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Prologue

"STEPHANIE!" a soft and calm voice calls me. As usual, I ignore it and silently pray to the spirits that it leaves me alone.

"Stephanie wake up!" this time the voice is filled with urgency yet still low.

I mumble random things in hopes it would work to my advantage, it usually does. I feel a cold liquid splash on my face - I am wide awake now. I jump out of bed, landing on my feet with my mouth hanging open in disbelief. This woman poured cold water on me. If it was urgent she should have stated so. I dry the water on my face with my palm.

"Mother how...." before I can finish talking a hand is over my mouth, my mother's hand, preventing me from uttering another word.

"Quiet," she whispers but not doing a great job because her voice is naturally deep - almost like a man's.

"What's going on," my voice is barely audible since I have a hand covering my mouth.

Mother shifts her hand from my mouth and rushes to the little cabinet where I keep my clothes. She starts throwing them in a small bag. Every time I try to say something she argues I keep my voice low. It is as if she's listening to someone or expecting something. When she is done packing my clothes in the little bag, she finds shoes for me to wear and tells me to change my nightclothes. While I am still struggling to put on my dress we hear a loud bang coming from the direction of the front door followed by a loud voice yelling, "Come out witch!"

Mother helps me with my dress. She opens the window, jumps out then asks me to do the same. I don't need to be told twice, the voices coming from the other room are telling me that my mother and I are in trouble.

"Mom, what's going on?" I ask as we run out of the yard, straight into the forest. It's not yet the full moon so it's dark in the forest, one has to carry a lamp or fire torch.

"They know," she responds, panting hard. She is holding my wrist with one hand and the other holding the lamp. The bag is hanging crossed on her body so that it does not fall off.

I turn to look back and see our little cabin that is now on fire - there go all my paintings and favourite dresses, "What do they know - why are they burning our house?"

She speaks fast with her breath almost running out, "They know what you are and we have to get you out of here."

I stop running and yank her hand off mine. I balance my palms on my thighs, catching my breath "What's going on and what do they know?"

"Stephanie we have to go before they kill you. Please, I will explain everything when you are safe."

"I am not moving until you tell me why we are running away from the only place we call home in the middle of the night."

She exhales heavily, "Eighteen years ago a young witch fell in love with a warlord and you were born."

"But it is forbidden for people like us to be with warlords mom. They will..." I gasp when a spear lands next to me. I look behind us and there are people carrying fire torches following and it

looks like a large group of people, angry people! They are throwing spears and shooting series at us.

My mother blows out the lamp, takes my hand and we resume running. Today the forest is not kind to my feet today, I keep stepping on sharp stones and loose tree branches. My legs are sore because of the tree branches scratching my skin. I don't know where we are headed but this is the direction to the border and the border is closed. It's sealed with magic so that no one crosses through. It requires the most powerful sorcerous to open it. It's dark and I cannot see what I am stepping on but I am just following my mother.

My mother falls letting out a loud shriek. I try to help her up but she falls back down.

"Mom we have to move."

"They used a spell on this place. It is as if they knew I was going to come this way

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" she groans as if she is in deep pain. I can barely see her, only the whiteness on her teeth. She lets out a groan, louder than the first.

"Mom, what's going on?" I ask touching all over her face in hopes to comfort her, "Tell me what to do."

"I am trapped. They cast a spell on this ground. It's not affecting you because you have your father's blood running in your..." she screams loud that it scares the animals nearby, I can hear the rats running for dear life, "It's a tracking spell. You have to go. They will be here any moment. You have to go Stephanie. You're the imprinted one and they can never find you."

"The imprinted! What does that mean?"

She hangs the bag over my neck, "Run towards the border and whatever happens, don't look back."

"No, I am not leaving you."

She screams again and I can see the light from the fire touches drawing closer to us, "Go and cross the border. Chant Oopmak (open) four times and it will let you through. When you're on the other side find my sister, her name is Wendy. Go before they get you."

"Let me do an unbinding spell, I am not leaving you," I say.

"Our magic doesn't work on enchanted ground. Only the powerful sorcerous can break it. Go, Stephanie!"

I try to help her up but it seems as if her body is glued to the ground. The voices are getting louder meaning they are near. I hug my mother and run towards the border.

Growing up we were told stories about the border. Some say there's nothing beyond the border and some say the sun on that side is very hot it burns one's skin. It is said that no one has ever crossed the border and returned. RockNile is a small town outside everything. It is a small town for people like me, people who are different as I like to call it.

Just like any other country or kingdom, we have rules and my mother broke the one rule that has death as a penalty. She got with a warlord - I wish she had told me sooner.

In RockNile a warlord is royalty and here royalty gets with royalty. It is an abomination when a warlord mates with a commoner. If one breaks the rules they get killed - that's how my father died or should I say the person I thought was my father since I just found out I have a war lord's blood in my veins. Joshua lusted on the neighbour's wife leading him to sin and also his death. Fornication or Adultery is a huge crime punishable by death in RockNile.

I hold on to my bag and run toward the border, not looking back. I hear a werewolf howl followed by other werewolves joining in. Tears fall on my face but I wipe them off and continue running. In RockNile when werewolves howl in the middle of the night it marks a witch's death.

I stop running when I am facing the border. When looking at it from this side it looks clear as air but the moment one tries to walk through it, it will slice them to pieces. Bones are lying around the border. Every time someone commits a crime or breaks the rules in RockNile, their punishment is death but they let the border kill you. I once saw a man who was asked to walk through it, he had committed adultery with his brother's wife and they brought him here. He just touched the border with his index finger and it ripped him to pieces.

I take a deep breath as I stand facing the border, ready for my fate. This could be the day I die or the day I get to see the other side. I let out a shriek when I feel something cut my arm - someone shot an arrow at me. I look where I came from and five men riding horses are coming toward me. The border is providing light. During the day the border is just as clear as the

air but at night it glows and looks like water on the sea - that's what my mother said. I have seen a sea in my life.

"Stephanie don't do it," that's my friend Daniel. We have been friends for as long as I can remember. He recently joined the King's army - they help keep the kingdom safe.

"I didn't do anything."

"I know and I am on your side," he gets off the horse and slowly walks towards me. I retreat slowly stepping towards the border, "Steph don't do it."

"Either way they are going to kill me."

He promises, "I will put in a good word for you. You could die"

"We both know not even the spirits cannot help me on this one. They are going to kill me anyway." I chant the spell my mother told and run toward the border trying to dodge the arrows being shot at me.

1

STEPHANIE

I closed my eyes and opened them, the next thing I am in standing in front of a large wagon with a loud sound I have never heard before. In RockNile we have many different kinds of creatures but I have never heard this one before. A man with a beard yells, "Bitch get out of the way!"

I look around and I am surrounded by different wagons of different shapes and colours. I hold on to my bag and look around me. One moment I was in RockNile the next I am in this weird looking place.

"I don't have all day!" the man is running out of patience so I step away from the wagon and look around me. Where am I and what is this place? My mother said I must look for my aunt Wendy but how do I do that when I don't know where I am?

"Nice hair!" a man wearing torn clothes beams at me. I quickly touch my hair. My hair changed colour, it is now white. No person of my kind has ever had their hair change colour but of course, I am different since I am half witch and half warlord.

I notice that all eyes are on me as I walk. People from around here dress differently from the people in RockNile even the way they speak is different. It is the same language but theirs has a different tone.

I continue walking although I don't know where I am headed. My feet are sore from the scratches I got running in the forest. I am surprised that in RockNile it was night and here it is day. I see a large stone ahead of me and decide to rest on it, ignoring people's stares. I am so hungry I could eat a whole cow.

I sit on the rock and draw lines on the ground. I pick up a little rock and cut my hand a little then let the blood drop on the lines I drew. My aunt shares the same blood as my mother and I have my mother's blood in my veins so a tracking spell on her should work. I cast the spell and a dark cloud appears in the south. I stand up and walk following the cloud.

Another wagon stands in front of me. Two men get out and they walk toward me. They are wearing the same clothes and in RockNile people who do that are people from the army. Maybe that's how the army from around here dresses.

“Excuse me, Miss!” one of the men says as they stand in front of me. I look at the sky and the cloud has stopped moving since I am also not moving, “Hey! Down here,” the man snaps fingers in my face and I close my eyes. I think he wants to cast a spell on me.

“I’m just looking for my aunt,” I say with my eyes shut.

“We got complaints that there is a weird looking girl here. Can we please see some ID?”

I open my eyes and scratch the back of my neck, “What is an ID?”

The man scoffs, “We don’t have all day, kid. Let us see your ID or you’d have to come with us.”

“I don’t know what an ID is.”

The other man is running out of patience so he takes out a shiny thing that was hanging on the side of his trousers, “You’re coming with us.” He grabs my wrist and pins my hands behind my back. My hands are restrained behind my back.

The other man protests, “Man you don’t have to cuff her, she looks harmless.”

“They all look harmless. Look at the blood on her hand,” he leads me to the wagon and pushes me in then shuts what I assume is the door. Maybe that’s how they do things around here so I sit with my hands behind my back. The two men get into the wagon and I scream when it starts moving. The two men look at each other and shake their heads. I hold my breath as much as I can until we get to the place where we are headed.

I noticed that the tracer cloud is in the opposite direction. One of the men helps me out of the wagon and into a place with many people. It is as busy as our marketplace and everyone is looking at me – I think it’s my white hair. They make me sit next to some boy or man it’s hard to tell around here. The boy has blood on his face and his hands are restrained behind his back like mine. I guess it’s a thing around here. I smile at him and he rolls his eyes.

“Why are you smiling?” I think I offended him because he sounds angry so I look away, “Why is your hair white?”

“I don’t know, I saw it like that.”

He scoffs, “Yeah right, I have never seen a melanin girl with white hair. It has to be a wig.”

“What’s a wig?”

“White hair! Come with me,” a lady wearing the same uniform as the one the two men that brought me here were wearing calls me. I stand up and walk to her. She sighs and removes the shiny thing that is binding my hands, “I am sorry about that.” She leads me to someplace that is a space with just two chairs and a table.

She asks me to sit down and I do as told. “What is your name, kid?”

“Stephanie.”

“Stephanie who?”

“Stephanie Richards,” my eyes are wandering around the little room we are in.

“Stephanie whose blood is that on your hand?”

I look at my hand and it’s still stained with blood. I didn’t realize I cut myself so much, “It’s my blood.”

“Did you have an accident? Did you trip and hurt yourself?”

I shake my head, “I cut myself.”

“Why?”

“I needed to perform a tracking spell, I am looking for my aunt.”

I retort and she stops writing on the little book in her hands.

She is writing yet has no ink.

“A spell? Did I hear correctly?”

I nod, “You heard correctly.”

She opens her mouth to say something but nothing comes out.

She writes in her book then says, “Where are your parents?”

“My father died when I was twelve and my mother died last night.”

My mother’s death seen to have gotten her attention, “Where is your mother right now?”

“In RockNile.”

She asks, “What is RockNile?”

“That’s where I can from. The other side of the border.”

She stands up and walks out of the room. She comes back with a huge piece of paper and lays it on the table, “Show me RockNile.”

“I don’t know how to read that.”

She smiles and asks me to follow her, “I think she has a loose screw,” she tells some lady who is wearing different clothes from others, “She’s talking about RockNile and spells.”

What’s a loose screw?

The lady sighs heavily

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“Let her go we have no time to handle crazy people even her dressing says it all.”

I look at my dress. What is wrong with my dress?

They let me go and this place is busier than where I was earlier. I find a place where I can do another tracking spell and the dark cloud appears. My feet are tired and I am hungry - I feel like I am going to faint. Everything here is different from RockNile. Their houses and even the place I am walking on – I feel like I am royalty walking on such fancy ground.

Night comes and I find a place to rest then resume finding my aunt the next morning. The cloud disappears when I am in front of a very colourful house. I hold on to my bag and head to the door. The door is made of a material we use for windows. I gently knock careful not to break it.

The door opens and a young lady barely clad talking to herself with a tiny thing pressed to her ear looks at me as if I am disgusting. She's chewing something and her face is panted - she looks like those women who entertain men when they come from war.

"Halloween is next week," she shuts the door in my face.

Halloween? I knock again and she opens again groaning as if she's in pain, "What do you want? I am on the phone?"

"I am looking for Wendy."

"Mom! A girl who looks like she's from the 1700s is here," she yells then walks away leaving the door open. The 1700s? I stand there waiting for Wendy. A boy who looks a little younger than the girl who opened the door appears.

He winks at me, "Hey hot stuff! I love your costume, where did you get it?"

"My mother bought it for me."

"Just between you and me, are you dad's mistress?" he whispers.

"No! I am no one's mistress. I am looking for my aunt."

“Man... that would have been hilarious. Come in,” he takes my hand and pulls me in. I lick my lips when I see some food on the table, “Hungry?” the boy asks and I nod vigorously.

He asks me to sit and gives me some buns I have never seen and yellow water that tastes sweet.

“Maggie! Brendon! Car right now!” a female voice yells.

“Aunty Wendy!” I run to her and hug her.

“Oh my God, Stephanie. Is this you? How did you get here? Where is your mother?”

I blink away the tears trying to stop myself from crying, “They killed her and I crossed the border.”

“I felt it but couldn’t put my finger on what it is. That also explains why your hair changed colour. The border always takes something from you when you cross it. It took your immortality,” she tucks my hair behind my ear.

“Meaning if I die here it’s over?”

She nods, “Yes but don’t worry you’re safe here.”

“What did the border take from you?”

“My powers,” she retorts and I gasp. What’s a witch without her powers?

“What the fuck are you two talking about?” the girl that opened the door for me asks.

“Language Maggie, this is Stephanie, she’s your cousin. Maggie, please take her to school with you because I can’t take her to work with me.” – Wendy.

“I am not taking her anywhere – she looks crazy just leave her at the house.” Maggie sounds angry.

“She’s not from around here, please Magret.”

Magret shakes her head, “You want people to laugh at me.”

“I’ll take her with me,” the boy comes to my rescue. His name is Brendon.

“Thanks, baby,” Aunty Wendy kisses his forehead and whispers to me, “Don’t use magic or spells. I will explain everything when I come back.” She turns to Maggie, “At least borrow her a dress.”

Maggie rolls her eyes and says to Brandon, “Find her something in those clothes I want to give away.”

Aunty Wendy and Maggie leave. She said she is going to work and Maggie is going to school. In RockNile women do not go to work or school.

“This way, white head.” Brendon shows me to some room, “I am not in a hurry, I hate History so you can bathe and I will find you something to wear.”

“Bath where?”

He shows me what they call a shower and the water comes out when you turn the thing. They don’t have to go to the stream here. Brendon told me to wrap a cloth around my body when done.

“I am done,” I smile at Brendon. I feel more refreshed. He walks up to me carrying a weird looking stick.

“Brush your teeth. Yeah, you stink,” he hands me the stick with a white liquid. I just stare at it – this is not what we use in RockNile, “I’ll show you.”

We stand in front of the mirror and he shows me. This is nice. I brush my teeth, “Then spit,” Brandon spits a white foam.

“I swallowed it.”

He laughs, “I don’t know where you’re from but you are weird. So this is lotion. You rub it on your skin.”

“I know lotion,” I smile. It smells good. I squeeze it in my hand and taste it when Brendon is not looking.

“No don’t eat it. It’s for the skin. I know it smells nice but don’t eat it.”

“How old are you?” I ask him.

“Going on 15... how old are you?”

“Going on 18.” I retort.

I wear Maggie’s dress although it’s tight since I am thicker than her. I am going to school with Brendon – I didn’t know if it’s allowed but many things are allowed here.

2

“Sit here and don’t go anywhere. I will come to check on you during break time.”

That’s what Brendon said before leaving me. I have been sitting here for some time now and I am hungry. I am tempted to look for Maggie since Brendon said she also goes to school here but what if Brendon comes back and doesn’t find me. The only thing I can do is sit or stretch myself when I am tired of sitting.

Luckily, people are no longer staring at me like the previous day. Brendon made me tie my hair up and wear what he called a beanie. I don’t know when is break time but I am hungry and it’s hot wearing this beanie hat. I stand up and start walking around but make sure I go back to the spot where Brendon left me.

I see a tree with black fruits. The tree looks very healthy and I am sure the black fruits taste delicious. They look like forest berries. I walk toward the tree and take some in my hand.

“Don’t tell me you’re going to eat that?” a male voice utters and I quickly spit out the forest berries look alike. I throw away the ones in the palm too.

“No.” I raise my eyes and they land on a boy/man. He’s wearing the same trousers as Brendon and the same shirt but his jacket is different from Brandon’s. He is dark-skinned and his hair is neatly cut. In RockNile is mandatory that men stay bald.

“What are you doing then?” when he speaks dimples appear on his cheeks. I have never seen a man with dimples.

“I just wanted to see them up close.”

“I’m Nathaniel but you can call me Nate or Nathan,” he extends his hand towards me and I just look at it. I don’t know what he wants me to do. In RockNile males and females are not allowed to touch each other or should I say witch females are not allowed to touch males. They are scared of being bewitched.

“I’m Stephanie.”

He smiles dropping his hands, “Why aren’t you in class.”

“What is a class?”

He laughs, “Aren’t you hot with that beanie on?”

“I feel like fainting.”

He yanks it off my head and his eyes widen, “Wow...you have white hair. I have never seen anyone with hair so white.”

“Well...”

“It's dope!” he sounds excited although I don't know what dope means or bitch – that's what that bearded man called me.

My stomach growls. I last ate that funny bread and yellow sweet water. Nathaniel laughs, “Let's get you some food.”

“My cousin asked me not to leave this place.”

“I promise to bring you back,” he grabs my wrist and leads me towards what Brendon called the school building. People are looking at me again. Nathaniel is greeting everyone we run into. He shouldn't be touching me. I am a warlord's daughter and I don't know what power I possess.

We get to a room with people talking loudly but they stop talking when they see me. The room goes ghost silent.

Nathaniel leads me to someplace that smells nice. Ladies are wearing matching clothes with food in front of them. Nathaniel hands me a rubber looking thing. I just do what he's doing, putting food in my rubber thing. He asks me to follow him.

I see Maggie and wave at her but she covers her face with her hand as if I haven't already seen her. Brendon told me that Maggie pretends not to know him when they are here – maybe

I should do the same. Nathaniel and I sit down – people are still staring.

“Do they always stare like this?” I murmur.

“They have never seen melanin so fly.”

Fly?

I eat the nice food and I am done in no time. I look at Nathaniel and his plate is still full. He pushes it to me and permits me to eat and I dig in. Their food is delicious compared to RockNile’s. On that side, we eat meat most of the time.

“You’re not from around here, are you?” Nathaniel asks and I nod, “Where are you from?”

“RockNile.”

“Where is that?” he questions and I shrug.

“Stephanie,” Maggie is now standing next to me, “What are you doing here and where is Brendon?” I don’t know why she’s whispering so I whisper back.

“He said he’s going for classes and he will see me at break time. Tell me when break time arrives.”

Nathaniel chuckles. Maggie grabs my arm and pulls me away. We go out, going in the direction where Nathaniel found me,

“Look Stephanie, I don’t know where you’re from but things here are different and those people are not nice people so go wherever Brendon left you and stay there before you embarrass me.”

“I’m sorry, I was hungry.”

She raises her voice, “I don’t care – go sit wherever Brendon left you and stay away from Nathaniel.”

She furiously walks away. I watch her until she disappears then go sit on the bench thing. She didn’t have to scold me like that. I blink away the tears in my eyes – I hate being yelled at. It makes me cry.

“Hey!” a voice startles me and I almost fall off the bench. It is Nathaniel, “What did Maggie say to you and how do you know her?”

“She’s my cousin and she told me to stay away from you so don’t talk to me.”

He sits next to me, “Maggie is bitter and she’s probably mad that I was eating with you. Everyone wants to eat with me around here.”

“Are you royalty?”

He laughs, “No but I hold a certain power since my father is the mayor of the town.”

I want to ask what a mayor is but I bite my tongue. I wonder where Brendon is?

“What are you eating?” I ask Nathaniel. I noticed he has something in his mouth.

“Candy.”

“Can I have what you’re eating?” I ask and he clears his throat and takes it out of his mouth then hands it to me. I put it in my mouth and it tastes sweet but not like honey, “You’re not supposed to chew it.”

“I’m sorry did you want it back?”

He chuckles, “You’re cute and no, you can have it.”

“Can I have more?”

“I am out of candy but I will give you one if I see you again

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” he promises.

I stand up when I see Brendon. His nose is bleeding so I rush to meet him halfway, "What happened? Were you attacked?"

He pushes my hands off his face, "I am fine and I brought you something to eat."

"I ate and I saw Maggie but what happened to your face?"

"Nothing and please don't tell my mother, promise you won't tell her," he requests and I just nod. His eye is bruised.

"Sup Brendon," Nathaniel is now standing behind me, "I see you got into another fight."

Fight? Does it mean he lost? In RockNile there is punishment for weak men.

"Leave me alone Nate," Brendon replies rudely. He asks me to follow him and that we are going home. I ask about school but he does not respond.

"Why were you fighting?" I ask Brendon.

"They were making fun of mom. She works around mentally unstable people. For some reason, she can communicate with weird people."

"What does mentally unstable mean?"

“People with unstable emotions meaning their mood can be extreme and changes quickly,” he retorts, “I saw you with Nathaniel, how do you know him?”

“He came to me and greeted me. He gave me food and Maggie got angry.”

He tells, “Maggie has a crush on Nathaniel but she’s scared to tell him.”

“What’s a crush?”

“He likes him. Don’t you speak English where you come from?” we walk into someplace that has many people sitting in groups, eating.

“Your English is different.”

We sit down. “I need to cover my eye before mom sees it.”

“I know how to get rid of the mark.”

He looks happy with my suggestion, “You can? Please tell me what to use.”

I place my palm on his eyes and whisper, “Genees (heal)”

“What was that?”

“I healed you,” I tell Brendon and he laughs.

“Stay here I’ll be back. I need to find some foundation to cover this up. Maggie always carries hers.”

Foundation? He leaves me at this place surrounded by strangers. I don’t know why he needs to cover when I healed him.

“Hey cutie, what would you like to order?” a man asks.

“Order?”

“What would you like to eat?” he's wearing a smile.

“Cow meat.”

He laughs, “You mean beef? How would you like it?”

“Fried and lots of it”

He sighs writing in his book. Just like that lady from yesterday, he has no ink, “Anything to drink?”

I point at the yellow water on the table next to me. He answers, “One large fried beefsteak with orange juice coming up.”

He walks away and then comes back after a while giving me the food. People around here are nice. I wipe my plate clean and I am only remembering Brendon when I am done. Maybe they will also give him his plate.

“That would be thirty- five dollars and forty-eight cents,” the man places a piece of paper next to me.

“What is that?”

“Your bill,” his smile disappears.

“What a bill?”

He scoffs, “Please tell me you have money on you. You can’t just eat for free.”

“You gave it to me.”

“I didn’t give you anything...” he yells and now people are looking at me. “Pay up before I call the police.”

“You asked me what I want to eat.”

He grabs me by my arm and pulls me to someplace. People around here seem two-faced – one moment they are nice the next they are angry. We walk into a place full of dirty things. He throws me a piece of cloth.

“If you think you’re going to eat for free then you’re crazy. You will clean these dishes and kitchen spotless,” he furiously walks out of the room slamming the door behind him. I look around me and I have never seen so many dirty plates. I know aunty said no magic but this is an emergency.

“Kombuis skoon te maak (clean kitchen)” I snap my fingers and the kitchen gets spotless in a second.

“Holy mother of Christ!”

I quickly turn and Brendon is standing by the door with his mouth wide open and his eyes wide open as if they are going to pop out. He looks pale as if he’s seen a ghost.

3

“How...You...One moment it was...” Brendon starts breathing heavily and hardly finishing his sentences because I don’t know what he’s trying to say. He fans himself with his hand and yells that I stay away from him when I try to shift closer to him.

“Are you okay?”

He looks like he’s going to pass out. I stand watching him breathe in and out until his breathing is back to normal. Did my hair change colour again or maybe my eyes turned green that’s why he looks startled.

“Brendon are you okay?”

He looks at me, still sitting on the floor with his back against the closed door, “How did you do that?”

“Do what?”

“One moment the room was dirty and the next it is spotless,” he asks.

“I did a cleaning spell... please don’t tell your mother. She asked me not to use magic.”

He looks at me with his eyes still wide open but they look better than when he first walked into the kitchen, “Magic? You know magic?”

“I’m a witch, Brendon, of course, I know magic. Everyone knows I have magic. Don’t you?”

He vigorously shakes his head. That’s weird because in RockNile everyone possesses a power of some sort. It’s passed down from generation to generation.

Brendon finally stands up and starts pacing up and down the room as if he’s thinking of something, “Okay so you’re a witch. Does my mom also know this?”

“She knows.”

“Is she also a witch?” he asks and stops pacing as if he won’t hear my response perfectly when he is pacing around.

“I don’t think I should be talking about your mother but in RockNile every one possesses a certain ability. Isn’t it like that here?”

He shakes his head, “Nope...never seen anyone snap their fingers and things happen. Maybe in movies but never in real life.”

