

EVERY  PHOENIX



CELESTIA

UNICORN BLESSED CHRONICLES

CELESTIA

YEAR TWO

SLAN ACADEMY: UNICORN BLESSED
CHRONICLES

BOOK TWO

AVERY PHOENIX
YUMOYORI WILSON

Contents

CELESTIA 2 BLURB

Prologue

Recovery.

Prepare For The Truth To Be Revealed

Truth Revealed

Everyone Deserves Forgiveness

Healthy or Tainted

Afternoon Nap

Twin Exploration

The Path Towards Light

Underwear

Faelia the Forbidden and Allies

Legends and Memories

Trial One- Phoenix Fall

T.L.C

Trial Two- Thirst or Unconsciousness

Trial Three and Strengthened Love

Unicorn Bliss

Trial Four- Fading Away.

Don't Leave Me Too

My Wounds Are Healing Thanks To The Light

Lucky Charms With A Hint Of Glitter

Trial Five- Intrusion Of Darkness

Heart Of A Huntress

Hidden Truth

Magical Discovery.

Stay Connected

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Cover Design by Covers by Juan

Contributions: Yumoyori Wilson

Formatting by: Avery P.

Not everything you see with your eyes is true, but magic can reveal all that's hidden within.

Celestia Rainbow and her team of misfits thought they had seen it all. But as they enter a new world filled with mystery and suspense, they are uncertain as to what their future holds at Aslan Academy, School for Hunters and Huntresses.

With very little time to recover, they are pushed into a new series of challenges, ones that can either make them stronger or break the bonds they've created.

Alliances are made, but evil is still trying to bring Celestia down a darker path. With the clock ticking and the Forsaken multiplying with each passing day, it's up to Finn, Hunter, Orion, Theo, Caio and Cairus to guide Celestia back to the light in the best way they know how, by loving her with all their might.

Will Aslan's badass unicorn be destroyed by the darkness within herself? Or will she be saved by the men who've sworn to protect and care for her? Only one way to find out.

Prologue

Darkness...

The pitch black engulfed me where I stood, surrounded by the heavy fog that chilled me to the bone. No matter how much I tried, the darkness never cleared, all efforts to summon my magic futile. My body trembled and my teeth chattered, the sound terrifying me.

I will die if I don't find a way out. I need to search for the exit.

Yet, I remained where I was, realizing there was a purpose to my suffering. I'd come here for a reason, but what was it? Did I have some sort of duty to accomplish? *A mission to complete and save the lives of many?*

How could I possibly help anyone if I couldn't even get myself out of this mess?

The endless possibilities of how to escape went through my mind, but I knew the darkness was winning.

I can't let it win. There's too much at stake.

That simple thought ran over and over again, but the dark chains that held me tightened, ensuring I'd never escape this barricade.

Laughter began to course through the hollow chamber, echoing over and over again. It took all my concentration in my weak state to understand their words as they sang a hymn in unison.

The Darkness is coming...

You all shall prepare.

The Darkness is coming...

Your land will be bare.

The people will cry and the earth will soon die, leaving nothing left to mourn.

The Darkness is coming...so prepare little one.

For you will be our queen, and kill everyone.

Every shifter, every human, all will be consumed.

Alas, you will rule the new world, our Queen of Darkness, Celestia.

“What?! No. I would never succumb to the darkness. I will fight!” I declared, but the sound fell on deaf ears as the voices laughed in joy and delight.

The Darkness is coming...you will soon see.

There will be no hope, we'll destroy the Unicorn Queen.

I pulled at the chains, trying to break free from my hold, but my bonds tightened and fear trickled through me. I realized I couldn't do this alone, and it wouldn't be long till their mockery and predictions came true.

I needed help. I had to call the others. Help...please.

Finn, Hunter, Theo, Caio, Cairus...Orion. Someone, help me?

But no one came, which left me feeling helpless. The darkness would win, but I couldn't allow it. My resolve was strong, but I felt so exhausted. I hung my head low, tears rolling down my cheeks in frustration as the voices continued to sing.

The Darkness is coming, we will have our Queen.

* * *

“Celestia.”

“Dark...ness,” I mumbled, feeling so cold as I turned over. “He...lp,”

I felt a hand settle gently on my shoulder, shaking me hard enough to pull me out of my dream. My eyes shot open and I quickly sat up, feeling extremely disoriented, but only seconds later they began to close once more. Hands rested on my shoulders, keeping me from falling forward, but my mind was already drifting.

I tried to listen to the conversation happening around me; my ears picked up Orion's and Finn's low voices.

“Celestia?” Orion's gentle voice called out but I felt too drained to give a reply.

“She's still really weak.” Finn's voice was low with hints of anger.

“Ms. Arcadia said she'd heal. Magnor has been checking every day so far and said she doesn't appear to be tainted, but everyone agrees she'll feel spurts of weakness until she regains her strength,” Orion explained.

“Still doesn't explain her dreams. This is the third day in a row where she's started whispering for help,” Finn complained

worriedly.

“I don’t like it either. It makes me really concerned. She doesn’t remember having them either,” Orion admitted.

I was unsure what he meant by that. *I’d certainly remember my dreams, right?*

“Let’s wait a few more days to see if it continues. Tomorrow, we’re supposed to learn the truth about everything from the REAL headmaster.” Finn emphasized the last part. *The real headmaster...my father.*

“Yes, that sounds like a good plan. Maybe we can talk with Orlando privately about Celestia’s dreams? He might know something,” Orion considered thoughtfully.

“Should we tell the others?” Finn questioned. There was a long pause.

“To be honest, I’m not sure. Telling them would make them worry and I can guarantee we’d all be fighting to be the ones to stay with Celestia if that were the case. We only got lucky with our current arrangement because of the lack of rooms and because Celestia didn’t mind sharing with both of us,” Orion pointed out.

“I guess. They’re working on where we’re going to stay now that we ‘passed.’ I do agree that the others would be really concerned and would probably all want to bunk with her, or at least rotate. It wouldn’t be hard, but I feel Celestia has enough stress on her plate with the whole family thing. Considering she’s still recovering from the Forsaken attack, she probably doesn’t need any added worry right now,” Finn replied.

“Why don’t we tell Magnor when Celestia goes to her checkup? Maybe if we tell him while she’s there, it’ll trigger

her memory?” Orion suggested.

“I’m fine with telling Magnor, but not with Cutie Pie present. Not yet anyway. Could cause her to panic and maybe even have a breakdown. Let her recover first. Maybe Magnor will have a better idea of when the time is right to tell her and explain to her what we’ve noticed,” Finn considered.

“Hmm...”

“What?” Finn demanded.

“When you’re not joking around, you’re actually rather intelligent,” Orion mumbled sarcastically.

Finn groaned. “Hearing that from you hurts.”

“Saying the truth is better than lying.” Orion’s tone was matter-of-fact.

I tried opening my eyes, but only managed to lift my heavy eyelids slightly.

“Lucky Charms,” I mumbled. My eyes were open wide enough to see Finn’s relieved expression even in the dimmed lights of our room. He reached out and stroked my head. The action made me relax, even though a part of me was still afraid. *Did I have a bad dream?* The thought made me try to remember something, but as the seconds passed, the paralyzing figments of my imagination were already fading, piece by piece.

“Hey, Cutie Pie. Are you okay?” Finn whispered as he continued to stroke my head.

“So tired.” My words were barely audible, the exhaustion in them a perfect indicator of how I felt. I just wanted to go back to sleep at that point.

Arms wrapped around me, giving me a gentle hug from behind. “You want to go back to bed, Celestia?” Orion’s soothing voice whispered in my ear, his calm tone making the tension in my shoulders begin to fade. I didn’t remember why I was tense to begin with. *Why did I wake up actually?*

“Yes,” I mumbled, relaxing in his hold. Soft lips pressed against my cheek where my spiral blessed marks were. A small smile tugged at my lips; I was happy to feel somewhat warm again. *Maybe the A/C was running and that’s why I had been so cold.* Being in Orion’s arms brought comfort, helping my mind calm and begin to drift yet again.

“Let’s go back to sleep. We have a big day tomorrow,” Finn suggested.

“Ya,” I heard Orion agree. My eyes were already closed and I felt him lower me back to the bed, his arm wrapped around my waist while his bare chest pressed against my back.

I had only worn my pink lingerie set to bed, having felt really hot after my shower. So, even with Orion holding me from behind, I still didn’t feel warm enough.

I fought to open my eyes. I noticed that Finn was in the process of standing up, taking a second to stretch before he took a step away from the bed.

“Lucy Charms,” I whimpered, wishing he’d come hold me too. I guess it was a weird idea to be sandwiched between two sexy men, but it would certainly be warm, which is what I really needed.

He turned around and even with my bleary eyes, I took a moment to savor the view of his bare chest and abs. “Yes, Cutie Pie?” A glimpse of happiness flickered in his green eyes as he lifted his hand to ruffle his short pink hair.

“Stay,” I mumbled, trying to fight off sleep for the moment.

“Stay? I’m not leaving this room,” he reassured me.

Orion chuckled. “She means come here and sleep on the other side of the bed.”

“Oh.” Finn seemed momentarily surprised and I was relieved when he walked over to the right side of the bed. Orion shifted our position so there was enough space for Finn to lay down beside me.

Finn lifted the thin blanket and crawled into bed. Once he was comfortable, he moved close enough so I could rest my head against his chest.

“Better, Cutie Pie?” Finn asked softly.

“Better.” I smiled sleepily. The combined warmth of Orion and Finn helped me let go of the last of my worries that prevented me from sleeping.

Something soft pressed against my forehead, and I realized Finn had kissed me. “Sleep well, Celestia.”

“We’ll be right here, so don’t feel afraid,” Orion whispered reassuringly.

“Mhmm,” I mumbled, even as the darkness slowly tugged at my mind. I wasn’t afraid anymore, knowing Orion and Finn were with me.

Yes, they’re here. I’m safe and warm. The Forsaken can’t get to me here. I’ll be okay. I’m strong...

Sleep took over then, ending my self-talk before I could finish.

Recovery

“So hot,” I mumbled, wondering if the A/C had been turned off during the night.

I tried to move but felt like I was locked in place. I mumbled something incoherent before relaxing again, debating whether I should go back to sleep.

“Bru-REE?” Arielle questioned. *“Are you going back to sleep?”*

I don't know. It's too hot to go back to sleep though. Arielle, can you put the A/C back on?

“Bru.” Arielle huffed. *“The room doesn't even have A/C. That's not the reason why you're so hot.”*

I frowned, trying to figure out another reason for why I might be so warm. *It's still summer, right? Maybe that's why. Wait, no A/C. Our dorm had A/C before. Who took it away? I bet it was Cairus. He's a snow tiger so he likes the cold.*

“Bru-reeee,” Arielle chirped. *“Cairus didn't steal anything. Open your eyes.”*

I was reluctant to follow her suggestion but I knew I wouldn't fall back asleep and would rather take a cool shower instead. It took a few tries before I was finally able to force my tired eyes open.

Hmm...this looks like Finn's chest, but didn't I share the bed with Orion last night?

“Bru...bru...bru,” Arielle replied. *“The joys of love. Waking up in a blissful sandwich of testosterone. I feel as a familiar, I'm missing out on this. Then again, female hormones are annoying, so maybe I'm better off.”*

Sandwich? Testosterone?! I lifted my head to see Finn's relaxed expression as he breathed peacefully, still deep in sleep. His short pink hair was messy and his free right arm rested under his head, sharing my pillow. I lowered my gaze to see his chiseled chest and noticed his left arm was around my waist. He was in dark green boxers with little pink stars on them, which I had to admit were cute and suited him well. My pixie boy. Wait. Not mine...Uh...hold on, where's Orion?

“Bru-Reeeeeee,” Arielle answered, sounding sorry for me. *“Hmm, you're rather slow this morning. I should tell Magnor.”*

I'm not slow! I was going to continue my defense but then I noticed Orion's arm was resting on my lower thigh. I looked over my shoulder and saw his sleeping figure pressed up against me. His long white hair was all over his pillow, with a few streaks clinging to his face. His lips were slightly parted, his inhales and exhales making a quiet sound. His pale complexion was still flawless as ever, not a pimple or even a pore in sight. He stirred slightly, tightening his hold on me and nudging his head into my shoulder.

“Celestia.” He was whispering in his sleep. I felt my cheeks grow red as I finally realized what Arielle was saying. *Oh hell, I'm in a man sandwich!*

“Bru,” Arielle chirped. *“I told you that. Are you sure you're okay? You've been really delirious the past couple of*

mornings. Maybe you're not getting enough sleep?"

I sighed, relaxing my head back against Finn's chest. Now that I knew the reason why I was so hot, I was content to rest, not wanting to disturb either of them. *I think I'm still really exhausted. I don't know. I just woke up, yet I feel like I didn't sleep at all. I'll tell Magnor about it today, or maybe Father.*

Today was the day we would be told the truth about Aslan Academy. Four days ago we had to go to a mandatory training session. We had to attend or face the consequences, regardless of the fact that Caio and I were suffering due to the sun's absence.

None of us knew we would be attacked by Forsaken, beings of darkness that had somehow managed to flood the halls of the school. While the guys had been fighting them off in the halls, I was stuck in the bathroom, trapped in the darkness.

Orion had come to my aid, shifting into his alicorn form and revealing what he was in order to save me. The others arrived to help, and when we tried to find the emergency exit, Magnor had appeared to lead us out through some portal.

When we arrived on the other side, we were greeted with the unexpected change of scenery as we realized we'd been blindsided this entire time. That was when my father, Orlando Rainbow, arrived and revealed that we'd passed the real test. The entire time we'd thought we were attending Aslan Academy, School for Hunters and Huntresses, had been nothing but a lie: a test to determine the true best of the best.

We weren't given any other information at that time. My father and Magnor insisted we should all get medical attention and would get an explanation once we'd recovered.

I was the most “injured,” as the guys insisted, and they stressed that I should get the most attention. I only had a few cuts and bruises, but my body was weak and my mental state needed to be checked. I thought it was stupid, but Magnor wouldn’t let me wiggle out of any of the suggested treatments, stating he wanted to be sure I wasn’t tainted, especially after being trapped with the Forbidden for such a long time.

I hadn’t given them the details of what occurred. Only Orion and Finn knew a little bit from when I struggled to sleep. Apparently, I was experiencing nightmares of some sort, but when I woke, I couldn’t remember having a bad dream.

I didn’t know what to expect today at our meeting with Father, but I hoped we’d have a moment to talk privately. Maybe he’d be able to confirm my health was in check and make sure I was okay. I did feel better than I had four days ago, but I didn’t feel confident that I was fully healed. *Could be just an after effect from everything that happened.*

“Bru-ree, bruuuu,” Arielle sang. I opened my eyes to see her fly over to where I was resting. She landed on Finn’s bicep and lowered her head to brush her face against my cheek.

I grinned. “Morning Arielle,” I whispered out loud, realizing I hadn’t greeted her yet.

“Bru-Ree,” she replied cheerfully. Her wings fluttered and flickered on and off, the blue flames appearing and disappearing as she hopped in place. *“Morning! Aside from your delirious behavior from earlier, how are you?”*

I smirked, rolling my eyes. *I’m fine and I wasn’t delirious. It’s hard for me to catch on to things when I’m half asleep, remember?*

“Bruuu,” she hummed. *“Hmm. I know.”*

I noticed the change in her tone, piquing my concern.
What's wrong, Arielle?

“Bru.” She made her way down Finn’s arm, hopping down to land in my hand. I lifted her up and placed her in the space between my neck and shoulder. She snuggled right in, sitting quietly while I petted her beautiful feathers.

I’d noticed over the last few days her appearance had changed slightly; her feathers were now a mixture of pinks, blues, and purples. Her eyes were still their amber beauty, but I wondered if the incident was what caused her feathers to start to shift and change.

“Ari,” I whispered, hoping my gentle voice would prompt her to open up.

“Bru-ree, ree,” she chirped quietly. *“I’m worried about you. You still don’t look well to me.”*

I gave her a sympathetic look, continuing my stroking motions down her little back.

I’m okay, Arielle. Don’t worry so much.

“Bruuu.” She ruffled up her feathers and snuggled next to me, making me realize my words hadn’t given her any reassurance.

“I’m okay, Arielle. Really. Don’t be so concerned about me. I feel much better than before and I’ll get checked with Magnor and Ms. Arcadia again today. You can come if you’d like. Would that help relax you?” I whispered out loud.

“Bruuu,” she replied. *“I guess.”*

She closed her eyes and went quiet. I continued to pet her, closing my eyes as well. *Arielle, I won’t disappear or die. Don’t be afraid. Where did my feisty spirited familiar go?*

I knew she was anxious about what she dealt with before I discovered her that fateful day. She was still quiet and I opened my eyes to see worried amber ones staring at me. “Bru-Ree?” she questioned hesitantly. “*You won’t die... right? You’ll get better and we’ll run and I’ll train with Sia at night....everything will be okay, yes?*”

I gave her a sad smile, moving so my cheek pressed against her little head. *I’m not going anywhere, Arielle. We’ll figure things out here and talk with Father. Then, we’ll work on returning back to our usual schedule. I bet Sia misses your spunkiness.*

“Bru,” she replied. “*Okay...I love you.*”

Her little expression of worry broke my heart, making me realize I must have really scared her and she’d just been putting up a confident front this entire time I’d been recovering. *I love you even more. Why don’t we sleep a little more?*

“Brruuuuuu,” she hummed, the sound a little more cheerful than before. She closed her eyes for a few seconds before opening them again as if to make sure I hadn’t disappeared.

She stared at me for a moment and I gave her a small smile, giving her enough reassurance that she closed her eyes again. This time, she fell back to sleep.

I continued to stroke her head for some time, trying to predict what would happen today during our meeting.

Father is the headmaster of Aslan Academy. This whole time, he wasn’t a gatekeeper. Does Mom know? Magnor must know, yet he didn’t tell me.

I didn't know exactly how I felt about the situation, but I felt at least somewhat betrayed by the deceit. Magnor had noticed my apprehensiveness when he was around but hadn't approached me yet, either because I was still recovering from the attack at the "old" Aslan Academy or he was waiting for my emotions to calm before confronting me.

Either way, I was really upset and hoped we got answers soon. I let out a yawn, allowing the tension in my body to slowly leave me while I enjoyed being in the middle of my pixie-unicorn sandwich.

Finn had been overprotective since we got here, and the others had followed suit. Even if I had to use the restroom, Arielle would have to go with me otherwise one of them would, no excuses. I didn't blame them for their behavior, but a girl needed some privacy, especially after being around six hot males all day.

Even now as I lay between the two of them, I was doing my best to try and ignore my arousal, even though the thought of being with both of them was turning me on more with each second that passed.

I need to try and get my own room, or some type of alone time, or I'll be so screwed. Can't even watch my "shows" because Orion's always here. Grrr. Maybe I can get Arielle to shoo him away for a few minutes. I guess that would be good enough.

I decided to think of something else, to distract my mind long enough to go back to sleep. So I returned to pondering what was going to happen now that we'd passed this test.

We only got a glimpse of the enormous school grounds, since Father teleported us directly into the medical building on the south side of this place. The dimension we were in was

called Asanla, which was where Aslan Academy originally came from, and according to our new knowledge, was where the real Aslan Academy stood.

I finally started to drift off to sleep, hoping the others were okay in their sleeping chambers. Theo and Hunter were sleeping in the room opposite ours, while the twins, Caio and Cairus, were in a room down the hall.

Sleep finally began to take me and I stroked Arielle's soft feathers a few more times, hoping I could help soothe her so she didn't have any bad dreams. Her loyalty and love for me always reminded me how grateful I was to have her with me. I knew in the next couple of weeks, I'd need her and the guys by my side.

The last thought I had was of floating in the little bubble barrier I made back in the washroom during the attack, while the darkness clung to my wrists. It was in the past, yet my wrists felt like they were once again trapped in the darkness' cold grasp.

I whimpered, beginning to feel afraid, but I knew at any moment I'd fall back asleep. Something warm wrapped around my wrist and something soft pressed against my neck. "Celestia, no harm will come to you." Orion's sweet voice whispered in my ear and the chilling fear that had been trying to overtake me dispersed, leaving me feeling calm once more. The markings on my wrists of winged hearts felt a bit warm, the sensation adding to my calm.

I wanted to say thank you to Orion, but I couldn't stay awake a second longer, finally falling back to sleep.

Thank you, Orion.

*Prepare For The Truth To Be
Revealed*

“You ready to go, Cutie Pie?”

“Just a minute,” I called to Finn who was still in the washroom, adding the last touches to his appearance.

I finished putting on my new uniform, taking a long glance in the mirror at the outfit and my overall look. Our new set of uniforms had been delivered early this morning by Othello, who said he’d return when we were all gathered and ready to head to Father’s office in the tall tower of Aslan Academy.

He said he’d give us an overview tour on our way and then we’d get a more detailed tour from Ms. Arcadia, who would give us our new timetables and such.

Thankfully today was Friday and we didn’t need to start classes until Monday, giving us the weekend off to absorb all the info and try to adapt to this new dimension.

My new uniform was gold and pink, with hints of lavender purple here and there which was an interesting look when paired with my purple-pink hair which now was beginning to have little streaks of gold as well. I’d never gotten time with Magnor to question why my hair was beginning to do something new, but hopefully I’d remember today during my physical examination.

I wore a short-sleeved blouse with gold buttons that tucked into my gold plaid skirt; the design was marked with pink and purple lines that reminded me of those kilts men would wear in those television shows I'd seen that focused on other dimensions.

I had a sleeveless vest that looked more like a cloak since the material reached my ankles. It was gold with ASLAN ACADEMY RECRUIT in large pink lettering.

Othello explained our ranks would change depending on our performance with each trial taken in the next couple of weeks, but he would go into more detail later on. We could wear any type of shoes, but for fashion's sake, I wore pink combat boots.

They were originally black, which led to me complaining that they didn't match my outfit at all. So Finn came over and sprinkled some of his pixie dust on them, turning them into the perfect Barbie pink. Every girl who loved pink needed a pixie shifter in their life for situations such as these.

My markings were on display and I wasn't planning to hide them here either, feeling there was no point. We weren't here to impress anyone. We were here to work towards becoming hunters and huntresses.

I lifted my wrists, my mismatched eyes lingering on each winged heart mark. I remembered a comforting warmth coming from them as I slept but I couldn't remember why. To be honest, I had no clue what happened last night that landed me in the arms of Orion and Finn, but I surely wasn't going to complain.

“Those are the markings that Orion placed on you, right?”

I looked over my shoulder to see Finn approaching me, his bright green eyes staring at my wrists as I held them up for inspection. I checked out his uniform: white sleeveless dress shirt, gold dress pants. The trim of his vest was a lime green that began to shift to pink at the bottom half and his tie had a similar transition from green to pink.

His pink hair was spiked up and I was impressed by his biceps, which were on full display thanks to his shirt being short sleeved. He looked really hot which made me wonder if I'd have to defend my claim on my men. *Yes, they were all mine. Someone would have to fight me if they wanted to take them away from me.*

“Yes. I haven't got a chance to find out what they represent, but Orion placed them on me after the Forsaken incident in the washroom, just before you guys arrived,” I explained. None of us had really elaborated on it and I didn't know when we'd have a chance to really sit down and talk about everything that happened at Old Aslan. Hopefully, this weekend would give us enough time to breathe and accept everything that had transpired. *Well, after the whole information overload session we were about to experience.*

Finn walked up to me and surprisingly pulled me into a hug. “Finn?”

He didn't say anything, just held me in his arms quietly. I relaxed in his embrace and lifted my hands to press them on his back as I hugged him back.

“How are you feeling?” he whispered in my ear.

“I'm okay, Finn. Are you worried too? I don't get why all of you are so concerned about me. I feel much better than before,” I pointed out. I really didn't like how anxious everyone was getting over my health. I was getting better and

it's not like I'd walked into any walls or tripped on the stairs lately, so that must have been a good sign, right?

He slowly leaned back to look into my eyes, his expression guarded but his eyes still showed a glimpse of concern. "You don't remember anything from last night?" he asked.

I lifted an eyebrow at him, tilting my head in confusion. "Last night? Do you mean before I went to bed? I think I comforted Arielle a bit in the early morning, but I don't remember anything else. That reminds me, why were you in bed with us?"

He frowned at my question, looking a little sad which made me feel bad. I quickly continued. "I mean...I'm just curious why you were there. I liked it...uh...well, ya, I didn't mind you being there. I just don't remember why you were there." My face grew red as I tried to elaborate, stumbling over my words.

He smirked, his expression softening as he lifted his hand to stroke my head, calming me from thinking about all the different ways I could have asked my question without hurting his feelings.

"I get what you're trying to ask. I got into the bed because you were cold," he stated.

I considered that. "I guess being sandwiched between two men is the perfect way to insulate heat," I mumbled to myself.

Finn chuckled. "It was nice."

His hand slid down to my waist, closing the space between us as our bodies pressed together. Our faces were just inches apart and my hands clung to his vest, a perfect diversion to distract myself from how fast my heart was beating against my chest. Not to mention the other equally distracting feelings I

had in other areas of my body, which made me squeeze my thighs together.

“So you don’t mind if I sleep with you guys tonight?” he questioned; his husky voice sent goosebumps through me. Finn always seemed like the playful type and only showed seriousness when something was wrong or needed action, but right now his eyes displayed a level of desire and intensity I hadn’t seen from him before. *And I absolutely loved it.*

“I don’t mind,” I replied, almost in a hypnotic trance while my eyes lowered from his darkened eyes to his soft lips. I was still new to the whole thing, only having just gotten used to kissing Orion. I didn’t know if I should initiate the kiss or if I was supposed to wait for Finn. *Would he know how badly I wanted to kiss him right now? Would he consider me weird for feeling this way so soon?*

We’d gotten close over the last few days, with him staying as long as he could every day during my recovery process and doing his best to attend any meetings or appointments concerning my health. It was something I didn’t expect, yet it was rather comforting to know how much he and the others cared for me.

It was the complete opposite of the life I’d had only a few weeks ago where no one cared for this useless, supposedly made-up unicorn shifter. My eyes still lingered on the smooth texture of his lips, noticing the way they parted slightly as if Finn was about to say something. I wanted to lift on my tiptoes and confirm if they were as soft as they appeared while also getting to experience Finn’s taste. My nerves, however, got the better of me and I clung to Finn’s vest tighter, both out of frustration and in desperation to feel his kiss. His lips slowly

morphed into a smile and I lifted my gaze to his eyes, which were hooded with amusement and lust.

“Do you want to kiss me, Celestia?” Finn whispered, his voice so low I barely heard him, but my ears had tuned in carefully, not wanting me to miss out on this chance. I didn’t know what would happen once we left this room to find out the truth about everything. We could end up in a situation where we may not get any alone time for me to kiss him and I didn’t want to miss this opportunity.

I opened my mouth before my logical side had a chance to think of all the reasons as to why this was a bad idea.

“Yes,” I whispered. I looked into his eyes that reflected myself back at me, seeing the love that shone in my green and purple irises while my heart beat so loud and fast that I wondered if Finn could hear it.

His smile widened, and he slowly leaned down until his lips pressed against mine. I let go of his vest to wrap my arms around his waist and he lifted his right hand to press against my cheek. It wasn’t long before his hand moved into my hair. He tilted his head and deepened the kiss with a level of passion and intensity so strong, I wondered if I’d be able to stop this from moving forward into something more.

Finn’s kiss was so different from Orion’s, from the movement of his lips to the way his tongue teased my lower lip, begging for entry. I moaned, my lips parting just slightly. He took advantage of the moment to slip his tongue into my mouth. Finn definitely knew how to kiss, making me even more curious about this mysterious pixie, but I had no room in my foggy mind to question it. I was way too concerned with sharing this kiss, and savoring his delicious taste.

When we finally parted, our breathing was rapid like we'd finished a race. He pressed his forehead against mine, keeping his eyes locked on me. They looked wild with excitement and he slowly smiled.

"You taste amazing, Celestia," he whispered. I blushed at the compliment, feeling a little embarrassed by my behavior. I was still getting used to this aspect of life: being with more than one person and the realization I'd just kissed Finn.

"That was...really nice," I confessed quietly.

He chuckled, pulling me into his arms once more. "If you want to kiss me, never feel the need to hesitate," he whispered in my ear, pressing his lips to the base of my neck. My eyes closed and I enjoyed every second of those soft lips teasing my feverish flesh. *Wow...if this is how it feels like just to be kissed on the neck, imagine what it would feel like in other places?*

Orion's kisses were gentle and slow, sending tingles of pleasure through me, but Finn's had a fierceness to them, awakening a strong pulse of desire that left me wanting more. I was kinda glad we had our meeting soon or I didn't know if I'd want to leave.

"You two done?"

We both turned to Orion, who was leaning against the doorframe of our room, a wide smile on his soft expression. His arms were crossed over his chest and his long white hair was styled in its perfect glory, not a strand out of place. Those purple orbs looked between us in amusement and I immediately blushed, realizing he must have been there for a while.

Arielle sat on his shoulder, practically hopping up and down.

“Bru-REE!” she cheered. *“AH! My Mistress finally took the next step into adulthood. We should have brought a camera. Ah, I’m going to cry.”*

OMG, Arielle! I quickly looked to Finn who seemed unbothered by Orion’s presence. Finn stretched, putting his hands in his pockets. “Ya, we’re done. Unless you’re planning to join. Although that would hold us up and I don’t want to have to explain why we were late to Magnor. I think Cutie Pie would faint out of embarrassment,” Finn teased, looking back at me.

I knew my face must have been beet red but I couldn’t understand how either of them could be so calm about this. “Aren’t you guys uh...mad or upset or something?” I questioned, unsure how they would have react to begin with.

Orion pushed off from where he was leaning against the doorway, walking over to us. Arielle fluttered her wings, flying over to land on Finn’s shoulder. He reached out and pet her head. “Morning, Arielle.” He greeted her with a gentle voice.

“Bru-REE!” she replied, brushing her head against his cheek. I don’t know when she’d become so relaxed with Finn, but I figured it must have been during the last few days while I had been recovering. I knew for a fact Arielle was nice to those who were kind and took care of me.

Orion stood before me and leaned in to give me a tender kiss on my lips. I slowly closed my eyes, enjoying the blissful moment and how gentle he was. Regardless of whether a kiss was fast or slow, I loved the intimate moment and moaned in Orion’s mouth when he deepened the kiss.

“Bru. Bru. Bru.” Arielle began to sing, which pulled me out of my daze. Orion smiled against my lips, breaking the

kiss and he chuckled.

“I don’t see why we’d be mad. We made a mutual agreement to share you,” Orion revealed.

“Mutual agreement to share me?” I repeated, slowly looking between him and Finn who shrugged.

“If we didn’t make an agreement, we wouldn’t be standing here with no interference from the others. Everyone’s been behaving because we all agreed that we’d share you,” Finn pointed out.

Orion looked to Finn. “I think we forgot one important thing.”

“What?” Finn asked, a curious expression on his face.

“We didn’t tell her that we made the agreement to begin with,” Orion revealed.

“Oh...ya that probably would have been a good idea.” Finn nodded.

“Bru-REE!” Arielle agreed. *“Ahh, the joys of male mentality. They all want a piece of my Mistress. Too bad I get first dibs.”*

She flew off Finn’s shoulder and landed on mine, rubbing her head against my cheek. I giggled. “Yes Arielle, you get first dibs when it comes to me,” I reassured her out loud. The guys both stared at me.

“You’re okay with both of us wanting to date you, Cutie Pie?” Finn asked.

“We’ll try to behave.” Orion grinned with a glimmer of mischief in his expression.

Finn exhaled. “The look on your face doesn’t reassure me at all.”

I laughed. “I agree with Finn there.”

“I’m innocent,” Orion defended with a pout that looked adorable on his pink lips. I grinned, reaching up to wrap my arms around his neck, kissing him without hesitation. I was rather comfortable with Orion and it was starting to feel like second nature to kiss him. It would help me explore this area more and gain experience while I began my relationships with the others.

“Sure you are,” I whispered against his lips, noticing the tint of red forming on his cheeks as he glanced away shyly. I lowered back down and looked at Finn.

“I’m okay with both of you dating me. The others too. Um...I’m still new to all of this, but if you don’t mind that, I think we could make this work.” I gave them a wide smile.

They both grinned, looking like they won the lottery. “We’ll learn,” Orion agreed.

“Yup. Now, we should head down before the twins get impatient and come up here. They hate waiting,” Finn pointed out.

“That’s why I’m here to collect you guys.”

We turned to the doorway; Hunter was there with a calm expression. His uniform was just like the others but with orange trimming. I glanced at Orion’s uniform that had purple trimming. *I guess our uniforms are based on our shifter animals?*

“Morning, Hunter,” I greeted.

He smiled, walking over to us. He reached my side, holding up his hand to stroke my hair. “You look much better compared to the last couple of days. How are you feeling?” he asked.

I nodded, giving him a wide smile. “Much better,” I reassured him.

He nodded, glancing at my lips before turning his gaze to Orion and Finn. “You two are really impatient,” he commented with a knowing smile. They both blushed and Finn ruffled his hair awkwardly.

“Go away. Actually, let’s get going. We’re going to be late.” Finn directed Hunter towards the door.

“Hey, I can walk myself and I want a morning kiss, you hogs,” he huffed.

“Get an afternoon one. Let’s go.” Finn pushed him out the door, looking over his shoulder at us, giving a wink before turning left to head down the stairs.

“It’s nice that everything’s slowly going back to how it was before,” I admitted. Orion slipped his hand in mine, leaning in to place a kiss on my forehead.

“I agree. You sure you’re okay? You don’t recall anything from last night?” he questioned.

I frowned, giving him a confused look. “No? Finn asked me the exact same question. Did I sleepwalk or something?” I couldn’t think of what else could have happened.

Orion stared at my lost expression and gave me a reassuring look. “Aside from the fact you were cold so we sandwiched you between Finn and I, you were talking in your sleep.”

I blushed. “Ah. Well...um...I kinda liked it. Does that sound weird?” I asked shyly.

Orion blinked before a seductive grin formed on his lips, making my stomach flip in anticipation. “Not weird at all,” he reassured me. We moved towards the door, his hand still in mine. He leaned in to whisper in my ear. “Between us, I enjoyed it too.”

We shared a look before we both laughed quietly. Orion squeezed my hand. “No matter what happens next, we all will be here to support and protect you. Don’t be afraid and if anyone does try to bother you, kick their ass.” Orion hummed.

I couldn’t help but laugh. “That sounds totally weird coming from you.”

He smirked. “I don’t promote violence,” he declared innocently.

“BRU!” Arielle flapped her wings, moving from my left shoulder to land on his right shoulder. “*Says the guy who killed a huge Forsaken like it was a twig.*”

“Arielle doesn’t believe you.” I giggled.

He looked at Arielle and grinned. “Okay, I was lying, but let’s just pretend for this scenario.”

I laughed, tightening my hold on his large hand. Orion had changed a lot from when we’d first met, showing me his compassionate side and a more carefree aspect of himself I knew he didn’t show to many people. It made me feel special and loved.

The warmth around my wrist returned and I was tempted to ask him about the markings, but I held my tongue, realizing we’d spent way too much time here already. Orion turned his

gaze to meet mine. “Let’s go find out the truth,” he declared. I nodded.

The truth about Aslan Academy.

Truth Revealed

“I ‘m glad all of you could join us. You look much better than at our first meeting,” Orlando Rainbow, my father, announced.

We were currently in the private conference room in the administration department of Aslan Academy. It resided in a large tower attached to the main building. We had to go through three different clearance points to reach my father’s office.

The professors and administrators easily put two and two together. We had heard the buzzing whispers of the headmaster’s daughter being one of the special recruits who had been accepted into Aslan after the Forsaken attack. It made me curious to see if the attack was real or if it had been planned as part of our test, but I’d just have to wait until I had the chance to ask my father, who now stood in front of us.

I was sitting between Hunter and Orion. Finn and Theo were sitting on Hunter’s side while Cairus and Caio sat on Orion’s. Father was standing before us with his wand, which I’d seen when we first arrived, in his left hand. His long blond hair was tied up in a ponytail and his gold cape was decorated with green magic circles rested on his shoulders.

The kindness in his eyes was still present as he talked with us, especially when they landed on me from time to time, but

his firm voice reminded us that what we were about to discuss would be more serious.

Ms. Arcadia and Othello were sitting to our left, both of them looking rather intimate sitting so closely together. I couldn't see if they were holding hands, but it was enough to make me curious if they had taken the next step.

Magnor sat on our right, looking as calm as ever. He wore a prideful expression while watching over us, but I did catch him staring at me a few times. He must have still been worried about my health after the attack. Arielle was sitting on Orion's shoulder still, all nestled up. She looked to be asleep but I knew she was quietly listening.

"I bet you have many questions, but first, I'd like to once again congratulate you on being accepted to Aslan Academy. I believe Othello gave you a small tour, but after this meeting, feel free to explore the grounds. It's Friday, so many classes will finish early, so you'll be able to check out the school grounds and areas outside. On the outskirts of our lands are barriers. It will be quite obvious and I highly suggest you do not cross them. The majority of students who do never return and I wouldn't want that happening to any of you," Father explained, his mismatched eyes landing on me when he said the last sentence.

I frowned at him and he smiled. "Especially you, Celestia," he confirmed.

"I follow the rules," I replied. Hunter, Finn, and Theo snickered, while Orion coughed, and the twins chuckled quietly. Even Othello, Ms. Arcadia, and Magnor had amused expressions on their faces.

"Oh c'mon." I huffed.

Orion slipped his hand in mine, squeezing it gently. “You do follow the rules...most of the time.”

“Celestia is like those shifters in scary movies where everyone says, ‘don’t go there’ and she totally ignores them and goes anyway,” Caio hummed.

“Our Dearest is a curious unicorn.” Cairus chuckled.

I blushed, wishing I was in front of all of them so I could give them the side eye. “I’m just interested in things, especially if they’re forbidden and shiny,” I mumbled and this time Father laughed.

“Haven’t changed at all, my sweet Celestia.” He grinned and I smiled, realizing how much I’d missed his joyous laugh.

“Now that we’ve had a good laugh, let us get back on topic.” Father looked at each of us before continuing. “To make explanations easier, let’s refer to this place as the New Aslan and the other one as Old Aslan.”

We all exchanged glances before nodding. We sat up a little straighter as we prepared for the discussion we’d been waiting for.

“The moment you received your invitations from Old Aslan, the test began. We assessed the way you prepared for the entrance exam and monitored how you responded to discovering your potential acceptance to the well-known school,” Father began.

“Wait, so you guys spied on us to see how we reacted? How?” Theo looked incredulous.

“Once each of you left for Old Aslan, an observer went to your home or village to ask how your behavior had been. Some may ask your parents, others will go to the town and ask those who watched you leave towards your town portals. The

gatekeeper also made an assessment of you before allowing you through the portal. If they felt you weren't ready and that we made an error in judgment based on the application alone, they have the right to deny your request, which has happened many times," Father explained.

I looked at each side of the table, noticing the guys' expressions, which were a mixture of confusion, shock, and irritation. I didn't like the idea we had been spied on to assess if we were worthy enough to even attempt the entrance exam, but this sounded like a protocol they had been following for years, so there wasn't much we could complain about if it had worked for so long.

"How does that work or accomplish anything?" I questioned. "There are people like Vincent, who came up and boasted about his acceptance but still got in. I don't see how that helps with anything." I didn't want to sound snarky or let on that his attempt to belittle me back then had brought me down, but it was a question of presentation and attitude.

"Since you've been here, have you seen Vincent?" Father asked us. We all looked at one another before shaking our heads. "No," I replied, speaking for our entire group.

"One thing at Aslan that we try our best to adhere to is respect. Being humble and accepting that you have been given an opportunity to become a hunter or huntress shows that you've been raised to respect what life presents to you. We do accept some who qualified for the sake of avoiding issues or accusations of favoritism from families of higher rank and class, but once you reach Old Aslan, it doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor. Your performance is what determines whether you will sit before me and hear the information I'm

giving you now, or get sent back where you came from,” Father concluded.

“Wait, they go back?” Caio asked.

“As in back home? So everyone who didn’t survive that attack is either dead or returned back to the dimension they came from?” Cairus clarified.

“Did people actually die?” Hunter questioned.

“And if they did, what do you tell the families?” Finn inquired.

“What happens to those who survive, but fail the test? Won’t they go spread the word that the Old Aslan isn’t real?” Orion questioned.

Magnor rose up from his seat, walking over to stand next to Father. “You guys have many questions, but let’s finish explaining first. Some of your questions will be answered momentarily.”

“Sorry,” I again spoke for myself and the others, who looked flustered and lowered their heads in apology. I didn’t blame the guys; we were finally getting answers but they were only creating more questions.

“When you arrive at Old Aslan, you are tested on multiple things. How you adjust to the rapidly changing environment, your performance on both the written and physical exams, your ability to adapt to working with your team and how you progress in the following weeks, both academically and in overall growth, all play a part.” Father paused before continuing.

“Normally, you are tested in a situation similar to what you all experienced, where you have to discover the hidden door which we call the emergency exit. Every student has been told

about this at some point, but as you can tell, the majority of students tried to escape in the opposite direction, or were overtaken by the Forsaken during the attack.”

“Wait, we weren’t told about the emergency exit!” I spoke up in outrage.

Hunter nodded. “I only knew about it because of my brother, who showed me that specific location back when I was younger.”

“You were all absent that day when it was discussed,” Ms. Arcadia revealed. “It must have been when Celestia and Caio became really sick and you all stayed home. There was a discussion about the exit in class because we knew the trial would be happening two weeks from then.”

“But, regardless of whether or not we knew, why does it look like we’re the only ones who made it?” I asked, still feeling rather lost about the whole situation. *If everyone, or at least the good majority of students knew about it, why hadn’t anyone been running towards it? If I knew there was an exit that would guarantee safe haven, why avoid it?*

Magnor stepped up to answer. “When you guys were heading towards the emergency exit, what did you notice?” Magnor asked, his eyes on me.

“Well, it was heavily guarded with Forsaken and took the guys a lot of magic to get past and hold them off long enough for all of us to go through,” I explained. I wasn’t in a position to fight at the time so Orion had carried me while the others fought.

“Exactly. Those who knew about the exit noticed how heavily guarded it was and instead of everyone working together and making a path for them to go through, they

dispersed, everyone thinking only about their own life rather than working on teamwork, which was one of the essential lessons we'd been trying to implement. We wouldn't have put any of you in teams if we wanted you to work alone. As a hunter or huntress, many missions are done in groups and your partner or partners must be able to rely on the fact you will defend them and vice versa," Father explained.

"So...basically everyone failed?" Theo clarified.

"Except us," Hunter added.

"Yes and no," Othello answered from where he sat. "This is where things get more complicated."

I glanced at Father and Magnor, who both exchanged glances. Magnor looked to each of us. "Whatever is said here, stays here. We're making this decision based on the fact you've all done well previously in upholding your secrecy regarding the Forsaken attack that happened during your exam. This has never happened before and that is why we need to take precaution."

Orion tightened his hold on my hand. I took a quick glance and saw him frown. Something was bothering him about this conversation and I'd have to remember to confront him about it later. I squeezed back and he met my gaze. I gave him a smile before I mouthed, "Relax."

He smiled, looking less restless than before and we both turned our attention back to Magnor and Father, who'd been eyeing the both of us.

"We agree to those terms. Nothing said here will be spoken of to anyone else," I confirmed. Father and Magnor nodded, glancing over at Othello and Ms. Arcadia who both looked satisfied with my declaration on behalf of my team.

“The test is normally done with Forsaken look-alikes. Generally, if students succumb to the Forsaken, they’re put into a state of sleep until we can deliver them safely back home,” Othello explained. I grimaced at the memory. *That certainly didn’t feel like a fake.*

“BRU!” Arielle spoke up, flying over to sit on my shoulder, her flames fluttering on as she glared at Othello. “*That was NOT a fake,*” she snarled.

Finn stood up. “Sorry to interrupt, but there’s no way those were fakes,” he declared.

“Mr. Charm and Arielle, can I finish?” Othello asked with a hint of amusement.

Finn sat back down. “Sure.” He sounded a little pissed off and my heart swelled at his concern. I gently stroked Arielle to calm down her anger and her flames slowly dissipated.

“Thank you,” Othello replied before went on. “As Mr. Charm stated, those Forsaken did not look fake, and he’s correct. They were the real deal.”

I peeked at both sides of me; every single guy wore upset expressions, especially Orion and Finn. I didn’t know how I felt about it yet, but there must have been an explanation.

“So, them being there wasn’t planned?” I questioned.

Ms. Arcadia sighed. “There is a section in the school where we create and store the fake Forsaken the day before the test. They were checked the night before and everything was fine. Because of the change in the environment recently, it was overlooked that a fellow professor, who was the one in charge of checking and releasing the Forsaken for the test, went missing.”

I shivered at the revelation, swallowing the lump in my throat. “Missing as in...” I trailed off, already imagining what could have happened.

Father was staring at me and nodded as if reading my thoughts. “It was reported and later reviewed on the surveillance footage. The professor went to prepare the Forsaken for the exam which would have happened about an hour after you all settled into your classrooms. When he opened the room to do the final check, he realized the Forsaken weren’t the fakes from the night before, but real ones. Before he could lock the chamber and seek help, he’d already been grabbed by the Forsaken. He was too tainted to save and had turned into one of them by the time help arrived.”

We sat there in silence, none of us able to speak. My left hand trembled slightly and I clenched it into a fist to hide my fear. Even though everyone was reassuring me I was okay, I felt like a part of me wasn’t. If I overlooked this, would I become a Forsaken too?

I felt something wrap around my left hand and I looked down to see Hunter’s hand grasping mine. I lifted my gaze to stare into his orange eyes. They held a level of reassurance that helped keep me calm, even though my growing nerves were trying to get the best of me.

“The Forsaken were able to escape the chamber and thus the reason why the attack happened way before anyone was prepared. By the time we managed to reach the scene, a lot of damage had already been done,” Othello concluded gravely.

“So...the students that were attacked and ‘failed’... they...” Caio trailed off.

“They’re actually dead,” Cairus finished.

There was a moment of silence before Father answered. “Correct. It is already known that you can die during your time at Aslan. This isn’t a place where we baby you. The moment you apply, you’re aware of the consequences and the possibility of facing death in your pursuit to becoming hunters and huntresses. Their families have been notified.”

“What about the ones who survived or were rescued during the attack?” Theo questioned.

Hunter nodded. “Ya. Aren’t they going to return home and explain what happened to them? None of us have heard of this so-called trial from past students.”

Ms. Arcadia spoke up. “Those who fail have their memories of the test wiped. They are informed only that they completed the exam and failed. If they didn’t sustain any physical wounds, we provide them with their test results which show they did not make it and they can re-apply, but there are specific factors taken into consideration if a student is given a second chance to reapply after failing the first time.”

We were silent once again, unsure what to say at this point. Father gave us a sympathetic smile. “I get this is a lot to take in, but this is how we’ve run things here for years. Hunters and huntresses are individuals who don’t just protect this dimension alone. They travel to many dimensions far and wide and help rid the darkness growing in each of them. Not every dimension or race call the darkness Forsaken. Some refer to it just as ‘the darkness.’ It’s everywhere and there WILL be incidents where your life is at risk and you will have to protect those who are helpless to defend themselves. That is why you are trained and are pushed to your limits here, so you’re prepared for what’s to come.”

We all nodded, unable to argue with his statement. We all were aware when we signed up that becoming a hunter or huntress wasn't going to be easy. It was a position looked upon highly by many, both young and old. They put their lives on the line so that we could live with little to no fear of Forsaken taking over our dimension.

Magnor had a sympathetic look on his face. "I understand this is a lot for all of you and will take time to process, but we don't have much time to give you. Regardless of whether the test was real or staged, you are the only recruits who made it this time. You will notice rather quickly your uniforms are unique compared to many of the students here."

I glanced down at my gold uniform, already noticing how unique the design was and that our uniforms were based on our shifter animals.

Father nodded. "Normally, recruits wear white and work their way up to black, red, gold. The highest ranks will have their uniforms specifically designed in the color of their shifter animal or be allowed to choose their own."

"For example, if a female has reached the highest rank, which we call Elite status, they can choose any color OR base it off their shifter animal. If they are a phoenix, the color of their uniform would be an amber color. If they are a unicorn, the color will be pink," Ms. Arcadia explained, looking at me with a smile.

"So we're gold? So second from Elite?" Orion questioned.

Father nodded. "Correct."

"But...isn't that too high for us? We're new and still learning." Theo frowned.

“Yea and wouldn’t we attract attention from the students already here?” Cairus pointed out.

“Exactly, we’d be new targets. Wouldn’t that cause problems or fights?” Caio wondered.

“It’s not like we’re worried about fighting them. We can manage just fine, but that could cause a disturbance and some students are obviously stronger and more knowledgeable than us,” Hunter added.

“In summary, it’s not like we’re afraid of a challenge. We’re Team Misfit and can fight our own battles if we need to together. However, we don’t want to cause problems for anyone,” I stressed.

I wasn’t afraid of fighting and defending my men. We weren’t pushovers and I could care less about rank, but I didn’t want to cause trouble with our enrollment. Also, knowing Father was the headmaster and that word was probably spreading that his daughter had survived the “entrance test” and was attending the real Aslan Academy, I didn’t want to make him worry about me. *Even if I was still upset with him.*

Ms. Arcadia smiled. She and Othello stood from their seats, walking over to stand at Father’s right side. “Team M, or Misfit, I feel you are not understanding why you are wearing gold uniforms, or have details representing your shifter animals,” she stressed.

“What are we missing?” Finn asked.

Father smiled at the question. “An attack of Forsaken occurred unexpectedly and your team of misfits were able to single-handedly fight off the darkness after saving a fellow comrade, using knowledge that wasn’t provided to you through us to find the exit. You worked together to defend

yourselves long enough to reach the portal and now sit here with humble attitudes after we've revealed the truth to you."

"Maybe to your team, you don't understand why you deserve your ranks and uniforms, but you displayed qualities essential for hunters and huntresses. We all know being able to kill a Forsaken is a difficult task for even experienced shifters. You worked as a team, and when given the opportunity to leave a fellow comrade, you didn't." Othello stressed the last sentence, his eyes lingering on me.

