

AVALON: Trail of the Tor



By
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Dedicated to Cherize van Coller, my number one supporter and best friend
who never gets tired of reading my drafts and ideas and Danielle Lee
who listened to my endless writers block rants without complaints.

CHAPTER 1

The day started out like any other. In the Evans household, everything was remarkably usual. Connor Evans woke up first. He baked Blueberry pancakes, drank his usual cup of coffee while reading the morning paper and then proceeded to wake his children. After breakfast, Caleb and Chloe had gotten dressed before heading to their rooms, Chloe carrying her cell phone against her ear and Caleb distractedly paging through a new computer magazine. It was an ordinary day – just like any other day in their lives. Everything changed, as soon as Connor turned on the television. Fourteen years of pretended normalcy ceased to exist. Even though he turned it to some music program, it merely flickered for a few seconds before switching to the news.

“Several people have reported seeing mysterious lights flickering over the Glastonbury Tor in the last three days. One onlooker described the lights as glowing baubles which floated and added that the lights moved around as though they were dancing. In other news...” Connor reached for the remote, turning the television off at once. He sat down slowly, fear nestling inside him. He could hear Caleb and Chloe’s laughter echoing throughout the house.

“They’re not ready.”

The desperate plea was whispered to the emptiness around him, but did nothing to ease his fears. Avalon. It was his home, but then Meryl died and he couldn’t come to terms with living there anymore. He had to take his children and leave. He knew the rules however. His wife’s father, Marlon had taken him aside when he had insisted on leaving all those years ago his voice urgent.

“You have to know that this is no permanent solution, Connor. They are going to have to come back.”

He wanted to refuse, tell the man that there was no way he’d ever return. But Marlon continued before he could open his mouth to speak. “You know the rules, Connor. You are aware of course, that my great ancestor Merlin, created the island of Avalon in an attempt to find a true magical home.”

Connor could only nod, unable to speak. “No one even knew that Merlin had a child, no one knew who the child’s mother was. Merlin himself did not know it until he was on his deathbed and that is when he told the child that he had intended Avalon to disappear with

his death. However, as his blood was inside the child, Avalon would not cease to exist as long as he – and his children – lived there.”

Connor realised what it meant. When Marlon died, his children would have to go to Avalon to keep it from vanishing.

The lights could only mean one thing. Marlon was dying. It was time to take his children back to the place he had once called home. It was time to go back to Avalon. He shuddered. His children were still playing outside, unaware that soon their peaceful existence would be shattered with the realisation that they would return to the place they had only heard of until now. Fourteen years, he had raised them as ordinary children, desperately believing that it could stay like that forever.

He never knew things could change so fast.

The magic of Avalon was slowly fading away along with Marlon’s last power to hold on to life. Even here, on her throne in the Castle of Camelot, she could feel it. Soon, there would be no more Avalon and they’d all be free to join the world outside of the protection of the magical island. Zephyra’s mouth twisted in an ugly smirk. Of course, the silly little Nomads would not be happy with that. Fools. They were satisfied with being hidden away here with their limited power, too afraid to pursue something greater. But not her.

Memories of years ago, a blonde man from beyond the borders of Avalon rushed to her mind and a tortured scream left her mouth. The throne disintegrated as her hand grasped the sides and she leant forward, her breathing rushed. “No.” She couldn’t allow the memories to return and make her vulnerable. She wouldn’t.

“My Lady!” Her thoughts were interrupted by a young woman entering quickly, her dark eyes wide in her head.

“Lady Zephyra...”

“What?”

Zephyra looked at the young shape shifter irritably. Though a capable fighter, the girl panicked too easily – as was evident by the sound of her voice now.

“There have been... rumours.”

“What rumours?”

Zephyra’s voice was sharp as she glared at the girl and Nola took a step backwards.

“There are children. Two. They are descendants of Merlin. They...”

“Impossible! I can feel the magic disappearing! There are none of his descendants in Avalon anymore!”

Madness haunted Zephyra's black eyes and Nola looked down quickly. "They are not here yet, Lady Zephyra, but... they are on their way."

An enraged scream left Zephyra's throat and she lifted her hand, sending Nola across the room. The shape shifter crashed into the wall, rubble falling down next to her instantly. Zephyra watched the crumbling wall for a second and with a wave of her hand, rebuilt a throne. She sat down on it and eyed Nola – suddenly calm.

"That is not good news, Nola."

Nola resisted the insane urge to roll her eyes at the older woman. Instead, she nodded.

"I know."

"Get out."

Zephyra sounded bored and Nola rushed away, crashing into a male figure on her way out. Obsession shone in Shia's eyes as he glanced at the quiet room. "Is she in there?"

Nola nodded, marvelling at the way he always seemed to look at Zephyra. "Yes. She's in a horrid mood though."

Shia frowned but ignored the warning, instead choosing to walk into the room bravely.

"Zephyra?"

He was the only one who never called her Lady. Usually Zephyra stood for it. No doubt the admiration of a young, handsome warrior flattered her. Today was different though as he had barely entered before she blasted him out of the room with a wave of her hands. Nola hid a smirk as she helped him up and the two walked off swiftly, stopping only for a second to listen to the taunting cackling of the woman inside.

"What's taking so long? I can feel it..." Savannah trembled as she looked down on the sand, moving her hands over it slowly. "I can feel the magic disappearing. Growing weaker. Why aren't they here yet? Marlon can't hold on any longer!"

"Calm down, Savannah."

It was Nathan who spoke, the ever calm leader of the Opulentia. Savannah turned to him, eyes blazing. "Calm down? Do you realise what'll happen if they don't turn up? No more Avalon. Do any of you know what it means?"

She gestured wildly, turning to face the two Nomads who sat quietly on a rock.

"Do you have any idea what they'll make us go through if... if..."

She broke off hysterically and Nathan stood, placing a cool hand on her neck. "Calm yourself, Savannah."

His voice held unsure authority and she smirked at him. “Yes, we must not lose control, right Nathan? Heaven forbid we had emotions.”

His eyes flashed, but he regained composure quickly. “I do prefer to avoid it.”

Savannah rolled her eyes and opened her mouth, but her retort was stopped by Lucian who stood slowly. “That is quite enough you two. Now, if Lorcan saw that they’d be here they’ll be here.”

Savannah looked at Lucian with reluctant respect. It was no secret that he was one of the strongest magical beings in Avalon. He could easily have been leader of the Opulentia, but instead chose to live in the mountains by himself. It was rather odd to have him with them, though she enjoyed it – if only to see Nathan view himself as an incompetent leader compared to Lucian. Savannah’s eyes travelled to Lorcan. The fifteen year old was the youngest Nomad ever to be chosen as a member of the Opulentia. Savannah grimaced. Most nomads had unsolved parentage. She was one of the few who had been born into a family of Nomads, though her mother had ceased travelling when she had her first child. Her great grandfather was first magical nomad ever. Born the son of a faerie and a mortal, he was seen as an outcast. A half-breed. He had travelled to the desert along with a few hundred other men and woman just like them, misfits to the society of Avalon. The group had grown over the years and by now more than a thousand nomads existed throughout Avalon. Lorcan was one of those who never knew his parents. Lucian had found him in the desert when he was a few months old. He kept to himself mostly, didn’t say much. When he spoke, it was usually about something of importance he had seen.

Like the arrival of the children of Merlin.

Excitement stirred in Savannah at the thought of this. Marlon was the last known descendant of Merlin – his daughter had died years before and her husband had left, taking their children with him.

When it became clear that Marlon was dying, panic spread throughout Avalon until Lorcan spoke. As usual, he was sitting alone at the tent, whispering to whatever insect he had found. He stood suddenly, approaching Savannah and Nathan. “They’re on their way.” Nathan spun around to look at Lorcan. “What are you talking about?”

“The children of Merlin. The ones who will make sure Avalon doesn’t disappear.”

He didn’t say anything else. He simply turned his back on them and sat down next to the tent again. Nathan had ordered her to find Lucian – a gruelling task. Lucian had returned to the desert with her and now there was nothing they could do but wait for their saviours to show up.

It was nearly midnight when Connor Evans woke up, his whole body trembling. He walked to the window, chills running down his back as he looked at the Tor. Where there had been small lights dancing around, it seemed as though all the lights had joined together in a spectrum of colour, whirling around the Tor. It was time.

He made his way over to Caleb's room first, waking him up before heading to Chloe's room. Both children looked at him sleepily as they put on warm jackets and scarves. "Dad, what's going on?"

It was Chloe who asked the question and he sat down, wringing his hands to keep them from shaking. "Do you remember me telling you about Avalon?"

Caleb nodded at once. "We were born there."

A shadow of a smile flickered on Connor's face. "Do you remember that I said... we'd go back there someday?"

Both children nodded and Connor took a deep breath. "Well... it's time."

"Now?"

Caleb's eyes were wide and Connor nodded.

"Now. Come on get in the car."

They drove up to the Tor in silence and Connor glanced back only once to see the awe on his children's faces as they stared at the beaming light. Connor parked the car a few feet from the steps, fully aware that he'd never see it again. They rushed up to the lights and Connor stopped in front of it. He could see Meryl's face etched in the light and the pain caused him to double over for a split second.

"Dad?"

Chloe's hesitant voice pulled him back to reality and he forced a smile to his face. "It's nothing."

She twirled a strand of hair around her finger nervously. "What does all this mean?"

Connor pulled her close, giving her a quick kiss on top of her head. "Sweetie... it means that we're leaving this world behind now."

"Forever?" He nodded curtly and Chloe took a deep breath, taking her phone out of her pocket. "Will my phone work there?"

Connor shook his head sadly and she took a step back. "Am I ever going to see my friends again?"

"No."

Caleb's hand crept to his sister's. "Do you... have magic powers in Avalon?"

Connor looked away. "I used to. I gave them up when I brought you here."

"Why did you bring us here?"

"I thought it would be safer. I needed... to be here. In a world without magic."

His voice broke as he stared at the lights. He wasn't ready to go back. Not that he had a choice. He pulled himself together quickly, taking his children's hands in his before stepping forward.

The light seemed to glow even brighter before it folded around them and started spiralling upwards, sending them to a vast nothingness.

She could feel it the minute they entered. Zephyra's enraged scream was loud enough to wake the dead and she turned her head to the skies, brown eyes turning black. "Hermico!" A dark cloud swooped towards her, turning into the charming Avalon messenger at once.

"Zephyra. What can I do for you?"

She trembled with fury as she looked at him, her face ashen. "I need you to call upon the leaders of all of my allies. I need to meet with them right now. If they're not here within seconds, I'll kill them just to get rid of my anger."

Hermico lifted a brow sarcastically. "What ever is the matter, dear Lady?"

Zephyra snarled at him. "Don't play dumb with me."

He barely managed to contain his laughter. "I see. You're not as happy about the magic returning to Avalon as the rest of us, are you?"

Fury rose in Zephyra's eyes at the sound of Hermico's amused voice. He took a step back and bowed mockingly, disappearing before a jet black tornado could hit him. Zephyra scowled angrily, sending the tornado into the sky before heading back into her castle.

CHAPTER 2

"They're here!"

Savannah saw the light first, rushing forward as the three people landed in the small oasis.

"Are you all right?"

Connor nodded, recognizing her at once. She had grown up since he had last seen her and he couldn't help but notice that she looked distinctively like her father.

"Savannah."

“Connor!”

She threw her arms around his neck, tears forming in her eyes, not even caring that his soaking clothes drenched her own. “Thank you.”

He didn’t need to ask what she thanked him for. The knowledge ached in him. Savannah’s eyes flickered to the children behind him and for a second he feared she’d kneel before them. She simply smiled before looking over her shoulder, however.

“Let’s get you dried off.”

He followed her to a tent, gratefully accepting the clothes she handed to him before watching as she guided Chloe to a different tent. He jumped when she returned minutes later, quickly fastening the top buttons of his shirt.

“Hurry up. Lucian would want to meet them.”

Connor jumped at the name, following her out of the tent at once. His breath hitched in his throat when he saw him. “Lucian.”

The years had no doubt changed his friend and Connor approached him hesitantly.

For a minute it seemed as though Lucian would hug Connor, but he took a step backwards at the last minute.

“Thanks for bringing the children.”

He turned his back on Connor and sat down in the sand, humming to himself tunelessly. A pang shot through Connor’s chest. There was a time when Lucian would never even think about turning his back on him.

Connor frowned as something brushed against him and a smile appeared on his face as his eyes followed his daughter. Chloe carefully walked to Lucian and sat down next to him, her hands folded neatly in her lap.

“What are you looking at?”

Lucian glanced at the girl quickly.

“You look nothing like your mum.”

Chloe moved closer to him, her eyes wide.

“Did you know her?”

“Yes.”

“I look like my dad. Caleb looks like mum. We’ve seen a portrait of her.”

Lucian simply grunted, his eyes fixated on a spot of sand and Chloe frowned, staring at the sand intently.

“What are you looking at?”

“I’m not looking at anything.”

Though he meant the words to be harsh, his tone was soft and Chloe smiled up at him.

“Why are you sitting here?”

“I like it.”

“Who are you?”

Lucian rolled his eyes, but smiled nevertheless.

“Lucian.”

Chloe’s eyes widened.

“My dad told me about you! He said you were his best friend!”

Lucian did not dare to look back at Connor. Instead, he kept his gaze on the girl with the piercing grey eyes.

“Did he now?”

Chloe nodded before scrunching her nose.

“He described you a little differently though.”

“Oh?”

“He said you were friendly, fun and very talkative.”

“Things change.”

He stood quickly and Chloe followed, slipping a hand into his. “My dad once said if we came back here, you’d teach us magic. Is that true?”

Lucian turned slowly. His eyes met Connor’s and he looked at the boy beside him – he truly did resemble Meryl as the girl had rightly said. He turned back to Chloe after a while, nodding curtly. “Yes. I’m going to teach you.”

“Why?”

“What?”

Chloe looked at him, startled by his rude tone. “I... I mean why do we need to learn magic?”

“Don’t you want to?”

“I guess.”

Lucian’s eyes narrowed and he nudged her towards Savannah. “You should go meet your grandfather. Take your brother with you.”

Chloe nodded and grabbed Caleb’s hand before rushing towards Savannah.

Savannah smiled, taking Chloe’s hand and leading her towards the tent where Marlon lay.

Lucian turned to Connor who was looking at his old friend apprehensively.

“You look happy to see us, Lucian.”

"We'll save the group hug for later. There's something you need to know."

He motioned for Connor to follow him. Lucian waited until they were out of earshot before turning to Connor, several emotions brooding in his eyes. "Do you remember Zephyra?"

"Of course! How is she?"

A muscle jumped in Lucian's jaw. "Demented. She doesn't want them here, Connor. She wants Avalon to end so she can... well, I have to admit I don't know what her plans are. We don't exactly share thoughts and secrets anymore."

Connor frowned, worry for his children building up in him. "What? What happened?"

"It's a long story. The point is... she'll do anything to get them away from here. That's why we need to teach them what we know. That's why... I... need to teach them, help them. They need to be able to fight her if it comes to that."

"Fight her? Lucian, they're... She's... she's an elemental. They're just children."

"They are children with magical abilities, Connor! Abilities they would have been familiar with had they grown up here!"

"You know I couldn't stay, Lucian!"

"You weren't the only one who lost someone."

"I'm sorry."

Lucian turned away once more, his jaw set. "That's beside the point. I know you don't want them to fight, Connor, but... with what Zephyra has become... they might not have a choice."

Connor shook his head grimly. "I'm going to see my father in law."

Lucian smirked. "After how you've left? I'm sure it'll be a lovely family reunion."

Tears formed in the old man's eyes when the twins entered the tent. The boy was the spitting image of his daughter. "Come here. Let me see you."

He himself was shocked by how weak his voice had become. Tears shot to his eyes as the twins rushed forward. The boy, Caleb, grinned brightly, hugging him spontaneously.

"Grandpa!"

Chloe seemed a little more reserved, but she held onto his hand tightly. Marlon managed a smile. "It's so good to finally meet you two. You are beautiful. Both of you."

Chloe's clear eyes burnt a hole through him. "Are you really dying?"

Marlon's aqua eyes clouded over. "I am, dear."

She took a deep breath, tears forming in her eyes. "It's not fair. We never got to know you!"

Marlon raised his hand, touching her hair lovingly. "At least I got to see you. I can die... happy."

"Dad."

Connor's voice had not changed one bit. Marlon raised his eyes to meet those of Connor and he forced a smile to his face as he returned his gaze to his grandchildren.

"You go... to Savannah and Nathan. You have a lot to learn. Remember that... your grandfather loved you. Very much."

They rushed out and Marlon hoisted himself up, looking at Connor sternly. "Connor. There's something we need to discuss before I die."

Connor smirked. "Down to business as usual."

Marlon took a deep breath. "It's about what you did to Hecate."

A muscle jumped in Connor's jaw. "I prefer not to discuss that."

Marlon frowned sternly. "I'm not going to tell you how utterly selfish and wrong it was. You should know, however, that it hurt her. It changed her in ways you cannot imagine. You should fix it."

A muscle jumped in Connor's jaw. "I know what I did was wrong. But with all due respect... it's none of your business."

Marlon closed his eyes. "If you're willing to live with what you've done, I can't stop you. I just care too much to let you allow guilt to destroy you. I need my rest now."

Connor almost ran out of the tent, his heart racing. He was barely back and already it felt like the past was catching up with him.

The dark cloud swept through the snow quickly, touching the ground as it passed a group of people before it turned into a tall man. Shia groaned as he looked at the man, his lip curling in distaste. "Hermico. What do you want?"

Hermico smirked, his blue eyes trailing over Shia. "Your darling Lady wants to see you."

He glanced at the whole group and sniggered. "All of you."

With a last look at them he disappeared in another cloud of smoke and Nola groaned, glaring up at the sky. "I have a feeling I know what this is about."

She shrugged at Shia's enquiring look, straightening her shoulders.

"We'd best get going."

It was infuriating. Avalon's magic was stronger than she'd ever felt it. It was not supposed to happen this way. Marlon was supposed to die a peaceful death and take the isle with

him. Zephyra jumped when four figures suddenly appeared in front of her and her eyes narrowed.

“Only you?”

It was Nola who spoke, the only female among them.

“Only the leaders came, my Lady.”

“I see.”

Zephyra’s eyes trailed over the four. Besides Nola and Shia, there was Tristan – with his blonde hair and blue eyes, no doubt the most handsome man in Avalon and the leader of the Veolo and Ianto, the burly head of the Aqti. It was an open question as to why they wanted Avalon to vanish and live their lives in a world where they might face persecution, but Zephyra preferred to keep some questions unasked. She was strong enough to destroy the world that would want to persecute her for her powers, she knew that. Nothing else, no one else mattered. She shook her head slightly, forcing herself to focus.

“You should be able to feel the magic returning to Avalon once more. I want you to make a plan to get rid of the children. Whoever succeeds... will be rewarded greatly.”

She disappeared with a whirl of her black dress, leaving the four without another word and they looked at each other curiously. Shia was the first to speak.

“Well... I guess we should come up with a plan to get rid of them. Quickly.”

“Rock Mountain? You want to take my children up to Rock Mountain?”

Connor stared at Lucian indecorously. Lucian seemed unaffected by this, as he simply shrugged. “I live there.”

Connor caught Nathan’s eyes, but the tall Nomad simply shook his head and Connor relented. “Fine. Just... be careful please?”

Lucian scoffed and nodded at Caleb and Chloe. “All right then you two. Come on, we don’t have all day. We should get going.”

Savannah frowned at Lucian. “Surely you can wait until tomorrow, Lucian. The sun is setting.”

Lucian’s icy gaze was enough to make her turn from him and send a pleading glance in Nathan’s direction. Nathan, however, shook his head. “It’s no use, Savannah. You know him.”

Lucian laughed humourlessly and nodded at the children. “You ready?”

Caleb looked from Lucian to Connor nervously. “Is dad coming with us?”

Connor's eyes flickered towards Lucian. "No, I'm not. But you'll be back at in the morning. Right Lucian?"

Lucian smirked, but his nod was curt. Caleb inched closer to Connor at once and Savannah stormed forward, grabbing Lucian's arm. She dragged him away, her voice hushed. "You could try at least."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You're scaring them, Lucian."

"Well, Avalon is a scary place. They have to get used to it."

"It's not their fault Connor took them away. Don't take it out on them that you're angry at their father."

"I'm not angry!"

Savannah rolled her eyes at him. "You lost Meryl, who was one of your best friends. Then Connor, your best friend in the world left and then, to make it worse, you lost Zephyra as well, who was not only your friend, but..."

"Don't talk about Zephyra to me!"

Anger flushed in him and Savannah took a step back, as though she suddenly realised that she's overstepped her bounds. "I'm sorry, Lucian. I know it's not my place, but... you needed to hear it. The kids... they don't stand a chance if you don't help them and you're not going to help them the way you can if you're angry all the time."

"Fine."

He forced a painful smile onto his face before walking back to the kids and Savannah sighed sympathetically before walking back to Nathan. "You should have been the one to talk to him, Nathan."

Nathan shrugged guiltily, avoiding her eyes. "You seemed to have it covered."

Silence settled between them and the turned towards Lucian who was leading Caleb and Chloe towards the mountains as Connor looked on.

CHAPTER 3

"Zephyra!"

The voice was a hushed whisper and she spun round, eyes gleaming on the pale face in front of her. "What do you want?"

Dark eyes flickered. "The children are here."

Zephyra's voice was harsh, unforgiving.

"You think I'm not aware of that? I can feel the magic around me! It's growing stronger every minute."

"They're heading to Rock Mountain with Lucian."

A terrifying sound escaped Zephyra's lips and the dark figure stepped back.

"It's not my fault!"

She laughed humourlessly. "If I thought for a second that it was your fault you'd be dead already."

Hoofs tapped backwards and Zephyra snarled. "Just get out of here. I'll deal with Lucian."

The shadow of a centaur disappeared into the darkness and Zephyra sat down. A small smirk formed on her face. It seemed as though she'd be visiting Rock Mountain again.

"So... are we just going to sit here?"

Caleb opened one eye to look at Lucian, who considered ignoring the boy. He opened his eyes after a few minutes however, sighing. "It's called meditating."

"Yeah. It's boring."

Caleb looked at Lucian fiercely and he groaned, throwing his head back. "It's necessary."

"Why?"

"To summon your powers."

Chloe opened her eyes as well, a frown forming between her brows. "To summon our powers?"

Lucian rolled his eyes, giving up on concentrating. "Power Augmentation is one of my powers."

"Meaning?"

It was Caleb who asked and Lucian sighed dramatically.

"Meaning I can sense and enhance the powers of everyone in Avalon. Or take them away if given the chance. I need to meditate with you to sense what powers you possess and then enhance them so you can start using them at a higher level than you normally would."

"Why?"

This time it was Chloe and Lucian closed his eyes, suddenly grateful that he never had any children. "Because you're going to have to fight to stay here."

"What if we don't want to stay here? We had lives back in Glastonbury."

Lucian smirked at Chloe.

"I'm sure you did. But your father probably told you why you needed to come back."

Caleb nodded slowly. "So why do we have to fight?"

"Because there are... people who don't want you here."

"Like who?"

"That doesn't matter. Could you focus now?"

Caleb groaned irritably. "How long until we get our powers?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"On how well you concentrate."

Chloe sighed, resting her face in her palms. "I'm never going to be able to concentrate for that long."

Lucian gritted his teeth. "Try."

"I'm trying!"

An icy wind swept over them before Lucian could retort and he stood quickly. "Get behind me."

Chloe and Caleb moved instinctively, cowering behind Lucian as a figure appeared in the wind. "Zephyra."

Lucian's voice held no emotion as he looked at her and she smirked at him. "I thought I'd find you here, Lucian."

Lucian moved forward hesitantly, his eyes not leaving her for a second. "Zephyra, they're just children."

"They're in my way."

Her voice was cold. His, pleading. "Don't do this."

She laughed a chilling laugh and Lucian raised his hands just as she lifted hers. A powerful force field blocked the whirlwind she sent in their direction and she jumped back as it turned towards her, sending it up in the air with a flick of the palm.

"Don't make me hurt you, Zephyra."

She was taunting him with a seemingly innocent smile and his heart ached. She hadn't changed in appearance much. Her raven hair was longer and messier – it no longer had the vibrant shine it used to and her eyes were empty. But other than that she looked exactly like she used to. She still had the same small frame, pale skin and playful smile.

"Enjoying the trip down memory lane?"

He broke free from the powerful used to be's and memories, sending her flying backwards with the tap of his hand and Zephyra groaned as she landed on the hard ground, looking up at him. Laughing.

“Hide. Now!”

His instruction to the children was gruff, hasty and he stormed forward, a jet black bolt shooting out of his hand, flattening her before she could move again. Her tornado hit him, sending him a few feet back before he jumped up once more and rushed forward where invisible ropes were already tying her up.

Zephyra smiled as he approached her, painful memories penetrating his mind with each step closer. “You’re strong, Lucian.”

His eyes were burning with tears as he looked at her, the vicious attack on his mind causing him to double over. It stopped suddenly and he looked up, surprised to see a glimmer of sorrow in her eyes as well. Lucian grimaced as the ropes loosened themselves. He shook his head as she blew a curl out of her eyes, licking salt from his upper lip.

“We can’t hurt each other, can we? Not really.”

She didn’t answer him, simply stared out in front of her – unwilling to meet his eyes. “Just go, Zephyra.”

She disappeared in a whirlwind, leaving him dazed and frazzled.

The children.

“Where are you? Caleb? Chloe!”

They emerged from behind a rock, both trembling. “Wh... who was that?”

The question came from Chloe and Lucian sighed.

“Her name is Zephyra.”

Caleb frowned, his eyes glued to Lucian’s face. “What did she want with us?”

“She wants to kill you. Or get you out of Avalon. That’s why you need your powers.”

“But you’re able to fight her.”

“I am.”

Caleb frowned, taking a step back. “You hesitated.”

“What?”

“When you were fighting her. You didn’t want to hurt her.”

Lucian turned away, stomping on a scorpion before it could scurry away. “Let’s get on with the meditating.”

“Why didn’t you want to hurt her?”

Lucian glared at Caleb, his eyes shooting daggers towards the boy. “It’s not your place to question my actions.”

“What if those actions endanger our lives?”

"You don't need to be worried about that."

Caleb stepped forward, eyes blazing. "How do we know we can trust you?"

"If I wanted to hurt you, I would have done it already."

"But you could have taken care of her and you didn't!"

"Stop questioning me."

"Or what?"

Lucian took a deep, calming breath. He could feel the energy burning in his hand and... A tree suddenly swiped at him, the branch slamming into his legs and sending him crashing down towards the earth. "What the..."

The realisation of what was happening hit him as he looked at Caleb who stared at the tree wide-eyed, his hands raised.

Lucian stood slowly, wiping a drop of blood from the corner of his mouth.

"If you want to fight me, boy, you'd better be ready for it."

He glanced at Chloe who was staring at her brother fearfully. She stepped forward suddenly. "I won't let you fight him."

"What are you going to do?"

The knock he sent their way hit them back a few inches and he quietly sent a force field their way too, ensuring they wouldn't get hurt.

"Leave her out of this!"

Caleb jumped at his sister's defence, desperately trying to control his power, eyes glued to the tree. Both Chloe and Caleb jumped back when the tree burst into flames and she shook her head, hand clasped over her mouth.

"I didn't mean to do that!"

Lucian laughed softly, the snap of his fingers extinguishing the flames.

"Of course. You're Connor and Meryl's children. You wouldn't do anything the usual way."

Caleb frowned, confused and Lucian smiled. "You got your powers because you stood up against me. Having said that... I am on your side. Get some sleep. We'll go down to the desert tomorrow. Savannah and Nathan can help you control your powers."

"Why can't we go back now?"

Lucian rolled his eyes, gesturing around him. "Because it's dark, I'm tired and we're not climbing down a mountain until sunrise."

He settled down on the ground and closed his eyes, falling asleep within seconds.

Caleb and Chloe shared a look and she shrugged before curling up on the ground and closing her eyes. Caleb sat down next to his sister, sighing. Chloe opened an eye to look at him, questions playing in her dark eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t sleep on the ground.”

“You haven’t even tried.”

Caleb sighed, his eyes drifting towards the direction of the desert. “I want to go home.” Chloe curled herself up in a small bundle. “This is our home now. We should make the best of it.”

A small fire burned in the desert, the light playing on the face of the man sitting on an isolated log. Connor was worried.

His children were somewhere up in the mountain with the man who used to be his best friend, the man who hated him now. “Connor?”

He jumped at the sound of a hesitant voice, forcing a polite smile onto his face as Savannah sat down next to him. “Don’t be worried. Lucian will take good care of them.”

“I know.”

He watched her as she sat, her slim figure carrying an air of elegance and vigour. “Why is Nathan leader?”

Savannah’s dark eyes snapped towards him at the question and he shrugged. “Why not Lucian? Or you for that matter? Your father was Leader.”

Shadows played over her face as she bent forward slightly, silky black hair falling to the ground. “It was supposed to be Lucian.”

“I thought it’d be him.”

Savannah smiled sadly. “We all did. It should have been. My father chose him, but he...”

She hesitated, biting down on her lower lip. “He didn’t want it. After Meryl died, you left and Zephyra... changed... he didn’t want any of it. He just went up to Rock Mountain and

stayed there. He helps us if we really need him, but he doesn’t want much to do with us.”

Connor frowned and Savannah glanced at him. “It hurt him, you know. Meryl’s death, but you and Zephyra... he felt you had a choice and you chose to abandon him. He doesn’t trust anyone anymore. He only counts on himself.”

Emotion cracked in Connor’s voice as he raised the next question. “So... why didn’t your father choose you?”

Savannah averted her gaze to the fire, shrugging slightly. "I guess he... my father, he... just didn't believe I could do it."

"I'm sorry I left, Savannah."

His voice was contemplating, composed and Savannah lifted her head to find his eyes.

"I'm sorry you left too. Especially without saying goodbye."

Connor took a deep breath. "I know. That wasn't fair."

A strangled cry from the tents attracted their attention and their necks snapped up.

The realisation hit Savannah like a ton of bricks and she closed her eyes.

"Marlon."

Connor was first to reach the tent, Savannah close behind. Nathan was crouched over the wizard, his eyes filled with tears. "I came in to check on him. He... his body is cold already, it probably happened hours ago. He was all alone."

Savannah shook her head, hesitantly reaching out to touch Nathan's shoulder.

"No, he wasn't. He'd met his grandchildren. He was completely content, Nathan. He wasn't alone."

Nathan crouched down, picking Marlon's cold body up in his arms. "He wanted... he wanted to be buried in the forest. He didn't want a funeral. I'm going to do... what he had asked of me."

Savannah nodded politely. "I'll call Hermico. Ask him to tell everyone."

"Thank you."

Connor followed her outside, watching quietly as she called softly up into the sky. The cloud landed right in front of her feet, Hermico's trademark smirk disappearing when he recognized Connor.