I try to touch his shoulder but he shifts away, “Brendon I won’t hurt you.”

He sighs heavily, “I know, I am still a little freaked out so keep your hands to yourself and don’t snap your fingers in places like this. What if someone had walked in on you?”

“Does it matter?”

“It does. Here people don’t know about magic even I am still shaking just don’t do it,” his eyes are fixed on my hands as if he’s scared I might cast a spell on him.

“Please don’t tell your mother that I used magic.”

“Relax, I won’t rat you out,” he stops himself from patting my shoulder, “Let’s get out of here.”

The door opens before we can and that mean man walks in.

“Oh my goodness what did you do to my kitchen?”

Am I in trouble? The man turns to me and beams, “It looks amazing! The kitchen has never been clean like this before. Do you maybe need a job? We would gladly hire you...”

“She’ll think about it,” Brendon takes my hands and leads us out.

We walk home. “So, do people in RockNile dress the way you were dressed?”

“Yes.”

“Did you have a boyfriend back there,” he winks. He’s smiling again. Relief!

“Yes, his name is Daniel and we have been friends for as long as I can remember.”

He laughs, “I mean lover.”

“Oh that, no...we don’t do that in RockNile. When a child is born she is given to the family where she’s going to marry to. They were waiting for me to turn 18 then my husband would come to claim me.”

“Sounds like an arranged marriage to me. But what if you don’t love the person?” he questions.

“There’s no such. One always grows to love someone.”

“So since you’re no longer in RockNile does it mean you can see other people?” he asks.

“No...I have a power that bends people to my will so I cannot be with whoever I want - my powers would destroy them. I have to wait for the person I was born for.”

“Born for? What the heck is that – someone should change the laws in RockNile,” he says and stops walking, “How’s my eye?”

“Brendon I told you I healed you.”

“Right...I forgot that you’re a witch. Before we get into the house I want to tell you something. Don’t be so open to everyone about RockNile and what you can do, of course, you can talk to me since I already caught you in the act but don’t tell anyone else.” He tells.

“Why not?”

“People do not like people who are different. Just trust me okay,” he says then continues walking. The house is just as we left it. Brendon removes the clothes he was wearing at school and makes us what he calls lefts over macaroni cheese. I wish Daniel was around to taste this delicious food. When we are done eating, Brendon says we don’t have to wash the plates. We put them in what he called a dishwasher then it does all the magic.

“Hey dorks,” Maggie walks into Brendon’s room. I am helping Brandon clean his sleeping chamber although it would have been easier to do it my way.

“You’re not a princess, Maggie they lied to you

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” Brendon replies rudely.

“Whatever, stupid... mom asked me to check if white head is still in one piece. Since you two are fine, I am going out with my friends and if mom asks I am at the library.” – Maggie.

“Nobody cares, Maggie.”

“Can I also go to the library?” I request. By the way, what is a library?

“No...hang out with Brendon, he’s more on your level,” Maggie says before slamming the door shut.

“Don’t mind her,” Brendon says as we get back to folding his clothes.

Aunty Wendy comes home when the sun is down. I love her shoes, they make her look taller. I stay with Brendon as aunty Wendy ‘showers’. I am surprised that she hasn’t asked about how and why I crossed the border. It is as if she was expecting my arrival.

“Aunty Wendy!” I walk into the room she’s cooking in. Brendon said they don’t use magic around here but everything is magic here.

“Hey, Steph. Everything okay?”

I sit on the chair, “Everything is fine... I am just puzzled by your calmness. It is as if you were expecting me.”

“What did you expect? Me to deny you? You’re my sister’s daughter and you’re forever welcome in my home.”

“I crossed the border. Don’t you want to know how I did that? And what is this place?” I question.

She wipes her hands with a white cloth and comes to sit next to me, “The border took my power but I can still see things meaning I knew you were on your way. I am sorry about your mother, sweetie.”

“You’re lying to me, I can sense it.”

She sighs heavily and stands up, “This is not RockNile and the sooner you accept that, the better. I asked Maggie to take you shopping did she do that? We need to get you in school because I have a job and I am sure you wouldn’t want to be alone at the house all day.”

“Maggie went to the library,” I reply ignoring the fact that she’s lying to me. I wonder what she’s hiding from me.

“Did Maggie ask you to lie for her?” she asks and I don’t respond although I have many questions like, how and why did she cross the border? Where is her husband? Why has she never returned to RockNile? Are Maggie and Brendon like us?

GWENDOLYN (WENDY)

I open my eyes when I hear a car outside the house. I am not a heavy sleeper. I peek through the window and see a grey Mercedes Benz parked outside the house. I put on my robe, slippers and then head out, careful not to wake the kids up. I get to the car, open the door and settle on the passenger’s seat.

“What are you doing here?”

A deep and husk voice answers, "Something or someone crossed the border two nights ago. Do you know anything about it?"

"Nope...who do you think it is?"

"Wendy you're a bad liar. Who crossed the border?" he knows me too well.

"It's Stephanie...I know just... don't say it."

"You have to tell her...can I meet her?" he asks.

"No, how can you even ask me that. I am not ready to go down that road yet. I ..." I see the front door to my house opening. Stephanie walks out. Henry and I get out of the car.

"She sleepwalks?" Henry asks.

"I don't know she came here today. Where do you think she's going?"

"She's talking, we have to wake her up," we run towards Stephanie and she's muttering muffled things.

"Steph..." Henry tries to touch her and she pushes him away it sends him crashing into his car setting the car alarm off. She turns to me, her eyes dark and she walks towards me.

"Stephanie!" I slowly walk backwards.

“Wendy...Wendy...we meet again,” she grabs me by the robe.

“Who are you?”

She looks into my eyes, her eyes are dark. Then she lets go of me, her eyes go back to their original state and she collapses to the ground.

“Stephanie!” I shake her awake.

“I’m tired, mom,” she mumbles.

“What was that?” Henry groans now standing next to me. “How did she do that?”

“I don’t know but I think something possessed her when she crossed the border.”

We hear police sirens. People around here don’t know how to mind their business.

“Help me carry her inside,” I say and Henry carries Stephanie. I am surprised she’s still fast asleep.

4

GWENDOLYN (WENDY)

Henry helps put Stephanie in bed. Maggie refused to share her room with Stephanie. Steph is using the guest bedroom which also used to be Henry's study - long story.

"Must we wake her up?" Henry asks.

"No, let's let her rest. Are you okay? Your arm is bleeding."

He smiles as he heals himself - show off, "Good as new."

"You're lucky to still have your powers."

We walk out of the room Stephanie is using and go to my bedroom. I stand by the window watching the police that has their cars parked on the road. When did Henry manage to get his car back to its original state? How I miss those days when I could snap my fingers and things happen. I can still do that but things are different now - things changed when I crossed the border.

"How are Brendon and Maggie?" Henry asks as we ignore the elephant in the room. He's acting normal for someone that got tossed into a car by an 18-year-old.

"Brendon is fine and Maggie is at that stage where everything and everyone annoys her."

"Are you going to tell Stephanie the truth?"

I sigh, "Henry I am tired. I had a long day at work and I have to go there in the morning not forgetting that Stephanie is possessed by something. I need a break."

"What do you think possessed her?"

"I don't know Henry but we have to find out and I need you to help me cast a spell around the house that will keep her in the house even if she sleepwalks. Who knows where she was headed." I tell.

"I will help you with the spell, Gwendolyn."

I laugh. Only Henry calls me by my full name. Others use Wendy, even my mother.

"Can I sleep here tonight?" Henry requests.

"Only if you leave before the kids wake up and keep to your side of the bed. If you do more like touching me, I am kicking you out."

"Even after all these children I gave you, you treat me like this?"
he takes off his shoes.

"Look where you giving me children has landed us."

STEPHANIE

I wake up before the sun comes out, it's a habit. I get out of bed and put on the warm and comfortable shoes, aunty Wendy gave me. I put on the robe and head out of the room. I feel exhausted. I hear voices talking, a male and a female. I stand by the door watching aunty Wendy talk to some man who has blood on his shirt. Aunty Wendy hugs him and stays in his arms for a while then he kisses her forehead and leaves. I wonder who that is. I rush back to the room and get in bed.

I pretend to be sleeping when I hear the door opening. I can tell that it's aunty Wendy by how she's continuously sighing. She touches my forehead and gently strokes my cheeks, "You've

grown so pretty and I promise to fix it all," she kisses my forehead.

I wonder what it is that needs to be fixed. I think I fell asleep while pretending to be asleep because when I open my eyes, aunty Wendy is no longer in the room. I get out of bed, bathe and brush my teeth. Today will be my first day at school. Aunty Wendy said she will go to work first then she will come to get me on her tea break. Today I am wearing Maggie's uniform although she's not happy about it. Aunty claims that Maggie has never worn it since it's too big for her.

I am standing in front of the mirror brushing my hair when I notice that my reflection in the mirror is not moving as I am. I raise my hand but my reflection is still staring back at me. It smiles. I am not surprised, I have seen worse in my life so I ask, "Who are you?"

"I am you."

"How..."

"Steph I am back!" Aunty Wendy yells from the other room. I look at my reflection and it's moving with me now. I place the

hair brush in the cabinet and rush out of the room. I find aunty Wendy waiting for me by the door. She is wearing her high shoes again. She takes us to school with her wagon she calls a car. We get to the school and aunty Wendy is talking to a lady called the principal - whatever that means. I watch aunty Wendy lie about my hair. The lady wants me to dye my hair black and that colouring hair is not allowed at the school. Aunty Wendy is explaining to her how I was born with white hair and that I am not supposed to cut it. Yes, I am not supposed to cut it but I wasn't born with white hair. Aunty Wendy also tells the lady that I have been sick my whole life and says a bunch of big words that I don't understand so the lady says I will have to be in a special class with children who are like me.

My first day goes well. I have already made a friend and her name is Hope. She talks a little slow though - everyone in my class seems to have one thing that stands out or maybe that's how people are here. Finally, they tell us to go and have lunch. I am hungry. Hope is showing me around the school since I don't know my way.

"I thought that was you," Nathaniel pulls me towards him by my wrist. People around here are not scared of touching

others. We wait for Hope and the two other girls I was walking with to walk ahead.

"Looking good," Nathaniel smiles at me and I thank him although I feel like this skirt is short.

"Where is my candy?"

He smiles and reaches into his pocket then hands me a paper. This is not what he gave me yesterday so I stare at him confused. He laughs and takes the plastic. The candy is inside.

"Thank you!"

He touches my chin and I feel something turn in my stomach. "You have beautiful eyes."

He glares into my eyes. Nathaniel is making me feel foreign things. We stare into each other's eyes for a while. His eyes turn dark, even the white part. I feel headed as if I am going to faint but I keep my eyes fixed on Nathaniel's. His eyes turn back to their normal state - now I can see the white part.

"Command me, mistress," he murmurs and I quickly shift away from him. What have I done?

I turn and walk away. I need to find Brendon.

"Stephanie wait," Nathaniel runs after me, "Did I do anything to upset you."

"No, help me find Brendon."

Speak of the devil, Brendon shows up.

"Brendon we need to talk

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" I take his hand and lead him outside the school building but Nathaniel is following us. I let go of Brendon's hand and go to Nathaniel.

"Why don't you go and eat."

"Yes, mistress," he turns and walks away. I don't know how I did that. My emotions took over and my powers took over. This is why we are not allowed to touch each other in RockNile.

"I did something terrible. Remember when I told you that I have a power that bends people to my will? I did it to Nathaniel."

"What do you mean, Nate looks fine," Brendon retorts.

"He looks fine but from now on he will do whatever I ask him to do."

"Cool then let's ask him for money," Brendon smiles walking away but I pull him back.

"You don't understand. He now belongs to me. Whatever I ask him to do, he will do it even if it means killing someone or himself. He will never have feelings for another woman that is not me. He is enslaved to me and serves me until he takes his last breath."

He scratches his head, "That's some messed up shit. So how do we undo this mess?"

"The spell will break when my heart stops beating meaning when I die."

"What! So there's no reverse spell or something?" - Brendon.

"Not that I know of. He looked into my eyes and no one has ever done that. My power overtook me and now he's enslaved to me," I sit on the bench and bury my face in my hands.

"Hey, it's not your fault. Let's just find a way to fix it."

"There's no fixing it, Brendon. I'd have to die for him to be freed." I retort.

"So now that he's enslaved to you does it mean he follows you around and has to be where you are?"

"Not necessarily but he will do anything to protect me and will do anything I ask. He will only love me unless I order him to

love someone else even if he loves that person he'll be doing it for me." I explain.

"I think now I appreciate my simple life. Let's go and eat, I can't think on an empty stomach."

Aunty Wendy is going to scold me when she finds out. In RockNile there's a punishment for this but luckily it's not death. Brendon and I find a table to sit at, and Nathaniel joins us. I forgot to tell Brendon that from now on Nathaniel will want to be close to me.

"Nathaniel can we talk," Maggie stands in front of us. Maggie doesn't greet like other people. Nathaniel looks at me for permission. I have ruined his life.

"You can go, Nathaniel," I say.

"Excuse you! Since when does he need approval from you?" Maggie yells drawing everyone's attention.

"Magret don't yell at her," Nathaniel comes to my rescue. After all, he's now my protector.

"Oh wow you're also taking her side." - Maggie.

"Maggie not now. We will explain everything when we get home," says Brendon.

Maggie turns to me, "Just go back to where you can from."
Then she says to Nathaniel, "Let's talk outside." she walks away
but Nathaniel doesn't follow her.

"Go and talk to her, Nathaniel," I say.

"I don't want to talk to her."

"I command you," I utter firmly.

"Yes, mistress." He follows Maggie.

"When you thought you've seen it all," Brendon claps. "Again, I
appreciate my simple life."

"Let's go..." I try to touch his arm but he shifts away.

"Sorry but try to keep your hands to yourself from now on," -
Brendon.

5

STEPHANIE

Magret is angry at me. I know she hated me but now she abhors the sight of me. I wish she was as understanding as Brendon. I tried explaining to her but she won't listen to anything I say. I swear if I had the power, I would reverse the spell or curse because there's nothing good about this power. I don't know why my ancestors would even pass on to me such a curse. I wonder what other power I possess and do not know about it since I am half warlord.

Back to Nathaniel, now he will be enslaved to me for the rest of his life. He seems like a nice person and I was looking forward to being friends with him. Now I will never get to experience that since he suddenly 'loves me'... after only knowing me for a day - making Maggie hate me more. Nathaniel kept following me at school. I had to beg him to go home. It took a lot of convincing though. I hate having to command him so I tried to ask nicely but no, he wants to be with me and he can't stand being far away from me. All he could think about during class was his love for me and that he would die for me - his words. I hate this, I do and I pray the spirits show me something.

Anything I can do to free him. I have never let loose my powers on anyone before. Nathaniel caught me off guard. I didn't know that he was going to glare into my eyes. So it's partly his fault too, right?

I have been in my room since I got back from school. Magret was driving us today and the wagon... I mean the car was moving a little too fast for my liking. I don't know what Nathaniel said to her when they were 'talking' but whatever it is, it made Magret hate me more.

"Dinner is ready," Brendon announces, standing by the door. He didn't knock. People here never knock.

"I am not hungry."

Brendon comes to sit next to me on the bed. He seems to be the only one that understands me, "Steph it's not your fault...maybe it is but you didn't do it intentionally. Stop punishing yourself."

"Maggie hates me."

"Maggie hates everyone. Maybe if you explained things to her as you did to me then maybe it would help," he suggests.

"I don't know. She won't talk to me."

“Then tell mom the truth. She might be able to help. I know she’s going to be mad but she will understand that it was a mistake.”

"I will try talking to her."

"Cheer up and if it makes you feel better, I like the new Nathaniel."

Brendon leaves the room. I wish I was in RockNile where no one is scared to use magic. In my town with everything and everyone I know. Here things are different and they speak differently, I hate it here. I want to go home.

“Steph!” Aunty Wendy walks into the room. See, they never knock, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.”

She pulls the blankets off me, “Dinner is ready.”

“I am not hungry.”

She sits on the bed, next to me, “Did something happen at school?”

“I accidentally used my powers on Nathaniel at school. He claims to love me, aunty. I have ruined his life”

“That explains why Maggie locked herself in her room,” she takes my hand and cups it with hers, “I know you could never intentionally hurt anyone. I am sure it was a mistake.”

“My mistake has cost Nathaniel his free will. Is there a way we can break the bond between him and me?”

She shakes her head and tucks my hair behind my ear, “There isn’t but what you can do is tell him to live his life the way he wants to. Command him to live his life however he wishes.”

“But still, I will be the only thing he lives for. Just kill me then.”

"I'd have to die first. Your mother sent you to me - you're my responsibility now and if you think of doing anything crazy, I bring you back and let you starve to death then bring you back again just to teach you a lesson," she threatens. And I thought my mother was strict.

"I feel bad about what I did to Nathaniel."

“Do you by any chance like Nathaniel?” she asks and it catches me off guard. Do I?

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.”

"I will think of something don't worry about it. Come let us eat, I know you're hungry," she stands up and helps me stand too. We head out of the room. Aunty knocks on Maggie's room, "Magret get out of this room or I am taking your phone for a month."

Maggie doesn't respond

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"Magret stop acting spoiled and come eat," she continuously knocks on the door but Maggie doesn't open it.

Aunty mumbles something and the door opens. I thought she said she lost her powers when she crossed the border.

"Magret Richards! If you don't get your behind out of this room I swear on my dead parents I will put you in a box and ship you to Korea," I hear Wendy yell.

I stop eavesdropping and go to the table. I sit next to Brendon. There's this connection I feel with Brendon as if I have known him my whole life.

Maggie and Aunty Wendy join us at the table. I am sitting between Brendon and Wendy - they are the only ones talking. Maggie looks like she wants to stab me with a fork.

"Come on girls, don't let a boy get between you two," says aunty Wendy.

Maggie harshly throws the fork on the table, "Mom I warned her to stay away from him. He doesn't even know her and now he claims to love her. How do you think that makes me feel?"

"Maggie it's not her fault that Nathaniel likes her. If you like him so much then why aren't you with Nate?" - Wendy.

"So now you're talking her side. This girl shows up from nowhere and you take her side over me. Wow mom," Maggie stands up from the chair, ready to leave.

"Maggie sit back down and stop being crazy. Stephanie is family." - Wendy.

"Then how come you've never mentioned her? Even this RockNile she talks of doesn't exist. I hate her and I wish she'd never come here. She's only been here for two days but has already ruined my life. I hate her." Maggie yells.

"Excuse me." I rush out of the room and go to my room. I think coming here was a mistake. I lock the door and open the

window then jump out. I will find RockNile and go back. I know there's a punishment waiting for me but at least it's home and I know people there don't look at me weirdly like they do here.

GWENDOLYN (WENDY)

"Maggie, why would you say that?"

"It's true mom. I warned her to stay away from Nathaniel and she didn't listen," Maggie retorts. She's very hot-headed - I wonder whom she takes after because I am nothing like her. How do I explain to her that Stephanie is from a whole that is different from ours? How do I explain to Magret that Stephanie comes from work with no electricity, phones or tared roads? RockNile is a kingdom in the middle of nowhere. It's an enchanted little town - it's not even on the map. In RockNile they live by rules and everyone plays a role. RockNile is different from here where boys and girls laugh and play around as they please.

How do I explain to her that Stephanie didn't mean to use her powers on Nathaniel? She's just a little girl that got a fuzzy

feeling around a boy and her powers took over. How do I explain to my children that I once was like Stephanie, clueless about this world? How do I do that without seeming like I am taking sides?

"I am going to go check on Stephanie," Brendon leaves the table.

"Maggie I am sorry about Nathaniel. I know you like him but..."

"Mom she's gone," Brendon storms into the room.

"What do you mean?"

"Stephanie is gone, she's not in the house." - Brendon.

Maggie rolled her eyes, "Maybe she went for a walk."

"She doesn't know this town, Maggie." I rush to my room to get my phone and call Henry.

Me: Henry do you know how to do a tracking spell?

Henry: Hi to you too, Gwendolyn.

Me: Not now... Stephanie left the house. Something took place between her and Maggie. I need to find her.

Henry: You know I don't possess that kind of power. Why don't you ask Maggie?

Me: I took her powers when she was born plus I can only do limited things.

Henry: Brendon?

Me: He's the ungifted one. He has no magic and no magic works on him.

Henry: We have no choice but to look for her like we would any normal person. I'll be at your house in a few minutes.

Me: No, I can't risk the children seeing you.

Henry: Wendy sooner or later they will. It's been 18 years for crying out loud.

Me: I said no! I will tell you when we find Stephanie.

I hang up and put on a jacket and boots. I head back to the kitchen, "Brendon wear something warm and let's go find Stephanie. Maggie, you can come if you want to."

Brendon is the first to leave the room then Maggie follows. They both come back wearing tracksuits. We get into the car and drive around the area. We drive around for about an hour and still no sign of Stephanie. After two hours we throw in the towel and drive back home in hopes to find her there but she's not. Maggie even called Nathaniel to check if she was there but she was not.

I am worried about Stephanie. This town is not like RockNile. Here there are rapists and murderers.

The next day I wake up with hopes that Steph will be in her bed but she's gone. She just got here and now I can't find her. The day goes by and still no sign of her.

"Mom why don't we just report her missing," Maggie suggests.

"She's not from around here."

"So what now? We are just going to continue searching?" she questions.

"Yes, we are going to do that."

"Wendy!" Henry storms into the house. I told him never to come during the day, "I have tried everything and I can't find her."

"Mom who's this?" Brendon asks.

"I will explain later... Henry we have to do something, anything."

"We'd have to summon Oliver, he's the only one that will be able to find her," Henry suggests.

"No! Think of something else."

I don't want anything that links me with people in RockNile. I love Stephanie but there's a road I am not ready to go down...not even for her.

STEPHANIE

"Thank you!" I receive a plate of food from Nathaniel. I have been at his house for the past two days. I know aunty Wendy came here looking for me but Nathaniel serves me and does what I tell him even if it means lying for me. Since Nathaniel and I share a bond, I can summon him when I need him. His parents haven't noticed that I am here. I stay in his room and try to be subtle when Nathaniel is in school. I have to find the border and try to cross over to RockNile - this place is not for people like me.

STEPHANIE

Something gently stroking my face wakes me up. I open my eyes and get welcomed by Nathaniel's handsome face.

"Good morning, mistress," he beams at me. Whoever said we must be referred to as 'mistress' must be of the underworld along with the person that gave us this power.

"Hey, Nathaniel." I sit up and he puts a pillow behind me. I feel like a warlord (royalty) right now but too bad I had to use my powers to get this treatment.

"How did you sleep and how do you feel? Do you need anything? Are you hungry?"

I shake my head, "I am fine. Come sit next to me."

He does so without question. He sits too close. I can't believe I am in a boy's room, I slept here and in the same bed with him. I couldn't let him sleep on the floor. This is his room. He kept to his side of the bed just as I ordered him to. I don't think he would have done anything to me but I can't take any chances. I can't manage to mess up again. I have to wait for the man I was given to when I was born. I wonder what he's like. I wonder if

I'll fall in love with him at first sight like in the stories I have heard. I wonder if he'll make me have that funny feeling in my stomach like I did that time when Nathaniel touched me. Most importantly, I wonder if I'll be able to love him. I wouldn't want to be with a man I don't like.

I wish RockNile was like this side and didn't have so many rules. Here people are allowed to do whatever they desire. Speaking of RockNile, I have to look for the border and go back. They could cut off my ears or take my powers but it's better than this place. I miss my friend Daniel and I wonder if that offer of putting a good word for me will still stand.

I look at Nathaniel and he smiles at me. Poor him, he will never like everyone else in his life. But my mother said I am half warlord. I wonder what I can do...

"Nate lie on your back," I say and he lays on his back facing the ceiling. I get on top of him - relax I am not planning on doing the nasties with him. I have to wait for my husband, remember. I have never kissed a boy before. I am scared I might bite someone's son. But, when I turned 17 my mother taught me everything I need to know about womanhood and how I must

behave when the one I was given to comes. See in RockNile we follow the rules - we hate angering the spirits because it never ends well when the underground gang is not happy.

Where was I? I get on top of Nathaniel and reach for his tie that is on the table next to the bed and cover his eyes.

He chuckles, "What are you doing to me?"

"Relax," I unbutton his shirt leaving his chest bare. He is not bad, almost like the boys in RockNile.

"Couteau." I whisper and a knife appears in my hand, "Romper le lien," I draw a euscorpiidae on his chest. Of course, he cannot feel the pain, I numbed it.

"What are you saying?" Nathaniel asks.

"Rompre le lien," I chant until I have drawn the euscorpiidae on his chest. I get off him and take off the blindfold. I use the same knife I was using on him to cut a small portion on my finger mixing his blood with mine. "This is going to hurt," I tell him then chant breek (break)

He groans loudly, holding on to the bed covers with veins popping on his forehead as he shakes uncontrollably. His groans get louder but I know no one is in the house. His parents

leave early in the morning - before he even leaves for school. He starts choking and I continue chanting "Breek" he opens his mouth and a euscorpiidae scorpion comes out. I take it, careful not to let it bite me and place it on his chest where it dissolves in his skin and the part I drew goes green.

