just how to get to me. Raven knew that I was soft, that I would be preoccupied by Roy and Vriknir. I had let Raven get to me, and I had dropped my guard.

The saying goes that you're never defeated until you give up. Yet, what else was I supposed to do? I'd always been good at fighting through the pain, but if pain were my only obstacle, I'd be on my feet already. My muscles had been ripped. It was amazing that my muscles were able to function enough to allow me to keep breathing. Getting back to my feet, continuing to fight, it just wasn't an option.

Raven stood over me, and this time I couldn't blink back the tears as I realized this was it. I wasn't scared of dying. I was scared of what my death would do to others. Roy, Dakim, Christian, Dustin, Myron, they would all be completely devastated. Kian, Karexon, Luke, Vic, Hiram, Lance, Lynam, Liam, Carmichael, they would all miss me as well. Of course, this was all assuming that they actually survived the war. With Dakim under lockdown, I had been their only hope, and I had failed.

I screamed out once more when he took out a canister of unstable Miutho and poured it all over me. He knew he had won, and now he was just enjoying it. Yet, I wouldn't let him enjoy it. I spit the unstable Miutho that had gone into my mouth in his face.

His jaw tensed as he wiped it from his face and then knelt down next to where I was crumpled on the ground. "I should drag this out. I should make you suffer just as much as I have over these past years. That had always been my plan. From the very beginning, I knew Vriknir would bring you in. You were the only one who had even the slightest chance of beating me other than your brother. Destroying Vriknir is just an added bonus. Now, I finally get my revenge. Your brother is in lockdown, and he has to sit in his cell and suffer with the knowledge that there was nothing that he could do to save you." He sighed and stood up. "Unfortunately, Roy was a slippery one and it took a little longer to capture him than I would have liked. So I am pressed for time. Any last goodbyes?"

"Go to hell!" I growled.

"Fair enough," Raven raised his hand to deal the final blow, and I didn't close my eyes. I looked him right in the eye. I wanted my death, the look in my eyes, to haunt him. Every time he closed his eyes, I wanted him to see my face. I wanted to make sure that never again would he be able to sleep at night.

*Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt...*

### **\*\*\*Myron\*\*\***

He forced himself to keep going, the sight of Roy being held captive giving him momentum. When he was close enough, he extended his hand and sent a sound wave at Roy's captor. It would hit Roy as well, but Roy had seen Rae get hit by Raven. He wouldn't let a simple sound blast keep him down.

Roy's captor fell to the ground clutching his ears, but Roy jumped back to his feet and quickly made his way to Myron. "I'm going to go after Rae, but you need to alert Lady Vanek. This war is only a distraction. Soldiers from Mekusc are digging tunnels underneath the city. They're going to cave it in."

Luke, who had also come running when he saw Roy get caught, joined them and spoke, "Vriknir soldiers aren't the only one who would get caught when the city collapses. He'd lose their soldiers to."

Myron shook his head, "I just heard Raven tell Rae that Vriknir was only his secondary target. Rae had been his primary target because he had wanted Dakim to suffer by losing his sister. He doesn't care about what happens to everybody else. Have you seen his soldiers? Their nervous systems have been disabled. They don't feel pain, so they fight until they're knocked unconscious or killed."

When Roy went to turn away, Myron gripped Roy's shirt, "You get Rae, and you get out of there. Don't even try taking on Raven. We don't need something happening to both of you."

Roy only broke free of Myron's grip and took off running.

### **\*\*\*Lady Vanek\*\*\***

"Thank you, Myron." She whispered. Myron was on the complete opposite side of the battlefield, but if he had been able to send his voice that far, then she knew he would be able to hear her reply. She closed her eyes, letting the information sink in, and then opened them again. She knew what she had to do. She ran from the battle field and made her way to the jail. When she reached the cell Dakim was being held in, she turned to the several Ellipsis members guarded the cell, "Leave us."

"But milady, it takes twenty of us Ellipsis members just to keep him in here. You can't possibly handle him on your own."