"What are you doing back?"

Connor shrugged. "I missed you too, Hermico."

Hermico did not return Connor's smile. Instead, his eyes flashed.

"You don't get to make jokes with me. Not after what you've done. What do you want, Savannah?"

Savannah bit down on her lower lip. "Hermico... Marlon just passed away."

His expression changed from irritation to sadness in a second and a light drizzle began to fall at once. "I see. I'll be off to... share the news then."

Savannah reached forward impulsively, squeezing his hands. "Thank you, Hermico."

He nodded, spinning away quickly, the rain falling faster by the second.

Lucian was the first to wake as soon as the sun started rising over the mountains.

He stood swiftly, grunting at Chloe and Caleb who sat grudgingly. "We should go back."

Caleb stood first, holding his hand out to Chloe. She allowed him to pull her to her feet, yawning. A glimmer of a smile shadowed on Lucian's face as he looked at the twins who were already prepared to descend down the mountain.

"I'm proud of you. Both of you."

True approval shone in the brown eyes fixed upon them and Lucian nodded quickly before heading down the mountain. Chloe and Caleb shared a satisfied smile before following him swiftly, their way down the mountain suddenly seeming shorter.

A pair of clear blue eyes followed the three as they descended down the mountain, a small hand buried in the fur of the threatening Liger next to her.

A growl escaped the fierce animal's throat and the small blonde girl shook her head slowly.

"Don't, Maslow."

Yellow and blue eyes met, something in the clear eyes of the girl speaking to the Liger. It lay down on the ground, its tail slowly moving from one side to the other.

The girl seemed to relax, stifling a scream as it stormed forward, rushing past the three.

Though the older man and the girl seemed unaffected by the majestic animal rushing past them, the boy looked at the Liger in awe before rushing after it.

CHAPTER 4

Chloe and Lucian stood frozen for a few seconds as Caleb's figure disappeared after the Liger, before Chloe lunged forward in an attempt to follow her brother. "Caleb, no!"

Chloe's voice held a note of hysteria, but Lucian reached forward, grabbing her arm before she could follow him. "No! We go back to the desert. Once you're there, I'll come back for him."

Chloe's eyes widened at the thought of leaving her brother and she tried vigorously to pull her arm from Lucian's grasp. "No! I'm not leaving him!"

Irritation seeped through Lucian, but he knelt down in front of her, his voice trembling with gravity. "Chloe, listen to me. I promise I'll bring him back, but we're taking you to the desert first. I'm never going to find him if I have to worry about you too. Besides, you'll

never make it over the mountain. The only reason why he's able to do it is because he can control earth. Just let me handle it."

Tears formed in her eyes, but she relented, allowing him to lead her down the mountain and back to the desert.

Caleb finally stopped when he noticed the unfamiliar terrain around him, his heart beating wildly in his chest. Something about the majestic animal forced him to follow it – he could not stop his feet from rushing after it, barely noticing the rocks giving way in front of his feet as he ran. Now that the Liger had disappeared from sight, however, he found himself lost in a strange forest.

"H... hello?"

A chill ran down his back at the eerie emptiness greeting his hesitant call and he moved quickly, shielding his body behind a tree. His body jerked when he heard a bizarre noise and he moved forward carefully. A herd of deer appeared out of nowhere, the large brown animals storming past him hurriedly. He gasped as he fell down on the ground, stifling a scream when a loud crack sounded through the air as one of the animals stepped on his ankle. Caleb groaned, the searing pain in his ankle responsible for the tears filling his eyes. A sob stuffed in his throat when another sound reached his ears. Light footsteps were making their way towards him and he looked over his shoulder.

A rather large shrub was visible, a few feet behind him and he pressed himself up on his hands, shifting towards the shrub as quickly as possible. Caleb closed his eyes as he crept in underneath the shrub, his heart beating rapidly as the footsteps grew nearer.

"Maslow?"

Of all the things he had expected, the sound of a coy, girly voice was definitely not one. Caleb opened one eye slowly. It was a girl who stood not far from him, her blonde hair shining in the soft sunlight. She was probably his age, perhaps a year younger. He shifted out of his hiding place, looking at her cautiously.

Her pale blue eyes found his and a crease appeared between her brows.

"Are you hurt?"

Caleb nodded, motioning to his ankle. "I heard it crack."

She sat down next to him, her pale hands resting on his ankle lightly. A small smile made its way onto her face.

"I'm Juliet."

"I'm Caleb."

He gasped as a strange warmth crept from her hands to his ankle, the pain gradually vanishing. "How did you do that?"

She smiled once more, her hands not releasing his ankle until the pain had evaporated entirely.

"I can heal."

Caleb nodded silently and she looked up at him slowly.

"I saw you following Maslow."

Caleb frowned slightly.

"Maslow?"

Juliet nodded curtly.

"He's a liger. He protects me. You shouldn't have followed him."

"I couldn't help it."

Something flickered in Juliet's eyes but she shrugged it off, turning her back on him.

"I'll get a horse to take you home."

"How do you..."

The whistle escaping her lips was the most beautiful sound he had ever heard and Caleb stood, entranced by the glow radiating from her as a tuneless song flew from her mouth. An enormous horse galloped towards them seconds later and Juliet walked to him, her hand resting against the horse's neck.

"Take him back to the desert."

She glanced at Caleb quickly before looking back at the horse.

"It's where he belongs."

Caleb walked towards them, entranced. His eyes found Juliet's as he mounted the horse and he spoke softly, his voice hoarse with anticipation.

"Will I see you again?"

Juliet's smile held a hint of sadness. "Avalon isn't that big. I have a feeling we'll run into each other when we least expect it."

In a deeper part of the forest, Hecate lifted a brow as Hermico walked to her door nonchalantly. "First the rain and now you're walking? Something must be wrong, Hermico!" The messenger's clear blue eyes were troubled as he looked at the beautiful witch.

"Hecate. Marlon is dead."

Hecate's eyes widened and she brought her hand up to her heart. "No! So soon?"

"It gets worse."

"It does?" Hermico closed his eyes. He was simply the messenger of all in Avalon. No one had ever seen him as a friend except for Hecate. Being the most powerful witch ever to exist, she knew what it was like being used. Therefore she had contained her powers and decided to hide away in a secluded hut in the forest. The two of them had bonded over being used only for what they meant to everyone in Avalon and they had become friends. It grieved him to upset her in any way.

"Connor is back."

"Oh."

It was not the reaction he had expected. When Connor had left, Hecate was a wreck. He was part of the reason why she had secluded herself, Hermico knew this. "Oh? That's it?" Hecate shrugged, smiling. "I knew he'd be back with the children when I helped him go, Hermico."

"And it doesn't bother you?"

She stepped forward, taking her friend's hand. "Avalon doesn't only need Caleb and Chloe. It needs Connor too. There's a war coming and he'll fight it. It's for the greater good."

Hermico grimaced. "How long must we suffer for the greater good?"

She touched his cheek gently. "Suffering is the price we pay for feeling. It is good that Connor is here. Perhaps he can convince Lucian to put an end to Zephyra's madness. I'm afraid of what that woman might get up to."

"Dad!"

Connor's head snapped up at the sound of Chloe's voice and he stood, rushing forward and swooping her into a hug. Fear etched inside him as she wrapped her arms around his neck, burying her head in his shoulder. "Dad... Caleb... he... he..."

Anguish lay naked in Connor's eyes as he looked up at Lucian. "Where is my son?"

"Connor, I'll go back for him, I swear."

"What happened? Where is he?"

Lucian glanced at the mountain before looking back at Connor. "There was an animal. A liger. Caleb followed it before I could stop him."

Lucian stepped forward, the horror in Connor's eyes mirrored in his own. "I'll bring him back to you, Connor."

He turned swiftly, heading to the mountain once more and Connor sat down, his arms wrapped around his daughter. "I'm scared, dad."

He couldn't bring himself to speak – neither to comfort her nor to echo her fears. All he could bring himself to do was hold her closer, his eyes closed in a desperate plea for his friend to bring his son back.

“Nola!”

Nola, Ianto, Shia and Tristan looked up from where they were plotting at the sound of Zephyra's voice and Nola stood quickly. It was not necessary for her to leave the room, however, as Zephyra busted in angrily.

“Where's Juliet?”

Nola turned to face the guys who looked up at her with blank expressions. “She... we... we were here the whole time, Zephyra... She was right here with us!”

Zephyra leaned forward slightly, glaring at the shape shifter. “Well quite clearly... she isn't here right now.”

Somehow Zephyra lowering her voice was more frightening than her screaming and Nola stepped back hastily. Zephyra's eyes flickered over every figure in the room.

“Find my daughter.”

She left the room with a whirl of her cloak and Tristan stood, his pale hands shaking.

“We'd better find her. Before someone else does.”

He evaporated into thin air and the remaining three glanced at each other before rushing out as well.

“Caleb, where are you?”

Lucian's voice was a hoarse whisper as he glanced around, tormented by thoughts of what could have happened to the boy. He had crossed almost the whole of Avalon, looking for him. Snow still clung to his beard and hair from his journey through the forest. He shook his head quickly, searching the mountain for any sign, any sound...

“Caleb!”

A soft whimper caught his attention and he moved in the direction of the sound swiftly.

“Who's there? Come out, I won't hurt you. I promise!”

It was a small, blonde girl who crept out of the cave and his breath hitched in his throat.

“Juliet?”

The pale blue eyes looked up at him, confused. “Do you know me?”

Lucian knelt down next to her and shook his head.

“No. I know... I knew... your mother.”

His fingers found the crystal hanging from his neck and a smile shadowed on his face. Juliet's eyes widened and she leaned forward to touch the crystal.

"Mum has one just like this."

"She does?"

Juliet nodded and took a step backwards. "Who are you?"

"My name is Lucian."

The pale blue eyes were fixed on him and he rested a hand on her head. "I won't harm you, Juliet. I promise."

"I know. I trust you."

He lifted her up in his arms swiftly, smiling. "Let's get you back home."

"Thank you. The boy you were looking for..."

Lucian froze. "I found him in the forest. He's on his way back to the desert already."

"Thank you, Juliet."

"Caleb!"

Chloe's cry was loud enough to wake the dead and she sped forward as soon as she noticed the horse carrying her brother, throwing her arms around his neck as soon as his feet touched the ground. "I'm so glad you're okay! We were worried, how did you get back?"

Caleb smiled, hugging his sister back hesitantly. For some reason, he decided not to tell her – or anyone else – about Juliet. A part of him wanted to keep her a secret as though he feared her memory would fade if he dared to share it with anyone.

"It's a long story."

Chloe's hand slipped into her brother's and she looked up at him, her eyes gleaming with tears.

"A part of me died when you ran after that thing, Caleb."

"I'm sorry."

She frowned suddenly, gripping his hand tighter. "Lucian! He's out there looking for you, he won't return without you!"

"What?"

She pulled him towards the fire, her expression anxious. "Come on! We have to tell Nathan and Savannah!"

Caleb followed his sister to the fire, the memory of the pale blonde girl safely buried within him.

Lucian took a deep breath as he passed the slow, his eyes flickering over the Lake in front of him and the castle behind it. A castle he had once dreamed of too...

An invisible force shot him back as his feet touched the water and he felt Juliet's arms leaving his neck before falling flat on his face. Lucian groaned as he sat up and his eyes shot towards Juliet. "Are you hurt?"

She shook her head silently, fear creeping into her eyes once more.

"If... if you're my mother's friend, why did she block the Lake against you?"

Lucian shook his head silently. "I brought you here safely, Juliet. I'll just... I'll call your mother."

She dashed forward as his fingers touched the crystal around his neck, shaking her head violently. "No! It's a trap, you want to hurt her!"

"Juliet!"

Lucian seized the girl's arms and knelt down in front of her, his eyes sincere.

"I promise... I won't hurt her."

"Really?"

"Really. Let me call her, make sure you're safe."

"If you hurt her..."

A smile played on Lucian's lips for a split second. "I promised, remember?"

Juliet nodded and watched apprehensively as he touched the crystal once more, turning it around three times to the left, four times to the right.

A shadow of Zephyra appeared at once and Lucian looked at it grimly.

"Zephyra, I'm at the Lake. I have your daughter with me."

The shadow disappeared swiftly and Lucian turned towards Juliet. "I guess she's on her way."

CHAPTER 5

Zephyra flew over grass and snow, her heart racing. Juliet. She was with Lucian of all people. She raised her hands impatiently, allowing the wind to carry her through the air swiftly. "Juliet!"

She saw them as soon as she reached the Lake and shot forward, swooping her daughter into her arms. Two pairs of brown eyes met over Juliet's head and Zephyra nodded slightly.

"Thank you for bringing her to me."

Lucian moved forward carefully. "I... I know what it's like to lose someone. I didn't want you to worry."

Zephyra nodded and turned to head over the Lake, but Lucian grabbed her arm before she could. "Wait."

"What?"

His eyes spoke volumes as he looked at her. "Why... why did you block the Lake against me?"

Something flickered in Zephyra's eyes, but she shook it off, the cold exterior playing upon her face once more. "I had to. You know it as well as I do."

"You didn't have to."

She stepped into the Lake, meeting his eyes once more. "Yes, Lucian... I had to. We were friends... before, but now... we're on opposite sides. I had to do it."

She disappeared across the Lake before he could reply and Lucian turned, his eyes burning with the realisation that she was right. She had to do it.

The figures appeared one by one, glancing around the room before breathing a sigh of relief upon the realisation that Zephyra was not there. Tristan looked at his friends quickly.

"Have any of you thought of a plan to get rid of the children yet?"

The petite figure appeared out of nowhere and Tristan, Nola, Shia and Ianto fell down in respect, glancing up at Zephyra nervously. She sat down, fingers tracing the lines of the throne. "You'll have to separate them from the Nomads. And Lucian."

Tristan's eyes shot upwards to face her, his face even paler than usual.

"My Lady... Lucian is with them?"

Zephyra snarled, anger ruling every fibre of her being. "Of course Lucian is with them!"

She grabbed onto the throne and leant forward slightly. "You all know how strong Lucian is – even without the power of the Castle. You have to find a way around him."

Tristan hesitated, eyeing her thoughtfully. "We could go through him."

"No!"

Her reply came swiftly, her voice harsh. "You will find a way around him. I won't let you risk going through him. He's too strong."

Shia frowned, glancing up at her. "True... but, we... you and us by association... we have the power of Camelot!"

Zephyra leaned back in the chair and an icy smile played around her lips. "Yes. Yet, he was able to kill me today. He didn't - out of choice. I'm afraid the rest of you do not have the... advantage... of a history with him."

She looked at them intently, her eyes narrowed. "He will not hesitate to kill you. Although he chose not to be a part of the Opulentia, Lucian is dedicated to Avalon. He will protect this place even though it is not truly his job. He will do whatever it takes to stop us. I want you to go around him. Do not get into a fight with him. Don't look at him, don't talk to him, do not breathe the same air he does. Are we clear?"

Her black eyes spat fire at the four and they retreated unwillingly.

"Are we clear?"

Tristan was the first to nod, followed by Nola and Ianto. Shia joined reluctantly, refusing a verbal promise however. Zephyra glared at them one last time before leaving and Tristan moved to the fireplace. "Move around Lucian. How do we move around Lucian?"

Shia's eyes darted towards the three people who crowded around the fireplace together. Smirking, he disappeared, rushing off to the forest in solitude.

"Lucian!"

Chloe saw him first, rushing forward. "He's back, Caleb is back!"

"I know."

She didn't think to ask how, just pulled him towards the fire where Caleb sat next to his father. Lucian rushed forward, pulling the boy up by his shoulder. "Come with me."

Nathan stood, looking at Lucian cautiously. "Lucian..."

Lucian simply glared at Nathan, pulling Caleb to the side with him. Caleb bit down on his lower lip, looking up at Lucian nervously. Lucian looked down at the boy, trembling as thoughts of what could have happened rushed through his mind once more. "Caleb..."

"I know. I really shouldn't have done it."

"You could have died."

Caleb sighed and folded his arms. "I couldn't help it."

"If you want to survive in Avalon, you're going to have to learn how to control those urges. Magical creatures are fascinating, but they can be dangerous. You can't just run off to explore every time you see something you're not used to. If Juliet hadn't found you..."

"How'd you know about her?"

Lucian frowned, observing Caleb closely.

"She told me she found you. What did you tell the others?"

"That the horse found me."

"Why not tell them about her?"

Caleb shrugged, avoiding Lucian's eyes. "I don't know. I just felt that if I kept it to myself..."

"She wouldn't disappear?"

Caleb nodded, looking at the older man thoughtfully. "You know what that's like, don't you?"

"I do, Caleb. And I know what it's like to be fourteen too."

"So you're not mad at me?"

"I'm mad at you. But that doesn't mean that I don't understand."

"I just... wanted to keep it safe. The memory. Is that silly?"

"No. It's not. It's human. We all want to hold on to memories that we are fond of."

"Do you have memories like that?"

He asked the question without a second thought to the fact that it could be intrusive.

Lucian thought for a minute and then nodded. "Yes. Yes, I do."

"I bet you want to keep them to yourself as well."

A glimmer of a smile crossed Lucian's face. "Definitely."

"Do you think I'll see her again?"

"I don't know, boy. Perhaps."

"But you don't want me to go looking for her, do you?"

Lucian sighed and put an arm around Caleb's shoulders. "No. I don't. I don't think it's a good idea to go looking for trouble."

"You think she's trouble?"

Lucian nodded stiffly, his mouth a thin line. "I do, Caleb. I know Avalon better than you do."

He winked at the boy warmly. "Come on. Let's sit by the fire."

Caleb followed Lucian closely, choosing however to sit down next to Lorcan and Chloe – a few feet from the adults. Caleb gestured to Connor, Nathan and Savannah who seemed to be engaged in a serious conversation that Lucian quickly joined.

"What are they talking about?"

Lorcan shrugged. "The war. If there's going to be one. They're discussing numbers and sides."

Caleb frowned. "Numbers and sides? We're seven people."

A smile flashed across the other boy's face. "We're just the Opulentia, Caleb. The protectors of Avalon – that is why we live here by the oasis."

Chloe interrupted him. "I don't understand. What has the oasis got to do with anything?"

"The oasis is the entrance to Avalon. The Opulentia are the elite of the nomads – only the most powerful nomads get chosen to join. We're the primary guardians of Avalon."

"So there are more nomads?"

Caleb sounded interested and Lorcan nodded quickly. "There are a lot of nomads throughout the desert. They're all on our side."

Chloe leant forward, her eyes shining. "Who else do we have on our side?"

"Most of the giants, the gypsies, a few witches, the mermaids and the wraiths. Oh, and the centaurs."

He looked up at the sound of laughter, grinning at the sight of Savannah pulling Connor to his feet to dance around the fire with her. He turned to the twins as he conjured a flute out of thin air. Chloe watched in amazement as soft music started playing while the flute floated through the air.

Noticing her amazement, Lorcan held a hand out to her before nodding to Caleb. "Let's forget about war for a bit. Come dance with us."

The Nomads were still awake. Shia groaned irritably as he watched them, dancing and laughing around the fire. As soon as they went to sleep... His gaze settled on the two smallest figures. Excitement bubbled within him at the prospect of his plan succeeding. The twins would be taken care of and Zephyra would finally see him in a different light. He'd be more than a mindless follower. He'd be a hero. She'd adore him for getting them out of the way. He'd wait for his chance. It had to be perfect.

They'd be no match for him, he was certain of that much. All he needed to do was act before they became too cautious. Shia's mouth curled in distaste as he watched Lucian hovering over them like some grotesque bird.

If only Lucian's overbearing caution had not affected them yet. Time, as always in Avalon, is of great essence. A moment too late and they'd ask questions rather than take risks. Glee erupted in his chest as he noticed them heading towards the tents. Shia cast one last look at the tents before moving in behind the bushes, closing his eyes as he sat down. He had to be careful. His dreams could not fall into the wrong hands. It took him minutes to find the vulnerable minds and he entered them without difficulty. The

illusion was buried in the back of his own head and he leant forward, willing it to fly into the tempting open minds in front of him.

Darkness surrounded her. Chloe jumped as another figure suddenly appeared in the dark and she squinted. "Caleb?"

Her brother nodded, licking over his dry lips nervously. "What... what do you think is going on here? Where are we?"

Chloe shrugged and took a step closer to Caleb. "I don't know. Should we... walk or something?"

Caleb shook his head vigorously. "No. Let's just... wait and see if something happens."

The small, bobbing light appeared at his words and Chloe gestured to it. "Does that count as something?"

Caleb gave her a lopsided grin before inching closer to the light. "We should probably follow it."

"Do you think so?"

"Yeah."

The light seemed to jump at their quick conversation before slowly starting to move forward. Both Caleb and Chloe hesitated before slowly trailing it. Caleb jumped and reached for his sister's hand when the scenery around them changed instantly, morphing into vivid grasslands. Chloe moved closer to her brother, her grasp on his hand tightening. "What's happening?"

"I don't know."

Chloe screamed as a big yellow bird descended from the sky, stopping to hover in front of them. The bird blinked twice before slowly hopping forward and the twins shared a hesitant look before following it. The bird moved swiftly through air and instantly both Caleb and Chloe leapt into the air, rushing forward. Neither of them was surprised when everything around them changed once more. This time, they stood at the opening of a large cave, an eerie feeling hanging in the air. "So... do we go in?"

It was Caleb who raised the question and Chloe nodded after a while. "We've come this far."

"Okay."

The dark cave lit up as soon as they stepped inside and Chloe started walking, instinctively knowing the way. They froze when the woman appeared in front of them, a

true glorious sight: Blonde hair hanging down to her waist and a light radiating from her. Chloe was the first to react, taking a hesitant step forward. “Mother?” The affirmative nod was all they needed and they rushed forward – to her waiting arms. Before they could reach her, however, they felt themselves pulled away and landing back on hard ground.

CHAPTER 6

The silence in the tent seemed to scream at the twins as they found each other’s eyes. Tears sprang to Chloe’s eyes as she reached for her brother’s hand. “Caleb... did... did you?”

“Yeah. I saw her too.”

Chloe was the first to stand up and Caleb looked at her hesitantly, Lucian’s words replaying in his ears. “Chloe... I don’t know if this is a good idea.”

“What?”

“I just... Lucian said that we shouldn’t go looking for danger. And this... seems rather dangerous.”

Chloe froze, her eyes pleading with her brother. “It’s mom.”

“But... it’s not supposed to be. I mean, you know she’s...”

“I know she’s dead, Caleb. But this is Avalon! Strange things are supposed to happen here. If there is the slightest chance that we might actually meet her... I want to go.”

Caleb nodded after a short silence. “Okay. Let’s go.”

They shared a quick smile before swiftly disappearing into the darkness, the dream path still fresh in their memories.

“Tristan. Wake up!”

Tristan opened his eyes hesitantly to glance at Nola, who stood in his room comfortably, her fingers tracing the lines of his desk. “What do you want?”

He sat up dazedly, pulling the covers up to his chin and Nola sat down on the bed, clearly dissatisfied. “Shia is missing.”

“So?”

“So I think he’s up to something. With the children.”

Tristan shrugged tiredly. “I don’t think he’d try anything without us.”

"Honestly? Are you that stupid?"

Tristan frowned, suddenly more awake. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Think of the reward Zephyra will give to the one who manages to get rid of the children.

Do you really think Shia would want to share any reward she's about to give?"

He gave in after a long silence, looking at her contemplating. "All right. What do we do?"

"We find out what he's up to and we stop him. We can't let him win, not without us."

"Here I thought we were on the same side. That we were loyal to each other."

"Don't be stupid, Tristan. On our side, loyalty doesn't exist."

A long silence followed her words and Tristan turned his head to the side, motioning at the black robe on the desk. It flew towards him at once and he pulled it over his arms. "Fair enough. Any idea how to stop him?"

Nola glared at him indignantly. "If I had... I wouldn't need your help."

They didn't get far before Caleb's hesitant voice brought their journey to a halt.

"It doesn't look the same. Does it look the same to you?"

Chloe stopped in her tracks at her brothers quivering voice. "Stop it, Caleb. Stop... doubting it. We're going to find her."

"Chloe, it's not right. Something... look around you! It's not like it was in the dream!"

"Well we probably only dreamt parts of the path! Savannah told me that sometimes things in Avalon are designed to test your strength and ability. So maybe we're being tested. Maybe she's... only going to be there if we push through to find her."

"Chloe, stop!"

Caleb reached forward, grabbing his sister's arm as fear nestled within him. "That doesn't even make sense!"

"And I suppose plants coming to life, controlling fire and a whole land full of magic makes sense to you!"

Caleb hesitated. "Well... if you put it like that."

She rolled her eyes irritably. "I want to see our mother, Caleb. You can stay or you can come with me. But I'm going."

Caleb turned to look back at the tents in the distance. The fire was still burning lively and a part of him longed for the safety and security of it. One look at his sister's face, however, changed his mind. "All right. I'm coming."

Relief washed over Shia as the boy finally followed his sister. It would not have been good enough, had she decided to go alone. If he did not get rid of both of them, the surviving one would be protected to a greater measure. They'd never stand a chance of getting close and Zephyra would never forgive him. He took a deep breath as eagerness to strike threatened to overwhelm him. Attacking this close to the Nomads' camp would be fatal. He had to wait until they were far enough.

The small ball of light slowly took form in his hand and he grinned, releasing it towards the children. He could hear their gasps as they saw it, their footsteps sounding like music in his ears as they mindlessly followed the bouncing light.

On the other side of the lake, Juliet sat up in her bed as she heard hushed voices outside her room. She moved closer to the door carefully, pressing her ear to the door in order to hear the conversation between Nola and Tristan as they passed. "I followed him as far as I could without him noticing me. From what I've seen, he plans to take them somewhere and attack."

"Kidnap them?"

Nola rolled her eyes irritably at Tristan's question. "You really think he's an idiot, don't you?"

"I do."

"I think he's manipulated their dreams, forcing them to go somewhere. I just... don't know where."

Juliet moved back towards her bed as their voices died down, tapping a light with her finger as she sat down. She instinctively knew who Nola and Tristan were talking about and she felt a slight twinge of distress at the thought of the kind boy getting hurt. Caleb. She opened the drawer next to her bed swiftly, placing the crystal ball on her bed and leaning forward slightly to look at it, her voice a hoarse whisper as she spoke.

"Ostendo mihi meus pectus pectoris. Ostendo mihi meus pectus... pectoris."

Nothing happened even as she stared deeper into the crystal ball and a frustrated groan left her lips before she threw the ball to the other side of the room. It simply bounced from the wall and rolled back to her bed and Juliet turned on her stomach, her eyes closed.

"Wherever you are... I hope you're okay."

"Are we still going the right way?"

It was Chloe who stopped suddenly, a frown creasing between her brows. Caleb turned towards her, his own face masked. "We're still following the light, aren't we?"

Chloe shrugged, suppressing a shiver. "Something doesn't feel right."

"You've got to be kidding me. You want to go back now?"

Chloe glared, folding her arms. "That's not what I meant. It just... doesn't look the same. Maybe we're going the wrong way."

"You're scared."

Anger flushed in Chloe's eyes and she folded her arms. "I'm not scared."

"Oh just admit it."

She glared at him, a glimmer of a flame appearing on her fingertips. "Stop it. I'm not scared."

Caleb stared at the flames forming in his sister's hands, his eyes widening. "Cut that out."

"Who's the scared one now?"

"Chloe, I'm serious! We shouldn't mess around with magic."

She muttered a soft insult in his direction and Caleb took a step back, shaking his head. "I don't want to be here if this is what this place does to us."

Chloe took a step towards him, the flames on her fingertips dying out. "I'm sorry. I'm just... I am scared. Not because I'm afraid we're lost or something just... Caleb, what if we get there and she's not there? Or what if she doesn't like us?"

Sympathy settled on Caleb's face and he pulled his sister in for a hug. "She'll be there. And she'll love us."

They did not notice the light figure hovering above them and started walking once again, their hands clasped together.

Hermico wavered for a few seconds before swiftly flying in the direction of the Lake.

Zephyra turned instantly upon hearing a soft sound behind her, her eyes narrowing as soon as she recognized the messenger, his translucent blue eyes twinkling. Her mouth curled in distaste as she eyed him and she folded her arms, taking a step closer.

"What do you want? I'm not interested in talking to one of Lucian's puppies."

Her insult did not take the twinkle out of his eye. He merely laughed, his velvet voice mocking her.

"If I was to follow, my dear, it would be you. You're much more fun to look at. However, as you know, I am but a messenger. I have no alliance."

She didn't stop glaring. "Yet you taunt me at every opportunity you get."

"It's always been like that. Even when you... were Lucian's puppy."

Her eyes shot fire at him at his words. "I was never his puppy. What do you want anyway?" "Just a fair warning, *my lady*." His smooth voice was thick with sarcasm and he inched towards her, his eyes looking right through her.

"The kids... Connor's children, *Meryl's* children. They're stronger than you'd think. I see a lot of their mother in them."

He should have expected the whirlwind to hit him, but it came out of nowhere too fast for him to react and he felt himself being hurled away, Zephyra's angry face disappearing in a swirl of wind.

Juliet could hear her mother pacing through the castle. She sighed, pulling the covers over her head and closing her eyes. If her mother's former friend was anything to go by, a different Zephyra existed some time ago. She couldn't help but wonder what had happened to change her mother and whether it had anything to do with her or her father. She had dared only once to ask Zephyra about her father and her mother was angrier than she had ever seen. She couldn't stop an ironic smile from forming. The only other time she had seen her mother nearly as angry was when she found out about the twins coming to Avalon and Juliet giggled lightly at the memory of Nola being blasted out of the throne room. Though she could not deny her concern for the boy she had met only days earlier, it was not enough to damper the glee she still felt upon remembering Nola's body flying out of the throne room.

Juliet could not deny that she loathed her mother's friends – for lack of better term – and she could not suppress the feeling that Zephyra herself did not particularly like them. They were simply a means to an end for her.

She reached for the crystal ball again, holding it to her lips once more, eyes closed.

"Ostendo mihi quis meus matris vereor. Ostendo mihi Caleb quod Chloe."

Her clear blue eyes never wavered as the white smoke morphed into a clear picture of two people, sitting on a bed of rocks near a river. She glanced into the picture for a few seconds before tiptoeing outside, her voice a hushed whisper. "Maslow."

The liger jumped to her side at once and she buried her hand in his fur, kneeling down next to him. "I need you to go to the River of Nox Noctis. I need you to help them find their way. I need you to protect them."

The liger gave a soft growl before disappearing into the darkness and Juliet tiptoed back to her room, satisfied that the twins would be safe. For now.

CHAPTER 7

“Did you hear that?”

Chloe looked at Caleb with a frown and he shrugged, shaking his head.

“Hear what?”

“That sound. Like... like there’s someone here. Someone or... something.”

“It’s your imagination. I’m sure of it.”