After some time, Nathaniel starts breathing normally. "Are you okay?" I ask him.

"Yeah...I think I zoned out for a moment." He quickly buttons his shirt but stops halfway. He gets off the bed and goes to the mirror, "I have a tattoo?"

"Is that what you call it this side? In RockNile it's a rune only the powerful witches can cast. It breaks any spell. I didn't think it will work for you. Wait... I command you to get me water."

He stares at me looking confused, "Huh? Rune? Witches? What are you saying and when did I get this tattoo? My parents are going to kill me," he's still looking at himself in the mirror.

I can't believe it worked. I rush to him and hug him.

"Slow down cutie, love me but don't break me."

He's back. The old Nathaniel is back.

"Are you okay?" I ask touching all over his face and chest

"I am fine but I wouldn't advise that you continue touching me like this," he smiles.

We sit on the bed. He's back to his old self. How did I manage to pull that through? No one has ever been able to break the bond between a confessor and the confessed. I was supposed to die for him to be freed. Does it have to do with the fact that I am outside the border? Is it because I am a warlord's daughter? I wish my mother was around to answer these questions.

"Hey," Nathaniel snaps his fingers in my face, "Are you okay?"

"I am fine...I am just thinking of home."

"Where's home and how is it like there?" he asks seeming a lot curious.

"RockNile is an enchanted town. We have so many rules but still

we live perfectly."

"Enchanted." he nods lightly looking at me like that lady did when I told her I cut myself to perform a tracking spell, "I think we should take you home, your family must be worried."

"I don't want to go back there."

"Maggie was just mad and I am sure she didn't mean to say what she said. Come, I'll drive you home," he stands up from the bed. Maybe I should have delayed breaking the spell.

Nathan takes me 'home' I love that he's back to being his normal self. I was getting tired of all the 'yes mistress' and 'what can I do to make you happy?'. Take me to RockNile, that's all I wanted to say but I know his response was going to be 'I don't know where's RockNile, mistress.'

"Are you okay?" Nathaniel gently squeezes my hand. I pull my hand away and put it in the hoodie pocket as he called it. He gave me his 'hoodie' he said I don't have to bring it back. I love that it smells like him and I hope the smell will never wash away.

"How are you going to explain the rune...I mean tattoo to your parents?"

He tucks my hair behind my ear with one hand while the other is on the wheel, "I will think of something and I owe your aunt an apology for lying."

"You handle your family and I will handle mine. Please avoid staring into my eyes."

He chuckles, "Are you scared you might fall in love with me?"

"No, but I wouldn't want to hurt you so avoid touching me or looking into my eyes."

He shakes his head, "Sorry but I can't promise that. Hey, do you want to grab lunch sometime?"

"What is to grab lunch?"

He laughs. I am used to everyone laughing at what I say, "Do you want to eat lunch with me?"

"Maggie already hates me, why don't you eat with her instead."

"I will talk to Maggie," the car stops moving and he gets out the helps me with the door. This is why I want to go home. Everyone is always helping me with something.

Brandon is the first to run out of the house followed by Maggie who is walking as slow as she can.

"Thank God, you are fine," Brendon hugs me, "A part of me knew you were with Nate. After all, you don't know anyone here."

"Brandon! Hey, Mags!" - Nathaniel.

"Hey." she greets back lowly then turns to me, "You good?"

"I am fine," I retort.

"My job is done...Maggie, can we talk?" Nathaniel requests and Maggie nods then tells me she's glad I came back. She doesn't look happy though.

"Am I missing something?" Brandon questions.

"I broke the bond."

BRENDON

Maggie, mom and are in the sitting room watching some boring show Maggie put on. I hate that she always chooses what we watch. I always get outnumbered when it comes to votes. Stephanie went to bed earlier. She had a heated argument with mom. Stephanie wants to leave - she says this place is not for people like her. Mom won't let her leave and Maggie won't apologize. I like Steph and I wish she stays longer.

Stephanie walks into the room - dragging her feet. Her hair is covering her face but she's walking perfectly. She walks to the door and tries opening it but the door is locked. She mutters

some inaudible things but she still can't open the door. She harshly hits it with her fist. I look at Maggie who shrugs looking clueless as I am.

"Steph!" Mom calls her she turns around and shifts her hair from her face. Her eyes are dark. Maggie is the first to scream and jump off the couch.

"She's sleepwalking," mom gets up from the couch and stands in front of us shielding us as Stephanie walks toward us.

"Break the spell, Wendy!" Stephanie commands.

"Steph calm...." Stephanie doesn't let her finish, she grabs her by her collar and tosses her across the room like a piece of paper. We are going to die.

She turns to us, Maggie won't stop screaming, deafening my ears. I still haven't moved, I am standing in front of screaming Magret. I don't know why we are not running for dear life. Stephanie places her hand on my shoulders. Dear Lord, if I survive this I am never sinning again.

BRENDON

One moment Stephanie's eyes are dark but the moment she touches me, they go back to their normal state and she collapses on the floor. I love watching movies with dark magic and mythical creatures but may I say, not a fan when it's in real life. Stephanie tossed my mother across the room like she was nothing. Stephanie is my size but the way she tossed her...I am sure mom broke a bone or two.

Maggie is the first to run to mom, to check on her.

"I'm fine," mom groans standing up from the floor. I still haven't moved from my position - I think my brain stopped functioning when I saw Stephanie's dark eyes.

Mom kneels next to Stephanie and shakes her awake. May I say, for someone who always has something to say, Maggie is too quiet today. I bet she's as freaked out as I am.

"Steph!" Mom shakes her awake. If I was her I wouldn't even be touching her. This girl tossed her across the room. I mean if

Marvel was here Stephanie would be part of the Avengers. They could use her power to fight Thanos.

"Mom...I want to sleep," Stephanie mumbles with her eyes still closed.

"No sweetie wake up... The dead do not talk to the living," mom continuously shakes Stephanie until she opens her eyes. I wonder which dead mom is referring to and are we going to ignore the fact that a 17 almost 18-year-old tossed her across the room. Does it hurt? I am sure she will need some counselling after that throw. I am sure tonight she will get in her room, close the door and shed a tear. It's like she was hit by Thor's hammer for a moment.

"Stephanie!" now mom is losing her patience. Freaked out Maggie walks closer and smacks Stephanie in the face - it worked.

"What was that for?" Stephanie moans with her hand on her cheek. I still haven't moved from my position. It's like I am nailed to the floor.

"What just happened?" The fake princess asks pacing up and down the room. "Her eyes were dark...Brendon, you saw it too, right?"

I nod with every strength I have. I saw it and I also saw mom being tossed across the room.

"What is going on and don't tell me she is possessed by some spirit of a dead relative?" Maggie asks. For someone who was screaming her lungs out not so long ago, she is now too calm.

"What are you talking about and how did I get here?" Stephanie stands up from the floor with mom's help and tries to balance on Maggie but she shits away.

"Don't touch me - you tossed mom across the room."

Poor Stephanie looks confused, "I'm sorry aunty, I don't remember anything."

"I want to know why her eyes were dark and what spell she was talking about. Are you guys practising witchcraft?" Maggie asks.

Mom sighs, "Everyone sit down so I can explain everything."

Sit down? I almost shit myself and she's telling me to sit down. I am not sitting anywhere. Stephanie sits down first and mom settles for the single couch. Maggie and I opt for standing - I am still in my spot.

Mother sighs heavily, "I never thought this day would come."

Woman hit the pin in the head before Stephanie starts her things. Is she forgetting that we almost lost out shit not so long ago? I am still shaking.

"My name is Gwendolyn Richards," mother starts. We know...can she tell us something we don't know like why Stephanie threw her across the room. "I was born many centuries ago. I know I sound weird but it's true. I was born in RockNile where Stephanie came from."

I slowly walk to the couch and sit down, and so does princess Magret. "So...I was born with special powers...in other words, I am a witch."

Maggie laughs, "Mom quit it with the games."

Mom snaps her fingers and the fireplace lights up. Aren't they supposed to utter words first? I wouldn't say I am shocked because Steph let me in on some stuff, what traumatized me is how she tossed mum across the room. That had me shitting myself.

Mother adds, "My mother was a witch too, it gets passed down from generation to generation. My father was a Dragoo it's a name given to people who are portals between the land of the living and the dead. As I said, I was born in RockNile and

RockNile is an enchanted town. It has many rules and most of them have death as a penalty. Long story short

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I broke one of the rules and had to run. I crossed the border and came to this side, just like Steph."

"Is this a joke? Really mom do you expect us to believe that enchanted towns exist? I get what this is ...it was just a prank to scare me. Stephanie's dark eyes, mom flying across the room and the fireplace lighting itself. You people are pathetic - I am going to bed." Maggie stands up and leaves the room. If I hadn't walked in on Stephanie using magic or witnessed the Nathaniel saga, I would not believe mom but I do.

"So what is wrong with Stephanie?" I ask mother.

"I think something possessed her when she crossed the border. I am still yet to find out. I noticed it comes out at night."

"Maybe it is leading her somewhere. Why don't you let her go and follow her to see where she's going." I suggest.

"You seem calmer about this than I expected." - mom.

"I watch a lot of television and you know I've always believed in stuff like this. Mom, you said this gets passed down from

generation to generation. How come we don't have powers like you and Steph?"

She replies, "I took Maggie's powers at birth because I lost mine when I crossed the border and you are the un-gifted one."

"What the hell is an un-gifted person?"

"Once every three centuries an un-gifted child is born in a family and that child possesses no magic or powers. No power works on them either," she explains.

"Did it have to be me? That's lame why don't I have powers?"

"Not having powers is the greatest gift ever, Brendon. People like you are feared in RockNile. No magic works on you meaning you're invincible. Even Stephanie couldn't do anything to you because no power works on you meaning you can walk in and out of RockNile without getting affected," she tells.

"Still, it sucks...I want to be able to light fires by snapping my fingers."

"Aunty you said I am possessed by something. What do you think it is?" Miss Toss-others-across-the-room asks. She's so subtle I forgot she's in the room.

Mom stands up and I hear her joints pop. Yup, I said it - I am sure it hurts like hell, "We'll talk tomorrow, sweetie."

Mom leaves the room leaving me with Stephanie. Now that I know her powers don't work on me, I am not scared of her.

"Did I do something? Did I hurt anyone?" Steph asks.

"You tossed mom across the room and demanded she breaks the spell - whatever that is."

Stephanie places her hand on her mouth, poor thing, "I don't remember anything. I don't know what's happening to me. The other day my reflection talked back at me. I don't know what it is but I think it has to do with me crossing the border."

"Can't you do a spell that shows you stuff? I have watched a lot of witches' movies and they have a way of channelling their demons or seeking answers." I suggest.

"I am glad you're the un-gifted one. The world would be in trouble if you had powers."

"Come on now don't make me sound like a bad guy," I chuckle. It's not fair though - imagine what I would do to those bullies if I had powers. But again I read somewhere that with great power comes great responsibilities. Look at what transpired between Nathaniel and Stephanie, I wouldn't want that.

"Do you have candles in this house?" Stephanie asks and I nod, "I want to try what you suggested - summon whatever spirit possessed me."

"My suggestions things doesn't mean you should do it."

She smiles, "I won't die on you, Brendon."

Stephanie and I find some candles in the house and sneak out. We need an open space and our backyard is the perfect spot. I watch as Stephanie draws some lines on the ground. I can't see what she's drawing - you see, in the movies, the camera gets the perfect angle but here to me it's triangles and circles. She places the candles making a triangle and sits in the middle with her legs folded. Man, Marvel could take some notes.

"If anything weird happens just touch me. No power works on you so it'll be able to help me snap out of it." she locks her palms together as if she's praying and mutters a bunch of stuff I cannot hear. The candles go off - luckily, I have a torch in my hand. I quickly rush to Stephanie, she said anything weird and this is weird. She has collapsed to the ground. I shake her - her eyes have turned white and she's talking to herself.

"Mom!"

STEPHANIE

"Stephanie." a soft and calm voice calls me. People just love disturbing my sleep. It's called beauty sleep for a reason - look at me sounding like Maggie. She's the one that always preaches about beauty sleep and how it's a necessity for a pretty woman like her.

"Steph wake up, it's midday already."

I quickly jump out of bed as soon as I hear the word midday. I am late for school. I hate how that principal lady looks at me when I come in late. It's as if she wants to say something every time she looks at me. I stand on my feet still rubbing the sleep off my eyes. Brendon didn't wake me up today.

"Steph."

"I am up, aunty Wendy... I don't know how I overslept. I will quickly get ready." I yawn still half asleep. That's the thing with me. I can get out of bed, and make myself a sandwich - I am learning new things eyy who would have known that bread can

go with so many things even green leaves. Where was I? I can make a sandwich half asleep.

"Stephanie snap out of it!"

That voice! I quickly look around me and look at this figure standing in front of me. I look at my hair and also look at my clothes. What is going on? How am I here?

"Steph what is wrong with you and why are you looking at me like that?" she tries to touch me but I shift away.

"Who are you?"

She slaps my arm - that hurt, "I am your mother, stop being silly and go get some bathing water."

"But you're dead."

"Stephanie I don't have all day. Go fetch water - I want to go to the market later today and fix your bed before you go," she says before exiting the room.

What is going on? My mother died - I crossed the border and went to the other side where there was Brendon and Nathaniel and Maggie. I sigh and head out of my room.

"Hey, baby!" a male voice greets me.

"Dad." it comes out as a whisper. My father died. How is he... How am I...?

This is just a dream. It's just a dream and I am going to wake up and eat some yellow water called juice and some crunchy things that look like they were dried in the sun yet you mix them with milk. I keep forgetting the name although Brendon keeps telling me what it's called. I am learning but some things are a little hard for me to remember.

"Aren't you giving me a hug today?" Father asks with his arms open and a smile pasted on his face.

"You died years ago."

Mother slaps the back of my head. This is abuse as Brendon calls it whenever aunty Wendy smacks him, "Stop being crazy and go fetch water. Your father is in front of you and you're saying he is dead."

"Don't be hard on her, honey. Come give me a hug, Steph," his arms are still open for me. I slowly walk up to him. If this is a dream then it feels real as hell- being around Brendon is messing with my head. I never say words like 'hell'

If this is a dream then I am loving it. I have never dreamt of my father. I touch his hand and it feels real. I throw myself in his arms and hug him tight. It reminds me of those days when I would hug him like this. He'd be coming from work and I'll be the first one to run to him - not that there were other children. I break loose from his embrace and shift backwards then wipe the tears off my face. It's nice to see him and mom but I don't belong here.

"It's nice to see you, Dad. You too, mom but it's time to go now. The dead are not supposed to talk to the living. I want you guys to know that I am fine and I love you very much. This is nice but you guys are dead." I say, in tears.

"Stephanie are you okay?" mother walks up to me and feels my forehead with the back of her hand. "Are you sure you're okay, sweetie? We are not dead."

Of course, they would say that. Isn't I am dreaming. I know they will be gone the moment I wake up.

"I love you, mom," I hug her

"Why are you acting like this? We are fine, Steph. It was a dream, baby. We are not dead."

"No

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this is a dream and I know you'll be gone when I wake up," I retort.

Mother slaps me hard on the arm, "Does that feel like a dream?"

I rub my arm - it hurts but still it doesn't make sense. I was with Brendon then I woke up here. I walk to the table and sit down. "I think a spell was cast on me. I wasn't here - I was on the other side of the border."

My parents look at each then look at me as if I am crazy yet they are wearing worried looks. My father takes my hand, "Uhhh why don't you tell us about your dream."

"Dad it wasn't a dream."

Mother also sits down and takes my hand, "Okay let's say it wasn't a dream....tell us what happened or what you saw."

I sigh heavily, "So dad died when I was about ten years old because he...well they let the border kill him." It feels weird to say that he fornicated especially now that he is in front of me, "So I grew up around mom, she raised me with love and taught

me everything I need to know including the Dos and Don'ts when the one I was given to comes.

"One-night mom woke me up saying we have to go and people were chasing us wanting to kill us. It turns out I am half warlord and my father is a warlord so people found out and wanted to kill us. We ran into the forest but mom got stuck because the ground was enchanted. She couldn't get up so she told me to run to the border and say a spell that makes the border open. She also told me to find aunty Wendy. I didn't get affected by the magic on the enchanted ground because I am half warlord. So I ran to the border although the royal guards tried to stop me, they failed. I crossed the border," I explain.

"Wow Steph, you are a good storyteller. Did you make that up and what do you mean you're half warlord. I have only been with your father and he's not a warlord." Mom says.

"I know but that's what you told me. I am not making this up."

"Steph I am also not dead. I'd have to commit a huge crime like fornicate for me to get killed by the border. Honey, it was just a dream." Dad gently squeezes my hand.

"It wasn't a dream, I swear I saw aunty Wendy. She lived in a whole new world with cars and schools."

My parents look at each other again. I am not crazy and that wasn't a dream.

"Stand up," mother commands and I do so. She takes my hand and leads me out of the house. Father quietly follows behind us. We go to the house next to ours. It's a little distance though.

"Gwendolyn!" mother yells as we walk into the cottage.

"Do you have to call me by my full name," aunty Wendy walks into the room. She is dressed like people in RockNile, with no high shoes or makeup. Can someone pinch me? This has to be a dream. I was on the other side of the border.

"It's urgent, your niece here is being weird today. She's talking about crossing the border and us being dead. I brought her here so she can see that it was all in her head and that no one died or no one crossed the border." Mom says and the whole time she's pocking my arm as if she wants me to snap out of it. I swear I crossed the border.

"Come here baby and tell me what you dreamt about," aunty Wendy opens her arms for me. Why are these people treating

me like I am crazy? I did cross the border. The door opens and Brendon walks in dragging his feet and groaning for no reason.

"Brendon!" I rush to him, "Please tell them that you were with me moments ago in your backyard. No power works on you meaning you know everything."

"What is a backyard and hands off the suit woman," Brendon answers.

"No Brendon tell them. Whatever spell that has been cast cannot affect you. You're the un-gifted one."

"Magret is the un-gifted one," he snaps his fingers and a red rose appears in his hand then he hands it to me and exits the room. I need to do something. This is a dream. I ask to perform a reverse spell and they permit me. In RockNile we can use magic as we please. I do the spell but nothing is happening. What is happening?

"Sweetie it was just a dream. Look I am here and I am not dead. Your aunt is here too she has never crossed the border," mother hugs me after I narrated to them how everything is on the other side of the border.

The day goes by and it is hard to believe that it was all a dream. So there's no Hope or Nathaniel? It was all just a dream.

STEPHANIE

"Hey, why the long face today?" Brendon nudges my arm after sitting next to me. I don't understand how everything that happened when I crossed the border, did not happen. It was real. I can feel that it was real but these people do not seem to understand me.

Everyone thinks it was just a dream since my parents are still alive. My father died when I was ten years old - I can understand what happened with my mother could be a dream but what about my father. That man died years ago.

"Would you believe me if I told you that you're outside the border and all this is just in my head?"

Brendon smiles and I know that look. It's the same look he gave me after I tasted that lotion. It's that look he makes when he doesn't want to hurt my feelings. Unlike Maggie, Brendon understands that I know nothing about their world. Now even I am confused. What's going on and which world is real? Could it

be that I tried to cross the border and it tossed me back in?
Could it be that all that time I thought I was outside the border
it was all in my head?

"Hey," Brendon rubs my arm. "Don't be hard on yourself...tell
me about this world you were in and how you crossed the
border and survived."

I take a deep breath, "Everything happened fast. my mother
woke me up in the middle of the night saying we had to run.
She didn't tell me all the details but she told me that I am the
imprinted one and that I am a warlord's daughter. She said that
was the reason we are being attacked. She strained a muscle
and told me to run and leave her behind. I swear I didn't want
to leave her but I had to run and cross the border. I know no
one has ever crossed the border but there was a spell for it.

"I crossed over to this new world, Brendon. Aunty Wendy,
Maggie and you were there. Maggie was this diva pardon me I
got used to that language that you taught me or must I say the
Brendon in my dream taught me...honestly, I can't believe it
was all a dream."

BRENDON

"It's not a dream, Steph. Where you are right now is the dream," I continuously shake her. She's been talking in her sleep since she collapsed in the backyard. Her eyes are white and she is talking to herself. Mom said she must have mistakenly cast the wrong spell or maybe the thing that was leading her outside the house is behind all this.

This is all my fault. I shouldn't have given Stephanie the idea of doing a reverse spell. Now she's stuck in RockNile thinking everything was a dream when where she is - is the dream. I still haven't told my mother that I am the one that gave Stephanie the idea to do the spell. This woman will take my phone and I can't have that so I told her that I went to check on Steph and couldn't find her so I followed her - don't judge me. I am not the first person to lie. I will apologise when Steph wakes up.

Margaret left for school - she only cares about herself plus she didn't see Stephanie - not that she cares. I called mom when

Stephanie collapsed and she carried her inside. Mom has been trying to bring Steph back but her spells are not working. She says only warlords or powerful witches can break spells like these. Warlords from RockNile, not warlords that crossed the border and lost some of their powers. That's what Gwendolyn said - sometimes she speaks in riddles.

"I have to say, I love the Brendon that side. He was funny and always had my back," that's Stephanie. She's having a conversation with someone.

"I know but you know the Brendon that side was cool. See even I sound like him - Brendon I swear it was real." Stephanie adds.

"Mom we have to do something. She won't stop talking, what is happening?" I ask.

"She's in RockNile and there's nothing we can do. If this goes on for another 24 hours we might lose her forever. I wish I knew how to break this spell but baby I am no warlord."

"Then who is?" I yell. "We can't let her die, mom let's find this warlord and bring Steph back."

"I called Henry, he will know what to do."

"Who is Henry?" I ask.

"I will explain when Steph is fine."

I feel like mom is keeping a lot of things from us. I understand about the witch thing. I would have not believed her even if she told me but this is not the first time she brushes this Henry issue under the carpet. Maggie and I suspect he is her boyfriend. I don't know why she hides him, who she shags is none of our business - pardon my language.

Mom stands up when she hears a car outside the house, "That must be him."

She leaves the room. I hold Steph's hands - she's still taking and she's trying to convince whoever she's talking to that she was not dreaming. I wish I had the power to whisper to her that she's not crazy and that I am here holding her hand. I don't know why I feel so connected to her. Not in a sexual way

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of course.

"Steph wake up," I murmur holding her hand tight. I notice that her hair is turning black. I don't think this is a good thing.

"Mom! Mom her hair is changing colour!"

Mom and some man I don't recognize storm into the room. The man is the first to check on Stephanie. He looks into her eyes which are still white and mutters a few words but nothing is happening.

"How long has she been like this?" the man asks.

"Six hours," I reply before my mother can.

"Six hours and you called me thirty minutes ago. Wendy, what's wrong with you? Don't you care about Stephanie at all? She was possessed by something when she crossed the border. Only if you had let me fix this in time but no, you want to do things your way just like you always do." the man yells - he looks angry.

I wonder if this is still about Stephanie or maybe they want us to organize a ring and a referee for them because mom yells back.

"Put yourself in my shoes, Henry. I am trying okay. Do you think this is easy for me? It's been eighteen years do you think I am happy things are like this?"

"Only if you had let me help you. We didn't cross the border so that this can happen. I went against everything I believe in only for you to come to this side and keep me say from my ." mother interrupts Henry.

"Not now, Henry." mother folds her hands across her chest.

"Can we focus of getting on getting Stephanie back then you two can scream at each other however you please?" I say because it seems these two have some unfinished business.

Henry sighs, "She is under a spell. She crossed the border and survived so they put her under this spell so that her body comes back to RockNile or should I say her soul. Everyone in RockNile knows that no one has ever crossed the border and survived. Not seeing Steph's body is proof that she survived and they can't have that because many people would want to cross over. There is a reason why there's a border. I am afraid we cannot help Steph."

"What do you mean you can't help her? We can't just let her die and mom said a warlord can help her." now it's my turn to yell. What do they mean there's nothing we can do? "Didn't you say we need a warlord to wake her up?"

"Well, Henry is a warlord and he failed," mother mumbles.

"But Oliver can wake her up," Henry suggests. Who is Oliver?

"No! We are not summoning Oliver," mother protests.

"She will die, Gwendolyn! Why do you have to be so stubborn? I just found my daughter and I am not about to lose her, because you cannot handle your past," Henry attempt to walk out of the room but mother blocks his way. Fire appears in her hand - it's about to go down people.

"Wendy I don't want to hurt you. Get out of my way and I am doing this for my daughter." Henry says. How is Stephanie his daughter? Mother's eyes start glowing and I stand in front of Henry - shielding him.

"I am sorry mom but I am with Henry on this one. We have to save Steph and we all know your powers don't work on me," I say confidently.

The fire on mother's hand disappears and she utters, "Fine then, summon Oliver. Do whatever you want but so you know, Oliver will never be accepted in this family." she exits the room. Why does mom act like she doesn't care about Steph? What is this woman hiding from us?

"So where's this Oliver?" I ask Henry.

"We'll find him at the border, let's go."

"And who is this Oliver?"

"The Imprinter!" we walk to his car. Mom does not seem pleased with all this but I would do anything to save Stephanie.