"Do not make me repeat myself!" Lady Vanek boomed.

The members all looked at each other but otherwise bowed their heads and walked away.

She waited until they were far away before she took out the keys to his cell. He was calm in the little corner he was sitting in, but when she finally managed to get the door opened, he had her pinned against the wall before she even realized she had gotten the door open.

She tore at the grip around her neck and tried to gasp in air, "Dakim, please."

"I promised her I would be with her in the shadows every step of the way. I've already broken one promise. I will not break a second one." Dakim then leaned in real close and whispered menacingly, "If anything has happened to her, I will reign all hell down on this place, and I will become much more than the mass murderer you accuse me of being."

She did the best to nod under his grip, and then he released her, dropping her to the floor. Before she could do anything, he was gone.

**\*\*\*Dakim\*\*\***

He came to a dead stop just outside the doors and dropped to his knees, his hand gripping his chest. It was like everything inside of him had just been ripped from his body. It were as if a thousand pounds had just been dropped onto his shoulders, and he couldn't breathe.

"Dakim!" Lady Vanek, who had chased after him when she saw him fall, reached down to him. "What's wrong?"

He dropped from his hands to his elbows, curling up inside himself as the pain continued to worsen. He knew this feeling. It had happened only once before, when he thought he had lost everything he had ever cared for.

Lady Vanek's attention was drawn away from Dakim as Raven stood on the cliff edge and shouted out over the battle field. "Your one hope, the great Raelyn Adelinda, has been defeated. Surrender now. Continued resistance is useless."

His words were like knives driving through Dakim's skull and heart. He'd just gotten her back, and now she was gone forever. He put his hands on his head, trying to hold himself together when it seemed like his head would explode. Tremors ran throughout his whole body and the ground around him began to shake. It was like an earthquake combined with a magnetic field. The rocks that had begun to break off from the shaking ground levitated in the air, and the family crest pendant around his neck began to glow. Green fire filled his eyesight. He ripped at his hair, trying to get it all under control, but it was no good. It was like a monster had been locked deep inside of him, but now the beast was angry, and he was free.

# Chapter 39

\*\*\*Colton\*\*\*

\*(He is rushing to the battlefield. He had been late because he'd had to sneak away from the rest of the team. As he is running, he is scolding himself in failing to watch over Raelyn. He gets to the battlefield right as Raven is bragging about how Raelyn had fallen. Colton then feels a familiar sensation and runs along the cliff a little ways to see Dakim on his knees becoming engulfed in a green flame. He is stricken with horror, questioning how he would have been able to transform, and then mentions something about the return of the dragon age. Try to foreshadow second book without giving too much away.)\*

\*\*\*Conrad\*\*\*

Conrad's ears twitched slightly as he picked up an unfamiliar sound, and he turned to face the back of the battlefield.

"What is it?" King Anselm shifted into his human form as he landed on the ground next to him.

Conrad's ears twitched once again, and he looked up to the sky, watching the Bird Shapeshifters dive bomb the soldiers from the air. "Get the men out of the sky."

King Anselm looked up at the dark sky, "The men can handle a little storm."

"No, not the storm..."

That was when King Anselm saw to what Conrad was referring to, "Oh, hell no! All units get down, NOW!"

\*\*\*Raven\*\*\*

"What is that?" A soldier left Raven's side to look at the black blob that had appeared on the horizon. Yet, he only made it a few feet before a mighty roar shook the battlefield, and he fell to the ground, landing inches from the edge of the cliff. Raven was the only one who had been able to remain standing without some sort of support.

When the shaking subsided, the soldier got to his feet and looked at the black blob, which had gotten much bigger, with new eyes. "It's a dragon!"

"It's Dakim!" Another soldier shouted. "He's coming to avenge his sister. We're all doomed!"

As if on cue, another roar rang out, and this time the soldiers weren't so lucky. The ground shook so violently that the cliff edge began to crumble, and all the soldiers nearby went with it. The remaining soldiers turned to flee, but Raven growled, "Nobody leaves. Anybody who does will face my wrath."