Father nodded. "And for that alone, I thank you. Not as a headmaster, but as Celestia's father." He bowed his head to the guys in gratitude. I swallowed the lump in my throat and Orion and Hunter each squeezed one of my hands. I gave them a small smile as Arielle fluffed her wings and began rubbing her head against the side of my face for added comfort.

"We'd do again in a heartbeat. That's our duty, nothing more. You don't need to thank us," Orion said quietly.

"Exactly." Cairus and Caio spoke in unison.

"We'll always protect her." Theo sounded confident.

"And if anyone tries to bother her here, don't be surprised if we beat them up," Hunter mumbled.

Finn declared, "She's ours to protect and it's as simple as that."

"BRU-REE!" Arielle called, hopping up and down as her flames ignited once again. "*These men need to settle down. I was here protecting Celestia just fine before they came along. Hmph. Trying to take my glory.*"

I grinned, petting her. "Yes, Arielle. You're my ultimate protector."

Father smirked, exchanging glances with the others before he sighed. “I think that’s enough explaining for now. I know you may still have more questions, so feel free to ask Othello, Ms. Arcadia, or Magnor if I’m unavailable. I think now would be the best time to explore the campus while many classes are still in session before you explore the outer sections. Your living arrangements are almost ready. You can do whatever you wish from now until eight in the evening. Please meet back here and we’ll finalize the paperwork, get you to your dorms and give you a detailed overview of everything that happens in Aslan so you’re prepared to start your classes on Monday.”

We all nodded and rose to our feet.

We’d finally learned the truth of it all, but something told me there was still more to the puzzle we were desperately trying to solve.

Everyone Deserves Forgiveness

“Celestia, can we have a word please?” Father called before I could leave.

“Sure,” I replied, looking at the other guys. They didn’t look worried but they didn’t seem happy to have to wait outside without me. “I won’t be long,” I reassured them. They all nodded; Hunter and Orion let go of my hand. Arielle hopped on my shoulder excitedly and I smirked, knowing it was her way of reassuring the guys that she was there to keep me safe, even though Father would never hurt me. *Men are so overprotective.*

Everyone but Magnor left the room. I stared at both of them with a blank expression. Magnor sighed. “I know you’re upset.”

I shook my head. “Upset isn’t the word to explain how I feel right now.”

Father frowned, guilt washed over his expression. “Celestia,” he whispered.

“Why didn’t you tell me? You lied to me for years, saying you were a gatekeeper and couldn’t come home,” I stressed.

“I couldn’t tell you,” he defended.

“Why not? If you told me you were the headmaster of Aslan and had to keep your identity a secret, I would have

understood. Mom isn't super specific about what she has to do in the dimension she's in right now, but that's better than lying, saying you're something you're not."

"Celestia, it's not that simple," Father mumbled. His weak defense only made me angrier. Magnor opened his mouth to speak and I glared at him, silencing him before he could interrupt. His bit was coming, he'd just have to wait.

"I'm your daughter. You should have given me the chance to safeguard that knowledge, rather than assume I couldn't keep it a secret to begin with. Do you know what I've gone through? The bullying I experienced because YOU weren't there to defend me. Every day I was tortured, both physically and emotionally. Hah, even mentally! You don't know the scars I carry and the hatred I held in my heart as I fought to not believe what everyone was saying over and over!" I shouted.

Father was silent, unable to fight against my claim. "If it wasn't for Magnor...you wouldn't even have a daughter to speak to right now," I whispered, looking away.

The room was silent, my words settling in with each passing second. I deserved to be mad. I'd experienced so much, all the while thinking my father was dimensions away, serving his duty as a gatekeeper. Yet here he was, a headmaster of the prestigious Aslan Academy, letting Magnor basically babysit me while he did his job. Was I just some hindrance or a burden to him?

My face must have displayed my fear because Magnor took a step forward. "Celestia. I know that look and it's not what you think," he whispered.

I huffed, turning my gaze to him. "You knew all along Father was a headmaster and didn't tell me either. You're just as guilty as him. Why wouldn't I think I was some kind of

nuisance or a liability? Just because you give someone a gift or present once every few years, doesn't mean shit. You saw how the villagers treated me. You witnessed first hand and it was only because of your intervention that it stopped. Why aren't you upset that you were practically forced to raise me, instead of my own father?!" I exclaimed.

"I wasn't forced, Celestia, nor was it a burden. I wanted to take care of you," Magnor insisted.

"Why? Did you get a bonus in pay or something?" I grumbled.

"Celestia, that's enough," Father snapped.

"You don't have a say!" I insisted. "You don't know how I feel right now. I went through so much shit because you and Mom went away. No one had answers, just excuses. You abandoned me for three years before Magnor interfered. Three years where I came home to an empty house. Three years where if I was sick, I had to fend for myself. Three...fucking years, where on some days I didn't have a single thing to eat and had to steal bread from dumpsters near the bakery. Three years where I was called names, punched, kicked, and shoved into walls, leaving bruises and cuts that I had to heal myself. You want that all to be erased because you had a job and said sorry? I should just ignore the pain in my heart right now so that you don't feel guilty just because you tried to contribute to my life when you bothered to think of me at all?"

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I slowly caught my breath, not realizing how loud I'd been. I bet the guys could hear me from outside but I didn't care. The pent-up pain I'd been holding in for the last couple of days had finally decided to burst and he would get every single bit of it. He deserved to know about everything he dismissed for the sake of his "job."

He pushed his duty of being a father on someone else and thought it was okay? I needed him to realize it wasn't.

Magnor sighed, walking up to me. I glared at him, thinking he'd just stroke my head and tell me to forgive, but he did something completely unexpected. He went on his knees, bowing his head. I stared at him in shock as he took a deep breath.

"I get you're upset, Celestia. You have every right to be. But I need you to understand that raising you was my decision. I chose to do it because I wanted to. There was no benefit or bonus. I promised I'd train you when you were ready and that night...when I saw how hollow your eyes were...I knew that you'd be strong enough to handle anything I threw at you. I won't kneel here and lie to you. A part of me did take you in to save you from...suicide...but I've never once chosen a student and regretted it. I knew you'd achieve great things and you've proven that. You've experienced things no one should have, simply because you were different. Yet, you've still grown into a woman who loves and is selfless. That wasn't because of me, or your father. That was all you and I acknowledge that. I apologize if I contributed to your hurt." I noticed the tears that fell from his eyes and onto the tiled floor.

"Bru..." Arielle flew off my shoulder and went to land on the floor beneath Magnor's lowered head. A teardrop fell onto her head and she fluttered her wings before flying up slightly to hover in the air while she rubbed her cheek against Magnor's tear-stained one. I could feel her sadness and pity for Magnor. I could tell from his actions that his intention was true. He honestly wanted to save me and it was thanks to him that I'd lived to be able to even tell my story. I wouldn't have made it this far without him, and his love and guidance were what helped me develop the tough skin I had now.

“I forgive you Magnor,” I whispered, feeling a little bad for making him cry. My own tears continued to fall down my cheeks. He nodded his head, slowly rising to his feet. I couldn’t let him leave without showing I meant what I said, so I took a step forward and wrapped my arms around him. He hugged me back, stroking my hair like he always did to comfort me.

“Please don’t be too upset. You have every right, but please understand,” he whispered. I simply nodded, still unsure how I felt about Father. He watched us in silence and I finally released Magnor, who moved to the side, giving me space to confront my father.

We stared into each other’s eyes for a long time and his shoulders sank in defeat and he bowed his head. “I’m sorry, Celestia. I...I should have been honest. I was sworn to secrecy by the council when I took my role. It was foolish of me to think everything would work itself out when I left, but I thought it would give you a better life. I had no idea about the torment you experienced. Maybe Magnor tried to tell me back then, but I wasn’t originally in this position where I sat in my office signing papers and running an entire school. I had to prove my worth and be a hunter for a few years in order to stand where I am now. Regardless, I know it sounds like an excuse and nothing can change what occurred in the past. You’re right. I should have taken my responsibility as a father more seriously and I didn’t. I know it will take time for you to accept my apology and look past the pain you endured because of my absence, but I hope we can fix this. I’ll try to work this out with you if you’re willing to give me a chance, and no matter your decision, know I love you,”

I closed my eyes and felt Arielle land on my shoulder. I could hear the regret in my father’s voice, the agony, sadness,

torment. Everything. He truly regretted his decision. I didn't need a looking glass to feel the emotion in the air and notice that he was on the verge of tears.

“Bru...” Arielle whispered. *“He does mean it. He genuinely wants to make things right.”*

I slowly opened my eyes, lifting my gaze to Father, whose head was still hanging down in shame. Through all the anger, I still remembered the kindness. The love he'd shown me in my childhood. The compassion when he told me stories and the happiness that flashed in his eyes when we were together.

Through all the bad memories, my heart still yearned for my dad. I still wanted him in my life, even if he hadn't gotten the opportunity to raise me. Even though he was far away, he didn't abandon me completely. He didn't hate or despise me like other parents might have. He accepted that I was a rare being in this world and only did what he thought was best. Even if, looking back, it wasn't the best choice.

“The dual swords you bought were pretty useful,” I mumbled, more to myself and Arielle than to Father and Magnor. “And you did get Mom's gift and made it so Sia and I could have an easier time.”

Father lifted his head slightly, his sad, tear-filled eyes meeting mine. We maintained our stare for what seemed to be minutes, but I knew only seconds had passed.

“Everyone deserves a second chance.”

It was weird to suddenly recall those words, remembering my mom's soft voice from when I was five. If she was here, she'd tell Father that it was his fault I was so stubborn and didn't want to forgive people so easily. Of course, we'd all

know my stubbornness was really from her. In the end, she'd encourage me to hug my father and forgive him.

I slowly walked up to him and a glimmer of hope washed over his once dejected expression. "You have to promise from now on you'll be truthful, or at least try to be," I whispered to him.

He slowly nodded, putting his free hand to his chest. "You have my word, Celestia."

I pondered what else to ask of him, unsure if there was anything else I wanted.

"BRU!" Arielle chirped and a thought coming to my mind.

"And when you're free...we have to hang out. Even if it's just for hamburgers. I like hamburgers and cupcakes," I said shyly.

Father smiled and nodded. "Anything you want to do, we'll do. Does that sound like a good deal?"

I met his gaze, giving him a small smile. "Yes," I replied. "I missed you."

He closed the gap between us, pulling me into a tight embrace. "I've missed you so much. You have no idea, my princess. I'm so sorry." He continued whispering apologies.

I knew he would keep his word this time and maybe one day we'd simply laugh at this memory, cherishing all the years we had as a family. All I hoped for was that Mom would come back one day too. Then with Magnor and Arielle, we'd be a happy little family.

Maybe then I could introduce my men as lovers, instead of just friends.

Healthy or Tainted

“I suggest no shifting for now and don’t use any magic until Monday when you start classes. Your body is still healing but it’s a lot better than just a few days ago. The guys have said you haven’t been sleeping well, so I’ll prescribe some sleeping pills. They’re strong, so just take one and if you feel weird or depressed, come back and see me,” Ms. Arcadia urged.

I nodded, sitting up before sliding off the medical bed to put my uniform back on. I’d undergone another medical exam, Ms. Arcadia volunteering to do my assessment rather than allowing one of the Aslan nurses. Father mentioned none of them had worked with a unicorn shifter before and felt more comfortable if Ms. Arcadia did it.

After our moment, I’d explained in detail about what had happened during the Forsaken attack to Father. Magnor stayed behind to help fill in the details of what had occurred at the school afterward. Father had been so busy with everything that had happened at the Old Aslan, when another incident occurred in a different dimension, which resulted in a group of shifters coming to Aslan for safe haven after their dimension was overtaken by the darkness.

I knew he was busy and had other things to attend to, so I reassured him I was fine, aside from feeling a little depressed here and there and my lack of sleep. He said I should continue

being checked once a week, and if I was struggling to come talk to him or Magnor.

Even though we'd patched things up, I still felt more comfortable with Magnor. I knew it sounded bad, but I just felt more reassurance that Magnor would have the time and mindset to listen to my concerns and he'd always made me feel at least a little better when I talked with him.

"I'll let whoever is outside waiting for you know they can come in to see you now. Wait a few minutes for the relaxation spell to wear off and you should be good to go exploring," Ms. Arcadia reassured me.

"Thank you, Ms. Arcadia."

She smiled. "You don't need to call me that here, Celestia. That's my Old Aslan name. Please, feel free to call me Miona. Just as you call Othello by his first name."

"But aren't you a professor here?" I asked, not wanting to sound disrespectful.

"Yes, I am. I teach a bunch of classes and should be your teacher for a good four of them, but titles are only used for ranks black and below. Red ranks and above are allowed to use our given names as long as it's done in a respectable manner. Since your group is close to Elite, I don't see the point of such formalities," she explained.

"Is Elite really special here?" I questioned.

"Elite is the title given to someone who automatically becomes a hunter or huntress by the end of their schooling at Aslan. Your group has already proven yourselves, having killed a Forsaken during your first physical challenge together. You showed teamwork by continuing to stay as a team after all that occurred, and once again proved yourselves during the

school incident. I know the information from earlier hasn't sunk in, but the Council is very fond of your group after all that has occurred. If it weren't for the fact you are all new, you would have achieved Elite status right away," she concluded.

"Wow." I glanced around the empty medical room. Miona had brought me to the private sector in the clinic. "Aren't you scared someone may hear our conversation?" I asked.

Miona laughed. "Nope. I always make sure to put a barrier around whatever room I'm in for privacy. You'll learn quickly at New Aslan that everything and anything can be used against you as a weakness. If you thought Vincent was amusing to watch, you'll enjoy the multiple fights that occur in class every day. I'll make sure to bring some popcorn and phoenix bird food for Arielle. She can take her pick."

I glanced at Arielle, who was fast asleep next to my pillow. I smiled at her resting bundle of feathers, before returning my gaze to Miona who was also looking at Arielle.

"She'll make friends here too," Miona whispered.

"Arielle? Are there familiars here?" I asked.

"Something like that. You'll see during your trials." She finished the last report and began gathering the different colored sheets together to place in my file.

"Trials?" I questioned.

"We'll explain more about those tonight when we present you all with your schedules, but trials are like exams. It's either as a team or with a partner. Together, you undergo a challenge. Your performance determines your score. Some trials are easy, while others could cost you your life. It's what separates the weak and the strong, the rude and the humble, and the shifters with evil intent and ones with hearts of gold."

She stared me right in the eye and smiled softly. “I’ll go get one of the guys. You can lay down for a bit.”

I nodded in agreement, watching her gather my file, then go over to pet Arielle, who didn’t even stir from the petting motion. She had been so anxious over the last couple of days she probably was having even worse sleep than me. I really hoped we’d be able to relax this weekend and get some snooze. I felt that we’d need it for next week.

“I’ll let Magnor and your father know about the results. I’ll see you tonight at eight,” she reminded.

“Yes. Thank you, Miona.” I gave her a wide smile.

“You’re welcome, Celestia. I have to admit, even though you and your father have very similar traits, your beauty definitely comes from your mother.”

“You know my mom?” I asked.

“Yes. We were in the same dimension for a bit. I guess you can say I left because my views changed and I decided my skills would be better off here helping your father with Othello. She’s a very strong-willed woman. Very stubborn.” Miona winked at the last sentence and I huffed.

“I’m not that stubborn,” I muttered as I lay back on the bed, making sure not to disturb Arielle.

“Sure,” Miona replied sarcastically. “Your mom would beg to differ.”

“I miss her,” I admitted, staring up at the dim lights in the ceiling. Miona leaned over so her head hovered above me, her eyes meeting mine. “She misses you too. I know it must have been difficult growing up without your parents, but I can reassure you, your mom is making a difference out there. Regardless of my change in professions, she’s doing

something that will maybe end everything that's happening beyond the protective walls. You'll learn more during class, but hopefully in time you'll get to see your mother as well. I think Orlando needs a good dose of her. He's been playing more cautious than usual. Maybe you'll help reignite the fire he once had."

"Hmmm." I tried to soak up everything she'd just said. I was unsure really how to reply or feel about her words, so I thought silence would be best for now. I'd figure it out later and if I had any questions, I could just ask Father.

I noticed the gold ring on Miona's fourth finger; the sky blue diamond matched her eyes perfectly. "Miona...um, sorry to be intrusive but you're married?" I asked.

She blinked, appearing confused by my question before she lifted her left hand to stare at the ring. A serene smile formed on her lips and she returned her gaze to mine. "Yes." The simple word held weight to it and I could tell whoever her partner was, she adored them.

"That's nice. Hmm. I thought you and Othello would be perfect together, though," I mumbled before yawning. I relaxed my head into the white pillow.

Miona smirked, walking over to the white curtains and pulling them closed to give me privacy. Before she left, she looked back over her shoulder. "I agree and we're very happy together. Thank you, Celestia, for the compliment. I'll tease Othello about it all day now. Get some rest," she encouraged.

I opened my mouth to speak but she was already gone, closing the curtain before the sound of her heels faded away.

"Well...that was an interesting conversation," I whispered to myself as I closed my eyes. I considered what we'd talked

about regarding the Forsaken. My heart clenched at the thought of the students lost in the surprise attack. Even if we knew that our lives would be at risk at Aslan, it didn't settle the pain and sadness I had for those lost souls. I just wished the darkness could be gotten rid of. That lives didn't have to be lost.

I guess that was the reason for hunters and huntresses, but wasn't there a better way to deal with the Forsaken without such risk? Would we end up being so immune to the loss of life that we wouldn't care if someone died, or even worse, became a Forsaken themselves?

Was there truly no way to heal them? To save them from the darkness within themselves?

* * *

The world was black once again, and there I stood, alone. I clenched my fists as I scanned my surroundings, looking for a way out. I bit my lip as fear began to course through me, each inhale and exhale reminding me I was still breathing...for now.

A chill ran through me and I turned my head, my eyes landing on a man. He was cloaked in darkness, only his head and hands visible. Aside from the dread that filled my being, I knew he held great power.

Power I knew I didn't possess. I would be no match for him and as he continued to stand there amongst the darkness, the suffocating energy grew stronger, making it difficult for me to breathe. I needed help. Someone had to help me.

The voices began to sing once more, the same hymn that I suddenly remembered knowing.

The Darkness is coming...

You all shall prepare.

The Darkness is coming...

Your land will be bare.

The people will cry and the earth will soon die, leaving nothing left to mourn.

The Darkness is coming...so prepare little one.

For you will be our queen, and kill everyone.

Every shifter, every human, all will be consumed.

Alas, you will rule the new world, our Queen of Darkness, Celestia.

“I will not be your queen!” I snapped, outraged by their words. I wouldn’t succumb to them. Why wouldn’t they listen to me? I wasn’t here because I wanted to be. I was here for some type of purpose, but not one of my own choosing...right? I wouldn’t volunteer to be their queen. I would never choose the darkness. The light was a part of my being. So why was I here?

“Because you chose this path, my Queen,” the man whispered, opening his eyes. I froze at the chilling white eyes, no pupil in sight. I wanted to scream and call for help but the tendrils of darkness took that opportunity to wrap around my ankles. They moved upward, making my struggle futile. In no time, the tendrils curled around my wrists. I hissed in pain, the chill of their touch almost excruciating. I closed my eyes tightly, wanting desperately to wake up from the nightmare. That is, if it was a nightmare. My wrists burned and I whimpered from the pain.

I opened my eyes and saw my wrists glowing. The markings Orion had given me shone brightly and the voices that once sang in joy, now screamed in agony.

“Impossible,” the man snarled, storming towards me. I closed my eyes, waiting for the punishment I knew this man would soon deliver, his pure white eyes unable to hide his rage.

“Celestia! Wake up!”

I snapped my eyes open, bolting upright. I worked to catch my breath, trying to figure out what had just happened before the memory left me. Orange orbs entered my line of vision.

“Hun...ter?” I asked, my eyes already beginning to close again. He placed his hands on my shoulders, shaking me slightly.

“Don’t go back to sleep, Celestia. Orion told me to ask you what you saw,” Hunter insisted.

I scrunched my face in confusion, curious as to why Orion wanted to know about my weird dream.

“C’mon, Cutie Pie. Tell me what you just saw,” he whispered, brushing his hand against my cheek. The worry that lingered in his eyes made me sad, and though I was tempted to go back to sleep, I fought the foggy of my mind to reply.

“Darkness. Singing. A man was there. Eyes pure white. Wants me to be queen. I didn’t want to be. Cold...afraid...wrist glow...markings...” I trailed off, unable to fight my tiredness any longer.

“Bru?!” Arielle’s chirp sounded far away, but I couldn’t keep my eyes open. I was just so tired and a quick nap would do me some good. Just a few minutes would be fine.

Just a minute...or two.

* * *

~**ORION**~

“Wait, so Celestia’s been having dreams about Forsaken ever since the attack?” Caio questioned.

“And we’re only finding out about this now because...?” Cairus added.

I was quiet, cradling Celestia in my arms and using a small dose of my magic to give her a boost. I’d felt her frustration even though I had been nowhere near the private medical clinic.

I told Hunter to go check on her while Magnor, Finn and I finally got a moment to talk about Celestia’s dreams. The conversation was interrupted when Caio and Cairus showed up saying Celestia looked really pale all of a sudden.

Magnor had just finished doing his own scan and was comparing it to what Ms. Arcadia had done less than an hour before. I didn’t think we’d have to deal with the topic so soon and I wasn’t in a good mood to discuss the details regarding it.

It wasn’t that I knew what was going on, but I wasn’t completely clueless, either. The problem was, did I trust the higher-ups at Aslan to know about it?

“We thought her dreams would go away. We didn’t see the point of worrying you guys and let’s be realistic, we’d all be fighting to sleep in her room in order to keep watch, which would go against the “consistency” rule Ms. Arcadia made. Remember?” Finn crossed his arms as he stared at Caio, Cairus, Theo, and Hunter who were lined up against the white curtain.

Magnor was still near the table next to Celestia’s bed, still focused on comparing reports. Lastly, Arielle was perched on Finn’s shoulder. It took both him and Hunter to calm her down. Her constant chirping because of her worry for Celestia made me sad for her.

I knew she cared for Celestia dearly and hated what was going on with her. All of us did, but I’d keep my suspicions about what could have been going on to myself for now. *Or at least, wait till when I was alone with Magnor and Finn.*

“I remember the consistency rule,” Theo sighed, ruffling his red hair. He’d dyed the ends back to black after Celestia said he could. His red eyes landed on me. “So she has these dreams about Forsaken but within seconds of waking, she forgets having them?”

“That’s what we’ve gathered. Hunter was able to get her to give more information than we’ve ever managed,” I replied calmly.

Hunter ran his hands through his long brown hair, then walked over to the medical stool with wheels. He sat there and crossed his arms over his chest.

“She said darkness, singing, a man with white eyes and something to with this man wanting her to be queen. The darkness might be the Forsaken. I have no idea why they

would be singing, or why on earth would they want OUR Celestia as queen,” Hunter huffed, sounding pissed off.

The others looked just as displeased, but I managed to contain my rage. I glanced at Finn, who met my gaze. He could tell I knew something and that I didn’t want to discuss it here. I’d known Finn the longest out of our group and though the others had earned my trust ages ago, a part of me wasn’t ready to reveal such valuable information so easily.

I knew Finn would carry that information to his grave if he had to. As for Magnor, I could tell when he introduced himself after Celestia had defeated the Forsaken and passed out, that he cared dearly for her.

The way he looked at her wasn’t just like a mentor and student. It was the look a father gave their daughter, one filled with both worry and admiration. I knew he’d do anything to keep Celestia safe and I figured I’d be more comfortable sharing with him than her real father who had yet to earn my trust.

“You think the Forsaken are after Celestia for some reason?” Caio asked.

“Dearest is the only unicorn registered in the shifter directory from her home dimension right now. Maybe they need her for something?” Cairus considered.

“Or they want to get rid of her because she has the power to destroy them,” Theo pointed out. We were all quiet and Magnor took the opportunity to clear his throat.

“For now, I don’t want anyone else to know about this. Not even Othello and Ms. Arcadia, Understood?” Magnor said in a threatening tone. We all straightened our backs at his low tone and nodded in agreement. He sounded pissed off and I

wondered if he'd be more upset when I presented my hypothesis.

“Bru...bru...bru,” Arielle chirped quietly. She looked so tired on Finn's shoulder and he frowned, petting her head.

“Hey, Arielle, why don't you go out for a fly with Hunter? Some air would do you some good,” he suggested.

“Bru?” She looked back at Celestia, who was fast asleep in my arms.

I gave Arielle a small smile. “I won't leave until you and Hunter come back. You need sunlight just like Celestia. Go get some air, she'll be okay.” She flew off Finn's shoulder and I outstretched my hand for her to land on. She stared me in the eyes for a moment, before she looked down at Celestia.

“See? She'll be fine, just sleeping now. I gave her a little energy boost so she'll be back to her bubbly badass self in no time,” I encouraged. I lowered my hand so Arielle was able to nuzzle against Celestia's left cheek. When she was satisfied, she flew off my hand, landing on Hunter's shoulder.

Hunter stood up, petting Arielle for a moment before turning to face the others. “Why don't we explore the campus? I think Celestia's going to sleep for a little while so it would be best if we used our time wisely.”

“I agree. Don't know about you guys, but this place feels like it's going to be a lot harder than Old Aslan. We should prepare while Celestia rests. We can't protect her if we don't know our way around here,” Theo reasoned.

The twins exchanged glances. “Cairus and I will go explore outside the school grounds and see what's around. Let us know when Celestia's awake. We can take her around to get some fresh air. She'll feel a lot better with some sunlight and a

moment to relax, at least until nightfall when we have to return back,” Caio explained.

“She definitely needs some fresh air. She’s been cooped up recovering the last couple of days. That could be contributing to her dreams as well,” Cairus added.

“Sounds like a plan. Orion, Finn, you two staying here? Theo and I will walk around and Arielle will get to spread her wings a bit. I’ll come back to relieve you two in a bit,” Hunter offered.

“That sounds fine with me,” Finn replied.

“Sure,” I agreed.

“Okay. If we don’t see each other later, we’ll see you tonight,” Theo pointed out.

The others nodded, saying their farewells to Magnor, who merely nodded. We waited for them to leave and closed the door behind them. Then we sat in silence for a minute. Magnor took a deep breath, snapping his fingers. A gold cube of energy appeared, surrounding us.

“That will make sure no one hears what is discussed here,” Magnor reassured us. I glanced at Finn who walked over and sat on the left side of the bed, shifting his position so he could reach out and move a strand of hair away from Celestia’s face.

She stirred slightly from the touch but then relaxed, still deep in slumber. “What’s going on, Orion? I can tell you know something,” Finn demanded.

I nodded, staring down at Celestia. Her expression was so peaceful compared to the last couple of days, with one nightmare after another disrupting her sleep. “I think I have a theory of what’s going on, but it could be way off. However, I

have a question,” I explained, turning my gaze to Magnor, who gave me his full attention.

“What is your question?”

“The results. There’s a major change, isn’t there?”

Magnor was silent for a moment, making Finn and I exchange nervous glances.

“Yes. There’s a significant difference. The results from earlier show Celestia is perfectly fine. Aside from her exhaustion, everything was normal. But...” He trailed off, looking rather upset.

“But the results you took were different?” Finn suspected.

Magnor sighed, walking over to us. He pressed his hand to Celestia’s forehead, closing his eyes for a moment. Neither of us interrupted, knowing he was conducting another assessment. It took him four minutes before he sighed in relief, removing his hand.

“She’s back to normal again,” he confirmed.

“That doesn’t answer our initial question,” I pointed out.

Magnor nodded. “The second results showed that Celestia was tainted,” he revealed.

We were both silent, the news striking a chord of fear inside me. I figure that was the cause of her nightmares and weakness, but when individuals were tainted, it was a downhill path until they were overtaken. Celestia had been recovering fine when she was awake and her health reports displayed that. How was she tainted one minute and healthy the next?

“Seeing as you haven’t freaked out, I’m guessing there has to be a reasoning for this?” Finn asked Magnor.

He nodded, walking back to the two files. “Whenever we’ve examined her, Celestia’s been awake or in a state of light sleep,” Magnor began. He picked up two sheets with graphs, coming back over to where we sat. He flipped them so both graphs were facing us. One looked to have normal lines in three different colors, while the second graph displayed a bunch of black lines that were all over the place.

“This graph is what Celestia’s vitals and magic balance look like.” Magnor lifted the graph with the chaotic lines, dropping his other hand to rest at his side.

“Are the chaotic lines a representation of the darkness trying to take over while Celestia is asleep?” Finn wondered.

“Yes, that’s correct.” Magnor walked back over, putting the two sheets back in their designated piles.

I decided to speak up. “Forsaken normally take over a person at their weakest point. Celestia being a unicorn shifter means her magic and general essence is of light. Her heart is pure as well, which only makes her even stronger. Forsaken would have a hard time tainting her when she’s awake. When she’s asleep, however, it would be easy to manipulate her through her dreams and force her into submission through a nightmare.”

Finn and Magnor both stared at me like my alicorn horn just popped out of my head. I sighed. “When my family was alive, there was a story my parents stuck by and told my sister and I. To other shifters, you might think of it as a fairy tale, but it’s not.”

Finn ruffled his hair, tilting his head in curiosity. “What story was this? The only fairy tale I was taught was the one about the Unicorn Queen.”

“The Unicorn Queen is derived from a different story,” Magnor pointed out.

I nodded, understanding the correlation. “Have you heard of the Reaper of Darkness?”

“It’s the tale of a man who made a contract with the darkness. He gave up his body so the darkness could have a physical form. In return, he was given the power to reap the soul of his wife who had left him for his best friend. That friend was of light and there was no way for the reaper to get near the woman he had once loved during the day. He waited until the peak of the night and slipped into her dreams, deceiving the woman into choosing his side by threatening to kill her new lover,” Magnor explained.

“So he went into her dream and killed her?” Finn seemed astonished by the tale.

“He took her soul and she was basically manipulated to return to his side, thus becoming part of the darkness she had so desperately tried to avoid in the first place by leaving him for his best friend who was of light,” I summarized.

“What does this have to do with Celestia?” Finn’s expression was serious.

Magnor turned his attention to me. “You think that tale is coming true with Celestia?”

“Maybe. I hadn’t thought of it before, but when Hunter said she’d seen a man who said she would be his queen, that story came to mind. The reaper never died, because darkness still reigns our lands, but there is only so long a soul can cling to the land of the living. My parents always said there would be a time where this woman’s soul would finally crossover, leaving the man without a queen once more. Then he’d reap

once again, looking for a queen that would join him and help him in his attempt to rule again,” I explained.

“Why now, though?” Finn whispered.

“The Forsaken have been increasing in numbers lately and seem to be growing stronger and stronger. I don’t know what’s boosting their growth, but maybe Orion’s theory is right and this reaper is after Celestia.” Magnor looked thoughtful.

“If he makes her queen, what’s the benefit? How does that help?” Finn argued. I looked down to Celestia, who stirred in my arms. We waited to see if she would wake, but she settled again, still asleep.

“Unicorn shifters have strong magic. Twice the strength a mage or sorcerer would be able to carry. Adding the fact Celestia’s father is an extremely strong magic user, even for a centaur shifter, and her mom who is a powerful magician, Celestia would be the perfect weapon on either side of a war,” Magnor admitted uneasily.

“There’s hardly any unicorn shifters left with Celestia’s level of magic. I may appear to be strong in magic, but if Celestia really tried, she’d be able to outdo me with ease,” I confessed.

“What do you think the reaper’s ultimate motive is, then? Make Celestia his queen and then just vanish?” Finn asked.

Magnor shook his head, crossing his arms over his chest. “The Forsaken’s increase in strength must have an explanation. The darkness has always wanted to take over all dimensions. With the recent events, Forsaken were able to destroy a dimension not too long ago. Only a few students survived, but they are not attending Aslan. It’s only a matter of time till the Forsaken work on taking over dimension after

dimension until there's nothing left and no one who can stop them from their reign of evil," Magnor concluded gravely.

"Would having Celestia on their side speed up that process?" Finn wondered.

"Most likely. Maybe give the reaper a boost in strength," I considered.

"The reason why unicorn shifters have been hunted for so many years is their high magic caliber. Their rarity and enhanced magic abilities when manipulated can cause harm to many people. Unicorn shifters can use any element of magic. Aside from darkness, they have no other weaknesses," Magnor explained.

"It's only a weakness when you don't accept it," I whispered. Finn and Magnor looked at me with wary expressions. I lifted my gaze to glance between them. "If Celestia accepted the darkness, it wouldn't be a weakness. It would be just another element she'll be able to use and manipulate. I think that's why she's so vital to this equation. Female unicorn shifters are rare and crowning her as queen would just help create more Forsaken. Since the reaper, if that's who's pulling the strings, can't get to Celestia through the Forsaken, he has to do it through her dreams," I acknowledged.

"So what can we do to prevent it? Celestia can't continue having these nightmares. She's barely had any good sleep over the last five days and it's only a matter of time till it wears her down, especially with starting classes soon on top of everything. Forsaken feed off the weak. If she continues to grow weaker, it's only a matter of time until..." Finn didn't finish, glancing away.

“Can we make her some type of dream catcher or an object that can ensure she can’t be intruded upon in her sleep when she wears it?” I asked.

Finn stood up, pacing around. “I can make something. I’ll need a nap after though, but it would use nature magic to create a type of barrier around Celestia when she sleeps. It wouldn’t drain anything from her since her magic complements the elements. It would be like Mother Nature protecting her without really trying. The stone would activate when any type of negative force attempts to disrupt her sleep.”

“That would work,” I agreed, thinking it over. “It wouldn’t appear to be a protective dream catcher of the sort if you made it look like jewelry, like an amulet of some sort.”

“Sounds like a good idea. Then it would be unnoticed by anyone who might have evil intentions,” Magnor admitted.

“That brings up the other thought I had. Did you guys figure out which professor went to finalize things for the exam?” I questioned.

“Yes, it’s been determined. Why?” Magnor asked.

“Did he talk to anyone before that?”

“We don’t know. They’re still conducting their investigation,” Magnor replied.

Finn narrowed his eyes at me, then closed them for a moment before opening them again. “You think someone at the school set the Forsaken thing up? Like, maybe even the same person who left a Forsaken fragment in the Omako forest?”

I slowly nodded. “I feel one of the professors or potential Council members could have been the culprit behind all of this. Whoever ordered it must have told this professor to do

the final check, knowing they wouldn't stand a chance in their current mindset. I may not have seen the other professors, but Ms. Arcadia once said in class that all professors have to be trained to handle the Forsaken, even in multiple groups. If you said the surveillance showed that the professor merely tried to run away, wouldn't that be a silly move? Celestia was trapped but was smart enough to create a barrier around herself like we were taught. How can a professor be easily defeated by Forsaken when they have been trained in the basics of how to survive long enough for help to arrive?"

Finn nodded in agreement. "He could have made himself into a diversion by setting up a bubble barrier. The Forsaken wouldn't have left the chamber until he'd given up, which should not have taken place. As a professor, I would have expected him to stall them until help arrived."

"You two think the same person who planted the fragment in your exam was the one to put in the real Forsaken in the chamber and somehow controlled that professor to release them early?" Magnor clarified. I frowned, not agreeing with what he said.

Yes, the same person was involved but it couldn't have been a controlled act in regards to the professor.

"What are you thinking, Orion?" Finn asked.

"What if there was more than one person involved? Maybe the main culprit who set up the fragments in the exam was told to do so. Same with the professor who went to ensure the test Forsaken were ready. I can understand the person who planted the fragment following his instructions because his life wasn't on the line. But the second one makes no sense. You said he tried to run away. That only tells me he truly had no idea what to do and panicked. If he was aware of the plan, he would have

made sure he survived it. Someone in a higher position is coordinating all of this, but I feel they're doing so from the outside. None of the professors give off 'reaper' vibes. Celestia and I would have been able to tell if they had." I thought it out as I explained my theory.

Finn and Magnor were quiet, staring at one another before returning their gazes back to me. "So not anyone we know," Finn concluded.

"No. Othello and Ms. Arcadia are genuine. Celestia's father is fine too and I don't suspect Magnor, obviously." I added the last part.

Magnor grinned. "Probably only because you already did a scan on me when we first met."

I glanced away, not wanting to admit that I had done just that.

Finn chuckled. "Orion's rather overprotective. He just tries to hide it from everyone else. I bet only Celestia picks up on his protective ways."

"I can agree with that. Celestia's very perceptive," Magnor praised. We all looked at her and I decided to get off the bed. Hunter would be here soon to take over and I didn't want to delay the switch. Finn came over to help me, lifting Celestia up so smoothly she didn't even stir.

I slid off the bed and Finn lowered her back down, pulling the thin blanket to cover her lower half. "What's the plan?" I asked.

"Start classes as normal. If anything, and I mean ANYTHING, is off with Celestia, you tell me. I know Orlando means well, but he's busy being headmaster and all, especially with the Forsaken attack and the realization we may have a

breach in our organization. Whatever we've discussed stays here. I will do my own investigation into the matter. If Celestia has any more dreams, make sure to get as much information out of her as you can before she falls back asleep or forgets. Finn, can you make the amulet here? I'd like for it to be refined with fire when you're done, and I'd need Hunter for that," Magnor concluded.

"Yup, I can make it now. Then I'll take a nap in the bed over there. I'll pull the curtains so Celestia doesn't notice," Finn replied.

"I'll stay with him just in case. Hunter and Theo can explore the campus interior and Caio and Cairus can take Celestia for some air," I offered.

Finn smiled. "Sounds good."

"Alright. Let's end this private conversation here...oh, and one last thing," Magnor announced. I walked over to stand next to Finn and Magnor turned to face us directly.

"This school will be different from anything you guys have ever experienced. There will be trials you will have to face, four or five to be exact. They will play with your mind and pull at your deepest fears. I think it's fair to assume that all six of you will have a common weakness." He turned his gaze to Celestia.

I figured that much. Celestia had made an impact on all of us and I knew without a doubt that people would try to use her against us.

"Regardless, you all know Celestia and the difference between the real her and a feared-induced fantasy. Don't let Aslan Academy's tricks fool you. That's the best advice I can

give you for now. If any of you are in a jam, feel free to find me,” Magnor offered.

We both nodded before bowing in respect. “Thank you, Master Rune.”

“I haven’t heard such formalities in a while. You’re very welcome. It’s the least I can do seeing as Celestia decided to get six boyfriends. Hmph. You give her one rule and she defies it six times,” he mumbled.

Finn and I smiled and chuckled quietly. I felt more at ease now that we’d had a talk with Magnor. So far we weren’t ahead of whatever was brewing behind the scenes, but we weren’t behind either. As long as I could keep Celestia safe, that was all that mattered.

Sorry Reaper of Darkness. I can’t let you have what’s rightfully mine.

Afternoon Nap

~C *ELESTIA*~

Something soft brushed my cheek, leaving me wondering if Arielle was awake. I moved my head slightly, wanting to sleep just a little more, but then I began pondering how long I'd been sleeping for. *Wasn't I supposed to wait till the relaxation spell wore off?*

I opened my eyes; dark orange irises greeted me and relief blossomed on Hunter's face. "No nightmares, huh?" His voice was a whisper.

"Hunter?" I felt slightly disoriented, which gave me the impression I'd slept a little too long.

"Afternoon, Cutie Pie. Did you enjoy your nap?" he questioned, looking amused by my confusion.

"Nap? Oh...did I actually fall asleep? Where did Ms. Arcadia go? Wait, did I sleep the day away?" I wanted to sit up, but Hunter pressed a firm hand on my shoulder. I realized I was in his arms in a medical bed in the private clinic. *Oh shit, I really did fall asleep. What year is it?*

Hunter began to chuckle. "Celestia, you look like you slept for years and just woke up. Relax."

“That’s because I thought I only closed my eyes,” I defended, but relaxed back into his arms. I wouldn’t miss a chance to spend time in his warm embrace. I felt like it had been a while since I’d seen the others, even though they had come to check on me throughout my recovery. It made me realize I’d have to try and balance myself out more with the others while still not isolating Orion and Finn. *Man, balancing your time between six men is hard.*

“How are you feeling?” Hunter asked. I tilted my head slightly to stare up at him. He looked relaxed but his face was guarded as if he didn’t want me to see how worried he actually was.

“I’m okay. Why? Did something happen when I was asleep?”

“Not really. We did make you something, though,” he mumbled. I gave him a curious look, a little excited at the thought of getting a present.

“A gift?” I asked, unable to hide my excitement. He grinned at my higher tone, reaching out to the table beside the bed. He picked up a little white box there and presented it to me.

He rested his chin on my shoulder and whispered, “We decided to make you something that would help you sleep better. It was originally supposed to be Finn and I making it, but then Orion wanted to join and then Theo and the twins arrived and said they didn’t want to be left out. You can probably guess it was either a battle of the fittest or we all could pitch in.”

“Aww, you guys actually didn’t fight?” I asked.

Hunter laughed. “Hell no! Magnor scolded us when we got a bit loud and almost woke you up.”

“Ah. That sounds more like it.” I giggled, shaking my head as I lifted my hands to receive my gift. “Thank you.”

Hunter relaxed. His arm returned to settle around my waist while I continued to enjoy my time being in his embrace. I opened the box and gasped at the beautiful stone inside. The heart shaped pendant sparkled with all the colors of the rainbow, the outside edges cradled by gold wings. I could sense the magic lingering within it, pick up a little bit from each of the guys. I grinned and turned to look at Hunter, who had a gentle smile on his face.

“Do you like it?” he asked.

“I love it! How did you make this? It’s so beautiful and looks super expensive,” I admitted. It looked like something you went to those expensive jewelers to have crafted or would have to order from a different dimension.

“Pixies can make the most expensive and valuable jewelry out of any shifter. Fae are good at it too, but pixies have endless possibilities. Finn mentioned he wanted to make something that you could always wear instead of just to bed. Cairus and Caio added that it needed to look both one of a kind and girly.” Hunter rolled his eyes at the last comment.

I laughed, shaking my head. “I seriously love and will cherish it. You all put a bit of your magic inside,” I whispered, trying not to cry. Gifts that held so much love in them really tore at my heartstrings and it was hard for me to not show my emotions and how much the gesture moved me.

“I’m glad you like it. Magnor added a pinch of protective magic inside it as well. You deserve the world, but I guess this

will have to do for now.” Hunter picked up the necklace from my hand and told me to sit up. I did as he asked, sliding out of his embrace to sit crossed legged in the middle of the bed. He changed positions so he was on his knees behind me.

He put the necklace on and its cool touch sent tingles through me. I could sense the little hints of magic from everyone: the nature magic from Finn, fire magic from Hunter, the calming healing magic from Orion, an interesting wave of magic I was unsure what was called, but felt like it came from Theo. Caio’s and Cairus’ magic was a mixture of fire and ice, the flame seemed somehow different than Hunter’s and the ice helped balance the magic. I could even sense Magnor’s magic, easily recognizing its protective nature.

“There,” Hunter whispered. His husky voice made me turn my head so we stared into one another’s eyes before I lowered my gaze to his lips. It was weird that I was suddenly aware of how attracted I was to each of my men. His dark orange eyes lowered to my lips, lingering there for a few seconds before they returned to meet my stare.

I wanted to kiss him, but I wasn’t sure how to approach it. His early comment from when Finn dragged him out of our room this morning came to mind. *Guess it’s worth a shot.*

“I thought you owed me an afternoon kiss,” I mumbled. My cheeks felt slightly warm from embarrassment at my quiet comment. I closed my eyes for a moment, wondering if I’d made a mistake.

Soft lips pressed against my forehead and I opened my eyes to see Hunter’s dark orange ones staring down at me. His cheeks were a little red but he held my gaze. “There.”

I lifted my hand to my forehead, feeling a bit relieved he hadn’t been upset by request, but still slightly disappointed. “I

wanted a real one,” I confessed and immediately regretted it, realizing I’d said it out loud. Hunter smirked and I covered my face with my hands to avoid showing how red it was about to come from my admission.

“I didn’t mean that. Blame the relaxation spell. Definitely the spell. I don’t need a afternoon ki-” I defended, but was cut off when Hunter’s hands wrapped around my wrist, moving my hands away from my face and in a smooth movement, his lips pressed firmly against mine.

My eyes grew wide while his slowly closed as he deepened the kiss. I tensed for a moment, but quickly relaxed as I kissed him back.

We pulled back slightly and our quiet but rapid breathing made me smile. Hunter grinned and soon we both were laughing.

“I think I like afternoon naps,” I whispered.

“Why?” Hunter asked.

“They lead to afternoon kisses.” I giggled.

He shook his head. “You really are something, Celestia,” he whispered, pulling me into a hug.

“Hey! Surprise hugs weren’t included in the deal,” I huffed but was laughing in seconds.

“I don’t remember agreeing to a deal.” Hunter chuckled before he began to tickle me. I laughed and tried to get out of his hold but then he hugged me again, pressing a gentle kiss on my shoulder.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” he whispered.

“That’s thanks to you guys taking care of me,” I replied.

“More like Finn and Orion hogging you,” Hunter pointed out. I smirked, shaking my head.

“They weren’t that bad,” I tried to defend.

“They were horrible.” We turned our heads at hearing two people call out in unison. Caio and Cairus walked in from the space between the white curtains.

“Hey, you two,” I greeted with a wide smile. I’d missed them even though we’d left the house together and we were all at the meeting. I wondered if they were just checking in or they were going to rotate with Hunter.

“Hey Cutie Pie,” Caio greeted, coming over to the bed. Hunter released me so I could move to the edge and reach out my arms for a hug. He embraced me, squeezing tightly for a long moment before letting go.

“Afternoon, Cutie Pie Dearest.” Cairus smiled and I couldn’t help but laugh at the extended nickname.

“That is way too long.” I giggled, shifting and opening my arms so he could give me a hug.

He held me just as tightly and chuckled. “I like it.”

“Of course you do. You gave her the long nickname to begin with,” Hunter sighed before he yawned. “Where’s Theo anyways?”

“Ah. He’s chasing Arielle,” Caio revealed.

Cairus pulled away and I glanced at the both of them in confusion. “Why is Arielle being chased by Theo?”

“Oh, Theo found a shiny button on the floor which belonged to a pixie shifter who dropped it. So he tried to give it back but Arielle swooped in out of nowhere and took it,” Caio sighed, shrugging his shoulder.

“You have to admit, it was totally hilarious. One of those ‘I don’t give a fuck’ moments and Theo’s been chasing her for a good half an hour. We decided to leave and come see if you were awake. I guess you like your gift,” Cairus explained, looking at my necklace.

I grinned. “Yes, I really do love it. Thank you guys.” I held the little pendant in my hand, staring at its beautiful exterior.

“We’re glad you like it,” Caio hummed.

Cairus clapped his hands. “Now it’s time for you to get some fresh air.”

“Fresh air? It’s not too late for us to explore?” I questioned. There weren’t any windows in this section so I didn’t know what time it was.

“It’s only three in the afternoon. We have lots of time. Let’s go, Celestia. Cairus will buy you food,” Caio offered.

“Um, why am I the buyer of the food? You’re the one who owes her food after you thought it was a smart idea to let Orion cook the other day,” Cairus reminded.

Caio frowned, looking away. “I didn’t think he’d burn all the food. He did make a really good cake though.”

“I still don’t get how he makes the best desserts but manages to burn everything else.” Hunter sighed, laying down with a yawn. “You guys go enjoy some sun. I’m gonna take an afternoon nap.”

“Sounds good,” Cairus cheered.

“Sleep well! Let’s go, Celestia!” Caio called excitedly. Both of them extended their arms to help me out of bed. I grinned, placing my left hand in Cairus’ and my right in Caio’s. They helped me up and after ensuring I was good and

felt energized enough to go exploring, we decided to make our departure. I glanced back at Hunter, who was already fast asleep, his breathing slow and his expression peaceful.

I bet Finn and Orion were relaxing by now and I hoped they were taking advantage of the extra time to catch up on some snooze. I figured Finn would be exhausted, especially after making me such a beautiful jewel. Orion must have been tired from dealing with whatever happened last night in terms of my supposed nightmares and barely getting any sleep.

I quickly walked up to Hunter, giving him a gentle kiss on his forehead before turning back, ready to enjoy some fun with the twins.

“Have fun,” Hunter mumbled sleepily. I blushed, looking over my shoulder to see his eyes were half open, fighting to stay awake long enough to bid me farewell.

I grinned. “Thanks, Hunter. Sleep well,” I whispered. He nodded before closing his eyes, falling asleep in seconds. It made me smile and I loved how compassionate my men were.

Now, it was time to enjoy the great outdoors.

Twin Exploration

“Celestia, there’s so much we have to show you. It’s beautiful outside the gates of the school. It’s like nothing we’ve seen before,” Caio cheered as we made our way towards the entrance gate.

“It’s that amazing? Isn’t it just like any other forest?” I asked, trying not to get distracted by the various shifters on their way to their next classes. We were still in our uniforms as we headed to the entrance gate and we were already catching a lot more attention than I expected.

It could have been our uniforms or the fact Caio and Cairus were both holding my hands and giving off defensive glares when anyone so much as thought of approaching us. I couldn’t help but feel a little special and adored their protectiveness, especially when some of the shifters were seven feet tall and a little too scary looking to say hello to.

“Trust us, it’s going to blow your mind,” Cairus emphasized.

“Okay, can’t wait to see it.” I felt excited.

We reached the gate and a giant, who had to be at least 8’5”, looked down at us. I frowned, staring up at the man who looked like an Egyptian god.

“Hellsin. We’re going to show Celestia around,” Caio called out to the giant.

“We’ll make sure we stay within the bordered areas!” Cairus added.

Hellsin stared down at me, looking deep in thought. He was a black man with gold jewelry and wore an outfit I’d seen a few professors wear. He knelt down and I stood my ground, even though my heart was hammering out of my chest. It wasn’t that he was scary looking. It was quite the opposite, and he was a magnificent sight to behold. His long black hair was in cornrows and the bottom ends were in beads. His gold jewelry looked wondrous against his very black skin.

“Ah. Orlando’s child. A pleasure to meet you, Celestia Rainbow, Gold Recruit.” He bowed his head in greeting. A few of the shifters who were trying to pass stopped to stare at me, wondering who I could possibly be for this giant to bow his head to me.