BRENDON

"So....you are Stephanie's father?" I say to Henry as we drive to the border or wherever this Oliver dude is. I wonder what this so-called border is and when did Henry summon this Oliver because I didn't see it. But again these people are capable of anything. A fire was in my mother's hands and she was ready to burn Henry's black self. I hate that I am the un-gifted one. Why did I have to be the un-gifted one? Couldn't it be princess Magret? Magret doesn't need any powers. Besides her stinking attitude, Maggie is pretty and smart. She has never scored below ninety-five percent in her school work. Then there's me - I have to say the man upstairs is always watching out for me. I am always in the middle, 50% baby - well a pass is a pass.

"I am not Stephanie's father," Henry blankly replies. This man is lying in broad daylight. He said, quote "I just got her Gwendolyn and I am not about to lose my daughter because you are not ready to face your past."

Okay, I might have not quoted it word for word but Henry said he is Stephanie's father. Speaking of fathers, where is my

father? To think I have never asked mum. I would've if she does get angry every time we bring up the topic.

"Am I not giving you everything you need? Aren't you guys getting everything you need? Then what do you need a father for?" Gwendolyn would always say when Maggie asked where our father is. And who names their child Gwendolyn? Couldn't they name her Stacy? Even my friend's dog has a better name.

I stop myself from questioning Henry further. Today is about getting Stephanie back. I will ask questions when my cousin is not dying. We drive for about four hours. Where is this border and did Stephanie walk to our house? After what seems like forever the car comes to a halt. I was dosing off, Henry was quiet all the way. We get out of the car and walk into the trees. We walk for about ten minutes and then see a boy standing with his arms folded on his chest. He is almost Henry's height but his shoulders are broader than Henry's. He is dark in complexion, I am not into boys or anything in that department but he is very handsome.

The boy or man, I can't tell if he looks 22 or 33. Henry and I walk up to him and he doesn't move. Shouldn't he meet us halfway or something? We drove five hours for Christ's sake.

When we get closer that's when I realize that the ground he's standing on is different from the bushy ground we are on. There are bones where he is and they look like human skeletons.

"Oliver!" Henry nods in courtesy. So this is Oliver, the warlord. I see why they are called warlords - he is muscular.

"Henry!" Oliver nods back. Am I also supposed to nod? Oliver shifts his attention to me, "Hey, little man."

I hate him already.

"Are you coming or do you and Henry still want to catch up?" I say ignoring that he called me little. I am fifteen and that is not little.

Oliver chuckles, "I can't cross the border without you."

This is the border? I slowly walk to the ground where Oliver is. Now I see it. Things are different from this side. Oliver places his hand on my shoulder and asks me to walk out with him.

"I don't understand this whole border thing?" I say when Oliver and I are standing next to Henry. Oliver snaps his fingers and a goat appears next to him. He pushes it to the ground he was on using his foot and the goat gets sliced into five pieces. What did

I just witness? I think I am going to be sick. So the border killed anything that tries to cross.

We drive back to the house and it feels like we are taking forever. Can't they snap their fingers and we appear at the house?

"Oliver!" I call, he's sitting in the back seat. "Henry said you're the imprinter, what does that mean?"

"It means I am Stephanie's boyfriend," he replies.

"What's your powers?"

He exhales heavily, "I can do everything just like everyone else but I am a little stronger since my blood is not diluted like some people."

He's looking at Henry when he says diluted. Does he mean mixed?

"Shut up, Oliver!" Henry says after clicking his tongue. These people know something and I will find out. I mean they can't talk in halves. I want the full story.

Finally, we get to the house. Before I can even unbuckle the seatbelt, Henry and Oliver are no longer in the car and the front

door is now open. So much for being the un-gifted one. I close the car doors and lock the car. I get into the house and go to Stephanie's room. All her hair has turned black and Oliver is muttering things I can't hear. Mom is standing with her back against the wall and her arms folded.

"Hey," she pulls me into her arms when she sees me, "She's going to be fine."

"I hope it works," I say.

Oliver holds Stephanie in his arms and says something in her ears. Stephanie stops talking and her eyes close. Her eyes were open and white since she collapsed.

"She'll be fine." Oliver lays her back on the bed and then stands on his feet. He's standing upright with his hands behind his back.

"You can leave now," mother says rudely.

"I am afraid, I can't. She's turning eighteen soon. I was going to come for her anyways

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" Oliver replies, calmly.

"This is not RockNile and what if Stephanie doesn't want to be with you?" - Wendy.

"What if she does," Oliver retorts, "Wendy I understand that you hate me but Stephanie was given to me. Besides my imprinting on her, she was given to me before she was even born. I am sorry if you can't stand me but trust me you'll be seeing a lot of my face starting today." Oliver says, still calm.

"I won't give you my blessings," - Wendy.

"I don't need your blessings. I only care about Steph." Oliver retorts.

"Go back to RockNile," Henry holds mom back when she takes a step towards Oliver and I see Oliver's eyes glow. What is going on? Are they going to fight?

"Wendy you knew this day was coming? Do it for Steph," Henry says. Do what? It's like I am hearing pieces of the story - which I am.

STEPHANIE

I slowly open my eyes and look at my surroundings. I can feel that someone is holding my hand. I close my eyes and the memory of me in the backyard with Brendon comes flooding my mind. Did the reverse spell work?

"Brendon" I shake him. He's sleeping next to the bed. I am sure his back hurts from sitting on the chair, "Brendon wake up!"

"I'm up," he jumps off the chair and stands on his feet. He rubs his eyes and yawns stretching himself.

"Steph you're awake, are you okay?" He hugs me.

"I am fine, what happened?"

He yawns and sits back on the chair, "You collapsed and started talking in your sleep. You were dying Steph and mom tried to bring you back but she failed. She called Henry and he also failed. They had to summon Oliver and he brought you back. Look your hair is no longer white."

"Slow down, Brendon and who is Oliver?" My hair changed back to its original colour.

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asks ignoring my question about Oliver.

"I am fine."

He slaps me on my arm - that actually hurt. "That's for almost dying on me. I was worried Steph."

"I'm sorry. I don't remember anything else that happened after that spell in the backyard."

He hugs me, "I am glad you're fine."

The door flies open and Magret walks in, "Who is that handsome guy in our sitting room?"

I shrug but Brendon replies, "That's Stephanie's boyfriend."

Maggie groans loudly and exits the room slamming the door behind her. What did I do this time? Most importantly who is this person Brendon keeps referring to as my boyfriend?

The door opens again. A male walks in, he's wearing the royal clothes from RockNile. I quick stand on my feet and do not dare to look at him, he's a warlord and that is royalty but what is he doing here. Where's aunty Wendy? I hope they haven't come to take me back to RockNile. I heard that warlords use the un-gifted ones to cross the border. People talk you know. I look next to me from the corner of my eyes and Brendon has left me.

"Hey shawty!"

Huh? I look at him and he's wearing a smile. All the fear I have disappeared, "Why do you speak like people from around here?"

He sits on the bed, "And what do people from around here speak like? Come sit with me, wife." he pats the space on the bed.

"You're the one who's supposed to be my husband?"

"The one and only, baby?" he pats the bed again but I don't join him.

"You're wearing clothes from RockNile yet speak like Brendon."

He exhales sharply, "Long story short, I crossed the border a long time ago and have been living this side. You see I am kind of the black sheep of the family and I had to go back to RockNile because the old man wouldn't stop bothering me about my 'wife'. I have to say I expected you to be a little ugly but hey thank you to the underground gang, they chose well."

"I am confused."

"Come sit next to me and I will explain everything." He pats the bed again.

My husband is the older version of Brendon. I am not even eighteen yet.

STEPHANIE

I am sitting on a chair, I made sure I sit in front of the door that way I know when someone wants to come in. Oliver made himself comfortable on the bed. I cannot believe that this man is going to be my husband. I swear if he wasn't wearing clothes from RockNile I wouldn't have believed that he's from there. He acts and talks differently from men in RockNile. He even lets his hair grow out – men must stay bald in RockNile.

I know it's too early to say this but I like Oliver. He sounds like the older version of Brendon – he's funny and doesn't stop talking just like Brendon. He has been telling me about how his father had to drag him back to RockNile. He says he didn't want to go back because he's not ready for the burden that comes with being crowned prince. He says they had to perform a spell on him that way he won't run away just to take him back to RockNile. I see the king means business.

I also like that he's happy to see me. I have dreamt of the day I meet my so-called husband but I didn't think he'd be this cool. I know, I sound like Brendon. Men from RockNile are very intimidating – I expected the same from Oliver but he's not. He smiles a lot and I can gladly say I am comfortable around him.

“Are you sure you don't want to sit next to me?” Oliver asks and I shake my head. I am fine at the door plus I don't trust myself near him. I might do some things I saw in the movie Brendon and I were watching the other day. Relax, it's not the nasties – I'd have to die first to do that.

“So...Stephanie, tell me about yourself?”

I swallow hard. Mom told me about this. It's like defining myself but the problem is that I don't know how to define myself.

“It's okay, don't answer that – we will talk about it on our first date,” he puts me out of my misery. What's a date?

Oliver stands up from the bed and walks up to me. He leans over and I shift backwards. He smiles reaching for the chair leg, he pulls the chair toward him and stops when we are near the bed. He sits on the bed, in front of me. He tucks my hair behind my ear and says, “Ask anything you want to ask?”

“Does your father know you’re here and how did you cross the border?”

He folds his arms and I watch his shirt stretch a little – I had forgotten how muscular men from RockNile are, “My father is probably thinking that I am in my room and soon he’s going to notice that I am gone then he will perfume a tracking spell.”

“No, we can’t have that. Your father can’t find me. I will get punished for crossing the border.”

“Relax, the un-gifted one is keeping us safe. Why do you think they never found Wendy? As long as he’s with us they’ll never find us - unless they cross over and do the work this side of the border,” he retorts.

“Aren’t you worried about your family? Your mother will be worried.”

He laughs, “I am too old for them to worry about me. I am surprised you’re not asking questions like when are we sleeping together or what now that I am here.”

Sleeping together?

“I am kidding, Stephanie. Relax, I don’t bite.”

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. Okay, maybe I wasn't prepared for his coming. My mother taught me everything but coming to this side messed with my mind. Coming to this side made me realize how behind people in RockNile are starting with their laws to their way of dressing. Look at me throwing my disbelief and everything I stand for out the window in just less than a month I have been outside the border.

Oliver didn't tell me why he's here because I am not eighteen yet or how he crossed the border. Does Wendy know that he's in my room? Will she give me away to Oliver's family since she's the only family member I have? Will she give me her blessing? I need her blessings, without her approval I won't be able to be with Oliver whether I already belong to him or not. Does this mean I'd have to go back to RockNile? I don't want to go back – I want to stay here and go to school.

“Uhm I have a request,” I say to Oliver.

“Your wish is my command, my princess.”

“Please don't take me back to RockNile. You see I ran away and if they find out they will have me killed. Please can we just stay side,” I request. He nods lightly.

“You can stay this side and no one will ever hurt you as long as I am by your side. My job is to love and protect you with my life. I will handle my father and RockNile – you just go to school and do what you wish.”

He’s calmer than I expected. My mother taught me that men talk and women listen but with Oliver it’s different. Could it be because he grew up outside the border?

“So what now? Are you my boyfriend as Brendon said?”

“I don’t know, you have the power to take me or reject me,” he says and I quickly look at him. I didn’t know I had a choice.

“I have a choice?”

He nods, “Yes, my lady. But I also have a request. Let me prove myself to you that I can make you happy.”

“Do you like me or are you doing it because I was given to you?”

“Steph I imprinted on you when you were born meaning I have loved you for the past eighteen years. You see people like me only love once and for some reason I chose you. It’s not something I can control it’s a bond made in the spirit realm and only death can break what I feel for you – my death because

even if you die I will still have feelings for you. I don't know if it's a curse or blessing this love one woman till infinity thing

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" he explains.

I find myself smiling. It's nice knowing that he loves me on the same level as someone who is confessed. Does it mean my powers don't work on him? Does it mean I don't have to worry about my powers around him?

"I don't read minds, Stephanie."

Yet he just read that I am talking about him in my head.

"Does it mean my powers don't work on you?" I ask.

"Define work on you?"

"Can I bend you to my will?" I question and I am surprised he finds it funny.

"I already love you, woman. Do you want me to love you more than I already do?"

"No, I mean... can look into your eyes and nothing will happen?" I say.

“You can look into my eyes, my princess. And no, you can’t bend me to your will because I am a male confessor and we are slightly stronger than female confessors.”

“I didn’t know there are male confessors?” There aren’t any male confessors in RockNile – not that I know of.

“I am the last of my kind meaning you and I need to get busy, the bloodline is dying.”

I swallow hard. He’s talking about sleeping together again.

“Relax Stephanie we just met. It’s not like we are just going to start getting along in one day then make babies.”

Relief!

The door opens, and Wendy walks in, “Oliver it’s time to leave.” She says coldly then shifts her attention to me, she’s now smiling, “How are you feeling?”

“I feel fine.” I retort.

“Oliver leave!” she shoots a stare at him. Why do I get a feeling she doesn’t like him? Oliver says goodbye and promises that he’ll come see me then leaves.

“Is he going back to RockNile?” I ask Wendy.

“He’s leaving with Henry. Are you sure you’re okay? You scared us Steph.”

“I am sorry and I promise not to perform a spell-like that again,” I say with my head down. That’s a lie. I know I will do a spell whenever I feel like I need answers.

“Let’s talk about Oliver.”

I don’t respond, I keep my head down and wait for her to continue. She holds my hands and says, “I love you Steph and you know I always have the best interest at heart but I don’t think Oliver is the right man for you.”

“Why?”

She stands up and walks around the room, “Oliver is way older than you.”

“But aunty that is his lineage. We know warlords are immortal even I was one before I crossed the border.”

She stands in front of me and holds my hands again, “Baby I want the best for you but Oliver is not the best of you. Forget about RockNile, live your life and fall in love with whoever you want.”

“What is wrong with Oliver? He sounds like a nice person.”

She shakes her head, "Find someone else, please!"

"Why, what is wrong with him? He is the one I was given to after all."

"Stephanie would I ever do anything to hurt you?" she asks and I shake my head, "Then please trust me on this one, Oliver is not good for you. Even Nathaniel is better."

"At least tell me why?"

"Just stay away from Oliver. You are young and you should be focusing on learning how to read and write not thinking about being someone's wife," she walks towards the door but I close it before she can reach it. She turns around and chuckles, more like –did-you-just-do-that. She can't ask me to stay away from Oliver and not give me a reason. I understand that Oliver is maybe a couple of centuries-old even though he looks twenty but our kind stops growing at that age.

"Why can't I be with Oliver?"

"Because I said so," she raises her voice, "This is my house and what I say goes."

“This is my life and we’ll be angering the spirits. I was given to Oliver at birth.” Look at me defending a man I just met. I don’t know if I even like him.

“This is not RockNile. I didn’t want to do this but you leave me no choice. You can’t be with Oliver staying under this roof so choose if you want Oliver or staying here,” she says keeping a straight face.

“Aunty Wendy!”

“And choose wisely young lady.” she exits the room.

STEPHANIE

Oliver or my aunt? How do I choose between the two? I know one would advise me to choose my aunt but as Oliver said, we have a bond made in the spirit realm. I hardly know him but somehow I am drawn to him. It's hard not to like him. Maybe he cast a spell on me. Why do I suddenly want to be near him? Why was I looking at his lips when he was talking. Why was I picturing doing things I have never dreamt of doing with him?

"So now you want to starve yourself to death?" Aunty Wendy asks standing by my bedroom door. I haven't left the room since she made me choose. I am mad at her. It is not fair that she is making me choose. Why can't I be with Oliver? I swear if I knew a spell that reveals secrets, I could have cast one on her. Aunty Wendy is very secretive and whatever she's hiding will one day blow up in her face.

"Dinner is ready, Stephanie!" Aunty Wendy announces and I nod. She sighs and walks up to the bed. "Baby I am doing it for you. I am sorry if I was a little harsh on you but one day you'll thank me for this."

"At least tell me why?"

"It's complicated. You know I'd never do anything to hurt you," she holds my hands and kisses them, "Trust me on this one."

"Fine, I won't be with Oliver."

She kisses me on the forehead and then pulls me out of bed. We head to the table, Maggie and Brendon are already waiting for us. I sit next to Magret, aunty made me sit there.

"You changed your hair," says Magret. I guess she didn't notice earlier.

"This was my original hair colour."

"White looked good on you," she hands me the bowl of rice so I can dish for myself.

Magret is being very nice to me. Even Brendon is surprised by her sudden change of character. Today she's talking and smiling. Usually, she eats concentrated on her phone and then leaves the table when she is done.

"You guys finish eating already so we can clean up - some of us have homework to do," says Magret. Brendon and I look at each other in awe. I think Maggie is possessed by something. Maybe something crawled out of the border and possessed

her. Brendon tries to touch her forehead but she slaps his arm away.

"What are you doing?" - Maggie.

"Checking if you don't have a fever. You have to be sick to offer to help with the dishes," Brendon tries to touch her again but she slaps his hand away.

"I am in a good mood today - Nathaniel and I are going on a date tomorrow," Maggie replies excitedly.

What is this date thing everyone keeps talking about, Oliver also wants us to go on a date?

"Did Nate ask you or did you twist his arm and cry until he felt sorry for you?" Brendon asks and shifts away just in time before Maggie's palm lands on his arm. These two are hitting each other.

"He apologized for the other day and said we can go out for drinks if I want to." - Maggie.

"Doesn't sound like a date to me," mumbles Brendon.

Aunty Wendy is quiet today. It is as if she's deep in her thoughts. Even when Maggie asks to go out with Nathaniel she just nods. I wonder if her mood has anything to do with Oliver.

"What's your boyfriend's name?" Maggie asks me.

"Oliver is not my boyfriend." YET!

"Why don't you invite him. We can go on a double date," Maggie is in a very cheerful mood today but this is her moment and I don't want to ruin it for her. Plus I am not allowed to be with Oliver.

Aunty Wendy goes to bed earlier and Maggie ends up not helping us (Brendon and me) clean up - something about her beauty sleep.

"Steph," Brendon says passing a plate to me so I can dry it, "Do you know that man that was with Oliver today?"

"I don't know him but I saw him leave the house a couple of days ago. I think he's close with aunty Wendy."

"I think so too and I think he's her lover." He hands me the last cup. Only if he'd let me snap my fingers and we won't have to dry any dishes.

"I think they are lovers too because he hugged and kissed her before he left."

He smirks and I know that look. He's up to no good, "I will find out, all I need to do is put my detective cap on."

Detective cap?

After cleaning the kitchen, Brendon and I watch a movie then we go to bed. I am always the first to wake up and Brendon told me to wake him up that way he can bathe before Maggie finishes all the hot water. I am used to bathing in cold water so I don't mind.

By seven o'clock, Brendon and I are carrying our satchels and waiting for princess Magret to finish powdering her face so we can leave for school.

"I am leaving for working, you guys take care of yourselves and Brendon, no fighting at school," aunty Wendy kisses our foreheads and rushes out with her high shoes. I wonder how she knows that Brendon fought at school because I didn't say anything.

"Magret hurry up already!" Brendon groans in annoyance after checking the little clock on his wrist. He is teaching me how to read the time. In RockNile we don't have clocks but we can tell the time by just looking at our shadows.

"I am almost done," Maggie yells from her room.

"You said that ten minutes ago."

"It takes time to look beautiful, I am not like Stephanie who just slaps vaseline on her face. No offence, Steph," Maggie retorts.

"What is wrong with my face?" I ask Brendon.

"Nothing is wrong with your face. You're naturally beautiful

" he tells me then yells, "You're not even allowed to wear makeup at school."

After a while, Maggie comes out of her room. She looks very pretty. We all rush to the car. Aunty has two cars, the one she left with and the one Maggie uses to drive us to school. Lucky we get to school before the bell rings and then go our separate ways. Aunty Wendy told me what to say to my teacher about why I wasn't at school the previous day and that I dyed my hair. Aunty Wendy is teaching me how to lie.

My day goes by very slow. May I say I am not a fan of this school thing? It's not fun and everything is just confusing. I can speak the language but writing it is another story. I will ask Brendon to help me because I can barely hear some of the things the teacher says.

Break time comes and I am the first to leave class after the bell rings. They serve delicious food at the school. I get my food and look for a place to sit but Maggie calls me before I can reach an empty table. I thought she said we must pretend not to know her. I walk to where she is, she's sitting with Nathaniel. I sit opposite them.

"Hey, cutie!" Nathaniel greets. He's always smiling, "Here you go," he hands me candy and I smile widely. He gives me candy every time we meet.

"Thanks, Nate."

"Since when do you give each other candy?" Maggie asks.

"It's our thing, me and Stephanie," Nathaniel winks and I giggle. He makes my insides warm.

Maggie rolls her eyes before saying, "Nate are we still on tonight?"

"Yeah...does Steph want to join us?"

Maggie frowns but quickly smiles, "Steph do you want to join us?"

I do want to join them but her eyes are begging me to say no. I reply, "Brendon and I are watching a movie later today, I promised."

"There's always a next time," he strokes my chin with his fingers but quickly pulls away. He likes touching me. He should thank the spirits that I can no longer use my powers on him.

Maggie gasp loudly, "Don't turn around but your boyfriend is here."

I turn around anyways. Oliver is here and he's wearing the school uniform. Is he crazy? He's centuries old.

"I didn't know you had a boyfriend," my eyes meet Nathaniel's

"He's not my boyfriend," I stand up and leave the table. I walk toward Oliver and ask him to follow me out.

"Hey, wife!"

"What are you doing here and why are you wearing the school uniform?" I ask. Man does he look good in the uniform. He is wearing the same uniform as everyone else but the way he's wearing it is just different.

"I am here to learn just like you plus I figured your aunt might have give you the stay-away-from-Oliver speech."

"How did you know?" I sit on the bench, the same bench Brendon asked me to wait for him on.

"Wendy hates me - she thinks I am not good for you?"

"Why? What are you two hiding from me?.. please don't lie."

He takes my hands, "You have no idea how many times I have told you this story. Okay so I am immortal and I am five centuries old."

Yet he looks twenty and five centuries wow. He goes on to say, "Your aunt hates me because I am the reason you always end up dying."

"Dying?"

He nods, "Unlike me, you're not immortal. They lied to you. You get born like a normal person and die like a normal person. I first meet you when I was a century-old..."

I interrupt him, "I met you yesterday?"

"Yes but I first met you then and that's when I imprinted on you."

"So you have loved me for five centuries? That doesn't make sense at all. I am eighteen."

"Can you please let me explain?" he asks and I nod.

"I first met you when I was a century old and Imprinted on you. We were very much in love and everything was fine, we were happy. I introduced you to my family and I was a crowned prince but the problem came when you got pregnant. Your secret of being half warlord came out. You died giving birth, along with the baby. Witch blood and warlord blood are not supposed to be in one vessel - it's too much power. It killed you."

I died?

"Wendy blamed me for your death she said if I hadn't been with you, you wouldn't have died. It turns out our child was going to be something that would bring the world to its knees and it's an abomination in the underworld so you had to die. Every century you get reborn by the same person, looking the same and with the same name but no memory of your past life. Since I imprinted on you, I always find you and we always fall in love but you always end up dying along with the baby. I tried to stay away but we always find our way to each other. Our feelings for each other are too strong and sometimes when I try to leave, you always get sick and for some reason only I can cure you bringing me back to you. Just like you getting possessed - that was fate bringing us together. I understand

why Wendy wants me to stay away but I can't no matter how I try. You have no idea how many times you have died then I have to wait a hundred years for you to be reborn only for you to die again. We have tried everything but you always end up dying. I have tried doing a spell that saves you and takes me but there can never be me without you. You were born to be mine so if I don't exist then you don't too so yeah... that's what's up between me and Wendy."

STEPHANIE

I want to believe Oliver but how does he expect me to believe that I get reborn every century. My mother told me that I was immortal - she was supposed to be immortal too. Instead of giving me answers, Oliver is making me more confused. There are so many things he said that do not add up, like how he acted as if it was the first time seeing me. I am not eighteen meaning it's not yet time for him to come claim me - how did he find me? How will I be reborn in the next life - that's if that is true. Both my parents are dead.

"Hey," Oliver cups my face making me look at him, "I know this is a lot to process but I had to tell you the truth. It's part of this bond we have - I can't lie to you."

"Yet you did. Yesterday you pretended as if it was your first time meeting me."

"I didn't lie to you"

I remind him, "You said you expected me to be ugly."

"No, it's not like that," he chuckles. This is not the time to chuckle, he lied to me and could be lying about this dying and

getting reborn thing. How do I even know he's the one that I was given? Is he 500 years old? Is that even possible?

Oliver lets go of my face and take my hands, "Let me show you something."

"I have to go to class."

"Please?" I want to go to class but there's something about the way he looks at me so I nod. He stares into my eyes until his eyes glow. I feel my body getting lighter, my eyes lids are now heavy - I can't keep my eyes open and I can feel myself slipping away as if I am falling asleep.

"Hey, princess."

Oliver's deep voice snaps me awake. We are in a place I don't recognize. He's wearing different clothes from the ones he was wearing a minute ago and the clothes he was wearing when I first saw him. He still looks handsome though. He says the same words and asks the same questions he asked when I first meet him.