“It’s not, I heard something, Caleb...”

A soft growl suddenly reached his ears as well and he jumped. Chloe grabbed onto her brother’s hand, her eyes wide with fear. “Told you.”

“Be quiet!”

He hissed the words before stepping in front of her, his body trembling. “If anything happens... run.”

“And leave you here? Don’t be stupid.”

“You never listen to me!”

“I’ll listen to you if you stop being stupid!”

“Stop calling me stupid. I’m trying to...”

Chloe’s scream drowned his words out as the large liger appeared from behind the bushes, but Caleb stepped forward, awe appearing in his eyes. “Maslow?”

Chloe frowned, taking a small step closer. “You... you know this thing?”

“It’s not a thing, it’s a Liger. His name is Maslow, he’s Juliet’s pet.”

Chloe laughed in disbelief, her eyes hesitantly trailing over the large animal, who now sat at Caleb’s feet. “Who’s Juliet?”

“She’s... a girl I met when I was... wandering around.”

“You met a girl in Avalon? Already?”

“Yes.”

“And... this is her pet?”

“Yeah. He protects her, she must have sent him.”

Chloe nodded sarcastically, sitting down a safe distance from her brother and the animal.

“Yeah, why not? I mean, why wouldn’t she know that we are... wherever... we are and send her man-eating pet to kill us?”

Caleb looked up at his sister, glaring. “She sent him to help us.”

“Even better.”

"You believe in running away from camp to chase after some dream, but you don't believe that Juliet could have known we're in trouble and sent Maslow to help us?"

Chloe lifted a brow as she sat back. "Do I believe that your creepy girlfriend who no one knows exists sent her vicious predator to save us? Let me think about that for a second."

"She's not my girlfriend. And... Maslow isn't vicious."

"Oh, did he tell you that?"

"No. He doesn't talk to me."

"But I'll bet he talks to... Juliet?"

"She can talk to him. She has powers too."

Chloe groaned, closing her eyes. "I think Avalon made you crazy."

"You can't just choose what you believe about Avalon, Chloe. You can't believe that the stuff you want to be true is, and the stuff you don't care about isn't. It's not how it works."

"Oh, suddenly you're the expert?"

"I just have some common sense. You seem to have lost yours."

Chloe glared at her brother, who had his hand buried in the Liger's fur and was leaning forward, whispering something. "At least I'm not the one talking to an animal."

Caleb rolled his eyes and knelt down to look at Maslow. "Maslow... I don't know if you understand me, but we need to get to a cave. I don't know where it is, but... it was beyond the snow, freezing cold... I don't know what else to tell you."

Maslow growled softly before turning his back to Caleb, pointedly gazing in the direction of the desert.

"No, Maslow. We don't want to go back there, we want to go to the Cave. Look, there were... carvings against the walls."

Chloe sighed before moving closer, kneeling down next to her brother. "Carvings of couples, of children... everything in there just seemed perfect."

To her surprise, something seemed to register in the Liger's eyes and she sat up, excited.

"You know what I'm talking about?"

Maslow took a step closer to Chloe and she glanced at her brother, who stood smirking.

"Told you he understood us."

Chloe's eyes narrowed, but she chose not to reply to his statement, instead turning her eyes back towards Maslow.

"I guess we'll follow him then."

Caleb flashed his sister a small smile and nodded. "I guess we will."

Blue eyes flickered behind the shade as the twins started following the liger in the direction of the Cave of Etersomni. Fury boiled within him for a minute. He knew who the liger belonged to. No doubt Juliet had found it necessary to send the animal to aid the children. Though he was fond of Juliet, he could not help but notice that the girl was a massive risk to their plans. He would have to talk to Zephyra about it.

The fury did not last however, and Shia smiled as he watched the children blindly following Maslow.

They would not be a match for the dangers they were sure to meet on the path to the cave and the protection of an animal could only go so far. He cast a silent spell in their direction, catching the red light which flew to him instantly.

He'd be able to track them without problems. As for now... there was something he needed to discuss with Zephyra.

"Chloe, run!"

Caleb's voice echoed through the darkness, but his sister stood frozen on the spot, eyes searching frantically. "Caleb! Where are you?"

"Just run! Get away from here!"

She seemed to unfreeze suddenly, running the trees seeming to move with her as she fled. A scream pierced through the air and she turned on the spot, the silver dagger reflecting in the sky. After a minute's hesitation she rushed in the direction of the frightened screams, lunging forward when she saw the hands clamped around Caleb's neck. The knife disappeared in his back and Caleb pushed him away, eyes wide. "I killed him." Caleb moved forward gently. "Chloe, you had to. You saved my life."

Lorcan jerked awake, the terror in Chloe's eyes still fresh in his mind. He sat up slowly, heart beating wildly in his chest. Though he had long ago learnt the importance of dreams, he hoped that the one he had just had did not have any meaning. The twins couldn't be in danger, not now. They have not learnt nearly enough to be able to adequately defend themselves and though he was young, he was mature enough to realise the devastating consequences it could have for Avalon if something were to happen to them.

He sneaked a glance at Lucian, who was snoring in the corner, before sneaking out of his tent and heading to where the twins were supposed to be asleep.

A part of him knew what he was going to find before he opened the tent, no matter how much he wanted to deny it. A barely audible groan left his lips as he stared at the empty sleeping bags and he glanced towards the direction of the moon. A grimace appeared on his face as the responsibility of what had to be done weighed down on him and he sat down grumpily. "Of course I'm the one who has to deliver the bad news. Of course I am." He took a deep breath before walking to his own tent, kneeling next to Lucian, who was still sound asleep if judging by the snoring emitting from his form.

"Lucian... hey. Wake up!"

The soft kick in Lucian's ribs effectively woke him and he sat up, rubbing at his eyes.

"What's the matter with you? It's the middle of the night!"

"Yeah, the twins are gone."

His words did not seem to register with Lucian who nodded before laying back down.

Mere seconds passed before he sat up straight once more, eyes wide. "The what are what?"

Lorcan grimaced, sitting down next to Lucian. Though he preferred his own company above that of anyone else, he felt a certain sense of respect and affection towards the older Nomad, who was said to be the strongest magical being ever to be in Avalon. "The twins. Chloe and Caleb. They're gone."

"What do you mean gone?"

"I mean go look in their tent. They're not there. They sneaked off somewhere."

Lucian muttered something about teenagers before getting up and stretching his arms to the side. "Well then. I guess we have to wake the others and find them."

This night was not going to end well. Juliet knew that as soon as she heard footsteps in the hallway, unmistakably those of Shia. She sighed when heard another pair of footsteps, followed by furious whispering. Her mother.

No, this night was definitely not going to end well. If it ever ended. She groaned softly before pulling the covers over her head and closing her eyes. She had no doubt that Shia saw Maslow and came to tell her mother about it, petty little suck-up that he was. For a minute, she considered blaming Nola and Tristan for the presence of the animal, but the idea passed quickly. Zephyra knew Maslow only listened to her. Best to feign stupidity then. Luckily she knew her mother's weakness and inability to resist her daughter's tears.

It was a rather irritable Zephyra who led Shia to the throne room and she sat down on the black throne before facing him, rubbing at her eyes sleepily.

"You'd better have a good reason for waking me."

Shia nodded, transfixed by the vulnerable beauty she emitted now instead of her usual cold splendour. "I... you..."

Anger boiled in her eyes and he took a quick step back. "I do have some... unfortunate... news, my lady."

"I'm listening."

He took another step back. "Well, knowing how desperately you want the twins out of the way... I thought it fit to do something right now rather than waiting another day... giving them another day to train, become stronger... harder to get to..."

"Get to the point, Shia!"

Though she respected his quick acting, she could not fathom his need to tell her what a good pet he'd been. "Well, I manipulated their dreams, so they'd see their mother and head over to the Cave of Etersomni. Of course I had not planned on them actually getting there, even though I did set up multiple traps if they did by some miracle. My original plan was to wait until they were lost, tired and confused and then attack."

Zephyra leaned forward slightly, interest shining in her eyes.

"And?"

"Well they did get lost. At the River of Nox Noctis. But... Maslow arrived."

"Maslow?"

The disbelief in Zephyra's voice was clear and Shia nodded. "It appears... that you're daughters' pet is leading them in the right direction."

Zephyra stood, slowly approaching him. Shia flinched when she lifted her hand, but she caressed his cheek slightly instead of the slap he had expected. "Thank you for telling me this, Shia. I'll of course, have a talk with my daughter."

Shia nodded and Zephyra smirked slightly. "You get back to those kids now. I'm sure Maslow won't get in the way. And if he does... get rid of him."

"Of course my lady."

A slender finger travelled from his cheek to his arm and her mouth formed a twisted smile.

"And... Good work, Shia. So far."

Shia nodded proudly before running off and Zephyra smirked before walking to Juliet's room.

The trembling figure hidden under the covers spoke of guilt. Zephyra resisted the urge to blast the room apart, instead cautiously approaching the bed and laying a soft hand on her daughter's shoulder. "Do you want to tell me why Maslow is running about?"

Wide blue eyes appeared above the covers, swimming in tears. "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

Juliet shook her head quickly. "The other day... when Lucian found me... Maslow and I came across a boy."

"Go on."

"Maslow seemed to like him. He came home much later that night and he's been... he's been running off ever since. I'm sure he'll be back in the morning though. He's still loyal to me, he just... I think he likes the attention the boy gives him."

Zephyra grimaced. "Did this boy happen to mention his name?"

"No."

Black and blue eyes met silently for a long time. Zephyra eventually stood, leaning forward to place a soft kiss on top of Juliet's head. "You're right. He'll be back tomorrow. I'm sorry for waking you."

Juliet just nodded, her eyes troubled. "I love you, mom."

Zephyra stopped at the door and her features softened in a smile. "I love you too."

CHAPTER 8

"Get up, all of you."

Lucian's voice rumbled through the tents and he watched as the sleepy faces slowly emerged. "We have a bit of a problem."

Savannah hid a yawn behind her hand, shaking her dark hair out of her face. "What's going on?"

Lucian ignored her, instead directing his attention at Connor. "Your children are gone."

Connor's legs gave way underneath him, his eyes closed. "What? How?"

Lucian shrugged, his mouth a thin line. "Apparently opening a tent flap hasn't gotten any harder over the years."

Nathan finally gathered his wits, stepping forward. "We have to look for them."

Savannah stretched and nodded in Nathan's direction. "We should go and get dressed then."

Nathan nodded curtly, heading to his tent at once. Savannah glanced at Connor's trembling form before heading to her own tent, edging Lorcan on with a gentle touch, leaving Lucian to talk to his former friend. A long silence settled between the two men, the distance between them seeming endless to both of them. Lucian sighed tiredly before taking the few steps towards Connor, sitting down next to him.

"Connor..."

"They're my children, Lucian. They mean everything to me."

Lucian shifted, his hand coming to rest on Connor's shoulder. "We'll find them."

"What if we're too late?"

A long silence settled between them and Lucian sighed. "I might not know... or love them... yet, I might not be worried for the same reason that you are. But you have to know that I will do everything in my power to find them before it's too late."

Connor nodded blankly, turning his head to look at Lucian. "Thank you."

A small smile graced Lucian's face and he stood. "Go on. Get dressed, we'd best be on our way. They can't be too far."

Connor nodded slowly, his shoulders hunched as he stood. "I just don't understand why they would have left."

Lucian glanced into the darkness, his face a mask. "I have a few theories."

One glance was enough to convince Connor that he did not want to know what those theories were and he retreated to his tent without a further word.

"Why do I feel like we're just going in circles?"

Chloe stopped, glaring at Caleb and he shrugged, glancing at Maslow, who sat waiting next to a tree. "I think he's supposed to know where he's going."

"I don't think he knows."

"Let's just... keep moving."

Chloe rolled her eyes, but proceeded to follow her brother. Both of them came to a sudden halt when an icy wind blew over them and they exchanged a confused look. "Caleb? Is it me or is it getting colder?"

Caleb grinned brightly. "That must mean we're reaching the snow."

Chloe nodded nervously, jogging to catch up with her brother.

"I guess we're not lost after all. I..."

Both twins yelped when an arrow shot out of nowhere, landing in Maslow's side.

The great animal roared before falling down and Caleb stepped forward. Chloe was quick to grab his arm, shaking her head vigorously. "Don't. Whoever shot him... they're still there."

Caleb looked up, his eyes wide with fear. "We're out in the open, Chloe. It's not going to be real hard to shoot us from up there."

Chloe stepped closer to him, her whole body trembling. "Okay. Now I'm scared."

Danger seemed to lurk in every treetop around them, the open space seeming like a prowling battlefield. Chloe tugged at Caleb's sleeve, her voice hushed.

"Caleb, use your powers. I have a plan."

"You do realise that we don't really know how to use our powers, right?"

"Just... do what you did on the mountain. And think about the fact that we're going to die if you don't do it!"

"No pressure then."

"Just... do it. I have an idea."

"Okay..."

Caleb took a deep breath and closed his eyes before lifting his hands. Small trees sprouted around them at once and Chloe nodded excitedly, taking a step forward. "Keep going, come on."

"Chloe, what..."

His words were drowned out by a gasp as flames emitted from Chloe's hands, setting fire to the row of trees. He coughed before quickly tugging his sleeve over his face. "What are you doing?"

"Whoever is up there... won't see us through the smoke. Just keep going, run!"

Juliet shot up in her bed when a pain ripped through her side. She bit down on her lower lip, breathing laboured. It took all of her strength to reach for the crystal, her eyes widening at the sight before her. A scream echoed through the Castle and Zephyra shrunk back in her chair upon recognizing her daughter's voice.

The pain in Juliet's cries was apparent and she knew what it had to mean.

She jumped up when the screams quieted into little sobs, rushing to her daughter's room.

"Juliet?"

Her daughter's tear-stained face broke her heart and she inched towards her, wrapping her in her arms. "Oh, my darling..."

Juliet pulled away from her mother, wiping tear stains from her face. “Who did it? Who shot him?”

“Juliet, don’t...”

“Who killed Maslow, mother?”

Zephyra closed her eyes, reaching for her daughter once more. “I don’t know. I promise, I have no idea...”

“Don’t... do this. Don’t lie to me.”

“Juliet, I am sorry. I didn’t want this to happen.”

“But it did.”

Zephyra nodded tiredly. “Yes. It did.”

Juliet stepped back, out of her mother’s reach. “Did he have to kill him?”

“Juliet...”

Zephyra stood, stepping towards Juliet and wrapping her arms around her crying daughter. “If I could change this... I would.”

“They wouldn’t have killed him unless you told them it was okay. It might as well have been you, shooting me with an arrow!”

Zephyra sunk to her knees at once, cupping Juliet’s face in her hands. “Don’t say that. I would never hurt you!”

“Not even if it was only me who stood between you and them?”

Zephyra shook her head slowly, tears forming in her eyes. “You’re my child. And I love you. I love you above all else.”

“But Maslow?”

“I’m sorry, Juliet. I really am.”

Fresh tears formed in Juliet’s eyes and she took a hesitant step forward, allowing her mother to embrace her.

The smoke was getting thicker around them and Caleb stopped, his breath hitched in his throat. Chloe did not seem to have a problem with the heat or the smoke, she simply kept running – only stopping when she realised that he had fallen behind. “Caleb! Come on!”

Caleb shook his head, trying to inhale, but clouds of smoke overwhelmed him and he fell down on his knees in a fit of coughs. “Caleb!”

Through the stinging in his eyes, he could make out his sister’s figure rushing towards him, pulling him up by his arm. He could vaguely see her lips moving, though he could hear no voice beyond the insistent buzzing in his ears.

His body shook in a rage of coughs and he felt himself slowly moving forward, the smoke blinding, choking him.

Finally, an icy wind swept over them, the fire fizzling out as they stepped onto a patch of snow. Caleb dropped to his knees at once, gasping for air. "Are you okay?"

Chloe approached her brother hesitantly and he nodded, eyes closed.

"Yeah. I just... why didn't the smoke affect you?"

"I don't know. We can ask Savannah or Lucian when we get back..."

"If we get back."

"Stop being so negative. We're fine."

"For now, Chloe! Whoever shot Maslow is still up there somewhere."

"They wouldn't have seen us through the smoke, it nearly killed you. It would have driven them away."

"Or it would have driven them right here, which is not exactly what we want. Besides... I have no idea where we are and Maslow was our guide. We're kind of lost if you hadn't noticed!"

Chloe rolled her eyes, kneeling in the snow. "I happen to be a little more positive."

"Oh, really? Since when?"

Chloe simply shot him a silent look before standing up and briskly walking forward. "Chloe, wait! Think about this."

"Oh, hush. Just follow me."

"How do you even know where we're going?"

"I don't."

Caleb stopped again, looking at his sister irritably and she shrugged. "I'm trusting my instincts."

"Something Savannah told you?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

She stared at him indecorously and he sighed. "Fine. I'll follow you."

"Good. Now, I think we need to go through the lake..."

"Isn't the castle beyond the lake?"

Chloe nodded, examining the area. "I think so... but Lucian said that you can see the castle from afar, so that's probably a different lake. Or at least... a different part of the lake."

"So you want to go through the lake? Ever heard of hypothermia?"

Chloe smirked at her brother, confidence oozing out of her all of the sudden. "I can create fire, Caleb. We'll be fine."

Caleb nodded curtly, following his sister to the lake. He shivered in anticipation upon noticing the thin layer of ice over the clear water and the pair shared a nervous look. It was Chloe who reached out for her brother's hand, her confidence wavering. "Ready?" Caleb squeezed his sister's hand, the image of a mother he had longed for his whole life jumping to his mind. "Ready."

CHAPTER 9

The idea that his children were somewhere in Avalon, possibly lost and frightened haunted Connor with every step he took. Savannah was the only one who seemed to notice this and she took great care to stay close to him, whispering comforts as though it would help in any way. Even Nathan and Lorcan tried to comfort him every few minutes, with a sympathetic rub on his shoulder or a promise of finding the twins.

Lucian however, ignored him pointedly, simply leading the way in silence.

Connor frowned when Lucian froze suddenly, his eyes turning upwards. Connor took a wild step forward, his voice shaking. "Lucian?"

"Wait for it..."

"Lucian, what..."

A small smile appeared on Lucian's face as Hermico descended from the sky, looking at the group lazily. "Out looking for the twins, I take it?"

Connor rushed forward, grabbing the messenger by his coat. "Where are they? Where are my children, Hermico?"

A burning flash emitted from Hermico and Connor let go of him as electric pangs shot through him. Hermico's mouth turned downwards in an angry grimace.

"Good to see you too, Connor. Apparently, you've forgotten a lot. Touch me again and I will kill you myself and spare our lovely Zephyra the trouble."

Connor took a step back and ran his fingers through his hair. "I'm sorry."

It was Lucian who stepped forward, his eyes guarded. "Hermico, if you've seen them..."

"I might have spotted them, making their way to the Eastern side of the Lake."

Lucian's face turned ashen at the thought and he turned to face Connor. "Zephyra's blocked the Lake against me. I'm not going to be able to pass. We have to reach them before they cross."

Hermico snickered. "Not likely. Perhaps you should cling to the hope that they... survive."

Lucian glared at the messenger, quickly grabbing two necklaces from his neck. "Hermico, I need you to give this to them. Make sure they wear it."

Hermico nodded as the chains fell into his hand, speeding away through the air once more and Lucian turned to Connor, who sat crouched on the ground. "Connor, listen to me. Those are enchanted Selenite necklaces. If they wear it, Zephyra's powers won't hurt them."

Connor looked up, his eyes red with unshed tears. "Zephyra has more than powers to fight with."

"I realise that, but I have to trust that we can get there in time."

Savannah bit down on her lower lip, her dark eyes clouded with worry. "But... if we reach the Lake and they've passed... If she's blocked the Lake against you, Lucian, it's going to be blocked against all of us."

Lucian shook his head slowly, his eyes finding Connor's. "Not all of us."

Connor scoffed, taking a step back. "That's ridiculous. I gave up my powers when I left, you know that."

"You've returned Connor and so will your powers. The only reason they haven't already, is because you don't want them."

Connor shook his head, his mouth forming a thin line and Lucian took another step towards him. "I know you're not fond of Avalon and if given the choice, you'd spend your life on the outside and never have anything to do with magic again. But your children's lives could be in danger. You need your powers."

Connor closed his eyes, trying to force the memories of a time when he was at the height of his power, away. It was no use, however, as the memories crept up to him.

Before the birth of his children, he had been a young idealist – wanting nothing more than to find the Power of Camelot and live with Meryl by his side forever. Together with his wife and two best friends, there was no doubt that they'd be able to find Camelot and proceed to become invincible. After all, they were the four elementals. Connor, who could control fire, was thought to be the strongest. He of course, knew that Lucian surpassed him in strength. What himself and Zephyra lacked in control, Lucian made up for with his calm,

though unpredictable, nature. Lucian controlled water while the Zephyra and Meryl respectively controlled air and earth.

They were young, irresponsible and impulsive. They thought they'd live forever.

Lucian stepped closer to Connor, his eyes shadowed. "We thought we'd be together forever. But Meryl died and Zephyra... she's not one of us anymore. You know her, Connor. You know how strong she is. You need to be able to fight her."

A muscle jumped in Connor's jaw and he glanced upwards. The leaves moved slowly as a breeze moved through them and chills ran down his spine. He simply nodded and Lucian almost smiled. "Sit down. We haven't got much time."

Lucian nodded at Savannah, Lorcan and Nathan, who immediately joined hands and formed a circle around the pair as they sat on the ground. It took all of Connor's self control to not look away from Lucian's prying eyes, as he felt the power he had nearly forgotten slowly returning to his fingertips.

"I'd wait with that if I were you."

Both Caleb and Chloe spun round at the sound of the melodic voice. Caleb immediately raised his hands, ready to fight, and Hermico laughed, chucking the necklaces at them.

"I'm not evil. I'm simply a messenger. Lucian sent you these. I recommend you wear them."

Chloe knelt in the snow, wrapping a hand around the necklaces. She examined the pure white stone with a frown and looked up at Hermico curiously. "What are they?"

"The stone is a Selenite. It protects from dark magic, making the powers of your enemies... useless."

Chloe quickly made a move to fasten the necklace around her neck, but Caleb stopped her, taking a step towards Hermico. "How do we know we can believe you?"

Hermico smirked, turning away. "I honestly... could not care less. I only brought you the necklaces because Lucian told me to do it."

Chloe twisted the necklace between her fingers, fear flashing in her eyes. "So... you're on our side?"

"No. I'm not on either side, I just... am."

Chloe hesitated. "So... how do we know it was really Lucian who sent you and not Zephyra?"

Hermico laughed. "I love how little you know about this place. Messengers cannot lie. Therefore, if it was Zephyra who sent me I would be obliged to tell you."

Chloe was first to fasten the necklace around her neck and Caleb hesitantly followed suit. He looked at Hermico, distrust still shining in his eyes. "Thank you... and tell... tell Lucian that we said that."

Hermico widened his eyes dramatically. "I will be sure to do that."

He twirled round before rising up into the air, his form quickly disappearing. Caleb took a step towards his lake, shuddering as the freezing water touched his foot. "I guess... now's as good a time as any."

Chloe grabbed onto her brother's hands, closing her eyes. "Okay. Together?"

"Yeah."

He licked over his dry lips, taking a deep breath, before jumping into the icy water, his sister's hand still in his.

Lucian grinned as a fire erupted around Connor. He quickly lifted his hands, casting a protective water shield around him and grinned at Connor. "You're stronger than I thought you'd be. I can only imagine how strong you would have been if you had stayed."

Connor's eyes held no humour as he looked back at Lucian. "I'm still no match for Zephyra. Even if I'd stayed. With the power of Camelot... I can't even imagine how strong she is. Not to mention impulsive, which happens to be her greatest strength. No one knows what she's thinking."

"It also happens to be her greatest weakness. At times she doesn't even know what she's thinking. Besides, all you need to do is keep her distracted for long enough."

"What if I can't? What if she kills me the minute she sees me?"

Lucian shook his head slowly, his shield falling as he took a step forward. The fire fizzled out as Connor dropped his hands and met Lucian's eyes. "She won't kill you immediately. I know her. She'll hesitate."

"For how long?"

Lucian shook his head slowly, his face unreadable. "Even if it's just a second... it's all you need."

All other questions died on Connor's lips. He simply nodded, his face ashen.

"I'm ready. We can go."

Both Caleb and Chloe's breath momentarily hitched in their throats the minute their bodies touched the icy water. Caleb shot up, pulling Chloe with him and they gasped gratefully as the fresh air hit their lungs. Chloe's eyes widened in fear as the water started bubbling

around her and she reached for Caleb's hand. He seemed to have slipped away, however, and a scream left her lips as a blue hand broke the surface of the water, grabbing her palm and pulling her down.

Her scream was drowned out as her head disappeared under the water while Caleb could only watch on helplessly.

Chloe opened her burning eyes, vaguely making out a shadow before a stinging sensation cut over her cheek. She kicked in the direction of the shadow, but it had disappeared, only to grab her from a different angle and press down on her head violently. Just when she thought her lungs would burst, Caleb appeared next to her, his hand clasped around a sharp rock. He stabbed at the shadow clumsily and black liquid mixed with the clear water. The blue arm left Chloe's neck and she shot upwards, panting frantically. Caleb appeared next to her, still armed with the rock. An eerie silence had settled over the Lake and they stayed frozen, afraid that a single movement would cause the blue hand to appear above the water once more. Chloe's horrified scream shook the nearby leaves as Caleb disappeared underwater. Finding him under the clear water was an easy task and she watched in fear as he stabbed sloppily at the much larger figure. She supposed it was some sort of a male mermaid, though his skin and hair was a deep blue. She was still spiralling around, searching for something to help her brother with when she saw another figure speeding towards the duelling pair. Though this one had a tail as well, Chloe could make out a cloud of blonde hair and a fair skin. It happened in a blur – Caleb shot upwards as a sword appeared in the new mermaid's hand and Chloe grabbed his hand before he could say a word, desperately kicking to get to the shore. The twins shared a terrified look upon reaching the shore, both of them trembling as they took deep breaths. Chloe closed her eyes as she lied back against her brother's chest. "I want to go home."

Caleb shuddered, squeezing her shoulder. "Me too."

They jumped when the water rustled next to them, a grin apparent on the young face appearing out of nowhere. "If home is going back through the Lake, I'd advise you against it. I'm Misti, by the way. And saving your lives was a pleasure."

CHAPTER 10

“Try harder, Chloe. Please!”

Caleb’s teeth chattered as he watched his sister vainly try to produce a fire, tears forming in her eyes.

“It’s not working! I don’t know why!”

The mermaid rested her chin on her hands from where she sat on a rock nearby, glancing at Chloe sympathetically.

“From what I’ve heard it’s been a rough day for you. Take a deep breath, try to calm down and then try again.”

Caleb’s mouth twitched in a small smile as he looked at the mermaid. Chloe closed her eyes and took a deep breath before willing a few dry leaves to set themselves alight. Misti clapped her hands together in glee, beaming at the girl. “Told you. Now you two dry off and tell me exactly what you’re doing here.”

Nathan, Savannah and Lorcan were gradually growing tired of the awkward silence looming in the air. Lucian and Connor walked a few steps in front of them, taking care not to walk too close to each other. Perhaps, and Savannah smirked at the thought, they feared that being too close to each other would somehow mend the friendship they were so intent on keeping at bay. Too deep in thought to hear the soft growl behind her, Savannah barely registered Lorcan’s bewildered outcry before feeling her head making contact with the hard earth, the foul breath of a panther suddenly suffocating her. “Savannah!”

She could vaguely make out Nathan’s voice above the threatening growls and closed her eyes. She could feel a stinging sensation in her neck, probably cuts from the sharp claws as the animal jumped at her. While her right hand was trapped under a massive paw, she quickly lifted the left, mustering all her strength to her fingertips. The force field glowed a bright blue for a few minutes before she pushed it forward, sending the panther flying off her. Lorcan and Nathan sped to her side instantly, helping her up. Lucian and Connor sped towards them as well and a bolt of electricity left Lucian’s fingertips as the panther jumped towards the group once more. It fell down on the ground, motionless, and Savannah glanced at it, barely aware of the trail of blood dripping from her chin. “Sav?” Nathan’s voice was the last thing she heard before falling into a merciful pit of darkness.

“Sav! Savannah, wake up!”

Nathan was in hysterics as he shook Savannah's thin frame, his hands trembling.

"Lucian..."

Lucian knelt next to her, his fingers swiftly feeling for a pulse. "She's going to be fine, Nathan."

He hooked a small bottle off his belt and Nathan looked at it suspiciously. "Is this Verve?"

Lucian nodded curtly and glanced up at the sky. Worry was etched on his face. "We have to go on, Nathan."

Nathan took the bottle carefully, glancing at Savannah before looking back at Lucian. "You three go on. I... I can heal her."

"Are you sure?"

Nathan looked up, his blue eyes gleaming. "Yes. Go."

Lucian nodded and sped off with Lorcan in Connor in tow, leaving Nathan behind. Nathan took a deep breath before reaching for the oil, his every sense praying that it would not hurt her any more than she'd already been hurt.

When Shia appeared in Zephyra's room, she stood in front of the window, gazing out at the Lake. She did not move at the sound of him entering, but spoke when he approached her – eyes still fixated on the Lake. "I hope that you bursting into my room like this means that you have something to tell me, Shia."

"I would not bother you if I did not have news. You know I... respect you too much."

She finally turned, her eyes glazed over. "Respect Shia? Or fear?"

Something playful slipped into her glance as she trailed a finger down his jaw line.

Shia did not recoil from her touch as she expected him to, however. Instead, he grabbed her frail wrist in one hand, holding it against his face for a few seconds before allowing it to drop. Her hand fell limply to her side as she watched him with narrowed eyes, her voice suddenly sharp. "Well? What is it that you want to tell me?"

"So far the children have made quite the impression. They have made it through the forest unscathed, they even survived an attack from Tempest and made it through the Lake..."

Zephyra rubbed her temples, anger residing in her eyes. "You say this like it's something I want to hear."

"Indeed it is. They are worn out, physically and magically. They are no match for me right now. I will kill them." She realised the true reason for his visit and it flickered in her eyes as she watched his every move. "And you have come to tell me what you want in return, I expect?"

He nodded, but she did not give him a chance to speak. "Glory, I expect. A high position – as my equal. Perhaps even as my master, is that right? You want to be feared, not throughout Avalon, but throughout the world we want to enter. Am I right?"

A smile settled on Shia's face as he shook his head. "Not at all... my Lady."

He bowed in her direction – gracefully mocking – and touched her hand.

"All I want in return is your respect." He moved around her, eyes trailing all over her petite frame. One would never have guessed that there was so much power hidden away in someone who could appear so small, so vulnerable at times. "I want your admiration. Your love."

She turned swiftly, her eyes rounded at his – he assumed she would find it preposterous – demands. Her full lips slowly curled into a smile, however and she gave him a curt nod. "If it is my respect, my love that you want... you will have it."