Not a single soldier hesitated at Raven's threat. Only one paused, but just long enough to look Raven directly in the eyes when he spoke, "Better to be executed at your hand than to be burned alive at Dakim's."

Raven turned his back on the fleeing soldiers to face the supposed dragon, but whatever had been on the horizon had disappeared. *Everybody knows that the Adelindas can't fully shift. Dragons are nothing more than a legend. That dot on the horizon was nothing more than a last minute scare tactic.* The corner of his lips turned up into a triumphant smile. *Vriknir is mine.*

A huge gust of wind came out of nowhere, and this time Raven couldn't remain standing. Another blew by, and a black mass, originally hidden behind the cliff side, shot up towards the sky. On his hands and knees, Raven, who was no bigger than the dragon's foot, struggled to get back to his feet.

Leaning on the tree for support, he threw his arms up in front of him, creating a barrier of Miutho. Yet, it was of no use. The dragon brought his head back, breathing in deeply, gathering in a ball of Miutho. He then thrust his head forward, sending out a beam of pure energy so bright that its light filled the entire area, blinding all the soldiers on the battlefield. It shattered Raven's Miutho barrier like a car windshield being hit with a baseball bat. Even his screams of pain were drowned out by the deafening sound of Dakim's Miutho beam. When the light finally cleared, nothing could be seen of Raven. Not even the ash had survived.

Then, the dragon itself began to glow, being completely consumed by light, but it was not a blinding light as the last one had been. It was like a shell had cracked and soon fell to pieces. All that remained was the human form of Dakim who immediately lost unconsciousness and fell to the ground with a heavy thud.

### **\*\*\*Lady Vanek\*\*\***

"Lady Vanek, the enemy is retreating!" Carmichael materialized next to her.

"What about the tunnels?"

He nodded. "We've successfully installed supports in key locations until we get can a team in there. Vriknir is safe."

She let out a sigh of relief, but then immediately remembered Dakim. "Carmichael, take me to where Dakim is."

He placed his arms on Lady Vanek's shoulders, and she closed her eyes. When she opened them again, she was standing on the cliff edge. When she saw Dakim on the ground, she immediately dropped to her knees next to him.

"Raelyn... Where's Rae?" He mumbled, only half conscious.

"Royce is taking her to the hospital as we speak. Dakim, where's Raven?"

Dakim tried to smile, "I disintegrated that bastard."

Lady Vanek sat back on her heels and burst out laughing with relief. Then she seemed to remember herself and looked around, "Let's get a healer over here!"

### **\*\*\*Conrad\*\*\***

He approached the cliff edge with King Anselm, but they stayed back out of everybody's way. Conrad watched Dakim thoughtfully as a healer bent over him, "I guess dragons aren't just legends. I wonder where it came about that dragons couldn't shift?"

"There is a lot more to dragons than the general public is aware of. They have a very dark past." King Anselm explained.

Conrad turned away from Dakim to face King Anselm. "Why does nobody else know about it?"

King Anselm didn't look at Conrad when he answered, "It was a long time ago. The few dragons that remained banded together and went into hiding, and most people were content to let them. It had been such a dark and bloody time that people were anxious to move forward. My father told of their past so there would be at least one person who knew about those dark days, but he told me only once and then refused to speak about it any further. He spoke with such hatred towards dragons and he persecuted them across Kusnik. Yet, after watching Raelyn these past few days, I find my father's story quite hard to believe. "

"Why haven't you told anybody about this?" Conrad continued to question.

King Anselm finally turned to face Conrad, "I met Asher Adelinda, Raelyn's father, when he had come to Vriknir's aid several years ago. My father's story was still fresh in my mind at the time, so I looked at him with nothing but disgust when I was introduced to him. Despite my obvious resentment

towards him, he greeted me with a smile and treated me with kindness. Later that day, when he was preparing to leave, I stopped him and asked him about the story my father had told me. He confirmed my father's story and explained that he understood my anger towards him. He told me that he wasn't offended by my anger, but only hoped to show that the dragons were moving forward like everybody else. He only wanted a second chance at life. It was like he was trying to make up for all the mistakes of the other dragons."

