

CHAPTER 1

Soleil

They say opportunity knocks at your door.
It burst through mine.

I let out a shaky breath, eyes locked on my brother. My grip on my sword remains firm; but hardly. The cheering shouts from the crowd, the ever present sense of being watched, the pain of losing Father mere days ago, it's all too much to bear.

It's too soon, I need more time.

But the idea of becoming Queen is too much of a temptation to pass. Opportunity rarely ever thinks in your favor.

"Nervous, dear sister? Don't worry, killing you is beyond my capabilities."

Asael's voice brings me back to my senses. That idiot is grinning in this situation? Is he that sure of his victory? We circle each other in the ring, swords held at the ready, not fighting just yet. Asael knows his power, and so does the rest of the kingdom. Nobody expects me to win.

Even I don't expect me to win.

But the sky will come crashing down before I admit it.

"Is your thirst for the throne so incessant that you forgot killing isn't an option? Did I upset you, brother?"

I say mockingly, putting on a confident front even if I know he can see through it. He can see through all the lies, anyone, anywhere. What was Father thinking, putting this in his will? Making his first and second born fight for the throne hardly makes any sense.

"I'd kill you if it weren't for Enora. Dealing with her daily tantrums is also beyond my capabilities."

Asael jokes, and that makes me let out an amused scoff. Of course. The only reason he's keeping me alive is so I can babysit our little sister? Nothing about him surprises me anymore.

"You managed to find a use for her. I'm almost surprised."

I laugh, yet my eyes remain serious as I take a step forward. Let's get this over with, shall we?

Asael grins in response, but he doesn't say anything. My silent invitation isn't lost on him either, and I raise my sword defensively as he follows me and steps closer. This is it. The big match.

"I'll try to avoid your face. Maybe you'll need it someday."

Asael comments condescendingly, making me narrow my eyes at him. Is he trying to ease my nerves or his own?

"Stop stalling, Asael. Your unwilling stature doesn't suit a King."

Almost immediately, his whole personality shifts. I barely manage to dodge as he brings his sword crashing down next to me. Eyes wide, feet nimble, I counter, watching relentlessly. Our swords clash, his force making me slide backwards slightly. I sidestep him, knowing he'd be able to beat me if I stayed there any longer.

I manage to keep up with his attacks by relying on my agility and determination. But his experience soon starts to show, making me use more strength than him. I'm doing more, gaining less. My breath is erratic from all the dodging, my arm straining from the constant swishing and parrying. Asael takes his chance, knowing that he is at an advantage.

"How applaudable. Most people wouldn't be alive by now."

I don't reply, simply glaring at his attempt to shift my attention to his words rather than his sword. Instead, I jump back, raising my sword to the sky. Clouds gather, forming a menacing torrent right above my blade. Asael's gaze hardens, both his hands tightening around the blade as he prepares for what's coming next.

Even if I don't want this, the public needs a convincing display. My mind is fixated on this, pulling off this complex move.

Asael takes an infinitesimal step to the left, and I use that momentary shift of weight against him. My sword comes down, thunder condensed in a swish of my blade. The lightning hits, blinding us all. It's bright, too bright. I make the mindless mistake of closing my eyes.

When I reopen them, I'm met with an unbelievable scene. Asael, unscathed. Asael, barely managing to dodge my strike. Huh. Fate does pick it's favorites.

I lunge forwards, ready to bring him down right now when he's shocked. It's not something I'm accustomed to, but the spur of the moment compels me.

In a split second, I realize it's not gonna work. He saw it coming.

I overextend myself on a particularly aggressive attack, and Asael saw his opportunity. He sidesteps my sword, knocking it aside with a flick of his wrist. The move catches me off guard, and Asael is quick to capitalize on my momentary lapse, immediately placing his sword under my chin.

"Checkmate, Sol."

I sigh, raising my hands in surrender as the crowd goes wild. The deafening applause ensues, celebrating the new rule, of the new King.

And yet I don't feel anything, not a hint of loss or remorse. Becoming the Queen wasn't really that important for me. I don't even know why I was fighting that hard.

"Try not to gloat about it too much, Ace."

I mutter dismissively, crossing my arms over my chest defensively as he lowers his sword and takes in the cheers from the crowd. Something about his eyes right now tells me he really wanted this.

One of us, I suppose.

He doesn't reply for a second, leading me to believe he's too lost in the moment. I look around too, taking in the relieved looks on the people's faces. People of every age, clapping and cheering for their new King. Asael. How predictable.

"It's King to you."

Asael grins, leaning forwards on his sword with a smug expression. And it takes me a second to understand what he's saying. So Asael-like. He doesn't even seem pissed about it, like that's something I should be happy about. Well, I am happy I bypassed that responsibility.

"Of course, your highness. How ignorant of me."

I say sarcastically, rolling my eyes despite the smile on my face. Morana has gained another High King, King Asael Bryx.

He is the thaw of chaos that we needed. At last, the age of tyranny and evil will come to an end. Peace and tranquility for humans and Fae alike. And I am certain he is qualified for this task. The people love him.

A formidable King and foe indeed.