He took a hasty step towards her, but she retreated, holding a hand up between them.

"As soon as you get rid of the children of course."

Seeing the hesitation in his eyes, Zephyra gently traced the outlines of his shoulders, a manic gleam hidden behind her eyelids. "Just think... the power the two of us could have... together. Without the boundaries of Avalon."

Shia did not reply. He simply grabbed her hand and pressed a furious kiss to it before twirling on the spot, vanishing in thin air. Zephyra stared at the spot he had vacated for a few seconds before giving in to the insane laughter bubbling in her.

Unaware of the events circling around them at the other end of the Lake, the twins happily sat close to Misti, intrigued by the beautiful mermaid. She, on the other hand, seemed fascinated by their decision to rush to another side of Avalon because of a dream. "I just don't understand."

Her blue eyes were clear, darting between Caleb and Chloe. "Couldn't you wait until sunrise and tell the others about the dream? They could have brought you here and you'd be safe. If you ask me, coming here because of some weird dream was a rather stupid thing to do. Not to mention, it was quite selfish. Your father must be beside himself with worry."

Caleb sighed, edging closer to the Lake. "We know, okay? We know that it was irresponsible and all of that stuff, but... a chance to meet our mother? They wouldn't have brought us, they would have said that there were more important things to do and... well, we don't agree."

Chloe glanced at Misti who was still looking at them disapprovingly. "You don't understand what it's like growing up without ever having known your mother. We just wanted to meet her once. Is it really that horrid and selfish?"

Misti was silent for a long time, but finally concluded. "I guess not. But you should know that dreams are not always what they seem. Even if you go to the Cave, there's no guarantee that she'd be there. I don't want to sound harsh, but if she's dead... nothing's going to bring her back."

A stubborn look settled on Caleb's face and he folded his arms. "We'll have a look anyway. What was the thing attacking us in the Lake anyway?"

Misti shrugged, looking bored. "Oh. That was Tempest. He usually is in foul mood, attacking anyone who dares to cross the Lake. Zephyra is the only one who can cross safely."

Chloe frowned slightly. "Is he a merman or something?"

Misti smirked. "Close enough. He's a Blueman. They're like regular mermen, but much stronger. They're the reason why there aren't any mermen left in the Lake. They leave us mermaids alone for most part, though Tempest will probably have my head for hurting him today. He's the Leader and he's quite vicious."

Concern flashed in Caleb's eyes as he looked at her. She could be no older than fourteen and was really pretty with endless white hair and aqua eyes. She looked so vulnerable.

"He won't hurt you, will he?"

Misti smiled confidently, her eyes shimmering. "He can try. I'm stronger than I look, Caleb."

He mirrored her smile, watching as Chloe got up. "We should probably be on our way to the Cave then. Are you sure you'll be okay?"

Misti nodded swiftly and a silver dagger appeared in her hand. She handed it over to Caleb, watching him worriedly. "Be careful."

He tucked the dagger into his belt with a grateful smile. "We will. Thanks."

He turned away from her to join Chloe, who had already stepped away from the Lake, but stepped back at the last minute. "I... I mean, you saved our lives and all. How will we know if you're okay?"

Misti leaned closer to him, her lips quickly making contact with his. "When you really want to talk to me, Caleb... you'll know how."

She disappeared under the water before he could respond and he joined Chloe, shaking his head dazedly. His sister looked at him with a grin, arms folded.

"Really, Caleb?"

“What?”

“We haven’t been in Avalon for a week and you’ve already gotten two girls? You’re a player.”

“I’m not a player! I... she kissed me, okay! And it wasn’t even a real kiss and Juliet doesn’t count either.”

Chloe simply laughed and they walked a few steps in silence before she stopped to look at him seriously. “But a mermaid? How would that even work? I mean for real. If she can’t get out of the water, where would you go on dates?”

He nudged her in the ribs with a laugh. “I’m not even thinking about that. Besides, with the whole fighting for our lives thing... I don’t think dating is going to be an option for either of us for a while.”

Chloe smirked slightly. “Dad would love that, wouldn’t he? He always did say no boys until I’m twenty one.”

Caleb laughed, putting an arm around his sister’s shoulder. “Well he didn’t say anything about Bluemen. You could always try to make this Tempest guy go soft.”

Chloe simply rolled her eyes at him and pointed in a Western direction. “The Cave should be that way. Are you ready to go see mom?”

Caleb nodded; his eyes wide. “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

Misti stayed hidden behind a rock, watching worriedly as they ran off. Only when they disappeared out of sight did she dive back into the water carelessly. She didn’t make it far before her path was blocked by a blue figure. Misti froze, watching apprehensively as Tempest approached her. His eyes seemed to be aglow with fury and she recoiled from him. Tempest was too fast however, grabbing onto her upper arm. Her nails and tail turned black with pain as he thrust a dagger into her abdomen and Misti shot upwards, a scream leaving her mouth. Tempest refrained from letting go of her arm, his mouth twisted in an ugly smirk. Misti’s eyes widened as the water around her heated, her pale skin reddening slightly. Tempest’s grasp on her arm tightened and they shot out of the water.

Misti coughed slightly when she landed on the rocks, quivering when the wind hit her skin. Tempest growled, moving towards her threateningly.

“This is my lake. How dare you interfere?”

She glared at him with blazing eyes, her voice hoarse. "Your lake? The lake belongs to all of us, Tempest! You're the only one insane enough to think that you have any say over who crosses, who speaks, who breathes..."

His face turned into a picture of fury, but Misti stood strong. "You know how Aqua and the other mermaids will react if you dare kill me. So go on. I would take that shot with love if it meant they finally got rid of you."

He stared at her intensely for a while before sneering. "I won't do you that favour."

Misti breathed a sigh of relief as he swam away, creeping back into the water. She glanced around nervously for a few seconds before speeding off to her cave.

CHAPTER 11

Though Nathan himself had never experienced the effects of Verve, he had heard from others that the pain of it was nearly intolerable. He faltered as he leaned forward, touching the marks where the panther had sunk its claws into Savannah's skin. Washing off the blood had been nothing compared to what he was about to do, and he noticed with a grimace that his hands trembled as he squeezed the oil onto his fingertips. She was unresponsive when he touched the Verve to her skin and he sighed in relief, hoping that it would stay that way. His hope was in vain, however. He had barely finished spreading the Verve over the first cut when she opened her eyes, the blue of them deeper than he had ever seen. It took everything he had not to step back from the obvious pain in them, but he continued rubbing it into her skin as softly as he possibly could. Her scream tore through the air when he touched a cut running over her collar bone and Nathan pushed her back gently, trying to look away from the tears running over her cheeks. "Savannah... Sav, listen to me... you need to calm down, this will heal you. Please, you need to... Savannah, you need to lay back. Please..."

His voice wavered as he looked at her tear stained face. "I'm sorry."

Savannah managed a smile through her tears, her hands twitching as he finished patting the cuts with Verve. "You didn't attack me. You're... helping."

She groaned in pain as he touched a large cut on her shoulder, biting down on her lip frustrated. Nathan stepped back and the empty vial evaporated as he waved his hand over it. "I'm done. Does it still hurt?"

Savannah nodded curtly, looking at him through her lashes. "Only when I breathe."

He returned her smile, moving in behind her and hoisted her up, allowing her to rest against his chest. Savannah closed her eyes, allowing the steady rhythm of his heartbeat to soothe her own racing heart. Nathan took her uninjured hand in his, squeezing it lightly. "Do you want me to take you back to camp?"

Savannah shook her head quickly, leaning her head back against his shoulder.

"No. I'll be fine in a second then... then we can go to the Lake. They might need our help."

Nathan smiled as he looked down at her. "You really are your father's daughter. He'd never let anything stop him either."

"If it was you who had gotten hurt, we'd be on our way to the Lake as well, Nathan. I know you."

Nathan shook his head tersely, avoiding her eyes. "You don't realise how many times I've thought that... it should have been you to lead. You're stronger than I am. You have more courage, more determination..."

She interrupted him quickly. "Nathan, I'm not stronger than you are. I admit that... there were times when I thought it should have been me too. But my father chose you for a reason. You see things like no one else does."

She made a move to stand and his eyes flickered over her. "Are you sure you're able to go?"

"I'll be fine. I have you to watch my back."

Lucian groaned as another steep hill blocked their view. Connor frowned and looked at his friend worriedly. "How on earth could my children have gotten this far?"

"Caleb is an Earth Elemental. Even when he doesn't know it, the Earth realises what he wants and caters to his every whim."

Connor muttered something about how ridiculous Mother Earth could be before heading towards the hill and Lucian quickly changed a laugh into a cough before following him.

Lorcan trailed wordlessly behind, but stopped suddenly, an eerie silence in the air.

"Lorcan?"

Lucian immediately noticed the suspicious glint in Lorcan's eyes and motioned for Connor to join them. The boy was quiet, but it made him extremely perceptive. He had long ago learned to pay attention to Lorcan's suspicions. "Did you hear something?"

Lorcan simply nodded, but nothing happened as they waited. It seemed to take ages before Lorcan shrugged and moved forward, heading towards the hill. They had barely made it to the top when a thundering sound alerted them of another presence. Nola stood

in front of them with a malicious grin, Tristan lurking behind her. Lucian grimaced at the sight of the pair in front of him, quickly pushing Connor behind a rock. Nola darted towards the rock at once, but a powerful shield from Lucian sent her backwards and crashing into Tristan. Tristan calmly pushed Nola off of him, glaring at Lucian.

The two men circled each other for a while, each one eyeing the other carefully. It was Tristan who attacked first, a black cloud of smoke sharply darting towards Lucian's head. Lucian evaded the mind attack swiftly before sending an electric bolt towards Tristan's body. Tristan laughed as he ducked the bolt with ease, sending a thousand flying sparks towards Lucian. He skidded backwards as the sparks connected with his midriff, groaning in pain as some of them exploded against his skin. Tristan's eyes mocked him endlessly and he was vaguely aware of Nola's voice taunting him as well. Her black eyes danced in front of him suddenly, reminding him of a playful younger version of Zephyra and anger washed through him. These were the people who had truly taken Zephyra from him. He straightened up quickly, fury flashing in his eyes. Neither Nola, nor Tristan had a chance to escape from the jet black bolts shooting from his hands – it flattened them within seconds.

Connor and Lorcan both looked at Lucian with wide eyes, glancing at the figures on the ground. It was Connor who spoke, his voice trembling. "They're not..." Surprisingly, Lorcan answered, shaking his head curtly. "No. They're not dead, they're just knocked out." He stormed further up the hill without another word.

The three came to a stop suddenly when the body of Maslow suddenly lay in front of them, a broken arrow lying on the ground next to his head. Lucian knelt next to the animal, resting his hand on the still body. "This was Juliet's pet." He shared a look with Lorcan before glancing at Connor. "Zephyra's daughter." Connor frowned and knelt next to Lucian. "You don't think Caleb and Chloe..." Lucian shook his head darkly and lifted the arrow between two fingers. "No. I think that there's a reason we're here and that the person responsible for that killed Maslow." "Which means that... they could have... they'd try... to kill Chloe and Caleb."

Lucian simply nodded and scanned the burnt bushes and trees around him. "It would seem, however, that your children aren't helpless."

Connor touched a burnt leaf with a small smile, but worry clouded his eyes as he looked at the burnt path to the Lake. "I can't lose them too, Lucian."

Lucian put his hand on Connor's shoulder firmly. "I already promised you. You won't."

"My head..."

Tristan woke first, putting a hand to his head carefully. He struck Nola in the ribs with an elbow, watching with a grimace as she sat up groggily. "What happened?"

"Lucian happened."

Nola groaned, falling back down. "He's strong for his age."

Tristan growled in her direction. "Now is not the time for jokes. Do you realise he could have killed us within seconds?"

Nola frowned slightly. "Which raises the question. Why didn't he?"

Tristan shrugged. "No idea. But we'd best warn Zephyra they're on their way to the Lake."

The further Caleb and Chloe seemed to walk, the more the light hearted mood seemed to dampen. Shadows flickered around them precariously. An eerie silence hung in the air around them. The wiry figure shot out of nowhere and sheets of metal flew at them swiftly. Caleb acted without thinking, pushing his sister behind a rock. "Hide!"

He never felt the dagger falling from his belt, only focused on the power already rushing towards his hands. Shia smirked at the boy as he landed. "Silly boy. I'll finish you off first and have your sister for dessert."

Caleb took a step back, his lips dry. "Not if my father gets here first."

Shia's laughter echoed over the hills. "Your father has no idea where you are. He has no way of finding you. You're on your own. At my mercy."

Another mass of steel shot towards Caleb, but it bent as though an invisible shield stopped it before it could touch the boy. A furious frown crossed Shia's brow as he looked at the useless piece of steel and then back at Caleb. "That's impossible. You can't form force fields!"

Laughter formed on Caleb's lips as a tree jumped behind Shia, the branch swatting him behind the head. "Has the idea that you're underestimating us ever crossed your mind?"

A touch from Shia turned the tree to a pile of ashes and he shrugged before turning back to Caleb. "No. But I do know what the Selenite on your neck does."

Fear flickered over Caleb's face, but he decided to hold his brave composure, conjuring up another tree. Shia turned it to dust before it reached his knees, bellowing with laughter. "Did you even think for one second that you could defeat me?" A few steps forward had him atop Caleb, hands wringing at his neck, squeezing the breath out of him.

Chloe had no breath to scream, no power to even move. Her heart seemed to have stopped completely as she watched the tall figure strangle her brother as Caleb powerlessly struggled against him. A silver spark caught her eye and she looked down, eyes flickering upwards once more as she noticed the dagger beneath the leaves. There was no time to think, no time to hesitate about what she was about to do. Not when her brother's life depended on it. Grabbing the dagger as tight as she possibly could, she lifted it, storming forward. It sunk into the back of the dark stranger with ease. Instantly, crimson liquid exploded from the gaping wound. Pale hands twitched around Caleb's neck before limply dropping to his sides. The only thought running through her mind was that he still stood. Without considering her actions, she pulled the dagger from his back and stabbed him again – unaware of the tears spilling from her eyes. Shia swayed on his feet for what seemed like an eternity, before keeling over, his eyes lifeless.

CHAPTER 12

They had not yet reached the Lake, when Lorcan came to a sudden stop. "Lorcan?" Lucian eyed the boy carefully, his eyes alert. Lorcan did not seem to register anything, however, as a far off gaze entered his eyes. Lucian's hand shot out, stopping Connor as he took a step towards Lorcan. "Don't touch him."

"I don't..."

A pain filled scream interrupted his words and the men stared at the boy in awe. Lucian shook his head at Connor's questioning look. He knelt next to Lorcan, careful not to touch him. "Lorcan. What is it? What do you see?" Lorcan simply shook his head, doubling over in pain as he turned to look at Lucian. Connor stared at Lorcan, his eyes wide. "Can't we do something?" Lucian shook his head, shifting uncomfortably. "Wait until it stops?"

Another groan emitted from Lorcan's throat and Connor closed his eyes. "He's a child, Lucian!"

"He can handle it. He's more powerful than you'd think."

Connor barely listened to Lucian, simply stared at Lorcan who was obviously enduring an immense amount of pain. The apparent pain stopped suddenly and he fell to his knees, out of breath, tears cascading from his eyes. Despite his earlier façade of nonchalance, Lucian knelt next to the boy, his eyes sympathetic. "Lorcan?"

Lorcan shook his head quickly, his breathing rushed.

"Minute..."

He didn't seem aware of Lucian's hand resting on his shoulder, only sitting up when he finally caught his breath. "What did you see, Lorcan?"

Lorcan avoided Lucian's question and stood up.

"Nothing."

"Lorcan!"

There was a harshness to Lucian's voice, but the boy ignored it. "I didn't see anything, Lucian. I swear."

Lucian's face turned ashen as he looked at Lorcan and he sunk to his knees, unaware of Connor's eyes on him. "You felt it."

Lorcan's nod was brisk and he glanced at Connor, whose eyes kept shifting between the two. "What is it? What did you feel?"

It was Lucian who answered, his voice a broken whisper. "Death."

He was dead.

Chloe could only stare at the lifeless eyes of the man in front of her, frozen in shock. "I killed him. Caleb, I... I killed him!"

Caleb moved towards his sister slowly. "Chloe..."

"I killed him."

The blood stained dagger slipped out of her hands as tears formed in her eyes. "You didn't... you didn't have a choice..."

Caleb's voice shook and he took another step towards her. "He would have killed me if you hadn't... Chloe, you saved my life."

She took a step backwards, shaking her head. "No. Don't. Don't touch me."

She moved into a corner, tears forming in her eyes. "I'm a murderer."

Caleb sat down next to her at once, putting a protective arm around his sister's shoulder. "Chloe, listen to me. You're not a murderer. He would have killed us. You didn't have a choice, okay?"

"Oh. Isn't that adorable?"

Neither of them had noticed the sharp wind or the woman landing a few feet away from them, but they looked up at the sound of her haughty voice.

Caleb stood slowly, recognition settling in his eyes. He was vaguely aware of Chloe rising behind him. "You're... you're Zephyra."

The witch laughed boldly. "Oh very good. Lucian has taught you well. Too bad all of that will go to waste."

She spared a glance at Shia's still body on the ground and a smirk crossed her features as she gestured to it. "I have to congratulate you. I didn't think you had it in you."

Chloe gasped at her heartlessness. "You don't even care that he's dead?"

Zephyra shrugged. "I can't say that I'm happy about it. He was one of my favourites. But I'm not particularly sentimental either. It's one of the sacrifices of a war. I'd say it's one of the things you'd learn in life. But I don't think you'll have the time."

Caleb took a quick step sideways to stand in front of Chloe and they flinched instinctively as a jet of black light shot towards them. Caleb couldn't stop the grin from forming as it turned upon hitting the invisible shield, shooting back towards Zephyra. She deflected it easily, her eyes narrowed. Chloe's hand shot to her necklace quickly and Zephyra smirked. "Selenite. I should have known."

Caleb took a hesitant step forward, hiding his trembling hands in his pockets. "You... you can't hurt us."

"No. Not yet."

She spun away in a whirlwind and Chloe rushed to Caleb, grabbing onto his arm. "Let's go back, Caleb. It's a trap. It must be."

Caleb hesitated, glancing at the direction of the cave. "She... she left."

"She's going to come back."

Caleb nodded hesitantly. "Okay."

A crack behind them set them in motion and they raced back to the Lake.

Chloe saw the three figures as they approached the Lake and her eyes widened as she recognized them. "Daddy!"

Connor dashed to the edge of the Lake, his hands idly gripping air. "You're all right?"

Chloe nodded, wiping stray tears from her cheeks. "Dad, I..."

She was cut off by a whirlwind swooping over Connor. He fell to the ground, watching helplessly as Zephyra appeared next to his children. A sword glimmered in her hand. Lucian moved forward, his eyes pleading with her. "Zephyra. Don't."

Anger flashed over her face as she looked at Lucian. "Selenite, Lucian? I'm disappointed. I expected something more."

She faced him, eyes wide and Lucian moved closer to the water, his hands tracing the invisible barrier.

"I can't let you hurt them."

She didn't notice Connor creeping closer, his hands outstretched. Nor did she see the two swords materializing next to the children. She spun round to face them as soon as she saw Connor jumping into the Lake, however, stunned to see the swords in their hands. Haughty laughter danced from her lips. "You think having swords will stop me? You might be able to pick them up. But you don't know how to use them."

It was Caleb who stepped forward, sword raised. Zephyra took a step back as their eyes met, clutching her head as unimaginable pain shot through her. His eyes. They were Meryl's eyes.

The boy transformed suddenly, morphing into a woman with long blonde hair and scared blue eyes. She clutched the sword tighter, her lips quivering as she faced the woman who used to be her best friend. "You left. How could you just die on me? We had a plan! We were going to be great and you gave up on me!"

Her lower lip trembled as she stared at her best friend, the sword shaking in her hands. A confused frown appeared on Meryl's face and Zephyra turned to the Lake, facing Lucian, suddenly furious. "You're doing this. You... you would do this to me? Use Meryl's memory like that?"

A blast emitted from her fingertips, sending Lucian crashing into a tree. When she turned back, the boy stood in the place of Meryl once more and she lifted her chin, taking a determined step towards him. A blast of fire sent her skidding backwards just as she lifted the sword and she looked up to face Connor, casting a protective shadow over his children. "Stay away from my children, Zephyra."

"I see you've gotten your powers back. Not that it's anything compared to what it could have been."

Connor glanced at his children, motioning for them to get back. They obliged and he took a step closer to Zephyra. "Nothing compared to yours, you mean."

She shrugged and quickly shot an array of translucent strings towards him. Connor fell to his knees as the strings hit him, the pain in his head reaching agonizing levels.

Zephyra's taunting voice managed to reach him through the waves of pain. "You're no match for me."

Connor glanced up at her, his body shaking from the aftermath of the forceful attack on his mind. Zephyra dropped her hands and a flash of regret swept through her eyes.

Connor watched Zephyra silently, no move escaping his eyes. The second she lifted her hand, he shot a blaze of fire towards her and scrambled to his feet. Zephyra recovered from the fiery blow within seconds, storming towards Connor viciously.

Expecting this, however, he raised his hands slowly. She sunk to her knees as the earth started moving beneath her feet.

Connor moved forward swiftly. Before Zephyra could even contemplate moving, a dagger materialized in her stomach. Zephyra gasped and her hands automatically flew to grip the handle of the dagger. Blood quickly stained her hands and she looked up at Connor through her lashes, unable to fathom that the meek friend she had remembered was able to hurt. Or kill. Nothing in his eyes was reminiscent of the man who used to be her friend.

"You won't touch my children again, Zephyra."

Unwilling to give up, she sent a swirl of wind his way. He deflected it easily and she closed her eyes, willing herself to stand. If it was a fight he wanted, she would give it to him.

The sound of gushing water caught their attention and both Zephyra and Connor turned towards the Lake. They could do nothing but watch in awe as Lucian sent a majestic wave their way. It swept them off their feet and carried them to the other side of the Lake in mere seconds. Connor coughed as the water spat him out on the ground. He sat up dazedly and was instantly tackled by a mass of limbs as Caleb and Chloe lunged into his arms. He took his time to verify that they were all right before he looked up. His heart stopped when he turned his head to see Lucian knelt down next to Zephyra, carefully pulling the blade from her stomach. He jumped to his feet, facing Lucian furiously.

"What are you doing?"

Lucian stood up and gazed into the distance, making a point of avoiding Connor's eyes.

"Your kids are fine. We should leave."

"Leave? Let her go?"

"Yes."

Connor shook his head, rage shining in his eyes. "You have got to be kidding, Lucian! You know what she is!"

Lucian spared Zephyra one more glance. She shrunk away from his eyes and gripped the rock behind her. "I know what she is. But now is not the time."

He deflected the fiery sphere Connor sent towards him easily and shook his head.

"You don't want to get into a fight with me, Connor."

"Don't I? You're choosing her side. That means you're betraying us!"

"I'm not choosing her side."

He deflected another cord of fire and lifted his hand, shooting a surge of water towards Connor. Connor's responding ball of fire froze mid air and the men turned to face Nathan and Savannah who had appeared out of nowhere. Zephyra gave them one look before disappearing in a panicked gust of wind and Nathan took a step forward.

"We're going back. Now. The two of you can sort whatever this is out when we get back to the desert."

Lucian grimaced and Connor nodded reluctantly. Savannah gave a quick nod in Nathan's direction and he glanced at the twins. "I'll have a talk with the two of you as soon as we get back too. But now... the most important thing is that we get out of here safely."

He turned at once, trudging off firmly. Savannah was the first to follow him. Lorcan gestured to the twins before pursuing them, Caleb and Chloe in tow. Lucian and Connor spent a few seconds in silence, each searching the other's eyes for a hint of regret. When none was found, they silently followed the group as well, an awkward strain settling between them once more.

CHAPTER 13

Blood gushed freely from the gash in her stomach. Zephyra groaned as she landed on the steps inside Camelot Castle, dropping to her knees weakly.

A flash of anger seethed through her. She had underestimated Connor. If Lucian hadn't stepped in, he would have killed her. Not because of his strength, but because of her arrogance.

"Mother?"

Zephyra lifted her head at the sound of Juliet's voice, unable to find her voice.

Blue eyes widened in terror as Juliet saw her mother, taking in her stance and the bloodstains on her dress instantly.

She rushed forward and, ignoring Zephyra's protests, hitched an arm under her shoulders, dragging her towards the room.

"Julie..."

Juliet shook her head quickly, her hands travelling over her mother's stomach expertly.

"Don't worry. I won't let them see you like this."

Zephyra closed her eyes, wincing as the heat from Juliet's hands spread to her stomach, the severed skin dragging itself forward to join once more.

Zephyra sat up, out of breath, her eyes finding Juliet's.

"Thank you."

Juliet nodded swiftly and took a step back. "What happened?"

Zephyra shook her head, her lips pursed. "Don't ask me that, Juliet."

"Mother. What happened?"

Zephyra sighed, reaching out to touch Juliet's hair. "I had a... disagreement... with someone."

"Did you kill... said someone?"

Zephyra shook her head slowly. "Not today. I... Shia is dead."

Juliet's eyes widened. "But I thought... did you?"

"No. It wasn't me."

Juliet was silent for a minute as she processed this. "What... what are you going to do now?"

Zephyra turned her head to the window, curling her body up in a feeble bundle. "Now... I need some sleep."

"That's not what I meant."

Zephyra closed her eyes, pointedly ignoring her daughter. "Mother. What are you going to do?"

Upon receiving no response, Juliet shook her head quietly and walked out of the room, leaving her sleeping mother alone.

"You betrayed us!"

They had barely stepped into the camp when Caleb finally let go of his rage, launching himself towards Lucian. Nathan took one step forward and grabbed him by his neck.

"That's enough, Caleb!"

"You weren't there! You didn't see how he protected her! He attacked my father!"

Lucian smirked at Caleb. "Actually your father attacked me. I defended myself."

Caleb edged forward, but Nathan's grip on him was too strong. Savannah sent an angry glare in Lucian's direction, her hand resting on Nathan's shoulder.

"Sort this out, Lucian. Behave like adults."

A smirk crossed Lucian's face and he turned, heading back to Rock Mountain without another word.

"I can't believe Lucian is such a traitor!"

Lorcan looked up as Chloe sat down next to him. He gazed at her silently for a while and she shrugged, his pointed gaze making her uncomfortable.

"What?"

"Lucian isn't a traitor."

"Of course he is. He saved Zephyra. You were there, you saw it."

Lorcan sighed and shifted his legs, turning to face her directly.

"Yes I was there. But I've grown up here and I've known Lucian my whole life. If you knew everything, you wouldn't be so quick to judge."

Chloe hesitated. Caleb was still in the midst of a serious conversation with Nathan, his head hanging. "So tell me."

Lorcan twitched when she spoke and turned to look at him. Chloe nearly stepped back.

His gray eyes seemed to look right through her. "Tell you what?"

"Everything."

Lorcan gave her a quick nod. "You just... have to realise that I don't know the whole story. I mean, there's a lot of history involved that I'm not familiar with."

She tilted her head. "I thought you knew..."

"I know some of it. I'll tell you what I know."

She nodded and Lorcan shifted in his seat. "Before your mom died... and your dad left, they were best friends with Lucian and Zephyra. The four of them were extremely powerful and they wanted to find the Castle of Camelot. They'd be invincible if they did. But before they could find it, Meryl died and Connor left. Lucian and Zephyra were heartbroken. I don't know what happened between Zephyra and Lucian, but she chose to look for Camelot alone. When she found it... I guess the power was too much to handle and she turned into this demented, power hungry person she is today. Lucian couldn't handle losing her as well and moved to Rock Mountain where he lived alone – until you came."

Chloe frowned. "That still doesn't explain why he saved her."

"I'm getting there. Lucian and Zephyra were more than friends. They were... or, are actually... soul mates."

"So... they were... in love?"

Lorcan shook his head quickly. "No. Not as far as I know. They're just... soul mates."

"I don't... I don't understand."

"Soul mates don't have to be lovers. They're just... soul mates."

"What does that mean?"

A far off glance settled in Lorcan's eyes. "It actually spread over from your world. When Adam, the first man on Earth was created, God looked at Adam and saw that he was alone. So He put Adam to sleep and took from him a rib, out of which he created a woman to be named Eve. The woman, Eve, was created out of Adam and thus she was a part of him - in body and in soul. Ever since that time, every man on earth and beyond has one rib less - a rib walking the world in the form of a woman. A part of his body, a missing piece of his soul."

They sat in silence for a while. "How do you know when someone's your soul mate?"

"You just do. Lucian told me that your soul mate is like another version of you. You share two parts of one soul."

"I always thought... that you're destined to end up with your soul mate. Or something like that."

"You don't need to be romantically involved with your soul mate. You just... share a bond that no one else will ever have. An unbreakable bond. Which is why Lucian can't kill Zephyra."

"What happens... when your soul mate dies?"

Lorcan shrugged. "I'm not sure. I just know that it's really painful. I've never known anyone who could really handle it. A lot of people die when their soul mate dies because the pain is too bad. Others leave Avalon."

"So... he wasn't protecting her today? He was protecting... himself?"

Lorcan nodded. "I think he's afraid of what might happen when she dies. He doesn't want to face the consequences yet. He will. But he's not ready."

He glanced over his shoulder. Nathan and Caleb were done talking and Caleb had headed back into his tent. He stood as Savannah came out of her tent she now shared with Chloe. Lorcan himself was now to share with Caleb while Connor and Nathan shared until

Lucian returned. Whenever that would happen. "Let's go to our tents. It's been a long day."

When Chloe made a move to protest, he gently nudged her and tilted his head in Savannah and Nathan's direction. "I think the two of them need some time to talk."

Chloe nodded and stood, surprising him with a quick hug. "Thank you. For telling me about... Lucian and everything. I understand now."

Taken aback by the sudden affection, Lorcan could only nod. "No problem. Good night... Chloe."

He walked to his tent, quite dazed and Chloe smiled to herself before moving in to her own tent.

Nathan smiled as Savannah sat down next to him. He nodded in the direction of the tents before looking at her. "They couldn't have made it any more obvious."

Her laughter echoed through the night and he shrugged. "Today was... quite a day."

Savannah's face turned serious. "It was. I'm so worried so about them, Nathan. Lucian, Connor, Caleb, Chloe... What's going to become of us all if they don't... get everything together?"

Nathan shifted his hand to squeeze Savannah's. "They will. I talked to Caleb and Connor, Lorcan talked to Chloe... Connor reluctantly agreed to talk to Lucian. He's heading up to Rock Mountain right now."

Savannah's eyes widened. "Right now? It isn't safe! It's getting dark and..."

"He'll be safe, Savannah. Connor... isn't in any danger. Besides, he's usually quite sensible. Stop worrying about things you can't change."