Conrad's attention was drawn back to Dakim when he realized the healer was helping him to his feet. "I don't believe it... When I shifted for the first time, I could only hold it for a few seconds before I reverted back, and I was completely wiped out. Sure Dakim may have fallen unconscious afterwards, but for him to be able to hold the shift as long as he did, and for him to be able to stand afterward... the dragons are truly powerful people."

King Anselm nodded in agreement. "According to my father, dragons were the very first creatures, and they were the ones to create Riora and Shapeshifters. The dragons were like deities."

The comment seemed to strike Conrad as funny. "It's ironic really. Dragons used to be considered gods. Yet, our people persecuted dragons and kicked them from their own country. Even the people of this country treat Dakim and Raelyn like dirt."

King Anselm smiled as well, "Yes, the dragons fell quite hard from their seat of power. It's sad that it almost took the death of a dragon for me to realize how wrong my father had been in choosing to persecute dragons even after their downfall."

"You said almost." Conrad noted. "Raelyn is alive?"

"We'll see. Royce got to her right away, but she is in critical condition."

They stood in silence for a moment as they watched Dakim slowly make his way across the clearing. When he stumbled, the healers apprehensively called out, but Dakim growled at them to stay away.

Conrad chuckled, "It's hard to understand your new found respect for dragons while watching Dakim's bad temper."

King Anselm also smiled, "Dakim is a thief and a criminal. There is no doubt about it. However, attacking Vriknir is the one thing he has always denied. Asher Adelinda only wished for a second chance for dragons. Maybe it's time that we start giving it to them."

Conrad sighed and looked up at the sky, which had begun to clear and rays of sunshine were beginning to break through the clouds. "I have been in your service for more years than I can count, and I still have not learned all that you have to teach me."

King Anselm chuckled and patted Conrad on the back, "Don't worry, my friend. I am still learning too."

**\*\*\*Dakim\*\*\***

Dakim stumbled down the hospital hallways, ignoring the gaping stares of the people he passed as he made his way to Rae's room. He slowly opened the door to find Rae unconscious on the bed with Roy by her side. Roy held her hand firmly in his, resting his forehead on their combined hands. He didn't move when Dakim entered.

"How is she?" Dakim muttered.

Roy took a shuttering breath and lifted his head, revealing the bright red tears that rolled down his cheeks. "Every muscle in her body was ripped when her armor was removed. She has serious burns from when Raven poured the canister of unstable Miutho on her, plus other abrasions and lacerations from her fight with Raven. With all the injuries she's sustained, the healers don't know if she'll ever wake up." Roy reached inside his pocket and pulled out a little black box. He opened it to reveal a silver ring. "I was going to propose before the battle started, but I hesitated. I wanted your blessing and I

wanted the perfect moment.” He shook his head. “I knew there was the possibility that we wouldn’t make it through this. I never should have waited.”

“There is one thing you should know that I’m not sure even Raelyn is aware of,” Dakim spoke as he walked over and took the ring from Roy, turning it over and over in his hand. Eventually he put the ring back in the box and set it on the table where she would be able to see it. “A dragon’s lifespan is almost triple that of a Riora. She will outlive you by almost two-hundred years. Knowing that, are you still willing to marry her?”

Roy didn’t hesitate, “Yes.”

Dakim smiled at Roy, but it faded when he looked back to Raelyn. He had broken his promise. He hadn’t been there for her in her fight. He couldn’t just stand here now, being completely useless. Dakim activated the Ultimate Defense enough to get his canines to extend and then bit into his wrist. He had learned long ago that a dragon’s blood could strengthen and heal a human’s body, but would it work on another dragon?