I slipped my hands out of the twins’ holds. “Oh. You don’t need to bow. I’m just, uh... a unicorn shifter. Minding her own business. No need for such formalities.” I squeaked, feeling even more embarrassed.

Hellsin chuckled. “You are like your mother. She did the same thing when she visited here once. Go enjoy Aslan’s immense beauty, blessed child.” He rose up to his full height with a soft expression.

Mom came here before? Blessed child? Hmm. There has to be more to this whole blessed thing. I knew about our blessed lines and some other terms using the word, but his comment reminded me of the dream I had with Orion, where he called me his “Blessed Love.”

“Thank you, Hellsin...uh, is it okay for me to refer you as such?” I questioned.

He grinned, nodding his head. “You may do so. Orlando must be blessed to have such a respectable woman for a daughter. Now go enjoy the vast wildlife of Aslan and stay far from the barrier walls. Gates will close at eight in the evening so make sure you are back if you have business on school grounds,” Hellsin reminded.

“Okay!” Caio and Cairus said together.

“Thank you, Hellsin. See you later.” I nodded my head to him and his smile widened as he watched us walk away. Cairus and Caio both grasped my hands once more, with Cairus on my left and Caio on my right as we walked down the path leading to the forest.

“He’s an interesting fella.” I was still trying to wrap around the info he’d unintentionally given me. *Mom knew that Dad was a headmaster here but didn’t tell me...*

“He looked super intimidating when we met him, but once he knew we were tiger shifters, he was super chill,” Caio mentioned.

“He also said it’s the first time he’s seen twins with different shifter breeds. He was very intrigued,” Cairus added.

“I’ve always been curious about that.” I had been unsure how they were twins but opposite breeds.

“I think that conversation would be too impure for you, Cutie Pie.” Caio grinned.

“Very impure. It would make our Dearest blush,” Cairus teased. I groaned, doing exactly what they just said, my cheeks growing red from their taunting. They both laughed while I

slid my hands out of theirs to cross them over my chest, stopping in my tracks.

We were already far out from the school grounds and there were no more shifters around.

“Aww, don’t be like that, Celestia.” Caio still had an amused smile on his face. His mismatched gold and amber eyes twinkled as the sun’s rays shone down upon us. He moved to stand behind me and slid his arms around my hips while resting his head on my shoulder.

I gulped, a little stunned by the dominant move. “Don’t be mad. We can tell you if you really want,” he whispered in my ear, his hot breath tickling my flesh. Cairus grinned, walking up to us. His arms wrapped just above Caio’s and his grin widened when my eyes lifted to meet his gold-blue ones.

“See, Mommy Dearest decided to be adventurous and wanted to experiment if she could get pregnant from both our dads,” he whispered, leaning in till his forehead pressed against mine.

“So they tried a number of interesting positions where both our dads could give it a go at the same time.” Caio wagged his eyebrows.

“And voila. We are the result of that night of adventure,” Cairus concluded. I was left speechless as my mind tried to figure out how the hell that kind of thing could even work.

Caio chuckled. “I think we gave her too much information.”

“Maybe. Dearest, you still with us?” Cairus asked, moving one of his arms from my waist to wave it in front of my face.

“But...but...you can’t...how? That’s like...how they did time it perfectly? I mean...OMG this is horrible,” I whined,

putting my hands to my face in an effort to rid my mind of that image. I wasn't visualising how his parents did what they did, but instead my thoughts were filled with a vivid image of me between the twins, trying to figure out who would be front and which would be back. *Dirty-minded Celestia! Ah, dammit. I need to do research on this. Can double penra- Wait, NO! I shouldn't even be thinking about this right now.*

"I think we've done enough teasing for today," Caio hummed. I thought he'd move away but then soft lips pressed against my neck. I froze at the heated touch and noticed Cairus' smile just before he lowered his lips to the other side of my neck, pressing a cool kiss opposite of where his brother was.

Hot and cold. I closed my eyes and tried to focusing on breathing, living in the moment as if time had stalled. They both moved back at the same time and I opened my eyes as Caio slipped away to stand next to Cairus, who wore a wide smile.

"Ya. No more teasing. I think that's as red as her face can go," Cairus declared playfully.

I mumbled something along the lines of "I hate you guys," and walked past them. They knew I didn't mean it, both of them chuckling as they caught up with my fast strides. They still slipped their hands in mine and I allowed it, truthfully loving the warmth each twin's hand gave me.

Even though I was acting upset, my heart wouldn't stop pounding loudly and I hoped the throbbing ache between my legs would calm soon.

I need to get laid. Would be nice to have two of them though. Two is better than one, right? Ugh, I haven't even done it in one hole and here I am daydreaming about two.

Shows. Yes, I'll just try to find time to return to my weekly shows of pleasurable solo entertainment. Maybe then I'll make it through this school year without jumping one of my men.

“Cutie Pie, wait. We can't go on foot from here out,” Caio warned.

“Hmm? Why not?” I asked, unsure why we couldn't continue.

“There's a cliff up ahead and it's too steep for us to walk on foot from here on out,” Cairus stressed, using his free hand to point ahead. I had to narrow my eyes to spot where the road ended. I saw trees in the distance, but no bridge or any other path as I glanced from around.

“Oh. Are we going to shift?” I asked. I didn't mind having to shift but I really didn't want to ask Father for a new uniform if I ripped this one. Caio and Cairus exchanged glances, grinning as they each let go of my hand. I gawked at them as they began removing their vests and slowly unbuttoned their shirts. I had to keep looking back and forth to try to give each twin the attention their chiseled body deserved. The buzzing feeling from their hot and cold kisses returned, turning me on. *AKLSDKSKN OMG!*

“Guys! You can't strip!” I pleaded, though my voice was doing a poor job at emphasizing how important it was, instead sounding breathy and uncertain. Of course my eyes and mind weren't complaining, clearly taking note of every lined detail for later purposes when I finally got some alone time with myself, but the more intellectual side of me knew I couldn't possibly let them strip out here. *I wouldn't mind getting a glimpse of those 7-inch...I NEED TO STOP THIS!*

“Dearest, if we shift with our clothes on, we'll ruin them.” Cairus looked very amused as he began to unbutton his gold

pants.

“Exactly,” Caio agreed, sliding his gold dress pants down his hips and letting them fall to the grassy ground. I took a long look at them in just their underwear before I snapped out of my daze, quickly turning around.

“Sorry,” I squeaked, realizing they had seen me totally check them out for much longer than I should have.

“Cutie Pie, if you want to watch us strip, just say the word,” Caio hummed and I wished I had a fan to help lower the damn temperature around us, or was it just me?

“Wait? Don’t I have to shift too?” I looked over my shoulder and froze. I watched stunned as they removed their boxers, giving me a very good view of 7A AND 7B, my new nicknames for Caio’s and Cairus’ cocks, which both looked extra glorious in the sunlight, and was a much better view than I managed to get back during the exam in Omako forest.

I tried to say something but couldn’t, completely embarrassed. Cairus walked up to me and placed his hands on my shoulders. “Take a breath, Dearest. I know our nakedness makes you freeze up since you’re not used to it, but this is a natural thing. Now breathe,” he instructed calmly. I took a deep breath, looking down to stare at my feet as I tried to calm my racing heart.

“It’s a natural reaction for her. She wasn’t raised where stripping naked to shift is considered normal,” Caio pointed out.

I could hear his approaching footsteps but got distracted, sighing in relief when Cairus started giving me a really nice massage. Well, who would have thought? Here I was in the middle of the forest with two naked brothers and one of them

was giving me a nice massage. What a swell way to spend the afternoon.

“Back on topic, you’re not shifting. You’re banned, remember?” Caio pointed out.

“And your majestic beauty would be too beautiful for this forest. We’d just stare at you all afternoon and eventually call it a night,” Cairus added.

“You guys are so sweet to me.” I smiled at their comments.

“Of course,” they said in unison. Cairus finished loosening the knots in my once tense shoulders and I listened as they began to back away.

“We’re going to shift, Celestia. You’ll ride with Caio and on the way back with me. If you feel tired, make sure you say so,” Cairus instructed.

“Okay. And your clothes?” I asked, noticing Caio had folded both sets of clothes and they sat neatly on the grass to my left.

“Can you hold onto them? Like maybe make a bag out of vines or something?” Caio suggested.

“This is when Finn would come in handy,” Cairus commented with a frown.

“He’d come in handy with a lot of things, if you know what I mean.” Caio laughed and I did know what he was referring to, which made my cheeks grow red once again.

I need to get used to them and their sex-related topics. Girls aren’t any better either though. I could already imagine all the sex-related puns Arielle would want to use just to tease me.

“Cutie Pie, we’re going to shift,” Caio warned.

“Okay! Um, good luck?” I was unsure what else to say to give them a boost. It wasn’t like shifting was hard. It was second nature, but for me it was really draining and was the reason I didn’t like shifting often.

“Thanks, Dearest.” Cairus chuckled. I decided to distract myself by shuffling sideways to grab their clothes. I took a calming breath.

“Vinelasha,” I requested. My soft voice sounded almost like a hymn as I cast the spell, asking nature to create the image that was in my mind. The breeze blew past me and I could hear the sound of crinkling leaves and movement at my feet. When the sound quieted and the magic faded, I opened my eyes to see the vine backpack I’d imagined in my hands. It was big enough to hold their clothes but not so hefty it felt weird on my back. I slipped my arms through the vined hoops which magically adjusted to fit nice and securely on my back.

I felt something brush my legs and I looked down to see Cairus, his bright blue and gold eyes meeting mine. I smiled, kneeling down to wrap my arms around him. “Is it weird for me to say I’ve missed you in this form?” I whispered into his ear. He purred, moving his head closer to lick my cheek, which made me want to laugh.

Caio came up to my other side, sitting patiently next to me as he waited for me to give Cairus a long hug before his turn. Cairus pulled away after a moment and Caio approached, his gold and amber eyes meeting mine. He pressed his forehead to mine and I smiled.

“I missed your form too,” I whispered, wanting to make sure he knew that I cared about him just as much as his brother. It was only thanks to them that I’d survived the Rhinroy attack back in Omako forest. I pulled my head back

and opened my arms, encouraging him to come forward so I could hug him. Cairus walked over to where Caio had been on my right side. He sat down on all fours and rested his head beside to my knees.

I spent a few minutes just sitting with them while petting their soft fur, enjoying both Caio's Siberian appearance and Cairus' snow tiger. The warm breeze blew by, carrying along multi-colored leaves. It wasn't fall yet, but the different colored leaves gave off that impression.

Cairus stood up, stretching out before turning to look at Caio and I. "Grr?"

"Yes, I'm ready." I assumed that was what he must be asking. I stood up and then Caio rose and stretched, before he lowering himself so I could climb on top of him.

"Are you sure you can carry me, Caio?" I didn't think of myself as heavy but I didn't know if he could carry me for such a long distance.

"Grr," he replied with a huff, staying in place. Cairus walked over to me and used his head to nudge my leg, ushering for me to get on Caio's back.

"Okay," I replied, still a bit hesitant but figured I'd give it a shot. It wasn't every day you got to ride a tiger through the forest. I made sure I was securely on his back and when I relaxed, he rose with ease. I wondered how I'd be able to stay in place if we went too fast, but Cairus was already ahead of me, striding over to my left side. He lifted his left paw to tap on my thigh. He then walked around and did the same thing with my right thigh.

In seconds, crystalline ropes formed around my thighs, one wrapping beneath Caio's belly and the other securely around

my waist, holding me in place. I smirked, touching the cool see-through glittering rope. It felt like ice, but was stronger than vines.

“That’s so cool,” I whispered, looking at Cairus, who sat back on his haunches, his mismatched eyes filled with pride. I giggled, reaching out for him to come get a good head rub. He moved towards my hand and I did exactly that, until Caio began to whine, sounding impatient and hitting his paws lightly on the ground in protest.

Cairus moved to stand next to him and huffed. Caio stared at his brother and gave him a little headbutt. I laughed at the two of them.

“I’ll give you a head rub when we get there, Caio,” I reassured him. He looked back and Cairus followed his gaze to both stare at me. Their eyes called to me, giving me the impression they wanted to know if they could move.

“Yes! I’m ready. I have your clothes. Let’s explore!” I cheered.

“ROAR!” Their loud response echoed through the forest. Cairus charged forward first, straight towards the cliff. *Wait a fucking minute?!*

Caio rushed to follow and I gripped his body tightly as we approached the cliff.

“Wait, we’re going over the cliff?!” I exclaimed, unsure what was about to happen.

I definitely didn’t strap onto Caio just to jump off a cliff and die so there must have been some magic juju about to happen, or that’s what I prayed for. I couldn’t look as Cairus jumped off first. I closed my eyes, knowing in seconds Caio would leap off the cliff as well.

When I didn't feel the sudden dropping sensation of us falling, I slowly opened my eyes. "We're flying?"

I looked at Cairus, who was ahead of us. His four paws were lit up in white and blue flames while mini circular whirlpools of air rested beneath his paws, clearly helping support his movement as he ran through the air.

I leaned slightly to my left and saw Caio's paws looked similar, but with yellow and orange flames and similar wind whirlpools supporting our combined weight. They ran through the sky at full speed, as easily as if they were walking on land, their movement not in the least bit hindered. I smiled widely and looked out at the vast forest life, noticing the different types of birds that flew by us as we began to dip towards a large circular opening in the forest, created by the surrounding wildlife.

"Roar!" Cairus called out and my instincts told me he wanted me to hang on tight. I grabbed onto Caio, leaning my body forward so I could wrap my arm around his neck as we entered the circular opening before we dipped forward.

Rings of various flowers, leaves, and vines rushed past us quickly, starting with red and then orange, yellow to green, and I realized each ring represented a color from the rainbow.

When we passed through the purple ring, I lifted my head and my eyes grew wide with awe. The forest went from beautiful to absolutely spectacular. A multitude of colors, ranging from red to purple and even a few pink and white trees filled the new forest. I looked to the vibrant blue sky which had different colored clouds. Animals I'd never seen before flew past, some looking like oversized hummingbirds and dragonflies, while others I had at least heard of to put a name to them. We began to approach a beautiful lake with a large

waterfall. The water was perfectly clear and the mist of water surrounding it let out sparkles of glitter.

If you ever imagined what an enchanted forest would look like if it were based on all the colors of the rainbow, this place would be a perfect embodiment of that.

“Wow...” I whispered in awe. Caio roared and began to descend. Cairus followed his lead and we came to land in the water right next to a smaller waterfall. Pure white fish shot out of the water, their scales shifting color from the flicker of light that shone through the trees, then back to white when they hit the water.

“This place is beautiful.” I spoke in a quiet voice, looking down to see the crystal-like vines melting into water. I moved off Caio, thanking him for the ride. He shook his body to remove the specks of water that clung to his fur before sitting down. Cairus walked over to his brother, settling next to him while they both watched me carefully.

I realized they were waiting for me to give them back their clothes, so I pulled off the backpack and gave it to Caio. They both got up and walked into the forest. I turned back to stare at the serene scenery as I waited for them to change.

I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply, unable to contain how happy I was to be standing here. The unicorn part of me felt the peacefulness that flowed through this forest, and the fresh air hadn't been tainted by pollution like some places in Versa.

It was like entering a holy place made for the purest of shifters and I felt right at home. I continued my slow inhales and exhales as if I was meditating, taking in my surroundings. The sounds of the birds chirping in the distances and the buzzing of the little insects that flew past me. The soft sound

of the flowing waterfall and the gentle waves lapping along the riverbank. The multiple scents of flowers and wildlife began to tickle my nose and I struggled to hold back the magic within me that begged to be let free.

Nature was one of my strong points and being in such a state of calm made it really hard to not let go and allow my magic to do more. I wanted to preserve such beauty, a part of me thinking it might one day disappear if I didn't do my duty to protect it.

I couldn't fight the urge any longer, allowing my magic to flow through me. Then, I opened my mouth and began to sing. I had no idea what I was singing, but that didn't matter to me. The words were foreign to my ears, almost as if I was speaking a language not of this world. Regardless of my inability to understand the words that left my mouth, the sound was indescribably beautiful and only made me happier.

It felt like I was singing a song of peace, telling the world to fight for tranquility not because it had to, but because such beauty deserved to be preserved. I continued singing, the magic flowing like a faucet that didn't want to be shut off. I felt the presence of animals crowding around me, but I didn't stop until I could barely stand.

When I finally opened my eyes, I blinked, noticing the various animals around me. Bunnies, deer, bears, foxes, and more. All of the animals came in pairs. I didn't understand it, but they all bowed their head at once as if acknowledging what I had just done. I just wished I knew what exactly I had done to get a mass of animals to come and bow to me.

"Celestia?" I heard Caio's soft voice call my name. I turned my head slightly as he slowly approached wearing his gold dress pants, but his chest was still bare. His eyes were

glowing, which was different. I noticed Cairus was still in his shifter form, eyeing me from afar. It was hard to focus just on him since he was sitting patiently next to two large lions, one male, and one female.

Caio reached me, placing his hands on my shoulders as if to make sure I could stand. Then his hands wrapped around my waist, embracing me from behind.

“What...did I just do?” I whispered, feeling rather exhausted when I had only recently felt like an energetic unicorn, ready to save the world and explore.

“Um...to be honest, I have no clue, but I’m having a real hard time being close to you right now,” he confessed.

“Why?”

“Because I feel I should be bowing down to you like the rest of them and thanking you for coming here,” he admitted. I shifted my gaze slightly and saw the struggle in his eyes, which were still glowing gently.

“What can I do to um...stop it?” I questioned.

“Maybe tell them ‘thank you’ and dismiss them? Let your magic take a bit of control, but try to keep conscious long enough to dismiss them,” Caio suggested.

I slowly nodded, closing my eyes and letting my magic take over once again, but tried not to lose all control.

“Thy children of land, sea, air, and soil be blessed and protect these sacred walls. Never allow the darkness to take such precious beauty away. Thank you for your warm welcome and be free to go off and enjoy the wonders of today once more.”

I opened my eyes and saw the animals bow one final time, before scurrying back into the wild. The birds and animals with wings returned to the skies while the dolphins and other sea animals swam back into the water.

I felt exhausted but a good tired and Caio sighed in relief. I looked back to see his eyes had returned to normal. I turned to see Cairus watching the two lions return to the forest before his body was immersed in light and he shifted back to his human form. Of course, my tired eyes wouldn't dare miss such a lovely scene of Cairus, his naked glory in our current surroundings kinda reminding me of the dimension's story of Adam and Eve.

He quickly pulled his pants on and strode over to us as Caio scooped me up and walked over to a large rock platform where he lowered me to sit.

"That was interesting," Cairus commented.

"Unexpected," Caio added.

"I don't know what I did. I just...the moment I took in how peaceful it is, my body just thrummed to life and deep down I felt this urge to protect it? Like...maybe something bad was going to happen here and I just needed to do something to prevent it from coming to pass," I confessed.

I didn't know much about my own breed and even in the forest with Magnor, there had been only a few instances where I'd fallen into such a zoned out state attempting to heal a part of the forest. Magnor said it had something to do with unicorn's essence and its natural calling to spread light and goodness through the dimensions while protecting the sacred grounds that had yet to be tainted by human or shifter. *Was that what I just did but at a larger scale? If so, why? What was the purpose of that?*

Cairus walked up to me and slid his hand along my left cheek, tilting my head to meet his gaze. “Are you okay?” he asked with a stern voice.

I blinked in confusion at his tone. “I’m fine? Why?”

“Cairus repeated your name three times already, Cutie Pie,” Caio pointed out.

“You did? Um...sorry. I was trying to figure out what just happened,” I confessed.

Cairus sighed, letting go of me and began gently stroking my head. “Just relax. It must have been some type of reaction to this place. We actually didn’t see this area on our first round,” Cairus confessed, ruffling his blue locks.

“You didn’t? I asked, feeling even more confused.

“Nope. To be honest, when I saw the first ring, something just compelled me to go through it,” Caio confessed.

Cairus nodded. “Same. It was like I couldn’t ignore it. I had to go through it.”

“Was the ring there before during your first exploration?” I questioned.

Caio and Cairus exchanged glances, both of them shaking their heads. “Nope,” they said in unison.

“That’s...um weird,” I confessed.

“Maybe we went through a dimension hole?” Caio suggested.

“Dimension hole?” I had never heard of such a thing.

“Some forests or even towns have dimension holes. It would be like a cave or a hole in a tree, or maybe even a door in a house that can lead you to a completely different

dimension. Maybe the dimension was calling out to Celestia, which is why it pulled us through,” Cairus considered.

“The forest kinda looks like it was made for Celestia. You know, rainbow,” Caio complimented, gesturing around at our surroundings. I grinned before lifting my hand to ruffle my hair. It was kind of sad that I already felt like I needed another nap.

“Well, that was really fun, exciting, and weird at the same time, but I personally wouldn’t mind taking a nap,” Cairus yawned.

Caio nodded. “I agree. We haven’t used our flying flame skill in months. Using it twice today kinda pooped me out.” He yawned before running his hand through his ginger locks.

“You sure you’re not just napping on my behalf?” I asked, feeling a little bad. I bet my exhaustion was written all over my face as I fought to keep my eyes open.

Caio and Cairus grinned. “Not at all,” they spoke in unison with soft expressions, but I still thought they were doing mostly for my benefit.

“Thanks, guys,” I whispered. I really did want to spend time with the both of them and felt bad for wanting to take a nap, but I was so exhausted and with my eyes getting heavier and heavier, I figured it wouldn’t be long till I was fast asleep, whether I wanted to or not.

“I have the perfect spot though,” Caio mentioned, coming over and picking me up with no visible effort. I didn’t even lift my head which rested against his chest. I struggled to stay awake long enough to see where we were going.

Caio lowered me to sit at the base of a large tree. I had enough energy to look up to see the multicolored leaves which

gave us enough shade from the sunlight but still allowed a few rays of light to pass through. It wasn't too far from the waterfall either, which helped keep the temperature nice and balanced.

I heard their footsteps and the sound of zippers, making me wonder if the guys were changing back into the rest of their uniform. I felt something brush my hand and I groggily opened my eyes to see Cairus laying in his animal form, his head on my lap and staring up at me. He yawned, his white sharp teeth making an appearance before he nudged my hand to pet him.

I smirked, lifting my hand to slowly stroke his head. Caio came out from the other side behind the tree, walking over to sit right next to me. Without hesitation, I lifted my other hand to pet his head before giving him the head rub he'd earned from earlier. I yawned again and moved so my head rested on Caio's warm body. Cairus walked over and I lifted my left arm to invite him to snuggle next to my left side. I lowered my hand to rest on his body and he relaxed while Caio yawned.

"Night, guys. Make sure we wake up before eight," I reminded. They both purred in response and I grinned.

I wondered if Sia would take over, unsure if she'd been making her early evening appearance like she used to. She hadn't been coming out as much as usual and it was bothering me. I glanced at the bracelets on my wrists before my gaze drifted to the markings Orion had given me.

I need to ask him about those too. There was so much going on and so many unanswered questions that needed to be solved, but that all could wait another day. This moment was too peaceful to miss out on a calming nap with my two tiger shifters.

*I let the darkness take me, dreaming of how lovely it would
be to have a threesome.*

The Path Towards Light

~S IA~

I opened my eyes, darkness surrounding me like I was under a thick cloth. I frowned, knowing exactly what was going on. The realization made me sigh dramatically.

“I guess that necklace only works for Celestia. Ah, what a pain,” I complained, crossing my arms. I felt a presence behind me, but all that did was make me grin as I slowly turned to face him. The reaper.

“I appreciate the visit, but A, I didn’t invite you. And B, I don’t think my other side likes you very much after the torment you’ve been giving her the last couple of days,” I addressed him, my previous smile turning to a straight line as I gave the man a stern look.

“You will succumb to me. She will be my queen,” he hissed and the voices around me began to sing and chant.

The Darkness is coming...

You all shall prepare.

The Darkness is coming...

Your land will be bare.

The people will cry and the earth will soon die, leaving nothing left to mourn.

The Darkness is coming...so prepare little one.

For you will be our queen, and kill everyone.

Every shifter, every human, all will be consumed.

Alas, you will rule the new world, our Queen of Darkness, Celestia.

“Ya, ya. Your stupid song is bugging my ears, and honestly, it would be nice if you were more creative and changed the name to Sia since I’m the one currently having to suffer through your terrible singing.” I rolled my eyes.

In a flash, the man was in front of me but I wasn’t afraid. I knew he needed us. He couldn’t harm us for the sake of whatever plan he had. Celestia didn’t know about it, but I did and I’d let him quiver in nerves until he’d long to be able to torment Celestia again. Too bad she had this necklace now. He’d get to deal with me instead every time he tried this stupid game.

“She WILL become my queen.”

I grinned and leaned forward till our faces were only inches apart, my mismatched eyes meeting his white ones. “Oh, sweetie. You may be unaware, but she’s been claimed. I’ll just let you stay in your delusional bubble. Maybe one day you’ll step out of your realm of darkness and come see for yourself.”

I turned away and strode forward. I might as well snap myself out of my dream rather than waste all this energy. The tendrils wrapped around my ankles, stopping me in my tracks.

“She is MINE! She’s always belonged to me! No one shall claim her.”

“See, you’re sounding like a broken record...hmm what should I call you? Uncle Reaper...well not like you’re my uncle but that does sound rather amusing. She’s been claimed and you can go ahead and test my other half all you want. I have enough belief that she’ll win, no matter what you have up your sleeve,” I declared.

He stared at me with bitter eyes and I kicked the tendrils off my ankles like they were nothing but harmless weeds. I continued walking, ready to wake up from this stupid nightmare.

“You’ll fade into nothing.”

I stopped, the sentence which seemed to echo through the air hit me right in the heart. My deepest fear, the reality I’d disappear sooner or later. The dark voices laughed and cheered, proud to have found some type of weakness.

“Disappear, disappear! You’ll cease to exist!” they cheered in unison.

I sighed, slowly turning around to face them. The singing darkness stopped and the reaper looked at me with angry eyes. I guess he didn’t like the fact that their little attempt to hurt me only made me smile with pride.

“You’re right. The stronger Celestia gets, the weaker I will become, until poof! Gone like a passing wind, I shall go. I accepted my fate long ago. I do not fear death. So feel free to remind me every single time you attempt to bother my other half, because I’ll be the one you’ll have to face and I’ll smile just as I am now. Her strength is my happiness, because then

my work here will be done. And that conclusion is not a curse. It's a blessing," I whispered.

I turned, and just like that my eyes opened.

I sat up slowly, noticing the sunset filling the sky. I looked to my sides, Cairus and Caio still fast asleep in their tiger forms. I grinned, gently petting them both as I slowly slid out of their protective hold and walked towards the stream of water.

I took a deep breath, glancing around the peaceful environment that surrounded me. A small smile formed on my lips and I turned my head just in time to see a large being walking down the path. I grinned at the appearance of Hellsin, who quietly made his way over to me, not disturbing the twins, who were still deep in slumber.

"You could get caught for being here if the twins wake up," I pointed out. He reached my side and I looked up to see his expression had softened.

"And you haven't changed a bit, Sia Rainbow," Hellsin replied, his voice low but filled with kindness.

"She's going to start piecing everything together. I doubt Father is ready for that," I whispered.

"I know and you're right, he's not. He wants his little girl to stay innocent and out of harm's way. I wished he'd be more like your mother."

"I don't know what she's like. I used to be able to see through Celestia's memories, but there's very few of those left," I admitted.

"The cycle of life. We're born to live life, to hold the memories of our past dear, and to live a future where day by day, those once cherished reflections of our past begin to fade

as we replace them with new ones. The irony of living such a long shifter life is just that,” he lectured and I nodded in agreement as we continued to watch the sky begin to darken and stars begin to appear, twinkling brightly.

“If she realizes what this place is, you won’t have much time left,” he cautioned.

“I’m aware. There’s still plenty of time till that possibility may come to pass. Till then, I’ll just enjoy life while I still can. I will miss you, though. We may not get to see each other again after this. Or this side of me anyway, that is,” I whispered.

Celestia didn’t know about Hellsin, only because she had been asleep when I met him that one night when he came to visit Magnor. I’d been sneaky and eavesdropped.

Eventually, Magnor realized I would keep the important information a secret and other bits and pieces I’d honestly forgotten after the years, but there was no way I could forget Hellsin and his kind smile. He’d be a key person in what was to come. I just knew it.

“I will miss you as well, Sia. It’s a great honor to have met you, but I hope we’ll have a few more encounters, at least. I’ll do what I can for Celestia when the time is right,” he reassured me.

I nodded, lifting my right wrist to look at the beads that rested there. I stared once more at the heart shaped marking with wings, reminding me of the pendant Celestia’s men had given her to fight off the nightmares she’d been having. They had no idea what was about to occur, but it wasn’t my place to interfere, even if it involved Celestia.

I need her to grow. I want her to be able to get through this with very little help from me. I have to know that when my times up, she'll truly be okay. Maybe then, I'll be confident that I can rest in peace. At least, I can fight this one battle she's struggling with.

It wasn't her fault that she was defenseless while she was asleep. The necklace would definitely help, but Celestia and the guys didn't know what they were dealing with. No one did.

At least if I take her place, the reaper can taunt me all he wants. I'll get my sleep eventually. At least Celestia can live, and maybe begin to start putting the pieces together.

"I guess you should go back to the gate. I'll be waking Celestia up shortly," I announced, glancing up at Hellsin, who nodded. He knelt down and lifted his hand to put something in my hair. I blinked in confusion and Hellsin's smile widened as he pointed to the smooth flowing water of the river. I walked over to it, leaning forward to see my reflection.

A white, tooth glimmering smile formed as I stared at my reflection, happiness fluttering through me.

"A rainbow rose huh? Totally original," I giggled.

"Just admit you like it." Hellsin rolled his eyes but chuckled quietly. I stood back up and walked over to his giant self, lifting my hands up.

"One final hug?" I asked and he grinned, wrapping his arms around me and literally lifting me as if I weighed nothing. After all these years, it still felt just like it did when I'd first met him and he picked me up. I was excited that Celestia would soon get to know him and he'd have a bigger purpose in her life.

“Farewell, Sia. No matter the trials and obstacles that await you and Celestia, know the final outcome will benefit everyone, and we, as in this blessed world, will forever be in your debt,” he whispered gravely.

I nodded into his shoulder, fighting off tears. *He was right. Despite the pain and hardship, the final outcome will all be worth it, for the sake of so many lives.*

For the sake of my sweet, Celestia and the men she loves so dearly. For the path towards light.

* * *

~**CELESTIA**~

“Naps in nature are so refreshing,” I hummed, feeling the strongest I had in days. Caio and Cairus looked back at me, both of them walking slightly ahead but my hands were still in theirs.

“You do look much better. Maybe it was just what you needed,” Caio suggested.

“Gives you a boost for our learning session,” Cairus added.

“Boo. Napping was better,” I mumbled, taking large steps so I was in the middle, between both brothers. I wrapped my arms around each of their arms, and they both sighed.

“She’s so happy,” Caio said to Cairus, who nodded.

“Happy and super energetic. The others are going to wonder what we did.”

“They will not. What could you have possibly done to make me super happy and energetic?” I questioned with a

challenge.

The twins grinned and I could tell they were thinking about trying something. We stopped just before the path that led to the gates of Aslan. We still had a few more minutes till eight, so we could relax for a moment.

“Want to play a quick game, Dearest?” Cairus asked.

“If I have a high possibility of winning, sure.” I grinned.

Caio chuckled. “It depends if you know us well enough.”

“I do,” I said assuredly.

“I love when you’re confident,” Cairus admitted, and I grinned, hiding how the sudden deepening of his voice had a physical effect on me.

“Let’s put her confidence to a test.” Caio moved to stand behind me. He covered my eyes with his hands and I giggled.

“If you’re going to use your hands to blindfold me, that kinda defeats the purpose,” I teased.

They chuckled in unison; the combined sound matched so perfectly I couldn’t tell who was who. In seconds, something soft replaced where Caio’s hands had been, a soft silk-like material. My senses immediately heightened, listening to the way one of the twin’s feet crunched in the grass. I suspected it to be Caio moving away from me, but I still felt someone’s presence behind me.

“Let’s play a game,” they said together, their voices still sounding as one which made me slightly nervous. I took a calming breath, knowing I’d make the wrong decision if I let my nerves get to me.

Deep within, I knew Cairus and Caio. I knew their slight differences and wanted to prove to them I’d been paying

attention the last couple of weeks. I wanted them to be proud that I knew them as individuals, not just as a unit or “one of the twins.”

“What’s the game called?” I asked, my voice low and breathy. I swallowed to hide how weird I felt. The thought of what they could do made me excited, but I had to remember we weren’t in the privacy of a bedroom, but outdoors just steps from the gate to the school my father ran. *Totally risky in getting caught but a little thrilling.*

“Guess who,” they whispered, their response coming from both sides. I listened quietly as they moved around me. I perked up when one of the twins stood in front of me. Their hand brushed my hair out of my face and placed it gently behind my ear. I didn’t need to wait to know who it was.

“Cairus.”

“Why?” they both asked.

“Cairus has a gentle touch and is more concerned about my hair getting in my face than Caio, who’d play with it,” I disclosed.

They both chuckled and sound of their footsteps made me realize they were standing on either side of me. “Correct,” they both whispered in my ears.

I shivered and had to remind myself to continue breathing at a normal pace. Hands settled on my hips, slowly moving up to grip my waist. I grinned, fighting back the moan that wanted to escape. From the firm grip, I knew it was Caio.

“Caio,” I said confidently.

“Good,” they replied, their amusement apparent in their husky voices.

Caio removed his hands and I wondered what they had planned next. They must have been running out of options because it took them longer to conduct the next move. I grinned, feeling like I'd won this challenge with ease, waiting for them to admit my victory and remove the blindfold so I could tease them about it.

“Are you guys ready to admit defe-”

Cool tender lips meet mine suddenly, cutting off my taunt and the simple action ignited a wave of heat through me. The kiss was very dominating which reminded me of Caio's behavior, but it could have also been Cairus trying to copy his brother. I ended up kissing him back, forgetting this was a challenge and getting lost in the heated exchange and in his addictive taste which I found so delightful. If it wasn't for the fact whoever's lips I was kissing remained cool even after our intense kiss, I would not have been able to determine who it was.

I gave one last firm kiss before I pulled back, my breathing a lot quicker than I expected. “Cairus.”

They both snickered and lips claimed mine once more. They were warmer this time but I wasn't going to be fooled. I pulled back and couldn't stop the giggle that left me. “Still Cairus.” I laughed.

“Ugh, it's too hard to win this challenge,” Cairus whined while laughing.

“It was your idea, now move so I can kiss her too,” Caio huffed. I was passed into his arms and his lips claimed mine. I expected him to be as dominating as Cairus, but he was the polar opposite, his deep kisses slow and sensual, making my toes curl and causing moans to escape my mouth in bliss. His

arms wrapped around my waist and I kissed him right back, loving the taste of him.

“Alright lovers, break it up. You went into overtime Caio,” Cairus scolded.

We broke the kiss and I giggled again. “Do I still need this blindfold?”

“Oh!” they both said together and I laughed harder.

One of them moved behind me while the other slid their hands down my waist to rest on my hips. I figured that was Cairus, keeping me still as the blindfold was untied and moved away. I opened my eyes to see Cairus’ wide grin. “Aside from challenges, we should have at least asked if we could kiss you,” he whispered, leaning in till our lips were almost brushing. “Can I kiss you again, Celestia?” he whispered.

My eyes were locked on his and I could have stopped breathing from the intensity of their gaze as they lowered to my lips. I didn’t give him a chance to speak, leaning forward and claiming his lips. I didn’t know what was going on with today, but it was like the “let’s have kissing lessons” day for me, but I was enjoying being able to up my skills in that department, which was still foreign to me.

You’d think kissing would feel the same, regardless of who it was with, but it was different with each and really unique to the the person. I was personally loving finding the differences with each guy.

Even though Caio and Cairus were twins, identical in many aspects, their kisses were far different and it left me curious about what they’d be like in the bedroom. I tried to distract myself from thinking about it, knowing I’d be turned on even more and this might escalate to one of these sex in the

forest scenes from my shows. *Yes, those shows that I desperately needed to start watching again in order to relieve myself from all this pent up sexual tension I was getting because of these men.*

When we broke apart, I needed a second to catch my breath and Cairus looked just as winded from our heated exchange. Caio slid his arms around my waist from behind, and he whispered in my ear. “Can I kiss you too, Celestia?”

I loved how they used my name instead of my given nickname like they normally would, making this feel more important and special than your average request. I angled my head so I could press my lips against his, going on my tiptoes at first until he tilted his head down and used his hands to direct me to lower my heels to the ground. We kissed for what I hoped was the same amount of time as Cairus, knowing if it was even a few seconds over, it would just end up being a back and forth exchange.

I moaned in his mouth when his hands lowered to my thighs. Suddenly I felt Cairus cool lips at my neck. *Oh my god, these two are dangerous together. No, lethal. I will die from either loss of oxygen or dizziness.*

“Bru, Bru, Bru. Bru-REEE!”

Arielle’s soft singing could be heard from the nearest tree, breaking the spell between us three as we turned our attention to her large frame.

“Arielle?” I asked, unsure why she was there but also realizing she’d been gone for the majority of the afternoon and early evening.

“Bru?” she replied. *“Aren’t you happy you have such an amazing familiar like me?”*

I tilted my head as I exchanged glances with the twins who began to blush. I think they just realized what they did and were reminiscing about our moment together. I'd be doing the same if I wasn't trying to figure out what Arielle meant. *What do you mean, Arielle?*

"Bru. Bru," she hummed. *"As the story tale once said, what time is it Mr. Wolf?"*

I blinked, needing a minute for my foggy mind to play catch up. *What time is it?*

"Bruuuuuu-reeee," she sang. *"7:59 and will be eight in twenty-five seconds and counting down."*

It took me five seconds before I processed what she said. Then I cursed and darted for the gate.

"Why are you running, Celestia?!" Caio called out.

I looked over my shoulder. "FIFTEEN SECONDS TO EIGHT!" I called out.

Cairus and Caio both exchanged looks before their eyes grew wide and they darted forward. "SHIT!" they shouted in unison.

I turned back to see Hellsin relaxing against the gate, one half of the gate closed while he kept the other open for us. I rushed in, Arielle gliding past me. Caio and Cairus ran inside together before Hellsin began to close the door. I could hear a few other students shout for him to wait but he didn't, shutting the gate and locking it firmly.

"Would you look at that? Five seconds past eight. I guess I'll have to have Orlando tell the magical mechanic to add some oil to these hinges. They're getting rather hard to close," Hellsin hummed.

I gave him a wide grin before walking up to him. “You’re awesome, Hellsin! Thank you.” Impulsively, I gave him a hug.

He chuckled and his hand gently rubbed my head which made me curious if he knew that the gesture relaxed me.

“You’re welcome, Celestia. Now I suggest you rush over to the meeting place with your two ‘friends.’ Othello and the others are going to be a tad late so maybe you’ll make it on time for the intro.” He winked, emphasizing the word “friends” as he spoke.

I blushed, wondering if he could see what we were doing back there but didn’t have time to think of it any longer.

“Yes! Let’s go! See you around, Hellsin! We’ll pay you back somehow!” I called, moving away before turning to dash past the twins who groaned.

“Cutie Pie, wait for us,” Caio whined.

“So energetic at the most random times. Dearest, wait!” Cairus called out.

Arielle flew ahead, leading the way. *Hey Arielle, where were you this whole time?*

For her to leave me all afternoon and evening was unusual unless she got super distracted by something shiny and was devising an evil plan to claim it as hers.

“Bru-Ree Bru,” she replied with pride. *“Nothing. Just looked around. I found a shiny button though. Theo tried to take it from me but he failed.”*

I giggled, shaking my head as we turned the corner. I saw the others crowded around the entrance of the medical ward we were in earlier today. *You have a problem.*

“Bru,” she huffed. *“Says the girl who kissed five guys in one day.”*

I gawked at her as I slowed from a jog to a walk, making it easier for Cairus and Caio to catch up. *How the hell did you know it was five?! You were only there for like four?!*

“Bru. Bru. Bru-REE!” she replied, dipping down to fly around me in circles as I came to a stop to concentrate on her. *“I see everything,”* she declared. *“Actually, Finn told Theo.”*

I put my hands on my hips, giving her an odd look. *What do you mean Finn told Theo? Finn wasn't in the room.*

“Bru....” Arielle stalled, slowly lowering down until I lifted my arm for her to land. She was bathed in light, turning into her smaller form and fluttering her feathers. *“Well, if you didn't realize, Orion and Finn were napping in the bed next to Hunter's and basically heard everything after Hunter gave you your necklace. I think your observation skills drop a few levels when you're near your lovers.”*

I groaned, using my free hand to cover my cheeks, which were growing redder with each passing second, the embarrassment sinking in. *I can't fucking believe this right now.*

“Celestia.”

Orion's gentle voice cued me to lift my head, noticing he was standing in front of me. Theo and Finn approached and Cairus and Caio's huffs could be heard behind me.

“Ah, Orion. Hey,” I said awkwardly, my eyes lingering on Theo who looked puzzled.

“Wow, Cutie Pie, your face is red. You could match Theo's hair,” Finn commented.

Theo rolled his eyes. “Can we leave my hair out of this? But seriously, Celestia your face is really red. You’re not coming down with a fever, are you?” He came to stand next to Orion, pressing his hand on my forehead.

I shivered at his cool touch which made me sigh. Arielle began chirping away then started hopping on my arm while looking at Orion who eyed her carefully.

He slowly grinned. “She should be fine, but Theo, check to make sure. Finn and I will go make sure we’re at the meeting room Ms. Arcadia showed us so when the professors arrive, they won’t think we’re late,” Orion suggested and Arielle flew off my arm to land on Finn’s shoulder.

“Wait, why do I have to- OW! Arielle?!” Finn whined when Arielle poked his head with her beak.

“Bru!” she replied.

Orion chuckled. “Arielle says you’re acting stupid.”

“You don’t fucking understand her,” Finn argued as they both moved towards the building, continuing the dispute as Arielle kept on singing away.

Cairus and Caio walked to stand where Finn and Orion had been. They both glanced between us, seeing Theo’s hand still on my forehead.

“We’ll go wait for the others.” Caio winked.

“Enjoy some cool air, Dearest. It will help the redness.” Cairus wiggled his eyebrows.

I stared at them speechless as they walked away. They went up the stairs and entered through the doors that Finn and Orion held open.

The doors closed and Theo and I stood there in silence. “A setup,” I mumbled.

“Definitely,” Theo agreed and sighed, shaking his head. He brushed his hand along my left cheek.

“You sure you’re okay? You’re not tired or dizzy or anything?” His voice was soft and filled with worry, which made me smile.

“I’m fine. A little winded ‘cause we had to run to meet curfew, but I feel the best I have in the last couple of days,” I reassured him.

“Good.” He gave me a wide smile. “I’m glad you’re getting better. All jokes aside, all of us were really worried.”

I lifted my left hand and placed it over his that lingered on my cheek, closing my eyes. “I know. I’m sorry for worrying you all. I really am better and thank you for adding your magic to the pendant. I really love it,” I whispered, looking down to the heart-shaped pendant which looked luminous in the moonlight that shone above us.

“I’m glad,” he whispered. I lifted my eyes to meet his red ones. I felt like we’d barely seen each other over the last couple of days and I’d missed his beautiful ruby eyes, and his red hair with black ends. I noticed his skin was a little paler than normal. I lifted my hand to brush against his cheek and he looked confused at my action.

“You’re paler than usual,” I pointed out, wondering if he was sick.

He blinked and gave me a small grin. “I’m fine, Cutie Pie. Just the moonlight playing with your eyes.” I frowned but maybe he was right and that was all it was?

“I guess,” I replied. He smiled, showing me white teeth and removing his hand from my cheek. I did the same and watched as he held out his hand, gesturing for me to take it. “Let’s go before the rest of the professors get here. They can teleport, remember?” he reminded.

I cursed. “Oh ya! You’re right! Let’s go.” I placed my hand in his and we began to move quickly towards the steps. Suddenly Theo came to a stop, tugging my hand gently which prompted me to stop in my tracks.

I looked back to give him a curious look. “What’s up, Theo?” He didn’t say anything at first but his cheeks grew red and he took a deep breath.

“Promise you won’t hate me for this,” he whispered. He took two steps, standing before me and I looked up at him in utter confusion.

“Promise? Hate you for...” I trailed off when he slowly lowered his head until our lips met. I blinked, my wide eyes meeting his half closed ones. My body unwound as I slowly closed my eyes, pressing my lips back. He let out a low moan and his hand released mine so he could wrap his arms around my waist and pull me into an embrace.

I moved my hands to run up his dress shirt before hooking my arms around his neck. Theo’s kiss was deep and almost instinctive, making me wonder if he had more experience than even Finn. We kissed until our lungs begged for air and we pulled away, but kept our distance close by pressing our foreheads together.

“Saved the best for last,” Theo hummed and I blushed, looking up at him shyly.

“How do you even know I kissed the others?” I mumbled, wanting to hear from his side of the story instead of Arielle’s.

He smirked. “Guys like to boast about who kissed the girl longer, but of course Orion’s in the lead since he’s all majestic and smooth. Finn accidentally brought it up when Arielle and I arrived at the private medical clinic to check on you.”

“Boast, huh?” I rolled my eyes. *Men.*

“Don’t give me that look. I bet girls do the same,” he countered.

I laughed. “I wouldn’t know, but if I’m basing my theory on all those girly films, girl talk is usually about which guy is off limits and trying to fight one another in locker rooms.”

“Oh really? Sounds a bit hot. Would you fight for us, Cutie Pie?” he whispered, leaning in to tug at my bottom lip. It took me a few seconds to answer, loving how his teeth pulled at my lip. His hands lowered to my ass, making it hard to concentrate.

“Do you have to ask?” I whispered back, kissing him. He smirked against my lips and squeezed my ass. His groin pressed against me which made me gasp at the burning ache that seemed to have ignited from the intimate move, making me want to move my hips.

“Celestia. I really hope we get more alone time,” Theo whispered, moving away to kiss my neck ever so gently.

“Me too,” I replied in a daze, not really thinking but responding because my body wanted him to continue what he was doing.

“Yes, I think the students have arrived.”

Theo and I both froze at the familiar voice and we pulled apart to look to our left. Magnor stood at the corner of the building, a wide grin on his face. It was one of those looks a parent would give when they caught you doing something bad.

“I guess we should pick up the pace, Orlando. I don’t think any of them knew you’d be attending the meeting,” Magnor said a little louder and we both cursed. I knew he was doing that on purpose, giving us a good five seconds to bolt before my father caught his daughter all wrapped up with a boy I’d just introduced to him a few hours ago. Not to mention, he was ONE of the six boys I guess I was dating which I hadn’t really told him about...yet.

Theo tugged my hand to get me to move and I took a final look at Magnor.

“Thank you,” I mouthed, knowing I’d probably get a lecture about this later but I was totally fine with Magnor’s lectures. *Father’s? Not so much.*

Magnor smiled and nodded, mouthing “You’re welcome, now go.”

Theo held my hand as we both jolted up the stairs and he opened the door for me to enter. We made it to the elevator, walking in and pressing the button just as we heard footsteps.

“I thought I sensed Celestia here?” I heard Father’s voice.

“Really? You must be excited to have her attending here,” Magnor hummed. We couldn’t listen in on the rest of the conversation because the elevator doors came to a quiet close.

We both turned to one another and laughed. “Adventurous, huh?” Theo complimented.

“More like daring,” I whispered as he leaned in to give me one more kiss.

I didn't know whether or not it was an accomplishment, but I'd successful kissed all six guys in a single day.

For five of them, it was the first time of hopefully many to come.

Underwear

“They are all bitches, that’s what. Maybe one or two of them are kind but other than that, they’re EVIL!” I exclaimed, bursting into the room with just a towel wrapped around my body and with my hair still dripping wet.

Orion slowly turned to look at me and I just huffed, going over to the dresser to find something loose and comfy to wear. I was so exhausted from the last three classes that I didn’t care if I looked like a wreck for our last class: Magic Manipulation for Advanced Hunters and Huntresses.

I noticed Orion give me a long up and down look, which normally would have made me blush but I was too worked up and sadly not in the more sexual kind of way.

“Is it that bad?” Orion asked. Our schedule had been utterly chaotic for the last two weeks. Classes were separated by gender, which was really not doing me any favors. Apparently my beautiful hair, somewhat lovable curves, and the fact I was the headmaster’s daughter were all working against me. It wasn’t like I was planning to make friends, but it would have been nice if there was just one soul here who didn’t have it out for me.

“If one more girl tries to pick a fight with me, I will fucking kick her ass and break her plastic-looking nose,” I declared in frustration. Orion smirked, rising from behind the

desk where he was working some advance magic calculations or some shit and came over to me.

“They all have plastic noses?” he asked with an earnest look. I sighed, fixing my grip on my towel to ensure it stayed there as I searched through the drawers in search of where all my sweats were.

“Yes. All of them. I’d be lucky to find even one with a real nose. They talk about plastic surgery and how I must have been blessed with nice genes, since I clearly didn’t need any, but of course I didn’t fit into their crowd because I’m not perfect. See, apparently my bless marks are a 5/10.” I emphasized the score before I sighed, realizing my last pair of sweats had been ruined by Arielle after we’d played around with her being human for a longer period of time than usual and she sneezed, shooting out fire from her nose. *Yes, fire from her nose. You heard that correctly.*

Orion approached me, placing his hands on my shoulders. I stilled at the touch, my body immediately relaxing in his touch. “Orion,” I warned.

“Hmm?” he mumbled, his hands still doing their work at massaging my shoulders ever so slowly.

“No more massaging,” I whispered.

My voice lacked conviction and only made Orion chuckle. “Why?”

“Because massaging is going to lead to you kissing my neck and someone is going to interrupt and then I’ll just be frustrated,” I confessed.

“Really?” He hummed in my ear and I looked at him, proving my point when I closed my eyes and kissed him.

I wouldn't deny Orion and I had been the most intimate out of all the guys the last two weeks and it was driving me insane. Don't get me wrong, I loved kissing him, especially loving that his kisses were growing in depth and he wasn't as shy to go to the next stage, which involved him pinning me down and kissing me until I was breathless and having difficulty remembering who I was.