She smiled at him teasingly. "Don't think just because you saved my life today you get to tell me not to worry. I always worry, it's what I do. Besides, we're heading into a war, it's natural to worry."

"Saving your life gives me the right to tell you to stop worrying for one night. Just one night, Savannah. Nothing's going to change by you driving yourself crazy. To be honest, if you lose your mind we might be at a slight disadvantage."

Her brow arched.

"Slight?"

"Well we'd still have me."

"Arrogant!"

“Confident. But in all seriousness... we’ve done all we could today. The twins are safe for now. Tomorrow the two of us can take them to The Cave of Notsalg. Train them, teach them what we know.”

“The whole day?”

“However long we need.”

Their hands found each other and Nathan tilted his head to look at her. “I never thought I’d have the nerve to... I never thought I’d feel good enough for you.”

Savannah avoided his eyes, unfamiliar with the territory. “I don’t understand. How could you not feel good enough? I mean, you’re the leader of the Opulentia. And I... have had a crush on you ever since my fifteenth birthday.”

Nathan laughed in clear disbelief.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“I’m not! You were my father’s right hand man. You seemed so strong, wise and handsome. I was fifteen years old, I was shy and awkward, I had no idea where I belonged or what I was doing half the time.”

Nathan grinned. “I remember meeting you at the party. You were shy and awkward.”

“Yeah, thanks a lot.”

Nathan shook his head slowly. “I saw you a year later at your debutante ball.”

Horror at the memory flashed over her face, followed by a look of surprise.

“You were there?”

“I was. You looked... so beautiful. I couldn’t keep my eyes off you, which might have why your father came up with a reason for me to leave rather abruptly.”

“I thought you hated me.”

“Savannah, after your father died and you were chosen to join the Opulentia under my Leadership... I felt guilty. I felt guilty because I had the opportunity to spend so much time with your father and you barely knew him. To make things worse, I knew that you would have been such a good leader. I felt inadequate.”

Savannah sighed. “I thought that you didn’t want me as a part of the Opulentia because I’m a girl.”

“We should have had this discussion ages ago.”

Nathan nodded and rested his hand against her cheek. Savannah’s face flushed as he leaned in to rest his forehead against hers. “It could have changed a lot of things.”

“Such as?”

His lips met hers tenderly. Savannah succumbed to his kiss at once, her hands wrapping around his neck. No other answers were necessary.

CHAPTER 14

One by one, the black clad figures appeared next to the lake – each in a cloud of silver smoke. An eerie silence hung about as they tread through the darkness, each unwilling to break the silence. Four men stepped forward, their eyes scanning the surrounds. It was the oldest of the four who broke the silence, his voice thick with grief. “You all know why we have been called here I suppose.”

A faceless voice rang out from the back.

“Why here exactly?”

Ellard turned to scan the environment. “This is where it happened.”

His eyes flickered over the crowd. Over a thousand warriors had responded to the call.

Once they had set their minds to it, they all knew where they had to be. Though he knew that Shia, their fearless leader was dead, he still refused to say it out loud. He couldn’t.

“We... we need to find the body before... before we can elect a new leader.”

A few sobs followed his words and Ellard choked back a few tears of his own before continuing. “You know how this works. Before his death, Shia had marked four of us as his possible successor. Liam, Gerard, Marcello and myself. It is up to you to choose the one who will lead you from here on. Scan the area. We need... we need to be certain that it isn’t a trick.”

The solemn figures all nodded before spreading out. Ellard chose to sit, his hands trembling. Though the opportunity of being elected as leader was a great honour, it did not compare to the loss of his friend.

A shout alerted him to the discovery of Shia’s body and he drifted in the destined direction. It was a faceless warrior who knelt next to the body, pulled the dagger out of his back. It ripped through Ellard’s heart, but he pulled himself together, nodding bleakly. Torches appeared in the hands of the warriors quickly and they turned to the four standing in front of them quickly. Like one man, they hit the bottoms of the torches on the ground thrice. Then they twirled them around, hitting the soundless melody four more times before lifting their torches to the sky. The flaming orbs moved towards the four, circling all of them a few times before coming to a stop in front of Liam. The youngest of the four. He glanced

at the other men and back at the flames before nodding quickly. Ellard watched bitterly as Liam's black attire went up in flames before turning into a rich silver colour. He watched as the warriors knelt, barely aware of his own eyes blazing at the child. He only knelt when he felt the jab in his ribs, fixing his eyes on the ground. That was it. They had chosen Liam, a boy half his age. A boy, who had none of Ellard's strength, none of his dedication or loyalty. But a boy who hungered for power and would stop at nothing to get it. Ellard shot to his feet, eyes blazing. Without a word, he disappeared in a cloud of smoke, leaving his warriors and the child they had chosen as Leader behind.

Hidden behind the trees, Nola turned to Tristan – unable to mask her glee. "I thought they were going to choose the guy who threw his weight around when they turned up. He was going to be much harder to convert to the Cause."

Tristan smirked a little as he watched the celebration before him. "When you say cause, you of course mean the destruction of Avalon and life as we know it, don't you?"

"Something like that."

"You think the kid will be easy to convince?"

Nola scoffed. "Please. Have you met you? Given the chance, you could convince Connor to kill his own brats."

"You say such nice things."

"Why do you want this? The end of Avalon?"

Tristan shrugged. "About twenty years ago... Hecate and I were lovers. She put a spell on me. As long as I'm here, I'd have everlasting youth and beauty. Immortality."

"Sounds like a pretty good deal."

Tristan smiled. "Except she didn't put the same spell on herself. She grew older, I never did. So it ended. I really... I really cared about her, you know and having things end like that... I didn't like it. If Avalon ended, we'd go out into the world. I'd look my normal age, but still have my powers. Maybe then... I don't know, maybe things will be like they used to be. Besides, I have to admit I do enjoy the prospect of living in a world out there beyond Merlin's protection. How about you?"

Nola shrugged lightly. "My dad is a mortal. I've always wanted to meet him, but I have no idea how to find him. If I have my powers on the outside... at least I've got a shot."

She shrugged, frowning irritably as she watched the festivities – which consisted out of the warriors dancing around fire, downing large glasses of beer and singing merrily. "Could you speed up the festivities and get them out of here?"

Tristan lifted a brow. "I thought you enjoyed the show."

"Not really."

"Impatient, are we?"

Nola groaned dramatically. "Tristan, if you don't mind warp them out of here, I will blast them all to death."

He rolled his eyes at her before directing his gaze to the dancing men. "Keep your temper in check."

He picked up a handful of dirt, blowing on it softly. Nola watched him, fascinated, as his blue eyes glazed over. "You will leave. The celebrations are over. You are all undeniably drunk. You will go home and sleep."

He blew the dirt in their direction, watching with a smirk as they all warped off at once.

"Happy?"

Nola nodded. "Very. Thank you. Come on, let's go."

The four horses stood peacefully, side by side. Zephyra watched them nervously, certain that any minute the peace would be disturbed. It never lasted.

"Why are you lurking behind the trees?"

She spun round at the voice, her eyes wide. "Lucian..."

He took a step towards her and she closed her eyes, certain that he had finally acquired the courage to kill her. Instead, his arms circled around her waist and he pulled her towards him, covering her lips with his own. Zephyra stood frozen for a few seconds, finally succumbing to the kiss out of pure shock. Lucian smiled tenderly when he pulled away from her. "Why are you acting so jumpy?"

Zephyra could only stare at him. "What?"

Lucian gave her a strange look before taking her hand in his and pulling her forward.

"Come on. Meryl and Connor are waiting."

Zephyra jumped at the name. "They... wait, what? Who? What are you talking about?"

Lucian frowned. "We agreed to watch the twins. Have you forgotten?"

"We... agreed?"

His laughter thundered through the forest. "Well, no. You agreed. You only managed to convince me because I love you."

Zephyra's gaze softened and her hands dropped limply to her sides. "You love me?"

Lucian just smiled. "Of course I do, Zee. I always have."

"And I... I love you?"

"I certainly hope so."

"Oh."

She could not find the ability to form coherent thought. Lucian frowned slightly before he entangled his fingers through hers. "Is everything all right?"

"I'm just... a little overwhelmed."

"Why, what's wrong?"

Zephyra shook her head quickly and turned to face him. "Nothing. Nothing's wrong. I'm just..."

A small frown settled between her brows and she allowed herself to rest her lips against his. "I'm happy to be here."

"Why does that sound like a question?"

Zephyra just smiled and squeezed his hand. "Let's go. Meryl hates waiting."

Lucian simply smiled and wrapped his arms around her.

When Zephyra opened her eyes they stood inside Camelot. Only it was a different Camelot. Instead of the dark and sombre colours, it was bright and cheerful.

"Aunt Zephyra!"

She didn't have time to register Chloe's dark eyes before the frail arms attacked her waist with a loving force. "I'm so glad you're staying with us tonight! Misti's been bugging me so much. I think she has a crush on Caleb though."

Zephyra froze as the blonde figure of her best friend descended from the stairs. Although she was quite a few years older than when Zephyra had last seen her, Meryl was aglow with life and the pain of it burst through her at once.

Meryl didn't seem to notice it. In fact, she smiled serenely at her daughter who was attached to Zephyra's waist.

"Zee, thank you so much for agreeing to watch them tonight. Connor and I need this night out, I don't know what we would have done without you and Lucian."

Zephyra could only nod.

"No problem." She glanced down at the girl, who was still attached to her waist.

"How do I get her off me?"

Meryl laughed lively. "Chloe, honey. Go tell Caleb that Aunt Zee and Uncle Lucian are here."

She looked back to Zephyra. "He idolises Lucian almost as much as Chloe idolises you."

Zephyra laughed awkwardly at this. "Idolises? I wouldn't go that far."

Meryl's smile was elegant. Poised. As always. "Oh, Zephyra. You know it's true."

Zephyra jumped as Connor appeared on the stairs behind Meryl, sure that he of all people would remember the horrific truth of what she's become. Despite her fears, however, he smiled warmly. "Thank you for watching them tonight, Zephyra."

Zephyra simply nodded, feeling for Lucian's comforting touch behind her. It barely registered to her that it was strange feeling comforted by the one person in Avalon who had the power to kill her. She merely accepted it, clinging onto his hand as she watched Meryl and Connor flippantly leaving the castle.

What seemed like an eternity of endless games and cries of outrage about the youngest mermaid in the Lake later, the twins finally headed to bed. Zephyra breathed a sigh of relief, glancing at Lucian before falling down on the couch tiredly.

"They have so much energy."

Lucian grinned and reached for her hand. "So you're not even considering having one of our own?"

A thought crossed her mind and she shot up from the couch, her face ghostly pale. Lucian frowned and reached for her hand. Worry lay naked in his eyes.

"Zee, I was just kidding."

She shook her head quickly. "It... it's not that. I just need to go... to the bathroom."

He nodded calmly, his eyes following her all the way up the stairs.

Only one door in the entire castle was closed. The door to Juliet's room. Zephyra's hand shook as she turned the knob, afraid of what she might find.

A frown flashed across her brow as she stepped into a room. It was empty, save for a long mirror in the corner. She stepped forward slowly, her eyes wide.

A pale face flashed in the mirror as soon as she could look into it. "How could you forget me?"

The whisper echoed throughout the room and Zephyra spun round, for the face had disappeared from the mirror. "How could you?"

"Juliet?"

She dropped to her knees, tears forming in her eyes. "Juliet, I would never forget you. I love you!"

"Love?"

The whisper mocked her in a way she had never heard her daughter speak before. “Juliet, please.”

“You loved me so much, you’ve forgotten that I even existed!”

“I could never forget you.”

A translucent shape suddenly appeared in the room, eyes glowing fiercely. “Of course you could, mother. You did. You have the twins now. Why would you need me?”

“I don’t understand what’s going on. I...”

Juliet’s shadowy form shook her head. “Meryl never died. Obviously she warned you against my father. I never existed. And you can’t miss what you never had, can you?”

Zephyra leaped forward as the shadow started fading, grabbing air futilely.

“Juliet!”

The image inside the mirror changed, turning into a familiar picture. One she’d never forget, no matter how much she tried.

She had nowhere to go. She was nine months pregnant; about to give birth to a child whose father had left her. Tears were streaming over Zephyra’s face as she made her way through the snow. Her eyes widened as the castle appeared in front of her.

Camelot.

Something inside her provided her with the power to break the barriers that the Castle had set against intruders. Tired and hurt, she made her way through the lake, shaking with trepidation. A scream left her lips as an intense pain shot through her abdomen. Through her lashes she could make out a dark figure in the distance and she lifted her arms, temporarily lifting all barriers from the castle.

Right now, she didn’t care about Camelot or its protection. All she knew was that she needed help. The figure reached her within seconds, strong arms lifting her up.

“Lady? Lady, can you hear me?”

She nodded against a broad chest, tears seeping through closed eyes. The velvet voice spoke evenly. “Just stay calm. My name is Ianto. I’m going to help you, everything is going to be fine. I promise.”

Her hand travelled to her stomach. “My baby.... Juliet...”

She woke with the agonizing scream spilling from her lips, her breath jaggedly racing as she sat up in the bed. It took her a minute to observe her surroundings and tears rushed

to her eyes as the frail form of her daughter appeared in the door. "Mother? Are you all right?"

Zephyra nodded as she wiped stray tears from her eyes. "Yes, sweetheart. I'm fine. I just had... a very bad dream."

"Ellard!"

Ellard turned at the sound of Gerard's voice, his eyes blazing. "They chose Liam! Liam!"

Gerard rested his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Don't dwell on it."

Ellard shot upwards furiously. "Don't dwell on it? I was meant to lead the warriors! Not that foolish child!"

Gerard sighed. "There's nothing we can do about it, Ellard."

Ellard's jaw tightened. "While it's true that I'm not going to lead the Warriors, there is something we can do about it."

Gerard groaned. "It scares me when you talk like that."

"I have a plan. Get ready to travel to the desert."

CHAPTER 15

Liam's large grey eyes glinted maliciously as he watched the drunken warriors disappearing. For some reason, he had no inclination to leave. He jumped as the two figures emerged from the shadows, watching them apprehensively as they approached him. The girl removed the hood of her cloak slowly, looking up at him with gleaming eyes.

"So. You're the Warriors' new leader."

He decided that arrogance would be the best defence. "I am. Who are you?"

Nola lifted a brow, slightly impressed by the tone of his voice.

"I'm am Nola. This is Tristan. I suppose you've heard of us before."

Liam smirked as he looked at them. "Of course. They call you Zephyra's henchmen."

Anger flashed in Tristan's eyes, but Nola subdued him with a single touch, turning to Liam once more. "Be that as it may. You are of course, aware that there is a war on the way?"

Liam grinned. "Perhaps. I am also aware of the fact that Lucian wants no war."

Tristan grimaced as he watched the young warrior.

"Lucian does not always get what he wants."

Nola looked at Tristan pointedly before continuing her well rehearsed speech.

"We are on the right side, Liam. The winning side. After the war is won, there will be no Avalon. All those who honoured Zephyra with their loyalty will be able to go beyond the borders, keeping their powers. We will rule the world."

Tristan moved forward swiftly, his blue eyes dancing. "Of course there is also the fact that all the leaders who swear loyalty to Zephyra, receive the power of Camelot."

Greed filled Liam's eyes at once and Tristan and Nola shared a gleeful look.

"The power of Camelot?"

Nola stepped forward, her hands resting on Liam's shoulders intimately.

"Think about it, Liam. Think about the power you could have if you joined us."

Liam nodded after a short silence. "Fine. I'd like to meet with Zephyra. To discuss my joining your cause."

The journey up Rock Mountain was a long and daunting one. As he reached the peak, Connor spotted Lucian from afar. He moved closer rapidly. "We need to talk, Lucian."

Lucian did not turn his head, but his shoulders hunched. "Do we?"

"I came all this way."

Sarcasm oozed from Lucian's voice as he responded. "So you did."

Rage scorched through Connor's body and he moved around Lucian. "You put my children's lives in danger today!"

Their eyes met and Lucian shook his head, defeated. "You know what she is, Connor."

Regret flashed in Connor's eyes. "I know. But Lucian, at some point she has to die."

"I know that. I... I'm just not ready for it. I'm scared of feeling that, Connor. I'm afraid I can't bear it."

An awkward silence ensued. Lucian's voice was broken when he continued.

"I saw you when Meryl died. I know that having your soul mate die hurts like hell. You had to leave to survive it and I had to watch that. And today, when I saw you there... the two of you ready to kill one another... the only thing I kept thinking was that losing your soul mate had to be horrible. But watching your best friend kill her? That would be unbearable." Connor nodded after a long, loaded silence. "I can't even imagine..."

"Neither can I and that scares me. For the first time in my life, I feel like such a coward."

"Lucian... being scared does not make you a coward."

Lucian met Connor's eyes, his expression unreadable. "Doesn't it? Because today my fear caused me to betray my best friend."

Connor shifted, sitting down next to Lucian. "If that makes you a coward... I am one just as much as you are."

Lucian scoffed. "What are you talking about?"

"I should have known you'd kill Zephyra when you're ready. I could have really hurt you today. I'm sorry."

Lucian forced a smile to his face. "It'll be over soon. It has to be."

As dawn broke over the desert, four figures slowly rose, packing necessities to start a day of training. Caleb watched as Nathan and Savannah softly argued over what to take and what to leave, irritation detectable on his face. "I don't get why we need more training. We already fought Zephyra once and survived it. Not to mention, we killed one of her guys."

Chloe shot him a horrified look, but it was Nathan who responded rather calmly.

"You didn't fight Zephyra and survive. Your father fought her. Had you been alone, you surely would have died. Besides, your minds were extremely vulnerable. It's horrendous how easy it was for them to infiltrate your dreams."

Savannah rested her hand on Nathan's shoulder and smiled gently at the twins. "All we're saying is that... Zephyra is stronger than you think. If you want to be able to defeat her, you have to develop your powers to their full potential. Otherwise she's going to find out what your weakness is and attack you there."

Chloe glanced at Caleb. "Stop sulking, Caleb. We need to be able to defend ourselves in case dad and Lucian aren't there to save our backs."

Caleb shrugged defiantly. "Whatever. Let's go then."

Chloe turned towards the tent in which Lorcan still slept soundly. "Isn't Lorcan coming with?"

Savannah shook her head distractedly. "He's staying behind to watch the camp."

"How far out are we going?"

Nathan answered Chloe's next question without looking up from where he was tying a small dagger onto the back of his boot. "Far enough."

Savannah tugged at the straps around her middle, holding up half a dozen water bottles. "Ready?"

Nathan nodded curtly and turned to the twins. "The part of the forest we're going to is linked to the world you grew up in. Because you grew up outside of Avalon, we need to find a link with the world you're familiar with. It's where you'll be at your strongest."

The twins nodded silently, their gazes firmly set forward as they started treading into the forest.

Greed flashed in Liam's eyes as he observed the inside of the Throne Room. "So this is Camelot."

Tristan glanced at him irritably. "Yes. Don't touch anything."

Liam rolled his eyes. "Did you miss the fact that I was just elected as Leader of the Warriors? Stop treating me like a child."

Silence followed his words as Zephyra stepped into the room, an icy breeze announcing her presence. She looked at Liam critically before sitting down on the throne, her eyes boring into his. She addressed Tristan without taking her eyes off Liam. "He doesn't look like much."

Nola looked back at Zephyra without blinking. "He was... elected as their Leader, my Lady."

Zephyra lifted herself off the chair, moving closer to Liam. A delicate finger moved across his cheek softly. "I have to wonder. Does he have the stomach to be one of us?"

The smile gracing Liam's face burst with confidence. "Think about it... my Lady. I am young enough to get close to the twins without arousing any suspicion. We don't even have to go to them and get our hands dirty. I can simply bring them to us."

Tristan scoffed and Liam turned to shoot him an irritated look.

"When I say I'm young, I do mean that I am actually young. Truly. Not magically enhanced. Lucian and the others would never expect me to be the Leader of the Warriors. They'd trust me."

Zephyra nodded after a long silence. "We'll see what you've got. Welcome to Camelot."

"So I've been thinking." Lucian rolled his eyes as Connor skidded down from a particularly large rock, waiting for his friend to catch up with him.

"Always dangerous."

Connor rolled his eyes before sitting down next to his friend, his expression animated.

"What if we break the bond?"

"What?"

"The soul mate bond, between you and Zephyra. If we broke it, you wouldn't feel the pain if she died. You'd... you'd hurt because you care about her, but it wouldn't be that devastating."

Lucian shook his head at once. "No. Can't be done, Connor."

"Sure it can."

"What are you talking about?"

"I might... know someone... who is able to help."

Lucian snorted. "If you're talking about Hecate..."

"I am. She's the strongest witch ever to have been in Avalon, Lucian. She's probably stronger than Merlin was himself. She could do this."

Lucian nodded slowly. "She could. The question is would she? I don't think Hecate owes us any favours."

Connor shrugged. "It's worth a shot. Besides, seeing her again would be quite nice. I've always found her charming."

Lucian thought for a minute. "Charming? Hecate is powerful, beautiful, smart and sometimes a little frightening. I've never heard anyone call her charming before."

Connor simply rolled his eyes, grinning.

"Look, if she can help you... it's worth a shot. My previous infatuation with her, not to mention my incredible debt to her aside. She's an asset to us, Lucian. We need her."

Lucian shrugged. "All right. I say we go look for her."

CHAPTER 16

Chloe jumped back as the electricity of Savannah's sword hit the ground next to her, her eyes wide. Savannah came to a sudden stop, blocking Nathan's sword as she turned towards the twins. "Watch our feet, forget the swords for now."

Nathan grinned as he blocked a hit from Savannah, jumping backwards.

"Watch her feet. Savannah is the best swordfighter in Avalon. Savannah simply smiled, moving towards him to swiftly back him into a tree.

"We all have our talents, don't we?"

Nathan dropped his sword as the blade of hers met the skin on his neck, throwing his hands into the air. "And you are unbeatable at yours. Chloe, pick up a sword."

Chloe's eyes widened even more.

"What? You're not serious, are you?"

Nathan simply nodded. "You're not going to learn by watching. Don't worry, she'll go easy on you at first."

Caleb frowned as he watched his sister pick up a sword. "What am I supposed to do? Isn't sword fighting a guy thing?"

"Did you see Savannah beating me just now?"

Caleb shrugged at Nathan's playful question, causing the older Nomad to laugh. "You and I are going to study Capoeira."

Caleb stared at Nathan blankly for a while. "What?"

"It's a form of Martial Arts. It was developed in Brazil. I met a young man from there who taught me, a long time ago. I'm the only one in Avalon able to use it."

"And you're going to teach me?"

Nathan grinned. "Let's just say, I see potential in you."

Inside the cave a lonely figure awoke from her sleep dazedly.

She could hear vague voices outside. Excited she stood, quickly grabbing onto the wall of the cave for support as her head spun. She moved forward one foot at a time, her blood boiling as her hands trailed the side of the cave to find the path. Maurelle bit back a scream as her hand appeared outside of the cave, only to have it set alight by the fierce power of the sun. She pulled back quickly, pressing the burnt flesh to her mouth. It was day.

She always wandered off when she was bored. Nola blinked, looking down at her nails. In a matter of seconds, she stood in the desert, looking down at the Nomad's camp. A malicious grin appeared on herself and she sunk down to the sand, slowly transforming into a scorpion. The glee she felt upon scurrying to the tents, disappeared the minute she realised that the quiet boy with the visions was the only one there. Though he's foretelling could be irritating, she was certain that his death would not harm the Nomads or impress Zephyra in any way. She scurried back to a rock, transforming to her own form once she was hidden from view. Killing the boy wouldn't even serve for her own entertainment. She glanced out from behind the rock, scoffing at his attempts to start a fire. No. She wouldn't attack the boy. She'd wait for someone deserving of her attention before leaping into a fight.

"Now Caleb... both hands on the ground. Push out one of your legs, like... like a horse would kick. It's called the Chapa-de-costas. Do it fast."

Caleb shrugged. "This is easy. Teach me something harder!"

Nathan grinned. "Something harder? Okay then."

He moved quickly, jumping over Caleb to position himself behind him. He swept his leg rapidly, jumping forward the second Caleb landed on his stomach. He grabbed onto Caleb's leg instantly, grinning.

"See if you can do this."

Chloe froze as she watched Caleb fall, her sword falling limply. Savannah moved forward, lifting Chloe's chin with the tip of her sword.

"Don't get distracted. Both hands on your sword!"

Chloe lifted her sword once more, frustrated. "I'm tired, Savannah!"

Savannah took another step closer, eyes blazing.

"Zephyra isn't going to ask you whether you're tired, Chloe!"

Fury soared through Chloe and she thrust her sword forward.

"Fine. Let's go on then."

Nathan's voice put an end to her fiery display, however. "No. Sav, we've been out here for days. We need to get back."

Savannah nodded simply, putting her sword back into its sheath. "You're right. We can't leave Lorcan alone much longer."

Nathan grinned. "Right, let's go guys. It's a long walk. As it is, we won't be there before sunset."

Camelot felt empty. Tears formed in Juliet's eyes as she took the horrid emptiness in.

Maslow, her only friend and confidante, would never return. Sure, she could blame her mother. But she knew that she was to blame. If she hadn't sent him...

A mocking voice cruelly interrupted her thoughts. "Oh look. It's little Juliet, all alone without her trusty pet."

Juliet's eyes shot up towards Tristan who loomed near the fountain in the middle of the room, looking bored. She glared at him warningly. "Don't."

"Oh?"

Tristan's laugh taunted her. "Are you sad, poor little Juliet? Was he your friend?"

Juliet chose to stare at him with an icy gaze.

"At least I know what friends are."

Tristan smirked. "Yes, the beast was a great friend, wasn't it? Kept you company, loved you. It followed your every command. And where is it now? Oh that's right. Dead. Which is coincidentally, where those precious twins are heading."

Juliet shot forward without warning, her hand clasp around Tristan's neck. Tristan gasped as her tiny hand forced the air out of her lungs mercilessly. When she spoke, there was a steely quality to her voice that he had never heard before. "Don't forget who I am, Tristan! I may choose to spend my time with animals, to care, to love... that does not mean I'm not powerful. Not only am I Zephyra's only daughter, but I was born in Camelot. I'm more than just a child."

She let him go with enough force to land him spluttering in the fountain. When he finally managed to climb out, still rubbing his throat, she had left.

One of the many advantages of transforming into a scorpion was that it meant she could live on insects if she had to. Nola groaned irritably, gazing down at the tents again. The others had been gone for ages. She knew Lorcan's daily routine like the back of her hand by now. Get up, take forever to start a fire, walk around the camp to ensure that everything was safe – he had nearly caught her once. Since then she had transformed as soon as he managed to get a fire started. Then he'd sit and mutter to himself, eat something, go out for a walk. Return with food, eat more, mutter more, kill the fire and go to sleep. She actually pitied him. His life was far more boring than her own. Delighted cries reached her ears and she moved forward, grinning upon recognizing the two older nomads and the twins.

For a minute, she considered rushing down and simply attacking the group. Logic prevailed however, and she skulked back behind the rock. She'd get one of them alone soon enough now that they were back.

Down at the tents, excited voices spoke animatedly about the training they had just received. "Savannah said that she'd never seen anyone pick up on sword fighting that quickly! She said that even she took longer than me to master the basics."

Chloe's voice was gleeful and she glanced at Lorcan, eager to acquire the cute boy's approval. Caleb interrupted her confident monologue.

"Nathan said that he'd never seen anyone he was interested in teaching Capoeira, but I have the potential to be great!"

Lorcan smiled quietly and Savannah took a step forward, resting a hand on each twin's shoulder. "You're both fantastic and I'm sure Lorcan already knows that."

Lorcan nodded in silent agreement and Savannah ran her fingers through her hair, yawning.

"I'm going to take a nap. You guys should get some rest too."

Caleb nodded at once. "I could do with some rest right now."

He looked at Chloe and Lorcan expectantly, but Chloe shook her head firmly.

"I'm good. I'm too excited to sleep now, I actually want to practice some more."

Lorcan grinned at her. "I'm not as good as Sav, but I'll practice with you."

Caleb simply rolled his eyes and stalked towards the tent. Chloe reached for her sword, picking it up carefully and standing to face Lorcan.

"Whenever you're ready."

"Tristan told me what you did."

Juliet froze at the sound of her mother's voice, turning to face her. "He was mocking me."

Zephyra descended the stairs gracefully, reaching to touch Juliet's cheek. "I am not reprimanding you, Juliet. I have to admit that I am surprised. I knew you had it in you, but I wasn't aware that you realised your own strength."

Juliet simply shrugged, passively allowing Zephyra to hug her. "I'm proud of you, Juliet."

Juliet pulled away from her mother, her expression incredulous. "You're proud because I threw Tristan into the fountain?"

"Not that specifically. But I am proud that you stood up for yourself. It is what you should do, my darling."

Juliet grimaced, turning. "Thank you for the motherly advice. I'm going to bed now."

"Woah!"

Lorcan took a quick jump back, blocking a blow from Chloe. "Didn't see that one coming! Could we take five?"

Chloe grinned at him, comfortably tucking her sword into its sheath. "Of course. And you weren't supposed to see it coming."

Lorcan simply smiled. "Seeing things coming is sort of my thing."

She sat down, craning her neck to look up at him. "Oh yes. The visions. How does it work?"

Lorcan shrugged uncomfortably. "I don't really... know. I mean, it just sort of happens."

Chloe sighed enviously. "I'm jealous. Telling the future... That's something everyone wants."

Lorcan grinned, shoving her playfully. "Oh, the novelty wears off. Besides, you control fire. That's cooler."

"Yeah, it'd be awesome if I wanted to be a pyromaniac. Fire scares me."

"It shouldn't, Chloe. Not anymore. Control the fire. Don't let it control you. There's nothing scary about it when you think about the fact that you can stop it at any time."

He stood, glancing at the tents. "I'll be right back."

Chloe simply nodded, staring off into the distance.

"Sure."

Nola nearly shrieked with glee as she watched the girl sitting by herself. Target acquired. She recognized boredom, restlessness from a distance. Right now, it screamed from Chloe's whole demeanour. Nola lifted her trembling hands, watching excitedly as purple orbs of light formed above them. She carefully levitated the lights into the sky, watching Chloe's expression change as she noticed it. As she expected, the girl glanced at the quiet tents before getting up and slowly moving towards the lights.

The lights were enticing. Chloe reconsidered following them for a minute, the memory of their experience at the Lake fresh in her memory. The reassuring lights of the tents, however, assured her that she'd be safe. It was without another thought that she proceeded to follow the lights. "Well, well, well... I knew that if I waited patiently you'd come to me. And would you look at that. Here you are."

The venomous voice stopped her in her tracks and she turned, reaching for her sword. Nola laughed as Chloe lifted her sword, her eyes glowing with malice. "You're willing to take me on then? Fantastic. This will be even more fun than I expected it to be."