“Dakim!” Roy jumped up in surprise.

Dakim waved Roy away and then put his bleeding wrist to Rae’s mouth. “When she wakes up, you have my blessing.”

“Dakim, thank you.”

**\*\*\*Raelyn\*\*\***

***MAY 29***

The first thing I became aware of was the gentle pressure on my hand and the soothing way Roy used his thumb to draw on my hand. The second thing was the horrible stench of the clinic and the sounds of the commotion. I tried to open my eyes, wondering exactly what was going on.

“Rae!” Roy suddenly shouted and everybody in the room was suddenly on their feet. My little clinic room was crowded with everybody from the team. Yet, in that very moment, I wasn’t concerned with anybody else in the room. The only thing I was focused on was the ring in a little black box that sat on my side table. I reached for it but a pain shot through my entire body, and I immediately dropped my arm.

Roy smiled, picked it up, and held it for me to see so that I wouldn’t have to move. “You know, this wasn’t how I had originally planned it. It was going to be a lot more romantic than you sitting in a hospital bed.” He chuckled and took the ring from the box, “Raelyn Adelinda, will you marry me?”

My brother and Myron chuckled, no doubt being able to hear the way my heart rate suddenly shot up. I took a deep breath and began solemnly, “Roy...”

I watched in amusement as his face fell and he disappointedly put the ring back in the box, but then I smiled, “Yes.”

He paused as if he might have heard me wrong and then pointed at me angrily, “That was mean.” He gently put the ring on my finger, careful not to cause me any pain, and then gave me a soft kiss.

Everybody in the room cheered, and I remembered them for the first time. Roy leaned back out of the way so I could see everybody. Dustin had a huge smile on his face and Christian was practically bouncing in his seat. Karexon had usual goofy grin and a proud smile was on Myron’s face. Dakim was in the back corner, and he gave me a small nod, showing his approval. Luke, Vic, Kian, Hiram, Liam, Lynam, Carmichael, and Lance also seemed generally happy for me.

Seeing the team started bringing back memories, “What happened?”

Myron stood up from where he was sitting and walked over to my bedside. "When Lady Vanek saw that things were going south, she freed your brother, knowing that he would be their only chance for success. Your brother defeated Raven —"

"I disintegrated him." Dakim corrected, and I gave him a funny look.

"Oh yeah," Karexon spoke up, "Did we forget to mention that your brother can actually shift into a full dragon now?"

"What?" I exclaimed, but immediately regretted it when pain shot through my body again.

Luke nodded, "Yes, it turns out that it really is possible for the Adelindas to shift."

"Anyway," Myron continued. "At the sight of Dakim in his shifted form, most of the soldiers went running for the hills. Vriknir is safe."

I smiled and rested my head on the pillow. I was still in pain, but their words made me feel a lot better. I looked at the ring once more and then looked at Roy, a huge smile breaking out on my face. Everyone in the room laughed, undoubtedly at the way my face had turned bright red. Yet, I didn't care. For the first time in a long time, I felt like a teenager, and I was enjoying the giddy feeling. I was on cloud nine, and I wasn't coming down any time soon.

~

## ***JUNE 5***

I bent over and tied my shoes, thankful that I wouldn't have to be wheeled out in a wheelchair as I would have been if I was in an Earth hospital. I was thankful to the healers for taking such good care of me, but I hated hospitals and clinics. I just wanted to be out of here.

"Good afternoon, Roy, Rae."

I looked up as Lady Vanek and the leading council member walked into the room. I was surprised to see them at this time of day. All the Riora had been spending most of their time digging through rubble and debris, searching for people and cleaning up. Many of the team weren't able to come visit me until late in the evening because that was when work stopped for the day. Roy was the exception to that. He had been here every moment that he wasn't being strictly ordered to do something.

"Roy, would you excuse us?" Lady Vanek asked politely, but it had been an order.

He nodded, gave me a smile, and then walked out of the room. The council member closed the door, and then I asked, "What do I owe the pleasure?"