He snaps his fingers and I open my eyes only to meet Oliver's gaze again. His eyes are still glowing and forcing me back to sleep. I close my eyes and drift into a world I don't recognize.

"My Queen!" Oliver's deep voice again. Still, I can not recognize my surroundings. Again he's wearing different clothes and so am I but this time my hair is red. He says the same words and asks the same questions he asked when I first meet him.

I close my eyes and open them when I hear the clicking sound. Oliver is still holding my hands and we are still on the bench but I felt like I was in another world. I look at Oliver and his eyes are still glowing making me sleepy.

"Steph!" Oliver smiles at me but this time I ask him who he is and he replies, "Your husband." Again....he says the same words and asks the same questions he asked when I first meet him.

What is he doing to me? I open my eyes and they meet his glowing eyes. I try to keep my eyes open but eventually close them and drift to another world.

"Hey, pretty lady. I am Oliver Stark."

I blush and tell him my name. He says the same words and asks the same questions he asked when I first meet him.

I open my eyes and we are still on the bench.

"Oliver stop, what are you doing to me?" I whisper trying to avoid his eyes but end up looking at them. Whatever he's doing is draining me it's like the time when I crossed the border it drained my powers a little.

"Hey, shawty!"

This time I recognize my surroundings. I am in my room, in aunty Wendy's house. Oliver is wearing clothes from RockNile.

I think now I understand. He was showing me all the times we have met before. He's telling the truth and every time we meet, he says the same words and asks the same questions. I think it's his way of trying to see if I remember my past life.

I open my eyes and this time I am welcomed by Oliver's brown eyes, "Are you okay?" he asks.

"Yes but I need a minute. What you did drained me a little."

"Do you want me to help with that?" I shift my head away before he can touch me.

"I'm fine...so those were all the times we meet? You have always been handsome."

He smiles and strokes my chin with his fingers, "You are beautiful and always have been."

"So if you know that I get reborn every century then why do you wait until I turn 18 to come to claim me? Why not come earlier since I end up dying."

He answers, "Because every time we fall in love, you always end up getting pregnant. I don't know if it's a spell but we just can't get off each other. No amount of magic or birth control can prevent you from getting pregnant."

"At what age do I get pregnant?"

"You never make it past your teens," it comes out as a whisper.

It's a lot to process. So I am going to die and there's nothing I can do to stop it. Did my mother have to get with a warlord? If I wasn't half warlord and half which this wouldn't be happening.

"So you get to love me for two years then I die. Then you wait decades?"

He nods, "You're worth the wait."

"Why don't you find someone else after my death?"

"Because a werewolf can only love once," he retorts. No wonder I always die. He is half warlord and half werewolf. The child would indeed bring the world to its knees.

"One last question," I say and he nods, "You're four months early - I am not 18 yet and how did you find me?"

"I am early because you were possessed by a Dashi, it is a dark spirit from the underworld that needed a body to possess. It sends off your spirit to another world where you think you're surrounded by family yet in the real world you're dying. The reason why your hair changed colour is that you were dying and the spirit was taking over your body completely. I was in RockNile waiting for you to turn 18. I couldn't find you that side

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I failed to track you until Henry summoned me. I had help from the un-gifted one to cross the border then came to save you," he explains.

"How did you know the right spell to free me?"

"Sweetie I am five centuries old, I know everything now," he retorts.

"Yet you still can't stop my death."

I think I hurt his feeling but he clears his throat and says, "There are some things that are just meant to be and we have no control over."

"I'm sorry, it came out wrong."

"No offence taken," he stands up, "You're late for class."

"You too."

"I am here just so I can see you. I know everything they are teaching. Since Wendy doesn't want me near you, this is the only way I get to see your pretty face," he winks.

"So Wendy hates you in every century?"

He nods, "She hates me."

"Then how do we end up together."

He smiles, "You'll see but now you need to get to class."

"I will do a spell on the teacher - what's the relation between Wendy and Henry?"

"Steph there are some things that are not my place to tell you. I can never lie to you but please never put me in a position where I end up exposing people's secrets."

Wendy is hiding something. I don't feel like going to class but I have to learn how to read and write. I ask Oliver to walk me to class so he can tell me about me in the last life. He says my character always changes when I get reborn and that sometimes I act like a spoiled brat - in other words, I sometimes act like Maggie.

"You can leave me here," I say when we reach the classroom. I can hear the teacher talking inside. Oliver places his hands on my waist and pulls me closer to him. I didn't realize he was so tall. He leans over and brings his face close to mine. I hold my breath and glare into his gorgeous brown eyes. He stares at my eyes for a while then whispers, "Breath, Steph."

He kisses my forehead, lets go of my waist then shifts backwards. His lips touched a small portion of my skin yet it sent tingles throughout my whole body.

"Go to class before I lose my morals in a public space."

"I don't mind," I reply and quickly cover my mouth then storm into the classroom. Why did I say that?

"Stephanie where are you..." I don't let the teacher finish talking I whisper, 'Vergeet ek het sopas ingestap.' (forget I just walked in)

GWENDOLYN (WENDY)

"Damn it!" I dump the bowl of water on the floor but quickly clean it up with a spell. I did spell that makes me see Stephanie where ever she is, all I need is something that helps me see a reflection like a mirror or clear water. That little girl is stubborn - she never listened to me back then and still doesn't listen.

Only if she would stay away from that Oliver boy. I just wish he can also stop looking for her - why can't he love someone else?

"Why are you here?" I said without looking at the person. I sensed that someone entered my office. I work at the hospital for special people in other words crazy people. Well, I understand them and I help them find peace and cross over to the other realm - the underworld.

"Don't you get tired of trying to separate Steph and me?" Oliver sits opposite me. I am surprised by how he made it here so fast. He was just with Stephanie minutes ago.

"Leave her alone - why can't you just find someone else?"

"Wendy we've been over this many times you know she'll get sick if I leave," he says.

"I will cure her, I have ways now."

He laughs, "You couldn't free her from the Dashi with those borrowed powers. Only I can save her. You're lucky I didn't tell her your secret."

"Leave, Oliver!"

"I am done protecting you, this time if she asks I'll tell her everything," he utters firmly.

"Too bad I can't kill you because you're starting to be a pain in my life."

"Too bad you can't because you'll be killing Steph too. There can never be her without me, Gwendolyn," he stands up and leaves.

I pick up the flower pot on my table and throw it against the door.

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STEPHANIE

"Hey, cutie," Nathaniel whispers sitting next to me. I am at the library doing my homework but the words in the textbook are very small. I am also waiting for Maggie to finish her cheerleading practice so she can drive me home. Brandon said he'll walk and that he wants to go play video games with some girl that he wouldn't stop winking at. I think he likes her.

"You good?" - Nathaniel.

"Yes, it's just that these words are so small. In RockNile we don't write such small letters."

He reaches for his backpack. He takes out a black thing and opens it, "Try wearing glasses," he puts them on me. I don't think these glasses work because now I can't see him properly, "They are reading glasses, look at the words."

I look at the book. This seems better so the glasses see words and not people - that's interesting.

"You can keep them, I have another pair at home," Nathan offers. He's such a nice soul and I am glad that I was able to break the bond between me and him. At least now we can be friends without him being under a spell.

I shift my focus back to my homework. I can feel Nathaniel starting at me but I try to focus although I have no idea what I am doing.

"It's there not they," Nathaniel corrects. I nod and fix it but he keeps correcting me. It's not two it's too. This is hard - why aren't they learning the same language as in RockNile? I forgot we don't have schools that side.

"This is hard," I throw the pen on the table, "I don't know anything and it's frustrating - I am dumb as Maggie said."

"Hey, you're not dumb," Nathaniel picks up the pen and hands it to me, "It's not your fault that they didn't have schools where you come from and if you ever need help with homework just shout."

"Shout at who?"

He chuckles, "If you need help ask me and I would be glad to assist you, cuteness."

"Thank you, Nathaniel." I take the pen and resume writing. Brendon says I write beautifully. "You know in RockNile we use ink and feathers when writing."

"Tell me about RockNile - what is it like there?"

I put the

pen down and close the books, "It's a small town that lives by the rules. There are things that only one gender can do and are forbidden when the opposite gender does it. We don't have cars or televisions or schools like here but for some reason everything is fine and we were happy."

I want to tell him about the magic and all the mythical creatures there but Brendon advised me not to overshare.

"Do you miss RockNile?"

I nod, "It's fun here but I feel like I don't belong. Everyone always has to help me with something and I always make a fool of myself."

"Give it time, you will adjust and sometimes change is good. I suggest taking things slow - you can't learn it all overnight."

"I love it here but there's just so much to learn," I tell him.

"One step at a time and I volunteer to teach you anything you want to learn."

"No, you don't have to. You have your life to live and you have your own schoolwork to focus on," I say. Maggie would hate me more if he does that.

"I can manage plus it's an excuse to see your pretty face," he stands up and carries his backpack, "I will see you around, I have football practice."

I wave at him until he disappears out of the library. It seems everyone has practice. I get back to doing my homework until I finish. I take my books and go to the school ground to check if Maggie is there but she's not. Only the boys are here - I spot Nathaniel in the crowd and wave at him. He runs to me...

"You're still here?"

"Did you see Maggie?" I ask him.

"She left some time ago."

That witch! I know she left me on purpose. I don't show Nathaniel that I am angry so I tell him I just wanted to say goodbye and then leave for home. The moment I step out of

the school gate, I spot Oliver leaning onto a car. He waves at me and I walk toward him.

"Hey, princess!" he greets me with much enthusiasm.

"Hey, Oliver," I wish I could return the energy but I am angry at Maggie and I swear one of these days I am going to turn her into a lizard.

"What's wrong?"

"It's Maggie, she left me

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" I kick the car wheel.

"Easy, princess. And, don't be mad - I am here to pick you up."

"Whose car is this?" I ask as he opens the door for me and asks me to get in.

"Steph I am five centuries old of course I own a car." He goes around and also gets into the car but he doesn't put on the seatbelt as everyone does when they get into the car.

The car starts moving and he drives me home.

"Why aren't you wearing the seatbelt?"

He puts on the seatbelt, "I am wearing it now."

"How did you know I was still at the school?"

He looks at me, "I know your scent."

I forgot he's a werewolf. I wonder if he fully transforms. My stomach growls, I skipped break time since Oliver was telling me about my past lives.

"Let's feed you, princess." Oliver drives us to that place where they made me do the dishes after giving me food. We get in and find a table to sit at. A girl approaches us and asks what we want to eat.

"What do you want, Steph?" Oliver asks.

I shift closer to him and whisper, "I don't have money."

He whispers back, "I am paying so order whatever you want."

I look at the lady and say, "I want cow meat."

"You're going to have to be more specific, sweetie," the lady replies.

"Give us a plate of smoked beef ribs and chips with cranberry juice and water, please," Oliver tells the lady. She writes it down in her little book and then smiles at us before leaving.

"You have money? Where did you get it?"

Oliver clears his throat, "I am royalty and don't you think it would be weird that I am centuries old yet broke."

"It's hard to believe that you're centuries old - you look twenty."

"We don't age after the age of twenty," he retorts.

The food is here and it smells delicious. The lady places the plate in front of me and tells me to enjoy the food.

"Where's your food?" I ask Oliver. He only has water.

"I ate."

He says he ate so I dig into my food with Oliver watching me and smiling non-stop.

"Tell me, Oliver...before you imprinted on me, did you like anyone?" I ask as I toss some fries in my mouth.

"Let's just say imprinting on you might be the best thing that ever happened to me because I would have died of Aids by now."

"What does that mean?" I ask.

"Eat so I can take you home, we don't want your aunt hating me more than she already does."

Oliver pays after I finish eating and takes me home. Aunty Wendy knocks off around five pm so I know she won't see me with Oliver.

"Thank you for driving me home and for lunch," I say to Oliver when he helps me out of the car.

"I got to spend time with you so thank you too for letting me buy you lunch and drive you home."

"You're so nice - it's very suspicious." I didn't mean to say that loud but it is true.

He leans onto the car and shoves his hands in his pocket. Did I mention that he looks amazing in the school uniform? He utters, "Do you maybe want me to be the bad boy?"

"I am just saying you're very nice."

"I am only nice to you," he shifts closer to me and hovers over me with his broad shoulders making me seem small.

"Maybe the reason you think I am nice is that I already know you more than you know me. I have been with you in your past lives. Although your character changes but you're still the same person and I guess I mastered how to handle you."

I swallow hard, he's standing too close and there's something about how he looks at me. He makes all my blood rush to my lower abdomen, "Mastered how to handle me?"

"I know your weak spots and how exactly to touch you," he runs his fingers up my arm, I am wearing a short-sleeved shirt. He leans over and whispers in my ear, "Let's not forget that I know how your lips taste, I know how soft your skin is and your warmth...you have no idea how much I am holding the urge to kiss you. From the moment I saw you again, my hands are itching to touch you."

He shifts away and leans back on the car, "But I have to be patient because even if I have memories of you - you only just met me yesterday."

" Breath, Steph." He adds

I tend to hold my breath when he gets close. He makes me feel things in places I am not supposed to. He makes my heart beat in places it's not supposed to. He places his hands on my lower back and pulls me closer to him. He presses his head against mine and says,

"You should go inside."

He kisses my forehead, let's goes of me and gets into the car then drives away.

15

BRENDON

I am in my room playing video games when I hear a noise outside my window. I put down the controller and try to calculate the distance from where I am to the door in case there's a need for me to run out. Listen...I support my life and if anything comes into my room, I am running. My heart almost jumps out of my chest when the window opens.

"Hey, little man," Oliver gets in through the window.

"Dude you scared me - ever heard of using the front door?"

"Your mother hates me so I am pretty sure she would slam the door in my face if I used the front door. Plus, I am here for you," he sits on my bed.

"What do you want from me?"

"I need you to help me when it comes to Steph. For example when I want to see her." he informs, "I also need you to give her this phone but don't tell her it's from me. I am sure you can cook up a lie and then teach her how to use the phone."

I fold my hands and sit on the chair in front of the television but face Oliver, "What if I don't want to?"

"Name your prize, little man."

"How dare you? Stephanie is my cousin do you think I would let you pay me just so you can see her?" I am offended and he is lucky that I don't have powers. I would have bored a hole in his face.

He stands up from the bed and walks toward me. Are all men in RockNile so tall and muscular? "So you'll do it for free? That's nice of you - I am going to Steph's room so keep your mother away," he pats me on the shoulder and opens the door.

"What's your intention with my cousin? Steph is very innocent and I don't want to see her get hurt."

"Relax, little man. She's safer with me than anyone else," he tosses me the phone and heads to Stephanie's room.

I open the box and it's a Samsung at least this one is easy to handle because Steph is a little slow when it comes to teaching her these things. I will also install some nice apps for her - look at me playing the best cousin of the year. Oliver needs to pay me, not that I would want to get paid for helping Steph but Oliver is not my relative so he has to pay. I toss the phone on

my bed and head to the kitchen, mom came back from work about half an hour ago.

"Gwendolyn! The beautiful woman that gave birth to me," I hug her.

"I don't have any money, Brendon."

I scoff, "I don't want money but what I want is to tell you about my day, lets's take a walk."

"I am cooking."

"We'll order pizza. I have some money from my chore savings. Let us go and enjoy the cool sunset breeze." I undo the apron from her body and hang it on the chair. I don't give her the time to protest, I lead her outside. A message pings into my phone.

'Good job, little man.'

I know that's Oliver and I don't want to know how he got my phone number. I reply...

'I hate you and you owe me twenty dollars.'

'Keep her away for an hour and I'll leave a fifty on your bed.' -
Oliver.

'This does not make us friends.'

I shove my phone into my pocket and cling on to my mother's
hand. "So, Gwendolyn..."

"Don't push it," she warns.

"I mean mom, please tell me about this being the un-gifted one
thing?"

STEPHANIE

"Hey!"

I scream but quickly cover my mouth. I go to lock the door,
people in this house never knock.

"Oliver, what are you doing here?" I whisper. Aunty Wendy specifically told me that she doesn't want Oliver in her house.

"No need to whisper, we are alone. Come join me," he's now sitting on the bed, "We have an hour until everyone comes back, come."

I hesitate but end up sitting next to him. He pulls me into his arms and lets me rest my head on his chest. He is very warm and I can feel his heart thumping and his hot breath on my forehead.

"Do your parents know about me?" I ask Oliver. The silence is getting awkward.

"They know - they cannot wait to meet you again."

"How come I am not immortal like other witches and warlords?" I sit up and look at him.

"I don't know, maybe it's just fate."

I lay back on his chest and say, "Then let's make the best of the two years I have left."

"You always say that but this time I promise to do everything in my power to save you, even if it kills me."

"No

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you can't die because if you do then I won't be reborn. Promise me that no matter what happens you will live and if I die this time please find someone else." I say. Although I wouldn't want him being with someone else.

"It doesn't work like that, princess."

"Then let me confess you before I die and order you to move on with your life."

I can seal the bond with a spell that will not break even if I die.

"We have tried that before and it didn't work."

"There has to be something we can do. You can't always wait for me only so my aunt can hate and blame you for my death," it is not fair. He deserves a happy ending.

"It is my fate and it was written before I was born. As you said, let's make the best of the two years we have. To hell with Wendy."

"Who is older between you and my aunt?" I ask and he smiles. He is older, "Wait a minute, do my parents always die like me? If so then who gives birth to me?"

He makes me sit up, "Can we talk about us, please? We have a couple of minutes until everyone comes back."

"What do you want to talk about?"

"More like, what do I want to do," he shifts closer and I lay back on my back letting him tower over me. He shifts his face closer to mine and stares into my eyes. This time I am failing to hold my breath because my heart is thumping hard. He looks at my lips and back to my eyes. He flips us over and now I am on top of him, he places his hands on my arms and pulls me closer to him. I know he wants to kiss me but I am scared I might bite him.

He starts with a peck, as he did on my forehead earlier today then gently sucks my top lip. I am clueless about this and I think he senses it too so he whispers, "Just follow my lead."

I follow his lead. For a second everything disappears and it feels like it's just me and him. I never thought I'd find joy in kissing someone but I feel like I am floating and he's making me feel tingles in my deepest and darkest places. The kiss is slow and passionate. My body shivers when I feel his warm hands on my skin as he gently strokes my back with his fingertips.

He flips me over and this time there's so much urgency in the kiss and I am failing to keep up. He pins my arms above my head and I hear the blouse I am wearing tear and I let out a scream when I feel a sting on my arm.

He quickly let's go and gets off me, before he looks away, I notice his eyes are glowing. I look at my arm - he scratched me.

"I am sorry," he sits up and buries his face in his hands, "I have never lost control with you before. I got over-excited and my animal side took over."

"I am fine, you didn't hurt me."

He turns to me and takes my arm. It's bleeding. He heals it and looks at my exposed chest but I grab the pillow and cover myself, "I'm sorry, Steph. I swear I have never lost control with you before."

"I am fine, Oliver. I understand too, it's been years and I am sure you missed me. Let me change my blouse." I walk to the closet and take out a red top then put it on. I walk back to him and hold his hands, "You didn't hurt me."

"But I ruined the moment."

I cup his face, "You didn't, we can start over."

"Your aunt is here - I have to leave."

I don't want him to go but Aunty Wendy will be angry if he sees him here, "Will I see you tomorrow?"

"Yes."

I walk to him and hug him. I don't know why I suddenly feel the urge to be close to him. He holds me tighter - it feels good to be in his arms.

"I wish you didn't have to go," my mouth betrays me. This man came into my life two days ago yet I want to be close to him always.

"Me too but we will see each other tomorrow."

"Who do you stay with?" I ask him.

"I stay with Henry."

"What is he to you?" I question. I know he wants to lie but I noticed it's hard for him to lie to me.

"He's my uncle but please don't ask further."

"Okay, I won't ask." I retort.

He pecks me on the lips and goes to open the door, "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Please come back, tonight," my mouth betrays me again. I want him close. Is this the bond he was talking about?

"I'll be here, princess."

"Why do you call me princess?" I ask him.

"I am a prince which makes you a princess."

"Oh!"

"See you tonight and leave the window open." he heads out. I throw myself on the bed and touch my lips. I got my first kiss.

16

BRENDON

'It's nice doing business with you, Mr Oliver.'

I send Oliver a text message after I find a fifty dollar note on my bed. I take the phone Oliver left and head to Stephanie's room. I did all the necessary settings and even installed WhatsApp and Facebook for her.

I get to Stephanie's room. As usual, I let myself in and find her smiling by herself. All the girls in this house seem very much in love except mom of course.

"Look at you smiling by yourself," I sit on the chair next to Stephanie's bed. It's the kitchen chair. I forgot to take it back when she got better, "Care to share why you look so happy?"

"Don't tell your mom but Oliver was here and...." I interrupt her. I don't want to know what her boyfriend did to her.

"I got you a phone - I used all my savings so you owe me one." I hand her the phone.

"I don't need a phone - I don't know how to use it."

"That's why you have me, the best cousin in the whole world. And, you do need a phone what if I want to call you? Take the phone, it's a gift and you don't turn down a gift. I have put mom's number, Maggie, Oliver and mine in there," I sit next to her on the bed and show her what she needs to do if she wants to call anyone of us. I also teach her basic things like how to unlock the phone and how to charge it.

"Why does your name have a red heart in front of it?"
Stephanie asks.

"Because I am your favourite cousin and you love me."

"I do love you and thank you for the phone," she hugs me.

"I have connected your phone to the house wifi but once you leave the house it will disconnect but don't worry, I will buy you data and connect you to the school wifi also."

"I have no idea what you just said but okay."

"Hey, kids," Maggie walks into the room carrying two dresses that are on hangers.

"Stephanie is older than you so you can't call her a kid."

Maggie rolls her eyes, "Whatever, I am preparing for my date with Nathaniel. Which dress must I wear? Maroon or Blue?"

"Maroon looks good on you - it makes your skin colour pop and you can wear that dress with sneakers or heels," I answer. Staying with girls is ruining me - I am starting to sound like them.

"Steph what do you think?" - Maggie.

"The maroon one is very beautiful."

"Thank you. I am going to go and get ready," she says excitedly and rushes out.

Stephanie and I go to the sitting room to watch the recorded episode of Lab Rats for this afternoon. Luckily, mom is cooking so I don't have to buy pizza.

"Don't you two get tired of this boring show of yours?" mother walks into the room.

"Brendon got me a phone," Stephanie waves the phone. I glue my eyes to the television although I can feel my mom looking at me. She knows I can't afford a phone.

"That's good." Mother retorts and then say to me, "Aren't you Mr Loaded these days."

"Stephanie is the only one who doesn't have a phone in this house so I emptied my piggy bank and got her a phone. I used my chore money too," I say then cross my fingers that she doesn't pick up that I am lying.

Mom kisses my cheek, "That's nice of you, looking out for your cousin."

"How do I look?" Maggie walks into the room. She looks amazing and I don't know if it's me but Maggie and Stephanie have some similarities although they are the opposite of each other.

"You look amazing but I think you should wear your hair down," Stephanie suggests.

"Oh, that's not her hair, she braided it," I duck down before the couch cushion Maggie threw hits me.

"What time is Nathaniel coming to pick you up?" Mother asks.

"Maggie replies, "At seven pm."

"No drinking alcohol and I want you back here by ten pm." - Mom.

"I think it's not fair that Maggie is allowed to go out with Nathaniel yet Stephanie who is older than her is not allowed to see Oliver," I voice out.

"You're right, Maggie you're no longer allowed to go out with Nathaniel," mom says walking to the kitchen.

"That's bullshit! You said I can date whoever I want," Maggie yells.

"You kids are not allowed to date until you reach 18 and that is final but for today you can go with Nathaniel since it was already planned ." - Mom. Okay, that's not what I expected. I thought she was going to let Steph see Oliver too.

"Argh, I hate you," Maggie groans loudly then says "I wish you choke to death so I can do whatever I want with my life," then storms out of the room leaving mom coughing uncontrollably as if she's choking.

Stephanie rushes to mom's side and yells, "Get Magret!"

I run to Maggie's room and barge in without knocking.

"What the hell, Brendon?"

I grab her by her wrist and drag her to the sitting room mom is still coughing and her face is pale with veins popping as if she's choking to death.

"What is going on?" Maggie asks.

"Take back your words," Stephanie commands.

"What words?" - Maggie.

"What you said - undo the spell. Say you wish she doesn't choke to death." Stephanie speaks with urgency.

"I wish you don't choke," Maggie says now crying, mom looks like she can't breathe.

"Say it as you said it before

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word for word." - Steph.

"I wish you don't choke to death," Maggie shouts and mom stops coughing. Stephanie rubs mom's back saying a bunch of words I can't hear then mom starts breathing normally - not exactly but better than minutes ago.

"What just happened?" I ask Stephanie.

"Maggie cast a spell on her mother."

"But she doesn't have her powers?" I reply.

"She still has her han which is the main source of her powers. She is a witch after all." - Stephanie.

"A what? I am not a witch!" Maggie yells.

"You are Mag...what mom told us the other day is true," I say.

Maggie shakes her head, "I am not a witch and witches don't exist."