I also knew it would be dangerous if he pinned me down in my very thin pink towel. I could imagine that he'd unhook the material before stripping out of that lavender shirt of his to let me feel him up while he explored my naked body. The sensual image made my pussy clench and I moaned as he deepened the slow but fierce kiss.

He pulled back to grin at me. "I'm only stopping because you can't miss this class."

I sighed, turning in his hold and resting my head on his shoulder. "I don't wanna go."

He chuckled, wrapping his arms around me and rubbing my back slowly. "I know, Celestia, but you have to beat all the plastic-nosed bitches and prove to them all how amazing you are, not like you would need to do much. Just walk in and throw some glitter for extra emphasis."

I lifted my head with a wide smile, raising an eyebrow at him. "Are you and Sia talking or something? That sounds like something she'd encourage." I giggled.

He smirked. "No, Arielle actually. She talks a lot when she's in her human form, mostly complaining about when you'll be back from class so she can bother you about her inability to find shiny things here."

I laughed. "She's having fun here, I think."

“I think there are other familiars here. Hunter and I saw a group of them on our way to class yesterday. I think that’s where she’s been disappearing to when we’re all in class,” Orion revealed.

“Really? Hmmm. I guess I don’t blame her. We aren’t allowed to use familiars until month two.” I was happy that Arielle would be able to mingle with other familiars in a safe environment.

With all the bullying that happened to me when I was younger, I was always worried she’d meet another familiar in town during her solo flights and get into trouble. Maybe the familiars here were more respectful and better behaved.

“Maybe she’ll find a boyfriend,” I mused.

“I’m intrigued that you’re supportive of the idea,” Orion pointed out.

I giggled. “That way I’ll be able to tease her just like she does to me,” I said with a mischievous smile.

Orion shook his head. “Women are scary.”

“Not even.” I giggled. He gave me another kiss and pulled away so I could figure out what to wear.

“What are you looking for?” Orion asked.

“Sweats. I’m too lazy to look good today. We’re going to get all sweaty in five minutes anyway. No point of me dressing up like a Barbie doll,” I replied, really wishing I didn’t have to go to class.

Orion walked over and pulled me into a back embrace. “Close your eyes,” he whispered, his voice sending chills through me. *Ugh, c’mon Celestia. Get a grip. He only asked*

you to close your eyes. He didn't say strip naked and lay on the bed.

“What are you planning?” I questioned.

“Something nice,” he hummed. I smirked and did as he asked, closing my eyes and waiting for whatever he was about to do. He placed his hand on my shoulders and I wondered if he was going to give me another massage, but instead I felt clothes appear on my body, replacing my towel. I opened my eyes and grinned at my new outfit.

The shirt was lavender with “Alicorns are Real” on it in gold glitter text, and an alicorn design beneath it with its wings spread wide. I had on dark grey sweatpants which looked a bit big for me in comparison to my new shirt, which fit my body shape perfectly.

“Orion, since when can you make clothes?” I questioned excitedly. I knew Caio and Cairus could do it, but they reserved it only for when they shifted and ruined their clothes by accident.

“The twins were teaching us the other day. You were fast asleep on the couch at the time,” he explained.

“Ah. Ya, I was tired,” I confessed. Ever since getting this necklace, I hadn't endured any nightmares that the guys had once reported. I didn't know if Sia had been taking over during the night since I still felt slightly groggy when I woke up, as if I'd been battling all night and only just got to rest, but once I started moving, I began to feel better.

I turned around and hugged him. “Thank you. You did a really good job, though the sweatpants are a tad big,” I pointed out.

He grinned, the seductive smile made me lick my lips and made me want to kiss him again. “I know they are.”

“You made them bigger on purpose?” I asked.

“No, they’re mine.” He winked as my face grew red.

The door opened, Finn poking his head through the space. “Lovebirds, can we go now?” He paused, taking a moment to look at what I was wearing. “Nice outfit, Cutie Pie.”

“Thanks, Lucky Charms.” I smiled.

“My sweatpants are better though.” He winked and I groaned.

Orion laughed. “You’re just jealous. Let’s go, Celestia.”

Finn rolled his eyes. “I’m proud to say I am, so I’ll hide her laundry and replace all her sweats with mine,” he declared.

“No hiding my laundry! I wear more than just sweatpants you know.” I argued.

They both turned to me to give me a look. “Finn, you know what to do,” Orion said conspiratorially.

“Hey, Cairus. Hide the underwear!” Finn called out.

“What?! Why are you telling Cairus to hide my underwear?!” I huffed, glancing over to Finn, who laughed at my anger.

“Because he’s folding your clothes, which includes underwear. The power is in his hands now.” Finn laughed, stepping into the room to try and avoid the chest slap I was about to give him.

Cairus walked into the room, staring at us. “Cairo’s folding them now. Why are we hiding them?”

“No one is hiding my underwear!” I shouted.

“Is Finn teasing Celestia again?” Hunter yawned, coming into the room to stand next to Cairus, who nodded.

“Probably. Something about hiding her underwear.”

“Why?” Hunter looked confused.

“I think for undisclosed reasons.” Orion chuckled and I picked up a pillow from the chair next to me and threw it at him.

“Ow. Alicorn down,” he called dramatically as he fell to the bed.

“That was fucking gold. Someone tell me they got that on camera.” Finn laughed.

“You’re fucking next,” I warned.

“I got it on camera and hid the underwear!” Caio appeared at the doorway, holding his phone with a prideful smile.

I rolled my eyes. “Where did you hide it?”

“Dearest, I think that defeats the purpose of us hiding it if we tell you,” Cairus chuckled.

I frowned, crossing my arms to face the others while Finn was backed to the wall in front of me.

“Fine. I’ll just walk around the house with no underwear. In fact, who needs a bra?! I’ll find the thinnest white shirt Orion has and make sure it barely covers my ass, then go walk around the whole damn house,” I declared.

They were all silent as if envisioning what I’d just described. I walked up to the door and Hunter, Cairus, and Caio moved out of my way. I turned back to glare at all of them.

“And guess what?” I whispered.

“What?” Caio asked, looking utterly confused like the rest of them.

“You won’t be able to touch me. Not even hug me or anything. It will just be your eyes being able to appreciate THIS. Maybe if I’m in a really bad mood, I’ll make sure I shower with the shirt on, seeing as you hid my underwear and all.” I was satisfied as they all gawked at me.

“You...wouldn’t,” Finn whispered and I couldn’t help but notice the large bulge in his grey pants. It made me grin wickedly as I ran my hand through my hair and winked.

“I would, Lucky Charms, and all of you know it,” I confirmed before turning around. “I’m going to class.”

I reached the stairs before I heard Finn. “OW! Why am I getting hit by pillows?!”

“Because you told me to hide the underwear!” Cairus huffed.

“Caio, go unhide it!” Hunter commanded.

“Roger that!” Caio replied.

“You could have just made her new ones,” Orion mentioned calmly. There was a moment of silence.

“How did you make her underwear?” Caio and Cairus asked.

“Like any other piece of clothing. I made her clothes... well aside from using my sweatpants instead, but did you really think I’d let our Celestia walk through the halls with no bra or underwear?” he questioned.

I smirked at his comment, loving how he said I was theirs. *Just like how they were mine.* I hadn’t even noticed he’d made me a bra and underwear, making me curious. I pulled back my

top to see a lavender bra with gold lace. There was even a bright crystal jewel in the middle. *Damn, he's good.*

They were silent for a few seconds before Finn spoke. "Guys, Orion's becoming one of us now," he whispered.

Hunter laughed. "Celestia is working her magic on him."

"I haven't changed," Orion mumbled.

"Ya right," the twins said in unison, before Caio spoke up. "You just got hit by a pillow."

"And dramatically fell down on the bed like it actually hurt, which it couldn't have," Cairus continued.

"Totally becoming one of us," Finn reiterated.

I smiled, walking down the stairs. Orion had become more open with us the last two weeks. He would keep up with our conversations and even bring up new topics of discussion when we were all gathered around for lunch or dinner. It was really nice to see how comfortable we'd all become with one another.

I would have never guessed the guys would be doing laundry, let alone MY laundry, but when I'd brought the topic up, the guys looked so confused, unsure why they shouldn't help by doing my laundry. Maybe I just wasn't used to having a group of individuals loving me to the point of doing things for me, not because they had to or wanted some type of benefit, but because they genuinely wanted to. It just reminded me of my past and made me wish I could have been able to meet these men earlier in my life. *Meeting them now is better than not at all, though. I guess everything happens for a reason.*

I noticed Theo taking some type of pill. He washed it down with half a bottle of water before he sighed, followed by

a yawn. Arielle was on his shoulder and looked back to see me.

“Bru!” She flew over to greet me and I smiled, lifting my hand for her to land her small frame on. *“Celestia.”*

“You’re in a good mood this morning,” I greeted, lowering my head so she could press her little forehead against mine.

“Bru Bru Bru,” she hummed. *“I slept and Theo feed me some jerky thingy. I’ve been having fun being human too, but I’m taking a break today. I don’t want to tire you out until we figure out this trial thing.”*

Oh right, the trials. The night I almost got caught by my father when I was making out with Theo, we were given more of an explanation about New Aslan and how our schedules would work. The whole thing with the gender divided classes was supposed to help weed out the weak with stupid drama and, of course, a few battles.

By the end of the month, we’d begin going through trials. Father explained that we’d have to go through five trials in all. In some, we would be partnered while others would be conducted in groups. The goal was to test us by putting us in situations that we might deal with as hunters and huntresses, some that might be super easy like solving a riddle and others that could cost us our lives.

Father had stressed that some things would be a simulation, but others would be real and could again put our lives at risk. I noticed when he talked about that part, his eyes lingered on me. I didn’t think the others noticed, but even though we’d been so far apart for all these years, I could tell how worried he still was for me. Magnor looked just as disturbed, but held more confidence in his expression than Father.

“Morning, Cutie Pie,” Theo greeted, pulling me out of my thoughts. Arielle flew off my arm and moved to land on the counter.

“Morning,” I replied, walking up to him. He finished drinking his water, then set the empty bottle down. He took a quick scan of my outfit before giving me a hug.

“Did Orion dress you?” he inquired.

“How did you know?” I leaned back to meet his gaze.

“Alicorns are real?” He hummed.

I giggled. “They are, in case you didn’t get the memo.”

Theo wrapped his arm around my waist, leaning in to give me a slow kiss. I wanted to ask him something, but now the thought completely slipped my mind as our lips moved together and I pressed closer into his side.

“I don’t appreciate you being in his sweatpants though,” he pointed out.

I laughed. “Men. You guys are so possessive. Also, I didn’t have any sweatpants left because a certain someone burned my last pair.”

Arielle didn’t even reply, more focused on Theo’s now empty water bottle. Theo grinned, wrapping his other arm around my waist so I’d focus solely on him.

“You’re going to be late for class,” he reminded.

“Hmm, defending my familiar, are we? What have you two been up to?” I eyed him carefully and he chuckled.

“Nothing, Celestia,” he replied, his eyes lowering to my lips again. I noticed the slight change in his ruby eyes. There was now a little glow to them, which was a little hypnotic

when I stared at them for too long. He quickly blinked and then it was gone, and he simply smiled. “Go to class or Magnor will lecture you.”

“Hmm.” I felt like I was missing something, but again I couldn’t put my finger on it. I almost grasped the thought in my mind, but then he leaned in and kissed me again, pulling me closer to press against him. I moaned, really loving being able to kiss the guys whenever I wanted and exploring all of these sensual things with them. Kissing was indeed my favorite so far, although I also loved when they kissed my neck, the twins dual kisses really being the tiebreaker if I added it to the equation.

Theo broke the kiss and gave my ass a squeeze. “Next time wear my sweatpants,” he whispered, his eyes locked on mine.

“Okay,” I replied in a shaky voice, trying to catch my breath.

“Bruuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu,” Ari mumbled. “*I hope you’re late.*”

I blinked out of my daze and glanced at the clock before cursing. “Ah! I’m gonna be late unless I sprint. Dammit, Ari, don’t jinx me.”

I leaned in to give Theo one last kiss before stepping out of his embrace and racing to the door. Arielle followed, hovering above me as I slipped my shoes on and grabbed my gym bag, which had a spare set of clothes.

“Celestia, breakfast?” Theo reminded.

“I’ll eat when I get back,” I called out, taking a final check in the little mirror hanging on the wall to make sure my appearance made me look like a decent human being. An arm circled around my waist, preventing me from leaving. I

glanced back to see Theo holding a lunch box. I took one whiff and beamed at the scent of hamburgers and bacon.

“Eat when you get there. We’ll see you tonight,” he whispered as he handed me the container. The thought of food seemed to remind me of my question.

“Oh, wait. Why were you taking medication earlier?” I questioned.

Theo raised an eyebrow at me and blinked. “Huh?”

“When I arrived downstairs you were taking a white pill, right? You’re not getting sick or anything...are you?” I asked, assessing his appearance. He wasn’t really pale like he had been the night of our first meeting but I was still concerned.

“I’m fine, Cutie Pie. Thank you for worrying. Now, you need to get to class,” he whispered, kissing my forehead. I closed my eyes, enjoying the tender display of affection before remembering again I was going to be late.

“Okay. Thank you! BYE GUYS! UNHIDE MY UNDERWEAR!” I shouted and saw Theo blush. I grinned and opened the door to dash off, with Arielle flying ahead.

I was so ready to get this class over with so I could enjoy the weekend with the guys. *I also hoped we’d do more than just studying and fighting practice.*

Faelia the Forbidden and Allies

“Hey, Rainbow. We need to talk.”

I mentally groaned, really wishing I didn't have to deal with this right now. My ass was fucking exhausted after today's class, which involved us going through a number of drills. I was in no mood for this after wasting a whole bunch of energy to prove I could jump, fly, and shield myself from income attacks, something Magnor had taught me when I was ten.

“What, Jess? Wait, it was Jess right?” My memory failed me since I zoned out during the icebreaker game we did on the first day of classes, too busy chatting with Arielle who'd been chilling in one of the trees watching our group.

“Jessica. Not Jess. We aren't close enough for you to call me Jess, unicorn wannabe,” she huffed. I sighed, focused on looking for my hair tie I knew I'd put in my bag. *Ugh, Orion better have not taken my hair tie again.*

“Okay cool, can you give me a sec?” I huffed, pulling out my phone and dialing Orion's number. Magnor had gotten all of our phones as a congratulation gift for getting into New Aslan, something I was super happy about because it was the newest model, which people would talk and boast about both in person and all over social media. I had no idea how he managed to get me a pink to purple metallic one with gold

outlining, but I absolutely loved it. Even the guys' phones were individualized to match their color preferences, which really tugged at my heartstrings because I knew Magnor hadn't just gone and picked any phone for them. He must have spent A LOT of time making sure it was a present they would cherish.

"Are you-" She began to huff but I cut her off. I lifted my hand as I pressed the phone to my ear.

The phone picked on the third ring. "Hey, Dearest, what's up?" Cairus answered.

"Cairus, why do you have Orion's phone?" I asked, a little puzzled.

"Oh, he's playing some game on mine. You throw birds or something," Cairus replied. I smirked, trying to imagine how Orion would look playing Angry Birds.

"Did you take a picture?" I whispered, feeling a little excited to have evidence of Orion's cute concentrated face staring at the screen as he tried to beat each level.

"Caio got a picture AND video earlier. We got you, Dearest." Cairus chuckled quietly.

I giggled. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Here I'll give the phone to Orion."

I could hear Orion in the background. "I'm not done."

"Our lover is on the phone," Cairus hummed.

"Oh, I want to talk to Cutie Pie!" I heard Finn in the background.

"Sit down, Finn. You have a phone, call her yourself," Hunter huffed.

“I love how he realizes this now only when Celestia calls someone else.” Theo laughed.

I knew the guys were having lunch at the moment and I’d be joining them momentarily now that I’d had a chance to shower after that madness.

“Stop being so loud, you’re gonna wake Caio up,” Orion pointed out. “And give me my phone.”

“You didn’t care about your phone earli- Ah. Fucking, OW. Orion, jeez, here.”

I grinned, unsure what Orion did but thought it was probably something entertaining. I noticed four other girls crowd around Jess, all of them looking pissed and impatient. I lifted my finger to signal I needed a minute, not giving a shit that they were kept waiting.

“Celestia?” Orion’s sweet voice made me grin as I absentmindedly ruffled my hair, which was frizzy after I washed and blew it dry.

“Hey, hair tie stealer. Did you take the pink hair tie from my gym bag?” I asked. He was silent for about five seconds, which was more than enough time for me to put two and two together. “You took it!”

“I borrowed it.”

“From my bag?” I asked.

“Yes. I needed it for something,” he muttered.

“I bet Celestia’s calling because Orion stole her hair tie,” Cairus chimed in.

“Again? Is Celestia on the phone?” Caio’s tired voice asked.

“Orion, do you secretly have an obsession with hair ties?” Hunter wondered.

“Celestia’s hair ties,” Theo amended.

“You guys are noisy,” Orion grumbled.

Finn’s laughter could be heard. “Aww, Orion’s blus- AH!” I heard a crash and the other guys started laughing.

“Totally deserved that,” Hunter laughed.

Orion cleared his throat and spoke up. “Do you need one? I can come bring one to you.”

“Can you?” I purred.

“Yes, if you want me to. I’ll come over and maybe we can walk back and have a little date?” he asked in a low husky voice.

“Orion Meadow, are you fucking flirting right now?!” Finn huffed before I heard muffled shouting.

“Go, Orion!” Caio called out.

“We’ll take one for the team,” Cairus added gleefully.

“Mjdslkdf!” The sound of Finn’s muffled voice continued.

“Remember, safe sex!” Hunter called out.

“And look both ways when crossing the street!” Theo added.

“That has nothing to do with anything,” Hunter scoffed.

Orion sighed; it sounded like he was walking. “They’re weird.”

I giggled. “But you like them as friends.”

“I do,” he said simply and I smiled.

“I’ll see you in a bit,” I whispered.

“Okay. Bye Celestia. Don’t cause trouble,” he added. I smirked, noticing how red Jess’ face was and the mean looks from the other shifters in the room.

“Trouble? I never cause trouble. I’ll see you in ten minutes,” I hummed, hanging up the phone. I took a deep breath and turned to the group of ladies.

“As you were saying?” I asked with a sweet voice, blinking my eyes innocently.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” Jess shouted.

“Oh, me? Well...my name is Celestia Rainbow. I’m twenty-five, I have an awesome, one of a kind familiar who’s a phoenix AND harpy shifter, and did you know my dear father is the headmaster of Aslan?! I sure didn’t, hah!” I laughed, knowing my little defiant introduction was only pissing the girls off.

“I don’t give a shit who you are!” she snapped.

“But you just asked me who the hell I thought I was?” I asked in a shocked voice, once again feigning innocence.

One of the girls leaned in to whisper to Jess. “You kinda did ask her technically.” The others sighed while Jess glared at her friend, who slowly backed away.

“ANYWAYS, do you guys need something from me? I have a date in less than eight minutes and would love to be able to maybe put some clothes on. Of course, I could always walk out in the lingerie set my boyfriend made for me, but that would attract unwanted attention and NO ONE wants that,” I emphasized.

“Boyfriend?! I didn’t realize you had one, since one moment your holding hands with one guy, then go off flirting with another, only then to kiss our sweet Orion!” Jess huffed.

Our? She did not just attempt to claim one of my men. I took a calming breath, trying to maintain my innocent facade. “Our? What do you mean ‘our sweet Orion?’ Last time I checked, he was my boyfriend,” I pointed out.

Jess opened her mouth to speak, but I continued. “AH! But I’m also dating Finn Charm, Hunter McGinty, Theo Kristopher, and both the Sun twins, so I guess maybe that’s where all this confusion is coming from? Aww sweeties, are you jealous that I have a harem?” I clapped my hands excitedly at their stunned expressions before giggling.

“I know, it’s a hard role to play. It’s kinda like being an awesome succubus but without the cool attraction powers and stuff. We’re actually in a mutual agreement and it’s been working rather nicely, but why am I even telling you this when it’s none of your fucking business?” My once sweet voice switched to a deadpan tone and I narrowed my eyes at Jess.

“You can’t have all the new recruits!” she huffed.

“Why not? Last time I checked, I was with them before we even came here, so what makes you think I’ll let any of you girls have MY men?” I demanded with a grin, my fingers itching to get a good shot at that long plastic nose which was really beginning to piss me off.

“You’re too fucking weak to hav-”

Multiple gasps were heard when my body acted instinctively; my leg shot out and hit Jess straight in her nose. The impact sent her flying across to the other side of the change room. I slowly lowered my leg and the girls nervously

looked back at me. I gave them an eerie smile. *Time to channel a little Sia for a daily dose of “fuck off bitches.”*

“Listen real carefully, bitches. Do not mess with me. I’m not here to play and I’m certainly not here to make fake friends with you plastics who think you can look at MY men and tell me you suddenly have ownership. They are MINE and I’ll fight every single one of you to prove my point,” I snarled, making sure I made eye contact with every single one of them, with Jess being the last to feel my glaring wrath. She stood up slowly, her nose bleeding all over the pink tiled floor.

“Five against one, you fucking slut,” she reminded.

I shrugged, picking up my clothes and putting them in my locker. I closed it so they wouldn’t get stained with the blood I knew wouldn’t be mine.

“Bring it on, sweetie. The more the merrier, if you know what I mean.” A surge of adrenaline and excitement ran through me at the thought of beating all of these fakes who’d been really pissing me off.

“BRU-REE BITCHES! I HAVE ARRIVED!”

We all froze, turning to see Arielle walk into the room, a pink towel around her human self. Her hair, which had been strawberry pink, was now dark purple with pink highlights that reminded me of my own. Her eyes were still their amber shade, but were practically glowing as if a flame resided within them. Her 6’2” frame and amazing curvy body put the towel to shame and would make even a straight girl question their sexuality at this point.

She crossed her arms over her bountiful chest and cracked her neck, snapping her fingers which created magic circles around her that transitioned from gold to red.

“My Mistress is right. The more, the merrier. So who wants to fight me and my Mistress’ new friend?” she demanded.

“New friend?” I whispered, unsure who she was referring to.

“Ah, so this is your Mistress, Arielle? No wonder why you have such a fierce personality for a familiar.”

A few of the girls moved back, looking like they would rather bolt out of here naked than face whoever the voice belonged to.

My eyes widened at the majestic beauty that stepped into view, her confidence in each step was enough to vibrate through any person and ensure the world itself knew of her presence.

Her hair was long, her roots were a dark brown, shifting to a beautiful balance of orange, reds, and golds making it look almost like her hair was on fire.

Her skin was pale, making her rosy cheeks and smooth heart-shaped lips stand out. She stood at 6’0” and had a white towel wrapped around her curves. Her breasts were slightly larger than mine and she had a small waist which gave her the perfect hourglass shape. She lifted her hand to run it through her hair. I caught a glimpse of the marking on her wrist as she raised her hand, it was one similar to mine but instead of a heart, hers was a feather.

Her eyes locked on mine and I was left in awe at how beautiful those glowing orbs were. At first they were aqua blue, then they began to shift from a teal color to an emerald green. Upon catching sight of me, they shifted to amber, a mixture of golds and oranges similar to her hair.

“Wow, you’re pretty.” I complimented.

She giggled. “Why thank you, Celestia. You’re looking gorgeous yourself. Sucks that these girls won’t let you change in peace.”

“Not to mention disturbing our sauna session,” Arielle added, the flames circling around her.

Jess shuffled to stand before turning to glare at the newcomer and Arielle. “Don’t fucking interfere, Faelia the Forbidden,” she spat.

Faelia? The Forbidden? The girl named Faelia grinned, ruffling her soft locks. I noticed her pointy ears and I realized why she was so stunning. *Fae?! But...she has phoenix in her?*

I didn’t know if it was because I’d raised Arielle, but I could distinguish rather quickly who was a phoenix shifter or not, except for Hunter for some strange reason, so I could sense the flames and magic in her and the aura around her that blazed with confidence.

“Now, that’s rather rude to use names you don’t know the meaning of. You wouldn’t like me calling you Jess-Fake-A-Lot now, would you? Since you like faking that you’re all tough and shit. Now, get out of here by the time I count to five, or I’ll make sure I leave third-degree burns all over your precious acne free skin,” she declared, narrowing her eyes.

She hadn’t even started counting before 80% of the girls ditched, some of them running out naked while others grabbed their stuff and dashed, not bothering to even change. *Well shit, I wish I had that kind of effect on people.*

“One,” Faelia began.

I watched in astonishment as the group of girls who had been supporting Jess suddenly ditched, grabbing their stuff and

bolting, leaving Jess standing there in shock.

“Two,” Faelia continued and Jess stomped her foot before dashing off with nothing but a towel around her waist.

“I’LL GET YOU BACK FOR THIS!” Jess screamed and the door to the change room slammed shut. I looked to Arielle and Faelia who exchange glances and shrugged.

“I never make it to five anymore. By three, everyone’s gone. No fun,” Faelia grumbled.

Arielle giggled, igniting her flames as she walked over to me. “Celestia! Orion’s going to be here in five so you should get some clothes on,” she hummed. When she reached me, she wrapped her arms around my neck.

“Ah. Arielle, what are you even doing here?” I asked, completely confused.

“I was enjoying the sauna!” Arielle replied happily, still hugging me tightly.

I sighed, giving her a wide smile. “I figured from your lovely attire, but what were you doing there?”

“Sitting and talking to Faelia, silly. Of course, Faelia was giving me the details about ‘How To Wrap Your Harem Around Your Finger for Dummies.’ I really wish we had a whole section of books in this weird series. Of course, my Mistress isn’t a dummy in the department of love with her six loyal men, but I had to get you some tips anyway,” Arielle stressed and I blushed at her direct approach.

“Arielle?! I don’t need to know how to wrap my harem around my finger. Wait, it’s not even a harem. I think? Ugh! This is embarrassing, Arielle,” I confessed, feeling shy with Faelia standing there. I lifted my gaze to look at her. She had such a beautiful smile on her pink lips.

“The bond between you two is strong. No matter what happens in the future, don’t let it break,” Faelia whispered, looking to be in some kind of a daze.

We both paused and Arielle spoke up. “Faelia?”

Faelia was quiet, watching us carefully. It made me realize she must be seeing something else and wasn’t really present with us, her eyes shifting to different colors.

“One will want to claim you, Celestia Rainbow. One of pure light and kindness, a leader, a lover, a king. Another will also be a leader, but tainted by darkness and greed. Believe in yourself and your love. Believe in the people who will do anything for you. Follow your instincts and your pure heart, because they will lead you on the path to victory,” Faelia foretold.

She then looked at Arielle.

“Challenges are ahead of you. Some that will push you to your breaking point, leaving you wondering if the struggle is worth it. Do not fear. Do not forget. Let your heart guide you and let your kindness continue to grow. Loyalty is in your blood and no matter the distance, you’ll always find your way to those you love and cherish.”

Arielle and I both nodded slowly, pulling apart to stand straight. Faelia blinked a few times, wobbling on her feet. Arielle and I both rushed to her side, holding her steady as she shook her head.

“Anddddd I did the weird fortune telling thing, didn’t I?” She giggled weakly, opening her eyes to give us an appraising look.

“Well it was just a little spooky, but your eyes were all cool and shit,” Arielle admitted.

I snickered. “Arielle, that’s not the way to comfort someone.”

Faelia giggled. “Sorry about that. It happens once in a while. Can’t help it. I should formally introduce myself though.” She stood straight, her previous confident appeal returning with force.

“Faelia Blessheart. A pleasure to meet you, Celestia. I heard many good things about you from Arielle.”

I quickly stood up straight, bowing my head. “Celestia Rainbow. A pleasure to meet you as well. Um...how do you know Arielle?” I asked, confused.

“Ah. She took my hairpin,” Faelia stated with a smile. I looked at Arielle who blushed, hiding behind Faelia.

“Don’t be mad. It was shiny...and sparkled...and she smelled nice,” Arielle defended.

I sighed, shaking my head. “Sorry. Arielle just can’t stop herself from taking shiny things. She loves buttons especially.”

Faelia smirked. “I realized that. Don’t apologize. She’s been keeping me company while you’re in class. I heard the headmaster’s daughter was attending and the girls were talking smack as usual. Didn’t think you’d also be the Mistress of Arielle. Your energy must be extremely strong to be able to host her human form and still do normal activities,” she pointed out.

“Ah. Ya. We’ve been practicing,” I admitted, feeling a little happy Arielle was getting the chance to meet other people and mingle in her human form.

It gave me reassurance that she’d be able to make friends and maybe find someone to love as well. She’d always be my

loyal familiar, but I wanted her to enjoy life as well, even if it meant she wouldn't always be by my side.

“My Mistress is amazing. That's why no bitches can try and lay a hand on her. Hmph!” Arielle declared and Faelia and I laughed.

“That reminds me, shouldn't you change?” Faelia asked.

I cursed. “Shit! I don't want him coming in here and seeing the blood all over the place. Ugh. Stupid Jess couldn't even clean shit,” I huffed, running back to the locker to put the clothes that Orion had given me back on.

“Meh. Someone will clean it up.” Faelia shrugged, looking unconcerned.

“Can we finish our sauna time now?” Arielle asked.

“Yes. Let's go back!” Faelia cheered. I closed my locker, making sure I looked decent before I went back over to them.

“Um, will I get to meet you again sometime, Faelia? Like when I'm not running to meet my boyfriend...oh ya, boyfriend.” I was still trying to get used to the term.

“For sure. I'm a senior here and assist Orlando, Othello, and Ms. Arcadia in classes and stuff. I'll be around and Arielle can easily find me. We'll probably see each other soon since two of my guys know two of your guys.” She grinned.

“Two of my guys? Wait...two of YOUR guys? You mean...” I trailed off, unsure how to say it without sounding disrespectful or weird. She merely giggled.

“Five men, two of whom are brothers and know a set of twins in your harem. I only know since they share the same class and I saw your group of men waiting for your class to finish so you all could walk back to your dorm. If you need

any harem advice, feel free to ask me.” She winked and turned around, heading to the sauna door.

Arielle quickly hugged me, pressing her cheek against mine like she always did. “Bye, Mistress! I’ll take notes for you!” she hummed before following Faelia, who grinned.

“I foresee a certain phoenix harpy human having her own harem. I think you should take notes yourself,” Faelia teased.

“As if! Stop teasing Faelia,” Arielle whined, her cheeks turning a light red. I smirked, watching as Arielle continued to defend herself. Faelia laughed as they entered the room, but then the door closed, silencing their bickering.

Faelia the Forbidden. I really wonder who she is. I already liked her and wondered if we’d be allies and friends. But for now, I had to go meet Orion. I ran to the door, opening it up and running forward just to crash into a hard chest.

“Ow,” I mumbled and looked up to see Orion looking down at me with a raised brow.

“Took you long to get changed today,” he commented.

“Uh...I was talking,” I defended.

“To?” he pressed.

“Arielle!” I replied.

“Where is she?” he asked.

I groaned, pushing him out and letting the door close behind me. “In the sauna,” I revealed.

He eyed me for a moment before reaching out to stroke my head. “My guts are telling me you caused trouble,” he hummed with a small grin on his lips.

“I was good,” I whined, giving him my best pout. *Come on, pouting game. Don't fail me.*

He looked at me and his cheeks grew a light red as he glanced away. “Alright. Turn around,” he instructed. I giggled, turning around and relaxing as his hands ran through my locks. He tied my hair up in the perfect bun and I looked back at his long white locks.

“I like when you have your hair down,” I admitted.

“Thank you, but it gets messy and in the way after class if I don't tie it back. A little annoying. Ready for a little date?” Orion asked.

I grinned seductively, slipping my hand in his. “Yes. Do I get a hint of what it involves?”

“Well, it involves whipped cream,” he hinted.

My face grew red. “Whipped cream...as in...” I trailed off. He noticed my flushed expression and it took about five seconds for it to click. When it did, his entire face grew red.

“I meant...cupcakes...or cake...or something baking related...unless you want to do other stuff.” He mumbled the last part, my ears almost missing it.

“All the above?” I suggested and he had a small smirk on his face.

“Only if we have time,” he teased, leaning in to kiss me. I smiled against his lips, lifting my hand to run through his white strands.

“Then we shouldn't delay. I like saving the best for last,” he whispered.

“Who is teaching you to be such a smooth talker?” I questioned, raising an eyebrow at him.

He chuckled. “Finn and Theo...well Hunter too. The twins also. Hmm. I guess I like listening and not showing all my cards.” He tightened his hold on my hand before he pulled away.

“That makes you the most dangerous of them all,” I teased before we started heading down the hall towards the main hall.

“I thought you knew that,” he joked. I giggled and he ended up laughing. It was nice to know I not only had a potential new friend but the reassurance that my relationships would only keep growing from here.

My gut told me our bonds would need to grow stronger for us to survive what was to come.

Legends and Memories

“Is the library just especially quiet on Sundays?” I whispered, trying to keep my voice low as we looked through the various books on the bookshelf in front of us.

“Not normally, or at least so the librarian said. Everyone is busy preparing for the trials, so no one is really concerned about studying or researching. If you try and train, however, all the rooms are booked and the fields are full of people exercising and practicing. I don’t even know why we’re whispering when I’m pretty sure we’re the only ones here,” Hunter stated.

I smirked, pulling out a book that caught my eye. It was Sunday and tomorrow would be the first round of trials.

All new recruits, regardless of rank, would have to participate in five different trials, either as partners or in groups. Recruits were put into groups of five to seven and one or multiple team members would have to go through these trials. If the designated team members failed, the whole group would be affected and lose points.

If you didn’t maintain an eighty percent average, you were kicked out automatically and some trials were more heavily weighted than others.

It reminded me of doing different projects and tests in school, with some being worth ten percent while others were worth seventy.

Team Misfit had been assigned together as a group, which I was totally grateful for. I had a suspicion that Magnor or Othello might have had something to do with that, but I wasn't complaining. Our team of uniqueness worked well together and it made me feel more confident knowing I'd be in the trials with my boyfriends.

We'd already heard the rumors of how intense these trials were. They could target any aspect of a person: physically, emotionally, mentally, or even spiritually. That was to put your quick thinking skills to the test, while some trials would put you in situations similar to what a hunter or huntress might experience on duty.

The last three weeks since starting at New Aslan, we'd learned about what was happening beyond the barrier wall. Many dimensions were dealing with an increase in the Forsaken, and had set up barriers to protect the towns and villages within. Even New Aslan had one, and many Forsaken were gathering around the school's barrier in hopes of getting in and invading the place where hunters and huntresses were trained to get rid of them.

We learned how some Forsaken were much more intelligent than the others, some not losing their knowledge or memories from when they used to be human or shifter. It was a hard topic to discuss, to acknowledge that many Forsaken weren't just created from darkness, but had been people like us who didn't have enough strength to fight. Instead, they succumbed to the dark pull and now lived as one with the darkness, fated to be killed by one of us.

I wouldn't deny a hint of worry ran through me as we talked about being tainted and the signs and symptoms to watch for. I paid close attention to the topic and though Ms. Arcadia reassured us that becoming tainted was a fast process, taking only a few hours, or sometimes just minutes for a shifter or human to be taken over and turned into a Forsaken, I still wasn't convinced.

I'd been going for check-ups regularly, and aside from my grogginess in the mornings, everything seemed to be normal. The necklace was doing wonders at preventing whatever nightmares I had been having before and I made sure to wear it everywhere, just in case I happened to fall asleep.

During our Friday night class, we'd talked about people who had revolted against hunters and huntresses. There was an organization called Alpha Pure, a group of shifters who had abandoned the hunter and huntress life to fight Forsaken in their own way.

They didn't believe we had to kill the Forsaken if we could somehow figure out a way to heal those who still had their consciousness intact. It was an intriguing idea to learn about since I'd never heard of the group before, even back in Versa. Apparently, they roamed outside of the protective walls, risking their lives in order to prove if their theory was true.

Ms. Arcadia had explained that some members of Alpha Pure were good while others were bad, kidnapping those who accidentally wandered out of the barrier walls and using them for their own experimentation, claiming if they hadn't saved them, they would have simply been consumed by the darkness, only adding to their growing numbers.

I was confused by their reasoning, seeing no benefit in either situation, but it was something that I didn't need to

concern myself with. We had no business outside the walls of New Aslan and had been reassured we'd never have to go beyond the walls until later in our careers as hunters and huntresses, after we'd gained more experience.

Hunter and I decided to have a little date in the library, after realizing all the guys were napping. Finn and Orion had been studying in the living room when they fell asleep and Caio and Cairus had been sunbathing in their tiger forms while Theo was reading a book. I'd woken up only because Hunter wanted me to eat, and discovered them all to be fast asleep. Hunter said we should take advantage of it and voila, the library was the chosen date destination.

We could have gone exploring or headed down to the town near the school grounds, but I wanted to check the library to find out more about my race. I'd hoped after finding out about New Aslan, I'd be able to find more information about unicorn shifters. I'd tried multiple times during the last three weeks to get another chance to see Father, but he'd been super busy, and Magnor had been in and out of New Aslan on business trips and traveling to other dimensions, which was part of his normal routine.

I was fine with Magnor being busy and not having the time to discuss my concerns, but Father did say he'd try to make things work out, and I was a little disappointed in the results of that at the moment. I couldn't be too harsh because with these trials about to happen, the school seemed to be super busy and a little chaotic at many times of the day. As headmaster, he must have been working nonstop to make sure things went smoothly, just as any leader would have to do in his position. I just wished he could take even five minutes to talk with me, instead of telling his secretary to pass along the message he was busy with tasks A, B, and C.

I'd told the guys about my little dilemma and they encouraged me to check out the library. I suppose when you couldn't get the answers you were looking for, you just had to find them yourself.

"I'm curious, is Sia hiding or something?" Hunter asked as he pulled out an old book that looked like it would turn to ash if he so much as opened it.

"Hmm? Sia hiding? What do you mean?" I questioned, uncertain what he was referring to.

"She just hasn't come out a lot lately. Maybe two or three times in the last three weeks, so I was just wondering if she just didn't like it here or something," Hunter explained.

"Really? Um...I don't know. She kind of does her own thing. Maybe she feels a little homesick or doesn't like how small our backyard is compared to the dorm in Old Aslan?" I suggested.

Sia loved training in the forest, but our new dorm was rather boxed in. Sure, it was even bigger than the dorm in Old Aslan, giving us a really luxurious living space, but the backyard was rather small in my opinion and didn't give you a lot of space to train outdoors unless you wanted to risk damaging another dorm's property.

We had three floors to ourselves like in the previous dorm but everything was more open and the training floor was massive. It even had a Forsaken simulation game where you could practice defeating them in preparation for the trials.

Either way, I did worry about Sia's absence. "Maybe if you or the others see her next time you could ask? I honestly have no clue," I confessed with a sad expression.

"Hmm. Aren't you able to do that rewind thing?" he asked.

“Rewind thing?” I repeated, not following his question.

“Sia once said that she can do a quick rewind and view what happened while you were in control,” Hunter elaborated.

“Oh. Ah...to be honest, I feel that only works for her. I used to be able to do it when we were younger and sometimes I still can if I try really hard, but it’s kinda like I have a block or something and can’t manage to do it properly. I’ve asked Magnor about it and he wasn’t sure what may have caused it. There are so few people with DEM that live as long as I have or have been documented as having it. I don’t get why there’s so little research on the matter, but there’s nothing I can do about that. I don’t really mind since Sia does her own thing and that’s something I respect. She doesn’t check on what I do when she’s asleep unless it deals with a battle or her needing the information from my previous conversation in order to confront someone,” I explained.

“I guess that makes sense. I am curious why there’s not a lot of research into DEM. Maybe people who experience it don’t like talking about it or forget?” Hunter suggested.

“Hm...maybe? I think I read memory loss was a side effect, but I’m not 100% sure. It’s been years since I last looked into it. Maybe after I find more about unicorn shifters, that will be the next topic I research.” As I spoke, I put the book in my hand back on the shelf.

“I’ll help,” Hunter reassured me.

I smiled in appreciation. “Thanks, Hunter.”

“Anything for you,” he whispered, putting the ancient text he was looking at back in its spot and moving past me to check the next row of books. I watched him quietly, my eyes appreciating his long brown hair that was currently braided

back after he'd apparently lost a bet with Finn; the result was Orion braiding his hair, which I could only imagine had been a funny moment. I wished I'd gotten to see it; I'd have to ask Caio if he'd caught it on camera.

We continued our search and I sighed when I still couldn't find anything after the fiftieth book, returning it to the shelf with a frown. It made me feel so helpless in my quest to find more about my shifter race.

With Father being a centaur and Mother a powerful magician, they didn't have any background knowledge regarding unicorns. I didn't think so at least, but couldn't ask since Father was currently busy and there was no way for me to get a hold of Mother at this point.

Maybe when I finally got a chance to confront Father, I'd ask about Mother and maybe get a chance to write a letter to her. Heck, I'd be thrilled to hear her voice. I tried not to let my mind linger on the subject, but with everything that was going on, it really hit me how much I missed her.

I sighed for the tenth time, closing my eyes and resting my forehead on the shelf of books, wishing I could find something, anything.

Were there really no other unicorn shifters left? Out of the many dimensions out there, was I really the only one? Orion did say there were very few alicorns left, the remaining ones choosing to hide their existence to avoid being hunted, but alicorns were their own branch of mythical creature and probably wouldn't give me the answers I so desperately searched for. Would I really never figure out what I'm truly capable of?

Arms slid around my waist and my back pressed against someone's chest. I immediately knew it was Hunter so I didn't

even open my eyes, my body melting into his hold.

“What’s wrong, Celestia?” His sincere tone made me lift my head and look up into his dark orange eyes.

“What if I’m truly the last unicorn in this dimension...or all dimensions? What if we can’t find anything about unicorns here? How will I find out what I’m able to accomplish? I’m still so clueless about my abilities. Aside from sleeping glitter, healing powers, and strong magic capabilities, I don’t know what else I can do. I’ve been trained by Magnor to utilize many of the physical combat and magical spells, which I can cast with ease, but I don’t know any other unicorn specific skills that can help me grow stronger,” I vented.

Hunter listened quietly, his eyes never leaving mine as I continued. “I feel like I’m at a standstill, Hunter. There’s just so much going on, and with the trials starting tomorrow, I don’t want to be a hindrance. I want to be able to protect and fight alongside you guys, but I feel I may not be enough. Every other shifter race has rows or even whole libraries dedicated to their kind. I have nothing. I can’t even find a damn book and we’ve spent two hours here. I just...I’m scared I’ll never know who I really am? What I can possibly accomplish and achieve?”

We stared in silence and he closed his eyes for a moment. “I understand. You want to be able to find out what your true potential is so you can perfect it. You yearn to avoid the mistakes past unicorn shifters have made and want to find out how you can contribute and add your unique abilities to the table while we walk this path of becoming people who can contribute to change, just like other special mythological creatures. I get it,” he whispered.

He took a calming breath and continued. “Don’t lose hope, thinking we won’t find anything, Celestia. This isn’t the only library that holds books on shifters. We may not find much or anything here, but that doesn’t mean no other dimension will hold information about unicorns. Orion seems to be knowledgeable, but he’s still slowly learning to trust us. Maybe eventually he’ll be able to assist you as well. All of us are willing to help you find the information you need to give you that peace of mind. So don’t worry about it. Working by yourself to find answers is hard, but if we work together and don’t give up, I think we can discover exactly what you want to know and more.” Hunter’s lips lifted into a smile as his eyes glittered with hope.

I slowly smiled back, knowing he meant every word and would help me, as would the others. It was another reminder that I wasn’t alone anymore. I didn’t have to hold everything on my shoulders and figure things out on my own. I had people who loved and cared about my wellbeing, and if I was struggling with something, I just had to reach out and ask for assistance. Knowing that option was there really helped calm my growing anxiety, replacing that feeling with happiness for having met these wonderful men.

“Okay. I’ll lean on you guys when I need help. Thank you, Hunter. I really mean it.” He always gave the best talks.

“I’m always here for you, Cutie Pie,” he whispered. I glanced at his lips, wondering if it would be wrong to kiss in the library. *As long as we’re quiet, it shouldn’t be against the rules...I think.*

Hunter must have read my mind, because he lowered his head until his lips met mine. I kissed him back, closing my

eyes and enjoying how his lips dominated mine and the taste of him when he slipped his tongue into my mouth.

He moaned while his hand slid down to hold my thighs, lifting my skirt slightly so his hand could rest against my flesh. I moaned as anticipation thrummed through me, wondering if we'd do more than just kissing in this heated moment.

The sound of heels clicking on the wooden floor caught my attention. I wanted to moan in frustration as Hunter broke the kiss, removing his hands from where they were. We both moved slightly apart. Hunter quickly grabbed a random book from the shelf while I placed my hand on one of the spines of the books, making it seem like I was interested in the ancient text about phoenix shifters.

"Everything okay over here?" the librarian called out from the entrance of the aisle.

"We're fine. Thank you," Hunter replied, pretending to look through the book in his hand. I was impressed that his voice was normal, since I was desperately working to steady my breathing.

I took a quick peek and saw the librarian eye us suspiciously, but after a few seconds she shrugged, turning around and heading back the way she came, the sound of her heels fading away. I sighed. "That was close."

"Living on the edge." Hunter chuckled, closing the book he held and sliding it back into its slot. I grinned, then my gaze locked on the book my finger was currently on. "LEGENDS OF MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES" was written in gold on the red spine of the book, which looked rather thin to be a collection of legends. I pulled it out, looking at the cover with different shifters on it.

Pixie, tiger, phoenix...wow there's even a bat shifter. This really reminds me of our group. I noticed the pegasus on the top right corner and a unicorn on the left. The sight of the two gave me a glimpse of hope that I might find something about unicorns in this book, even if it was merely a legend.

The current information about unicorns was all over the place, most shifters generalizing us as innocent, harmless creatures who sparkled glitter and would be more likely to end world hunger than to kill a living being or creature. *Basically bullshit.*

I opened it up, scanning the contents and noticing a legend about phoenix shifters. I didn't spend too much time reading it, but it did remind me and make me wonder why I hadn't seen Hunter shift yet.

Finn said pixie shifters rarely shifted because being small wasn't always an advantage and was really energy taxing. His magic was more than enough to prove his worth, though. If he needed to find something precious, pixies were perfect for locating anything lost or otherwise missing.

Theo said he could change to a bat, but felt he could do more damage as a human. I'd already seen Caio and Cairus in their tiger forms plenty of times, and I knew they didn't mind shifting back and forth.

Orion and I didn't like to shift, 'cause it was too magic draining and frankly neither of us saw the point walking around the house all majestic if we weren't going to be fighting someone or something. Also, we still wanted to keep Orion's alicorn status on the down low.

"Hunter, do you not like shifting?" I asked. Maybe he didn't like burning stuff, but with a phoenix shifter's ability to

make their flames harmless, I really doubted that was the issue.

He was silent for a long time before he answered. “Reminds me of my brother when I shift. There aren’t many phoenix shifters left and our breed is the type to rely on bonding with other phoenixes. When my brother was alive, we spent a lot of time exploring and working to strengthen our flame, but when he died...I just couldn’t keep up the routine we once had. Every time I shifted and entered the sky, the memories would flood my mind, making me realize that he wasn’t coming back. It’s funny how they talk about phoenixes rising from the ashes, yet my brother couldn’t even do that because there were no ashes left.”

“Why...not?” I asked, struggling not to cry at the pain in Hunter’s voice. It was still hard for him to talk about his brother and my heart ached for him.

“When there’s a high risk of you becoming a Forsaken after an attack, they...have no choice but to kill you...they take the body after you’ve said your goodbyes,” he revealed.

“And do what?” I questioned, a spike of anger going through me at his words.

“I don’t know. Dispose of the body in their own way. We don’t get anything. No urn with their ashes or anything. The expenses of their burial are covered by the Council of the area they died in. Phoenixes have the chance to resurrect like the legends say, but it’s a pretty rare thing. Regardless, it’s still a chance the Council isn’t willing to take.” Hunter turned his head to meet my gaze.

He frowned, taking two steps forward to stand before me. He raised his hand to wipe my cheek. I blinked, not having realized I was crying.

“Hey now. Don’t cry,” he whispered, giving me a sympathetic look before wrapping his arms around me.

“I...but that’s so sad and infuriating. How does a family get closure that way? I know well enough that phoenix shifters are one of the races who take death the hardest because of how bonded your race is with one another. How can they take that right away from you?” I cried.

I’d done years of research on phoenix and harpy shifters on Arielle’s behalf, wanting to make sure I could be the best Mistress for her and attend to all her needs she wouldn’t otherwise receive because of her being abandoned. Their race took death the hardest out of all the shifters, dealing with lots of mental issues that came with losing a loved one, which made it hard for them to open up and trust people again. It was worse when multiple casualties occurred in a phoenix’s family or group. Some legends say a phoenix could even feel when one of their own passed on, sensing their flame burning out.

“I agree with you. Maybe one day the Council will realize that, or better yet, maybe there will be no more Forsaken. At least everyone would get the opportunity to bury their loved ones or keep their remains. All we can do now is accept that this is the way life is,” Hunter whispered, tightening his hold on me and placing a soft kiss on my neck.

I nodded into his shoulder, knowing he was right and that there was nothing I could do to change what had already happened. All I could do was to help support Hunter any way I could, and hopefully one day he’d be able to shift without reliving the loss of his brother.

We separated and Hunter gave me a slow, tender kiss. Then we returned to looking through the book I had found. We

found a small section on unicorns, but there was nothing detailed about my race other than some old legend.

“This sounds familiar,” Hunter whispered, reaching out to stop me from turning the page.

“Huh? This one?” I looked down at the legend he was pointing to.

He nodded. “It’s about three people who were best friends.” He plucked the book out of my hand, making sure he didn’t lose the page and slipped his free hand in mine. We moved down the aisle where there was a bench. He sat down and slipped his hand from my grasp to pat at his lap.

I grinned, not hesitating to sit on his lap and got comfortable as he positioned the book so we could both view it. “There were three friends. Two guys and one girl. The first guy was an amazing leader and very kind. He brought light and good fortune to people’s lives . The second guy was also an amazing leader. He had the brains and the looks, but he didn’t like to share or do things for people unless it benefited him. Whenever he did do something, it ended up going sour in the end,” Hunter explained.