Lady Vanek took a deep breath and then began. "We have two things to discuss. The first is your brother. He's been cleared of all charges that we have against him and will be seen as a hero. However, other countries still have charges against him. If he leaves our borders and is apprehended, there is nothing we can do."

I breathed a sigh of relief. "I understand."

The council leader spoke next, "The second thing is about Ellipsis. It is customary for the strongest in the village to take leadership. Dakim is the most powerful by far, but with his history, the people would never accept him, so the council has decided that you are next strongest eligible candidate. Normally you would be offered Lady Vanek's position, but you are too young. Instead, we are offering you the position as head of Ellipsis."

I paused, not able to wrap my head around their offer. "You want me to be General?"

"Yes."

I looked between Lady Vanek and the council leader. They were being serious. I sighed and looked away, my eyes catching the ring on my finger in the process. I smiled, just as I did whenever I saw it, and spun it around my finger. "You know, I always said I'd never get married at eighteen. I wanted to



be out chasing my dreams, not stuck at home running a household. After the past few months I've had here, I've realized that I'm not suited for the Riora lifestyle. As screwed up as Jerome was, he was right when he said that I wasn't cut out for this. Actually, I was planning on putting in my resignation as a Riora."

"You would resign?" The council leader exclaimed, "Even with all of the good you could do with your abilities?"

"I will be here if you need me in emergencies, and I will continue to train and stay at the top of my game. Trust me, my brother won't let me slack off," I reassured the council leader, "but I want no part of the Riora lifestyle. I've had enough violence to last a lifetime."

"I see. Thank you, Raelyn." Lady Vanek nodded and then went to leave, pulling the council leader with her.

"I may not be a good leader, especially as the head of Ellipsis," I called after them and they stopped, "but I know who would be."

# Chapter 40

*JUNE 7*

"Ow," I snapped at Roy when he pulled tight the strings of the decorative brigandine I was wearing for the ceremony. He smiled at me in the mirror, and I glared at him. He had done it on purpose. "I don't get why I even have to wear this stupid thing. It's not like I don't have my own armor."

"Yes, but that armor is actually useful. This is just for decoration so you look like the rest of Ellipsis. You and your brother even get your own capes, even though they don't have the Ellipsis emblem on them." Roy explained and then pushed my head down so he could tie the strings at the base of my neck.

"You of all people should know that when it comes to clothing, I like to be different."

"Trust me, I know, but it won't kill you to look like everybody else for a few hours." He chuckled and then attached my cape. "Are you ready?"

I nodded and then took his arm, allowing him to lead me to the banquet hall where the celebration ceremony would be held in just a little while. Almost everybody else had beaten us there. Just one person was missing. "Where's Myron?"

Karexon rolled his eyes. "Where do you think?"

I sighed and held my hand out. I let pure Miutho form into the shape of an umbrella, handed it to Roy, and then made one for myself. "Come on."

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I approached Myron with Roy beside me. Our feet squished in the mud and the rain pounded on our umbrellas. "Myron?" I asked when we arrived next to him, just like the first time I had found him here in the cemetery. I lifted the umbrella over his head so he was out of the rain.

"More names will be added to this." He spoke solemnly.

"The entire village would have been added to this if we hadn't done something."

The corner of Myron's lips turned up. "Yes, I am aware, but if it weren't for Raven, we wouldn't have to add names at all."

Roy shoved his free hand into his pocket. "If not Raven, then it would be another. There is always work for a Riora."

"That is true," A smile broke out on Myron's face, and he put his hand on Roy's shoulder, "But until another arrives, let us celebrate the one we have already defeated."

"Wait," I stepped out from under the cover of the umbrella and kneeled down next to the memorial. I let pure Miutho flow from my hand and form into the shape of a candle. After placing the candle in the ground, I snapped my fingers, igniting a flame at my fingertips, and lit the candle before stepping back.