CHAPTER 17

Nola screeched with laughter as she dodged Chloe's attempts to hurt her, shooting a green beam of energy towards her. "Oh, come on! That can't be it. Put up a fight!" Frustration welled up in Chloe as she stormed forward, furiously swinging the sword in Nola's direction. Nola laughed again, playfully dodging the sword before kicking it out of Chloe's hand. She moved forward promptly, her hand closing in around Chloe's neck. "Now what am I going to do with you, sweetheart?"

"You're going to let her go."

Nola laughed at the confident voice behind her shrilly. "Oh am I?"

Her laughter increased when the figure emerged from the dark.

“Lorcan, isn’t it?”

She glanced at the sword in his hand and rolled her eyes. “If you wanted my attention, all you had to do was ask.”

“Let Chloe go and I won’t kill you now.”

“Like you stood a chance.”

He shrugged, the sword dangerously swinging in his hand. “Are you scared?”

Chloe screamed when ropes shot out of thin air, tying themselves around her squirming body. Lorcan moved forward the minute Nola stepped away from her, the sword moving sharply in his hand. Nola dodged it easily, laughter ringing through the sky. She didn’t notice Lorcan moving around her, the laughter freezing in her throat when he appeared behind her unexpectedly. She shifted to her scorpion form quickly, scurrying a few feet away before morphing back into herself. Lorcan took a few steps forward, his eyes dangerously fixated on her face. Nola’s scream echoed through the night as veins exploded in her head at once. The pain stopped just as suddenly as it began and she whimpered, looking up at Lorcan with bloodshot eyes. He seemed to tower above her, strength seeping from his stance. “You tell Zephyra that it’s a bad idea to mess with us. We’re called the Opulentia for a reason. We’re way more powerful than you think.”

He grabbed Chloe’s arm, dragging her down to the tents without another glance in Nola’s direction. Chloe waited until they reached the fire before looking at him dejectedly.

“Thanks.”

Lorcan just nodded, avoiding her eyes. “You know we have to tell Nathan, right?”

“Tell me what?”

Nathan’s voice shocked them and Chloe looked up at him fearfully. It was Lorcan who stepped forward, his hand wrapping around Chloe’s protectively. “Nola was here. She... attacked Chloe.”

“What?”

Nathan’s face transformed into a mask of anger as he knelt beside Chloe. “Did she break our enchantments? Did she come down here?”

Chloe shook her head hesitantly. “No. She was... up the hill, a few feet from here. I followed her.”

“Why would you do that, Chloe?”

“I don’t know.”

Nathan shook his head irritably. “Lorcan, keep an eye on her. I’m going to wake Savannah.”

“What are you going to do?”

“We’re going to look for Nola and handle her.”

Caleb skulked back into the tent as he listened to Nathan’s angry voice. It frustrated him the way everyone expected them to just sit around, yet they were supposed to save Avalon. He frowned upon noticing the dagger in the corner of the tent.

He was certain that they had left it by the Lake. He moved to pick it up, a finger carefully tracing over the blade. The image of the cute, flirty mermaid flashed in front of his eyes and he grinned, twirling the dagger in his hands. A thought suddenly occurred to him and he grabbed the handle of the dagger tightly, ploughing it into the ground. He didn’t have to wait long before a replica of the lake appeared around the dagger. Excitement bubbled over in him as the dagger transformed into a transparent imitation of Misti. He rushed forward, taking a disappointed step back when his outstretched hand passed right through her.

“Are you really here?”

Misti shrugged, the smile on her face frozen. “It’s complicated.”

“Which means no.”

Her infectious laughter soothed him and he sat down next to her, shaking his head when he realised that even the water was no more than an illusion. “I’m not physically here, Caleb. But it’s real. So what’s bothering you?”

He glanced at her and shook his head. “I just needed some cheering up and I thought of you.”

Her smile illuminated the tent. “I’m glad you thought of me. I happen to be very good at cheering people up.”

“We’re never going to find her!”

Lucian smirked as Connor sat down on a rock, his face a picture of frustration.

“Need I remind you that this was your idea?”

“I am aware of that, Lucian. But she’s the only one in Avalon strong enough to break the soul mate bond and when that’s done...”

“He can kill me without feeling pain.”

Never before had a voice sounded so wounded. Connor and Lucian both turned to the direction from where they had heard the voice, facing Zephyra silently. She took a hesitant step forward, her eyes glued to Lucian’s face.

"You would do that? You would break the bond?"

Lucian steeled himself, forcing an icy quality to his voice. "Well, it's like you said, Zephyra. We're not friends anymore."

Anger flashed across her face. "I'm not the one who gave up on you, Lucian."

Lucian froze, making a move towards her. He reconsidered, however, choosing to stay frozen in his spot. "I never gave up on you."

She moved closer, forgetting for just a minute that she was powerful, hated and intent on destroying the man in front of her.

"When Connor left, you changed. Our dreams, our destiny... it didn't matter anymore. You acted like you had lost everything."

"Our dreams didn't make sense anymore, Zephyra."

She blinked stubbornly. "It did to me! I didn't want to find Camelot alone, I had no choice. You weren't there. You gave up on me long before I found it. I was hanging on to our dreams, that was what kept me going and when I had to do it alone..."

She broke off, laughing softly. "Are you really curious as to why I blocked the Lake against you? Why I changed? You weren't the only one who lost Meryl and Connor, Lucian. I lost them and then I lost you."

He took a step towards her, sympathy shining in his eyes. "Then you lost Jack and..."

Fury burnt in her eyes as a strong gust of wind hit him square in the chest.

"Don't you dare talk about him! Don't you dare act like you still know me!"

She turned, disappearing in something resembling a cyclone and Lucian raised his hands to settle the storm. He turned to Connor, trembling. Connor rushed forward at once, putting a comforting arm around Lucian's shoulder. "Don't blame yourself for what she's become, Lucian."

"I can't help it. If I'd been there for her..."

"We can't change the past. Besides, she knew you'd react like this. Zephyra knows you, it's a part of the game she's playing."

Lucian nodded finally. "You're right."

"So we go on?"

Lucian nodded hesitantly. "Yes. Of course we do."

"Nathan. Are you sure this is the right thing to do?"

Savannah froze, turning to look around. A haunting feeling loomed over the dark desert.

"Shouldn't we wait for Lucian to..."

Nathan interrupted her irritably. "If we wait for Lucian, we'll be too late. I am capable of handling this, Savannah."

She reached for his hand. "I know you are."

He flashed a quick smile in her direction. "I didn't mean to snap at you."

"I know you didn't. I don't doubt you. I just have a bad feeling."

For a fleeting second, he considered admitting that he shared the same ominous feeling and suggest going back to their tents. Instead, he chose to simply stalk forward, Savannah's hand safely captured in his.

A thousand thoughts ran through Zephyra's mind as she sped through the forest. Along with the dream replaying itself in her head, was the coldness in Lucian's eyes. A coldness she had never seen before. Fear nestled within her. She had trusted that the soul mate bond would prevent him from killing her. If it was broken... She came to a sudden stop, trying to halt the horrendous thoughts drifting towards her. Without the bond, nothing stopped him. Defeating her would be easy.

Her raged scream pierced the air and she sunk to her knees, trembling furiously. Along with the realisation that she had to stop him, she was intently aware of an incredible pain surging through her entire body. The pain intensified when her attempt to spin away failed and she fell to the ground in a miserable heap. Her powers were tied to her emotions, which were out of control. There was no use trying to use them before she got it together. She closed her eyes, angrily trying to ignore the tears rushing to the surface. The grunt behind her alerted her to another presence and she gasped upon noticing an enormous bear slowly making its way out of the bushes.

Fear paralysed her and she stood frozen. Zephyra's heart sank when she noticed a cub appearing beside the first bear, which still grunted irritably. The bear's movement was sudden as it reared slowly, its paw dangerously waving in the air. She fell to her knees as the paw struck the air where her head had been seconds earlier. There wasn't time for thinking her actions through. Without another glance at them, she turned, rushing away as fast as she could. For some reason, the earth seemed to fight against her. She didn't notice the rock before it was too late and a scream stuck in her throat as she tumbled to the ground. She could still hear the growls behind her and she closed her eyes. A sharp scream elicited from her throat as she felt herself lifted from the ground. "He's gone, you're safe."

The gruff voice was undoubtedly human and Zephyra opened her eyes slowly. A friendly pair of blue eyes met her gaze and she gasped upon realising her distance from the ground. A twinkle appeared in the blue eyes, followed by an enticing smile.

"It's your lucky day. If any of the other giants had found you, they'd rip your limbs apart."

Zephyra shivered. "How is that supposed to make me feel lucky?"

"I'm not like that. I'm Magnus. The social outcast of the giants."

She smiled back at him warmly. "I'm... Zephyra."

His smile disappeared at once. "The queen of Camelot."

Her nod was curt and Magnus laughed softly, settling her on his shoulder.

"You're not as frightening as they make you out to be. Let me take you back where you belong."

For a minute she wished that she could stay in the forest with the friendly giant who had no reason to be nice to her, yet was. For just a minute, she craved an uncomplicated life with friends who cared. Zephyra nestled her head against Magnus' shoulder and closed her eyes. "Thank you."

CHAPTER 18

Connor grunted when another mountain appeared in front of them.

"Seriously? Where does this woman live?"

Lucian laughed softly. "If I know Hecate... somewhere extremely hard to find."

Connor frowned.

"That doesn't sound like the Hecate I know."

"People change I guess. The last time you saw her was fourteen years ago."

A sad smile settled on Connor's face. He could still vividly remember the last time he had seen Hecate. It was shortly after Meryl's death. She had come to sympathise.

"Connor?"

He had looked up, surprised to find Hecate standing there. "How are you doing?"

He shook his head distraughtly. "I can't... think. Everything just hurts."

Hecate sat down next to him. A slim hand crept onto his knee. "Is there anything I can do?"

He looked at her with bloodshot eyes. "Can you make it stop hurting?"

Mixed emotions flashed in her eyes. "I could."

She recoiled from the hope in his eyes. "It's a complicated spell, Connor. And it won't take your hurt away, it will only help you deal with it."

"Please?"

Hecate closed her eyes. "You'd have to leave after it's done. You'd have to go out of Avalon and return only when you're ready."

Connor grabbed on to both her hands. "I'll go. I'll do anything, but I can't feel like this anymore. It just hurts too much."

She had performed the excruciating spell and assisted him in leaving Avalon. She was the only one aware of his decision to leave and she was given the task of telling all of his friends that he had left.

It now dawned upon him how unfairly he had burdened her. Connor shook his head.

"She should hate me for what I have done to her."

Lucian shook his head at once. "Hecate would never hate you. Trust me."

"How could you know?"

Lucian simply smiled, the memory of his last conversation with Hecate rushing to his mind. She had surprised him by coming to Rock Mountain unannounced.

Lucian was not happy when he looked up to find Hecate standing a few feet from him, observing him quietly. "What do you want, Hecate?"

She sat down and shrugged. "I need your help."

Lucian froze. "My help?"

He took a step towards her. "What would you of all people need my help for?"

She looked around, her features clouded in misery. "You've managed to... get away from everything. No one bothers you here. I want that."

Lucian moved to sit down next to her. "Why on earth would you want that, Hecate? You're the most powerful witch in Avalon. You help people."

Hecate's laugh was bitter. "Yes, well. With great power comes a lot of lonely days and a crowd of people who use you. I just need some peace."

"Is this still about Connor?"

She blinked the tears away. "Sometimes I wish I never helped him. Perhaps he would have healed here and..."

Lucian sighed and lifted her chin with his index finger. "Perhaps he would have seen you?"

Hecate shook her head slowly. "No one sees me, Lucian. They see power."

"You loved him so much you let him leave?"

Hecate shrugged. "It was helping him leave or watch him waste away."

Lucian nodded grimly. "I'll help you. As long as you realise you're never going to settle in one place. You're going to have to move around."

"I could do that."

He had helped her find a place in the forest to start out with. When he had returned to the spot a few months later, she was gone. He shook his head and squeezed Connor's shoulder. "Trust me. I know."

"Here we are."

Magnus gently let Zephyra down as they reached the Lake. He knelt down and smiled at her softly. "If you ever need me, just call. I'll hear you."

Zephyra impulsively reached forward and rested her hand against his cheek.

"Thank you, Magnus. For everything. I won't forget what you did."

Magnus simply smiled at her before running off and Zephyra crossed the Lake speedily.

Tristan roused from his seat next to the fountain the minute she entered. "My Lady! Where have you been?"

A light appeared in Zephyra's eyes as she looked at the handsome young man. "Tristan. Do you know where to find Hecate?"

He shook his head after a short wait. "No. She moves around quite a lot. But I'm sure I could find her if you needed..."

"Do that. Go out, find her and kill her."

The last colour drained from Tristan's cheeks. "Kill... kill her, my Lady?"

Zephyra arched an eyebrow. "Yes. Is there a problem?"

"Not at all. I... I'm just... is it wise to kill her? She's strong, we could use her abilities to our advantage."

"Killing her isn't the smartest choice, Tristan. It's the only one. Now I expect you to do as I say instead of questioning me."

Tristan nodded blankly, his eyes looking unusually wide in his pale face as he spun out of the castle.

Back at camp, Chloe was still sitting next to the fire, her eyes fixated on the sand. Lorcan looked at her sympathetically. They had no idea what Avalon was about, they were bound to run off and investigate things whenever the opportunity presented itself. It was what any fourteen year old in their position would do. They shouldn't feel bad for being curious about Avalon. He took a few steps forward and sat down next to Chloe hesitantly.

"Are you all right?"

Chloe looked at him tearfully. "No."

"Chloe..."

"Why am I so stupid? I should have known it was a trap. And now Nathan and Savannah are out there, probably in danger, all because of me. And you... you could have been killed and it was my fault. Everyone probably hates me now."

"Hey!"

Lorcan put an arm around Chloe's shoulder, allowing her to rest her head on his shoulder.

"I don't hate you and neither does Nathan or Savannah. As for the could have been killed part... that silly little shape shifter couldn't kill me if she had an army to back her up. You're not stupid and you didn't put anyone in danger."

She shook her head. "I was the one who convinced Caleb to go out and look for the stupid cave too. Then I killed someone and..."

She broke off and a sob escaped from her throat. "I don't want to be here. I want to go home."

Lorcan sighed and pulled her closer, uncomfortably patting her on her head. "This is your home now. You'll be fine. You will. I know that."

In the deepest part of the forest, Hecate was peacefully preparing an experimental potion in the warm safety of a hut she had built with the help of the Giants. The crack outside should have warned her of a lurking danger. Had she paid attention, Hecate would have noticed the screech of a crow at her window. But she had not even given the fact that her life could be in danger a second thought. Being the most powerful witch in Avalon, Hecate knew that both sides would need her. Therefore, when she heard the crack outside, she opened her door without expecting for a second that it would be her last time.

She recognized the white haired Veolo instantly. "Tristan."

He nodded politely. "Hecate. Could I come in?"

She moved to block the door. "No."

Something flickered in his eyes as he looked at her and the fatal realization dawned upon her. "She sent you to kill me?"

Regret flashed over his face. "I am sorry that I have to do this. I have always cared for you."

Hecate laughed softly. "You care about what I have done for you. Not about me, Tristan. Never about me. But I have to wonder... aren't you afraid that killing me would reverse all the spells? The beauty, the power, the eternal youth... it could vanish with my death."

He caught her hand, a muscle jumping in his jaw. "You loved me. You wouldn't have done that. You wouldn't have thought it necessary."

He didn't mention that it didn't matter. None of it mattered anymore. He winced when the hand caught in his, suddenly burst into flame and he jumped backwards.

Hecate moved forward angrily, fire in her eyes. "You always were too sure of my love."

Tristan found himself flying backwards in an instant, groaning when he felt his spine cracking against the trunk of a tree. The next blast hit him before he even got to his feet.

The realisation of her extreme power hit him the second an enormous tree flew towards him, hitting him in the stomach. A pained scream left his lips and he sent a wave of energy her way. It missed, as he expected and Tristan ducked as she recoiled with another blast. It scraped the top of his head, but he fell down in mock pain. Hecate froze for a second, watching his crumbling figure. Tristan opened his eyes wide, willing his seductive power to the front. "Hecate... help me. Please."

She moved forward in a trance like state, kneeling next to him. "No. I'm sorry, Tristan. But it's you or me."

He closed his eyes, forcing a few tears to escape from them. Tristan observed through his lashes, watching intently as she turned away from him. She had just started walking when he jumped to his feet, both hands circling around her neck. He didn't dare look in her eyes, see the fear in them. He could feel the dark death rushing from his hands. Only when her body had gone limp against him, did he let her sink to the ground, silently realising that the tears on his cheeks were real.

CHAPTER 19

Both Lucian and Connor fell to the ground as they saw the dark cloud heading in their direction. It swooped over them before touching the ground and turning into Hermico quickly. He looked at them curiously.

"You seem like you're up to some thing."

Connor merely grunted. Lucian, however, looked at Hermico with interest. "You could find someone, couldn't you?"

Hermico smirked. "Well, it is my job to be able to find anyone in Avalon. Why?"

"We're looking for Hecate."

A look of distrust crossed Hermico's face. "What do you want with her?"

"We need her help with... something."

Hermico shook his head firmly. "No. Hecate doesn't want to be found."

Connor lifted his head to look at Hermico. "We're her friends. Help us find her. Please?"

"Friends? You haven't spoken to her in fourteen years, Connor. You're everything but a friend to her. And you, Lucian? Did you even once bother to see how she was? No, all you ever do is ask for her help when you need it."

Connor closed his eyes, regret dancing in his heart. "I know... I've been horrible to her. I know I owe her a lifetime of apologies, but I truly care for her. If we didn't care about her, we wouldn't ask you of all people to help us."

Hermico sighed dramatically. "Fine. Her house is not far from here. Follow me."

"I'm exhausted, Nathan."

Savannah looked at Nathan miserably. They had left the desert, heading into a deep part of the forest. Nola was nowhere to be seen and she had started considering that following her was madness. "She's around here somewhere. We're going to find her."

Savannah moved around Nathan, grabbing onto his hands. "Then what? We're nearly at the Lake, Nathan!"

Nathan frowned slightly. "She managed to come all the way to our camp and lure Chloe away, Sav. What if Lorcan isn't there to save her next time? We have to get rid of this girl. She's dangerous."

Savannah saw the scorpion first and she pulled Nathan aside swiftly. "Watch out."

Nathan knelt to the ground, looking at the creature attentively. The beady eyes seemed to glare at him as the animal raised its tail warningly. Nathan took a step backwards quickly and watched in awe as the scorpion gracefully transformed into a girl.

Nola laughed softly, winking at them. "Thanks for the lift."

Savannah stormed forward, her sword trembling in her hand. Nola seemed to be awaiting her attack and she blocked the blow easily. Savannah laughed as Nola thrust her sword forward, using the movement to launch herself over Nola's head. Nathan shook himself out of his daze, allowing a rock slide to hit the ground violently as he moved his hands to the side. Nola dodged the rocks with a gasp, flattening her body against a tree. She stifled a shriek when a sword sunk into the tree next to her shoulder, launching herself forward into Savannah. Savannah groaned at the contact, pushing Nola away while simultaneously reaching for her sword once more.

Nathan felt the chilly wind first. He watched, frozen, as Zephyra appeared in the eye of a tornado. Fury seemed to seethe from her body as she sunk to the ground, sword ready in her hand. He jumped forward with a kick to her shins. Zephyra's cry of pain filled rage alerted Savannah and Nola to her presence. Nola abandoned Savannah without a second thought, warping to Nathan and striking him with several quick punches.

Savannah gripped onto her sword, reaching it just in time to block a strike from Zephyra.

The clanging of metal meeting drowned out Nola's whispered insults and the sound of various kicks and punches. Fear nestled in Savannah as black and blue eyes met over swift moving swords. Neither of them stopped or turned to look as they heard a grunt followed by the distinctive sound of flesh hitting ground. The rock slide took them both by surprise and Savannah shrieked as a large boulder picked her up, swooping her deeper into the forest. "Nathan, what..."

Nathan's lips met hers in a quick kiss and he glanced over his shoulder. "You need to run, Sav. Now."

"What? No, I'm staying. I'm finishing this."

Nathan shook his head quickly. "It's no use. She's stronger than us and if Nola wakes... I'll distract her. Run."

"What about you?"

Nathan pressed his lips against her hair. "I'll be fine. I'll see you tonight."

"Promise me?"

Nathan nodded quickly. "I promise. Now go."

Savannah grabbed onto his hand, her eyes meeting his.

"I love you."

"I love you too."

He turned the sword in his hands, swallowing. "Run."

She nodded apprehensively, rushing back to the desert as quickly as possible. Nathan took a deep breath before lifting the sword and taking the last few steps out of the forest. His breath hitched in his throat as he took in all the faces now surrounding Zephyra. Fear of what would have happened to Savannah if he hadn't read Zephyra's mind threatened to overwhelm him, but he shook it off. She was safe now. He didn't protest as a centaur grabbed his arms, tying chains around his body. He didn't protest as they dragged him towards the Lake roughly. He simply closed his eyes, willing Savannah's image to come to his mind.

Tears formed in Tristan's eyes as he ran through the forest. It was over too soon. Hecate was his reason for joining Zephyra in the first place and now... He came to a sudden stop, falling to his knees. If he hadn't killed her, Zephyra would have killed him and then sent someone else to kill Hecate. It was for the best, really.

Someone else would have killed her more violently, would have hurt her. At least he made it quick. As quick as he possibly could have. No matter how much he reasoned with himself, he couldn't deny the horrible truth. He had killed the only person he had ever come close to loving and there was no taking it back. He'd have to live with it forever. He grabbed onto the silver chain around his neck, staring at the charm on it. Immortality suddenly had no meaning anymore.

Connor saw the destruction first as they reached the site where Hecate had lived, leaving Hermico and Lucian behind as he raced down to the pathetic heap of bricks that used to be her house. "Hecate!"

He barely registered Lucian and Hermico joining him as he threw bricks aside, desperately searching for any sign of life. Any sign of hope.

The pained scream erupting from Hermico's throat destroyed any last semblance of hope and Connor flew outside with Lucian on his heel. They froze when they saw them – Hermico knelt on the ground, holding on to Hecate's lifeless body. Rain started pouring

from the sky as they moved forward, kneeling next to Hermico. His eyes were bloodshot as he looked at them. "She's dead. They killed her. Out of everyone in Avalon, I thought she was the last person..."

He shook his head, overwhelmed, and wiped stray strands of hair out of Hecate's face. "I thought she was the last person they'd kill."

Lucian nodded quietly and put a comforting hand on Hermico's shoulder. "We all thought so. Thought they'd need her too much."

Hermico stood slowly, still hugging Hecate's frail body to his chest. "I need to go. Tell... everyone."

Connor moved forward swiftly, lifting Hecate's body out of Hermico's and into his own arms. "Go on. I've got her."

Hermico didn't respond. He simply spun around and disappeared in a dark cloud, a few drops of rain falling where he had stood.

"Connor?"

Lucian's voice was tentative, but Connor didn't even hear it as he sunk to his knees, still holding on to Hecate's body. His fingers lightly traced her fine features as he looked down into her empty eyes. Tears splashed from his eyes onto her face, mixing with the rain pouring from the sky. It was Lucian who knelt down next to his friend and reached over to close Hecate's eyes forever, tears forming in his eyes as well. Hecate spent most of her time alone, cooped up in this little house in the forest – afraid of the unwanted attention her extraordinary power would attract. The only time he had seen her creep out of her shell was when she had fallen in love with Connor. And when she had come to Rock Mountain with a broken heart after helping him leave Avalon. "Connor, I know you cared about her..."

Connor nodded, letting the witch's body sink down to the ground. "I did. Just... not enough. We should have known they'd do this, Lucian. We should have saved her."

"How could we have known? How could we have expected this?"

Connor just shook his head. "She'll never know how sorry I am for what I've done to her."

Lucian forced a smile to his face as he rested his hand against Hecate's cold cheek. "She did. I'm sure she did."

Connor shrugged, his eyes still fixed on Hecate's face. "Could we... we should bury her, shouldn't we?"

Lucian looked up at the pouring rain. He knew Hermico well. The storm would last for days. "Yes. We should."

CHAPTER 20

Lucian watched silently as a wooden chest materialized out of thin air. Connor simply nodded at him and Lucian stepped forward to pick Hecate's body up and laying her down in the chest. Connor took one last look at her face before closing the lid. He knelt down next to the chest, tears forming in her eyes. "I'm so sorry for everything, Hecate. You have to believe that. If I could do things differently, I would. You have to know that."

Lucian swallowed back tears as his hand trailed over the rough wood. "Goodbye, Hecate." Both men turned away as the chest burst into flames, allowing tears to fall for the friend they had let down.

Nathan groaned in pain as the flurry of air hit him square in the chest. He opened his eyes, thrusting his neck backwards upon finding Zephyra's black eyes boring into his.

His heart tightened with fear as his eyes surveyed the room. He recognized Nola and Tristan. A young boy and bulky man stood whispering next to them. Zephyra lifted her hand graciously. "Ianto."

The dark skinned man took a few steps forward. He looked down at Zephyra, unable to mask his delight. "My Lady?"

Zephyra touched his cheek playfully. "Let us see whether you are able to convince Nathan here to let the Nomads abandon Lucian... and join us."

Nathan smirked. "Even if we did abandon Lucian, we would never join you! You are against everything that we stand for."

Zephyra grabbed onto his hair, pulling his head downward. "Honour. Courage.

Determination. That is what you stand for, isn't it? How courageous is it to hide out in the desert? We are everything that you stand for!"

Nathan jerked his head from her grasp, struggling against the chains reining him in. "There is no honour in anything that you do!"

A frozen quality glazed over Zephyra's face. She turned to Ianto with a smirk. "He is all yours."

Ianto laughed cruelly, moving so he faced Nathan. His velvet voice was laced with haughtiness. "It would be easier to just agree to join right now. Less painful."

Nathan spat on the ground next to Ianto's feet condescendingly. "I would rather die."

His words were followed by an agonized scream as he felt a rib crack under Ianto's intense gaze. He gazed up at Ianto, out of breath. The minute their eyes met, his insides

exploded. He was vaguely aware of Nola's giggles at his pained shrieks, gasping for air as his throat started burning poisonously.

Ianto took a menacing step forward, his eyes not leaving Nathan's for a second.

"Believe me. Soon, you'll be begging for death."

Something was different at the camp. Lucian realised it the minute his feet touched the sand of the Opulentia. He glanced at Connor apprehensively. "Do you feel it?"

Connor nodded at once. "Something's wrong."

They rushed forward, freezing at the sight of Savannah anxiously fretting about.

Lucian froze as she rushed past him without noticing his presence, her hair flying in a messy cloud behind her. "Dad!"

It was Caleb who spotted them through the confusion and he rushed forward.

"Dad, something awful happened."

Connor and Lucian shared a knowing look and Connor knelt beside his son. "What's going on, Caleb?"

"One of the shape shifters attacked Chloe. Nathan and Savannah followed her into the forest and Zephyra captured Nathan."

"What?"

Caleb nodded vigorously. "Savannah's in a right state! She wants to go save him. We have to go, dad!"

Lucian nodded at once. "We'll start working on a plan right now."

Finally. It tore through Hermico's heart to see Hecate's house in the pathetic bundle of heaps that it was now turned into. A small smile graced his mouth upon noticing the small cross burnt to the Oak tree outside her house. She would have appreciated it. Tears formed in Hermico's eyes as he knelt in the middle of the rubble, ignoring the blood seeping from his hands as he scraped every last bit of wood, glass and steel towards him, determined to get rid of it. There should be no sign of Hecate's struggle, of the violent death she suffered. Blood and tears mixed on his hands as he stepped back from the heap, easily blowing it up in a cloud of black smoke.

She deserved better.

Juliet took a deep breath as she heard another shrill cry. Something was clearly going on. Even though Zephyra had strictly forbidden her from leaving her room for the rest of the

night, she couldn't help but want to investigate where the horrible sounds were coming from. She bit down on her lower lip nervously before creeping into the dark hallway, gradually sneaking to the throne room. She took a deep breath as she turned a corner, her eyes widening as she looked into the room, where a man sat tied to a chair while her mother stood in front of him confidently. Zephyra looked at the bloodied man with disdain. Juliet pressed her back to the wall as her mother turned, frightened of the consequences of being noticed. Zephyra's sharp voice cut through the silent room like a blade, but Nathan did not even bother to look up.

"Tristan. Take him down to the cellar."

Juliet skulked into a dark corner as Tristan grabbed the man, dragging him past her without a second glance back to the room.

Connor and Lucian looked at Savannah jadedly as she rushed past them once again. This time, however, Lucian stood and grabbed her arm firmly. "Savannah. Sit down."

Savannah pushed him away irritably. "I can't! There's too much to do, I have to get ready."

Connor frowned. "To do what, Savannah?"

She looked up at him, her eyes tear filled. "I have to find a way to save him."

Lucian nodded in understanding. "I know you want to save him, Savannah. So do we, but we can't just rush to Camelot and expect to walk out of there with Nathan."

She froze, staring at Lucian wide-eyed. "You're right. I have to find a way to get in without them seeing me."

Connor stood and placed a soft hand on Savannah's shoulder. "Don't think for one second that we're going to let you do this alone, Savannah. We're in it together."

His words seemed to register with her and she nodded serenely. "All right. How do we do this? He's been there for ages, he must be going out of his mind."

Lucian glanced at the tents. "First we need... we need to make sure he's alive."

The colour disappeared from her cheeks and she sunk to her knees. Connor's arms went around her waist automatically, holding her from falling to the ground.

"Connor!"

The fear in her voice was evident and he shook his head. "I don't know, Savannah. I wish I could say that he'd be fine, but I just don't know."

"I'm scared, Connor."

He pulled her close, allowing her to rest her head against his chest. "Me too."

The pair looked up as Lucian appeared next to them once more, Lorcan silently by his side. "Savannah. Do you... do you have any connection to Nathan? Anything that belongs to him?"

Savannah shook her head with a frown. "None that I can think of."

Connor coughed lightly. "There will be something in the tent. I'll go have a look."

Lucian nodded as he rushed towards the tent, while Lorcan sat down next to Savannah. She smiled through her tears as he put his arm around her shoulder awkward. "I don't really know what to say."

She looked down, allowing the tears to start falling. "You don't have to say anything. Just... sit here with me?"

Lorcan nodded warmly. "I will."

"Thanks Lorcan."

They looked up hopefully as Connor appeared, Chloe and Caleb trailing behind. Lorcan immediately noticed the guilty look on Chloe's face and he shook his head as their eyes met. Chloe simply shrugged, watching fearfully as Connor handed a necklace to Lorcan. Lorcan closed his eyes as the string touched his fingers, a picture of a battered man instantly flowing to his mind. He opened his eyes quickly.

"He's alive."