“So like good and bad?” I clarified.

Hunter nodded. “Something like that. Kinda the impression I got when I heard the story when I was younger.” He turned to the next page.

There was an image of the three of them, but the girl caught my attention. “Wow. She’s beautiful.”

Hunter chuckled. “You’re better but yes.” I giggled at his compliment.

“She was the town’s beauty and was just perfect. Everyone loved her, both young and old, and her beauty alone could

move mountains. She was powerful too and always wanted the best for everyone,” he continued, turning the page. I frowned, looking at the revealed image; black clouds and things that looked like tendrils seemed to dance around the woman.

“Both guys loved the girl and wanted to marry her. Though the girl loved both men, the first was her true love and she ended up marrying him without telling the second guy.”

“She didn’t tell him? But...but he was her best friend too! You weren’t allowed to marry two people back then?” I questioned appalled by her actions.

Hunter snickered, so close to losing himself to laughter. “No, Cutie Pie. In this story, she could only choose one.”

“That’s silly. Why choose?” I mumbled.

He grinned, kissing my cheek. “I agree with you. But she didn’t tell him because she knew he would be disappointed and potentially hate her. She didn’t want that,” he revealed.

“My ass would have hated you more for not telling me. No faith in him,” I commented.

At that, Hunter really laughed. “Sadly, not everyone is like you, Cutie Pie.”

“True,” I conceded, allowing Hunter to continue.

“The second guy was enraged that she’d chosen the other man without telling him. People mocked him, saying that he would always be second best. It didn’t matter if he had leadership qualities, or worked twice as hard, the first guy would be favored because he was the light and now with a queen who was just as kind as him and was loved by many. It was the perfect match for the land, leaving no room for someone like the second guy. He tried to ignore the reality presented to him and years passed. Before long, he realized

that everyone was right. He was also very lonely with nobody to love and not a single friend to give him comfort.”

I frowned as my shoulders sank, feeling bad for the poor guy. “He must have been so lonely with no one to talk to,” I whispered.

“Yeah. That’s why he decided he didn’t want to be alone anymore. That’s when the darkness came in. He found that the darkness could be used as power and offered his soul in exchange. His goal was to take the woman he loved away from the first guy, but he couldn’t during the day because he was a being of the light,” Hunter explained.

I felt I’d heard this story before, but I couldn’t put my finger on when or the details. “So instead of striking during the day, the second guy evaded the woman’s dreams at night. He weakened her night by night, until she sadly died. The sadness of the land and its people mourning her only made the second guy stronger. He took advantage of his increase in power by taking the woman’s soul and keeping it for his own. That’s basically where the term reaper is derived from. A man who comes and takes our souls when we pass,” he concluded.

“Wait...this sounds different from what I’ve heard.” I defended. Now that he was explaining this part of the story, it was triggering some type of memory, but I didn’t know where it was from or why this story felt so familiar.

“The original legend is this one. It’s been changed and altered over time. Some say the girl originally married the second guy and divorced him for the first guy. It’s been changed and altered because some people felt it was too sad to be made into a fairy tale. So they changed it up. The fairy tale is called the Unicorn Queen because they believed these three were unicorn shifters. I don’t know what type, but some said

the second guy was a dark unicorn. Some call them Dark Riders or Dark Wings.”

“Dark Riders...never heard of them,” I admitted, curious to know more about them, but knew I wouldn’t find any information about them now. Hunter closed the book and I was about to stand up, but his arm circled around my waist, preventing me from moving. I turned my head to face him and he lifted his hand to stroke my hair.

“We’ll find more about them and unicorns in general. All I know from my childhood when I was curious about this legend is there are good unicorns and bad ones. Some don’t mean to be bad, but are tainted, kinda like how Forsaken taint people and consume them, making them into their own? That’s the idea I always had about it all, but once we finish the trials, maybe we can start looking elsewhere to find more information,” Hunter offered.

I nodded in agreement and tilted my head to receive one last kiss from Hunter before we went back to the dorms, ready to prepare for the trails to come.

Trial One- Phoenix Fall

“Is it bad for me to say I’m a little nervous?” I turned to Hunter, who was fixing his fingerless gloves. He finished strapping them on before coming up to me and placing his hands on my cheeks.

“We will be fine. I’m rather confident we’ll pass this, no problem.” He grinned.

I giggled. “You’re just excited you got to be partnered up with me first,” I hummed and he chuckled.

“Yes, that too. You okay now? You looked really exhausted this morning,” Hunter pointed out.

“Ya, I feel a lot better. Caio whipped me up a nice bath with some aromatherapy things and it was SO relaxing. Maybe I’m sleeping too much?” I pondered.

We were currently standing on the platform of our first trial. It was in a remote area and the platform was 500 feet from a body of water. Neither of us knew what the purpose of the trial was or how it was related to Forsaken. The only hint we were given was “*Stop The Cycle.*”

We were given special uniforms to wear for our exams, so I was currently wearing gold shorts with pink trim, a pink t-shirt, and pink combat boots. We were still required to wear our long cloak vests. My hair was in one of Orion’s hair ties

after I'd complained I didn't want to deal with it getting in the way.

Hunter was in gold shorts that reached his knees, an orange shirt, his gold vest, and a pair of black boots. His hair was also up in a ponytail. Both of us wore gloves, his being orange while mine were pink.

We waited patiently for the siren that would signal the beginning of the trial. This was the first out of five and would last fifteen minutes or stop if the team passed or failed before that time.

No one would be able to see the challenge and it would be reviewed by the professors and headmaster in private. The professor in charge was given the rights to pass or fail a student right away, but it would still be reviewed by the panel of professors to ensure the win or loss was fair and accurate. This eliminated any potential of favoritism or professors being biased.

The others were at home, waiting for us to text them the results when we were finished. Though, it all depended on if we finished unharmed or not. I would at least do my best to stay positive.

I was still a bundle of nerves, not because I didn't believe myself, but because of the pressure of screwing up. Of course, we'd worked together during the entrance exam, but this was an official test that if I didn't meet the requirement in time, would affect everyone on the team. The pressure of disappointing the guys was what scared me the most. We'd been through so much together and I didn't want to let them down.

Hunter's hand lifted my chin up and I stared into his eyes, which were filled with determination.

“We will do just fine. I have confidence in you, Cutie Pie. Stop thinking you’re not enough. You’re strong, a quick thinker, and are more than capable of completing a trial. You’re here because of all those amazing qualities and more, and I am very proud to stand next to you right now. We’ll represent Team Misfit and prove that being different has benefits that no one can beat,” he encouraged, then leaned in to whisper in my ear. “And we have a lot more fun.” He quickly kissed my neck.

“Hey?! There are cameras. What if Father sees?” I pointed out.

Hunter grinned, shrugging. “Don’t care. Now that you mention it, though, I’m gonna make this a tradition. We have to kiss you before each trial starts,” he declared proudly.

“Oh c’mon. You wouldn’t da-”

He grinned and I immediately put my hands up in a cross to ward him off. “No.”

He chuckled and sighed. “Ah, Celestia. You aren’t being any fun right now.”

“Finn’s rubbing off on you too much. He’s rubbing off on Orion too,” I pointed out.

Hunter chuckled. “Finn rubs off on everyone. Helps make situations that are intense like these calmer. I agree, he is rubbing off on Orion. I approve of that, though.” He winked.

I grinned, nodding my head. “Me too. Thanks, Hunter.” I took a step closer to give him a hug. He hugged me back, taking a deep inhale, as if memorizing the lingering scent of my lily and lavender scented shampoo that the twins had gotten for me this weekend when they went into town.

“You’re welcome, Celestia. We’ll do just fine,” he reassured me, which helped me shake off the last bits of anxiety, replacing them with the motivation to do well in this trial.

An intercom sound went off, followed by a voice. “Good morning and welcome to the trials. All new recruits have been accounted for and placed in their designated stations throughout Aslan. We will only relay this message once, so please listen closely. The trials are to put you and your skills to the test. It will challenge your quick thinking, knowledge, combat and magic skills, and in some scenarios, your emotional balance. You may shift into your animal forms if needed. For this trial, no weapons or familiars are allowed. Other trials will state if they will be allowed ahead of time. When the siren goes off, the trial will begin. The remaining time will be magically displayed on the back of your hands. If in a scenario you lose your hand in battle, the timer will be moved towards your feet, or to other body parts that are easily visible. If you lose your eyesight, the remaining time will be announced verbally each minute,” the voice declared.

Lose...body parts?! I glanced at Hunter who wasn’t able to hide his surprise.

We shared a look before the voice continued. “The goal of these trials is not to break you, but to make you stronger. What lies ahead in a hunter or huntress’ career is not butterflies and rainbows. It consists of hard work, determination, and perseverance. Some of you will break, others will fall, and some may even lose their life. We want to find those that, no matter what is put in their path, will fight to conquer the obstacle, whether it was planned or not. I wish you all the best, and if you do die during the trials, we reassure you that your families will be notified and your bodies will be returned to

your designated realms with funeral costs covered. Best of luck, new recruits. The trials will begin momentarily.” The voice finished and the intercom clicked off.

We were both silent for a long moment. I had to take a second to process all the information the neutral voice had just spilled. A part of me was afraid, but the stronger part was ready for the challenge. I’d worked so hard to stand here, and I bet the others had too. I wasn’t afraid of death. What I was scared of was failure and didn’t want to experience it.

“Celestia,” Hunter whispered. I looked up to him in time for a quick kiss on the lips. I was momentarily stunned, a bit surprised by the sudden move.

He pulled back and smiled. “Whatever happens, we can do this. Don’t be scared and let’s show them that we deserve to be here.”

I smiled and nodded. “Okay,” I replied, blushing slightly. “And you kissed me, silly.”

He smirked, clearly pleased that he’d ignored my original statement to not kiss me on camera. “I’ll give you another one when we win.” He winked, lifting his hand up and presenting it to me. I smirked, placing my hand in his. Then we stood straight, waiting for the trial to begin.

After about ten seconds, the siren sounded off, signaling that the trial had started. Hunter and I lifted our free hands and noticed the magic digital clock appear on the back of each of them. 15:00 glared at us in gold numbers, then began to countdown.

We waited, my eyes scanning around the little platform. White clouds passed by above us and the blue sky was beautiful as ever, and the sea below was calm. We continued to

wait till a full minute passed, at which point we were both confused.

“Isn’t something supposed to happen?” I asked Hunter, who grimaced.

“Ya. It should. I asked my mom about it this weekend and she said the trials change so often she couldn’t even give me a scenario to help explain it better. You basically just have to expect that anything can happen at any point,” he warned.

We continued to wait, still holding hands as we began to walk around the square platform. “Um. There has to be something we’re missing,” I mumbled, trying to figure it out.

“I don’t sense anything here. Not even any animals right now. It’s just nature. What are we supposed to do?” Hunter muttered, looking deep in thought.

I slipped my hand out of his and lifted my hands up to fix my ponytail. “Maybe there’s a trig-”

My eyes went wide as the section of the platform beneath my feet vanished and I began to fall, prompting a shriek to escape me.

“CELESTIA!” Hunter called out, his figure getting smaller and smaller as I descended towards the water. *SHIT!!!!*

I noticed Hunter jump off the platform, and I decided to try to slow my fall with magic. I lifted my hands, quickly envisioning a whirlpool of wind to catch me. “WINDWHIRLA!” I declared, feeling the magic at my fingertips, but nothing happened. *What the flying fuck?!*

I could hear Hunter shouting while his hands were in front of him, like he too, was trying to conduct a spell but it wasn’t working. *No magic?! Dammit, I can’t fucking fly.*

This was one of those moments when I really wished I could be an alicorn, so I had wings too. I quickly looked over my shoulder, realizing in seconds I would crash into the water. I took a deep breath, looking back up a Hunter, who appeared like he was about to take a deep breath.

I crashed into the blue sea, the impact almost forcing the air from my lungs, but I managed to hold it in. My body didn't slow down as it submerged deeper and deeper into the dark ocean. I quickly scanned my surroundings, realizing there was nothing but water to be seen. No fish or plants, just clear water that grew darker and darker as I plunged deeper into the depths of the cold ocean.

I looked up and saw Hunter had plunged into the water; his face scrunched in pain from the impact but that didn't seem to slow him down. He tried to kick his legs to get closer to me, but our surroundings became so dark I could no longer see him.

I closed my eyes, realizing I would need air soon, but tried to keep calm. *Think, Celestia, think. How are we supposed to stop the cycle?*

I tried to come up with something but was shocked out of my thoughts when I felt my body somehow fall out of the water. My eyes snapped open and I cried out when I landed on my back. I coughed, trying to take in air while scrambling to my feet. I quickly scanned the area, realizing I was back on the square platform. I crawled to the edge, looking over the lip of the platform, seeing the peaceful scenery of the calm sea below. I looked up at the sky above, seeing the clouds floating slowly in the bright blue sky.

“What. The. Fuck?” I breathed before I heard and felt the slam of something else hitting the platform. I whipped my

head, looking over my shoulder. Hunter was at the other side of the platform, coughing and trying to recover from the rough landing.

“What the fuck?” he groaned, rolling on his stomach; his eyes quickly landed on me.

“That’s what she said,” I mumbled and he huffed.

“I love how we’re dealing with some messed up trial thing and you’re still here making a joke,” he praised.

“You okay?” I asked, beginning to crawl towards him.

“Just barely. What just happened?”

“I have no clue,” I replied, lifting my hand to see five minutes had already passed. “Shit! We only have ten minutes left!”

I tried to get up, but flinched; my back was killing me. “Ow.”

“Did you hurt your back?” Hunter asked, watching as I moved carefully.

“Maybe. I guess it wasn’t smart to plunge 500 feet with your back facing the water,” I huffed.

Hunter rose up, needing a second to steady himself to keep from losing his balance. Then he began walking towards me. I reached out my hand to him, but a second later, he was again looking down at me from the platform while my body began round two, plunging down to the sea below. *OH C’MON!*

I gritted my teeth, trying to see if there had been a change in the environment as I continued to plunge towards the water. I looked up to see Hunter had jumped after me, and was a lot closer to me than the first time, tucking his arms against the sides of his body to increase his speed. I realized quickly he

still wouldn't make it in time before I plunged into the water and that my back wouldn't be able to handle another harsh impact. I quickly turned so my back faced Hunter and put my hands out into diver position.

I took a deep breath and BOOM! I was in the water, sinking deeper with every passing moment at the same pace as the last time, but my eyes caught something that made them grow wide in fear.

Sharks. Not ordinary sharks. Massive ones that looked like they could swallow a group of twenty people whole in one go. There wasn't just one or ten of them, but at least fifty watching us sink into the deep sea. Their red eyes made my heart practically stop.

We won't make it the third time. I was slowly putting the pieces together. The cycle started when I let go of Hunter's hand. Then the platform would disappear, we'd fall into the water, and boom, then back on the platform. We couldn't use magic meaning we had to use our shifter animal somehow. Each fall took a full five minutes and we only had ten minutes before this last one, so now if I reached the platform, we'd have less than five minutes or one more cycle at that point. If we crashed into the water, the sharks would eat us and if we somehow survived that, we'll fail the moment we reached the platform...or whatever was left of us at that point.

I looked up to Hunter, whose eyes were wide, seeing all the sharks watch us as we sped past. His eyes met mine and I lifted my hand, pointing to the magical time display before gesturing that we needed to hold hands when we reached the top.

I did the hand gesture twice before the light bulb seemed to click. He quickly nodded, right before my surroundings went

completely dark.

In seconds, my body slammed into the platform again. I coughed, the pain almost crippling. I tried to get up, but I was struggling. My body hurt so much it was seriously difficult for me to do anything but just lie there.

“Fuck..” I cursed, slowly trying again to scramble to my hands and knees. Another loud noise was heard on the other side of the platform and then I could hear Hunter coughing.

“Celestia! I have to hold your hand?” Hunter questioned, struggling to recover just as I was, but already crawling towards me despite his injuries.

“There are three cycles. We just went through two of them. Either you grab my hand or you’re going to have to shift, Hunter. I can’t move and I can’t fly. If we hit the water, we’re shark food and if we survive somehow, we’ll fail due to running out of time,” I explained quickly, my desperate eyes meeting his. I saw the conflict in his orange orbs, the thought of him shifting and having to deal with those anxieties pained me, but if he didn’t crawl faster and I couldn’t move my body, we were going to fall soon and be doomed for failure.

I pressed my lips together to muffle the whimper that tried to escape. I slowly began to drag myself towards Hunter, who had made it to the halfway point of the platform. I quickly glance at the digital clock: 4:55 and counting down. My gut was telling me we only had five seconds before we fell, so I pushed faster to try to reach Hunter who was so close. He held out his hand to me while supporting himself on his knees and free arm. I reached out, our fingertips brushing when the platform beneath me vanished.

I shrieked, closing my eyes and waiting for the falling sensation to begin once again, but a hand held mine and my

body hung off what was left of the platform. I opened my eyes to see Hunter's frightened expression.

"I got you, Cutie Pie," he said through gritted teeth. I breathed a sigh of relief, blinking back tears as he slowly pulled me up and into his arms. He held me tightly and I trembled in his hold, both of us making sure we were still holding hands.

"Did we win?" I asked.

"I think s-" Hunter began, but we both screamed as the platform disappeared. We plummeted towards the sea full of sharks. *FUCK, FUCK, FUCK!*

"HUNTER!" I screamed, realizing he'd have to shift. My voice was filled with fear as we began to drift apart. Hunter reached out and gripped my other hand. We tried to slow our descent, but it was no use.

I looked around us as the wind picked up. The clouds shifted to grey, thunder and lightning appearing out of nowhere as rain and high winds hit us with shocking force.

"CELESTIA...I..." Hunter shouted over the wind. I met his wide eyes, fear lacing their beautiful orange depths. *He's scared to shift. He doesn't want to relive those memories.*

I swallowed hard, realizing that I didn't have the heart to force him to shift, even if our lives depended on it. Maybe there was another way to save ourselves.

"It's okay," I replied with a small smile. The regret that blossomed on his face made me so sad. The winds got stronger and more fierce to the point that it was hard to keep our hold on each other. I swallowed, using all my strength to pull myself close enough to give Hunter one last kiss.

If we died right now, I wanted him to know I loved him.

I loved all of the guys, but I hoped the simple kiss would make it so he didn't regret this moment.

I didn't want him to die blaming himself. It wasn't his fault that life left scars and wounds after knocking us down with challenge after challenge.

Whether it was the death of a friend or family member, or the scars left by bullies who wanted nothing but to shame us till we slit our wrists and begged for death, the wounds that lingered and bruised our lives weren't because we were weak.

It was because we were strong enough to fight and move forward. We were willing to take our pain and let it motivate us to try again, even if it meant we were no longer at 100% like we used to be. That was something I was okay with, even in this moment when we were at the brink of death. I wouldn't die hating him.

I'd die loving the man who survived the war this life had forced on him.

A gust of wind hit us, strong enough to break us apart.

"CELESTIA!" Hunter screamed and I tried to respond, but the wind was whipping my body left and right, like a rag doll fluttering aimlessly to the sea below. I opened my eyes to try and figure out how close I was to the sea's surface and saw the sharks wide jaws filled with sharp rows of teeth, waiting for my body to crash either into the ocean or directly into one of their mouths.

I closed my tear-filled eyes, bracing myself for my painful death. I thought about my mom and dad, wishing things had been different and we could have spent more time together as a family. I thought about Magnor and all he'd done for me,

saving me from my own demons and raising me like his own daughter.

I thought about Arielle and that fateful night when I found her in the pouring rain. I wondered if she'd be able to live without me. I hoped if she couldn't sustain herself after my passing, she'd find a new Mistress to support her. I thought about all the guys and how they had changed my world for the better in such a short period of time.

They had made me realize how amazing life could be with the right people in your life and Team Misfit had helped me learn to love the person I'd grown up into. I'd found a group of people who loved me, professors who wanted the best for us, and had at least tried my best to become a huntress.

With only seconds left before my death, my only regret was not having loved harder. I wished I'd been able to show the others more passion and work harder to learn more about all of my men. I just hoped with our approaching death, that they wouldn't let the grief of our passing kill them.

I took a final breath, letting my mind drift in hopes the darkness would take me before the pain of sharp teeth puncturing my body overtook me. But suddenly, something wrapped around my waist, stopping my downward movement immediately. I groaned at the whiplash effect of the sudden stalled movement. I opened my eyes to see large gold talons wrapped around my body. I was few feet away from the sharks, which began to chomp and some even tried to jump to reach me but I was still too far out.

A loud ear-piercing screech filled the air, slicing through the high winds and harsh rain that poured down on us. I lifted my head, using as much as my concentration as I could to try and ignore the pain; I saw a large phoenix.

“Hu...nter,” I whispered in awe as tears rolled down my cheeks. He was absolutely stunning. His large flaming wings extended out, the vibrant colors of orange, reds, gold, and green burning furiously, even with the onslaught of rain that attempted to extinguish his flame.

His beak was gold and he screeched again, flapping his wings once, which sent an onslaught of wind to the sharks below. He lifted us up, avoiding the waves of wind coming left and right.

He took a deep breath, and magic circles began to appear up in the sky, one after another, until there was a row of large orange magic circles above us. With a loud screech, the magic circles activated, initiating beams of fire that shot out, straight into the sea of sharks. The combined eerie noise of their anguish hurt my ears. The sharks burned, the powerful beams of fire so strong that it looked like the water did nothing to stop its rage.

I felt too weak to keep my head looking up at the sky, but was strong enough to lift my hand to see the time: 59 seconds left.

Hunter soared through the air, the winds already beginning to diminish and the rain slowly came to a stop. By the time we reached 500 feet, the scenery was as it had been when we started and the platform was once again in the place it began, as if it had never vanished multiple times. Hunter lowered me to the ground, laying me on my front before slowly turning me so I rested on my back.

I opened my weak eyes, looking at his glorious form. His head lowered so I could stare into his mesmerizing orange eyes which held hints of gold, orange, and green. I lifted my hand which trembled, reaching up to touch his flaming cheek.

I had no doubt in my mind that his flames wouldn't hurt me. I gave him a small smile as he lowered his head so I didn't need to stretch my hand all the way, brushing his warm cheek against my hand.

“Hunter.”

“Bru,” he replied and I giggled.

“You sound like Arielle.”

“Bru-Raru,” he huffed, fluttering his feathers, which began to return to normal, his flames extinguishing in seconds. His feathers were lovely mixtures of golds, reds, and hints of green, and his size just amazed me, being at least three times as big as Arielle, which was a little scary but still super cool.

“You're really handsome,” I whispered, lowering my hand. He leaned his large head to rest against the side of mine, the warmth of his feathers rather comforting. I watched as his body was immersed in white light and shrank in size until only the glowing silhouette of Hunter's human form remained.

The light faded and his naked self appeared, his head resting on my shoulder as he tried to catch his breath. He was already shivering. I frowned, hoping he wasn't cold. I snapped my fingers, mentally casting a spell, hoping it would work.
Warmthana.

A cloak of thick wool appeared above his body, lowering slowly to cover him. He slowly lifted his head, his weak eyes meeting mine as tears pooled in them. I smiled, trying to ignore the stinging in my own eyes as I tried to give him the best smile I could muster.

“I guess magic works again,” I whispered, hoping it would cheer him up. He smiled, a tear rolling down his face. The next fell down to land on my cheek. I lifted my hand once again to

brush his cheek that was beginning to grow red as he choked out a sob.

“Don’t cry, Hunter,” I begged and he nodded, sliding his arms around me and holding me tightly.

He sobbed into my shoulder and I silently cried my own tears, sad that he was hurting. I knew our time was up, and was only waiting to hear the results.

The siren went off and I had no clue what it meant, but my consciousness wouldn’t let me stay around to find out, already beginning to drift. The last thing I heard was the intercom turn on, the voice from before saying one word.

“Passed.”

T.L.C

“It’s not that bad,” I mumbled into the pillow. My body tensed as I waited.

“Not that bad, my ass. At least this cream will help with healing and make it easier for you this afternoon during the next trial,” Theo offered.

I sighed, turning my head to lay on my arms which rested on the oversized pillow. I was lying on my stomach on a massage table in the training room. I was wearing only a pair of red lace underwear, waiting for what would likely be most painful back rub ever. The massive pillow under my arms was there more for me to clutch at in pain than for any physical comfort.

It had already been a week since Hunter and I passed the first trial, allowing Team Misfit to continue classes like almost nothing had happened. Too bad Hunter had been knocked out for days. He had only woken up two days ago and was still on forced bed rest after his shift. On top of that, my back was still being a bitch after treatment.

When I’d woken the day after the trial, the others had given me a summary of what happened after I passed out. The moment the exam was over, Arielle had sensed my distress as if a barrier had been lowered, allowing her to see I needed help.

Ms. Arcadia had been assigned to our care after we'd been stabilized. We had been staying in the private section of the medical clinic until I'd woken up. Hunter was still recovering there. Ms. Arcadia wanted to make sure he was okay and wouldn't pass out randomly from exhaustion, which would put him at risk of hurting himself.

My back was in rough shape from the impact of the water and falling onto the platform repeatedly. Magnor had heard about what had happened and returned early from whatever business he had been on in another dimension to help out. He and Finn had whipped something up using herbs that Caio and Cairus had spent a full day in the wild searching for. Orion had also added some healing properties to the cream to help speed up the healing process.

It was supposed to be applied all over the back and then covered in bandages to ensure the cream stayed in place as the healing magic allowed the cream to absorb into the skin and take effect. Orion had been applying the cream during the mornings and nights, but today there was a major test for each team and four members were required to attend so he didn't have time to apply the cream.

Since Hunter was down, the twins, along with Finn and Orion, went to represent us. I'd personally asked Orion if I could spend a little time with Theo, especially with our exam coming up this afternoon.

It wasn't like we had some type of plan since you couldn't expect the unexpected when it came to the trials, but I just wanted to enjoy his presence after the long week of recovery before we were thrown into another risky test of power. Finn and Orion had kept me company at night, the three of us sharing a bed which was really comforting. Caio and Cairus

would have afternoon naps with me after Orion applied the cream because it had to set in, which meant I had to stay still for at least an hour.

That left barely any time with Theo, though he made sure to help me catch up with what I missed from class. He would also read me different stories, which were the perfect way to fall asleep on his shoulder, yet I still felt it wasn't enough.

I'd been thinking a lot about the guys and our dynamic, and I realized how much I wanted this to work. During what I thought were my last moments, they were the ones to come into my mind, which just showed how much of an impact they had on my life and the love I wanted to share with them in return.

"You okay, Celestia? You're so tense," Theo whispered, pulling me out of my thoughts.

"It's painful when you first apply it. Once it absorbs, though, it feels like I never injured my back to begin with," I admitted.

"Hmmm," Theo replied, and I took a peek over my shoulder at him. He was in black shorts and wasn't wearing a top, which was common for the guys when they were chilling at home. I made a slow, appreciative perusal of his body while he still was deep in thought, staring intently at my bare back. It was really hot to see him so focused. I had to look away or I knew I'd become even more aroused than I already was. Even though it was painful when the cream was applied, the thought of a man's hands going slowly up my back did some weird things to my body that I tried really hard to ignore, but couldn't quite manage to.

"I think I can make it less painful...but...uh..." Theo trailed off. His hesitation made me look back again and I

noticed his face slowly turn red.

“What?” I asked, interested to know what he was thinking about.

“Well...there’s a technique some vampires with magic abilities use when their partner is in pain. Some medics do it, but it’s generally reserved for mates. They use it when a vampire gets a serious burn or injury that would otherwise take a lot of time to heal. I only know how to do it ‘cause during my recovery, I watched a medic do it to her husband after he got injured,” he explained, his eyes looking everywhere but at me.

I gulped, my mind already jumping way ahead and imagining what could possibly be done that would be just for mates. *Kissing? No, maybe it’s more intimate. Well, they have to use their hands right? Or are they using other parts of the body?*

“Does it require our clothes to be off?” I questioned shyly, trying not to blush at my question.

Theo’s face got more red. “No. Uh...I can put a shirt on if you want?” he offered.

“You don’t have to,” I replied and glanced away, my cheeks burning red. We were both silent for a moment, then Theo took a deep breath.

“Think of it as acupuncture. I’ll first press lightly on your back while initiating the magic with my hands. It helps to relax the tension and numb the pain receptors, but it heightens others...if you get what I mean.” He mumbled the last sentence and I had to blink a few times before it finally clicked.

“Oh.”

“Ya,” he replied quietly.

After a long moment, I decided to speak up. “I don’t think I’ll mind. We’re dating after all, right?” I asked, my heart speeding up as I waited for his answer.

With all that happened, maybe my mind needed the reassurance that he still cared, especially since he was the one I had gotten the least amount of time with lately.

Theo smiled, the sweet expression calming my nerves. He walked over to the head of the table and knelt down so his head was at eye level with mine. “Exactly. We’re dating, so I don’t want you giving me such a worried expression thinking otherwise,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss me. I smiled against his lips before we shared a slow kiss, pulling back only when we had no air left.

He lifted his hand and moved a strand of my hair, tucking it behind my ear. “It will make the process a lot easier and then I can at least put more of the cream on without the fear of hurting you. Orion asked if I could try to apply more if you could tolerate it, so it lasts long enough for us to complete the exam and get back home before it began to wear off.”

I lifted my head slightly to nod. “Okay. I’m ready when you are. It won’t tire you out, right?”

He grinned, shaking his head. “Nope. It barely requires magic. Big things can come in small packages.” He winked, wiggling his hands and I giggled.

“Alright, do your acupuncture magic.” I hummed and relaxed, lowering my head to rest on the pillow, moving my arms so I could cuddle the pillow if it was painful.

“The initial touch may be painful, so brace yourself. Once I start, try to relax and breathe slowly,” Theo instructed.

“Okay,” I replied, my body growing tense as I waited for his touch. He whispered something under his breath and it felt like a soft breeze passed. I couldn’t help but ease my curiosity, looking back over my shoulder to see Theo’s eyes closed while his fingers were spread out. Red magic circles formed in front of his palms, growing bigger with each passing moment.

Little threads wrapped around his fingers and as they tightened, they marked their spot with red lines. When the magic circles disappeared, he had markings all around his fingers and both wrists, almost looking like he had gotten his hands tattooed. He opened his eyes, their red glow making its appearance, reminding me of last time I’d seen that when I’d asked if he was okay.

“Ready?” he asked. I nodded, turning back to rest my head while holding onto my pillow in preparation. I squeezed my eyes shut and his hands pressed on my lower back. I hissed at the pain that shot out, my hands gripping the pillow tightly.

“It’s okay, Cutie Pie. Just a give me a moment,” he whispered and I whimpered a reply that was totally incoherent but at least told him I understood.

He slowly began to press harder on my flesh and I had concentrate to stabilize my breathing. I gripped the pillow as tightly as I could as I tried not to cry. It still hurt so much, even though we’d been working on treatment twice a day.

Theo’s hands left my lower back, moving slightly upward. I braced for the fresh wave of pain, but his touch wasn’t as bad this time, only sending small tingles of pain compared to what I’d felt before.

“Do you still feel pain, Celestia?” Theo asked, his voice a little breathy.

“Only a little this time. It’s a lot better than before,” I admitted.

“Okay. I’m gonna continue,” he warned me.

“Alright,” I replied, my body relaxing a bit now that I knew the pain wouldn’t be as intense.

He pressed slowly and my tension began to fade, barely feeling any pain from the action. He finished where he was working and moved up to the middle of my back, pressing steadily. I didn’t even make a noise, my body completely relaxed and pain-free. His hands continued their journey up my back until he reached my shoulders, giving them a slow massage which felt absolutely amazing.

Cairus and Caio were good at massages, but this one felt a lot more intense and relaxing. Maybe it was his magic at work, but damn, it felt so good I almost let out a moan by accident. After five minutes of him giving me the best massage I’d ever experienced, he released me and walked over to grab the container with the specialized healing cream. He came around the table, and I heard him open up the container.

The coolness of the light purple cream spread along the lower part of my back, and my muscles seemed to unwind at the nice sensation. I could tell Theo put on a generous amount, and he began to slowly spread it across my lower back in careful circular motions.

It felt absolutely amazing. No, there wasn’t even a word to describe how amazing it felt and my mind had already now crowned Theo as my future cream applicator. *Sorry, guys.*

By the time he moved to the middle of my back, I realized what he meant by other sensations. My body began to tingle

and my pussy felt hot as it clenched in desire. I bit my lip and tried to pretend it didn't affect me, but it did so very much.

He had reached the top of my back, and I couldn't help but moan quietly into the pillow. I had to actively stop myself from trying to press my lower body into the table as if to soothe the growing ache that seemed to only get stronger.

“Celestia, you okay?” I heard Theo's concerned tone and I merely lifted my hand to give him a thumbs up, because I knew if I said a word, it would come out as a breathy moan. I didn't think it would be good for both of us to be horny right now so I tried to hold back. Sure, we could find time for some lovely activities before our exam, but I could already guess it would be exhausting. Also, since I was still a virgin, it would probably leave me wobbling like a penguin, even if Theo knew exactly what we were doing, and a little part of me told me he did. *Or it could have been his practiced hands that made me think that.*

He finally reached my shoulders and I moaned louder at his touch, arching my back slightly. *Oh fuck, how can this be so intense?* It felt like his fingers weren't just massaging me, but sliding in and out of me instead. The thought alone was almost enough to throw me over the edge I was teetering on.

“Celestia,” Theo whispered.

I swallowed hard, unable to ignore the husky quality to voice. I lifted my head to meet his gaze. His red eyes were so intense, glowing just slightly and I didn't even think, leaning in to close the distance between our lips. He kissed me back with a level of fierceness that made me moan as I closed my eyes.

His hands didn't stop their slow movement and I couldn't hold back my orgasm any longer, my body growing rigid. I

gasped, but it didn't stop Theo from kissing me, slipping his tongue into my mouth as his hands slowly lowered down to the middle of my back.

By the time we pulled away, my breathing was coming in wild gasps and his eyes were filled with lust, his red glowing eyes lowering to my swollen lips before trailing down to my neck.

"I think I should stop...or I won't be able to," he confessed between breaths. I bit my lower lip, my cloudy mind trying to think logically about this but my body didn't want him to stop.

There was a knock on the door, snapping us out of heated daze. The door slid slightly open and a sleepy looking Hunter poked his head through the opening. He slowly looked at our intimate position and smirked. "Should I come back later?" I blushed, completely snapping out of my daze as a wave of relief hit me.

"Hunter," I whispered, smiling.

"Nah. I just finished," Theo replied.

Hunter raised an eyebrow, lowering his gaze to Theo's shorts. "You sure? I don't mind coming back," he offered and I followed his gaze. Even though Theo's shorts were black, I could see his erect cock straining through the thin material. Theo's face grew bright red as his eyes returned to their normal appearance, the glow dissipating.

"I'm going to wash my hands. Make sure you stay still, Celestia. I'll bandage your back in a moment," Theo instructed.

"Ah...okay," I replied, watching as he walked quickly out of the room.

I turned to Hunter, who chuckled. “He’ll be back in a few minutes. Probably has to relieve himself.”

“You’re evil,” I commented. His grin widened and he walked right up to the where I lay, leaning forward to give me a kiss.

“If I was in his position, I wouldn’t have stopped,” he whispered against my lips before giving me an intense kiss. *Shit, so good.* Even though he wasn’t touching me other than his lips, the sensation felt amazing. We finally broke apart and I looked up at him curiously.

“How long were you there?” I asked.

He considered my question for a moment. “Since Theo asked if you were ready.”

I groaned, burying my head in the pillow. “That’s embarrassing to know,” I mumbled.

“Not really,” Hunter replied, sounding amused.

I tilted my head to the side to glare at him. “Very evil, Grumpy.” I teased and he laughed.

“I haven’t heard you use that nickname on me in a long time and I’m not grumpy. I’m in a good mood,” he hummed.

I took a slow inspection of his appearance before looking back up to meet his gaze. “Are you okay? You’re not in pain, right?”

“I’m fine, Cutie Pie. Been given orders to sleep as much as I can. I’m going to take a nap but wanted to make sure you were okay first. The guys gave me updates, but I wanted to see for myself how your back was holding up,” he explained.

“I’m glad...um...” I trailed off, unsure if I should bring up the topic. He seemed to understand my hesitation and he lifted

his hand to stroke my head.

“I’m fine. I don’t regret shifting to save you. I’d do anything for you...even if it’s painful,” he whispered gravely.

“I don’t want you to be in pain,” I spoke quietly.

“I don’t like seeing you hurting either, Celestia. It could have been a lot worse, but thankfully it wasn’t. The past is in the past. I have to focus on the present and that revolves around making sure you are safe. A little nightmare or bad memory here or there is better than seeing you in pain, so don’t worry,” he reassured me.

We shared a look and I finally sighed, knowing he meant what he said. He leaned back down, kissing my forehead. Then he walked over to grab the roll of bandages. I gave him a look. “You’re going to bandage me?” I questioned. “I thought you were going to nap?”

“I haven’t been doing my duties in taking care of you. I think I can do a nice bandage job while Theo takes his time.” Hunter winked.

“Ah...” I realized Theo wasn’t back yet which made me remember what Hunter had been referring. “Okay.”

“Stay still, okay?” he soothed.

“Hmm. Okay,” I replied, relaxing my head into the pillow and snuggling it. Hunter worked on placing the wraps, line by line in slow, methodical motions. My body tingled here and there, finally relaxed after the thrilling orgasm I’d just experienced, which I tried not to linger on. I suddenly realized how tired I was.

We still had some time before the next trial and a nap was rather tempting. I didn’t have much time to debate, my

conscious already beginning to drift in and out. I decided I would sleep for a bit but wanted to say one more thing first.

“Hunter?”

“Yes, Cutie Pie?”

“Thank you...for everything,” I whispered, meaning every word. It was nice to know my men had the time, love, and caring hearts to assist me.

“You’re welcome, Celestia,” he replied and that was the last thing I heard before I fell into a deep slumber.

Trial Two- Thirst or Unconsciousness

“Run run run!” Theo shouted and we both dashed out of our hiding spot, running as fast as our legs would take us, doing our best to avoid the boulder that was picking up speed.

“Theo, I think there’s a place we can hide!” I called out, running even faster to give myself the few extra seconds to confirm my quick observation, I slid into the spot, realizing it was big enough to fit both of us and allow us to avoid the oversize boulder that would otherwise squish us.

Theo slid right into the hiding spot with ease. His body pressed against mine just in time; the boulder moved passed us, crashing into the black wall of the oversized maze. We both sighed and worked to catch our breath, falling to our knees.

“Fuck...I don’t know if I can last much longer, Cutie Pie,” Theo confessed. I wanted to answer him but was still fighting just to breathe.

We were currently in the middle of Trial Two and it was just as difficult as the first. Our task? “Avoid unconsciousness.”

Simple right? Totally wrong. The trial was scheduled to be two hours long and we were now entering the final fifteen

minutes, or so the magical display indicated. However, we were both already completely exhausted.

Since the start of the exam, we'd been moving non-stop. Avoiding boulders, attacking Rhinroy, dodging flaming arrows, and various other traps set to knock us out.

If it weren't for Theo's quick eye, we would have been hit by a massive log, which I had no doubt in my mind would have knocked the both of us right out, making us lose the trial.

I glanced at Theo, who was panting, lifting his hand to wipe the sweat off his forehead. I realized he looked really pale and his eyes were doing the red glowing thing again.

"Theo, what's wrong?" I asked, now realizing he looked really sick.

"It's nothing...I just don't know if I can last the fifteen minutes if we have to keep this up," he confessed, his weak eyes meeting mine.

I lifted my hand to brush against his cheek, and even though he was drenched in sweat, his skin was still cold. His glowing eyes lowered to my neck for a long moment before he looked away. "We should get moving," he stressed, trying to rise back up but he could barely stand.

I quickly caught him, and helped him lower to his knees to rest against the wall. "Theo, what the fuck is going on?" I demanded.

He was silent and I groaned, rising at the sound of something coming our direction. I walked out into the path and could hear Theo's tired voice. "Fuck, Celestia don't do something stupid."

I ignored him, noticing a gigantic boulder approaching. I'd been timing the approaches of attacks and realized the bigger

they were, the longer between attacks. Seeing as this boulder could barely fit between the walls of the black maze, I'd figured we'd have one more attack before the trial was over. I lifted my hands to my dual swords, pulling them out of their sheath and immediately pooling my magic into them.

They began to light up, the inscriptions glowing a dark red as I held them both aloft. I let my anger boost my energy, allowing it to grow and build until I was practically trembling with rage and power. The large brown boulder was finally seconds away from me and I prepared myself for the powerful attack.

“SLASHSONADA!” I declared with strength, lowering my arms in a swift movement which sent out two waves of power, one white and one red. The two waves merged into one and within seconds, sliced right through the boulder with ease. I lowered my blades and changed my position from facing the approaching halves of rock to standing to face the wall. The two pieces passed by me and crashed into the maze all, the impact making the ground tremble while the loud sound echoed through the air.

I lifted my swords, sliding them back into their protective covers tied to my back before looking over my shoulder at Theo, who sighed.

“Remind me not to piss you off,” he mumbled.

“You're pissing me off now by not telling me what the fuck is wrong with you,” I snapped. He flinched at my harsh tone and looked away, seeming a little hurt by my words. I sighed, ruffling my hair which was loose since Orion didn't return in time to let me steal his hair tie.

I walked back to where Theo was resting, his back pressed against the wall. I knelt down in front of him, sliding my hand

into his, which prompted him to lift his eyes.

“We’re a couple, right?” I asked. He slowly nodded, looking confused by my question.

“Then you should be okay with telling me if something is wrong, Theo. I tell you and the others if something bothering me. Well...not all the time without a little pestering and glaring, but I’m stubborn like that.” I mumbled the last bit, not liking the fact I had to acknowledge my stubbornness.

“But it’s not your responsibility,” he whispered.

“Why is that? We’re in a trial where your life is in my hands, just as mine is in yours. I trust you to protect me and I hope you can do the same. That includes helping you when you’re not feeling too hot, but that means you have to help me out when my slow brain isn’t understanding why you’re in pain and look as pale as a ghost,” I explained.

“Pale as a vampire, Cutie Pie,” he whispered. It took me a good ten seconds before I finally understood what was going on.

“You’re low on blood?” I asked, a little stunned at the realization, but it totally made sense. *That’s why he was taking that pill in the kitchen and why his eyes were glowing red.*

He slowly nodded. “There aren’t many vampires here so they don’t supply blood as often. I have pills which usually carry me over just fine, but I guess maybe because I’ve been using my vampire powers more, it must have had a major draining effect on me,” he confessed with a sigh, resting his head back on the wall. He looked like he’d pass out within minutes if we didn’t figure this out.

I glanced at the digital magic display on my left hand, 7:05 minutes left on the clock. There would be one more attack

before the trial ended and we needed to be ready, but before I addressed that, I had one more question.

“Your magic. Is it derived from your vampire or bat shifter side?” I questioned. He opened his weak eyes, staring into my stern, mismatched eyes. He knew I wasn’t going to drop the subject so he let out another weak, resigned sigh.

“Vampire. Bat shifters can’t use magic very well,” he admitted.

I grimaced, realizing it was my fault he was suffering because of earlier. He immediately sighed, tugging my hand which pulled me forward. He wrapped his arms around me in an embrace.

“Dammit, Celestia. Don’t look so depressed. It really hurts my heart to see you look so down,” he whispered.

“But it’s my fault you’re in pain now!”

“It’s nothing. I just need a little bit of blood. We can find a Rhinroy or something. Please don’t blame yourself. It was a nice experience earlier. I...wouldn’t mind doing it again. Minus the pain and cream that is.” He hummed and I blushed.

“Ah...not the time to tease me,” I scolded quietly. “But, sure.”

He grinned, trying to get up but he could still barely move. I frowned, rising up and looking between the walls.

“One sec,” I announced, bouncing on the balls of my feet before I pushed off the ground, quickly placing one foot one side of the wall and immediately pushing off to place the other leg on the opposite wall, repeating this till I was the top of the maze wall. I quickly stood there, looking across the vast land. I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath and zoning everything out.

My senses heightened and I secretly asked nature to help me, trying to find any living creature close enough to help us out. I waited another thirty seconds and the wind passed me, the thought flowing into my mind that all the Rhinroy were gone and there weren't any living creatures around.

I silently nodded to myself before jumping off the ledge and landing back down with ease. "Theo, there's nothing," I announced. He grimaced and looked away. I sighed, knowing exactly why he was upset.

"Why can't you use my blood?" I asked. "It better not be too glitter-filled for you."

He grinned, but shook his head. "It's complicated."

"Theo, we don't have time for this. We have four minutes and my gut is telling me something is going to go down at the last minute. We need to do this now," I declared. I walked up to his side, lowering to my knees. He met my concentrated gaze and his gaze lowered to my neck, looking a bit dazed. He slowly swallowed, his Adam's apple moving up and down, the tension showing just how much he needed this.

"It may hurt..." he began and I rolled my eyes.

"Theo Kristopher, hurry the fuck up and bite me. You can tell me the side effects later," I ordered and he rolled his eyes.

"Impatient," he mumbled.

"I'll pretend I didn't hear that," I commented, moving my hair to one side so blood wouldn't get onto it. I had no idea how this worked; the only thing I had to go off was what I'd seen in the movies.

"Wait, one question," I declared.

He lifted his eyebrow at me. "What?"

“Do you sparkle?”

“Really?”

“I’m 100% serious,” I stressed and he gawked at me.

“Why does everyone think we sparkle?”

“Um...because the internet says so,” I replied.

He groaned. “Come here, Celestia. No, I don’t sparkle. The internet is bullshitting you.” He huffed and I smirked, crawling into his lap. Once I was comfortably sitting facing him, we shared a look and he took a deep breath.

“Make sure you tell me when to stop or if you feel really tired,” he warned.

I nodded. “Do your worst, Sparkle.”

“I pray you don’t start calling me that,” he whispered but otherwise didn’t delay, leaning in so his lips brushed the left side of my neck.

I had to fight not to arch at the feel of his cool lips on my heated flesh. He slowly moved down my neck, stopping halfway between the base of my nape and shoulder.

His arms went around my waist, making sure I was close. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. He kissed the area first, sucking on it softly, which made me moan quietly. He took that moment to puncture his fangs into my flesh and I tried not to flinch. My hands were pressed on his chest, gripping his shirt tightly.

The pain wasn’t unbearable, but it was definitely noticeable. But when he started to suck, drinking my blood slowly, everything went 180. My body grew hot and the tension in my muscles left as I suddenly relaxed, feeling really good. The sensation reminded me of what he’d done with his

hands when applying the cream, but it was even stronger and more intense right away, giving me no time to prepare for the sensual feeling that flowed through me like a wave of cool water.

I moaned, lifting my head as I zoned everything out. It was like I was in a euphoric state where you didn't care what happened around you, only able to concentrate on the tingling growing pleasure running through you. I moaned a little louder and realized sitting on his lap had been a really a bad idea. I had such a strong urge to move my hips, just so I could rub my pussy against his groin, trying to make contact with the bulge that was slowly growing, even as I tried to keep my movements small in an effort to stay still.

It took another thirty seconds before I began to feel dizzy, even with my eyes closed. "Theo." I moaned quietly, hoping it would be enough to signal him that I wouldn't be able to take much more if he continued.

He retracted his teeth at my feeble warning, sucking at my flesh before he pulled away. I slowly opened my eyes, lowering my head back down to meet his bright red ones, the glow in them slowly dimming. He looked immediately better, color returning to his skin and he licked his lips that still had remnants of my blood.

"Fuck, now you look pale as fuck," he whispered, lifting his hand to brush my cheek. I didn't reply, instead leaning in and kissing his lips. He looked a little shocked at my sudden move, but I closed my eyes, feeling like I needed to kiss him. He didn't push me away and it took him a moment before he was kissing me back. The kiss didn't last as long as I wanted it to; he broke us apart slowly.

“Cutie Pie, take a few deep breaths,” he coached. I ignored his words, my eyes focused on his lips. He sighed, rubbing his thumb along my cheek. “Celestia,” he said in a sterner tone, which caught my attention.

I gave him a sad look, unsure why I was suddenly in trouble. He didn’t change his expression which was guarded, but his gentle rubs from his thumb hinted he wasn’t angry.

“You’re a little buzzed from the bite. I need you to take a few breaths real quick,” he encouraged. I didn’t really get what he meant by buzzed; my mind was feeling way too calm and foggy to hear any buzzing, but I did as he asked, taking slow deep breaths.

Inhale and exhale, over and over again, and it wasn’t long before my mind finally cleared and I blinked at him in confusion. “Shit...what just happened?” I whispered.

“I promise I’ll explain later when we get the chance. I feel a lot better and stronger though. Thank you,” he whispered, bowing his head to me in gratitude. I smiled, feeling relieved to see he did look a lot better than before.

“I’m glad. I think the exam is over?” I wondered. We glanced at our clocks, 1:10 and counting down.

“One more minute. Let’s get up at least. You think you can stand?” he asked.

“Uh...ya,” I replied, but I wasn’t actually sure. My body felt like mush from whatever we just did. I never thought having one’s blood sucked could be so pleasurable. I slid off his lap and he immediately rose, presenting his hands to me.

He helped me up but I wobbled, my feet practically trembling. He slid an arm around my waist, letting me rest against him for support.

“Thanks,” I whispered to him, hoping my legs would cooperate.

“No problem. Let’s try to get out of the maze before-”

A loud rumbling noise rang out through the field and Theo and I watched as the ground began to shake.

“Earthquake?” we asked in unison. The trembling of the earth got stronger and stronger. The ground began to crack, little tiny lines which began to form into huge ones. Then water began to shoot out in one area and hot lava shot out on the other side.

“Uh. Theo? I can’t fly,” I pointed out, gripping his shirt. He didn’t answer, instead quickly scooping me up and pushing off the ground. He landed on top of the wall with ease and we watched in horror at the wave of lava that was heading towards us from our left while a tsunami of water was coming our way from the right.

We are so screwed. I closed my eyes shut, pressing my forehead into Theo’s shoulder. I wrapped my arms tightly around his neck, bracing myself for the dual collision.