It was a Miutho candle, and rain, snow, sleet, or hail could never make it go out. Now, even in the darkest night, there would always be a light to guide the lost souls that never quite made it home.

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A hushed silence fell over the crowd when Dakim and I appeared in the doorway. Before us were rows upon rows of people. In the very front was the stage. Lady Vanek and the council leader stood in the center at the podium. To their left were King Anselm, Conrad, Dawn, Carmichael, Lance, Dustin, Christian, Luke, and Vic. On the right were Myron, Kian, Karexon, Roy, Hiram, Lynam, and Liam.

"I am proud to be standing here before you today in the center of a strong city and not in the ruins of one." Lady Vanek began her speech. "We have gathered here today to celebrate our victory over our enemy. Almost thirty years ago we gathered for the same reason. Ironically, we gathered to honor the father of the two we celebrate today. Asher Adelinda set out on impossible mission. He was prepared to die for a country that wasn't his own. He was a hero, and so are his two children. It is my honor to give the same award my predecessors gave Asher Adelinda to his children, Dakim and Raelyn."

Our names were the cue. I ignored the butterflies in my stomach as the first beats of the music began, and Dakim and I took our first steps forward. We made our way down the aisle, keeping to the rhythm of the music. When we were halfway down the aisle, I felt Dakim's Miutho connect to mine.

*Just think of this as practice for your wedding.*

I was careful not to roll my eyes, but I let Dakim feel my annoyance. *As if I wasn't nervous enough already...*

We made our way up the stage steps, and Lady Vanek and the council leader took a step to the side so we all were in the center. Myron stepped forward, holding two wooden cases. The council leader opened the first one, revealing the gold medallion inside. He carefully picked up the medallion, letting the ribbon unfold, and handed it to Lady Vanek. She held up the medallion for everybody to see, and then went up on her tip toes to place it around Dakim's neck.

"Thank you." He whispered, and she smiled.

The butterflies in my stomach went wild when the council leader opened the next wooden box and lifted up the gold medallion that would be given to me. I wasn't excited because I was receiving an award. I was excited because the medallion physically represented the months I had spent training, and the blood, sweat, and tears that were spilled in the process. It showed that I had fought for something I believed in. It symbolized all the people who had given their lives and all the lives we had managed to save. It was our victory.

Lady Vanek once more lifted the medallion up for everyone to see, and I bowed my head. Her fingers tickled my skin as she lowered the medallion over my head and then let it go. It was heavy, and came to a rest in the same spot as the Adelinda family crest. Lady Vanek stepped back as Dakim and I turned to face the crowd, and, taking Dakim's hand in mine, I brought our fists into the air. At that exact instant, the crowd burst into cheers and cannons fired so much confetti that I could hardly see Dakim standing next to me.

"I have one more announcement to make." Lady Vanek spoke into the microphone when the confetti finally cleared enough for people to see, surprising us all. This wasn't part of the ceremony. She took Roy's hand and then took mine as she led us both up to the podium. "For those of you who have not heard yet, a little over a week ago, Lord Adimari proposed to Lady Raelyn."

The crowd cheered once more, and several of the guys let out whistles. One shouted out, "Give her a kiss!"

Roy was hesitant, but Lady Vanek pushed him over to me and I smiled. He looked out at the crowd and then back at me. Then out of nowhere, he pulled me close to him, leaned me back, and gave me a passionate kiss. Unsurprisingly, the guys let out more shouts and whistles. Roy smiled as he put me back on my feet, and I tried to catch my breath, my cheeks feeling like they were on fire from embarrassment. His bright red eyes seemed to be on fire, reflected the pride and excitement he felt. It gave me an idea.

I stepped back in front of the podium, and the crowd slowly quieted down. "Forgive me if I'm a little flustered. I'm still trying to get my thoughts back in order." I joked and laughs rang throughout the crowd, but then I turned serious. "At this time I want to thank the people who made me who I am and who helped me get to where I am today, and please bear with me because it's a long list."