Stephanie snaps her fingers and the fireplace lights up she utters, "Ligte af."

I don't know what that means but the lights go off, "We are all witches, Maggie and your powers are coming back to their original home."

She snaps her fingers and the lights go on again.

Maggie shakes her head with tears falling on her face, "I am not a witch." she runs to her room. I run after her but she's locked herself inside her room.

"Maggie!"

"Go away, Brendon," she yells from inside.

I leave her and go to the sitting room. Mom is sitting on the floor with her face buried in her palms. I kneel next to her, "Are you okay?"

"I am fine - give your sister some time to process everything."

"Does it mean you no longer have your powers?" I ask her and she shakes her head.

"I took some of them but I didn't take her hand. You and Steph go to your rooms. I need to rush somewhere," she stands up. Gets her car keys and phone and then leaves. I look at Stephanie who shrugs. I head to my room and so does Stephanie.

STEPHANIE

I walk into my room and find Oliver sitting on the bed - he's reading my homework book.

"Hey, you're not supposed to be looking at my things," I try to snatch the book from his hand but fail.

"You're improving...it took me a while to adjust to this world but you're doing great."

I sit on the chair next to the bed, "Of course, you'd say that to make me feel better since I am your girlfriend."

"I didn't know we had a title now," he shifts his face closer to mine, "Why don't you give your boyfriend a kiss then?"

"My mind is occupied, Maggie found out about her powers."

He leans back on the pillows, "Wendy shouldn't have taken them in the first place."

"How do you know everything about everyone and don't you dare say because you're centuries old."

He exhales heavily, "Let's just say our love story isn't the only thing that repeats itself over the centuries."

"So aunty Wendy always takes Maggie's powers?"

"Steph I am here to spend time with you, can we talk about us and not other people's business?" he locks hands with me. I get off the chair and sit on the bed next to him.

He runs his fingers in my hair and kisses my forehead, "For a second, I thought you'd be scared to get near me after clawed you."

"It was a mistake so don't worry about it and trust me after what you made me feel, I want to be near you."

"And what did I make you feel, princess?" he asks and I blush burying my face in his chest.

Oliver says, "Before I forget, you need to be there for Magret. This is all new to her and she is confused so try to be there for her although she's the hardest to handle."

"Do Maggie and I get along in the past life?"

He places his hand on my chin and makes me face him, "You have very beautiful eyes."

"Don't change the subject."

He cups my face, "I m not, you do have beautiful eyes and a big forehead and beautiful, kissable lips."

He plants a kiss on my lips. I hold on to his shirt as he pulls me closer wrapping his muscular arms around me. There's something about his lips that make me lose all my senses.

"Steph!" Brandon barges into the room but covers his eyes with his hands, "I didn't see anything and please try locking the door next time. It could have been mom."

"We are dressed, little man. You can open your eyes," Oliver tells him.

He peeks through his finger gaps then clears her throat, "I think we should check on Maggie."

"Actually you should check on her," Oliver gets off the bed and walks to Brendon. I also get off the bed.

"Why me? You guys have powers and spells so you should go," Brendon complains.

"But you are the un-gifted one so let's go," Oliver grabs him but his arm and leads him out.

"If I die I will haunt," I hear Brendon say.

"Un-gifted ones don't have an afterlife," Oliver tells him.

"Steph!"

"He's joking," I retort. He's not, there's no afterlife for the un-gifted ones.

Chapter 17

GWENDOLYN WENDY

I drive to Henry's house at full speed. I just hope his nephew is not around that boy makes me want to rip his head off. He just can not stay away from Stephanie. Something about a bond that keeps them together. I don't care about some stupid imprint - I want him to stay away from Stephanie. I park my car in front of Henry's house and make my way inside. Luckily the door is not locked so I invite myself in.

"Let me guess, you need my help," Henry says with his eyes fixed on the glass in his hands. I assume there's whiskey in there.

"Magret's powers are coming back. It's happening again."

He sips on his whiskey and then places the glass on the table. He walks up to me and stands in front of me, "You knew this day was coming, Wendy. Why do you always have to act surprised as if this hasn't happened before? I am tired of you and I'm tired of everything. You won't let me near my kids and

you won't tell Stephanie the truth. I am tired of you trying to do things your way."

"My way is keeping us all alive, Henry," I tell.

"Is it? Is it, Wendy?"

I exhale heavily, "You'd do the same thing if you were in my shoes."

"No, I wouldn't and I am tired of being your puppet that you come to when you want kids, I am going back to RockNile."

"They will kill you, Henry. Please don't go back," I hold his hands.

"You want me to stay here and be miserable? You want me to watch you keep my children from me until they die? You want me to watch you hate my nephew? You know Oliver didn't choose to imprint on Steph just like I didn't choose to..."

I interrupt him, "Shut up!"

"That's the problem with you, Gwendolyn. You want everything to be done your way and I am sick of it. It's either you tell my children who their father is or I am going to RockNile."

He walks back to the chair he was on and takes a seat. I clear my throat and say, "Fine - I'll tell Brendon and Maggie the truth

but only if you help me handle Magret. She found out about her powers and you know how difficult she is."

"Oliver and Stephanie will handle her like they always do. You prepare to tell the truth."

I nod, "I need time."

"Time is what we don't have and Stephanie also needs to know the truth because this time Oliver is willing to expose you if that's what it takes to save Steph."

"Can't you talk to him and tell him to back off a little while I handle my family?" I request.

"They have already seen each other and if you try to separate them, Steph will get sick. We have been through this before. Let the poor kids be."

"Let them be?" I yell, "We both know once those two fall in love they start fucking like rabbits leading to Stephanie getting pregnant."

"You know that is very rich coming from you."

I breathe in and exhale, "Please just help me with Maggie and I promise to tell the kids the truth."

"This is not the first time you make fake promises but let's go," he gulps down the remaining contents in his glass then follows me to the car.

STEPHANIE

Brandon knocks on Maggie's bedroom door and she yells "Go away!"

"Maggie open up so we can talk," Brendon continuously knocks.

We hear a clicking sound as if the door has been unlocked. I look at Oliver and he looks elsewhere but at me. I know that was. Brendon walks into the room. Oliver and I are still standing by my bedroom door. We can hear Maggie yelling but we can't make sense of what she's saying.

"Do you think we should go and check on them?" I ask Oliver and he nods.

We lock hands and walk to Magret's room. She wipes the tears off her face when she sees us and asks, "What is Oliver doing here?"

"I am here to see Steph," Oliver answers then let's go of my hand and walk to Maggie. He sits next to her on the bed and

says, "I know this is hard for you to process but there's nothing wrong with being a witch. Not all witches are bad people - it's just a name people think is associated with evil."

"I have never heard that a witch did a good thing. People are going to call me names when they find out," Maggie wipes the tears off her face with the back of her hand but the tears won't stop falling.

"Don't worry about people, you just have to make sure you don't use your powers in front of people. If you don't tell anyone then we won't either." - Oliver.

"I don't want to be the weird girl. I have seen movies with people that are different. People don't like different - to the world being different is like a disability."

Oliver wipes the tears off her cheeks. I don't know why I felt something tick in me when he touched her. Oliver says, "The movies don't always get it right. Steph has powers yet she's fine."

Maggie giggles but the tears won't stop falling on her face, "You mean the same Stephanie that watches food cook in the oven?"

Oliver answers, "She's from a different time and things are different on that side. This is all new to her. And, Steph is not the only one that has powers. Your mom has powers and so do I."

Maggie looks at him. I can tell she doesn't believe him, "You have powers?"

Oliver nods, "Yes and I am not weird. We will teach you how to use your powers. But it doesn't mean you should abuse your powers. With great power comes great responsibilities. Your powers could also be your downfall."

Oliver is such a smooth talker. I thought he said he's only nice to me.

"You're sweet and Steph is lucky to have you as her boyfriend," Maggie says.

Oliver looks at me and winks, "I am the lucky one

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" he stands up from Maggie's bed and snaps his fingers, and a white rose appears. He hands it to Maggie and tells her to cheer up.

"That is so cool," Maggie smiles, "What if I want a teddy bear?"

Oliver looks at me and I nod although I don't know what a teddy bear is. He snaps his fingers and hands, Maggie, a fluffy animal toy.

We hear something break and turn to see what it is. We forgot that Nathaniel is coming to pick up Maggie.

"Nate!" Maggie stands up from the bed. "When did you get here and how much of this conversation did you hear?"

Nathaniel shifts backwards when Maggie tries to walk to him, "You people are witches?"

"You have no proof of that," Oliver answers seeming unbothered.

"I...I heard everything and..." Nathaniel stutters. Brandon tries to walk close to him but he tells him to stay away. "You people do witchcraft and I saw this guy snapping his hands and a flower appeared."

"Can we kill him?" Oliver asks.

"I will handle this," I say then turn to Nathaniel and say, "Jy het nie enige gesie enigiets (You didn't see anything)"

"Yes, mistress," Nathaniel responds.

"Stephanie!" Oliver exclaims.

I ignore him and say, "Hey, Nate we didn't hear you knock."

"Hey, I am sorry you guys were not answering the door so I let myself in," Nathaniel responds wearing a smile as he usually does.

I look at everyone and they seem shocked. Oliver is the first to say, "Hi, Nathaniel." With his eyes glued to me.

"Mags are you okay?" Nathaniel asks.

Maggie answers, "Yeah I had an outburst with mom but I am fine."

"I am sorry and I had brought you something but I accidentally dropped it." - Nathaniel.

"Brendon will clean it up," Oliver grabs me by my wrist and leads me to my room. I don't get to hear Brendon complain because Oliver is pulling me hard. He closes the door behind us when we get to my room and locks it with magic.

"You confessed him?"

I sigh and sit on the bed, "Yes but I broke the bond. He's still confessed but has his free will."

"Oh!"

"Relax, you're the only man that loves me," I assure him.

"I can never compete with the confessed."

"You don't have to," I retort, "I am yours and yours only."

"But how did you break the bond?"

"I don't know but I used the rune," I tell him then get off the bed and walk toward him, "I don't know if I am exaggerating but I felt something when you touched Maggie as if I didn't want you to touch her."

"It's part of the bond we have. I think your parents did something when you were born."

"Something like what?" I ask.

Oliver's eyes glow and he says, "Wendy is back."

"Are you leaving?"

"I have to," he kisses me on the forehead then leans over and kisses my lips, "I'll miss you."

"Don't go," I whisper.

"Steph I have to."

"Family meeting," Aunty Wendy knocks on the door, "You too, Oliver dining room, now!"

STEPHANIE

"How did my aunt know that you're here?" I ask Oliver.

"She came with my uncle and I am sure he told her I am here."

"So you can just sense people from afar?" I ask.

"If I know their scent then yes."

"Does my scent change over the years?" I am curious.

"It does - I'll tell you about it after your aunt scolds me for being here."

I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him down to my level. I smash my lips on his and kiss him. If a person had asked me three days ago if I'd ever kiss a guy, I would have thought it is disgusting but right now I can't get enough of Oliver's lips. It's like a thirst I need to quench. How can I be so drawn to him in the little time I have known him. Only he's supposed to feel the bond but how come I feel it too. My body yearns for him. I want him so bad it hurts.

Oliver pulls away and presses his head against mine, "They are waiting for us."

"You go first - I'm coming." I wait for him to walk out and sit on the bed catching my breath. What is happening to me? I close my eyes and lay back on the bed replaying the kiss in my head. My body yearns for Oliver's. I don't know why I suddenly want him so bad.

"Steph, we are waiting for you," Brendon calls from outside the room.

"I am coming." I look at myself in the mirror and then rush to the sitting room. I sit next to Oliver who places his arm around me and gently strokes my arm with his fingertips. Only if he knew what it does to me. Maggie walks into the house - I assume she came from walking out Nathaniel. Maggie sits on the arm on the couch where Brendon is sitting.

Aunty Wendy clears her throat, "Kids...there's something I want to tell you."

I feel Oliver tighten his grip around my arm. I assume that means bad news.

Aunty Wendy tries to say something but words fail her. Henry holds her hand. She takes a deep breath and exhales. "Kids...I know you have been asking about your father...Henry is your father."

Brandon jumps out off the couch, "I knew it...I knew something was going on between the two of you."

Aunty Wendy looks at me, "He's your father too, Steph."

I feel Oliver tighten his grip, it is as if he feels that I want to rush off.

"Wait...so Stephanie is my sister and not my cousin?" Maggie asks and aunty Wendy nods, "How, does it mean Henry slept with her mother?"

"No, I am her mother," Wendy whispers.

BRENDON

I look at Stephanie and her face is emotionless. I expected her to shout or throw a fit after hearing that her aunt is her mom but she's just sitting there. I have nothing against Steph and I

love her as a sister. Her being my blood sister shows why I cared for her so much. As for mom, I am angry at her for hiding the truth from us. This man has been coming to our house and she didn't care to introduce us. Then there's Stephanie, she grew up in RockNile where they don't have toothpaste yet we grew up in the city.

"You're Stephanie's mom, how?" Maggie asks.

Mom replies, "I was born in RockNile. In RockNile warlords fall in love with warlords but surprisingly a warlord imprinted on me. It's a crime in RockNile for a witch to fall in love with a warlord. We tried to keep away from each other but the bond was too strong so Henry and I had to run away from home which also meant he was giving up the throne. Since Henry left RockNile, his little brother was crowned king - Oliver's father. With help from one of the powerful sorcerous, Henry and I crossed the border and I lost my powers. Henry is a warlord and they can cross the border without any consequences."

Mom takes a deep breath and exhales before proceeding

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"I found out a week later after crossing the border that I was pregnant with Steph. Everything was perfect, I had the man

that I love, a home and a beautiful daughter but I wanted my powers back. Being a normal person was hard since I had grown up using magic. When Stephanie turned a year old, Oliver imprinted on her. She was a little girl and he was about twenty years old. It just didn't feel right - I was nineteen back then."

So Oliver is older than mom? Clap once!

"Oliver loved Steph so much and watching him love her like that got me worried. I didn't want Steph to suffer the same fate as me which is to love only one man in her life because as time went on I grew out of love with Henry. He still loved me unconditional but I just didn't feel the same way anymore and I didn't want that for my little girl. I asked Henry to summon the wizard that had helped us cross the border. I went behind Henry's back and asked the wizard to give my powers back but he said there will be a prize to pay. Eager to get my powers back, I agreed without knowing the consequences and got my powers and immortality back.

"I was happy when I could feel that my powers were back in my body but then the wizard told me that the prize for getting my powers back is that my daughter will have to sacrifice her

firstborn child and that my daughter will never make it past her teens. The only way to reverse the spell is if I give back my powers which will take away my immortality and kill me.

"I was hurt - all I wanted was I spend time with my little girl. I tried to do a reverse spell but failed. When Oliver found out my secret, he tried to protect Steph by bonding her with him but I had the higher power because I was now carrying Maggie and borrowed her powers.

Time went on and I thought the curse was broken but Oliver and Steph found a way to each other and Steph died after giving birth - it was a stillbirth. What I didn't know was that Steph's death would affect Brendon leading to his death too. Maggie's powers are her downfall - they always kill her. When I lost you all I was very devastated but what I didn't know is that I have to re-live that because you three get reborn every century," mom explains.

I look at Steph who just cleared her throat. She has tears on her face, "Who were those people that I was living with?"

"They were confessed. I ordered them to be your parents," mom retorts.

"You let me call you my aunt and you lied to me when I came here. About my mortality. You lied about everything, Wendy!" Stephanie shouts.

"I am sorry!" - Mom.

"You even tried to separate me from Oliver?"

Mom answers, "Because him getting you pregnant leads you to your death."

"You lead me to my death, damn it," Steph yells. "No wonder I feel this urge to mate with Oliver it's because of the spell because the child is a sacrifice. The child is your ticket to immortality. You kill me and not Oliver!"

Stephanie's eyes turn dark and everyone gets on their feet. Her eyes literally start bleeding.

"It's the blood rage," Henry whispers.

Oliver tries to hold Stephanie back before she attacks mom but she pushes him away and he goes crashing against the television. Miss Toss-others-across the room is back.

"What is happening?" Maggie asks getting behind mom.

"She's under the blood rage. She won't break free until she kills Wendy." - Henry.

Henry and Magret go flying across the room too leaving mom exposed. Stephanie stresses her arm toward mom who starts floating in the air. Stephanie is choking her. What do I do? I don't have any powers - I am the un-gifted one. Wait... no magic words on me. I run to Steph and hug her. I hear mom's body fall to the floor.

"Steph! Stephanie look at me," I cup her face, "You need to come out of the blood rage."

"She lied to me."

"She lied to all of us, this isn't you please don't do this," I plead with her. Her eyes go from being dark to their normal state.

"She lied to me," she hugs me back, crying.

ROCKNILE: STARK CHAMBERS

"You called for me, father," Deanna kneels. She's in the throne room. The King is seated on his throne with his beautiful queen next to him. Around the throne room are the royal guards - armed men with swords. One would mistake them for statues because they never move. Sometimes Deanna even tries to scare them just to see if they flinch but all they do is blink and stare at a blank space like they always do.

"Where's your brother?" the king asks with a hoarse and deep voice. His voice is deep yet it echoes - that's how quiet the room is. No one dares to breathe when the king is speaking - not even the queen.

"I think he's in his room, father," Deanna retorts with her head hung low. Even though her father is the king of RockNile, when summoned she has to act like everybody else.

"Then go call him."

Deanna clears her throat and shifts uncomfortably. She knows very well that her brother is not in his chambers - he hasn't been there for a couple of days.

"Yes, father," Deanna stands up preparing to exit the throne room. She knows very well that her brother is not even in RockNile.

The King shakes his head. His children do not care that he's centuries old and that he knows all the tricks - after all, he was once their age. "Go and get him. Tell him there's something important I want to discuss with him. It's high time he stops chasing after that girl and starts acting like the future king of RockNile."

"Future king?" Deanna looks at her mother who shakes her head and blinks rapidly as if she's trying to stop herself from crying. The only time when another king is being prepared is when the current one is about to die. "Father, are you dying?"

The King shapes his head, "No but it's time I rest my child. I have lived and it's time to let your brother take over so he can also leave the throne to the coming generation."

"But Oliver doesn't have an heir or a queen. Mother, what is this?"

"It is what the spirits want, Deanna and we cannot oppose. You are a female child and soon your love will come to claim you and there will be no one to rule the kingdom when we are gone," Queen Portia retorts.

Deanna scoffs, "Do you guys seriously think Oliver could agree to be king. You had to tie him up to do the ceremony when crowning his prince. He'd never agree to be king."

"Just find your brother and I will handle everything. I am giving you a month to get him back home. Take the un-gifted one with you - she will help you cross the border." - King Joshua.

"Fine, I will bring Oliver, you highness," Deanna bows before exiting the throne room.

"Scarlet!" Deanna calls.

A young servant girl rushes to her and kneels in front of her, "Yes, princess."

"Stop it with the bowing and kneeling because where we are going you won't be doing that. Get ready we are leaving RockNile," Deanna commands.

"Where are we going, my princess?"

"We are going to get my brother," Deanna says excitedly. It is not the first time crossing the border and she knows all the joys of being outside RockNile.

Deanna waves her fingers and the metal choker on Scarlet's neck breaks. The un-gifted ones are considered a threat in RockNile because they can easily walk in and out of the border

and no power works on them making them the most powerful people in RockNile. It is custom that all the un-gifted ones wear a metal choker that is sealed with magic that way they can be like everyone else.

BRENDON

I think Stephanie and I share some sort of bond because hearing her cry is making me feel like someone is stabbing my heart with a knife. I hate mom for keeping her from us but again she was trying to save herself.

So...Oliver got hurt when Stephanie tossed him across the room but healed himself - I am surprised that his girlfriend is stronger than him. Maggie broke her arm - Oliver healed her too since she can't use her powers, yet. The television broke - Oliver owes us a new television. I can't miss the next episode of Lab Rats because of him. Besides everything that happened, I am glad no one got hurt - physically.

We are all sitting down

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and the only thing we can hear is Stephanie's cries. She's making me also want to cry. If I could, I would take the pain away just to make her stop crying - that sounds like something Oliver would say but I would.

After some time, Stephanie's sobs quiet down. The room goes silent, I can even hear the clock ticking.

"Are there any other secrets you guys want to share?" Maggie breaks the silence and no one responds.

"Does this mean Oliver and Stephanie can not be together since they are now cousins?" I question.

Henry replies, "In RockNile warlords fall in love with warlords. Meaning we are all one big family that way there won't be any fights when it comes to who sits on the throne."

"What did Oliver mean when he said your blood is diluted?" I add.

"Oliver has a loose screw in his head." Henry retorts. I look at Oliver who is shaking his head.

"I want to leave," Stephanie stands up and wipes the tears off her face.

"Stephanie I am sorry - I know you're mad but I swear I tried reversing the spell but failed," mom says.

"You lied to me and I will never forgive you for that. You had the chance to tell me the truth but you didn't." Stephanie retorts then turns to Oliver, "Please take me out of here?"

"Sure!" Oliver stands up.

"Can I come too?" Margaret gets her phone. I am not staying here with mom and her boyfriend so I am going with the others.

Henry gasps and a third eye appears on his forehead. Maggie is the first to scream.

"Jesus Magret...we are a family of witches and warlords. Quit it with the screaming," I think my left ear lost hearing. Maggie is very dramatic. Only if she had stayed and listened to mom the other day when she was explaining everything.

"Uncle, what is it?" Oliver asks.

"Deanna is here."

Who is Deanna? Oliver doesn't seem bothered so I guess that means there is no danger. Oliver takes Stephanie's hands and then tells us to follow him to the car. Maggie and I follow without thinking twice - we both don't want to stay here with Gwendolyn. She lied to us and It's going to take more than just apologizing for things to be fine again.

We get to the car that I assume is Henry's because Oliver doesn't have the keys but it starts anyways. It must be nice to have powers. I am sitting in the front with Oliver and the girls are at the back. The car won't move yet it's on - these people and witchcraft. I wonder who is stopping the car from moving.

Oliver growls and I look at Steph, "Your boyfriend's eyes are glowing. Do we need to run out of the car or something?"

"He's a werewolf, he does that when he senses something," Stephan retorts. Wow! A whole werewolf? I'd run for my life.

"Deanna, what do you want?" Oliver asks. I look at Steph who shrugs. Is Oliver seeing something we are not? I look in front of the car. There are two girls - one of them is wearing a black leather jumpsuit and the other one is wearing a floral dress. I bet fifty bucks Deanna is the one wearing black. She has a bad witch vibe with her high ponytail.

"Hey, Brendon!" she winks at me and then walks to the car with her friend. They get into the car squeezing at the back with Maggie and Stephanie.

"Hey, Scarlet," Oliver greets. The car starts moving.

"Prince Oliver, how are you?" Scarlet replies.

"You're a prince?" I ask Oliver and he doesn't respond. I don't know why he suddenly looks annoyed. We didn't ask Deanna to come here, "Aren't you going to introduce us?"

"She's your wife," Oliver takes a sharp turn causing me to hit hard on the window. Which one is my wife?

"I assume you're not happy about that," I flinch holding my head. I know he did that on purpose.

"He has no choice but to accept it - we were matched at birth," Deanna touches my shoulder.

"Hey, hands-off lady. I don't know you and I am fifteen. Leave me alone."

"Either way you're my husband," Deanna giggles.

"This family makes me want to murder people," Oliver mutters accelerating.

STEPHANIE

He's glaring at me - not nicely or sweetly. A part of me wishes I could read minds just to know what he is thinking. Both of us are mad but neither of us knows why we are fighting. He's sitting on a chair at the far end of the room and I am sitting on the bed. The tension between us is thick. I swallow the lump growing in my throat and try to speak my tears voluntarily fall on my face.

"You did this to us," he mutters sullenly.

"I am sorry." that's all that comes to mind. I don't know why I am apologizing but for reasons I don't know of, I see it fit that I apologize.

He shakes his head and darts his eyes at me. We lock eyes for a moment - I can see the hurt in his eyes. But how come I don't know what I did?

"All I ever did is love you," it comes out as a whisper. "Why how you do this to us?"

"I was confused and I am sorry. I choose you and I want you." I retort.

"You always do that and the worst part is that my feelings for you never change no matter how much you hurt me," he stands up and paces around the room.

I get off the bed and walk up to him. I hold his hands and look into his eyes, "I choose you and I promise I love you and only you."

I still don't know what I am apologizing for but my lips find his and I kiss him. Surprisingly, he kisses me back. As always his kisses leave me out of breath and lightheaded. He says he loves me more but I doubt it. Only if he knew how I feel about him. then he would know that I love him more.

He lifts me and I lock my legs around his waist. He walks to the bed, not breaking the kisses and gently lay me on the bed. He towers over me and goes back to kissing me. As usual, the kisses are slow and un-rushed. I could kiss him all day if he'd let me. His lips part from my lips and he leaves a trail of wet kisses from my jawline down to my neck. I lay back listening to the tingling sensation that is spreading through my body like a wildfire.

"Steph," a soft voice calls me.

I slowly open my eyes but something is forcing me to close them.

"Stephanie wake up. Are you having an erotic dream?"