“Hold on, Cutie Pie!” Theo shouted over the loud noise and I nodded. Our body was shot upward, making me realize Theo must have pushed off the ground into the air, but there was no way we’d make it through the remaining time at this point and unless he controlled gravity, we would be falling back down real fast, since what goes up, most definitely has to come down.

I heard the sizzling sound of the lava colliding with water and a burst of steam hit us, making me cough. I waited for our imminent death, wondering if we’d feel more of the cool

sensation of the water or be burned to nothing by the lava. But nothing happened.

I slowly opened my eyes, pulling back to see we were high in the air, the maze below now non-existent as the water and lava battled it out.

I looked at Theo and my eyes grew wide at his wings. A smile slowly formed on my lips. “Bat wings?!” I exclaimed, feeling a little excited to see his large black wings which had hints of red in them.

He nodded with a wide smile. “I don’t normally call them ‘cause they use a lot of energy, but I’m really buffed up thanks to the blood boost so it was really easy to summon them. You okay?”

I nodded, feeling a little better. I yawned. “Ya. I’m good,” I reassured him. “Tired.”

As I finished the word, the siren went off and the intercom clicked on. “Passed.”

We both smiled in glee and I hugged him tightly. “We did it!” I cheered.

He chuckled, hugging me tightly. “We sure did.” The simulation slowly returned to normal, the lava and water disappearing until the land was once more green and the maze was back in place like nothing had happened. Theo lowered us to the ground, retracting his wings as he did so.

“Um. How do we get back anyway?” I asked, realizing I wasn’t awake the last time our trial finished.

“I escort you back.” I heard Magnor’s voice call out. We both turned and saw him approach us, a wide grin on his face.

“Magnor!” I said happily and his expression softened at my excitement.

“You did good, Celestia,” he praised and I smiled brightly at him. He looked at my neck for a moment, raising an eyebrow at me before his grin widened.

“So Mr. Kristopher, I guess when all this is over, you’ll come over for dinner some time,” Magnor teased. Theo’s face went bright red and I blinked in confusion, not understanding what he meant.

“Um. Yes Sure. Though, I’ll bring the others too,” Theo confessed shyly.

Magnor grinned. “I guess you would. I don’t think Orion’s gonna let you have the upper hand though, so you better go explain.”

I yawned as I rubbed my eyes, totally not following the conversation at this point.

“You two can have your manly chatter, I’m gonna go nap,” I confessed.

“BRUUUUU!”

I opened my eyes to see Arielle flying towards me. I smirked. “Arielle,” I greeted, lifting my arm so she had a place to land.

“Bru!” she replied, settling on my arm before leaning in to begin rubbing her cheek against mine. “*Celestia. You look pooped,*” she hummed.

I smiled. “Ya. I’m tired,” I replied out loud, yawning right after.

“Let’s go back,” Magnor suggested. Theo walked up to stand on my right side, sliding his hand into my free one,

squeezing it comfortingly.

Arielle shifted to her smaller form, moving to land on my left shoulder. She avoided the spot where Theo had bitten. She kept hopping up and down which caught my attention.

What, Arielle?

She lifted her head to look up at me. “Bru bru bru,” she replied. *“I never knew you could get tattoos during the trials.”*

“Huh? Tattoo?” I asked out loud. Theo looked at me in confusion, both of us slowing down so Magnor wouldn’t overhear our conversation.

“Arielle says I have a tattoo,” I whispered.

Theo looked down to where he’d bitten me and frowned. “I think it’s just a mark. It’ll fade in a few days. I’ve seen it happen a few times back when I was in the Coven.”

“Oh. Okay,” I said with a shrug. I didn’t really mind, but it made me wonder what it looked like. *I would have to remember to check later.*

“You two coming? I rather avoid your father’s grumpy mood after he sees the playback of your trial,” Magnor declared. We both stopped in our tracks, Theo and I exchanged glances with wide eyes before we gawked at Magnor who stopped mid-stride and looked back over his shoulder at us.

“Father’s watching?!” I exclaimed.

“I thought they chose the professor randomly. Not all of them,” Theo added.

Magnor grinned. “The headmaster is curious why his daughter has six guys on her team who seem to be more than just friends. I really don’t want to deal with his whining, so

hurry up.” He shrugged, turning back and continuing to walk forward, leaving us behind him stunned.

“Is this what Magnor meant by dinner?” I asked, looking at Theo, whose cheeks were blazing red.

“No Cutie Pie, but I will leave the explaining for another day. Let’s jet. I don’t want to deal with your father right now,” he whined, tightening his hold on my hand before he began speed walking forward, tugging me along as he went. I grinned but didn’t argue, kinda not wanting to deal with it either.

“Bru- Ree. Bru- Ree. Bru, Bru, Bruuuuu.” Arielle began singing away happily and I sighed, knowing she must have figured something happened between Theo and I.

Magnor snapped his fingers, a portal appearing before him. He waited for us to catch up. “Good job today, you two. Go home and rest,” Magnor encouraged, giving me a proud smile before lifting his hand to stroke my head.

I smiled back at him. “Thanks, Magnor.”

“Thank you, Master Magnor.” Theo smiled.

“BRU!” Arielle cheered before she continued singing away, not missing a beat. We walked into the portal. I was a little excited that we’d passed our second trial.

I was even more excited to nap, however, and a little part of me hoped Theo would be my sparkling snuggle buddy.

Trial Three and Strengthened Love

“**A**RIELLE!” I commanded, dropping to the ground to avoid the five-foot tall bear that leapt at me, his claws narrowly missing me.

The bear skidded to a stop, turning around without losing momentum as he charged towards me for another attempt.

He didn't even get close; Arielle crashed into him, her leg hitting its side with so much power, he flew into the air. She'd used the attack to push herself up and she flipped in the air before her flaming wings burst out of her back.

Multiple magic circles appeared across the sky, sending beams of fire at the stampede of bears coming at us from all sides.

Cairus and Caio appeared from the forest in their tiger forms with the two orbs we needed. One was orange, which was in Caio's mouth and the other orb was blue which Cairus held in his mouth. They skidded to a stop, presenting the orbs to me. I quickly took both orbs out of their mouths, holding them securely.

They moved to stand protectively on either side of me. Then they both roared in unison, large magic circles forming beneath the ground, one in a gold-red color beneath Caio and a blue-purple one beneath Cairus. Ice shards began to rain down

on the approaching crowds while fireballs shot out from behind Caio, attacking the bears who were trying to dodge the ice shards.

Arielle flew higher up in the air and I took a calming breath, closing my eyes. I held the orbs protectively against my chest while I concentrated a large amount of mana, knowing Arielle would need it for the next attack.

“Arielle!” I called out when my mana was high enough for her to initiate the final blow. She nodded, raising her hands in the air and closing her eyes. Her blazing wings doubled in size, stretching out in multiple colors. She looked like a blazing rainbow as a vibrant glowing bow and arrow appeared in her hands.

The neon orange and gold weapon burned with intensity and caught the attention of the bears, distracting them for a moment. Arielle raised the weapon in the air, loading the arrow and aiming upward. She pulled back on the bow, chanting something under her breath before letting go.

The arrow shot straight up, disappearing from everyone’s sight. The bears looked confused, their attention wandering back to us, who’d also been distracted and had stopped our onslaught of attacks. Well that is, everyone was distracted but me, since I knew exactly what was about to happen.

The sky suddenly darkened and seconds later, multiple flaming arrows began to rain down, crashing down to the earth. The bears screamed in agony, being pierced all at once, over and over again as the rain of arrows continued. Cairus and Caio cuddled next to my feet, looking a little spooked out by the immense show of power. I knelt down to comfort them, placing the orbs at my feet so I could pet them both, while my eyes stayed focused on the sky and Arielle’s attack. She was

breathing hard but her eyes blazed with power. Her neon dark purple hair with pink highlights whipped back and forth from the force of the wind and power brewing around her.

When I saw no more movement, I decided to call off the attack. *Arielle. Enough.*

She snapped her fingers and just like that, the arrows stopped and the sky returned to normal. She slowly lowered to the ground, landing quietly as her burning flames extinguished. The siren went off and the intercom clicked before a voice spoke. “Passed.”

We sighed in relief and the dead bears slowly faded away as the once-battered environment healed as if nothing had happened. Arielle walked up to me and I gave her a weak smile before I leaned forward.

“Ah. Celestia!” she called out, surprisingly catching me in time before I fell. Caio’s and Cairus’ whimpers could be heard but I felt so groggy, just needing a moment to keep my eyes closed and wait for the dizziness to past.

In seconds, another pair of arms held my shoulders and helped Arielle lower me to the ground. “Celestia, can you hear me?” Caio’s serious voice called out.

“Dearest?” Cairus questioned.

“Let me shift back. I’m taking a lot of energy from her,” Arielle announced, her voice filled with worry. I could feel the magic in the air as she shifted back and I sighed in relief, feeling a little better at the sudden addition of energy that began to flood back into my body.

“I’m...fine. Just need a moment,” I confessed.

“Is she okay?” Othello’s worried voice spoke. I heard footsteps approaching us at a fast pace.

“Bru....” Arielle’s quiet response made me lift my hand, knowing exactly where she sat without the need to open my eyes. I slowly pet her, hoping it would reduce her worry.

“I’m just really groggy,” I admitted.

“We should take her to the clinic to be checked,” Cairus suggested.

“Ya. Cutie Pie has been really groggy in the morning lately. Not to mention she’s been sleeping longer and longer,” Caio added.

“Cutie Pie?” Othello asked.

“Dearest,” Cairus replied as if Othello would know that nickname instead.

“Bru,” Arielle huffed.

“Oh, Ms. Rainbow. She’s been sleeping more but still feels weak and is incoherent when she wakes?” Othello confirmed.

“Yes. That’s what Finn, Theo, Hunter, and Orion have observed this week,” Caio explained.

“She takes afternoon naps with us too and she’s still really weak when she wakes as if she hadn’t slept at all to begin with,” Cairus added.

“You guys...are exaggerating,” I mumbled.

Sure, the last couple of days had been really exhausting but I thought maybe it was because of the trials, but they hadn’t drained my magic to the point of me feeling this tired. Even after hours of sleep and taking naps, nothing seemed to be working. I’d slept twenty hours yesterday, not even waking for lunch or dinner.

In fact, I hadn't been eating a lot at all. I would have rather got the extra time to snooze than to eat a meal. Orion scolded me about it this morning, saying he'd spoon feed me if I missed even one more meal.

"I'll ask Miona to take a look at her. Orlando isn't on campus right now to take a look and Magnor went on an emergency trip this morning and won't be back until the next trial. Let's get Ms. Rainbow to the clinic," Othello suggested.

"Who's Miona?" the twins said in unison.

"Ms. Arcadia," I mumbled, trying not to nod off but failing miserably.

Arielle moved from my hand and in seconds her head was brushing my cheek over and over soothingly.

"Bru..." she whimpered. *"I'm sorry, Mistress."*

I don't get why you're apologizing, Arielle. I'm fine. You did a really good job. We passed thanks to you. Don't be worried. I think...I will just take a quick nap.

"Bru-Ree," she replied. *"Okay. I love you. Please be okay...don't leave me."*

I'll never leave you. That was the last thing I thought before I fell unconscious.

* * *

"Bru. Bru. Bru. Bru,"

"Don't worry, Arielle. Celestia's experiencing exhaustion and malnutrition. She needs to sleep in order to recover faster. When she wakes up, I'll make sure she eats a nice warm meal

and goes right back to sleep. At least the IV is helping ensure she gets enough fluid in her.”

I stirred, letting out a weak moan as I turned slightly, my mind trying to figure out why Arielle sounded so sad. I really disliked when she was upset. The thought she was troubled by something made it hard for me to go back to sleep, even if my body desperately wanted me to.

“Celestia?” a familiar voice questioned. I didn’t reply for a while, debating whether to stay awake for the sake of figuring out what was worrying Arielle, or if I should head back to sleep.

“Bru....” Arielle chirped quietly, and once again, the motivation to check on her was strong enough to help me open my eyes. My vision was blurry at first, slowly coming into focus for me to see Faelia sitting on my right, right next to the bed I was in. Arielle was on her shoulder but immediately flew down to land right next to my face so she could nuzzle right next to my cheek. She began whimpering away, her small chirps making me concerned.

“Why is Arielle so worried? Did someone die?” I asked, totally confused.

“No one died. She’s worried about you,” Faelia answered.

“Me? Why? Oh...Hi Faelia,” I started asking questions before I realized I hadn’t greeted her, which was a little rude of me. She gave me an appreciative smile as she nodded her head.

“Afternoon, Celestia. She’s worried because you fainted after the trial due to exhaustion and malnutrition,” Faelia revealed.

“Fainted? I don’t remember fainting,” I added. Everything was kind of foggy and I really was unsure what had happened.

“You fell unconscious after Othello arrived on the scene after you passed the trials. Twin Two carried you with Twin One explaining everything to Miona while she was giving you treatment,” Faelia summarized.

“Oh,” I replied, looking to my right. I spotted an IV pole, following the clear tubing to see a little needle placed in my arm which was connected to the long clear tubing linked to the bag of clear fluid.

“Bru.” Arielle snuggled as close as she could before she relaxed, quickly falling asleep. I lifted my right hand to stroke her softly, feeling bad that I’d been worrying her.

“Have you been sleeping, Celestia?” Faelia questioned.

“Yes. Too much actually,” I confessed.

“Arielle says you have DEM. Sia, was it? Has she been taking over when you sleep?” Faelia inquired.

“Um...no. Not lately. Before we arrived at Aslan, she would every night but now, not really. I’ve been assuming she just didn’t want to tire me out,” I confessed. I didn’t know for sure, but that was usually the reason why she’d stay absent for a longer period of time.

Faelia looked deep in thought, crossing her arms. “I don’t know what it would be then. I guess everyone will just have to keep an eye on you to make sure you’re in good health. Your men were worried.”

“Where are the guys?” I asked, curious now that she’d brought them up.

I felt bad for worrying them. It totally hadn't been my intention. I wanted them to know I was okay, already picturing their worried expressions.

“There's a test in class. You were excused but the rest of them had to attend. It a little lengthy, so they won't be back for awhile. Miona did say I should get her when you woke up and that if you're strong enough to go back home, you can. Of course, I won't let you go alone so I'll escort you back,” she reassured me.

“You don't have to,” I whispered, not wanting to be a burden to her.

She laughed. “I want to, Celestia. I know we haven't gotten any time to do what friends do, but once you've completed your trials, there will be plenty of girl time,” she reassured me.

“Okay. That would be pretty nice,” I confessed. The idea of having a female friend like Faelia really intrigued me and sounded like it would be fun. It was also nice that she was in a similar situation to mine, having more than one lover.

“Faelia, I have a question.”

“What would you like to know?” she asked; her eyes twinkled with delight as if she knew exactly what I wanted to ask.

“How are you able to share yourself with your men? Does it get easier with time? I just...feel I'm struggling to give them all enough time with everything that is happening. I'm also scared of disappointing them,” I confessed.

“Why would you disappoint them?” she asked.

“I don't know? What if I'm not strong enough or am unable to share myself properly amongst them?” I pressed,

lifting my eyes to stare into hers.

She held my gaze, taking a deep a breath before closing her eyes. She was silent for a while before she opened her eyes, a smile forming on her lips.

“Celestia. You truly underestimate how powerful you are. It kinda reminds me of myself when I too, felt I would disappoint my men. It takes time, Celestia. Your journey is only beginning and I won’t lie and say you won’t experience challenges, because you will. But those experiences are what will help you grow together. For both yourself and the men that have immense love for you, even if they themselves haven’t fully realized how much they care don’t think you aren’t good enough, because you are. Just believe in your love and know that nothing can tear you apart if you fight back and stand firm in the love you hold dear. That’s the best advice I can give you since it’s something I would have told myself a year ago,” she confessed with a bright smile.

I grinned. “Thank you, Faelia. That helps ease my worries a lot.”

“Anytime. Strengthen your love with your men, and never hesitate to be yourself. They fell in love with you and will continue to love you for the person you are.”

I nodded and sighed. “Why don’t you sleep a little more? I’ll wake you up and take you back before classes are done so we don’t need to deal with crowded halls,” Faelia suggested.

“That sounds great. I wouldn’t mind more rest,” I admitted.

Faelia nodded. “I’ll keep an eye on you. Just sleep.”

My eyes already felt heavy and I didn’t fight the darkness as it rose up to greet me.

As long as I'm true to myself, I can love my men with all my heart.

Unicorn Bliss

I lay in bed, staring at my phone as I watched the brunette being pressed against the glass window, her lover sliding his cock inside her. He began pounding into her while kissing her neck. She moaned loudly, begging him to go faster.

Faelia had walked me back, insisting I should rest while waiting for the guys to return. We'd exchanged numbers and she told me if I ever needed advice, she was only a call away.

Arielle had woken up momentarily but fell right back asleep. I let her rest in Hunter and Theo's room since she had a spare little nest there for her when she wanted to go listen to Theo's stories he would tell before bed.

I was tired, but I couldn't go to sleep. So instead, I decided to take advantage of the little alone time I had while the guys weren't here to please myself. With all my intimate interactions with the guys, I really needed some relief, especially after my back treatment with Theo and him biting me.

I continued to watch the show. A second guy showed up and positioned the girl in front of him. He slid his cock into her with ease before lifting her up. The first guy positioned himself at her backside, preparing his cock with some lube.

He slid into her anus and I lifted my an eyebrow, completely intrigued how they were fucking her so smoothly while also holding her up in that position. Their combined moans got louder and louder and I wondered if they would cum together or separately.

“Celestia.”

I flinched at the sound, which was next to my right ear. I whipped my head around to see Orion’s calm purple eyes meeting my wide panicked ones. I gawked at him while the video continued, choosing that exact moment to get loud as fuck.

“Yes, fuck me! I’m going to cum! Yes, yes, YE-”

I quickly pressed the button on the phone, closing the app and swung the device to land on Finn’s bed.

“Orion! What...how...I didn’t hear you...I...” I stuttered, my whole face felt like it was on fire, embarrassed to be caught watching porn.

“I said your name when I entered. You didn’t reply,” he replied. He went back over to the door, closing it quietly and locking it. *Aww fuck, that’s not a good sign. I bet he’s gonna lecture me.*

I glanced away, trying to avoid his gaze as he returned to where I now sat in just a t-shirt.

I can’t believe this. Orion caught me watching porn and I’m not even wearing a bra to hide my damn hard nipples. I might as well been laying naked for his arrival that I was too busy watching a brunette get banged by two hot guys to notice.

I noticed he wasn’t in his uniform, just in white jogger pants and a light purple shirt, giving me the impression he

must have been planning to train upstairs and came to check on me on his way.

I shuffled off the bed, walking over to the desk to try and distract myself, or at least look busy, which was probably even sillier. I waited for my heart to calm from its rapid pace.

I heard his footsteps approach but didn't move, my eyes glued to the wooden surface of our desk. I didn't know how to confront him after that embarrassing moment. *Oh hey, I know you just caught me watching my lovely graphic shows that were unexpectedly at the sex scene part right when you arrived. Totally wasn't watching a two-hour porn movie. Nope. Not at all.*

“Celestia,” Orion spoke quietly. I wanted so desperately to face him, but I was still trying to figure out a believable excuse and ignoring the fear in my heart that he'd think I was weird for watching porn.

“Blessed Love, turn around please?” he whispered. The desperate plea and use of that familiar nickname were what made me slowly turn around. I lifted my gaze to meet his calm expression.

I didn't understand why he didn't seem mad or freaked out. He lifted his hand to brush my hair out of my face, tucking a few strands behind my ear before brushing my cheek.

Then he tilted his head slightly and leaned in to claim my lips. The kiss was slow and gentle, reminding me of the first kiss we had back at Old Aslan in the closet.

He leaned back, to stare into my eyes. “Why do you look so scared?” he asked, giving me a troubled look.

“You...aren’t you mad...or weirded out about what you just saw?” I blurted out nervously.

“Why would I be mad?” He looked genuinely confused.

“Because...you just walked in on me watching...um...” I couldn’t even say the word, feeling ashamed all of a sudden. The only person who knew I watched that kind of thing was Arielle, but she was a girl and didn’t think it was a big deal. Being caught by a guy though, felt like I’d been caught sleeping with another person in bed.

“Watching porn,” he clarified and I slowly nodded, looking away. His hand moved down to grip my chin gently, moving my head so I couldn’t avoid his gaze any longer.

“What’s wrong with that?” he asked. I blinked, opening my mouth, ready to give him the multiple reasons why he could find something wrong with what just happened, but my mind went blank, leaving me speechless.

Orion sighed, removing his hand from my chin so he could slide both hands into mine, giving them a comforting squeeze.

“Celestia. There’s nothing wrong with watching porn,” he assured.

“But...” I began, but he quickly shook his head.

“You have needs just like any other shifter. I guess it’s kinda of all our fault for teasing you so often, but it’s not something you should feel ashamed about,” Orion concluded.

“I...but...well... you’re not mad?” I asked.

“Nope. That looked like a good one too,” he confessed, his cheeks tinged slightly red from his own confession. I gawked at him, totally blown away that my innocent looking Orion just complimented my porn and indirectly said it was okay for me

to watch it. *Maybe we'd be able to watch it together sometime? Oh my, that would be hot.*

“Where are the others?” I asked.

“Out. The twins know two of Faelia’s men who are brothers. They decided to catch up and dragged Finn, Hunter, and Theo along. I told them I’d join them later, but wanted to make sure you were okay,” he explained.

I smiled. “You weren’t going to go back, were you?”

He shrugged with a little grin. “Nope.”

I giggled, looking into his eyes and lifted my arms to rest on his broad shoulders. His hands landed on my hips and his gaze lowered to my neck.

“Theo’s bite still hasn’t faded yet?” Orion asked. We’d explained to them what had happened during the exam and how Theo had needed blood or he would have passed out. None of the guys seemed to mind, saying the little mark, which looked like a bat with a heart beneath it, was cute.

It was going to fade anyways so it wasn’t a big deal. I did like the placement though, making me wonder if Magnor would be fine with me getting a tattoo in the same spot.

“Not yet. Is it not healing properly?” I asked. I hadn’t been paying close attention to it. The area was still sensitive so I tried to avoid touching it unless I was bathing. But Finn had been teasing me all week about it and would purposely kiss the area when I wasn’t paying attention just to turn me on; then he would run away. *Finn and his damn teasing.*

“No, it’s fine. It’s cute,” Orion admitted, lowering his head and brushing over the area with his smooth lips.

I gasped at the touch which sent shivers through me, while his hands gripped my hips slightly, pinning me in place between him and the desk behind me.

“Still sensitive though,” he acknowledged, sounding amused as he pulled back to meet my wild eyes.

“Tease,” I mumbled and he chuckled. We shared another look and a thought came to my mind, realizing I had yet to confront him about the marks on my wrist.

“Orion. The marks on my wrist, are they going to disappear too?” I asked. It had already been seven weeks since that incident and the marking was still as vibrant as ever.

“Do you want them to?” Orion inquired. I could tell he was hiding something from the flicker of worry that flashed in his eyes.

“No,” I said adamantly. I truly loved them and I couldn’t ignore the warmth they sometimes gave me when I needed it the most. “But I want to know what it means and why you called me Blessed Love? You’ve used that name before...well, you did in my dream when I was trapped back in the washroom at Old Aslan,” I admitted, thinking back to the dream in question.

Orion was silent, looking hesitant about the question. He finally spoke up. “It’s called a blessed mark.”

“Blessed mark? Like how we have blessed lines?” I asked, unhooking my arms from around his neck to point to my spiral lines on my cheek.

“Something like that,” he agreed, speaking in a hushed tone like it was some type of secret.

“What does a blessed mark do? No, what does it mean to get one?” I questioned. I had one on each wrist so it had to

mean something. He remained quiet, looking away.

“Orion,” I pressed, sliding my hands into his and squeezing reassuringly. I didn’t like how scared he now looked, making feel like we’d just reversed roles.

“You’ll be mad if I tell you,” he whispered, still not meeting my eyes.

“You won’t know that until you tell me and it’s a little hard to get upset with you, Orion. You didn’t get mad catching your girlfriend watching porn.” I mumbled the second sentence and it made him smile a little.

“That’s different...and really hot, but don’t tell anyone I said that,” he confessed, turning his head to stare into my eyes. I smiled, leaning into him before I went on my tiptoes and kissed him.

He slowly closed his eyes and I followed suit, enjoying the serene kiss that I knew was delaying his confession, but I wanted to give him some comfort so I didn’t mind.

We slowly ended the kiss and he pressed his forehead against mine. “Blessed marks are what a shifter gives to someone they cherish,” he whispered.

My heart melted at his words, making me pull back to stare directly into his purple eyes. “That’s so nice. Why would I be mad about that?” I asked, confused.

“Because...well, from what I remember from when my mom explained it to me, a blessed mark is like a bonding. In some shifter populations, it’s referred to as mating. The male initiates the blessed mark on the female he wants to protect and claim as his,” Orion revealed.

I blinked and slid my hands out of his to lift my wrists and look between the two markings. “I have two though?” I

pointed out.

“I’m aware,” he replied, his face growing even redder.

“What does two mean?” I asked.

“Two blessed marks from the same shifter means the male is giving up his right to marry any other female but the one he marked,” he revealed, waiting nervously for me to respond. I didn’t, completely speechless by his words so he continued his explanation.

“The marking in return protects the female in different ways, depending on the shifters and if they’re compatible. Some are able to rid darkness or prevent certain powers from hurting you while also serving its purpose to tell other shifters you’re off the market. In alicorn tradition, you give them to the woman you’ll marry so other alicorns know she’s yours. Only the male can approve of the female being with more than one shifter. If he’s comfortable with those individuals, that’s when she can gain blessed marks from them as well.”

He took a deep breath and looked into my eyes. “When the Forsaken was trying to overtake you, it started at your wrists. I knew if I did kill it, you’d already be tainted and die by the time the professors got to us. I couldn’t afford that. I didn’t want to lose another person I cared about. I just couldn’t allow the world to take yet another person I loved away from me. I didn’t know how blessed marks worked, but I just wished as hard as I could that I could protect the woman I loved and that I vowed to protect and serve her for all the years I lived on this earth. I didn’t think it would lead to being a bonding of sorts, especially the kind resulting in two blessed marks, but in the end, I didn’t care. You were alive, not at 100%, but you were breathing and was conscious long enough for help to arrive. I

don't know if my actions will backfire later, but I'm willing to accept those consequences when they come," he concluded.

"But...what would happen if I said I didn't want this?" I asked.

He lowered his gaze and swallowed. "Then I'd protect you from afar. I would let you love whoever you liked. I don't like being in control of who you love, but I didn't know I'd make two markings. But I'd just protect you and watch you be happy from afar," he confirmed sadly.

I had to pause in my thinking, so stunned by his selflessness that my brain couldn't wrap itself around the reality of the situation. "Does this mean you'll never be able to love anyone else?" I asked, already guessing what the answer would most likely be.

"Correct. Once an alicorn has proclaimed his love for someone, that's it for them. Our magic is used to create the blessed marks and can be called upon by the female, regardless if she means to or not. The male can't unbind from her or he'll die. If he's discarded, he'll still protect her until his time upon the earth is over or he dies from loneliness. All types of unicorns need to have some type of purpose in life. If they feel neglected or useless, they slowly spiral into depression and eventually die either because of unknown causes or..." He trailed off.

"Suicide," I whispered, my past suddenly making a bit more sense.

I had felt worthless and decided it would have been okay for me to die because no one needed me. Magnor coming into my life gave me a new purpose and when I became Arielle's Mistress, that gave me another role which helped me accept that I deserved to live.

“Orion...” I tried to think of something to say but was struggling.

He gave me a sad smile before lowering to his knees, making my eyes grow wide in shock. “I’m sorry for taking that right from you. I panicked and instead of telling you right away...I just couldn’t. The others kind of know what the markings are but not the full extent of them. I’d done some research and ended up asking Magnor about it and he’d directed me to the right resources to find what I needed. I told him I’d confront you when it was a good time, but then the trials came along and everything has kind of been all over the place. Plus you’ve been really weak lately and I’m worried it might be because of what I did.”

“How could giving me blessed marks be the reason for my exhaustion?” I asked.

“It’s just a theory and Finn and I are looking into, but we feel you’re still a little tainted from the attack. However, the blessed markings seem to be holding it off. We don’t know, because on your examinations, it shows you’re perfectly fine, so my theory could be wrong. I just...want to protect you, Celestia. You’re so kind and you liked me without hesitation. You didn’t criticize my hair or the way I dressed. You didn’t pester me about what shifter I was or what power I could bring to the team. You just cared...and loved me for who I was. That is more than enough for me to want to protect you for as long as I live. It’s not like I have anyone else to take care of,” he whispered, lifting his eyes to meet mine.

I blinked back tears, watching his purple eyes grow glossy. The pain was so strong in those beautiful orbs I just wanted to hug him. And that’s exactly what I did, kneeling down to wrap my arms around his neck and hug him as hard as I could.

I didn't care that my breasts pressed firmly against his chest, or how my shirt barely covered my ass. I just wanted him to know how loved he was, because I knew in my heart I couldn't live a life without him anymore. *I wouldn't let him disappear.*

"Orion, don't apologize," I whispered and he wrapped his arms around me. We didn't say anything for a long time, just holding one another and listening to our quiet breaths.

I eventually pulled away, sitting back on my heels and lifting my hands to cradle his face, hoping my face showed my seriousness.

"I don't despise you, nor do I hate you for what you did. For you to be willing to give away your rights to love another to save me...that means more than words can ever express. It proves to me that you were willing to sacrifice your happiness for me and I'm so grateful to you, Orion. Please don't go away," I whispered.

He slowly nodded, a tear escaping his eye to land on my index finger. "So...I can stay?" he asked and his voice was filled with such emotion, it felt as if someone was trying to rip my heart out.

"Yes, Orion Meadow, my Orion. You can stay by my side. We can eat cupcakes and you can continue to steal my hair ties. We can keep cuddling and maybe we'll watch a 'show' together." I smiled and he slowly copied my expression with a smile of his own.

"I love you, Celestia," he whispered, leaning in to kiss me. I responded immediately, kissing him back with force. If it weren't for my need to respond to his words, I wouldn't have broken the kiss.

“I love you too, Orion.”

We kissed one more time before getting to our feet. I leaned against the desk behind me. “So...Magnor was okay with the blessed marks?” I asked, trying to imagine his reaction.

“He knew what they were the moment he saw me carrying you before we entered the portal. I don’t know if your father knows what it is, though. Magnor said if you’re fine with it, then he approves,” Orion confirmed.

I smiled, feeling really happy by his confession. I didn’t mind that Father didn’t know yet. It seemed to not matter as much compared to Magnor’s acceptance, which sounded bad, but that was honestly how I felt about it.

“That’s a little exciting. Wait does that mean we’re married?” I asked.

He blushed, looking in deep thought. “Um. We don’t really follow unicorn tradition, so let’s say not really. Bonded, yes. Married...I’d rather give you a ring first at least,” he mumbled and I smiled at his sudden shyness.

“You’re the best, Orion,” I whispered, sliding my hands up his chest and wrapping them around his neck, pulling him down for a passionate kiss. He kissed me slowly at first, his hands landing on my hips and his body pinned me against the desk.

The kiss grew into something stronger, almost desperate, as our mouths moved of their own accord. I didn’t think, letting go of my fears and insecurities.

Orion was willing to give up his chance at love with someone else for me. He’d put himself second so I could be his first priority. That held so much weight in my heart that I

wouldn't let my doubts stop me from showing him how much I loved him.

It didn't matter if I was inexperienced. I'd just let my body do its own thing, because so far that was working just fine. Each kiss grew more and more intense, and our breathing escalated to panting and gasping as we tried to catch our breath, despite neither of us wanting to stop.

His hips angled forward, pressing his groin against my pelvis. I gasped, but was silenced by his lips once again. In seconds he lifted me up and set me on the desk. I hooked my legs around his waist, my pussy wet and throbbing.

He released my lip to kiss my neck, purposely sucking on the sensitive part where Theo had bitten me, making me moan louder than I expected while my back arched. It felt so good and I was losing myself in the magical bliss, loving how confident and in control Orion was in this moment. It was a big turn on and something I personally hadn't expected simply because he gave off the innocent appearance. *Not like I was one to talk.*

He pulled back and my hands unhooked from around his neck, lowering to the bottom of his shirt so I could slowly lift it up, my hands craving to feel his bare flesh.

He lifted his arms, allowing me to pull his shirt up and over his head. He flung it somewhere and let my hands press against his chest, starting at his shoulders and slowly sliding down to his pecs and then upper abs.

His low moan was music to my ears and I grew excited when he placed his hands on the band of his joggers. I unhooked my legs so he could lower the material with his boxers. I bit my lip hard, my eyes focused on his cock which was hard and seemed to twitch at my lingering gaze.

He gave me a moment and I took every available second to appreciate his naked body. I looked up at his handsome face, his purple eyes dark with desire and his lips swollen from our intense kisses. His cheeks were a light tinge of red and his long hair still looked as beautiful as ever. I lowered my eyes to his chest which rose and fell at a rapid pace due to him trying to catch his breath. His smooth pale skin was perfect, with not even a hint of hair on his chest. I lowered my gaze to his lower half and again appreciated his abs before focusing on his long length, which looked ready to slide into me just like they did in the porn shows.

Orion stepped forward, his eyes on my shirt. I knew that the thin white fabric was doing little good at this point, my nipples so hard they poked at the fabric, fully visible and defeating the purpose of me even wearing it.

I crossed my arms and gripped the bottom of my shirt, lifting it up in a slow movement and shivering at the way his eyes trailed down my naked body in worship.

“You’re so beautiful, Celestia,” he whispered.

I smiled. “And you’re incredibly handsome,” I whispered back. His hand reached out and ran his fingers through my locks before gripping my hair gently, stabilizing my head as he pressed his lips firmly to mine.

The fierce kiss took my breath away and in seconds I was in his arms and being lowered to the bed, my head resting on my body pillow.

I didn’t know what to think, wondering if we’d go straight into the moment of sex or if we’d have some foreplay to heighten the first experience.

“My instincts are telling me we don’t have a lot of time, but I don’t want to rush this for you,” he whispered, crawling up so he hovered over me, lowering his head to kiss my neck slowly. I moaned, letting my eyes close while my mind tried to focus on his words, instead of his hand that was slowly trailing down my side and stopped at my thigh.

“Then we shouldn’t delay. You aren’t rushing anything. I feel we’ll get the chance to do other things in the future.” I purred and he grinned, the confidence in his smile sent waves of warmth through me and made my stomach flip in anticipation for our future activities, but first I had to focus on the present.

“This is your first time?” he asked, and I slowly nodded. A beautiful smile formed on his lips and leaned in to kiss me, giving me a tender kiss before pressing his forehead against mine.

“Then I’ll make it as pleasurable as I can,” he whispered against my lips. His hand that rested on my thigh moved between my legs, teasing my entrance with his fingers.

I closed my eyes and moaned, spreading my legs wider in hopes he wouldn’t continue to torment me, and would slide his fingers inside me. It was interesting how different it felt to have your lover tease you with their fingers than it did when you did it on your own with masturbation.

He didn’t delay, my moans and my movement enough to let him know it was okay for him to slide a finger inside my wet pussy. I sighed in relief, enjoying how his finger slid in and out with ease thanks to my wetness. He pumped his finger in and out a few times, testing out if I was okay before adding another finger, which made me moan as I arched my back slightly.

He took advantage of my reaction, lowering his head till his mouth latched onto my breasts. “Ah. Orion!” I whimpered, his tongue tracing along my hard nipple while a good portion of my breast was still captive by his mouth.

His fingers inside me began to thrust faster, pausing every so often to so he could tease my bud with his thumb, making me moan and whimper at the alternating motion. I was getting close, my breathing growing more rapid and my moans more frequent. My pussy began to clench around his fingers, making it feel really tight. He focused solely on his finger movement, releasing my breast and increasing his pace until I couldn't handle it any longer.

My body tensed as my back arched. I came hard around his fingers which were still deep inside me.

“Wow,” I breathed, trying to catch my breath after my explosive orgasm. Orion grinned, slowly pulling out his fingers, which were coated in my cum.

“The way you moan really excites me, Celestia,” he whispered, lowering his hand covered in my juices to his cock, wrapping around it.

He positioned himself at my entrance and I took a nervous breath, my eyes looking up to meet his. “It's going to hurt a little in the beginning, but I promise it will feel good by the end. If you want me to stop, just say the word,” he reassured me and I gave him a firm nod.

I knew it would hurt in the beginning, but I was willing to take all of him and was sure he'd make the first experience enjoyable.

He slowly inched his way into me, pausing for a moment at the bit of resistance. His eyes lifted to look at me one more

time. I smiled, encouraging him to continue. Instead, he leaned forward, using one arm to hold himself up. He kissed me hard before sliding the rest of the way.

I whimpered into his mouth, the sound muffled as my body grew tense because of the initial pain, but I bore with it, knowing it would pass in a few moments. I focused on kissing Orion, the slow tenderness of the exchange helping numb the pain which was already beginning to dim with each second that passed. Eventually, I broke the kiss, urging him to move.

I wanted this so bad and I didn't want to be interrupted, my body desperate to have this moment with just Orion.

"I'm going to start moving, Celestia," he whispered, his voice strained.

"Okay." I hummed and he pulled back slowly before sliding inside me. Slowly out, then in, over and over again until I needed more.

"Faster, Orion," I begged, opening my eyes to give him a pleading look, knowing if I didn't he might question if it was a good idea.

He did exactly what I wanted, increasing the pace of his thrusts, which made me moan and groan at the feel of his cock filling my tight pussy, replacing the lingering pain with pleasure with each stroke.

"So good, Celestia. So tight and hot," Orion said with a husky voice as he pumped in and out of me. He ended up leaning back down to kiss me again while our hips continued to move together, and his thrust got ever faster and deeper.

"Does it feel good?" Orion breathed.

"Yes...so fucking good...ah. Don't stop, please!" I begged, not even thinking of what I was saying. I was so lost

in the multiple sensations, loving the way each stroke made my breasts bounce and the sound of moans that escaped my lips. It was even more of a turn on to hear Orion's rapid breathing and his moans as he thrust deeply in me.

I was getting close to an orgasm, but I wanted to wait, wanting to hold it long enough for Orion and me to cum together.

"Orion," I begged, gasping. I bit my lip as my pussy fluttered around his cock, my orgasm so close I didn't think I'd be able to hold it much longer.

"I'm so close, Celestia. A bit more." He grunted, his moans growing louder as he pounded into me. His fingertips dug into my skin as he gripped my hips, his cock so deep I could feel the base of his shaft. "Cum for me, my Blessed Love."

One final thrust and the sweet command was all it took to lose all control. I came hard around his cock, crying out in ecstasy. My pussy clenched tightly around his erection and he cursed, shooting his hot cum inside me. It felt amazing and my body trembled so hard before I collapsed onto the sheets beneath me, trying my best to catch my breath. Orion fell forward, using his hands to rest on each side of me, hovering over me while he caught his breath.

His cock was still deep inside me and he ever so slowly pulled out, making me whimper in both pleasure and pain.

"Fuck, sorry Celestia. I lost control," he admitted. I opened my eyes to see the regret in his expression. I leaned up to kiss him and he moaned in response, deepening the kiss.

"It's fine. That was amazing," I reassured him, using my teeth to tug at his lower lip. He kissed me one more time

before he rested on my left side, pulling me into his arms.

“Um...aren't we supposed to do the whole protected sex thing?” I questioned, just now remembering he didn't put on a condom and he'd cum quite a bit.

“Unicorn shifters don't get pregnant the same way as other shifters do. Takes a few times from the same shifter in a certain time span before you can potentially get pregnant,” he disclosed.

“Where did you learn about that?” I asked. He was quiet and I groaned. “Do not tell me...” I trailed off and he chuckled before kissing my forehead.

“One-hour lengthy sex talk with him. He told me if I made you cry, he'd kick my ass and ‘accidentally’ feed me to the Forsaken.”

“That's horrible, but Magnor wouldn't really do that.” I hummed.

“I won't take my chances,” Orion whispered, stroking my head gently. “Get some rest. The guys will be here soon, but the door is locked.”

“That's why you locked the door,” I mumbled before I yawned.

“Of course.”

“Shouldn't we shower?” I suggested.

“Later. We can take a nice bath,” he offered.

“A glitter bath.” I giggled.

“Of course. Only fitting for an alicorn and unicorn.” Orion hummed.

I closed my eyes, resting my head on his chest. “Night, Orion.”

“Night, my Blessed Love, and thank you,” he whispered.

Trial Four- Fading Away

“I don’t really feel good,” I confessed as we readied ourselves for the next trial.

Finn walked up to me, pulling me into a warm embrace. “What’s wrong, Cutie Pie?”

“I just don’t feel right. Maybe I’m just tired?” I suggested. Since the last trials, I’d been struggling with exhaustion. Magnor was looking into it after Ms. Arcadia had conducted an intense head to toe scan. It would take a week for the results and to find out what could be happening with me.

Again, I showed no signs of turning to a Forsaken, but Ms. Arcadia did emphasize I needed a break because of my exhaustion, especially after passing out after the third trial.

On the charts, it showed I was sleep deprived, but I’d been sleeping just fine. I decided to tell the guys to check in with Sia the next time she took over, but Orion and Cairus had stayed up all night to watch me for the rest of the week and Sia hadn’t taken over once.

I just wanted a break at this point, but with the next trial only moments away and the final trial occurring in a week’s time, I realized I wouldn’t get the luxury to rest for a while. Not unless I wanted a ticket straight out of Aslan.

The student population had literally been cut in half by this point, and from overhearing Othello's conversation during my examination with Ms. Arcadia, another 25% of those numbers would drop out or be eliminated before the fourth trial had begun.

The professors had been right. Old Aslan was nothing compared to New Aslan, and as powerful as I knew I was, I questioned if I'd make it through this next trial with as shitty as I currently felt.

"We can drop out," Finn suggested, his face full of worry. I knew he meant those words and I gave him a small smile, hoping it gave him enough comfort.

I shook my head adamantly. "No. We can't leave the others. Team Misfit consists of all of us. I won't let my tiredness get in the way...I hope."

He stared me in the eyes for a long moment before slowly nodding. "Okay, but if it's too much for you, tell me."

I hugged him tightly, afraid of what was to come, but we didn't have any more time. The siren sound went off, alerting us to enter the designated room.

Trial Four would be in a simulation room. We would have to solve some type of problem or reverse the situation that occurred. Examples from past exams ranged from figuring out how someone was murdered or a simple math question. The scenarios all varied and were all chosen by different professors who got assigned a stack of students. We had no idea who chose our trial, but I just hoped it wouldn't be too difficult.

Finn slipped his hand into mine before we moved out of our embrace and took a few calming breaths. We then walked towards the open door, and into the empty white room, looking

over our shoulders to watch as the door shut. I swallowed, a feeling of dread running through me but I had to remain calm for the sake of Finn and the others. I couldn't let Team Misfit down after all we'd been through so far. After this was one more trial which I assumed would be with Orion since, after this trial with Finn, I would have been partnered with all the other guys, which was interesting, since that almost never happened from Faelia's experience.

A loud sound went off, the signal informing us the exam had started. We prepared ourselves for the worst, Finn's hand tightly gripping mine. I'd dealt with falling and crashing into a sea of shark shifters with Hunter, dealing with the struggle of not losing consciousness in the Trial with Theo, and an intense battle with multiple raging animals with Cairus and Caio, so I had no idea what to expect.

The seconds ticked by and nothing happened. Finn and I looked at each other slowly in confusion. "Um...is the room broken?" I wondered.

"I don't know. Maybe there's a delayed reaction," Finn suggested. I glanced around the white room, frowning at the plain walls which reminded me of a mental ward.

"This room gives me the creeps," I announced, looking back to Finn who I realized was no longer standing there. *What the fuck?*

"Finn?" I called. I felt his hand still in mine. His now-invisible grip tightened as if he was begging me to not let go. My breathing picked up as the walls began to bleed a sickly black: the color that reminded me of the Forsaken.

I stood my ground, even though my body trembled with my growing fear. *It's just an illusion, Celestia. That's all it is.*

Just like they did in the other exams. Illusions to break you while you're at your weak point. I can go through with this.

I squeezed Finn's hand tightly even though I still couldn't see him to give me the reassurance my mind and heart needed. I glanced around the room once more, trying to find some way out or a clue to solving this puzzle, but there was nothing that caught my eye

"We meet again."

I slowly turned my head at the sound to where Finn once stood. My eyes landed on white eyes; the man from my previous nightmares was here in the room with me.

"What are you doing here? I'm not dreaming!" I shouted.

"Correct. You're not dreaming. Or are you? I'm unsure, my queen." He grinned happily.

"Don't call me that! I don't belong to you," I declared.

"Really? So you belong to that pitiful excuse of an unicorn?" He huffed, slowly approaching me. I narrowed my eyes at him, watching him stalk around me like a predator ready to attack its prey.

"Don't insult Orion, because you're nothing close to him," I snarled.

The man laughed. The sickening sound made my stomach flip, making me want to vomit. "My Queen, this world has blinded you. Don't you understand that you belong at my side? You've always been destined to stand beside me. I've waited decades for your rebirth. I won't let you be taken from me again," he insisted.

"Reborn? Sorry buddy, but I doubt I've lived before this and I don't really believe in the reincarnation stuff. So why

don't you go away?" I grumbled, looking away from him. I felt Finn tug my hand, the gesture making me wonder if he was checking to ensure I was okay. I tugged back, tightening my hold once more. I didn't know what he might have been seeing, but his hands felt clammy and cold, even though we were gripping one another like our lives depended on it.

"Would you believe me if I told you the other half will fade away?" he questioned.

I froze, slowly lifting my head to meet his gaze, which made him smile with glee. "What are you referring to?"

"The side of you that has been protecting you from my visits at night for the last two months. The beautiful side of you that is so selfless to suffer through my constant suffering and the hymns of my people. The part of you that is fading piece by piece, because you are getting stronger. The side of you that belongs to me, that you're killing because you'd rather love that pathetic unicorn with wings who can't even defeat me alone," he snarled.

Sia? He can't be talking about Sia...no. Why would she be fading?

The man laughed as if listening to my thoughts. "You don't know? I guess she can't tell you and not many people have lived long enough with Dual Essence Mortality to understand. Why don't I tell you the tiny detail they never explain to those who have such a condition?" He walked around me until he stood right before me, lifting my chin up with his cold hand that made me shiver and teeth begin to chatter. I could FEEL the darkness leaking off him, the sinister evil that cloaked his body and the hollow white eyes which pierced through me like he was looking into my very soul.

“When the dominant personality grows stronger, the other begins to fade. Little by little, piece by piece, the side of them disappears until there’s nothing left,” he whispered. I looked at him with wide eyes, trying to ignore his words that sounded far too true. Something in the back of my mind told me he wasn’t lying and that scared me even more.

“No. You’re lying.” I refused to accept what he was telling me.

“I am not, my Queen. Why would I lie to you?” he asked in a sympathetic tone.

“You’re not making sense. One minute you’re saying Sia is your love, but the next you’re calling me your queen?!” I shouted.

“Because that’s what it has come down to. Day by day, Sia keeps me company. She endures the hymns of my people and listens to my torments, but no matter how scared she is, she stands there with the perfect smile. But she will eventually disappear, and in the end, will simply be a part of you. When she disappears, the part of her will become one with you and her existence will leave your mind. You’ll never remember her. So, you’re still my queen. Sia is just my temporary lover. Isn’t that kinda what you’re doing now? Using her to run from your destiny with me?” he questioned me.

I shook my head from side to side, wishing I had both hands so I could punch the smirk off his face. “Never! I wouldn’t use Sia. She’s a part of me. She loves me and I love her! I’m not a user like you.” I snapped.

“But, my Queen, aren’t you doing just that? She protects you from my nightmares, leaving her so exhausted that it’s now affecting your health. Don’t you feel weaker as each day passes? Aren’t you falling asleep more and more? My Queen,

the truth does hurt, but I would not lie to you,” he whispered, leaning in closer.

I moved my head away, tugging at Finn’s hand, wishing he’d let go. I wouldn’t let this man kiss me and I sure as hell wouldn’t believe his lies.

“I won’t believe you! Fuck off!” I cursed, wishing this exam was over. The black liquid that had pooled down the walls had reached my feet and tendrils began to wrap around my ankles. I cringed and a whimper escaped me from the chill touch. I gritted my teeth as I tried to fight off my sudden weakness. *I can’t lose. The guys need me to win this. I won’t fail them.*

“Why don’t we ask her?” he offered.

What?

“C...Celestia?”

My body grew rigid hearing the voice identical to my own. The man moved away from me so I could see Sia standing before me. Her eyes were filled with shock and fear as she took a long look at me, noticing the tendrils that had wrapped around my ankles.

Her gaze slowly lifted and landed on the man standing where Finn had once been. Her eyes grew wide as saucers. “Don’t you dare hurt her!” she screamed with rage.

“Oh, my love. That is not how you greet me. We’re just playing a game. I won’t hurt your precious angel,” he defended, leaning in till his lips pressed softly to my neck. I gasped in pain as a wave of cold air rattled through me and for two seconds, it felt like there was no air in my lungs.

“STOP! Please!” Sia begged, tears already forming in her eyes as she reached out to me. The man grinned, pulling away.

I gasped for air and began to cough, struggling to stay on my feet.

“That sounds better. I love when you’re more submissive, my love. I wish my queen over here would do the same by following your example. Then we wouldn’t have to use such tactics.”

I was catching my breath and opened my eyes to meet Sia’s scared ones. “What do you want? Just don’t hurt her,” Sia negotiated.

The man laughed. “I would never hurt my queen, but I told her the truth.”

Sia froze, her lip trembling as she slowly met my weak gaze. My gut dropped as we stared into each other’s eyes. Her expression told me all I needed to know.

“You’re...fading,” I whispered. She tried to speak and I could practically see the gears her mind turning as she tried to figure out some type of excuse that I would believe, but I knew could read her as easily as I could myself and the look Sia had on her face was full of guilt, giving her away.

“Celestia...it’s my duty,” she whispered.