I took a deep breath and then looked out over the crowd. "I want to begin by thanking my parents, Asher and Catriona Adelinda. They gave their lives so that I may live to see another day.

Unfortunately my time spent with them was short, but I know they continue to watch over me. I also want to thank a Hunter named Colton Myska who had my back when I thought I was alone. Next, I want to thank Carmichael Wallace and Lance Demetriou for helping me take my first few steps as a Riora, and Lynam and Liam Keynes for helping me take my final steps when we applied for Ellipsis. King Anselm, Conrad Lyall, and Dawn Lyon took us in and came to our aid, and Lady Vanek trusted me even though I was the sister of a man everybody believed to be a traitor.

"I also want to thank the Blade Brothers, Hiram and Kian Dalca. Hiram didn't turn his back on me even after I called him a lying traitor. Kian was always there to help me in whatever way and was always there to give me the dumb downed version whenever I didn't understand. Karexon Radev," A smile broke out on my face as I spoke his name, "He always kept me in good spirits with his constant humor and goofy smile. I want to thank Victor Dymock. He did a lot of behind the scenes work that most people would just overlook. He spent so much time making sure that I had everything I needed to further my training. Luke Espie," I paused, searching for what to say about Luke. "I owe a lot to him. He was a loyal friend when everybody else turned away from our family. He stayed with my brother no matter what."

I took a deep breath as my emotions started to kick in. "The last couple of people I could go on and on about. The first are Christian and Dustin Murray. They raised me. They trusted me. Most of all, they believed in me. I grew up scared of my abilities because I had no idea why I had them. Yet, even though at the time I believed myself to be a freak, they stood by me and supported me. The second is Myron Masters. He didn't know me, but he offered me a home. He took it upon himself to make sure that I had everything I needed. He was my mentor, but he was also like a father. Even when I shut everybody else out, he was the one person who remained in my life. Next is my fiancé. Even when I had given up on myself, he didn't. He pushed me in my training, never letting me stop. He didn't let me get off easy. He always made me work for it." I turned to Roy. "Actually, you were a pain in the ass. Why am I marrying you?" The crowd laughed and I smiled, "No, in all honesty, he is everything I could hope for and more. I'd be lost without him. The final person is my brother. Although it may seem like I spend most of the time being angry at him at him for never giving me a straight answer, I actually spent most of my time admiring him. He's probably going to be angry with me later for saying this, but I still see him as the big brother who used to sit with me out in the field and teach me origami. He is the big brother every girl could only dream of.

"Lastly, I was to thank all of you. We never would have won if you all hadn't stood up to fight for what you believed in, to fight for your home. You are the real heroes." The crowd broke out in applause one last time and then I smiled, "This officially concludes our ceremony. Let the party begin!"

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"There you are!" Myron exclaimed when he found me a few hours later sitting on the picket fence that stood a little ways away from the party. "Disappearing from the party is something I would have expected Dakim or Roy to do."

I giggled, "Forgive me. I only came out here to think."

He joined me on the fence. "Think about what?"

I shrugged, "Life."

He rolled his eyes, "Here we go."

I laughed and nudged him in the shoulder. "I'm being serious."

He smiled and then waited for me to continue. I smiled as well and then looked out at the setting sun. "You know, for the past several months, I have done nothing but focus on Raven. Everything in my life revolved around him. Now that he's gone, I start thinking, what now? I've closed the chapter on Raven, but now I find myself staring at a blank page."

Myron smiled down at me, "Before I went to Earth, I had to learn all about the Unites States presidents, and I believe it was Abraham Lincoln who once said, 'The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time.' Don't worry about that plank page. Trust me. It will be filled soon enough."

"Thanks, Myron."

He patted me on the back and then walked away, leaving me to watch the sunset. I smiled to myself just as the last bit of sunlight disappeared beyond the horizon. The day had ended and a new one was just beginning. I decided that I would take after Roy and for once stop worrying about what was to come. I had the rest of my life to change the world. *I am here. It is now. This is life.*