"What?" I sit up and try to rub sleep off my eyes. Whoever said people must wake up in the morning has a special spot in the underworld. I yawn and look at my surroundings, that's when everything from last night comes flooding my mind. My aunt is my mother. My father is my boyfriend's uncle. My brother is

paired with my boyfriend's sister. I think my brain just threw up.

"Hey, I am talking to you," Deanna snaps her fingers in my face. How I wish I shared the bed with Magret instead. Oliver's sister doesn't stop talking. So we slept in pairs. Oliver shared a room with Brendon, Maggie with Scarlet and me with princess Deanna. I know her from RockNile - we are not friends but everyone knows the king's daughter. I am surprised I had never seen Oliver or heard about him - maybe it's because he is the black sheep of the family; his words.

"Hey," Deanna snaps her fingers in my face again, "Were you having an erotic dream?"

"Why? Do you want me to narrate it to you word for word?" Look at me turning into Magret - being around her is rubbing off me.

"I have seen and heard worse over the centuries," she lays on the bed facing the ceiling.

"How old are you?"

"You do not ask a lady her age. Out with it...what did you dream about?" she asks. I can't tell her about my dream. She adds, "You were crying then you were moaning which when I think about it, is the same thing but I want to hear the first part."

"It seemed as if Oliver and I were fighting. He was mad at me for something and he kept saying I hurt us and that I always do that."

"You are very trusting, Stephanie. I might be Oliver's sister but I could be the enemy. Okay, let me interpret your dream. So the first part means that history will repeat itself and the second part was just your subconscious playing tricks with you," Deanna says.

"You interpret dreams?"

She answers, "No but I know you want answers."

"So what is the history that will repeat itself?"

"You will cheat on my brother with a human," she says as if it's nothing as if she's used to it.

Before I can ask further, Oliver walks into the room, "I hope you're not lying to my woman."

"We could be naked - don't you knock?" Deanna gets off the bed and walks to the closet, takes out a jacket and wears it. This girl seems very familiar with this house. I didn't get the chance to ask much about it last night. I was tired and the only thing I needed was the bed.

"Go bother Brendon, he's in the kitchen

" Oliver says. Deanna rushes out of the room, excitedly. Poor Brendon!

"How are you feeling?" Oliver opens the curtains. The sun is already up - we have to go to school.

"I don't know how I am supposed to feel about all this. Wendy being my aunt and that I am going to die. My life was so much better before I crossed the border."

He walks up to me and holds my hands, "I'm sorry - I feel bad that I knew the truth and didn't tell you. Wendy did try to reverse the spell but failed. She made a blood covenant and those are not breakable."

"So I just have to wait to get pregnant then I die?"

He cups my face and kisses my lips, "I'll make the little time we have together the best of your life, I promise. For now, we have to go to school."

"My uniform is at Wendy's."

"Your uniform is here. That school has been wearing the same uniform since forever. You'll find everything you need in the bathroom. I'll tell Deanna to bring the uniform here," he tells.

"Are you also coming to school?"

"I am a student now so yes plus I'll get to see you throughout the day," he pecks me on the lips then releases me from his embrace.

I walk to the bathroom and stop after opening the door, "Have I ever cheated on you in the past?"

"You should bathe, we are going to be late for school."

I guess that is a yes, "Who's house is this?"

"Mine...bathe then join us for breakfast..."

"Why is Deanna here?" I am sure he's getting annoyed by me asking a lot of questions. I want to know what to expect after all I am dying soon. Not to mention how I always picture Oliver shirtless. The movies I watch with Brendon mess up my mind.

"I think she's here to get me. I think my father wants to talk to me."

"You're going to leave?" I don't know why I suddenly feel sad. I wouldn't want him to leave. He is the only person keeping me from tearing Wendy to shreds. I don't want him to leave - not when I feel this need to be close to him.

"I won't go if you don't want me to."

Oliver is too nice but I answer, "Why do you say yes to everything I ask? You're too nice."

He shifts closer and stands in front of me, "I wouldn't want to scare you away with my bad boy side."

"I wouldn't mind seeing him a little. Can I get a kiss before you go?"

In a flash, I am on the bed with him on top of me. I exhale heavily - he caught me off guard. I hear the buttons of the shirt I am wearing fall to the floor - I slept in his shirt. No wonder I was dreaming about him this shirt smells like him. The same shirt that now does not have buttons - luckily I am wearing panties that match my bra. Aunty Wendy or should I say my mom bought them in pairs but I always mismatch them.

Oliver brings his lips to mine and kisses me. He breaks the kiss and stares into my eyes, "Is what you want?"

I nod vigorously and he laughs getting off me "Once we start, we won't be able to stop."

"Have we ever not done it?"

"Yeah but you still die before you turn 20, baby or no baby," he retorts.

"Then let's do it. I am going to die anyway."

I lie on his side and look at me, "Let me hear what my father says first."

"What do you think he wants to talk about?"

"Giving up the throne. He's immortal and giving up the throne means dying. When a warlord dies he gives up his immortality and is granted three wishes. I just need to convince him to help you," he tells.

"What if he refuses?"

"Then I won't be the next king," he pecks my lips and then gets off the bed.

MAGRET

"I think I forgot my phone, I'll get it," I say running to the bedroom I slept in with that weird Scarlet girl. She hardly talks. I get that she's a servant in RockNile but she's just too much.

I get my phone and pass by the mirror looking at my eyebrows. I'm so pretty, Henry and Gwendolyn understood the assignment.

"Magret..." a voice calls.

"I'm coming!" I yell.

I look at the mirror and notice my reflection is not doing the same thing I am doing. I feel my body getting goosebumps as a cold breeze goes through my braids. I need a jacket.

"Magret."

I scream and drop my phone, my reflection is talking to me.

"Let me out," it says.

I grab my phone and run to the door but the door closes before I can go out.

"Let me out, Magret!"

"Stephanie!" I call trying to open the door but it's now locked,
"Brendon!"

"They won't hear you, Magret!" it laughs.

STEPHANIE

We are in the car, waiting for Maggie who went to get her phone I'm in the house. Today I am the one sitting at the front seat with Oliver. Brendon, Deanna and Scarlet are at the back. I don't know where they are going but Deanna is wearing our school uniform. I don't want to know where she got it - I just feel sorry for Brendon. This girl has been in his life for a couple of hours but she's already making his life a living hell. Brendon is a talker but today he's quiet.

"What is taking Magret so long?" Oliver sounds the horn. She has been gone for a while now. I am sure she's trying to make herself more pretty since she left her makeup kit as she calls it.

"Must I go check on her?" Brendon asks. I know that is just his way of trying to get away from Deanna. It seems Deanna is enjoying pissing him off. It's not fair that Oliver and his sister have met us before meaning they know us better than we know ourselves.

"Dean cut it out and go check on Maggie," Oliver says.

"Fine," Deanna gets out of the car and runs to the house.

"Your sister is crazy," Brendon says, one cannot miss the anger in his tone. It is as if it's Oliver's fault Deanna is bothering him.

"Are you okay?" Oliver squeezes my hand. I nod and he takes my hand and kisses the back of it, then whispers, "I love you."

It takes all I have not to squeal. The things he makes me feel. Oliver checks the time on his wristwatch and shakes his head, "Scarlet check on them, please."

Scarlet does not wait to be told twice, she climbs out of the car and disappears into the house. "Who is Scarlet?" Brendon asks.

"Someone that has been in my family for a while now. What is taking these girls so long?" Oliver gets out of the car - so do Brendon and me.

"It's confirmed, we are going to be late for school," Brendon walks ahead of us, "Only if you two could see yourselves in my eyes. You're annoying to look at always smiling at each other, unprovoked."

"We don't expect you to understand - you have never been in love." Oliver retorts.

Brendon opens the door and ducks down - a piece of wood was thrown at him. I look at Oliver who shrugs. We rush to the house to see what's going on. Deanna is lying on the floor unconscious and Scarlet is pinning Maggie to the floor trying to keep her down.

"What is going on?" Brandon asks not sure whether to go to Deanna or his sister - our sister.

"I think she's possessed," Scarlet grunts trying to keep Maggie down. I look next to me, Oliver is no longer there. He's helping Deanna get up - it seems she hit her head hard because she has

blood stains on her forehead but no wound. She must have healed herself.

Maggie manages to push Scarlet off her and gets on her feet. Her eyes are not dark like a possessed person and that could mean she willingly let the spirit take over but why would she do that?

Brendon helps Scarlet up and we all stand in front of Maggie who utters, "Get out of my way."

"I'm afraid we cannot do that," in a flash, Deanna is next to Maggie with Scarlet and they are trying to hold her down. "A little help, Brendon?"

The ungifted ones can hold her down and she can not use her powers on them. I look at Oliver who seems relaxed. I ask, "Aren't you going to help?"

"They got this."

I don't know how Maggie breaks loose but she sends Brendon crashing on the table. He groans standing up, "I thought you said no power works on me?"

Oliver laughs, "That doesn't mean you can't get hurt?"

"I am done taking it easy on you," Deanna punches Maggie in the face sending her to the floor. She does not give her the chance to breathe

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she binds her hands with magic. She gets on top of her and unleashes punches on her face.

Oliver pulls her off Magret, "Okay, I think you punched the dashi out of her."

Maggie groans loudly, "What happened?"

Brandon groans too, taking a seat on the floor, "The usual, isn't there's never a dull moment in this family."

Margaret replies, "What do you mean and why won't my hands move from the floor? My face hurts."

"What happened is that you took the Minder's deal. What is wrong with you?" Deana yells? The Minder is the ruler of the underworld and the one that releases the dashi spirits to find as many hosts as it can.

"Can we break the spell?" I ask Oliver.

"The spirit left her body thanks to the spell her mother used when taking her powers."

"Don't tell me a dashi is roaming around freely?" I say.

"English, please! What are you guys talking about?" Brendon asks?

Deanna replies, "A dashi is a dark spirit from the underworld looking for a physical body to possess."

"And where did this dashi come from?" - Brendon.

"Someone, that shall remain nameless," Deanna looks at Oliver, "Took the spirit out of his girlfriends and did not send it back to the underworld. The dashi can possess anyone and once it does then it needs the mother confessor to mate with and bear corrupt children."

"Who is this mother confessor?" Maggie asks, she's still on the floor.

"It's Steph."

"Didn't they say she dies after giving birth?" - Brendon.

"Just like there is the un-gifted one, there's also the pristinely gifted one and he has the power to summon spirits from the

underworld and give them the breath of life meaning if they manage to get Steph, we are doomed," Deanna explains.

"You guys said there's no way to keep Steph alive?" - Brendon.

"It's better I die than to be the Minder's baby maker. And, how am I the mother confessor?" I question.

"You and I are the last of our bloodline," says Oliver

"Guys hello, I am still on the floor," - Maggie.

Denna retorts, "You accepted the deal with the dashi, you're not to be trusted. We have to destroy that spirit before it possesses someone else."

Taking the dashi's deal means Maggie let it out when it asked her to.

"Accept that she kicked your ass," Oliver frees Maggie. I look at Scarlet - there's something about her that I can't put my finger on. "I need you guys to know that the dashi isn't just a spirit that possesses people but it's also a deceiving spirit that can

come to you in form of a friend or anyone close to you. Be careful," Oliver adds.

NATHANIEL

I am in my room, lying on the bed facing the ceiling. I bunked class today. I don't feel like going to school. My parents don't know that of course. The door opens and I sit up when I see Stephanie..

"I need to use your body," she walks up to me. She touches my chest and I feel something take over my body. I look around and Stephanie is gone. I feel a sting on my chest and lift my shirt up. My tattoo is gone too.

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STEPHANIE

We all skipped school today. We have been doing a lot of that lately and messing with the teachers' minds in the process. We are looking for a way to find this dashi spirit before it possesses someone else. That is if it hasn't found a host yet.

Oliver and I are in the sitting room, watching television. Maggie is somewhere in the house looking for network - whatever that is. Scarlet is in the kitchen - she offered to make lunch and I am sure Deanna is somewhere in the house bothering Brendon.

I can't get over what Deanna said in the morning. So Oliver is waiting for me to cheat on him and it's something I always do. Why would I cheat on him? Oliver is a nice person. I wish Deanna hadn't told me.

"Are you okay?" Oliver asks stroking my hair. I am laying my head on his lap. I am not okay - how can I be okay knowing that

I will hurt the man that has loved me for centuries. How can I be okay knowing that I will hurt him even though I love him so much?

I sit up and fold my legs, "Are you capable of loving someone else that is not me?"

He tucks my hair behind my ear, "Tired of me already?"

"No, but I think it's not fair that you have to wait for me all those years. Is there a way to break the claim?"

"Not that I know of but it sounds like something only the Minder can do or the pristinely gifted one," he retorts. "And Steph, you don't have to worry about me. I don't mind waiting for you."

"I just want you to be happy."

He kisses my lips, "I am happy as long as I am with you."

"When are you going to RockNile? Your father wants to talk to you."

He sighs heavily, "I don't want to be king because that means they will have to match me with another Queen since you always die."

I smile trying to hide that I am not happy with what he just said, "At least you'll have someone to love when I am away. Plus you said you will ask your father to use one of his wishes on us. You can ask him to break the imprint."

"Are you serious right now? Why would I want to break the imprint? You're the one I want," he raises his voice and stands from the couch

"Oliver if I don't die then Wendy will. How will I be reborn without her?"

"I will ask my father to use two wishes then," he states.

"Or just break the imprint. I'll still come back either way."

He stands up, "Without the imprint, I won't feel the same way I do about you. I will probably imprint on someone else. Why can't you understand that I want you? I want to be with you...I don't care that I have to wait." he exits the room evidently upset.

GWENDOLYN

A knock wakes me up. I look outside and the sun is up. I overslept and Henry is not by my side. I check the time on my phone and it is minutes after noon. Last night all the secrets were revealed. I never thought I'd live to see the day when I tell my children the truth. The hurt in their faces tore my heart to shreds.

I wish they can understand that I did try to save them. I am a mother and it's also not easy for me to give birth to children only for them to die. The wizard that sealed the spell for me, gave his soul to the underworld meaning it can never be reversed. I am stuck with this curse.

"I am coming," I fasten my gown heading to the door.

"Good afternoon, Miss Richards," Nathaniel greets me as soon as I open the door, "I hope I didn't wake you up."

"No, please come in."

He sits on the couch, "Maggie

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Brendon and Steph did not make it to school today. I wanted to check if they are okay?"

"They are fine...we had an emergency so they had to skip school. They are at their uncle's place."

He retorts, "You don't look good, what is wrong?"

"Everything is a mess, Nathaniel but let me not bore you with my problems."

He reached for my hand, "Everything will be fine - the spirits will remember you again. You have suffered enough."

"What are you talking about?"

He stands up, "I'll be on my way."

There's something different about him today but I can't tell what. I walk him out and then go back into the house. Someone knocks again and I go to check...this time it's Oliver.

"What are you doing here?" I sit on the couch.

"I wouldn't be here if it's not important, Wendy. My father sent Deanna to come to get me. That means he's ready to give his soul to the underworld. I might step in as new king of RockNile but I think he'll hand over the crown with a condition that I find another queen."

I don't care about what his father and him want to do but what I am worried about is the imprint. If the king breaks the bond between Oliver and Steph then it means she will not get reborn. If the king uses one of his wishes to give Steph immortal then I will die. It's a loss for me either way - I don't want to die.

"You're telling me all this because?" I try not to sell my emotions out.

"I need you to convince uncle Henry to go back to RockNile and marry the woman that he was given to. It's the only way, Wendy."

I lose again. As if it's not enough that I have lost my children, now I will lose the man I love, "On one condition, if you bring my children back home."

"I will see what I can do and there's a dashi on the loose. Steph's life is in danger." - Oliver

"But the imprint protects her?"

He replies, "When she turns eighteen. Still, on the Steph matter, do you know that she's asking me to break the imprint? I love your daughter but she just gets worse by the century. I wish she could understand that either of us chose this - it's just our fate."

NATHANIEL

I draw a pyramid surrounded by a circle on my bedroom floor and put candles in each corner. I sit in the middle of the

pyramid with my legs folded and palms locked. I chant, "Groot heerser! (Great Ruler)"

Fire appears in front of me and I get on my knees with my head hung low. I hear a voice say, "My child! You did well but that body is marked by the mother confessor so you have to act fast. You only have a couple of weeks until that body rejects your spirit."

"I am willing to do whatever it takes to get the mother confessor on our side, master."

"Your sacrifice will forever be remembered in the underworld. Find the mother confessor," the fire disappears. I stand on my feet and get my phone. I call Maggie...

Me: Maggie...what's good? I didn't see you in school today.

Maggie: Something came up, I am not home.

Me: Your mother told me, I was at your house not so long ago.
Are you okay though?

Maggie: I will be fine...

Me: Send me your location so I can come to see you.

Maggie: I am fine don't worry about me.

Me: We are friends and I need to know you're safe so stop making excuses and send your location.

I hang up and wait for Maggie's text message. My target is Steph, of course.

BRENDON

"Brendon! Don't you knock?" Maggie yells when I enter the room and close the door behind me, locking it. I am tired of Deanna - it's like she enjoys annoying me. I can already feel my trousers getting loose. If this goes on for days then my trousers will be falling off.

Maggie is not my favourite person but right now, I prefer her company to anything. Plus, I feel like we need to talk about what mom said the other day. I feel like Maggie is on her own on this one. Steph has Oliver and I don't care even if we were aliens - I am fine.

"Hey, Maggie," I sit on the bed. She is busy with her phone but she puts it away when I sit down.

"What do you want, Brendon?"

"How are you holding up, after what mom said and being possessed yesterday?" I sit on the bed facing Maggie with my legs folded.

"I have to admit it's a lot to take in but I am fine. I just need some time to adjust. I am more worried about Steph...she's our sister and she grew up without us only to find out that we have two years until she dies."

I sigh heavily, "It is what it is and I know you don't like Steph but she needs you. There are some things she might need to discuss with you and not me."

"Look at you outgrowing me - don't worry I will keep an eye on her. I was talking to Nate so close the door behind you."

"Can I stay here for a while...Oliver's sister is driving me crazy. I promise you won't even notice I am here," I plead.

"Deanna is pretty and trust me if you mess up this chance you will never get another woman that is pretty as she is that likes you."

"I can get any woman I want," I say in protest.

"What I am saying is that enjoy the moment. We are all going to die soon."

"You are being very weird today...let me go and check on Stephanie," I get off the bed and head out. I pass by the kitchen getting some water and also trying to hide from Deanna.

"Hey."

"I am just having water," I choke sending me on a coughing spree. "I thought it was Deanna."

"It's just plain old Scarlet, let me help with that," she cleans up the stain on the floor with her powers.

"Thanks, it must be nice having powers," we sit on the kitchen chairs. "How are you related to the Stark family?"

"I am part of the un...I am Deanna's servant."

"Oh...does she treat you right?" I question and she nods, "What kind of a person is Deanna...I heard she's my wife might as well know what I am getting myself into."

"Deanna is the sweetest person I have ever met but she doesn't want anyone that messes with those she loves. She's respectful and cares about her brother more than anything. After your death, she dedicates her life to keeping her brother from going crazy because Steph's death always leaves him broken. She's an amazing soul."

I smile she does sound like an amazing soul. Maggie walks into the room and groans loudly.

"What is up with you?" I ask her.

"Do you know that Nathaniel made me wait for him for the past hour only not to show up? Do yourself a favour, Scarlet and never fall in love. Boys will always disappoint you."

"Stop lying Maggie, you were just with me minutes ago," I retort.

"I am going to lie down and ask Deanna, I was waiting with her outside," she leaves.

"Has anyone seen Steph?" Oliver walks into the room.

Scarlet answers

"In the room."

Oliver rushes off, "Whatever you do, please don't disturb us."

TMI...Steph and Oliver are adorable and annoying at the same time. Then make you want to fall in love and not fall in love at the same time. I am just happy that he makes Steph happy.

STEPHANIE

"Oliver!" I get off the bed and meet him across the room. "I am sorry and I didn't mean to upset you. I am just worried about you. It's not fair that you have to wait for me after I die. I wasn't trying to hurt your feelings or push you away I..."

He shuts me up with a kiss and lifts me letting me lock my legs around his waist. He walks to the bed and gently lays me there.

"You're not angry at me? You seemed upset when you left," I say in between the kisses.

"How can I be angry when I am kissing your sweet lips?"

"I took one of your shirts, I hope you don't mind?" I say catching my breath. Today he's not giving me the chance to breathe.

"You can wear anything of mine you want to wear."

"Oliver wait," I say when he tries to strip me off his t-shirt.

"What are we doing?"

He gets off me and lies on his back, "We are kissing."

"Yeah, but you want to take off my clothes and we never do that."

He lies on the side and bites his lower lip, "There's nothing wrong with trying a new thing. You know love is more than just words. I want you to feel it." He runs his fingers on my face going down to my neck, down to my stomach. I lock my legs when his fingers lift the t-shirt.

"Oliver, what are you doing?" It comes out as a whisper.

"Relax and trust me...I'd never hurt you, Steph."

I nod and focus on his touch. I suck in some air when he sneaks his hand into my panties and kisses me so that I don't make any noise. I don't know what he's doing to me but it's making me feel things I have never felt before. My body is craving something. Something that is not what he's doing. I hold on to his shirt when I feel the wave building up...I don't know if I am getting possessed but I just don't want him to stop what he's doing.

He removes his hand and leaves me hanging. I can feel the tears burning my eyes, "Why did you stop?"

"Do you want me to proceed?"

I nod vigorously and he takes off this t-shirt and then gets on top of me.

GWENDOLYN

It's been two hours, trying to convince Henry to go back to RockNile but he's refusing. He'll be saving his daughter...his children. Maybe if he's on the throne he can put on a good word with the pristinely gifted ones to help break the curses without anyone dying.

"Uncle please, if my father breaks the imprint Steph won't be reborn." Oliver pleads. This is all his fault. Only if he hadn't imprinted on a one-year-old.

"If I am committed to another then it means I am losing the woman I love and my children. It's already a crime that I imprinted on someone that is not a warlord." - Henry.

"Henry it's the only way to save our children...please do it for me," I kneel next to him holding his hand.

"I care about you, Wendy but I am afraid you're asking for the impossible. I would do anything for my children but not this," Henry exits the room.

Oliver sighs, "We are doomed."

We sure are! "Don't you have other uncles or family members that can step in as King?"

"Do you think I'd still be here if there were other family members?"

I reply, "This is all your fault. Of all the people you had to imprint on a one-year-old."

"I don't have time for you. This is all on you but as always you're using me to make yourself feel better. You're the reason your children die, not me," he stands up from the couch.

"Where are you going?"

"To throw up... You disgust me," he heads out, slamming the door behind him.

Even blaming him doesn't make me feel better. Nothing can stop my children's deaths. I just have to face the consequences of my actions over and over again. That's the prize I have to pay for being alive on this earth. The sad part is that not even death is an option for me.

STEPHANIE

"Wait! Oliver wait," I push him off me. This is so wrong in many ways. Our siblings are in the other room and we shouldn't be making out - a word I picked up when Oliver and I were watching a movie earlier today. The girl and boy in the movie were doing the same thing we are doing right now.

I am in my panties and bra and Oliver is in his undergarments too. I don't care about waiting until I turn eighteen but there's something off today or maybe it's because Oliver's animal side hasn't manifested yet. I love it when his eyes glow when we kiss. Not that I want him to claw me again but today there's just something off about what we are doing. I feel like he's rushing me and letting his emotions control him because he knows that I will get pregnant if we continue with this.

"We have to stop."

"Why...what's wrong?" Oliver asks. I noticed today he's getting easily irritated.

"Oliver what if I get pregnant? Don't you think we should think this through?"

He kisses me, "I'll pull out - just trust me."

"And what is to pull out?"

He groans in annoyance, "Steph can we just do it?"

"This is my first time, okay and I am not even sure if I want to do this. I heard it hurts - I know it's probably the gazillion time for you but at least make it special for me?"

He mumbles, "Gazillion is not a number."

"You know what, I don't want to do this anymore," I get out of bed and pick up the t-shirt I was wearing and put it on.

"Sweetie wait," he blocks my way and cups my face. He gently kisses me, "I am sorry and I promise I will make it special. It's just I miss you and I just want to feel your warmth. You know how crazy I am about you. I love you, okay."

"Okay," I look aside as he kisses my neck, "Oliver tell me, what was the name of that movie we watched when we first went out?"

He speaks in between the kisses, "Can we not talk about movies we watched and focus on what we are doing."

I take a deep breath and do a quick scan of the room. My phone is not here and this is not Oliver. Oliver's eyes glow when we kiss and Oliver will never try to sleep with me- not before eighteen. Oliver does not call me 'sweetie' he calls me princess. And Oliver knows that we have never been on a date.

"Can I use the bathroom?"

He frowns and goes to sit on the bed. I walk to the in-suited bathroom and lock myself inside. The window is small and no one will hear me from here. Who made bathroom windows to be so small?

"Babe!" he knocks on the door, "Did you die in there?"

"I am coming," I flush the toilet and wash my hands. That could be a shape shifter or the real Oliver, possessed. I get out of the bathroom and try to calculate the distance from where I am to the door.