“Duty? I...I need you though! You’re a part of me. Why do you have to fade? Why didn’t anyone say anything?!” I snapped.

“No one knew,” she whispered, but I could tell she was lying.

“Liar,” I whispered.

She sighed. “I’ve hurt you enough, Celestia. Now you need to wake up. Finn needs you. Well...he will need you. Please survive this. It’s nothing but a test, an illusion. This

isn't real. Just like me." She whispered the last part as tears rolled down her cheeks.

I wanted to reply, my mouth opened to speak or even scream, but the words got caught in my throat. My eyes grew wide, watching Sia begin to fade, little by little, particle by particle. She lifted her hands, which trembled as she continued to fade.

Her eyes met mine. "It's a test, Celestia."

"No...you're fading," I squeaked, tugging over and over for Finn to let go, but his grip was like stone. I began to scream, needing to save Sia. Was it weird to have such a strong desire to save a part of yourself? To know that without that part, you'll realize the hollowness in your heart and to understand that without that part, you'd be incomplete.

I tugged and screamed, watching Sia disappear until only her head remained, her hair floating upward as it too began to fade into mere particles.

"Celestia. Just trust me. The reaper wants you to believe this. He wants to break you so you become a Forsaken. You're tainted, Celestia. You have to fight it or you'll become exactly what he wants: the Queen of Darkness," she whispered and just like that, her image was gone, nothing but specks of light falling to the floor, then disintegrating into nothing.

I was speechless, my mind trying to understand everything, but it just couldn't keep up any longer. I screamed and cried while I tried to stay standing, my hand still in Finn's invisible hold.

"It hurts, doesn't it, my Queen? Losing someone you care about, even if that someone is a part of who you are. Or should

I say, who you used to be?” the man Sia called the reaper whispered, coming back to face me.

I couldn't look up at him, my eyes locked on the place where Sia once stood. *If this was just an illusion, why did it hurt so much? Why did the pain, which felt like little pins and needles, poke at every part of me, especially my heart that hammered so hard against my chest until I thought it would eventually stop?*

The reaper sighed, reaching out to tilt my head up as he leaned forward, his eyes looking directly into mine while I felt the tendrils move up and begin to wrap around my body.

“Time is up, my Queen, but do not fear. I'll be sure to relieve you of that hindrance, so you're all mine once again. I won't let anyone have you this time. I'll love you no matter how much hate you hold in your heart for me,” he whispered and then he kissed me.

I closed my eyes, trying to focus on the fact that this was all an illusion. I squeezed Finn's hand so hard I wondered if I was cutting off his circulation. My legs grew weak and I couldn't support myself any longer, falling forward.

Something wrapped around my waist, stopping me from hitting the ground. “Celestia?! Cutie Pie, stay with me,” Finn begged.

I struggled to breathe, tears rolling down my cheeks as I stared at the now white floor. Arms encircled me and I whimpered, unsure if it was the Forsaken or Finn's actual arms holding me.

“Cutie Pie, please. Don't make that sound. I won't hurt you, Please believe me,” he whispered and his trembling voice

was the only thing that helped me realize I wasn't in the illusion anymore.

I slowly lifted my head, realizing Finn was cradling me in his lap. His green eyes were filled with tears and his cheeks were flushed and tears ran down his face. His lips trembled and his eyes held immense fear, making me wonder if mine looked the same.

My heart ached for him, even though I was still struggling with the pain that was trying its best to cripple me. I tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come out and the frigid sensation of the reaper's lips on mine made me afraid to even use my lips.

Finn stared at me for a long time and without any words, leaned in very slowly. I wanted to push him away, knowing he was about to kiss me, but I couldn't do it. I secretly wanted him to kiss me, hoping it might rid me of the cold that flowed through me and the fear that dug at my heart.

His eyes lifted to meet mine, waiting for me to say something, anything to stop him but I closed my eyes and used what little courage I had left to close the distance between us wanting to feel his warmth.

I didn't know what the purpose of this trial was, but at this point, I didn't care anymore. Finn's kiss was delicate while his free hand lifted to slowly stroke my head, each rub helping to bring me back to the surface and away from the dreadful memories of what just happened. We pulled away to stare at each other and I lifted my trembling hand to press against his cheek.

"You...didn't...let go," I whispered.

“And lose you? Never.” He cradled me into him. I didn’t know what he saw and I didn’t know if I’d ever find out, but whatever could have possibly turned Finn upside down was something that must have had a major impact on his life.

The siren sound went on and the door opened, the rest of Team Misfit charging in.

“Fuck. Finn, Celestia. What the fuck happened?!” Hunter cursed as he looked back forth between us.

“Not here,” Orion announced in a stern voice, causing the others to look at him. I could barely keep my eyes open now that the trial was over but I felt if I showed any form of weakness here, the reaper would somehow see and use it against me. *I can’t let him win. He already broke me, but he won’t see me at my lowest. I’ll stay awake. Yes. Until he can’t see me...till it’s safe.*

“Cutie Pie, can you stand?” Finn whispered.

I slowly nodded, trying to get up, but my hands and legs shook. Orion frowned, immediately coming over, and just like that, he scooped me up into his arms. I opened my mouth to argue, but his stern gaze shut me up before I even had a chance to speak. He blinked for a moment before his expression softened, regret filling his facial features.

“Celestia, don’t look so afraid,” he whispered.

I bit my bottom lip hard, trying to figure out some type of expression that would look better...happier? Maybe even stronger, but I just couldn’t manage it. He noticed my struggle and leaned in to whisper in my ear. “I know you’re scared. I understand what’s going on. Just stay awake a bit longer.”

I slowly nodded and he looked back at Finn, who was also struggling to remain standing. Hunter and Theo ended up

helping him. I tried to see his expression, but his eyes remained fixed on the ground, making me want to cry. He almost looked ashamed for showing weakness and though I had similar feelings of hopelessness running through me, I wanted to do something to help him. To reassure him that he did a good job.

I knew we had passed, but I couldn't get a grasp on what the purpose of the trial was. Orion began to move, the others following behind us as we exited the room and moved into the hall. I couldn't concentrate on what was going on around me, the sounds seemed dulled and the fast movement of healers and those who had survived the trial were running all over the place, trying to get as far away from the room as their legs could carry them.

I zoned everything out, focusing on my breathing and trying not to lose it. I felt like I was on the edge and was unsure if I wanted to remain there or fall over. My Sia would disappear. I was the queen of a madman who was some type of reaper and seemed to be a figment of my imagination. Finn was broken and I didn't know why. Even the slight thought of Arielle still recovering made me whimper as tears rolled down my cheeks.

“Shh, Celestia. Almost there, my Blessed Love. Please hang on a little longer,” Orion soothed. I did what he asked, the title he gave me helped me to hold back the flood of emotions that fought for freedom.

We reached a room and the door opened. Magnor greeted us with a shocked expression. One look at me made his expression turn grim. “Inside, now.” He gestured for us to enter and the guys all walked in before Magnor closed the door behind us. Orion carried me over to one of the sofas in

what looked like to be an office, slowly lowering me to the brown leather chair.

“Attend to Celestia. There’s something wrong,” Finn warned. I heard approaching footsteps before Magnor kneeled next to Orion, who held my hand.

“Celestia.” Magnor’s soft voice caught my attention. I lifted my gaze to meet his worried eyes. “What happened?”

How could I even explain that torturous experience? Where would I even start? I swallowed the lump in my throat and let the emotions go.

“Sia...going to fade away,” I whispered, tears rolling down my cheeks. Magnor looked surprised by my words and Orion looked just as shocked. I didn’t delay my explanation, knowing my body would give up on me any moment now.

“I’m his queen. Sia’s his love. She’ll disappear and leave me and I’ll just forget? Maybe everyone will forget. My poor Sia. She’s mine, yet she’ll fade. I’m the queen. He’ll hurt Orion. He’ll rid the world of the hindrance...he’ll get rid of everything important to me. Of course he will. He’ll take Sia...then Orion...then everyone I love. I’ll be left with nothing. Just...like...before.” I slowly began to panic as more tears rolled down my cheeks and I fought for air.

Orion and Magnor exchanged looks but I couldn’t concentrate, curling up into a ball and beginning to rock back and forth.

“I’m his queen. He’ll take her away. I’m his queen. She’ll vanish and leave me astray.” I sang quietly, the eerie tune slowly coming to my mind as the words I had once forgotten finally emerged like I’d never lost them.

“The darkness is coming...You all shall prepare. The darkness is coming...Your land will be bare. The people will cry and the earth will soon die, leaving nothing left to mourn. The darkness is coming...so prepare little one. For you will be our queen, and kill everyone. Every shifter, every human, all will be consumed. Alas, you will rule the new world, our Queen of Darkness, Celestia,” I sang in a mournful voice.

“Magnor,” Theo whispered, fear lingering in his voice.

“Caio, Cairus. Go get Orlando and Ms. Arcadia now. Hunter and Theo, take Finn straight home to rest. Orion, stay here,” Magnor ordered.

I kept singing as I rocked back and forth, feeling dizzy and exhausted, but afraid to sleep. *I was a coward. Maybe the reaper was right. Maybe I was using Sia to fight my own battles, ones I knew I would never be able to win on my own.*

“Celestia,” Magnor whispered. I lifted my tear-filled eyes to meet his sad ones. He lifted his fingers to my eye level. I glanced quickly at Orion, scared something bad was about to happen, but he squeezed my hand tightly.

“I’ll be right here,” Orion reassured me. How could his words mean so much to me, outweighing my internal battle of feelings while I tried to focus on the reality before me?

My attention returned to Magnor’s fingers and I had to concentrate with the little energy I had left to focus my blurred vision.

“Sleep,” Magnor whispered, snapping his fingers. Just like that, the world went dark.

To my great relief, the reaper wasn’t there to haunt me.

Don't Leave Me Too

~F *INN*~

“Finn! Open the fucking door or I’ll burn it to fucking ash!” Hunter shouted, banging on the door. I trembled on the floor, feeling extremely weak after vomiting three times already into the toilet. The thoughts and memories of everything that had happened continued to course through me like a movie on replay and I just couldn’t stop it from repeating no matter how hard I tried.

With each replay, I could feel the fear I had felt during the trial, watching my race go extinct before Celestia turned into a Forsaken. It seemed so fucking real, so vivid I almost vomited a fourth time thinking of it.

I laid on the cold tiled floor, my body trembling but I felt hot. I’d tried not to break down back there for the sake of Celestia, but watching her break down only contributed to the agony I was currently facing. I’d heard the rumors about this test, how intense and hard core it was and how it literally could break a person, but I hadn’t realized it would be that bad.

I never imagined they would have chosen our worst insecurities and fears and brought them to life so they

shattered any hope you had. I felt terrible that throughout the entire experience, I had been more affected by the loss of Celestia than losing my own family.

She'd been fine, smiling and laughing as she always did, but slowly...little by little, she got weaker and weaker, and it got harder for her to fight. When she turned to a Forsaken it wasn't because she wasn't strong enough, it was because her very soul was tired of fighting. She'd been drained until there was nothing left of her and she faded into darkness, turning into a Forsaken, one so powerful none of us could stop her.

She killed all those she loved: Orion and Hunter, Cairus and Cairus, Theo and Magnor, her father, the professors, everyone. I watched everything and the pain that tore at me was the knowledge Celestia was within the Forsaken, watching helplessly as she killed every single person she knew. There was such sadness and regret in her glazed eyes with each kill that followed until I was the only one left.

“FINN! Fucking open this door!” Hunter huffed.

“Orion?” Theo's astonished voice called out.

“Move,” Orion instructed and the hall was quiet. I closed my eyes, trying to pull out of the memory that was consuming me. Celestia raised her black sludge hand and aimed the endless amount of tendrils towards me. They all struck out at me, piercing through my weak flesh and consuming me. I'd be added to the growing darkness that would spread and destroy the world thanks to Celestia. She was the center of it all.

The sound of the door opening piqued my interest, unsure whether I'd fallen unconscious or not. Orion knelt down and I wanted to move away, but I just couldn't find the energy.

“Shit, Finn. Is he okay?” Hunter questioned. It made me sad to hear how worried he sounded about my current predicament, knowing he usually tried not to show how important I was to him as a friend. I always felt we were like brothers, but I didn’t know if he felt the same way, but his worry confirmed he did care, which was a comforting thought to have.

“Finn, you’re going to be okay,” Orion reassured me.

“No...Celestia. She’ll disappear. She’ll leave...” I breathed, trying to get up, but felt so cold. I couldn’t afford to lose her. Not without telling her how I felt. Not without seeing her smile one more time. She couldn’t become one with the darkness. She was ours. How dare someone else try to take what they had no ownership of? She loved us and protected us. Misfits who others thought were just a pain in their asses or too weak to be of importance.

She didn’t care about our flaws. Instead, she loved us wholeheartedly, all the while thinking she wasn’t good enough. I needed to prove to her she was worth the world, and nothing could possibly replace her.

Orion placed his hand on my shoulder. “Finn, relax. She’s okay. Magnor stabilized her. She won’t disappear. There no signs of darkness in her at the moment. We just have to keep an eye on her until then. Magnor’s watching her and I’ll go back and stay with her, but you need to calm down and rest. You can’t protect her this way.”

He understood me. He understood why I was so afraid. I knew Hunter did too, but Orion and I had gotten to know more about each other pasts thanks to Celestia. I’d told him things I hadn’t even told Hunter.

Hunter doesn't need to know what happened last week. He'd just pity me. From Celestia falling ill and getting the phone call from back home, everything felt like it was crumbling around me. Now after that traumatic trial, I was struggling to keep it together anymore and Orion knew it.

“Let’s get him cleaned up and in bed,” Hunter suggested. Orion rubbed my back soothingly and they waited till I wasn’t feeling nauseated to help move me. I must have fallen asleep at one point, because I woke up in bed. I heard quiet whispers from the left of me.

“That trial was fucked up. I’ve known Finn for years and never seen him break down like that,” Hunter whispered, his voice sounded aggravated.

“They say they do it to weed out the weak. Even if it traumatizes the remaining ones left?” Theo sighed. “How does that possibly help?”

“If they break down your walls, what do you do?” Orion asked. There was a moment of silence before he continued. “You build stronger ones. You harden the shell around you so no one can make you feel and go through the same pain again. They do this because they’re trying to make it so we can’t easily get taken over by Forsaken. If we have a hard shell and have already experienced it, we’re numb to a second attempt. At least if a Forsaken attempts to take over you, it will be a much longer process, which may give your partner or team enough time to defeat the Forsaken and get you help before you’re consumed.”

Theo groaned. “This is fucked up.”

“Is Finn going to be okay?” Hunter questioned, sighing heavily.

“He needs to rest. Magnor said he wants Finn to stay at his place tonight and tomorrow so he can make sure he’s okay. You know how dangerous it is for pixies when they’re unstable,” Orion pointed out.

“Dangerous when unstable?” Theo sounded confused.

“Pixies lean on one another for strength. They’re a race like werewolves and phoenixes in the sense that need their family and loved ones nearby or else their magic dims away. Finn isn’t as reliant on his family, but he usually has us around him to help compensate for that. Now that Celestia’s in the picture, you can get how important she is,” Hunter explained.

He was right about Celestia, but he didn’t know what I’d been hiding all week, which was slowly killing me.

“We all care about Celestia and I think this exactly why she’s been in every single trial. Haven’t you noticed? Four trials and she’s been in all of them when on other teams, people have only been going twice at most. Why is that?” Orion mumbled thoughtfully.

“You think her father is testing her?” Hunter asked.

“I doubt it. Her father looks so damn busy, he’s barely able to pay attention to her at all,” Theo grumbled.

“The person who sabotaged our exam put snakes in Celestia’s locker. Maybe they’re the reason she’s been part of every Trial,” Orion muttered.

“They want her to break,” Theo concluded.

“So she will change into a Forsaken,” Hunter added solemnly.

“And if this legend is coming to pass, then maybe the man doing all of this is the Dark Unicorn,” Orion whispered.

“Wait. The legend about the reaper is true? Hunter asked.

“I think that is what’s going on. I’ve been debating if that was the case for a while, but nothing was adding up. Now after Celestia’s breakdown, it makes sense,” Orion disclosed.

“Wait, you mean the legend about the Dark Rider who stole the princess’ soul in her sleep to get back at his friend who was the Prince of Light?” Theo asked.

“Everyone tells the legend differently, but that’s the one.” Orion nodded.

“So Celestia’s the one he’s after, but who’s the prince?” Theo asked. There was a moment of silence.

“Why are you all looking at me?” Orion sounded annoyed.

“I think it’s the hair,” Theo whispered.

“Totally his hair. If he was a prince, I’d believe it,” Hunter added.

“I don’t know. We can figure that out later. I’m tired and would like to go back and check on Celestia. I don’t want her waking up and freaking out,” Orion concluded.

“Good call. I’ll stay with Finn. Theo, can you go check on the twins? I want to make sure they’re holding up well,” Hunter asked.

“Sure. I think they went to check on Arielle,” Theo commented.

“She still hasn’t recovered yet.” Hunter sighed.

“I think that’s what will make this trial really hard on Celestia. Lack of sleep, her familiar still recovering from that horrible incident, along with dealing with finding out Sia will disappear,” Orion whispered with a frown.

“It’s too much on her. She needs a good break. Also, I’ve been doing some research about DEM. We may be able to figure something out,” Theo revealed.

“Really?” Hunter asked.

“Ya. I need to go back home and check the Coven library. I think they’ll have something about the condition in one of their ancient texts. We’ll look into it after the trials. That would relieve some stress.”

“Arielle will recover soon too. She just needs lots of rest, and at least she’s being watched over. Faelia’s been helping out too. She said if we need help, we can ask her,” Orion added.

“We’ll figure this out. I think it would be a good idea for Celestia to talk with her father too. If he knows the extent of everything and hears it from his daughter, maybe it would help reinforce the fact we need to figure who pulling the strings around the school,” Orion concluded.

“Agreed.” Hunter nodded.

“Sounds like a plan,” Theo declared.

“I’ll see you guys later and make sure you get some rest somewhere along the line,” Orion encouraged. I heard footsteps and then the room was silent for a bit.

“Orion’s really changed recently. Very leader like now,” Theo pointed out after a time.

“He always had it in him. It’s just his past that sometimes holds him back to be the leader he is. We all know how that kinda feels,” Hunter replied.

“I hope Finn gets better. His family would be worried,” Theo pointed out.

“I agree. His sister would be all sad and would nag at me for as long as she could if she found out Finn got sick. I’ll have to call his family later this week to check in if Finn gets worse. Maybe they can come visit if the headmaster will allow it. Or maybe he could take a short trip to see them.”

“That would help him a lot. Let’s see how this all plays out. I’ll go check on Arielle and the twins. Then we’ll be back and make something to eat. At least if Finn wakes up, we can get him to eat something and have some food left for Celestia when she recovers,” Theo suggested.

“Perfect. I’ll see you in a bit. Be careful,” Hunter whispered.

“You too. Watch Lucky Charms. If he gets worse, call us. Can’t have any of us falling ill for the sake of Celestia’s mental health.”

“Roger that,” Hunter replied.

I listened to Theo’s fading footsteps and then Hunter sighed. I heard the dialing tone of a phone. I listened closely, ring after ring, waiting for someone to pick up. I already had a guess of who he was calling, but my heart longed for it to be someone else.

“Hmm. No one’s answering. I guess I’ll try tomorrow. I wouldn’t have much to report anyways and don’t need to listen to his sister nagging twice,” Hunter sighed.

I couldn’t help but sniff, slowly turning to my side as I fought not to cry. I listened to the approaching footsteps, a hand gently landed on my shoulder but I stayed as still as possible.

“Man, he’s crying in his sleep. What did you see, buddy?” Hunter whispered, agony lingering in his voice.

It wasn't what I saw that made the tears roll down my cheeks as I begged for darkness to take me. It was the reality that I knew no one would answer his call...ever.

You can't pick up the phone when you're dead.

*My Wounds Are Healing
Thanks To The Light*

~C *ELESTIA*~

“I’m okay. I really am. I just went and checked in on Arielle. She’s getting better and at least once I get a bit stronger I can help her too. No...I’m going to talk to my dad. Just for comfort, you know? Ya. Okay.”

I listened closely to Cairus’ sweet voice, with Caio in the background as they alternated back and forth. I had just stepped in front of the door to Dad’s office when the twins had called to check in on me while Orion and Theo were off getting lunch. I’d been given approved time off after the fourth trial, as had Finn and I decided to take advantage of the free time to see my Father.

I had no idea what Father would say but I knew something was wrong with me. I could feel it, but I had to confront my dad with how I felt in order to hopefully get some answers.

A part of me was angry, but another part was just in desperate need of his attention and love. I knew he was busy, but I just needed him to hear me out and maybe see if he could clarify whether the dark being I’d seen in the vision was real. *The reaper.*

“How’s Finn?” I asked, trying to hide the worry in my voice.

“He’s looking a lot better than before. Magnor isn’t convinced though and said he still wants to observe him for a bit,” Caio answered me. There was a shuffling sound, which told me Caio had handed the phone to Cairus.

“He should be staying with Magnor for one more night. At least if he’s home tomorrow we can spend the weekend all together before the last trial on Monday,” Cairus suggested.

“Ya. I think that would help. I’m gonna head into Father’s office now so I’ll text you later,” I reassured him.

“Okay, Dearest. Just don’t stay there too long,” Cairus stressed.

“Why?” I asked.

There was shuffling once again and Caio answered. “It’s gonna rain, Cutie Pie. So try to get home before then or stay at the office until it passes.”

“Okay. I’ll stay away from the scary rain,” I joked.

“There’s our Celestia,” Cairus whispered.

I smiled. “Thank you Cairus. Thank you, Caio.”

“You’re welcome,” they both replied. We exchanged goodbyes and I hung up, sliding my phone into the back pocket of my gold shorts. I took a deep breath before knocking on the door and opening it slowly.

The secretary looked up from her desk, her expression telling me this wasn’t going to go the way I wanted it to.

“Hello, Ms. Rainbow. Do you have an appointment to see your father?” she asked. Her monotone voice made me frown

as I walked up to the brown desk to face her.

“No, but I need to talk to my father. It’s important,” I stressed.

The redheaded woman sighed, shaking her head. “The headmaster is busy. You’ll have to make an appointment like everyone else.” She didn’t even bother to look back up at me as she continued typing away on her computer.

“But this is serious and a family matter. I should be allowed to see my own dad,” I insisted.

“Sorry to say, but your dad is a very important contributor to many dimensions across the galaxy and he has tons of work on his plate to focus on. He’ll schedule you in the priority section, if it makes you feel better,” she mumbled.

“You said that last time and told me the wait list for the priority list was six months long. MONTHS!” I emphasized, getting impatient. “I need to see him now.”

“So do a lot of people, but you don’t see them walking in here like they own this place and demanding to see the headmaster. Fill out the form on the counter for the priority list and I’ll put you on there. If not, please go back to class.” She huffed, rolling her eyes, before returning her gaze the computer before her.

I stood there speechless, anger boiling through me. *Why was everyone making this so fucking difficult? I need help. I need answers. Why am I not allowed to see my own fucking father?!*

My hands clenched into fists to hide how they trembled with rage and I took a calming breath before I opened my determined eyes. *Fine. She wants to play, bitch? I’ll show her how savage a unicorn can get when angered.*

I took another breath to calm myself, lifting my hand to my mouth and let my magic flow through me. The woman paused in her typing, turning her gaze to me. Before she could open her mouth, I blew a puff of glitter into her face. The rainbow-colored sparkles rained down on her and before she could retaliate, her eyes grew heavy.

Her head fell straight to the desk with a “plop” and I sighed, not feeling an ounce of pity. To be honest, it kinda felt good to do the deed. She was being a bitch by not letting me see my dad. That was a good reason to do what I did. *I wasn't bad or anything. She just deserved it.*

I walked down the hall, reaching Father's office. I knocked three times before opening the door. Father's mismatched eyes looked up from the stack of forms on his desk. When he saw me at the door, his eyes widened with confusion.

“Celestia? What are you doing here?” he asked, sounding a little stunned, but his expression quickly shifted from confused to worried. I closed the door quietly and walked up to his desk. He put his pen down, focusing his attention on me.

“Your secretary has declined my requests over and over again whenever I want to see you,” I revealed.

Father frowned. “Well, she's just following protocol, sweetie. She's used to people from across the dimensions dropping by and wanting a word with me,” he defended.

I didn't like how he was making an excuse for her, making the little bubble of anger inside me grow. “But I'm not other people. I'm family. What if Mom came to visit? I bet you wouldn't tell her to write her name on the six month priority list,” I snapped.

Father sighed, pinching his nose for a moment before opening his tired eyes and meeting my hard gaze. “Celestia what’s wrong, and how were you able to get in here anyway?”

“Everything is wrong, and I sprinkled some sleepy dust on your secretary who was a complete bitch to me,” I exclaimed.

He surprisingly smiled but then shook his head in dismay. “You can’t go sprinkling sleep dust on someone just because you don’t get your way. That stuff is powerful.”

“Oh. Like I, Miss Unicorn Shifter, with NO knowledge of her kind and no resources to figure out what the fuck I can do would know that. I’ll make sure I sprinkle half the dose next time I have to see you and she rolls her eyes at me again,” I huffed.

“Celestia.” Father frowned at my response.

“Something is going on. Something really bad. I can feel it,” I disclosed.

“Maybe you just need some rest after your recent trial, sweetie,” Father suggested, relaxing back in his seat and running a hand through his long hair.

“The trials are only a part of it, Dad. Something bad is going to happen. I can actually feel it. I haven’t felt normal since coming here. Magnor, Miona, Othello, they all have done multiple tests on me and have found nothing. Now I have a sneaking suspicion they actually have seen something, but one minute it’s there, and the next it’s gone again. Am I tainted or not? I need you to check or send me to someone who can determine that!” I stressed.

“Your results don’t come in until Monday evening, Celestia. If there was something urgent, the analysts would have called me earlier to tell me. The trials are just wearing

you down, which is to be expected. You're not tainted." He brushed off my concerns.

"You haven't even checked? Can't you use your magic like how Magnor or Miona do? Even Othello has taken a moment to respond to my request. Why don't you seem more worried about this? If your child says something is wrong, the least you can do is show a little more concern!" I shouted. *Why doesn't he get it? Why does he think this is nothing?*

"Because I'm busy, Celestia. We're dealing with Forsaken outbreaks in other dimensions, more Forsaken attacks and now I'm dealing with students accidentally leaving the grounds and finding themselves on the other side of the barrier where they are at risk of being killed by Forsaken or possibly kidnapped. I don't have time to waste."

"So, me coming to you, telling you I feel like shit is a waste of time?" I asked, my voice cracked as tears formed in my eyes. *He doesn't care.*

"No, sweetie. Ugh, I'm not good at this like Magnor. He should be back sometime in the next hour or so. Why don't you go ask him to do another scan on you? I really can't spend anymore time on this." He gave me a sympathetic look, which made me clench my fists and bite my lip in frustration.

"Then I wanna talk to mom! She'd at least listen to me. She'd understand and try to help me. Let me talk to her," I demanded.

He grimaced and looked away. "You can't talk to her right now," he mumbled.

"Why not?! You were able to talk to her to get my graduation gift. I know for a fact she's in on the whole

headmaster thing and doesn't believe that gatekeeper lie!" I shouted.

"We're...it's complicated, Celestia. I won't call her."

"Why not?! What's complicated about talking to your wife?!" I insisted.

"We are just dealing with some stuff, Celestia. She has her beliefs and I have mine," he whispered.

I blinked, my mind already thinking the worst. "Are you two going to divorce?"

"No...we just need a break to do our own things. She's busy with her job, like I am with mine," he stated, sadness in his eyes. I could tell he still loved her, but with his current attitude, it didn't seem like he was going to fight for that love.

"You're not even trying?! You can't even make time for your daughter who feels like shit. What do you think about how Mom feels, who's supposed to be your partner in crime till death do you part?!" I snapped.

"Celestia. ENOUGH!" he shouted back. I glared at him as my body practically trembled in anger. His anger-filled eyes seemed to notice how upset I was, because they softened before he sighed.

"Celestia. I can't deal with this right now. There are too many things going on. Stop worrying about unnecessary things. The trials have been rough on you and your behavior is an expected result to that. Go rest and be with your teammates," he encouraged.

"Teammates?" I whispered, tears pooling in my eyes. Father looked away, doing his best to ignore my tears that began to roll down my cheeks.

“Yes. Those boys. They can cheer you up,” he suggested.

“They aren’t my teammates, Father,” I snarled, narrowing my eyes at him.

He was silent for a few seconds before he answered. “Well, they surely can’t all be dating you.”

“They are actually,” I declared. He lifted his gaze to meet my blank stare, the tears still flowing down my flushed cheeks.

“Celestia, I won’t appro-”

“You won’t approve of what? Me dating six men? Oh, so now I need your approval? My father who can’t take a moment to talk to me. My father, who said he’d try to make this work but has ignored every single call your secretary has made to tell you that your daughter was here to see you. I tell you I may be tainted and have felt like shit for seven weeks and you brush me off and tell me to go be checked by Magnor, who at this point, has been a better father than you!”

“Cele-”

“NO! Don’t you fucking ‘Celestia’ me. Do you know how shitty the last four weeks have been?! I’ve been a part of four trials, Father! FOUR! When everyone else has done a maximum of two. Why is that?” I questioned.

I’d heard Magnor and Othello talking about it when I was pretending to sleep during my recovery in his office. I was the first to be in all trials so far and Magnor was worried I’d also be chosen for the final one, which wasn’t recommended for my mental health.

“The Council helps decide who enters these trials. If they want to test you, they can. I have no say.”

“You’re THE HEADMASTER?! How can you have no say?!”

“Celestia Rainbow! STOP!” Father snapped, slamming his hands on the desk and rose up. “I get you’re stressed and may be going through a rebellious stage after everything, but this isn’t the time.”

I was silent, thoughts flowing through my mind as my body felt suddenly cold.

“I guess you’d have time if I was dead right?” I whispered. He froze and I noticed him bite his lip in frustration, but he remained silent.

“The men I love are all suffering because I’m not better. They try to act like everything is okay, but it’s not and they know it too. They are doing all this research behind my back to try to figure out what’s wrong with me. My familiar, who I’ve had for fifteen years got hurt and still is at risk of dying. The side of me who’s done nothing but protect me and fought multiple times in my stead will one day disappear and I won’t even fucking remember her when it happens. Now my father, who’s supposed to care when his one and only child comes to beg for help, states I’m being rebellious and is wasting his time. My mom is far away...and I can’t even talk...to her... because you guys are on bad terms and may get a damn divorce...and Magnor’s not even here...so tell me. Where does that leave me?”

He was silent, blinking his eyes and a tear dropped to the desk. Lightning flashed and thunder rang through the sky.

“Celestia...I’ll...work something out, just not today. Go home before the storm starts. I’ll talk with my secretary and make some time after the trial on Monday. Get some rest.” He

dismissed me, sitting back down behind his desk and began reviewing the next stack of papers.

I nodded, knowing there was no point trying. I turned around, heading to the door. “If something ever happens to me...please don’t cry. It would be a waste of tears,” I whispered in a toneless voice before I walked out the door, closing it behind me.

Just a waste of time. Rebellious stage. Father and Mother aren’t talking. No one cares that I feel cold and hollow. No one cares that I may be tainted and could become a Forsaken? No one cares about my pain.

The thoughts repeated over and over again while my legs took me outside without conscious thought. My brain was scattered with dark thoughts as I walked down the path to go back home.

I walked for a long while before I realized I should have been home ten minutes ago.

I lifted my head to see I was in a forest.

When did I leave the school? Silly me.

But my feet stayed where they were. I didn’t want to go back. Why return to a place that didn’t care about you? I was just a tool in their game of “Become a Huntress.”

My own father didn’t care that I was hurting.

If my father didn’t care...would the guys abandon me too?

My tired eyes lowered to the necklace on my neck, the heart-shaped jewel seemed to twinkle at my attention. I lifted it up to admire its beauty. Finn had made it with his awesome pixie skills and everyone had inputted a bit of their own magic.

“You’re gonna need a re-boost soon,” I whispered to myself, knowing the crystal couldn’t understand my words. Magnor said most of the others’ powers were gone from the necklace at this point, and only Finn’s remained since he created the necklace.

“Silly. They don’t need to re-boost you. The dreams were less painful than how I feel now,” I whispered.

A drop of water hit the surface of the jewel.

I blinked, slowly looking up at the sky which was filled with grey clouds. A flash of lightning went off before a loud wave of thunder boomed overhead. Suddenly, rain began to fall on me, drop after drop, till I was completely drenched.

I didn’t move, not thinking there was any point.

As I stood there, my body trembled from the cold and my lips began to chatter away. I slowly smiled and laughed to myself.

“Doesn’t this remind me of that fateful day back then? Who would have thought I’d be all alone now? Father didn’t care. Arielle could die. Sia would disappear, and it wouldn’t be long till the guys abandoned me too. Did I really think I could live happily?” I whispered, sobs vibrating through me as the tears began to roll down my wet cheeks.

“You can be happy.”

I slowly turned my head to see a tall man. He wore some type of uniform with a long black cloak, and his long black hair fell perfectly down past his shoulders. His white eyes were familiar, but they showed kindness, which I could see even without his irises being present.

He had a small smile on his soft face.

I let go of the pendant, allowing it to fall back to its place on my chest, right above my breasts.

I turned to face him.

“I can?”

“Yes, my Queen. You certainly can. You don’t need those people to be happy. I’ll value how powerful and beautiful you are. I’ll make sure you feel better and get the help you need. I’ll love you no matter what. You’re my queen after all,” he whispered.

“Queen...I’m a queen?” I asked.

He nodded. “Yes. You’re my queen, Celestia. I never abandon what’s mine.” He held his his hand out to me.

My legs moved on their own, step by step, getting closer to the man whose cloak seemed to be made of its own essence, as darkness began to pool from it to the ground like sludge.

I didn’t care, my eyes focused instead on his hand, which looked so warm compared to the chill and pain I felt both from the inside and outside.

“Cel...estia...Mis...tress?! Cel...estia!”

A voice kept going in and out of my mind, the sheer panic in its tone made me pause as I tried to figure out who it was. The man lifted his other hand, his arms spread out to hug me.

“Join me, my Queen. Let us seek happiness and show those who ignored us what we can accomplish,” he whispered.

I silenced the desperate voice in my mind.

This man was real.

He wanted to help me.

I didn't need any more fake words or excuses. I just wanted to be loved. I wanted happiness. I wanted to get better.

I was only two steps away when my wrists burned, causing me to flinch.

“Ow.” I whimpered, lifting my wrist.

I saw bright glowing marks that were a mix of lavender and gold.

I hissed when my neck grew hot and I noticed the lingering marking from Theo was glowing a red so bright I could see it from the angle I was at.

The man in front of me tried to grab me, but the necklace on my neck began to glow a bright green, growing hotter and hotter until it felt like it was burning my skin.

I fall to my knees, trying to figure out what was going on as the necklace began to shine so brightly; the man hissed in agony.

Darkness seemed to surround me like a globe trying to attach itself to me but was hitting a green barrier that bubbled me in. I looked down at the heart shaped necklace, but gasped when I saw it wasn't there anymore.

In its place was a marking, right on my chest.

The image looked like a girl kneeling on the ground, in the same position I was currently in. She had short hair and wings that shot out from her back, but looked like they were fading away. A little halo floated above her head and tiny pixies and vines seemed to wrap around her in comfort.

She looked sad, but I felt that the nature around her would comfort her broken heart.

Was that how I looked like now? Broken?

“CELESTIA!”

I lifted my head to the sound, but couldn't see anything through the darkness which continued to hammer at the bubble around me, trying to break the shield.

The man hissed and I turned my head back to where he stood, his white eyes filled with anger.

“I'll return, my Queen. Be ready for me.”

With that, he vanished into the darkness and I was back in the forest, the green bubble still protectively around me.

I turned my left to see a breathless Finn, tears in his eyes while he stood in the pouring rain which left his clothes soaked.

“Fi...nn. Finn?” I repeated, blinking back tears.

I turned my body so I could face him and noticed how scared he looked. Was he afraid of something? Of someone? Why did he look like his world would end at this moment?

I thought the pain in my heart was enough, but seeing Finn's agonized expression hurt more and I couldn't take it.

My Finn didn't deserve to be so sad.

I lifted my arms up and whispered, “Lucky Charms...you want a hug?” My lip trembled as I held back my own sobs.

He bit his bottom lip while his shoulders shook.

He took a step forward, then another, until he stood before me. The green bubble slowly vanished, having finished what it was supposed to accomplish. Finn fell to his knees before embracing me.

His arms tightened around me, and his head dug deep into my shoulder. I returned the hug, my hands pressing against his

broad back and my sobs muffled by his drenched shirt.

“Finn!” I cried, realizing how much I needed one of my guys.

How much I missed each of them and how badly I’d missed Finn the last couple of days.

“Dammit, Cutie Pie. You’re gonna kill me,” he whispered, sobbing into my shoulder.

“I’m sorry.” I realized I must have done something wrong for him to be crying so hard. We cried in each other’s embrace while the rain poured on us both. I leaned back to look into his sad green eyes.

“Finn...no one wants to help me,” I confessed with a sob. “Father...I asked him to help me. Something bad is happening, but he’s too busy. I can’t talk to Mom...and Arielle...I miss Arielle and Magnor...and all of you. I just want someone to help me. I want to be normal again and be happy. I want to be a happy unicorn...but Father doesn’t care.” I whimpered.

Finn placed his hands on my cheeks.

“We’ll help you. Team Misfit...your loyal boyfriends will help you. We’re searching really hard. We just haven’t found the right information yet. We love you, Celestia. We won’t ever abandon you. Arielle’s going to be okay and Magnor...” Finn trailed off, looking over his shoulder.

I followed his gaze, my eyes growing wide at what I saw.

There was Magnor, with sad eyes, standing there as I stared at him, just like sixteen years ago. His silver eyes stared at me, holding sadness instead of their usual wisdom. He glanced at Finn and I and frowned at our drenched appearance.

Magnor began to make his way towards us. Finn helped me up before taking a step back, giving me space to confront Magnor.

When he stood before me, I opened my mouth to pour out my agony.

“I asked Father for help...but he cast me away. I didn’t ask...I begged. He and Mom are having issues and I can’t talk to her. I tried to tell him that there’s something wrong, and he won’t listen. There’s something wrong with me, Magnor. Deep inside me somewhere, there’s something there. I don’t know if I’m tainted or something, but I feel horrible. The world around us is crying and yet no one is answering its pleas, just like how Dad won’t listen to mine. I need help. I want to solve this, but I don’t know how!” I confessed.

I clenched my fists and looked up to him.

“Will you help me? The guys will help, but we need someone higher up to direct us where to go. I need to find out who I am, Magnor. I need to find what I can do to help this world that seems to be dying. I want to heal the dark part inside me, but I can’t do that alone. Please...help me?” I begged, lowering my head to stare down at my feet.

At this point, I was okay if he rejected me just like Father had. Magnor was just as busy. I wasn’t his child or responsibility. I was just his student and eventually became someone he cared dearly for. If he said no, I’d find another way.

With my men, we’d figure this out.

A hand gently patted my head and I looked into his tear-filled gaze as he continued to stroke my wet hair comfortingly. The rain beat on both of us as we stared into each other’s eyes.

He gave me a small smile and spoke. “

I’ll always help you, Celestia. All you have to do is ask.”
He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me into an embrace.

I held him tightly as I cried, feeling exactly like the nine-year girl, back in the forest, accepting her fate to no longer exist. Instead, this time I felt loved.

I was loved by so many, yet for a moment I lost sight of it, thinking I’d find happiness elsewhere. I was blinded by my pain and thought I could take the easy way out. Thinking if I disappeared, no one would mourn me.

But I was wrong. A man who didn’t need to raise me held me in his arms and the tears that fell down his cheeks were because of me. If I disappeared, I knew he’d mourn me. If I vanished, the men who loved me wholeheartedly would suffer for it.

I was blinded by my agony, but I realized now that I had people who loved me. I could fight the hollowness in my heart. I could heal my wounds.

I just needed a little bit of help.

And as the rain poured down on us, I knew I’d get the assistance I needed to find my way back to the light.

Lucky Charms With A Hint Of Glitter

“What is it? It’s rainbow looking,” I mumbled.

Finn smirked at my apprehensiveness, walking over and presenting me the warm pink drink in a clear mug. It had different color star shaped things that reminded me of sprinkles and the whipped cream was topped off with pink and blue syrup with marshmallows of different pastel colors.

“Unicorn hot chocolate. Caio texted me the recipe yesterday when I said I was bored and wanted to make a magical drink without pulling an Orion and burning down Magnor’s kitchen,” Finn explained as I accepted the drink warily. He sat in the armchair just next to the burning fireplace, looking down at me as I sat crossed legged with my drink in hand.

Magnor encouraged me to stay at his place tonight, wanting to make sure I was okay and worried about me getting sick after being in the cold rain for too long. I’d showered first, then stationed myself on the red carpet in front of the fireplace, waiting for Finn to be done with his shower. Magnor went over to our dorm to tell the others I’d be staying with Finn for the night. He said afterward he’d be going to Father’s office to have a “chat.”

I knew that meant Magnor was going to have a long argument with my father and was kinda glad I wouldn’t be

there to see it. Magnor was nice, but when he was angry, it was pretty terrifying.

Magnor explained to me that I could be a part of the old legend Hunter and I had read in the library a few weeks ago that was coming to fruition. He thought it was just a theory, but with everything that had happened from my dreams, the increasing occurrence of Forsaken outside the school's barrier, and now almost being consumed by that mysterious man with white eyes who to Finn, apparently looked like a large Forsaken, I was starting to believe Magnor was right.

Our only problem was figuring out how to stop the legend and figuring out why I was the prime target. It couldn't be as simple as me being the only female unicorn shifter. There had to be something more to it than that.

Till then, the plan was to finish the final trial and Magnor would petition the Council for our team to be given some time off.

A few had made similar requests in the past and been granted with little fuss. If Magnor represented us, they couldn't refuse, especially after everything he'd done over the years. He'd already informed Othello and Miona, and they both agreed and reassured him if there were any problems, he could contact them for extra support.

It felt reassuring to know that all these people wanted to help. Even Hellsin had looked gravely concerned when he came by on Magnor's request to report the sighting of the Forsaken. He had given me a big hug, lifting me up like I was but a child and told me to not lose hope.

I lifted the mug to my lips, tasting the star sprinkles and sweet syrup before taking a sip of the pink hot chocolate. I

sighed in satisfaction and looked over at Finn, who had a small smile on his lips.

“You like it?” he asked.

I nodded. “Love it. Sweet, but not too sweet. Just perfect,” I whispered, deciding to have some more.

“Perfect like you,” he said softly.

I giggled. “Smooth move.”

“In the ways of Orion. I think I should graduate from Alicorn school for Smooth Material,” he teased.

“Smooth degree from Orion Academy. Maybe you can sneak into those direct messages and wing yourself a unicorn.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad, though I’m not that smooth. Direct interaction is better. So we’d have to go on a date so she can see how manly I am.” He winked and I almost snorted on my drink.

“Manly, my ass.” I giggled and he chuckled, the combined sound of our laughter warming my heart. It felt like it had been so long since we’d both laughed and joked with one another, making me miss how things had been at Old Aslan. I knew we’d get stronger after all we’d been through, but I wished they didn’t try to break and shape us into people we barely recognized.

We focused on drinking the warm liquid until nothing was left. We set our mugs down on the coffee table before watching the flames that burned in the fireplace.

“Finn,” I whispered after a time.

“Yes, Cutie Pie?”

“How did you know I was in danger?” I asked, looking down at my chest. I wore one of Finn’s pink t-shirts that apparently used to be green until he pissed Orion off and he decided pixies deserved only light pink shirts, changing the majority of Finn’s wardrobe to the pastel color.

I at least wore lingerie, Magnor having a few spare sets of clothes here on my behalf, just in case I came and visited him during my time after the trials. The V-neck shirt was low enough to show my cleavage and the visible mark of the girl with broken wings, surrounded by little pixies and vines. Upon closer inspection, you could even see little blossoms of flowers at the base of the vines.

Finn was silent, prompting me to turn my head. He looked deep in thought as if I wasn’t even there. I crawled over to him to sit on his lap. He blinked out of his daze, blushing at my sudden presence on his lap.

He didn’t push me off, though. Instead, he secured an arm around my waist, positioning me so my legs rested on one arm of the velvet red and gold chair and my back could rest on the other side.

His green eyes met mine and he lifted his free hand to play with my long hair. Then his finger trailed down my neck and stopped right before the newly added mark. I’d tried not to touch it, the surrounding area still tender and sensitive. I figured it was a blessed mark, just like the one Orion had given me, but I didn’t understand how it was possible.

“The necklace I made, I added enough magic to have a little backup reaction if something threatened to hurt you. At the time, I had no idea the dreams would escalate to this, but my mom always taught me that when you want to protect what’s important to you, you need to make sure there’s a

backup plan in place. Then if all else fails, you won't lose them because you have a hidden plan," Finn explained.

He gave me a small smile before he continued. "I had a hunch that the others' magic would fade if we didn't top it off soon. So the backup plan was that if you were in danger and no one could get to you on time, the necklace would use my magic to protect you as long as it could till I could get to you."

He took a deep breath. "I was already walking around before the rain began and then I got a text from Faelia saying Arielle was freaking the fuck out, saying you were in danger. At that point, I was able to sense exactly where you were and arrived just in time to see the Forsaken thing trying to hug you. I knew there's no way I'd make it in time...and well...I kinda marked you by accident," he confessed.

"Accident, huh?" I whispered, shifting slightly to wrap my arms around his neck and stare into those green orbs which reflected his despair.

"I thought I'd lose you. During the trial...I saw the Forsaken consume you. I knew it was a simulation, but it felt so real. The pain I felt...just remembering, I still feel how afraid I was that I'd allowed the woman I loved to be consumed. The girl who cared about everyone but herself, and I couldn't even tell you. I couldn't say, Celestia...I love you. I didn't get to prove to you how worthy your life was to me...to our little group of Misfits."

I fought the tears that threatened to escape my eyes as I watched a sad smile form on his lips. "So when I reached you and saw the Forsaken just a few steps away from you...I got angry. I was so mad that this Forsaken thought he could have you. This reaper or whatever he was, though he could take

what was ours. You are our Celestia, our girlfriend...our queen. What makes him think he could have you?"

"Finn..." I whispered. He looked to my chest and ever so gently traced the outline of the new mark. I closed my eyes, biting my lip and holding back my moan. I opened my eyes when his finger left my skin.

"I couldn't afford to lose another person. It was wrong of me to put a claim on you without your permission, but if I was given the same choice, I'd do it again. My love for you is strong and if you ended up hating me, I wouldn't regret this. I'd be able to live with the fact you're alive and breathing. I'd survive not being able to marry anyone else, just to be able to hear your voice, even if it was only from afar."

"I'd never hate you," I whispered, tightening my hold to give him a hug.

He sighed, resting his head on my shoulder. "I know."

I held him for a long time, the only sounds were that of our breathing, our rapid heartbeats, and the crackling of the fire that continued to burn away, giving the room warmth amidst the storm happening outside.

"Finn...what do you mean by you losing another person?" I questioned, that sentence lingering in my mind. Finn had never expressed having lost anyone. In fact, his family had called just two weeks ago and teasingly told him he should come home to introduce his new lover.

He was silent and I pulled back. My eyes widened at the sight of his tears, immense sadness in his expression. "They're dead, Celestia."

"What?" My voice was barely audible.

“They traveled to a dimension nearby due to the recent Forsaken outbreaks happening. Other shifters had fled as well and there was a shelter for them until they could migrate to another dimension the following day. The shelter got attacked by a group of Forsaken...and...well...you can guess what happened.”

“No...” I whispered. “Why...why didn’t you say something?”

He had been acting like everything was okay. He never looked depressed or sad all week, aside from the stress of the trials and the worry he showed regarding my health during my recovery and our trial. I would have never guessed he’d been in this much pain.

“You were dealing with a lot, Cutie Pie. That would have been rather selfish of me to dump my burden on you after the trial, your continued exhaustion, and the incident with Arielle. I hate seeing you in pain. There’s no way I’d be able to worsen that burden with the death of my family,” he whispered.

“No...survivors?” I asked.

He shook his head. “None. I got the call and Orion was there to see me break down. He took me to Magnor who instructed Orion to keep a close eye on me, but after the recent trial...I broke. I felt so sick and felt like I was going to die. I couldn’t eat for a bit and the guys had to end up picking me up from the washroom floor after I kept vomiting and lost consciousness at one point. I just didn’t want to function anymore. Pixies don’t handle death well. When we lose even one person we love, it’s...hard. Really hard. I’d lost my family and then watched you disappear. I just couldn’t. Magnor forced me to stay here so he could watch me.”

“What would happen...” I tried to ask, but trailed off when Finn smiled.

“Perfect bait for Forsaken. Pixies are extremely powerful with nature magic. It’s just our size that fools people when we’re in our true forms. If a pixie is consumed by a Forsaken in a natural environment, the darkness grows significantly and is given the ability to manipulate the earth with the lingering magic in the body of the pixie shifter.”

“Wait...so what happened to the dimension your family was in?” I asked.

“It’s gone.”

I was silent, blinking a few times as I processed his words. “G..one?”

“Poof,” he said and a tear rolled down his cheek. “My family were some of the stronger pixies in our community. My parents had lived many years, far longer than the average shifter or even pixie, making their magic both old and extremely powerful. I’m only guessing, but after they were consumed, the combined power and their deaths probably vibrated through the dimension. We sometimes say that Mother Nature can sense each pixie’s death. One death leads to an area in the forest to wither. A group of pixies and the added magic probably caused the planet to weep in agony. Maybe the Mother Nature there knew that if the problem was unresolved, every living thing would be consumed by the darkness.”

“She self-destructed,” I whispered.

“Bingo. I’m assuming she must have somehow released a toxic gas that put everyone to sleep across the dimension.

Once that was done, boom! Gone. That's the most likely explanation I've come up with," Finn concluded.

"Finn...I don't even know what to say." I sobbed.