Lucian fastened his backpack around his shoulders and nodded. "Let's go then. All of us." He rushed towards the forest without another word, Savannah and Connor hastily moving next to him. Lorcan grabbed on to Chloe's hand as she took a step forward, stopping her in her tracks. "It's not your fault."

Her eyes clouded over and she shook her head. "Isn't it? If he dies... I'll never be able to forgive myself."

Caleb frowned at her words and shook his head. "Chloe, you didn't make him chase Nola. You didn't do this."

Chloe slipped her free hand into Caleb's. "I didn't make it happen. I just started it."

Juliet rolled her eyes as Tristan returned, immediately rushing up to Zephyra. She didn't hesitate for a second. With a backwards glance at her mother, who was excitedly whispering to Ianto, she made her way to the cellar as quickly as possible. Juliet's heart went out to the man the instant she saw him. He sat huddled in a dark corner, blood and tears mixed on his cheeks. "Are... are you all right?"

He looked up, not even attempting to smile and Juliet inched forward.

"I'm sorry. For what they did to you."

A white cloth appeared in her hands and she dabbed at his face lightly. "I could... heal you. Help you get away. I don't know how long it'll take, but I can try."

A frown crossed his brow. "Why would you help me?"

Juliet froze, the blood stained cloth dropping from his face. "I'm her daughter and I love her. But that doesn't mean I agree with her."

Nathan closed his eyes, vaguely aware of an insistent buzzing in his ears. "How long have I been here?"

"Almost two weeks now."

He pushed her dabbing hands away and his eyes bore into hers. "How much longer will she keep me alive?"

"I... I don't know."

"Please?"

Juliet sighed and chuckled the cloth to the side. "Not long. I'd say a day if you were lucky. But if you'd just let me heal you. You could get away, I could get you out of here."

"No."

Frustrated tears welled up in her eyes. "Why not? Why won't you let me help you?"

"Because I won't let you risk it. Also, I need... I need you to do something else for me."

"What?"

"I need you to find Savannah. Make sure she... they, make sure they don't come here."

Understanding shone in Juliet's eyes at once. "You love her."

"I do."

She hesitated. "I'll find them and tell them not to come, but you should know that if she loves you... it won't stop her."

"You have to."

Juliet inched forward. "Let me heal you first."

"No. They'll be on their way, there's no time!"

"But..."

Nathan flashed her a quick smile. "You can heal me after you've stopped them."

"What if it's too late?"

Their heads jerked up at the sound of footsteps looming in the hall. A sad smile played over Nathan's face as his eyes met those of Juliet. "It already is."

"Nathan..."

He shook his head and twisted the wrist band from his arm. "Could you give this to Savannah? It's the only way they'll believe you."

She nodded, folding the bloodied wrist band in the cloth. "Tell her... tell her I love her. And that I'm sorry."

Tears sparkled in Juliet's eyes as she nodded. "I will. I promise."

CHAPTER 21

Juliet stared at the masses entering Camelot with wide eyes. She had never before seen so many people around the castle. Ianto, Tristan, Nola and Liam each seemed to be leading a group of over a thousand bodies, each clothed in armour. The Aqti under the lead of Ianto were by far the largest group, all resembling Ianto with their dark skins and hulking bodies glistening in the light of the dawn. Tristan had a small group, though there was a clear resemblance as well – all of them were men and seemed fairly young with white hair and blue eyes. Nola's group was more varied. Each shape shifter had an individual look to her, though they all wore the same uniform. Juliet closed her eyes as she noticed Liam and his warriors carefully drawing black lines across their faces. She only had to look at the clothing and mass of weaponry to realise what was happening. They were preparing for war. Juliet took a deep breath, rushing towards the Lake hastily.

No one seemed to notice the girl rushing by, all too prepared with the preparations. Ianto's deep voice roared through the snowy plains. "I need you all to listen carefully now. We're preparing for a war, it's impertinent that we do not underestimate those who are on their way." A voice within the group scoffed. "Like we can't defeat three adults and three kids!" "Keep in mind that Lucian is one of them. You realise that even without the power of Camelot, he could take us down if he had the chance. It's important that we kill him first. Focus on him."

A sharp pang shot through Zephyra's chest at his words, but she lifted her chin, choosing to ignore this. Ianto glanced at her before continuing. "When Lucian is disposed of, we have to kill the twins. Do not underestimate anyone. They could bring others, so be prepared for that. If they do bring all of the Nomads, this war might take longer than we are anticipating." Nola's eyes shot up to Ianto. "You think they'll bring the other Nomads?"

"I think they'll be stupid not to and Lucian was never stupid. For all we know, they could bring more than the Nomads. Some of the Giants have joined their ranks, as have most of the centaurs. Like I said, we need to be prepared for anything. We need to be prepared for war!"

He turned to Zephyra as the battle cry raged through Camelot, his dark eyes fuelled with concern. "Are you sure you want to stay and fight?"

Zephyra nodded curtly. "Of course. Why wouldn't I?"

"My Lady... If you are to be killed, our victory would not be secured."

Zephyra smiled and touched his arm gently. "He won't kill me, lanto. He won't have the courage."

The Lake seemed unusually quiet and Juliet took a hesitant step forward. She jumped when a pale face with dreamy blue eyes broke the surface of the water. She froze, her breath hitched in her throat. "Who are you?"

The violet eyes glowed. "Misti. And you are Juliet. Zephyra's daughter."

"I am."

Misti lifted a single brow. "What do you want?"

"For you to get out of my way. I need to go to the desert."

"Why?"

Juliet seethed with irritation. "It's none of your business."

Misti's violet eyes flashed a deep scarlet. "Do you really think that I'd mindlessly let you pass so you could do your mother's dirty work and kill the twins? They're my friends, I would never do that."

Juliet hesitated. "I don't believe for one second that they really are your friends! How could you have met them?"

"Why do you care?"

Juliet folded her arms. "I happen to know Caleb. He's not the kind of person to find you mermaid-types charming."

This time, every inch from Misti's nails to her hair flashed a violent red. "My type?"

Juliet shrugged. "Oh exotic. Fun. Flirty. Caleb likes nice girls."

Misti smirked. "In that case, why would he even talk to the spoiled little princess of Camelot? At least my mother isn't the one trying to kill him."

Her piercing gaze didn't miss the fear in Juliet's eyes and she laughed. "Oh! He doesn't know you're Zephyra's daughter, does he?"

“No.”

Misti moved out of the way swiftly. By now, her tail was shining a bright pink.

“Go ahead, little Juliet. Have your fun. At least I know he’ll hate you when he finds out the truth.”

Juliet glared at Misti, raising her eyes up to the sky as a whistle elicited from her lips.

Misti rolled her eyes at the Phoenix swooping down to Juliet, watching with disdain as she climbed onto the majestic bird. “He’ll never hate me. Who says he’ll even find out?”

Misti simply shrugged. “The truth has a nasty way of coming out and ruining things. I’ll be counting on that.”

She disappeared under the water at the same instant that the Phoenix shot up in the air, Juliet clinging onto its neck worriedly.

Ellard frowned as he reached the camp of the Nomads, only to find it deserted. He kicked a stone irritably. “Ellard?”

Ever the supportive best friend, Gerard was quick to be by his side. “I can’t believe they chose that... that child over one of us! He is not equipped to lead them!”

Gerard glanced at their surroundings. Anxiety was evident in his eyes.

“What are we doing here exactly?”

A muscle jumped in Ellard’s jaw. “Joining the Nomads.”

“You’re kidding? You want to join the Nomads? The Protectors of Avalon?”

Ellard nodded firmly, taking a confident step forward. Surprise flashed over his face as a blast hit him backwards the second his foot touched the border of the Opulentia.

“What the...”

Gerard smirked. “Obviously they don’t welcome visitors.”

“Well they’re just going to have to.”

“Ellard, they’re never going to trust us.”

“We’ll make them! I refuse to follow Liam, Gerard. We won’t survive without an alliance and if that means joining the Nomads, I’m going to do it. Are you with me or not?”

Gerard sighed, sitting down reluctantly. “Fine. Only because you’re my best friend.”

They had been walking forever, muttering amongst themselves about ways they could possibly enter Camelot, when the soft voice stopped them dead in their tracks.

“Wait.”

Caleb was first to recognize it and he spun round quickly. “Juliet?”

There was a short silence before Juliet stepped out of the shadows, her expression tearful. She moved past Caleb, her eyes finding those of Savannah. The bloodied wristband trembled in her hand as she looked up at her. "I'm so sorry."

Savannah shook her head dazedly. "What are you talking about?"

"I tried to stop it. I tried to help him, but..."

Lucian took a quick step forward, gathering the weeping girl into his arms. "What happened, Juliet?"

She latched onto his neck, trying to stifle sobs ripping from her throat. "They wanted him to persuade the Nomads to join. That way they could force him to bring the twins to the Castle, but he wouldn't let them. So they kept hurting him and... and then..."

Lucian closed his eyes as an agonized wail tore from Savannah's lips. "They killed him?" Juliet's nod was barely perceptible. It was Caleb's voice breaking the silence, invaded only by Savannah's soft sobs. "How do you know all this?"

Juliet moved away swiftly, her hands trembling. "Because it was my mother who had him killed. I... I'm Zephyra's daughter."

Caleb could only stare at her silently, aghast by the confession. "Caleb..."

Juliet took a step towards him, her eyes filled with tears. "Caleb, please just..."

He turned away from her with a stony expression. "Shouldn't we capture and kill her like they did to Nathan?"

Chloe took a fierce step forward as Juliet choked back a sob. "Caleb, don't. It's not her fault, don't be like this."

Lucian nodded in agreement. "She came to warn us, Caleb, risking her life. You are not to harm her. None of you are."

Caleb nodded begrudgingly. "Fine."

Lucian knelt next to Juliet, his eyes overflowing with sympathy. "Thank you for coming to tell us, Juliet."

She bit down on her lower lip. "There... there's something else you should know."

Lucian nodded encouragingly. "It's a trap. Going to Camelot. They're all preparing for war. You won't stand a chance."

Savannah dried the tears from her eyes and nodded firmly. "We... we should go back to the tents then. Not give them a chance to hurt anyone else."

Connor reached for her hand kindly. "I agree with Savannah. Let's return. Now. And..."

He turned towards the girl, smiling softly. "Thank you, Juliet. We will call Hermico to tell your... to tell Camelot that we won't be arriving. You should go back before she suspects anything."

Juliet nodded, disappearing into the forest with a last silent glance at Caleb. It was Savannah who led the way back to the tents, the entire group choked by silent tears.

Lucian waited until she was out of earshot before calling the messenger. Hermico arrived within seconds, his eyes widening at the news. "Nathan is dead?"

Lucian nodded grimly. "This is not the news I want you to share, however. I have a message for Zephyra."

Hermico nodded, a small smile grazing his face. He reached out to shake Lucian's hand hesitantly. "I don't believe in alliances, Lucian. But there has been too much death in Avalon already. I do hope that you can end this before it's too late."

Ellard frowned as he watched the sun setting, jumping at the sound of a soft hiss behind him. "Gerard? Did you hear that?"

Gerard nodded distractedly. "The snake? Yes."

Ellard yelped, his eyes wide. "Maybe we should come back another time."

Gerard rolled his eyes irritably. "You're kidding, right?"

"I'm not about to sleep out here with the snakes! We'll sleep in the cave of Notsalg tonight.

Come on, hurry. No one will find us there."

Gerard smirked, rolling his eyes as he followed his friend silently.

Zephyra lifted her head as the pure white cloud descended to the ground, groaning when Hermico appeared in front of the groups. "What do you want?"

Hermico smirked. "I have a message for you."

Disappointment settled within her at the tone of his voice. "What is it?"

"Lucian wanted me to let you know that there wouldn't be a war today."

Fire shot from her eyes. "What are you talking about?"

"They aren't coming. The smart young boy, Caleb, I think it is, wanted me to tell you that you probably should have waited with killing Nathan if you wanted them to come here."

He grimaced upon seeing the pure rage on her face. "I'll see you later. Have a nice day, Zephyra."

He shot up into the sky, just in time to miss the gigantic tornado erupting from her fingertips. Several warriors, however, were not in time to move away and she watched with a stony face as the tornado carried them away. "My Lady..."

It was Ianto who joined her side, carefully escorting her inside, while terrible yells still erupted from her lips. Tristan stared at the masses, grimacing.

Nola move closer to him, her hand slipping into his. Tristan glanced at her gratefully before turning his attention towards the crowd. "Obviously there has been... a setback. The war will continue, I can promise you that. Just... not today. You can all go."

He turned away from them swiftly, entering Camelot with Nola and Liam in tow, unable to watch as the crowd disappeared one by one.

An awkward silence hung in the air as the group of Nomads reached their tents.

Lucian made a move towards Savannah, his eyes laced with sorrow. "Sav, I..."

Savannah shook her head, motioning for him to stop talking. He looked at her expectantly, turning towards Connor in confusion when she simply turned her back and walked off.

"What was that?"

Connor watched as Savannah sat down on a rock a few feet away. He could see the emptiness in her eyes even from a distance. "She's hurt, Lucian."

"Which is exactly why we should... talk to her. Support her. Isn't that what you do?"

Connor shook his head slowly. "No. Not right now. Leave her be. She needs some time on her own."

He walked off in the opposite direction immediately and Lucian shrugged. "I'll be in my tent then."

His eyes hardened as he looked at Chloe. "No sneaking off."

Chloe rolled her eyes irritably. "I won't."

Lucian flashed her a quick smile. "Caleb. No killing anyone, torturing anyone or thinking about how much you hate Juliet."

Caleb made a face. "Whatever."

He stomped off angrily and Lucian sighed before evenly walking to his own tent.

On the opposite side of the desert, swords clung as a thousand Nomads trained meticulously. A loud scream rupturing, caused all eyes to lift at once. Kerr rushed to his mentor's side at once, brow furrowed. "Shim! Shim, what's going on?"

The tall nomad clutched his chest as he rolled on the sand, pained groans escaping from his lips. "Savannah."

Kerr frowned. "Your soulmate?"

Shim managed to nod weakly. "She's hurt. I can... I can feel it."

Tears filled Shim's eyes as he looked up at Kerr. "I've never felt anything like this before!"

Kerr reached forward, pulling Shim upwards. "What do you want me to do?"

Shim looked at him through bloodshot eyes. "We have to go... We have to go to them. I have to find out what's going on. I have to fix it."

Kerr nodded hastily. "We go. We'll fix it."

The pain stopped suddenly and Shim reached for his heart, panting. "Get the horses. We're going now."

Lorcan inspected Chloe closely. "So?"

She shrugged, a frown creasing her brow. "What?"

"Chloe, what's bothering you?"

She smiled, allowing Lorcan to drape his arm over her shoulders. "I just feel like... if I hadn't followed Nola, Nathan would still be alive."

Lorcan came to a sudden stop. "Chloe, no. Don't think like that. If you hadn't followed her, she'd probably still be here, waiting to strike. She could have killed all of us. What happened to Nathan was horrible. But it wasn't your fault."

Chloe sighed and glanced at Savannah. "I still feel horrible."

"I know. So do I."

Chloe watched as her brother stalked out of his tent rigidly. "I'm going to talk to Caleb. I think he needs me right now."

Lorcan nodded hesitantly. "I'll leave you to it. Just... call on me when you feel guilty."

Chloe allowed herself to smile and stepped forward to wrap her arms around Lorcan's neck in a quick hug. "Thank you. I'll tell you. I promise."

Lorcan smiled serenely. "I'm going to go to sleep. Everything will look different in the morning. I'm sure of that."

"I hope you're right."

CHAPTER 22

"We have to do something! She's been pacing all night!"

Nola glanced at the throne room agitatedly. "We can't let it go on like this."

Tristan sighed, putting an arm around her shoulder. "There's not really a lot we can do about it now, Nola. We have to wait."

She groaned. "I'm going to lose my mind if she keeps pacing like that!"

Liam's face lit up unexpectedly. "I have an idea!"

Ianto shook his head gloomily. "Save it, kid."

"Just give me a..."

Nola turned towards Liam with a frosty glare. "He said save it, Liam! We're not interested in your ridiculous ideas, just let it go!"

Liam sneered at her, his eyes fluttering from one to the other subtly before he popped out of the room. Nola scowled. "It's almost midnight. I need to go, I have some business to attend to."

Tristan's eyes flew up to her face. "Zephyra business?"

Nola rolled her eyes irritably. "Not everything is about that. It's full moon tonight, the Shape shifters need to come together for the power dance. I'll see you in the morning."

Tristan nodded blankly as she left, stretching his arms. "I'm going to get some sleep. Good night, Ianto."

"Did you hear that?" Gerard jumped as they entered the cave, grabbing onto Ellard's arm. Ellard shrugged him off agitatedly.

"What are you talking about?"

"I heard footsteps."

Ellard shrugged nonchalantly. "We were walking."

"I wasn't talking about us."

He broke off when a small figure crept towards them cautiously. Ellard took a step back at once, staring at the girl who limped out of the shadows suspiciously.

Her eyes seemed to be glazed over and her voice was hoarse when she spoke. "Who's there?"

Ellard held Gerard back, his tone icy. "Who wants to know?"

The girl coughed. "Please... please help me. My name is Maurelle. Please help me."

"What's wrong with you?"

Pale, bony hands grabbed onto the wall of the cave. "I live alone in this cave. I can't see. I'm sick. Where are you?"

Gerard stepped forward before Ellard could stop him, his closing around the girl's arms. She lifted her head slightly, a vicious grin appearing on her face.

"Thank you."

Gerard's scream echoed through the cave as she jumped forward, ripping his arm from his body. Her eyes widened at the blood and Ellard turned away, unable to watch as she feasted on the man in front of her. She spoke mere minutes later.

"You can turn around now. I'm done."

He jumped at the transformation she had undergone. In the place of the fragile shadow of a person, stood a young girl who was enthrallingly beautiful – albeit covered in blood.

Ellard avoided looking at the pathetic mass of bones that used to be his best friend, instead choosing to look at the cave wall intently. "What are you, a vampire or something?" She laughed freely, allowing her golden hair to fly over her shoulders. "Don't be ridiculous. Vampires are extinct. I'm a faerie."

Ellard grimaced. "I've seen faeries before and none of them were... murderous."

Maurelle shrugged, using her hand to wipe the blood from her face. "You've only met the cute kind."

Realisation dawned upon Ellard at once. "You're a dark faerie? I didn't realise there were any of you left."

She moved swiftly, pressing her hand against his chest within seconds. "I'm the only one. Thank you for bringing dinner."

The sounds of various animals echoed through the forest as a group of women danced around a large fire. Nola could feel herself moving sideways, her movement increasing as though she had more legs. To the right of her, the shrill shriek of a falcon escaped Skye's lips. The tempo of the beautiful dance increased as the fire started burning out, coming to a sudden halt with the rise of the sun. Nola sat down on the grass, out of breath, watching suspiciously as a group of shape shifters huddled closely together, whispering quietly.

Nola stood, approaching them with determination. "What are you talking about?"

Skye turned to face Nola, her dark eyes clear. "About what we've become. Nola, this war that almost happened could have killed all of us. Do you realise how dangerous your ambitions are?"

Nola sneered at the older woman. "It's not up to you to question me."

Skye looked down at Nola, her eyes cold. "I was under the impression that we do things in a democratic manner."

"You were wrong."

Skye nodded firmly. "In that case..."

She turned into her falcon form with the swoop of an arm, flying off into the distance without another word. Nola gasped, staring at the disappearing figure. Her voice was cold when she addressed the group. "Does anyone else want to challenge my authority?" She stood silently as a few more shape shifters skulked off, staring at the remaining women silently before turning around and rushing off in the opposite direction.

It was eerily silent when dawn broke over the desert. Lucian sat unmoving with his back against a rock, eyes closed. He opened one eye when he heard a moving, smiling at Connor wearily. Connor sat down next to Lucian, his brow furrowed. "Have you been up all night?"

"I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about Nathan, about the mess we're in now..."

Connor nodded slowly. "You realise that... Lucian, we need you to lead the Opulentia."

Lucian shook his head firmly. "I can't do that."

"You might not have a choice. Lorcan is too young and Savannah is in no state to lead anyone right now."

Lucian closed his eyes again. "We could get someone from outside."

Connor stood, his eyes blazing. "Now? Are you insane? Lucian, you're our only hope."

Lucian stood, nodding gruffly. "This is not a permanent thing. Only until we get rid of Zephyra."

Connor nodded, grateful. "Of course. After that you can go back to hiding in Rock Mountain."

"Thank you."

Lucian smirked, freezing to his spot when Savannah made her way out of her tent.

"Is it just me or does she look different?"

Connor moved forward swiftly, inspecting Savannah curiously. "She looks... calm."

Savannah turned to them at once, her entire demeanour teeming with serenity.

Lucian approached her hesitantly. "How are you feeling?"

Savannah's eyes were empty of any emotion as she looked at him. "I am perfectly fine, thank you."

A tortured scream ripped through the air. Both Connor and Lucian spun round to find the source of the sound. They stared at the sobbing mess that was another shape of Savannah in awe. The calm Savannah shrugged, gesturing to the weeping girl. "She's a bit out of it though."

Lucian reached out to grab onto Savannah's elbow. "Is that..."

"Dad!"

Chloe's yell interrupted them and they watched bemusedly as she rushed down to them.

"Savannah's in the tent, breaking..."

She ceased speaking the second she saw Savannah standing next to the men, her eyes widening.

"You were just up there! How are you here now? Looking... different?"

Lucian grunted. "Savannah, this is not healthy."

Chloe looked up at Lucian confusedly. "What is going on?"

Lucian ignored Savannah, who sat down robotically, ignoring the weeping of her replica.

"Savannah has the power of emotion projection. Which means that she can cast out her emotions when she doesn't want to feel them."

He pointed to the sobbing mess on the sand. "Whether it is sadness or anger."

Chloe shook her head slowly. "So we have three Savannah's and none of them is really Savannah?"

Lucian nodded grimly. "Unfortunately."

"How long does this last?"

He lowered his voice. "Until she gets the courage to deal with her emotions, this is what we're facing."

Chloe groaned, turning away from them and walking to the oasis that marked the edges of the Opulentia's territory.

The soft crack alerted her to another presence and she jumped, her heart skipping a beat.

"Don't be afraid."

Chloe watched in awe as a tall boy emerged from the shadows, a friendly light in his eyes.

"Hi."

Chloe forced a smile to her face. "Hi... Who are you?"

"Liam. You must be Chloe."

She nodded tentatively. "You don't need to be afraid of me."

Chloe sighed, a small flame jumping from finger to finger. "I don't know who to believe or what to trust right now. I just mess up everything."

Liam moved closer, careful not to touch the enchantments Lucian had cast around the borders. "You could take a walk with me?"

"I don't think that's such a good idea."

Liam smiled confidently. "You don't need to be worried. I'll protect you."

Chloe laughed softly, but proceeded to shake her head. "Today isn't really a good day for that. Sorry."

He tried to hide the disappointment in his eyes with a cheerful smile. "Maybe next time then?"

Chloe returned the smile, though hers was a little more reserved. "Maybe. If we see each other again."

Liam winked playfully. "Oh, I know we will. Someone as pretty as you? There's no way I'm allowing this to be our one and only conversation. Next time I will convince you to come exploring with me. I know Avalon like the back of my hand."

Chloe laughed shyly. "How will you find me?"

Liam slipped a small crystal over the border. "Turn that three times when you're ready to take that walk. I'll be here."

Chloe fastened the crystal around her neck. "We'll see about that. Goodbye Liam."

He flashed her a charming grin. "Good bye for now, Chloe. I can't wait to see you again."

She watched him spin off with a silly grin, turning at the sound of horses racing towards them. Chloe rushed forward, joining Lucian, Connor, Caleb and Lorcan as they stood proudly, awaiting the arrival of the two men in the distance. They seemed to close the distance in a matter of seconds, a black and a brown horse stopping mere inches from them. The older man, mounting the black horse, looked down at the group with a frown. "Where is Savannah?"

Lucian ignored Chloe's mumble of "Which one?" and simply pointed towards the rock where Savannah sat staring out in front of her. The man slid down from his horse's back at once, rushing to her without another word to them. Chloe looked at the rider of the brown horse curiously. He smiled warmly as he slid down to the sand as well. "You'll have to excuse Shim. He has this incredible desire to help Savannah through her pain in the shortest time possible. I'm Kerr, his protégé."

Lucian smirked at the thought. "Shim has a protégé?"

Kerr lifted a brow. "Yes. I was chosen to study under him in order to perhaps become the Leader of the Opulentia in the future." Connor simply lifted a brow and glanced at Lorcan. "You are not a member of the Opulentia yet and you're already preparing to be the leader?"

Kerr took a step towards Connor. "If you believe it, you will achieve it."

He approached Savannah and Shim confidently, sitting down next to her. Shim glanced up at Kerr, but returned his gaze to Savannah, his voice unusually soft.

"Get some rest, Savannah. Kerr and I will go to Camelot and retrieve Nathan's body. We'll be back before you wake up."

Savannah seemed to register Nathan's name and she lifted her eyes to meet Shim's gaze.

"Promise?"

"I promise. But you have to get some sleep. Now."

She nodded obediently, heading to her tent at once. Kerr stared at Shim in awe.

"Camelot? Do you have a death wish?"

"No. I'm going to invisibly sneak in, grab him and get out."

Kerr scoffed. "You make it sound incredibly easy. Do I fit into this plan at all?"

Shim grinned brightly. "I need to get there fast. You're my ride."

"Caleb?"

Lucian looked at the boy worriedly. In the terror of Nathan's death, they had forgotten about the shock of Caleb learning that Juliet was Zephyra's daughter. No doubt he was upset. Caleb glared up at Lucian furiously. "You knew, didn't you? You knew who she was?"

Lucian sighed. "I did."

"How could you not tell me? How could you not tell me that she was evil, that she was dangerous? Do you want me dead?"

Lucian sat down next to Caleb and put his arm around his shoulder. Caleb shrugged the comforting arm off angrily. "Answer me!"

"I don't want you dead, Caleb. I didn't tell you who her mother was, because it's none of my business. Juliet is not evil or dangerous. She would never harm you – or anyone else for that matter and I think you know that."

Caleb shook his head firmly, but Lucian simply smiled. "You wouldn't have liked her this much if you didn't believe she was good, Caleb."

"I don't like her!"

Lucian stood with a sly wink. "Of course you don't."

Kerr and Shim reached Camelot within minutes. Shim's eyes flickered to Kerr.

"There's a cave not far from here. Hide there."

"Shim..."

Shim shook his head quickly. "I'll find you. But seeing as you can't be invisible, you'll just attract unwanted attention. Now go."

Kerr nodded in agreement. "Fine. Just be careful."

Shim flashed him a cocky grin.

"I always am."

Kerr watched worriedly as Shim's appearance slowly faded until he could no longer see him. Only then did he hurry to the cave. Shim moved forward slowly, careful not to make a sound. He knew how perceptive Zephyra was and for her to find him would be catastrophic to say the least. Excitement rose in his chest as his hand touched the door. This was it. The door creaked as he swung it open and he held his breath, frightened that someone could have heard the noise. He breathed a sigh of relief when nothing happened, stealthily walking down to the cellar.

Caleb stared at the Oasis longingly. It felt like ages ago that they had fell into it from a different world, blissfully unaware of what waited upon them. He rushed forward, water splashing as he jumped into the fountain.

"I want to go home!"

He slammed his fists on the water, fury boiling in him. "This isn't fair! I want to be with my friends, at my real home! I don't want to be in some stupid place where magic exist and where everyone tries to kill me!"

His breath rushed as he sunk to his knees in the water, his white hair soaking. "I don't want to be here."

Strong arms pulled him out of the water. He didn't need to look up to know that it was his father and he yanked away angrily. "Don't! You brought me here! You did this."

Connor held his son closer, regret sinking his heart. "I'm sorry you're unhappy, Caleb."

Caleb turned towards his father with blazing eyes. "Why did we have to come back? Why did you bring us here?"

Connor sighed, sitting down next to his son. "Coming back was never the choice. Leaving was."

"I don't understand why we need to be here."

A sad smile played across Connor's face. "I know. You will someday."

Inside the lonely castle, Zephyra froze when she heard a strange noise coming from her daughter's room. She moved to open the door quickly, gasping at the heartbreaking sight of Juliet's body bursting with sobs on the bed.

"Juliet?"

She gave no indication of hearing and Zephyra took the few steps inside, sitting down beside her daughter, resting a hand on her hair lovingly.

"What happened, sweetheart?"

A tearstained face looked up at Zephyra. "I lied, mom. Now he hates me."

A million questions raced through Zephyra's mind as she lay down on the bed next to her daughter, wrapping her arms around her. Both looked up at the sound of the cellar door slamming and Juliet wiped a tear from her face. "What was that?"

Zephyra shook her head tenderly, holding her daughter even closer. "It doesn't matter now. You tell me all about this person who is dumb enough to hate someone as perfect as you."

Shim froze as the door slammed behind him. He flattened himself against the wall at once, waiting for the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs. Only when he was sure that no one was coming did he dare to look up. Shim's breath hitched in his throat at the sight of the man in front of him. Nathan's body was barely recognizable. Bloody and battered, it was easy to see that he had suffered dearly. Shim moved closer to him quickly, picking the broken man up in his arms. Nathan's shape disappeared the minute it touched his skin and he rushed outside again, dragging the limp body through the lake.

"Kerr!"

Kerr rushed out of the cave at the sound of Shim's voice, his eyes widening when he saw Nathan. "What have they done to him?"

Shim shook his head quickly.

"I don't think we want to know. Do you think you could glamour him? I don't want Savannah to see him like this, she'll never get over it and I do not have the strength to bear another nervous breakdown."

Kerr nodded, his hands tracing Nathan's body speedily. Shim smiled when Kerr stepped back. "Now he could be sleeping. Thank you."

Kerr nodded silently and Shim strapped Nathan's body to his chest before linking his arm through Kerr's.

"Let's go back."

CHAPTER 23

"Savannah."

She jumped at the sound of the familiar voice, her eyes widening. "Nathan? It... no, it can't be you. It can't. It's impossible."

He sat down next to her, a smile playing on his face. "You should know better than to say that."

She reached out, grabbing onto his hands. "Are you... are you staying?"

The answer was clear on his face and she blinked tears away. "I need you, Nathan."

Nathan shook his head as he pulled her into his arms. "You don't need me. You know that."

Her tears seeped onto his shirt as she latched onto him, her body trembling with sobs.

"Is that why you're here? To tell me that I'm going to be okay without you?"

Nathan laughed dryly. "No, I'm way more selfish than that. I... needed to see you again. To say goodbye."

Her eyes darkened. "Back in the forest. You knew they were there, didn't you? You knew... you knew that you were going to die?"

"I suspected that it was a possibility."

"Why didn't you let me fight with you? Or run with me?"

He pushed her away a few inches, lifting her chin with his index finger. "If we fought, we would have lost. If both of us ran, they would have followed us."