He smiled, pressing his forehead against mine. "There's nothing you can do or say to change it, my Sweet Blossom. At least I know they're not in pain. They've moved on and hopefully are looking down on me, telling me I made the right decision by claiming you."

"You won't regret it?" I asked. I didn't want him feeling that he had to do this. He didn't need to be with me.

"Never. I love you, Celestia. I've known that for a while. Just haven't had the guts to tell you. My parents were aware the last time I talked to them and both they and my sister approved of me going forward with it. I have their blessings, even if I can't hear them say it one more time." He gave me the best wide smile he could muster and I sobbed, leaning in to kiss him hard.

"How did I get so damn lucky?" I whispered against his lips.

He smirked. "I'm called Lucky Charms for a reason, Sweet Blossom," he whispered, before claiming my lips. We kissed, muffling our sobs as we held each other tightly.

We finally broke the kiss when we were both breathless. Finn chuckled. "Plus, Orion got first dibs and Theo slid in there without realizing it."

I blushed before giving him a confused look. "Theo slid in where? I didn't get a direct message." I huffed. Finn laughed and I smiled in relief, lifting my hands to wipe his tear-stained cheek.

"Your bite isn't fading anytime soon," he revealed.

I blinked, looking down at the mark before returning my gaze to him. “It’s not?!”

“Orion and I knew right away it was a blessed mark. Even Magnor knows. That’s why Theo got a long talk from Magnor after your guys’ trial. Theo still doesn’t know why and neither do the twins. We haven’t really had an opportunity to discuss it with them. It’s rare for vampire shifters to mate at first bite, but it’s possible when the vampire has a strong connection and feelings for the person being bitten,” Finn explained.

I gawked at him. “Well...shit. Um. Does that mean Sweet Blossom is what you refer to me as? Like um...how Orion says Blessed Love?”

“Ah, yes. Pixies call our partners Sweet Blossom because when you officially marry, the female always seems to blossom and become even more beautiful,” he elaborated.

I grinned, loving the meaning of it. “I like it.”

“I’m glad,” he whispered, his eyes lowering to my lips. I didn’t give him a chance to think, leaning in to kiss him again. Kiss after kiss, we sat there until Finn scooped me up. He carried me up the stairs and straight to the bedroom, while kissing me passionately.

He kicked the door shut, lowering me to the bed. His hands roamed my body possessively while we continued to kiss.

Clothes quickly fell to the floor, and in seconds I was naked in bed with Finn hovering over me, his hard cock at my wet entrance and both of us breathless. Our eyes locked on one another in desperate need.

“No condom?” I asked.

“Unicorns don’t get pregnant easily.” He grinned proudly, making me laugh.

“Please don’t tell me you got the talk too? How?” I huffed.

“Magnor has some weird sense shit. But we’ll talk about that later. Maybe when we have a nice hot bath.”

“Why would we need a bath?”

He grinned. His eyes darkened with lust, making my stomach flip and pussy ache with anticipation. “When I’m done with you, Sweet Blossom, we’ll both be a sweaty mess and need a long relaxing bath to soothe our aching muscles,” he promised before he leaned in to whisper in my ear. “Well, soothe them enough so I can take you all over again.”

With those final words, he thrust his length inside me and kept to his word.

Trial Five- Intrusion Of Darkness

“Orion, wait,” I whispered, tugging at his hand to signal him to stop.

He paused, looking over his shoulder to meet my hesitant gaze.

“What’s wrong Celestia?” He kept his voice low for the sake of not giving away our location. I took two steps forward to stand in front of him, my hand still in his.

Today was Monday, the day of the last trial. As we suspected, I was again one of the chosen participants to participate, along with Orion. The trial was called “Lost and Found,” which made no sense to either of us as we walked to the portal which led somewhere in the forests of New Aslan.

The others were pissed I had been selected again, especially Finn, who had gone off to get Magnor and Faelia, stating there must have been something going on and this was our chance to catch the culprit. We had no choice, however, but to start the trial, hoping the others would figure things out, or at least get us a clue of what was going on.

“I feel something coming our way. A bit far out, but the ground is trembling slightly,” I pointed out.

Orion frowned, closing his eyes for a moment. “You’re right. You sure you’re okay to fight?”

I grinned, nodding my head and pointing to the blades on my back. “Of course. I’m ready to get this over with.” I hummed and he smiled, pulling me into an embrace and lowering his lips to mine.

The weekend had been spent resting and enjoying time with all my guys. The rest of them ended up at Magnor’s house Saturday morning. Finn explained what happened to his family and the guys each gave their condolences. We ended up going deep in the forest, and found a perfect spot to make a memorial of all the pixies lost that day.

It may not have been much, but it was a place Finn could go and mourn his lost family, surrounded by the peacefulness of nature.

Once this trial was over we’d leave for a month long break, all of us agreeing to go to different dimensions in search of finding more about unicorns and other mythological creatures. Having such information could potentially help us search for allies across the realms to fight together against the Forsaken that seemed to be growing in numbers at an exponential rate.

We broke the kiss when we heard a twig snap. We both went into a battle stance, my hands reaching back to pull out my dual blades while Orion manifested a wand that reminded me of a unicorn horn.

We began to move, walking slowly while scanning the area with our eyes. We reached a clearing and lowered our weapons when we saw nothing. I lifted my eyes up to the large clear wall a few feet away, focusing on the little strips of rainbow light that flickered on and off.

“The barrier?” I asked, sliding my swords back into their scabbards on my back. Orion returned to my side, slipping his

hand into mine as we began to walk closer to the barrier which was so tall, it disappeared into the cloudy night sky.

“Yes. It’s really beautiful for a barrier. It must be sustained with light magic. I wonder how they keep it up continuously,” Orion questioned. I nodded, wondering the same thing.

We had almost reached the wall, when we heard a crack. We both looked back to see a black deer with red eyes.

“Um...Orion? What is that?” I asked.

“That doesn’t look like a normal deer,” Orion whispered, gripping my hand tightly before positioning himself in front of me with his wand in his left hand.

The deer just stared at us, and I focused on his red eyes that blinked. *He’s...sad?*

“Orion. It’s sad,” I revealed.

“It’s cloaked in darkness, Celestia,” Orion countered.

“But it’s not evil,” I insisted.

He turned his head to meet my gaze, those beautiful purple eyes locked on my mismatched ones. He was silent for several seconds before he sighed. “I’m not going to bother trying to convince you. So stubborn.”

“I didn’t even tell you my plan yet.” I grumbled.

“You don’t have to, Blessed Love. Your eyes give you away. Be careful, and if it does anything, and I mean ANYTHING that can hurt you, I will kill it,” he warned. I nodded, giving him a wide smile at his belief in me. I slowly began to approach the deer that stayed in place, eyeing me carefully. I finally reached it, presenting my hand out to it.

The deer lowered its head, nudging its nose to my hand. “Hey there,” I greeted, my voice low and gentle. It seemed to relax and I moved my hand to stroke its head. I could feel the darkness that cloaked its body, but it looked like it hadn’t taken over yet. I closed my eyes and smiled.

“You’re fighting to protect your unborn baby, huh?” I whispered, opening my eyes to see the deer blink its red eyes before nodding. I gave a nod of understanding, closing my eyes again and letting my magic flow to my hands. My mind told me I could heal her. *I could save her and her unborn fawn.*

I heard Orion gasp but I didn’t let myself get distracted. I focused on letting the magic flow out my fingertips, the warmth of my magic fluttering through me and making me smile at the soothing feeling. When I felt like the deed was done, I opened my eyes and smiled as the deer moved closer to me and began licking my cheek.

“Go somewhere safe and live,” I whispered, wrapping my arms around her neck as I bid her farewell. I could feel her happiness and that was enough for me. I pulled away and she looked between Orion and I before she went on her knees and bowed her head. Orion and I exchanged looks, unsure what she meant by her bowing gesture, but then she got up and ran away, straight into the nearest set of trees and out of sight.

My shoulders sank and I sighed, feeling really tired. Orion was at my side in two seconds, his hands on my shoulders to steady me. “You okay?” he asked.

I grinned, lifting my head to look up into his worried eyes. “That was amazing, Orion. I healed her,” I expressed in disbelief and he smiled, lowering his lips to mine.

When he pulled back, his eyes were filled with pride. “Yes you did, Celestia. That was beautiful,” he whispered.

“You think I could do that to those who change into Forsaken?” I questioned.

“Maybe, but it would put yourself at risk if healing the deer made you this tired,” Orion pointed out.

“Hmm. True.” I looked down at the palm of my hands that still tingled with magic. Orion followed my gaze, placing his left hand on mine and brushing the blessed mark on my wrist. I shivered at the touch and he lifted it up to kiss the area. I moaned quietly, closing my eyes to savor the pleasurable feeling and onset of energy.

When he lowered my hand, the marking was glowing brightly and I no longer felt tired at all.

“What did you do?” I asked.

“Just gave you a little energy boost,” he replied with a grin.

“Thank you.”

He nodded, placing his hand in mine and giving it a light squeeze. “Let’s figure this out so we can go home. We still have time?” he asked. I nodded, lifting my free hand to look at the magic display, 50:49 and counting down.

“Oka-”

“GRAAAEEEEEEEEEE”

Oh for fuck sakes, not again. We both turned to look behind us. There was the largest Rhinroy I’d ever seen. It was huge, reminding me of the Forsaken that first attacked us back at Omako Forest. It didn’t give us time to think, charging at us with full force.

“Run!” Orion shouted. I let go of his hand to dash forward, but noticed another Rhinroy of the same size charging from our right, seconds away from tackling Orion. *FUCK!*

“Orion!” I screamed, shoving him to the ground, out of the way of the Rhinroy’s attack, before pulling my dual swords out to get into a defensive stance.

“GRAEEEEEEEE!!!!!”

“SHIELDALA!” I countered.

The gold magic circle appeared before me, making a shield in time for the Rhinroy’s impact, but the shield only protected me from the attack.

It couldn’t prevent my body from flying into the air. A scream escaped me as I felt my body go through something hot before entering a completely different environment.

My body began to fall, and I tried to think of another spell to cushion my fall but my mind was so distraught, clouded with fear as I held my breath.

The air was cold and it was hard to breathe. Within seconds, my body crashed into the ground, the impact so hard it knocked me right out.

* * *

~*ORION*~

“CELESTIA!” I screamed, watching her body fly like a ragdoll through the air, straight towards the barrier.

No, no, NO!

She hit it and a scream escaped her, but instead of falling forward towards the ground below, she went right through the barrier, her scream disappearing when she did.

FUCK!

Panic pulsed through me as I charged forward, not caring about the Rhinroy that was tailing me. I didn't care about the fucking exam when Celestia was now on the other side of the barrier and at risk of getting attacked by a multitude of Forsaken waiting to devour her.

I charged directly at the barrier, bracing myself just in case it didn't let me through. But I ran straight through it, skidding to a stop at the sudden climate change. There was a loud bang behind me, and I heard the muffled cries of the Rhinroy as it tried to get through the barrier, but couldn't.

I didn't have to think about them or the fact we were able to go past the barrier with no issues. I quickly scanned the frigid area, noticing the puffs of cold air that escaped as I tried to catch my breath. I noticed a small purple glow a few feet away, the light was a shining beacon in this otherwise dark environment.

My body moved before I could even think.

Within seconds, my eyes landed on Celestia's body. She'd fallen on her back which must have knocked her right out, considering the height she must have fallen from.

I quickly dropped to my knees, pressing my fingers against her neck to find a pulse.

I sighed in relief when I felt it and immediately began checking for any open wounds. She had a gash on the right side of her head, blood dripping from the wound and falling to the dark green grass that looked almost frozen. Other than that,

she didn't look too beat up, but it looked like she might be unconscious for a while.

I made sure she didn't have any spinal injuries before I scooped her up to rest in my lap, positioning her head against my chest as I used my right arm to hold her and my left to begin healing her wound.

“Well, well, well. Look what we have here.”

I frowned, taking a deep breath at the chilling voice before lifting my head to look in front of me.

A man walked out of the fog that cloaked the forest, his black cape fluttering behind him as he approached. I held Celestia a little tighter as if he might rip her out of my hands if I didn't hold her close. I couldn't let him have her. She wasn't his and I knew he wouldn't dare share her.

“You can't have her,” I declared, narrowing my angry eyes at him.

The man stood at 6'2", with no weapons in sight. His long black hair surpassed his shoulders, every strand perfectly in place. He wore black pants, a white dress shirt, and black shoes. He wore a silver necklace in the shape of a crescent moon, and his pale complexion and pure white eyes looked both beautiful and deadly at the same time. He had a slim build but I suspected he hid muscle underneath his clothes. His lips curled up into a smile as he stared at my analyzing gaze.

“Now, after all this time, I would have thought you'd learned how to share by now,” he hummed in glee and I gritted my teeth as I tried to remain calm.

I wouldn't lose to him. I just couldn't.

He smiled, pulling his left hand out from his pocket, gliding his hand through his black tresses before a wand

appeared, the shape and design almost identical to my own.

He took a deep breath and his white eyes twinkled with delight.

“I think it’s time we have a chat, little brother.”

Heart Of A Huntress

~CELESTIA~

*I opened my eyes, feeling the earth beneath me. The sun shone brightly overhead and I had to blink a few times to see the beautiful sky in its many colors. I slowly sat up, holding my head, which was pounding like crazy. **What happened?***

I glanced around the beautiful oasis, stunned by its beauty and serene atmosphere. From the many unique flowers that were in full bloom and the warm breeze that passed, carrying multiple floral scents, I felt almost at home.

It reminded me of the place Cairus and Caio had discovered, but I knew somewhere deep within me, that this was where I belonged. Where I should have been born and raised. It made me wonder what it would look like at night, and it made the unicorn side of me excited to shift and explore.

“Celestia.”

I looked over my shoulder and a wide smile formed on my face; mismatch purple and pink eyes locked onto mine.

“Mom?!” I scrambled to my feet and before I knew it, I was in her arms, holding her tightly. My beautiful mom, who I’d missed dearly, was actually here.

She giggled, stroking my hair soothingly. "I've missed you, Sweetheart."

"I missed you too," I whispered, fighting tears. I had missed her soft scent of lilies, her long flowing pink and purple hair, and those beautiful mismatched eyes that reminded me of Sia. Her voice sent flickers of hope through me, making me feel that everything would be alright.

"Mom, what are you doing here?" I was confused as to why we were in such a beautiful place. I'd been doing something important, I remembered that much, but I had no idea how that led to me being in a beautiful field of flowers and rainbow skies with my mother.

I looked up to meet her gaze and she gave me a sad smile. "We don't have much time, Sweetheart. You have to go back. Your friend needs you."

"Friend?" I asked, even more confused.

She nodded. "Yes. He'll need your help. You have to go back."

I frowned and looked down at my feet, debating if this would be my only chance to see her. I had so many questions, but there was no time for me to get the answers I needed.

She lifted my chin up and smiled. "You can't delay, but this won't be the last we see each other. I swear it," she whispered, pressing a kiss to my forehead.

"I love you, Mom," I whispered, hoping she'd keep her promise and I would see her again.

"I love you too, Celestia. Believe in yourself and the love you have for those dear to you. Prove that you have a heart of a huntress. Now go," she urged, pointing forward. I didn't hesitate, turning around and running forward as fast as I

could. The world began to fade, dematerializing into glitter as a doorway of light shone brightly up ahead, engulfing my vision and returning me to the surface.

* * *

I groaned, different sounds vibrating around me as I woke up.

My head was pounding, but that was least of my worries because suddenly, a loud ear-piercing cry rang through the air. My heart dropped and my eyes widened at the familiar noise. My body shot up into a sitting position and saw Orion's alicorn form tangled in multiple tendrils.

"Orion?!" I cried out, scrambling to my feet, but then the world began to spin, making me grit my teeth as I tried to fight off the dizziness.

But it was to no avail, my body falling back. Someone stopped me from falling; their hands landed on my shoulders and back like a wall for me to rest on.

Their hold felt familiar, but somehow different. I slowly lifted my head up to see pure white eyes, but a familiar face that made me tilt my head in utter confusion.

"O..rion?" I asked.

He smiled, the expression eerie, but with a sense of beauty to it. "Oh, my Queen. I know my brother and I are very alike, but I'm not at all like him."

"Brother?!" I practically squeaked, recovering from my dizziness and pulling out of his hold to face him. He looked like the spitting image of Orion, but the aura around him was much darker and made my skin crawl.

He nodded, taking a moment to bow before me.

“Yes, my Queen. My name is Odion Meadow. I’m Orion’s older brother. It’s nice to show my real appearance to you in the flesh.”

My jaw went slack and I stared at him blankly.

Spitting fucking image? Holy shit.

“Twins?” I questioned and his grin widened. “Yes, my Queen. It’s a terribly long story and I personally don’t blame my brother for not sharing it with you, but I’m guessing he may not get the chance at this point.” Odion frowned, his eyes looking past me.

I whipped my head to see Orion’s body cloaked in darkness, red eyes glaring at me as he began stomping his hoof.

NO.

“Orion!” I cried out, ready to dash towards him, when a hand grabbed my wrist, stopping me. I looked back at Odion, who had a troubled expression.

“It’s too late for him, my Queen. You’ll only be risking yourself,” he warned. I could hear the sympathy in his voice but his expression gave away his true amusement.

“Change him back!” I ordered.

“It’s not that simple, my Queen. The darkness chooses its victims. I’m just the carrier.” He shrugged.

“He’s your brother!” I snapped.

“True, but why should I care when he has what I rightfully own?” he countered.

“You don’t own me!” I snarled. He pulled me forward until I was in his hold, his left hand held my wrist while his right

arm wrapped around my waist, pressing my body against his.

“That is where you’re wrong, my Queen,” he whispered, before his tender lips landed on mine. My body froze up at the kiss, unable to distinguish the truth from the lie. How could he be so evil, yet kiss so tenderly?

I tried to pull away, but he only deepened the kiss, moaning into my mouth.

I can't do this!

“NEIGH!” I heard the loud agonizing call before the sound of stomping hooves hitting the ground.

Odion broke the kiss and grinned, lifting us up and moved back just in time to avoid Orion’s attack. He let me go with a devilish grin on his lips.

“Now, brother. You shouldn’t be interrupting us. It’s rather rude.” Odion sighed dramatically.

Orion looked even angrier after that, his raging red eyes glowed and he charged towards Odion, who avoided his attack again. He landed opposite of me and Orion skidded to a stop, turning his head to his brother who grinned.

“Hmm. It looks like I’ve run out of time. At least I can’t say it was a waste,” Odion mumbled, his thumb trailing across his bottom lip while his eyes stared at me. He didn’t need to have irises for me to see his desire for me and I didn’t know whether to be intrigued or totally sickened by the idea.

“My Queen, I’ll be back to claim you, dead or alive. Try to survive my little brother’s tantrum. He’s rather hard to handle when he’s mad.” Odion winked and blew a kiss my way.

“NEIGH!” Orion charged straight towards him.

Odion shook his head and snapped his fingers. His cloak wrapped around his body and black magic circles appeared, one beneath him and one above him, slowly moving towards one another.

By the time the circles met, Odion was gone.

Orion skidded to a stop, crying out over and over again while his hooves stomped the soil where his brother once stood.

I sighed, glad he was gone but left completely confused with everything. I had to try and heal Orion. I didn't know if I had enough strength for it, but I needed to try anyway.

“Orion?” I whispered, reaching out my hand. He turned to me and a shiver ran through me; those red orbs were filled with hate and the intent to kill.

“Orion? It's me, Celestia.” I raised my hands in defense but it did no good. Orion stomped his hooves and began to charge straight at me.

Aww shit!

“SHIELDALA!” My hands rose up to cast the spell, just in time for Orion's attack that hit me with force.

I stood my ground as his head pressed against the shield which was already beginning to crack. I realized I wouldn't be able to hold it much longer.

Before I could react, the shield shattered and Orion charged right into me, sending me flying straight into a set of trees. I cried out, my body falling to the ground and I began to cough.

“Ow.” I slowly got to my hands and knees, lifting my head to see Orion eyeing me carefully.

“Jeez. I get you’re angry Odion kissed me, but could you be just a little more gentle?” I huffed.

He blew out steam from his nostrils and a red magic circle formed beneath him.

“Oh, no! Don’t you dare blow fire at me, Orion,” I snapped, scrambling to my feet and pointing my hand at him. He stalled, almost looking frightened at my sudden harsh tone.

“I get you’re mad. Just stay still. Please,” I soothed, slowly approaching him. He didn’t move, which was a good sign and I mentally sighed in relief when the magic circle beneath him disappeared. If he started a fire, we’d be in a major dilemma with how fast the flames would spread, potentially destroying everything here.

Not like the area was alive with all the decay and darkness.

I was only three steps away when he began to back up, looking like he was angry, but also confused.

“Orion, please let me heal you. Odion’s gone,” I urged.

He stomped his foot against and I cursed as he stormed forward. I dodged his charge but had no time to recover. He did a sharp turn and charged straight into me, sending me flying into a cluster of trees, breaking a few until I slammed into one that stopped my movement.

I dropped to the ground and let out a groan before I began coughing up blood. I fought to get on my hands and knees, my breath ragged as I fought to stay conscious.

I heard a sound and lifted my head to see Orion approach me cautiously, looking a bit sad.

“Your brother was right. You’re hard to handle when you’re pissed,” I whispered.

I slowly rose to my feet, which trembled. I ended up leaning my back against the remaining tree behind me for support.

I used my arm to wipe the blood from my lips, looking down at my uniform that was in tatters. That’s when I noticed the thick tree bark poking out from my left thigh.

I bit my lips, just now feeling how fucking painful it was.

Shit. This isn’t good.

I looked back at Orion whose eyes lingered on my leg, watching the blood drip down onto the desolate earth.

“Orion. I can’t hurt you. I...just...can’t. You have to let me heal you. I get you’re upset. Maybe you’re even mad at me... but I...can’t lose you to the darkness. You can kill me after if you like. Just...let me help you,” I begged.

He didn’t move and I sighed, trying to catch my breath. I’d only have enough energy to heal Orion and not the wound on my leg. I could already feel the effects of the blood loss and was trying not to vomit from the gruesome appearance of my leg.

I just had to make sure Orion was okay. If he was healed of the darkness, that’s all that mattered. We couldn’t lose any more alicorns.

My gut told me that.

I raised my arms up and Orion began to stomp, getting ready to charge.

“It’s okay. Whatever you decide to do...I know it’s not your fault. You loved me and that’s all that matters,” I

whispered, hoping that if he was going to kill me, he'd at least give me one last hug first.

He charged forward and I closed my eyes in defeat, fighting not to lose consciousness.

I could sense his hurt, feel the pain that radiated off him, especially after seeing his brother kiss me. He thought I wasn't his anymore, that his brother had won, but he was wrong and this was the only way I could think of to prove that to him.

I must have gone in and out of unconsciousness for a split second because when I opened my eyes, I was still leaning against the tree. Something licked my cheek and I sighed in relief.

I opened my eyes to see Orion, his red glowing eyes filled with sadness.

I smiled as best as I could and he took a step forward into my arms. I hugged him, holding back a sob as I stroked his fur that was still cloaked by the cold dark aura.

"I'm gonna heal you now, Orion," I warned. He huffed but stayed in place, making me grin. "And you call ME stubborn," I mumbled, knowing he was still a little mad.

What was left of my magic poured into my fingertips and I let it flow out without holding back. He was much bigger than the deer and I knew with how unique of a shifter he was, it would probably cost twice as much energy to heal him.

I let the energy continue to flow until I had nothing left, and was fighting to keep my eyes open. I smiled as the darkness faded out of him, floating in the air, before vanishing.

Orion pulled back to give me a full glimpse of his pure white body, those beautiful wings I adored reappeared and stretched out before retracting back to his sides.

“Welcome back,” I whispered, the relief of it all finally sinking into my body. His body began to glow and was immersed in light.

I felt a sick feeling running through me that I was powerless to fight, a chill running through me as the pain began to pulse all over my body

My knees buckled and I fell forward, bracing myself for the fall.

I could only imagine the pain I’d feel when the tree bark that was protruding from my body got pushed further by the fall, but I couldn’t shift fast enough to fall on my side.

Arms caught me before I hit the ground, and seconds later, I was lowered gently down, my body cradled in warm arms.

“Fuck, Celestia. I’m so sorry. Can you hear me? Celestia!” Orion called out. I smiled weakly, needing a few moments to finally open my eyes before looking up at his gorgeous purple eyes that were filled with tears as his lip trembled.

“You know...when you swear...it’s really hot,” I commented.

He smiled, tears rolling down his cheeks before he leaned over and kissed me. I could sense his hesitation in the kiss, but I didn’t mind, kissing him back with everything I had. This might have been my last kiss, so I needed to make it count.

He broke the kiss and I took the moment to apologize. “I’m sorry. I didn’t...didn’t...think he’d kiss me. Don’t be mad,” I begged, tears rolling down my cheeks.

“Celestia...I’m not mad at you. I’m sorry, it’s my fault. I... should have realized it was him. I didn’t think...it’s a long story...but I’m not upset with you.”

That's a relief.

I tried to respond but I was so cold, and it was getting hard for me to breathe. "O...rion. I...don't feel...good," I sighed.

My lip trembled and I could barely feel anything. It was like I was freezing up from the inside out. With that, my fear grew stronger.

"I need to get you back," Orion said quietly, but then his eyes lingered on my leg.

"It's...bad...isn't it?" I whispered. Orion bit his lip and I didn't need for him to reply to know this wasn't going to turn out well.

"I'll take you to Magnor. He'll be able to help," Orion suggested determinedly.

"She'll die before you reach the school gates," a voice announced. Orion looked up and I ever so slowly turned my head to the right. I saw a tall man with short black hair and brilliant pink eyes. There were two other people behind him, wearing similar uniforms, but you could tell the guy who spoke was the leader of the group.

"Who are you?" Orion narrowed his eyes at them, looking like he'd kill them if they so much as glanced at me funny.

"As important as that question is, we don't have much time to waste. Unless you want Celestia to turn into a Forsaken," the man disclosed.

I was confused that he knew my name. He walked forward and Orion held me tightly to his body, his eyes locked on the approaching stranger.

He reached us, lowering to one knee.

His pink eyes looked into my eyes.

A sad smile formed on his lips and he reached out, stroking my head soothingly, which left me even more confused.

“How...” I trailed off, closing my eyes shut as a shock wave of pain suddenly coursed through me.

“I’m sorry Celestia. I know how curious you are, but I need to save your life first, which means we need to get this bark out of her leg, now,” he insisted.

“She’ll bleed out,” Orion pointed out in a worried voice.

“If we leave that in, she’ll become a Forsaken. Everything in this part of the forest is tainted. You can already see how cold she is. If it weren’t the fact that she’s a unicorn shifter, she would have been dead and consumed by now,” the man pointed out.

Orion was silent and the man sighed. “I’m gonna need your help when I pull it out. The moment I do, you’re going to have to use whatever healing magic you have to halt the bleeding. That will give me enough time to heal her,” he explained.

My body trembled and I whimpered, unsure if I could take much more of the pain and cold. Orion looked down at me, fear in his eyes as he bit his bottom lip.

“Fine. But you need to tell me who you work for, or at least where we’re being taken to,” Orion insisted.

“We are part of Alpha Pure and are bringing you back to our camp. I’ll be honest, we’ll have to follow protocol until you’re deemed cooperative and trustworthy enough to walk around freely, but at least your girlfriend will be alive. Good enough?” the stranger confirmed.

“Fine, but we can’t be separated or I’ll wreck shit up,” Orion declared.

“Sure.” The man sighed, shaking his head. He turned his gaze to me and gave me a sympathetic look.

“Sorry, Celestia. Because of how painful this is going to be, I need you to sleep,” he revealed.

“But...” I began, but trailed off.

I was fighting off sleep right now, but I was scared if I closed my eyes, I wouldn’t wake up again. He stroked my head once more, the action relaxing me a little. He smiled, his pink eyes twinkling brightly.

“You will survive this, but no more time wasting. I vow you will be fine,” he whispered.

I didn’t know why I felt he was telling me the truth, but I nodded slightly and he smiled. He lifted his hand and took a deep breath, slowing blowing out a stream of air.

Pink sparkles that reminded me of glitter rained down on my face and a wave of drowsiness hit me.

I noticed Orion’s shock but I couldn’t focus on it anymore, my eyes slowly closing as my mind drifted further and further into the dark abyss.

The last thought I had was of the pink glitter that rained down on me, and the culprit of the magic, who now looked familiar to me, but I couldn’t figure it out for the life of me.

But I knew one thing.

That man was most definitely a unicorn shifter.

Hidden Truth

~F *INN*~

“This doesn’t make any sense. That looks like-”

“It’s not Orion,” I defended immediately.

Theo looked at me, his eyes glowing red in anger.

“THAT person is Orion, Finn. Do not try to act like a blinded fool by saying otherwise. Only Orion has nice fucking hair that makes him look like he came straight out of a shampoo commercial.”

Hunter sighed. “I’d have to agree with that comment.”

We were in the private conference room with Othello, Ms. Arcadia, and Magnor. Hunter, Theo, and I were waiting for Cairus and Caio to go get Celestia and Orion after we received permission to stop the exam.

We had gone through the surveillance tapes from Old Aslan, and to everyone surprise, the footage showed Orion putting the snakes in her locker. On close inspections of the recording from the Omako Forest examination, it was Orion who put the fragment there while we were all asleep. For all the trials, he had somehow used his magic to make the machine always pick Celestia, the footage showed him

standing near the meeting area before our partnering, and also at the location of each of the trials.

That was more than enough to freak everyone out, but we waited for the twins to get back and we could confront Orion directly. *Wait for everyone to confront Orion, except for me that is.*

I knew exactly who was in those surveillance tapes but even with how critical the situation was, I couldn't yet share. With how Theo was acting, I doubt he'd believe me. I didn't blame him for his reactions, knowing it was something that occurred when vampires were far from their mate; they basically lost their shit. *Especially when they have no other way to contact her because of the trial.*

"Mr. Kristopher, calm down," Othello ordered, not looking worried, unlike Ms. Arcadia and Magnor. Theo glared at him, looking like he'd pounce on him if I didn't grab his arm. He turned his glare to me and was on the verge of hissing, his white fangs in clear view.

"I get it. You think I'm not freaking out too. I know there's something wrong and Celestia's at risk, but you throwing a fucking vampire tantrum is not gonna help anyone. She's alive. You know how I know? Because if she wasn't, her mates would feel it. Now stop acting like a kid and if you dare hiss at me, I'll wrap your ass in a cocoon of vines and put you in the fucking corner!" I snapped.

Everyone was completely silent as they stared at both of us. After a full minute, Hunter spoke up.

"Mate?" he asked, looking a little stunned.

I let go of Theo and he retracted his fangs and walked over my left to lean against the wall. He crossed his arms and

decided the floor would be the next victim to feel the wrath of his glare while he moped.

“Oh...they all haven't marked her yet?” Ms. Arcadia asked, slowly looking to Magnor who sighed.

“One was an accident, and the other two did it to protect her in the moment. I don't think it was an intentional bonding.” Magnor shrugged. Othello snapped his finger, the result made the door open slowly.

It was at that moment Caio and Cairus returned, both of them entering the room in their tiger forms. They didn't pause as light engulfed their bodied and their naked human forms emerged. They snapped their fingers in unison, clothes appearing on their body in seconds.

“Bad news,” Caio announced.

“What?” I asked, bracing myself to hear what they had to say.

Please don't be dead, Celestia.

“The trial area was empty. Only things there was those stupid gigantic Rhinroys who were a fucking pain in the ass to knock out,” Caio explained.

I opened my mouth to reply but Cairus held his hand up to stop me. “When we came back, Hellsin told us he felt something go through the barrier. He's the one who manages the energy flow through it and said he felt the surge of a breach, twice. Normally he goes and checks, but he knew a trial was going on and thought it could have just been a Rhinroy,” Cairus explained.

“Fuck.” Hunter cursed.

Theo bit his lip. “Where are they?”

“We don’t know,” the twins said together.

Cairus continued. “We were able to go through the barrier with Hellsin’s help, but there’s nothing there. It’s a fucking dead zone. We smelled blood, but we don’t know whose it was.”

“Couldn’t you smell Celestia’s scent or even Orion’s?” I asked.

“The other side of the barrier is like no man’s land. We could barely catch the blood scent. It’s hard to breathe there and it’s super cold.” Caio shuddered.

“What now?” Theo asked.

“And what’s this about you guys being mates?” Hunter addressed.

“Huh?” Cairus and Caio questioned, looking at me before glancing to my left at Theo and then my right to the Othello, Ms. Arcadia, and Magnor.

“Uh. Are we missing something?” Caio asked.

“You can tell us, we won’t look as mad as Theo looks,” Cairus added. Theo looked like he was about to hiss at them and which prompt me to call upon a vine that manifested into my grasp while I glared at him. He mumbled something under his breath, sounding like “*I fucking hate you right now*” but remained quiet after that.

Magnor sighed. “Hunter, Caio, Cairus. Do you all know what blessed marks are?”

“Yes.” All three of them spoke in unison.

“Great, saves me a whole explanation. Celestia was marked by Orion after the attack at the Old Aslan. Those are the markings you see on her wrist. She has another one on her

neck from the trial with Theo and one more on her chest from Finn,” Magnor summarized.

“Those weren’t tattoos?” Caio looked surprised.

“And isn’t the mark on her neck supposed to fade?” Cairus asked.

“And what damn mark on her chest?” Hunter demanded.

There was a knock on the door. It opened to reveal Faelia, who had Arielle on her shoulder.

“Before you men get all upset with one another, I got some dirt on our guy!” Faelia declared, walking into the room with pride.

“BRU!” Arielle fluttered her wings and hopped off Faelia’s shoulder, coming to land on mine.

I smiled in relief to see her looking much better than she had before. She still had a bandage around one of her wings, but other than that, she was okay. She began brushing her head against my cheek and I lifted my hand to pet her.

“I’m glad you’re better, Arielle,” I whispered to her.

Othello sighed. “Ms. Blessheart, you have to learn to close doors,” he complained, snapping his fingers which caused the door to shut.

“Aww Master, be nice. I did good this time. You’ll praise me in a second.” She huffed.

“Master?” All the guys asked, looking at Faelia before glancing over to Othello, who rolled his eyes.

“I don’t get why any of you are shocked right now,” he grumbled.

Ms. Arcadia laughed. “Because you don’t have the look of a teacher who’s dedicated many years to raising Faelia. See, you look at Magnor and can totally see it. You, not so much.” She hummed.

“I’m hurt by your words, Miona,” he mumbled. She smiled, sliding her hand in his.

“Uh. Are they dating?” Caio asked Cairus, who frowned.

“I don’t know.”

“They’re married. Now can we get to Faelia’s news?” Magnor spoke up. We were all silent, stunned by the revelation, but realized this wasn’t the best time to talk about it.

Faelia smiled, walking over to where I stood to face the majority of the guys. She lifted the file in her hand. “I found out who the culprit is,” she declared.

“Orion’s our culprit. We saw the footage,” Theo snapped.

Cairus and Caio both looked lost. “Orion?” they said together.

Faelia rolled her eyes. “Theo, stop jumping to conclusions without supporting evidence. Technology is so overrated. Sometimes you need a shifter and familiar who likes shiny things and are rather good at snooping.”

“Faelia, did you go into Orlando’s office, again?” Othello scolded.

Faelia flinched, slowly turning to give him a little smile. “Um...it was all for the sake of saving Celestia and proving Orion’s innocence. Don’t be mad.” She cleared her throat and stood up straight, her expression growing serious.

“Orion is innocent in this,” she announced.

“How?” Theo asked and she pulled out a picture.

“This is a picture of Orion, right?” Faelia asked, showing it to everyone around the room.

“Yes,” they all replied.

She grinned, walking over to the desk behind me and setting the file down. I moved to stand next to Hunter and the professors came closer to see what she was going to reveal. She pulled a second photo out with the guy we saw on the surveillance.

“Who is this?” she asked.

“It’s Orion,” Theo replied.

“Looks like Orion. Just with black hair and darker clothes,” Hunter concluded.

“That’s not Orion,” Cairus and Caio said in unison. I sighed in relief, turning to the both of them who had stern looks on their faces.

“Would you like to elaborate, twins?” Faelia asked.

“Orion’s nose is just a bit smaller than the other guy’s,” Caio pointed out.

“Also Orion’s hair roots are pure white. He doesn’t use any chemicals in his hair other than shampoo. If he used dye, we would have seen, and using magic to disguise natural hair is a pain in the ass and costs too much energy over time. We would have seen his black roots much earlier,” Cairus added.

“Observant,” Faelia complimented.

“What are you trying to say? In all the footage, Orion was away from the scene. It’s him using some magic,” Theo pointed out.

“He wasn’t there for all the incidents. The final trial selection was Sunday night because the professors wanted to start bright and early the next day,” Hunter pointed out.

“Exactly. Orion was with Celestia because she asked if we could have a campfire and make marshmallows,” Cairus reminded.

“Ding ding ding, we have a winner.” Faelia hummed.

“Bruuuuuu.” Arielle hopped impatiently on my shoulder.

Faelia smiled. “Yes, Arielle you’re right. We’re wasting time.” She set those pictures down and pulled two more out. She lifted the first one, revealing an image of Orion as a kid. His purple eyes were wide and had teeth-showing smile on his face.

“This is the picture you take when you decide to reside in a dimension for longer than one year. Orion is six in the picture,” Faelia announced before lifting the other picture. Everyone but me gasped. The same little boy was in the picture. He looked a little shy and his bright lavender purple eyes almost appeared white. Faelia lowered both images and pulled a final picture: Orion and the look-alike standing side by side.

They held hands in the picture while Orion’s other hand was mid-wave. He smiled widely and his copy had a small smile on his face. A man stood behind Orion’s copy, his hand on the boy’s head while a woman with long hair stood behind Orion, kneeling down with her hand on his head, smiling brilliantly.

“Orion Meadow and Odion Meadow. Identical twins. This is the last picture found with both of them together. All other records of Odion were destroyed. All that is written is that

Orion and Odion were different shifters. Orion being an alicorn, and Odion...” She trailed off, looking unsure if she should mention.

“And Odion being a Dark Rider,” I finished.

Everyone looked at me with stunned expressions. I didn’t wait for anyone to reply as I continued.

“Orion knew his brother until he was six. His father decided he didn’t know how to raise a Dark Rider and knew it would become problematic when Odion got older. Orion was the quiet one while Odion was willing to defend what he thought was right. All Orion knew at the time, was that his father had sent Odion away to be trained by someone else. Orion was able to meet him once, later on after that but he didn’t tell me the details of the interaction. The following year, his family was murdered.”

The room was silent.

“I’ve known the whole time because Orion told me he was worried Odion was the one trying to fulfill the legend. Orion said he’d discuss it with everyone after the final trial because he knew Celestia couldn’t handle any more revelations with all the stress she was already dealing with,” I concluded.

“Okay, before you all freak out and have stupid debates about how this can’t be, we need to move and search outside the barrier because my gut is telling me Celestia and Orion have been taken,” Faelia announced.

“Taken?!” All of us but the professors exclaimed. Faelia sighed, taking a calming breath before closing her eyes. When they opened, they held a dazed appearance to them, shining with multiple colors.

“Black hair, pink-eyed man, and two guards approached Orion, who is injured and Celestia, who is really hurt. The pink-eyed man did something and Celestia fell unconscious. It looks like she injured herself severely and Orion and the man helped heal her before picking her up. The guards took Orion too, who passed out later. Then they disappeared into the forest,” she summarized, closing her eyes and when they opened, they were back to normal.

“Alpha Pure,” Theo whispered.

The others nodded, looking like they came to the same conclusion. “We have to save them before they become experiments!” Theo stressed. He turned his attention to the professors. “You have to help us search or we’ll lose valuable time.”

Othello and Ms. Arcadia exchanged glances, both of them turning to Magnor, who sighed.

“Faelia, you said the man has pink eyes and black hair?” he asked for confirmation.

Faelia lowered into the desk chair and sighed, looking exhausted. “Yes.”

“Then I’ll handle it. Finn, you’ll be coming with me,” he declared.

“What? Why does Finn get to go?” Theo asked.

“Ya. Can’t we all go?” Hunter asked, looking a little hurt.

Magnor shook his head.

“What’s lost can be found if you have a pixie on your side. I need him to find the location I’m looking for. Bringing all of you would slow us down and put Celestia and Orion at risk. You wouldn’t want that, would you?” he asked.

They were silent and sighed.

“Good. Let’s be off. Arielle, come along,” Magnor declared walking to the door. I sighed, stepping forward to follow, but stopped to talk to the guys real quick first.

“I get you’re confused and angry, but we’ll talk it out once Celestia and Orion are safe and sound. Get some rest,” I urged before walking forward.

Magnor opened the door for me, letting me through.

“BRU-REEEE,” Arielle called out.

Faelia smirked. “Bye, Arielle. I’ll make sure the others know and don’t kill one another,” she reassured her.

I smirked as Magnor and I made our way to the elevator.

“You’re too calm,” I pointed out.

“Am I?”

“Yes. I’d think you’d be freaking out,” I pointed out. “Which means, you’re hiding something.”

“You’ve been very observant lately, Finn,” Magnor commented, turning his gaze to smile at me.

“Can you keep a secret?” he asked.

I nodded and he leaned in to whisper something into my ear.

My eyes grew wide and locked on his when he leaned back.

“Now can you trust me?” he asked.

I slowly nodded and Arielle hopped happily on my shoulder, singing away.

“Let’s go get my Sweet Blossom,” I whispered.

~C E L E S T I A ~

“Celestia?”

I snuggled closer to Orion, not wanting to get up yet.

“Five more minutes,” I mumbled.

Orion chuckled. “We aren’t home right now, Blessed Love. You have to get up,” he whispered, stroking my hair. I considered whether he was making that up, but decided to open my eyes to see for myself.

I looked up to see Orion’s relieved expression, though he looked like he’d gone to war and stayed up for another twenty-four hours. “Orion? You look tired as fuck,” I mumbled.

“You’re one to talk,” he teased.

I slowly sat up, flinching at the pain from my left leg. I looked down and saw it was in bandages and that I was wearing a pink nightgown. I looked over to Orion, who wore white shorts and a black top.

“Black doesn’t suit you.” I frowned, not liking the combo.

“You’re full of comments today.” He smirked, leaning in to kiss me. I pressed my lips against his, lifting my hand to run it

through his white locks. When he pulled back, he continued. “But I agree, I don’t look good in black.”

“Hmm. I think I need to catch up because I really don’t understand how we landed in jail,” I commented, lifting my hand to point at the bars of what looked like a high-class dungeon.

“They have to follow protocol here because their commander is out. They can’t let us roam around freely without the Commander’s permission,” Orion explained.

“What is this place exactly?” I asked.

“Alpha Pure,” Orion announced. “We were ‘kidnapped.’” He said, using air quotes.

“Hey! Don’t go say we kidnapped you when we had to lug your ass all the way here.”

I turned to see the familiar guard, my memory finally playing catch up.

Orion rolled his eyes.

“Fuck off,” he huffed and I smirked, slowly turning back to look at him.

“Did I tell you when you swear it’s totally hot?” I hummed.

He blushed and looked away.

“I thought you said that because you were delirious from the energy loss,” he mumbled.

“Nope. It’s seriously hot,” I emphasized before leaning in to whisper in his ear. “Can you swear more in bed? Total turn on,” I purred.

His face was bright red as he shyly met my gaze.

“If...you want.”

“Yeah!” I declared and I heard a man laugh, catching my attention.

“Can you two wait until after we’ve got you a room before you plan your fantasies?” The black-haired man walked into view, his pink eyes landing on us.

He had a wide smile on his face.

“Sir Prism!” The two guards stood at attention.

He gestured for them to relax and turned to face us from the barred entrance. He wore simple black pants and a white top, looking like he’d just woken up from the way his hair was ruffled and his pink eyes, which still held a sleepy appearance.

“How you two holding up, especially you, Celestia?” the man asked.

“Um, sorry if this comes out rude, but who the fuck are you?” I demanded.

“Blessed Love, I think if you left out the ‘fuck’ out of it, would have been a little nicer,” Orion pointed out.

I frowned.

“But I’m adding emphasis. You have to take into consideration he’s a complete stranger that helped us and we’re in this luxurious dungeon hotel place,” I replied innocently.

The man laughed, catching our attention.

“Luxurious dungeon hotel. I like that. I’m going to assume since you can talk normally without passing out, you’re a little better.”

“I guess. Um...thanks for healing me and not killing Orion,” I whispered, bowing my head slightly.

Orion also bowed his head. “Thank you for saving the woman I love. It wasn’t your duty and I’m forever grateful.”

“Ah, but interestingly enough, it was my duty, but thank you for your humbleness. It gives me some reassurance.” He grinned.

Orion and I exchanged looks as we frowned, completely confused by his words. Suddenly we heard the sound of the door down the hall opening, then loud clicking noises echoed down the hall.

“Commander!” The guards stood at attention and Mr. Prism smiled, a kind expression forming on his face as he looked down the hall.

“You’re early.”

The figure came to view and I gawked at the stunning beauty, my heart feeling like it came to a stop.

Orion’s jaw went slack as he stared at the woman next to Mr. Prism. She turned to face us and a remorseful smile formed on her lips as she blinked back tears.

Orion moved off the bed, helping me to stand. When he felt I was fine and could hold my weight, he looked between the stranger and me.

“Double,” he commented.

Mr. Prism chuckled.

“Mother and daughter, Orion. Meet our commander of Alpha Pure, Charlotte Rainbow.”

“M...om...” I whispered, tears pooling in my eyes as I stared into her mismatched ones that look just as beautiful as they had in my dream from before.

All these years, I’d wanted to see her again but now that she stood before me, I couldn’t move.

She must have realized I was frozen in shock, because she nodded her head in understanding.

The guard that had been quietly standing there the entire time moved forward to open the cell door, pushing it back to grant Mother entry. She walked up to me slowly, her heels clicking on the cement floor until she stood before me.

She opened her arms up and smiled.

“Hey, Sweetheart. I missed you.”

I lost it, breaking down into tears as I stepped into her arms. She held me tightly, holding me and keeping me from falling to my knees. She lowered us both to the floor and cradled me.

My head pressed against her chest as I cried and cried.

She stroked my head soothingly, telling me it was okay for me to cry and that she’d missed me so much. She was so proud of how much I’d grown and how selfless I’d become.

She held me for a long time until my tears went dry and became just quiet whimpers. She cried as well, happy to finally get to hold me in her arms again after so many years.

When I finally calmed, she helped me up. Orion took the opportunity to help me stand by wrapping his arm around my waist and allowing me to lean on him for support.

Mother stared at him for a long time before she smiled.

“An alicorn, huh? Interesting that my daughter bonded with an alicorn.” She hummed.

We both blushed at her words and Orion looked a little surprised.

“How...do you know what I am with one look?” he questioned.

“I’ve studied about all types of unicorn shifters for years. I don’t need to see your form to know what you are,” she declared.

“Mom, you know about unicorn shifters?” I asked in shock.

She grinned, nodding her head.

“Of course. How can any mother give birth to a unicorn shifter and not search far and wide to learn more about them? I knew plenty before your birth, but having you only made me motivated to learn more.”

“Dad doesn’t know. He said you two aren’t on good terms and need a break,” I mumbled.

Mr. Prism laughed.

“Ah, Orlando’s such a dick. Was he working when you asked? He’s always an ass when he’s working.”

Orion and I slowly looked at Mom, who rolled her eyes and gave Mr. Prism a look.

“Harrison. Don’t be mean,” she scolded.

He just shrugged.

“If I found out he was an ass to Celestia, I’m wrecking his office and blaming Hellsin.”

Mom sighed, shaking her head.

“Why are you such a troublemaker?”

“In my blood, Sweetcakes. Now can we move out of here? I think we’re gonna have some explaining to do and I’d personally like to make a big meal for all of us to eat while you give Celestia and her mate the whole story,” Harrison suggested.

“Um, mom? What’s going on? How does he know Hellsin and why is he calling you Sweetcakes?” I asked, utterly confused by this point.

“You can go make food, and that’s a good idea.” She answered Harrison before turning her attention to Orion and I. “I’ll explain everything over dinner, but I have one last thing to show you,” she insisted.

We both nodded and Orion helped me walk as we followed Mother.

Harrison bowed his head to both of us before leaving down the opposite hall, the guards following him.

I glanced at Mom’s flawless appearance. Her long sleeveless white dress flowed elegantly as the gold cloak with pink and purple trimming fluttered in the passing wind that came in through the crack of the door we were approaching.

When she got there, she nodded to the two guards.

They bowed, before returning the way we came, leaving us alone with Mother, who turned to face us.

Her long pink and purple hair was tied up in a high ponytail and her cheeks were still flushed from her tears. She stared at the both of us and took a deep breath.

“What have you heard about Alpha Pure?” she asked.

“You guys are a rebellious group who kidnap shifters who wander outside the barrier by accident and use them for experiments. Some of you are good, but the majority only have hidden intentions,” Orion answered.

I nodded my agreement.

“Some of you used to be hunters and huntresses, but decided to take a different route to face the forsaken, and ya, you guys kidnap shifters. Especially unicorns and other mythological creatures for experimentation and research.”

She frowned, shaking her head. “

Celestia, do you really believe that?”

“Well...ya, I do. I mean, I didn't think you'd kidnap unicorn shifters, but hunters have been known to hunt and kill us. They killed Orion's family in front of him and Magnor never would let me go too far outside the forest when I was younger for fear I'd be taken.”

She nodded, looking deep in thought before she turned around and opened the door, gesturing for us to follow her.

We walked into the bright light and both gasped, the familiar scenery made my heart blossom with happiness and hope.

Mother turned around to face us, but it was almost impossible for our eyes to focus on her with the incredible amount of beauty before us.

“We don't kidnap unicorn shifters or other mythological creatures, Celestia,” she whispered, smiling at the creature who landed next to her.

It spread its wings out as it cried out in greeting, leaving Orion shell shocked as he squeezed my hand tightly.

Mother reached out and pet the pure white alicorn, before returning her gaze to us.

“We save them. Welcome to Alpha Pure, sanctuary for endangered shifters across the dimensions, and the place you were born. Welcome home, Sweetheart.”

TO BE CONTINUED.

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- Avery P.

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