"So, what, you sacrificed yourself for me?"

"I love you to death. Literally."

Fresh tears streamed over her cheeks. "It's not fair. We just found each other."

Nathan leant forward, capturing her lips in a soft kiss as tears formed in his own eyes.

"I can't find reasons for why this happened, Savannah. Just know that I'll always love you."

She sobbed, touching her lips as she watched his form fade away in front of her eyes.

"I love you too, Nathan. Forever."

"Savannah?"

It was another voice calling to her and she opened her eyes, jumping when she saw Chloe kneeling next to her. She sat up slowly, still trembling from the dream. Chloe twirled a strand of hair around her finger nervously.

“Shim... Shim and Kerr are back. It’s time for the... it’s time.”

The group standing around the simple white chest were all dressed in solemn black. Somewhere in the distance, a phoenix seemed to sing a sad song. Savannah was the first to step forward, placing a single rose on the chest. “Goodbye, Nathan.”

Connor and Shim were instantly at her sides, supportively grabbing onto her arms. It was Lorcan who levitated the chest into the air, Connor who set it alight in a brilliant spectrum of flames. A small smile graced Savannah’s face as the red rose petals fell to the sand, unharmed.

She knelt to the ground, pressing a fallen petal to her lips. “I love you too.”

The group watched, smiling, as the replicas of Savannah disappeared in a huff of smoke. Shim waited until Savannah walked up to her tent before turning to Lucian.

“Lucian. Could we talk?”

Lucian nodded gruffly. “Of course.”

Kerr watched worriedly as they walked off, heading to his own tent. He had a feeling that whatever Shim and Lucian were going to talk about was not about to end well. It was better not to be a part of it.

Ellard watched as the girl skulked into a corner, whistling softly. “Are you really blind?”

Maurelle looked up at his sudden question. She hadn’t expected him to talk to her at all. After witnessing her devour his friend, she figured he’d make a run for it so she had turned his legs to lead. After that she figured he’d sit and wait for death quietly.

Clearly she was wrong. She shook her head slightly. “What?”

Ellard repeated his question and she vainly searched his eyes for any trace of malice. She decided to answer him after finding only pure curiosity.

“Sometimes. When I haven’t fed in a while I get weaker. My eyesight goes first. It’s worse at night. I can’t go out during the day, because after living in a cave for so long... my skin has become too sensitive to the sun.”

“Do you have to feed on humans?”

"No. Any living creature would do. Unfortunately they don't really wander into the cave that often."

Ellard nodded thoughtfully. "I have a proposition for you."

"I'm listening."

"I'll go out and hunt. I could bring you... food and in return..."

"I spare your life."

Ellard nodded enthusiastically. "Something like that."

For a minute she seemed to consider it, but she quickly shook her head. "No. No way, you'll just leave me here to die as soon as you get the chance to leave the cave."

Ellard reached forward fruitlessly, his heavy legs preventing him from moving.

"I won't, Maurelle. I promise."

Maurelle laughed. "Like I'd believe your promises. I could... I could put a spell on you.

Forcing you to return to me every night."

Ellard seemed to think for a minute. "Do it."

Lucian searched Shim's eyes worriedly.

"What is this about?"

"It's about Nathan."

Lucian nodded thoughtfully. "I thought something was going on."

Shim frowned. "Really? How?"

"I know Zephyra. Nathan looked peaceful. Like he was sleeping."

Shim nodded stiffly. "Not when I found him. Zephyra's a ticking time bomb, Lucian."

"You think I don't know that?"

Shim took a deep breath. "I think you're unwilling to admit it because of your history."

Lucian took a giant step forward, seizing Shim by the shoulders. "You know nothing of our history!"

Shim pushed Lucian away effortlessly. "I know enough, Lucian! My father was a part of the Opulentia before his death. Do you really think that no one knows you were in love with her your whole life? We all know why she's still alive. Had it been anyone else, you would have killed her ages ago."

"Leave me."

Shim sighed. "Lucian, I mean no disrespect. I just..."

Lucian shook his head slowly, avoiding Shim's piercing eyes. "Just leave."

Shim nodded, turning blankly and heading up to the tents. Lucian closed his eyes as Shim left. It was true. Although he did not love or even like what Zephyra had become, his hesitation to kill her could be attributed to the care he still felt for her. He couldn't expect everyone to go into a battle with a leader who hesitated.

Lucian lifted his chin, eyes glazed over slightly.

It was time to end this – once and for all. He glanced at the people who stood by the tents before swiftly making his way towards the mountains.

Ellard couldn't stop the screams tearing from his lungs. Through the waves of pain, he could not help but notice that Maurelle seemed to quite enjoy hurting him. She stepped back suddenly and the pain stopped at once. Ellard sat up straight, his eyes glued to hers.

"Is it done?"

"It is. Try not to come back to this cave, Ellard and the pain you felt will double. It will go on for days and then finally kill you."

Ellard glared at her. "You couldn't just do a spell to force me to return each night?"

"I could. But it wouldn't be half the fun, now would it?"

It was silent in the desert. All the adults were either in their tents or scanning the environment for possible foes. Lorcan, Chloe and Caleb sat next to the oasis quietly, each busy with their own thoughts. A pierced scream from Lorcan suddenly broke the silence.

Chloe and Caleb leapt towards him, but he shook them off, his eyes closed.

When he opened them, he looked troubled. Chloe grabbed onto his hand, her eyes wide.

"Lorcan, what happened?"

"I had a vision. Of Lucian."

Caleb frowned. "He's up at Rock Mountain. We saw him going. What did you see?"

Lorcan shook his head, visibly pale. "He didn't go to Rock Mountain. He went to Camelot."

"Tristan?"

He figured it would be Nola who approached him. Tristan turned to face her, his mouth a thin line. "What?"

She shook her head softly. He was the only one who ever got to see Nola's softer side.

"I've been watching you ever since... I've been watching you. You're angry."

Tristan laughed dryly. "Angry? Why would I be angry?"

She moved towards him swiftly. "Look, Tristan, I know you're hurting..."

He shook her hand off. "I'm not hurting. I'm distraught. I'm the one who killed Hecate. She's always been good to me and I betrayed her. For what? To save myself."
"Anyone would have done that, Tristan."

He lifted his chin, a strange expression in his eyes. "If she wants me to be heartless, it's what I'll be. I'll help her destroy Avalon for one reason and one reason only. To get the hell out of here."

Caleb and Lorcan both stared at Chloe like she had grown a second head. Chloe stamped her foot, looking at the boys angrily. "Stop looking at me like I've lost my mind! We have to save him, you know that as well as I do."

Lorcan raised his hand calmly. "All right. So obviously someone needs to save Lucian. Why us though?"

Chloe gestured wildly. "Who else is going to go? My dad who doesn't want his powers? Savannah whose powers are out of control? Or the new guys who are... nowhere near as strong as you are, Lorcan?"

Lorcan hesitated. "What if we are not strong enough for her?"

"All we need is a few seconds to get Lucian away from there. We can do this. I know we can."

Caleb was the first to nod. "I guess... we do owe him."

Lorcan shrugged. "I do too. So let's go. Before anyone sees us."

They glanced up at the tents before hurriedly venturing in the direction of Rock Mountain.

Ellard shivered as he took the first step outside the cave. It wouldn't have surprised him if Maurelle's spell killed him the instant he tried to leave. He had not yet spent twenty four hours with her and already he knew that she was terrifyingly impulsive. Nothing she did make sense. The vision of her devouring Gerard obviously played a big part in his assessment of her mental status. He took another step outside, breathing a sigh of relief.
"Afraid I lied?"

He jumped at the voice behind him, turning around quickly. Maurelle sat in the mouth of the cave, careful not to move out of the shadows. Her eyes were closed and she looked weak. Tired. Sympathy stirred in him. Though he could not guess her age, she still looked like a child to him. It couldn't be an easy life, living alone and hanging on by a thread purely because you were immortal.

"I'll be back soon, okay?"

Maurelle waved him away, seemingly irritated, but he could have sworn he had seen her smile. Ellard couldn't stop a small smile from forming on his own face. The poor kid needed a father figure. He'd be that for her.

The sun was setting. Lucian came to a sudden halt. It would be no use to go forward now. Chances of him getting eaten by a rowdy giant or animal were simply too big. He ignored the nagging voice inside, shouting at his every fibre that he was searching for reasons to procrastinate. Instead of listening to his conscience and going on, however, he chose to crawl into a hole in the ground. After fixing a few leaves on top of the hole, he closed his eyes – intent on getting some rest. Sleep would not come, however, as memories seemed desperate to plague him.

“Could you imagine what it would be like? Finding Camelot?”

The Zephyra next to him had shining eyes, vibrant hair. Her body seemed to be aglow with passion for life. A few feet away, Meryl laughed unreservedly.

“Oh I could! Zee and I would be treated like princesses. We'd host fancy balls and invite all of Avalon, simply to let them see us in our gorgeous dresses. We'd dance the night through.”

Zephyra grinned. “We'd be so powerful.”

Meryl nodded in agreement. “We would own Avalon.”

Connor grinned, tugging at Meryl's golden hair. “Well, since it is your birth right...”

Meryl scoffed. “Please. My father is not happy about us setting out to find it.”

Zephyra looked at them proudly. “Do you know what the best part of finding Camelot will be?”

Each of them chimed in with their own answer.

“The power.”

“The glamour!”

“The control.”

Zephyra shook her head enthusiastically. “The four of us. Together forever.”

He groaned at the memory. They were children. What did they know about power or control? What did they know about life? What did they know about forever?

Lorcan was the first to come to a sudden halt. Both Chloe and Caleb looked at him curiously. "Lorcan? What's wrong?"

He shook his head quietly. "We should rest."

Chloe gasped. "Are you kidding? We're barely down Rock Mountain!"

Lorcan glanced at the rocks behind him. "Which is exactly why this is a good place to sleep. It's already getting dark, there is no way we're going into the forest now. We'll all be killed."

He looked at Caleb expectantly. "Care to make a cave?"

Caleb hesitated. "I don't know how."

Lorcan gestured around him wildly.

"Just... think about a cave and... I don't know, you're the Earth Elemental."

Caleb closed his eyes, stretching his hands out in front of him. Chloe yelped as the earth started moving beneath their feet, grabbing onto Lorcan's hand. Lorcan blushed at the contact, holding her hand a little tighter as he looked at Caleb. A cry of surprise echoed through the mountains as a small gap formed between the rocks. The second Caleb turned to face Lorcan and Chloe, Lorcan let go of her hand as though it was on fire. He coughed slightly before heading towards the cave, glancing inside.

"It's not very big, but it'll do."

Caleb pulled a face and motioned for Chloe to crawl into the cave. Lorcan shifted backwards as she entered, pointedly avoiding her eyes.

"Chloe, you can create a small fire. It'll keep us warm."

Chloe nodded, carefully setting a few bricks aflame before settling down on the ground. Lorcan could not stop the sigh of relief when Caleb crawled in between him and Chloe, shifting uncomfortably.

An awkward silence settled between them as they waited for sleep to come. Caleb decided to break the silence after just a few minutes.

"So... Lorcan?"

"Hmmm?"

"You said I was an Earth elemental. What does that mean?"

Lorcan sat up, his eyes piercing Caleb.

"You don't know?"

Caleb shrugged lightly. "In case you hadn't noticed... we don't really know a lot about Avalon yet. Sure, we learn how to fight and use our powers. But no one really bothers to tell us anything."

A small smile crossed Lorcan's face. "I guess everyone expects you to know all of this. We tend to forget that you've just come."

Caleb frowned slightly. "What do you mean?"

"You learn everything really fast and... well, I feel like I've known you forever."

He glanced at Chloe's sleeping form before looking back at Caleb.

"To answer your question.... Elementals are the most powerful beings in Avalon. Lucian and Zephyra and your father are elementals. So was your mother when she... before she..."

Caleb nodded quietly. "Before she died?"

Lorcan nodded. "Yeah... Each elemental is connected to one of the four basic elements. Being the elemental of a specific element means you're able to control that element. It also means that the element can't hurt you. Chloe and your father, for instance can't be hurt by fire. Elementals are sort of... like royalty in Avalon because there are so few of them. The last time all four elementals walked Avalon was when your parents were still here with Lucian and Zephyra. Obviously with you being here and your controlling of the Earth element, all four elements are once again present in Avalon."

"Only the four of us won't be united."

Lorcan shrugged.

"I guess not."

"What happens when an elemental dies?"

"You're born an elemental. So naturally if you are one, your children would be also. If an elemental should die without children he or she has the ability to provide someone else with the gift. That one would never be a full elemental until the third generation though."

Caleb frowned. "It's all so complicated."

"I guess it's easier when you grow up around all of it."

"I guess it is."

Lorcan smiled sympathetically. "You'll get used to all of this."

"I hope so. I'm just glad you're around too. It's nice to have someone to talk to."

Lorcan nodded enthusiastically. "It is... I'm really glad you're here. Not just because you're saving Avalon. Well that too, but... I like having friends."

Caleb grinned brightly as their eyes met.

"Good night, Lorcan."

He shifted once more, falling asleep almost instantly. Lorcan gazed at the twins for a few minutes, his heart beating wildly in his chest. What if he was leading them into danger? What if he was the one leading them to their deaths?

An image of Connor screaming for his immediate death sprung to mind and he shuddered. They were going to help Lucian that was it. They weren't going to fight anyone. Caleb looked up at a screeching sound, glancing out of the cave only to see a man grabbing onto a large bird-like creature and run off. He shivered, retreating further back into the cave, his eyes closed.

Maurelle's face lit up when Ellard returned to the cave, carrying an angry looking griffin in his arms. Though his shape was blurry, she noticed what she guessed to be a trickle of blood trailing a path from his forehead to his neck. She averted her eyes to the griffin, hiding her excitement behind a façade of detachment. "A griffin? No fluffy white bunny?" Ellard smirked, having noticed the grin on her face when he had entered. He presumed that her stay in the cave had been lonely – she probably craved company.

"I thought you'd appreciate a predator more."

Maurelle shrugged, making a grab for the griffin. Ellard watched in surprise as she retreated into the darkness with it. She must have read the question on his face when she returned, casually wiping blood from her chin. "It's awkward to eat in front of you, okay?"

Ellard scoffed. "That didn't stop you from eating my best friend while I watched."

Her cheeks tinted a faint pink colour. "I was hungrier. And I didn't know you then."

Ellard smiled confidently. "You think you know me now?"

Maurelle seemed to think for a minute, her big eyes fixated on him. She nodded after a long silence. "Well enough."

Ellard grinned, settling into a corner. "I'm kind of tired after hunting the whole night. You're not going to eat me in my sleep, right?"

Maurelle laughed as she sat down next to him. He took a minute to take in the unusual sound of her laughter and looked down at her.

"It's a fair question."

She shifted closer to him subtly. "I won't kill you. You're my meal ticket."

Ellard laughed softly, ruffling her hair playfully. "Don't you forget it."

It took him mere seconds to fall asleep and Maurelle watched the lines of his face relax intently. She hesitated for a second before resting her head on his shoulder and closing her own eyes.

As the two people in the cave of Notsalg drifted off to sleep, three others woke up in a cave nearby. As usual, it was Lorcan who woke first. Before he had time to ponder waking the twins, however, he became aware of Chloe's eyes on him. He smiled awkwardly, straightening his shirt.

"Morning."

Chloe sat up slowly, her hand automatically rushing to her hair. Lorcan didn't seem to notice, instead turning away from her to look at Caleb.

"Should we wake him?"

Chloe nodded before realising that he had his back turned to her. "Yeah, I guess... we should get a move on."

Lorcan nodded, giving Caleb a soft kick in the ribs. Caleb jumped at the contact, his eyes immediately wide open. "What's wrong with you? Why did you kick me?"

"You were sleeping and we needed you to wake up."

Caleb rolled his eyes and stood up, snorting at the sight of Chloe.

"Your hair looks awful."

Chloe gasped, both hands flying to her hair as she desperately tried to pull her fingers through it. "I slept in a cave!"

Lorcan smiled coyly. "It doesn't look that bad. You look pretty."

Both Chloe and Caleb stared at him at his words and he blushed furiously, rushing out of the cave. Caleb snorted before moving towards the opening as well.

"Just so you know... he's lying. You look horrible."

Chloe pouted, following her brother. "You could try to be nicer, you know?"

"What? I'm honest."

She snorted, her eyes lazily travelling over him. "You don't really look like a fresh morning breeze either. The only one who even looks like he could sleep at all is Lorcan. How do you do it?"

Lorcan avoided her piercing gaze by staring off into the distance, his hand drawing figures in the sand. "I guess I'm used to it. The safest route would be to go to the River of Nox Nortis and then turn to the grasslands from there, but it's going to take much longer than just heading through the forest."

“What would Lucian have done?”

Lorcan turned to look at Caleb honestly. “You know what he would have done.”

It was Chloe who made up their minds, heading to the forest wordlessly. She stopped after a few feet, turning to look at them.

“We want to get there fast, don’t we?”

Lorcan and Caleb both nodded, following her silently. Lorcan looked at Caleb in surprise when the younger boy poked him in the ribs playfully. “I take it you don’t know any other girls.”

Lorcan frowned. “I know girls. Granted, most of them are centaurs or faeries, but...”

Caleb shook his head. “I bet they’re trolls.”

“Actually all trolls are male.”

He looked truly surprised when Caleb laughed spontaneously. “You don’t really get anything, do you?”

“What am I supposed to be getting?”

“I’m just saying... there must be something really wrong with all of those girls if you’re crushing on my sister.”

Lorcan’s eyes widened. “I’m not...”

Caleb smirked. “Right. I believe you.”

Lorcan just scoffed and they walked in silence, Chloe still a few feet ahead of them.

“So... do you think she likes me?”

Caleb just rolled his eyes and the two boys shared a grin as they walked faster to catch up with Chloe. She waited until they caught up to her before they carefully made their way through the forest.

In the same forest, a few feet ahead of them, there was nothing careful about the way Lucian stomped through the bushes. Carelessly pushing branches to the side, he blankly moved forward, unable to push the memories that had once again invaded his mind aside. He came to a sudden stop when the sound of footsteps caught his attention. A shield formed around him instantly and he crept towards a bush, waiting until the footsteps had disappeared. Only when it was silent around him once more did he proceed towards Camelot, fresh determination shining in his eyes.

Lorcan stopped in his tracks as Ianto emerged from the bushes, trying his best to cover the twins with his arms. Ianto’s laugh bellowed through the forest at this futile attempt and

he watched as more men descended from the sky, looking at the children threateningly. Ianto mock bowed in their direction, his black eyes shining with glee.

"Zephyra will be happy to know that I took care of you."

It was Chloe who took a bracing step forward, blazing eyes.

"You have to take care of us before bragging."

"It will be my pleasure!"

The smirk froze on his face as a massive fire erupted from Chloe's fingertips, sending him flying backwards. Both Caleb and Lorcan looked at Chloe with wide eyes, amazed at the sudden power emitting from her. Lorcan and Caleb stepped forward quickly as Ianto made a move to get up. The trees had barely sprouted from Caleb's hands before dying down, a green light from Lorcan hitting Ianto square in the chest. Lorcan grabbed Chloe's hand, tugging her forward.

"We have to make a run for it before they wake up! Our luck won't last forever, come on!"

Chloe glanced at Ianto's still form before allowing Lorcan to pull her away, Caleb following shortly behind.

The screech of a falcon above them stopped them for a second, but after lingering for a second, they ran further, eyes fixed on the snowy mountain top a few feet away.

A shadow was thrown over the icy Lake as Lucian approached it. He shook his head grimly, stopping before his feet could touch the water. He could vividly remember the Lake's reaction to him and he was in no mood to be hurled across the snow once again. Instead of even attempting to cross the Lake, he simply raised his hands, lifting the water a few feet above his head.

"Lucian!"

Zephyra's shrill voice echoed through the waters and he clapped his hands slowly as she appeared next to him. "I thought that would get your attention."

A nasty smirk settled on her face and she folded her arms. "What is it that you want, Lucian?"

Lucian set his jaw and turned to face her. Regret flashed in his eyes. "I've come to end this."

Her laughter reached him about the same time a majestic storm flattened him. "You can't hide behind the wind forever, Zephyra!"

He glanced up at the lighting brewing in the sky and shivered slightly before he looked back at Zephyra. The winds stopped as the Lake wrapped itself around Zephyra, engulfing her in a flood of stormy water.

He moved closer slowly, groaning when a dark beam of wind hit him in the gut. Zephyra didn't even seem to notice the rain falling down on her as the wind started twirling in a tornado in front of her. Lucian noticed the tornado zooming towards them at the same time as noticing the three children moving out from behind a tree.

He hesitated, gasping for air as the bustle of wind flattened him mercilessly.

"Lucian!"

It was Lorcan who ran to his aide, the twins following closely behind. Lucian was vaguely aware of Zephyra's insane laughter and he waved his hand, the Lake bowing to his will and forming a wall between her and them.

He turned his gaze to the children, a mixture of emotions playing in his eyes.

"You shouldn't be here! Don't you know how dangerous..."

He broke off as the water started floating above them. Everything seemed to happen in a slow motion. All he could see was Zephyra moving towards them, her eyes gleaming madly. "Stop. Right there where you are."

Every eye turned towards the voice. No one even knew where Juliet came from or how Lorcan had spotted her, but he stood with his arms around her, a dagger threateningly resting against her neck. Lorcan glared at Zephyra, pressing the blade harder against Juliet's skin. A strangled cry left Zephyra's lips as a drop of blood trickled down her daughter's neck. "Let her go! Let my daughter go right now!"

Lorcan gestured to the three figures at her feet.

"Let them go first. Or I kill her."

Zephyra grimaced at the thought of a mere child threatening her, but took a careful step away from Lucian. "Fine. I'll let them be. Let her go."

Lorcan shook his head slowly. "Go into the castle first. The second I let you go, you'll try to hurt them again. Don't think I don't know that."

Fury shot from Zephyra's eyes. "If you think that I'm going to leave and let you take my daughter..."

"Mum..."

Juliet's soft voice was laced with fear and Zephyra turned to look at her. "Mum, go. He'll let me go if you leave, I know it."

Zephyra shook her head fearfully. "I can't leave you with them."

Juliet trembled as she raised her hand to wipe the single drop of blood from her neck.

"I know he'll let me go, mum. Lucian won't let anything happen to me."

Zephyra's face hardened. "Lucian is not our friend, Juliet!"

Juliet smiled sadly. "I know. But he's not a liar either. He won't hurt me."

Zephyra turned to face Lucian and he scowled. "Zephyra, I would never hurt a child. Juliet will be safe. Do as Lorcan says."

She moved away slowly, her eyes transfixed on Lorcan. "I will kill you for this. You should know that."

Lorcan shrugged indignantly. "Then so be it."

He released Juliet the minute Zephyra disappeared from sight, watching as she ran back to the Castle as fast as possible. Lucian simply shook his head before heading to the forest. The children glanced at each other uncertainly before following him swiftly.

Inside the Castle, Zephyra's eyes narrowed as she glanced at the retreating figures. Her attention shifted the minute Juliet entered the room and she rushed forward, scooping her daughter into her arms. "Are you hurt?"

Juliet shook her head quietly as she wrapped her arms around her mother's neck.

"I never should have left you with them! If anything happened to you..."

Juliet smiled timidly. "I trust Lucian, mum. So do you. You don't want to, but you can't help it."

Shadows set in Zephyra's eyes and she held her daughter closer. "It will be him or me in the end, Juliet. No matter how much we used to... care about each other. You have to know that."

Juliet nodded stiffly. "I do."

The journey back to the desert was silent. It was only when they reached Rock Mountain that Lucian turned to face the children, his eyes shooting fire. "You all could have been killed! What were you thinking?"

Chloe reached for his hand, her eyes wide. "We wanted to help you. We were afraid of losing you."

Lucian shook his head tiredly. "You're more important than I am."

Chloe shrugged, her eyes fixed on his. "We need you to survive this, Lucian. We need you to lead the way."

He nodded after a long silence, his voice thick. "Thank... thank you. For helping me."

Chloe smiled proudly as they made their way over the mountain. A group of frantic nomads awaited them, breathing sighs of relief as they reached the desert.

Connor took a leap forward and enveloped his children in his arms. His eyes spoke volumes as he looked up at Lucian, who simply nodded with a small smile.

He looked at the group warmly before turning to Connor. Shim, Savannah, Kerr, Chloe, Caleb and Lorcan were talking animatedly, the older nomads listening with intent as the children recanted their experience. Lucian took a hesitant step towards Connor.

Connor understood the gesture and the two men walked off, shoulder to shoulder.

They waited until they reached a lone rock before they sat down next to each other.

Connor broke the silence. "Lucian... are my children ever going to be safe?"

Lucian shook his head slowly. "They are right now. I don't know what the future holds, Connor."

"Do you still love her?"

The question hung between them tensely. "I do."

Connor glanced at the group before looking back at his friends.

"It changes everything, doesn't it? Love. It changes the way you look at her."

"It does."

"Do you think she'll change her mind about them?"

Lucian shook his head tentatively. "As much as I want to believe it... I can't. She's... there is still a little feeling left in her. It's just not enough. It will never be enough."

Juliet's blonde hair was a mess atop her pillow. Zephyra kissed the top of her daughter's head lightly before leaving her room. She moved towards the cellar slowly, glancing over her shoulder before entering. Four bricks stirred to the side as she moved her hand over them and she reached into the crack. When she reached her hand back, a small vile sat between her fingers. Her vulnerable show of emotion replayed in her head as she lifted the vial to her lips.

Zephyra choked when the liquid in her throat turned to ice and moved through her veins painfully. She fell to her knees when it wrapped around her heart, gasping for air. After what felt like eternity, she found the power to stand again, which she did with a deep breath.

When she turned to go to her room, any semblance of emotion she could possibly have felt had vanished from her eyes.

Shim turned to Caleb with a small smile.

"Caleb. Now that Savannah seems to be better. I was thinking that I should take you under my wing, give you some special training. Give you the skills you need to defeat that old Camelot hag." Caleb's eyes lit up at once.

"I'd love that."

"I thought you would. We can go to the forest in the morning, just us younger guys."

Chloe glared at Shim, making an annoyed noise before stalking off in the direction of the oasis angrily, muttering to herself furiously.

She recognized Liam the second she reached the fountain, her eyes lighting up.

"Liam! Hi."

Liam grinned brightly. "I told you we'd meet again. I would have said hi sooner, but I saw you were busy..."

Her smile faded. "Yeah. Our friend Nathan died. It was his funeral."

"I'm sorry about that."

"Thanks."

He held his hand out to her graciously. "You seem like you need that walk."

Chloe glanced at Shim and Caleb, who were talking excitedly, her anger levels rising.

"You know what? I do."

She took his hand confidently, meeting his smile. "As long as we make it quick. If they notice I'm gone, I'll be in trouble."

Liam squeezed her hand. "We won't go far."

"Capoeira? Nathan never taught that to anyone!"

Shim looked at Caleb, impressed, and he nodded. "He said I had potential."

"I think so too. I'm no Capoeira artist, but I do know some kickboxing. Maybe I could teach you that, but you have to work on the Capoeira too."

Caleb nodded excitedly, turning when Lorcan approached.

"Hey, Lorcan! Guess what! Shim's going to train me!" Lorcan smiled distractedly.

"That's great, Caleb. Have you seen Chloe, though?"

Caleb frowned slightly, his excitement fading. "No. Why?"

"I can't find her anywhere. She was at the Oasis a minute ago."

Caleb shrugged irritably. "She probably wandered off again. She does that all the time."

Lorcan nodded distractedly. "I'm going to take a short walk. See if I find her."

"Okay."

Caleb turned to Shim as Lorcan walked off, his expression agitated. "She always does this! She always steals my thunder!"

Shim smiled, rubbing Caleb's shoulder. "Forget it, Caleb. I'm taking you out to training, not her. No one is going to steal your thunder here."

Chloe stared at the field of flowers in awe. "This is amazing, Liam!"

He laughed, casually draping an arm around her shoulders. "Don't be so impressed. It's just an illusion."

"It's still awesome."

Liam smiled, glancing up at the sun. He jumped up, pulling her with him.

"Come on, we'd better get you back before they start missing you! We've been gone way too long."

Chloe pouted. "I'm having way too much fun with you."

He laughed, wrapping her in a hug. "I'm having a lot of fun with you too, but I can't get you in trouble now, can I?"

She sighed dramatically, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "Fine. Come on, let's run!"

Liam stopped her just before they reached the border, pressing his lips against hers quickly. "Goodbye, Chloe. I'll see you again."

Chloe's eyes widened and she touched her lips, in awe. Her voice didn't return until after he had left.

"Bye..."

She spun round, grinning. Her smile faltered when her eyes met those of Lorcan, who looked back at her with a stony expression.

A door slammed inside Camelot and Zephyra lifted her eyes when a lanky figure entered the throne room. "What do you want?"

Liam took a small step back upon noticing the hardened look in her eyes.

"I have news."

Zephyra arched a brow. "Unless someone died, I don't care."

Liam laughed softly. "Dead, no. But I have little Chloe completely smitten with me."

Zephyra's shrugged. "I see. And you are planning to use this?"

Liam nodded excitedly. "With more time, I could convince Chloe to switch to our side. Or if she doesn't do that voluntarily she could always be... enchanted."

Zephyra's eyes narrowed. "That doesn't solve our problem."

"Unless we convinced Chloe to kill her brother and she left Avalon out of guilt."

Chloe glared at Lorcan heatedly. "It's none of your business, Lorcan! Stay out of it."

Lorcan grabbed onto Chloe's elbow. "Chloe, you should know better than that."

She turned around, her eyes spitting fire. "Maybe I don't! Maybe I liked walking around with someone who doesn't constantly treat me like an idiot!"

"Chloe..."

She shrugged away from him. "Just leave me."

She raised her gaze, watching as Savannah stepped out of her tent, joining the Shim and Caleb conversation. She forced a smile onto her face, rushing forward as Savannah called her over.

Savannah turned to the girl apologetically as she reached them. "So... I hear Shim is taking Caleb out to train him."

Chloe shrugged, her eyes narrowed. "Yeah, so?"

Savannah laughed softly. She pulled Chloe closer and looked down at her.

"So... I thought it was time I pulled it together." Chloe looked up cautiously.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean... it's my job to make sure you reach your full potential, Chloe. I'm going to do just that."

A pure smile brightened Chloe's face. "Thanks, Savannah."

She looked at her brother with a teasing smile.

"Maybe we can show the boys just who the strong ones really are."

Caleb laughed, putting an arm around his sister's shoulders.

"Oh, you think?"

"I know!"

Their laughter echoed through the desert, all the way to where Connor and Lucian stood.

A million thoughts raced through his mind as Connor watched his children where they stood next to Savannah and Shim, having grown almost as tall as them. One thought managed to stand out above the million others.

The were safe. For now.

End.

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