He looks at me and laughs. He picks up his trousers and puts them on, "You figured it out didn't you?"

"What did you do to Oliver?"

"I didn't do anything but it's all up to you if you want to do this the easy way or the hard way," he smirks.

I run towards the door but he catches me before I can and tosses me back on the bed. "You should have just let me make love to you but you chose the hard way," He binds my hands with a spell and rips the t-shirt off my body.

"Oliver! Help!" I scream.

"It's no use, mother confessor," his eyes turn dark as he walks toward me.

BRENDON

"Oh my God, can't they keep it down?" I cover my ears with my palms. Stephanie is traumatizing all of us by screaming her lungs out. And, who screams as if they are dying like that. We get that they are having fun but seriously they should have the decency to hide their things from us. We are going to have nightmares after this.

"Please tell me it's not what I think it is?" Maggie walks into the kitchen, "Are they shooting a horror movie?"

"We should knock on their door just to make sure it's not something else," I suggest.

"You can't disturb people that are making love," Scarlet.

"This is not making love... what is he doing to her. Why is she screaming so loud?" Deanna joins us in the kitchen, "Is his manhood man or razors because that's the only thing to explain why she's screaming so hard."

"Why don't we all take a walk and we'll come back later. This is very disturbing," Maggie stands up first and we all follow her out. We head out of the house and a car just parked. I think it's Henry and if it's about coming home. I am not interested. To our surprise, Oliver climbs out.

"Oliver!" Maggie gasps.

"Holy cow..." Deanna looks at me then Oliver. It's as if we are thinking the same thing, "How are you here?"

"Hi to you too and where are you all going?" - Oliver.

"How are you here and who is making Steph scream so loud?" Deanna asks.

Oliver answers, "What is not funny, you've tried this before remember?"

"She is not joining, someone is with Steph and we all thought it was you," says Maggie.

Before I can blink Deanna and Oliver are out of sight. Those two should learn how to move with all of us. Some of us have no superpowers or witchcraft magic. Maggie, Scarlet and I rush to the house and find the door to the room where Steph is, in pieces. Deanna is standing by the door and Oliver is with Steph who is crying and have the bed covers covering her body.

"I told you to watch her, Deanna!" Oliver yells, "You had only one job!"

"I am sorry, I thought she was with you." Deanna is now also crying, "I'm sorry Oliver. I really thought she was with you."

"What's going on?" Maggie whispers to me because it seems we are the only ones in the dark. Steph is crying and who was in the room with her?

"I think the person we thought was Oliver earlier was just the dashi spirit disguised as Oliver. I don't know why it didn't cross my mind that Oliver had left the house. The dashi spirit needed to mate with the mother confessor to produce physical babies..." Deanna sits down holding her head.

Maggie gasps and quickly covers her mouth with her hand, "Oh my God she was screaming for help. How can we all have missed that? So since this dashi thing slept with her then what now?"

"She's the Minder's now and soon she will have the Minder's mark. When she gets marked the Imprint/ bond she has with Oliver will break and we will lose Steph to the dark side." - Deanna.

"Can't she abort the baby?" Maggie asks.

"The dashi probably used dark magic on her and as we speak she could be pregnant. Times outside the border and inside are different. A week here is a year in RockNile meaning the moment Steph crosses the border she'll be ready to deliver the baby and trust me she'll be giving birth to a dark lord." Deanna explains.

"A dark lord?"

"Steph is a princess with or without Oliver imprinting on her. The dashi needed a host and a carrier which right now is Steph, the mother confessor." Deanna retorts.

"Okay enough with the bad part...what can we do to stop Stephanie from giving birth to this dark lord?" I ask but Deanna does not respond.

"You'd have to kill her and burn her body so that no spell can be performed on her but that would also mean she'll never be reborn," says Scarlet.

"I say we go to church...this is beyond witches," Maggie suggests.

Stephanie screams before I can give Maggie a piece of my mind. She doesn't even go to church. Oliver lets go of Stephanie who is screaming holding her arm and gets off the bed. Oliver's eyes are glowing and I can tell he's in pain but he's hiding it well.

Oliver's eyes stop glowing and he says, "I'm sorry Steph."

"Oliver she needs you," Deanna pleads with him but he leaves the room anyway.

I sit on the bed next to Steph who is catching her breath, her arm now has a snake tattoo. I look at Deanna and she says, "That's the Minder's mark."

"Are you okay?" I ask Stephanie. She shakes her head and clutches the bed covers close to her chest, "I'm sorry we didn't know you needed help."

Steph answers, "The imprint is broken."

STEPHANIE

It feels like a nightmare. Its as if I am going to wake up with Oliver next to me and he's going to hug me and tell me that I was just dreaming. I knew my fate was messed up but I didn't think it'll get worse. Today I lost my pride and the man I love. Today could mark the day when the greatest evil was created and there wasn't any love in it. I hate myself for not noticing earlier that it wasn't Oliver. Why wasn't I with the others in the first place? Maybe if I had gone back to RockNile while I still had the chance, all this wouldn't have happened.

I have the minder's mark and who knows what will happen to me after this. Everyone except Oliver is in the room and I am still half-naked under the covers. No amount of consolation can take away the trauma I experienced minutes ago. Nothing can make me feel better. Not even my tears heal my heart. I just want to die - maybe it might release the trauma from my heart.

Henry and Wendy are here. I am sure Wendy is happy she finally got her wish.

"We have to go back to RockNile because every moving hour here days are moving in RockNile," says Henry.

"Can't we save her this side? They will kill her if they find out she has the Minder's mark," Wendy retorts.

"That baby cannot be born, Wendy. It will destroy her and without the imprint, she will be gone forever." - Henry.

"Can't Oliver imprint on her again?" Brendon asks. He hasn't left my side to let go of my hand since he came into the room.

"It doesn't work like that, little man."

I quickly look up when I hear Oliver's voice. He's avoiding my eyes and it hurts. It hurts that my feelings for him still haven't changed even when that demon was using his face to force itself on me.

Oliver clears his throat, "Henry is right, we have to take her to RockNile and try to find a way out of this."

"Can I talk to you?" I ask with my eyes fixed on him and ignoring everyone's voice just like they have been talking about me as if I am not in the room.

"We'll talk," he answers.

"Can we talk now?" I request. He sighs and shoves his hands in his pockets. He whispers something to his uncle who is standing next to him. Everyone stands up and leaves the room. Deanna comes in after a couple of minutes and gives me clothes to wear.

Oliver waits until his sister leaves and says, "I am sorry I wasn't here to protect you."

"What's going to happen now, between you and me?"

He replies, "I don't know Steph. I didn't even know its possible to break the imprint - it was a myth. I don't know what happens from here."

"Do you still love me?"

"I'd be lying if I say I feel the same way about you as I did when I left this place," today he's not smiling or showing any emotions like he usually does.

"So you're telling me you no longer feel anything for me?"

"I care about you but I can't say the same about loving you. The imprint was a bond made in the spirit realm and now it's broken," he retorts.

"Then how come I still love you?" I yell. "You come into my life, love me and now you want to leave me when I need you the most?"

"You have the Minder's mark Steph. I am sorry but it is what it is."

"It's not fair! That thing came here and forced itself on me and you want to leave me on the same day? You don't even care how I feel?"

"You're being fair right now, of course, I care about how you feel. I have loved you my whole life and this is the first time in five centuries I don't love you so I am sorry if that makes you angry," he says.

"Why are you acting like this? You're supposed to be on my side and tell me everything will be fine?"

He's still standing by the door. I hate this. I hate this bond that is broken and I hate everything associated with it. Oliver says, "I am not acting like anything...this is me when I don't love you. You just hadn't met that side of me. I will always have your back Steph but I might imprint on someone so prepare for it."

BRENDON

I knock on the bedroom door where Oliver and Stephanie are. They asked me to call them and they will talk on our way to RockNile. I was also eavesdropping and I heard everything they said. It's not fair that Steph always loses it all. When will she get her happy ending? She got violated and gets to lose the man she loves all in one day.

"You want to imprint on someone else?" I overhear Steph say. Didn't they hear me knock?

"I don't know but I am just giving you a heads up." Oliver retorts.

"It hasn't even a day and you're talking about imprinting on someone else?"

I take a deep breath and let myself into the room. It's not like they will hear me with the yelling they are doing. Well

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Steph is the one yelling.

"Not now!" Steph yells at me. I don't miss the hoarseness in her tone - maybe it's because she was crying. And, she has no right to yell at me. It's not my fault that I knocked and they didn't hear me.

I rub my palms against my trousers and answer, "I...I didn't mean to disturb...they told me to call you and that we have to be at the border before dawn. You two will talk in the car. We have to get going before..."

She interrupts me, "I said not now, Brendon."

"I know but they say that the time difference between here and RockNile is different. The moment you cross the border things will be different."

Her eyes turn dark and she says, "Don't make me repeat myself."

"Your powers don't work on me," I say confidently.

She smirks, "Are you sure about that?"

I feel my throat tighten and start coughing uncontrollably. I start gasping for air. It is as if something is pressing down on my throat.

"Stephanie enough!" Oliver warns her. I feel the tightness on my throat loosen but I am still coughing, "Are you okay?" Oliver checks my neck and then helps me up.

"You said no power works me?" These people are liars.

Oliver replies, "She's half-witch and half warlord now she has the king of the underworld's mark trust me not even a fly is safe around her."

"Why isn't she attacking? Her eyes are still dark?"

"The darkness hadn't fully taken over her body... She can still resist it. Honestly, I don't know what's what anymore," he answers.

Stephanie's eyes turn back to their original state. "What happened?"

"You almost killed me, that's what happened," I rub my neck. It's still sore and since Oliver's powers don't work on me, he can't help.

"I am sorry," Steph tries to get close but Oliver and I shift backwards.

STEPHANIE

"Everything will be fine," Oliver says binding my hands. He's not using a rope or anything light because they are scared I might break out of it. I don't know where they got this chain and key that requires magic to unlock. He also puts a metal choker on my neck. The one that is worn but the un-gifted ones in RockNile.

Oliver helps me to the car. We are on our way to the border. Deanna will drive us and I will be sitting next to Scarlet in case something happens. Oliver will be with Henry, Maggie, Wendy and Brendon.

"My father will fix everything," Deanna assures me as she starts the car.

I look at Scarlet and she smiles at me. We drive to the border. We drive for some time until Deanna receives a call.

Deanna: We are all fine and Steph is fine.....Relax uncle plus I have Scarlet...I could use a bathroom break....fine!

She tosses the phone on the seat next to her. It's getting uncomfortable in the sitting position I am in and my fingers got a cramp. I feel the metal on my neck loosen and look at Scarlet who smiles. The chain binding my hands untangles too.

Scarlet murmurs, "Motorongeluk. (Car accident)"

26

STEPHANIE

One moment everything was fine then the next the car was spinning but luckily, Deanna managed to do a spell that saved us but I can't say the same about the car.

"What happened?" Henry asks as they help us out of the now squashed car.

"I don't know, the car just flipped," Deanna answers.

Everyone looks at me. The chains that were on my hands loosened and I no longer have the metal choker. "It wasn't me, it was Scarlet."

"Excuse me? Are you accusing me of almost killing us?" - Scarlet.

"You cast a spell and..."

She interrupts me, "You're one that broke out of your chains and who knows maybe you're trying to stop us from going to RockNile?"

"Why would I..."

This time Oliver is the one that interrupts me, "Can we get moving, please? We have to get to the border before dawn. I am sure we can all fit in uncle's car."

"Scarlet is un-gifted, Steph. Maybe the dark hold took over for a moment," Deanna rubs my arm and then walks to the car.

Everyone follows behind Deanna heading to the car leaving me with Scarlet. She whispers to me, "You're not crossing that border, mother confessor."

This girl is up to something and she's not un-gifted but how do I prove that when all they think is that I might have a demon in my belly and that I am the Minder's own since I am marked.

I sit next to Brendon in the car. He locks hands with me and says, "You'll be fine."

"That's if I don't kill everyone first. It seems everyone thinks the worst of me," I answer with my eyes fixed on Oliver. He's driving but I can see him through the view mirror. He keeps stealing glances at me. We drive for hours then the car just stops moving.

"Are we out of gas?" Aunty Wendy asks. I wish to talk to her, just the two of us - she owes me answers.

"No, but the car won't move. I guess we'd have to walk on foot from here," Oliver retorts getting out of the car and so does everyone.

"Can't you guys super-speed us to the border like you do when moving quickly?" Brendon asks, innocently. Bless his soul only if he knew that people like him are a threat in RockNile.

"We can, little man but it's exhausting when it's a distance hence we used the car. Don't worry we are close to the border," Oliver answers and we start walking. Everyone is avoiding talking to me except for Brendon. They are walking in groups, Henry is with Wendy and Maggie. Deanna with Scarlet and Oliver with Brendon.

I am following behind them thinking about everything. What if I am pregnant? What will happen when the darkness takes over completely? Will I become the Queen of the dark side? What will happen to Wendy if I don't die? She hurt me but that doesn't change that she's my mother.

"Stephanie!" a voice startles me. It's Oliver and I didn't realize I am falling behind. "Are you okay?"

"I don't know."

"Steph we will fix this, I promise. I know I acted like a jerk back at the house but I will never turn my back on you. I was just angry. I have loved you my whole life and it's just frustrating that my love for you just vanished."

"So you don't feel anything for me anymore?"

"You're still very beautiful in my eyes and I can still fall in love with you given a chance. What I hate is how my feelings for you just disappeared out of the blue. You have no idea how crazy in love with you I was," he says and I smile but my smile disappears when the thought of him imprinting on someone else crosses my mind.

"We should catch up on the others." I walk ahead of him but he catches up with me.

"I might not love you as I did in the morning but you still mean the world to me." he locks hands with me and in a flash, we are walking next to Brendon who is mumbling inaudible things.

"What is it, little man?" Oliver asks him.

"I feel like we are going in circles?" Brendon states. "We have passed that weird-looking tree five times now."

Oliver's eyes glow and he growls. Everyone stops walking and we look at him. Deanna growls too and utters, "We are not alone."

I stand in front of Brendon, shielding him and Maggie cowers behind Wendy. Everyone else can defend themselves - I am more worried about what Scarlet is up to because I know this is her doing.

"I hope I didn't disturb your little trip," says a voice. We all turn and get the shock of our lives.

Maggie gasps, "Nathaniel? What are you doing here?"

"Your little friend is sleeping at the moment," Nathaniel boldly answers. "Ahh Henry my old friend...you haven't aged at all and what do we have here, Gwendolyn I see you took my advice," he winks at Wendy.

I wonder what advice it is and who possessed Nathaniel.

"Who are you?" Henry asks.

Nathaniel laughs, "That's not how you treat an old friend, Henry. But, today I am not here for a family reunion - I am here for what is ours."

Oliver stands in front of me

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"You're going to have to go through us first."

Nathaniel laughs, "Who is us? You're with a witch with borrowed powers, a weak warlord, the un-gifted one, a teenager who can't even cast a single spell and your weak sister."

Deanna answers, "You're still outnumbered."

Nate shakes his head, "You're dealing with a spirit from the underworld and I have the pristinely gifted one on my side."

Scarlet goes to stand next to him. I knew something was up with this girl.

Deanna shakes her head in disbelief, "We treated you like family, Scarlet."

"You treated me like a slave and you made me wear that metal choker my whole life. But, I have nothing against you - we just want the mother confessor." - Scarlet.

"What do you want with me?" I ask.

"We want the baby you're carrying." Scarlet retorts.

"You're not even sure there's a baby."

"Our master will be the one to confirm that and if there isn't well Nathaniel's body is here to help," she says with a smile pasted to her face.

"Oliver get me out of here," I whisper. He grabs my arm and tosses me on his back.

"Keep your eyes closed," he says.

I can feel the air hit my face and I can feel it in my hair. I feel like I am floating but I don't dare to open my eyes, I cling on to Oliver, tight. After some time, Oliver puts me down. I slowly open my eyes and feel lightheaded. My legs are wobbly and I feel nauseated.

"I am sorry, I forgot you're not used to it. Sit down and put your head between your legs." he helps me sit down and I do as he says. He rubs my back until I feel better.

"Do you think the others are fine?" I ask him, holding in the urge to vomit.

"I don't know but right now we have to keep you safe."

"Aren't you scared I might hurt you?" I lift my head but fail to hold it in. I throw up. He was moving too fast and I feel like my stomach is inside out

He rubs my back, "Let's get you inside."

"Wait, Oliver. What if I am pregnant?"

He carries me in his arms and takes me into the house. The place looks like the houses back in RockNile.

"What is this place?"

"A place where no one will ever find us," he opens the door and then puts me down. I look around the house, portraits are hanging on the wall. Portraits of me and him and in each portrait, I look different.

"Oliver, what is this place?"

He answers, "Our first house. It's old but I like it. We came here the first time we eloped together."

"We eloped?"

He nods, "Your mother wouldn't let us be together so we came here and don't worry not even the Minder can find us here. Rest and I'll get the fire going. It's going to be dark soon."

"So you mean to tell me that we always cross the border? All centuries?"

He nods, "Not all centuries, sometimes we'll be in RockNile."

"Scarlet said I mustn't cross the border meaning maybe the Minder wants me this side."

He replies, "He knows that we will get rid of the baby when you're in RockNile."

"I think it's more than that? The imprint wasn't supposed to break either. Didn't you say it was a bond made in the spirit realm?"

He sits down, "Now that you mention it, the imprint never breaks, not even when you die. I get that the Minder controls the underworld but something doesn't add up."

"Deanna said I always cheat with a human, who is it?"

He shrugs, "I don't know but you always confess that you cheated."

"Deanna knows this how?"

He holds his chin, "Deanna sees things but still a lot doesn't add up. Deanna shows up to get me and suddenly the imprint breaks? Someone is using some dark magic."

STEPHANIE

It's now dark outside and I am getting worried about the others. Are they safe where they are and why is Oliver so relaxed? Maybe it's one of those things that repeat themselves and he's used to it.

I have bathed and surprisingly there are clothes that fit me - they were a little dusty but nothing a spell can't fix. Oliver had to do the spell for me, my powers are not working.

Oliver is making us something to eat, I assume he went hunting because I smell meat.

"Hey," I sit next to Oliver in front of the fireplace. This house reminds me of home even the clothes I am wearing are from RockNile.

"You look great - that was your favourite dress."

"I can see why, it's very pretty but wait till Maggie sees it and rolls her eyes telling me it's from the seventeen hundreds." I retort.

"It is an old dress. Are you hungry?"

I follow him to the kitchen, "Are the others okay, not that you'd know but I am worried. Don't you think we should go check on them?"

"For now your safety matters more than anything. They want you and we have to find a way to get you to RockNile so we can see if we can break the Minder's bond."

"Is that even possible? And, aren't you scared the darkness might take over me and I choke you to death?" I ask and he laughs.

"I am pretty sure you can't overpower me, possessed or not."

"You sound so sure Mr Stark," I sit facing him.

He tucks my hair behind my ear, "Let's say this is not the first time something possesses you and this is enchanted grounds. You didn't notice but the moment we entered the fence surrounding this house, you left all your powers behind. It's like the border but the only difference is that only us two can cross."

"So here I am just a normal person?"

He nods, "That's why we created this place so that no one can ever find us."

I look at my hand and I still have Minder's mark on my arm, "What about this mark?"

"It's a part of you now but no dark power works on this ground so you're safe."

"You created this place meaning you can still use your powers?"
I fold my arms to my chest.

His eyes glow and he says, "We can't both be defenceless. I need to protect you after all."

"But the imprint broke, why do you suddenly care and feel drawn to me? You said you no longer love me."

He shifts closer and whispers in my ear. "When a child is born in RockNile she is given to a family she is going to marry in. Her suitor has to wait until she's eighteen to claim her."

I exhale heavily trying to ignore what his voice is doing to me. "Does it mean I was given to you? But I am not a warlord."

"You're half warlord and the spirits are never wrong. They chose you for me."

I shift away from him a little. I can't concentrate when he's so close, "Oliver don't you think maybe that's the reason I die. Think of it, my parents committed a huge crime - a child that is half which and half warlord. That is an abomination in RockNile."

You made it worse by imprinting on me, making our child a threat to the whole of RockNile. With a child that powerful, the Minder stands no chance."

"What are you saying?"

"I am saying, maybe the child isn't the threat. You said it yourself that I am the last of our line meaning only warlords are confessors but this time there's a half-witch and half-warlord confessor.

They are trying to get rid of me but the imprint kept bringing me back. Maybe Wendy didn't do anything - I think they tricked her using her powers. I had never met Aunty Wendy but for some reason, I recognized her when I came here and the tracking spell worked perfectly.

I also don't think Wendy told the whole truth. Wendy was expecting me when I came this side meaning she knew I was coming." I tell.

"Now I feel like we are the ones that are being played."

"Oliver think of it, your father knows that Henry and Wendy fled RockNile. The sorcerous can sense when someone crosses the border and they could have easily killed them but they made a deal

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a blood covenant. Remember I told you that I broke the bond between Nathaniel and me? No one is capable of doing that meaning I have the strongest han and no one can have power more that much power in RockNile - it's a threat to the higher ranks." I explain.

"So they tried to get rid of you but the imprint kept bringing you back."

I nod, "So this time they used the minder meaning if I die then I am gone forever. Unless you imprint on me again," I retort.

"But who could be behind all this?"

I shrug, "Whoever it is they made a deal with the Minder but they used a dashi spirit meaning they must want another mother confessor that's why...yesterday happened."

"You always give birth to a male child and male confessors are hard to control. This is just too much," he buries his face in his palms, "All I ever wanted was a normal life but I guess fate had something else in store for me."

"Hey... it's okay. I am going to die soon and you might imprint on someone else."

He frowns, "Never say that."

"Oliver I love you but let's face reality, I am a threat to the world and right now I could be carrying the greatest evil. You don't love me anymore so maybe this is what's best."

He cups my face, "I still care about you and you're not carrying a demon or a dashi's child you hear me. I'll fix this and things will be back to normal."

"I'll still die, Oliver but at least this time you have the chance to move on and be with someone else."

He growls and holds me by my arms. I can feel his claws dig into my skin. He glares into my eyes, "How many times do I have to tell you that it doesn't work like that? Stop saying you'll die...you're mine and mine only."

"Oliver you're hurting me."

He lets go of my arms and presses his head against mine. His breathing has escalated and I can tell he's trying to calm his animal side. I don't know what is going on or why he suddenly feels so drawn to me but I get on my toes and kiss him.

He places his hand on my lower back and pulls me closer as we kiss. I feel the dress tear and pull away from his lips to stare into his eyes. His eyes are glowing. He pulls me closer and kisses me hungrily. He tears the rest of the dress off me and starts kissing my neck. I flinch when I feel his claws dig on my back. I can feel the blood dripping on my back.

"Oliver you're hurting me."

"You're mine," he murmurs. "I don't care if I have to wait for you."

According to myth Imprinting occurs anytime after a werewolf's phasing. It is an involuntary mechanism by which shape-shifters find their soulmates. It is a profound, intimate phenomenon that exists among the werewolves. It's not the earth holding the imprinter but the imprintee meaning no amount of power or sorcerer can break the bond between the two.

They tried to break us apart but the imprinter is deemed to be the perfect match for the imprintee. It happened when Oliver first saw me meaning he's unconditionally bonded to me for the rest of his life. I guess they can only break us for a couple of hours but he's mine until I choose to break us up.

"Are you okay?" I ask Oliver. I think whatever spell that was cast to break us apart just broke.

"I'm sorry, Steph. I can never stop loving you. I don't know what got over me."

"It's okay, we are together now and that's what matters." I kiss him.

"I love you," he lifts me and lets me lock my legs on his waist as we kiss.

"You love me again?"

"I'll always love you, Princess," he carries me to the bedroom, the room that I was supposed to sleep in. We had agreed to sleep in different rooms.

He gently lays me on the bed and towers over me.

"Oliver I..."

He shuts me up with a kiss, "Forget about the dashi. What matters is that we love each other."

I close my eyes and listen to the tingling sensation spreading throughout my body as he leaves a trail of wet kisses on my neck.

He stops kissing me and stares into my eyes, "Are you eighteen today?"

"No, next month."

"We've never mated before you turn eighteen," he utters.

"Maybe we have rewritten the stars and the spirits will see that we love each other and give us a chance."

STEPHANIE

I slowly open my eyes and the first thing they land on is this handsome warlord lying next to me. I bite my lower lip and slowly peek in the blanket. I wasn't dreaming. Last night happened and last night was magical. At that moment we froze time - it was just him and I. We forgot about the Dashi, about the Minder, about me dying and literally everything that has been causing us problems.

We did not just sleep together but we made love. Nice, slow and passionate love. He was glaring into my eyes, every emotion and every thrust. For a moment our souls entwined and we became one. And then it started building up from the deepest parts of my body and ripped me apart like electric shock leaving me trembling with satisfaction.

Even if I were to die today, I'll go to the underworld a happy woman. Last night Oliver made me the happiest woman alive. I always thought that people mate so they can multiply but Oliver taught me that it's also a way one expresses love to their other half.

I gently stroke Oliver's face with my fingertips down his jaw line to his muscular chest. Only I get to have him, touch him and do whatever I want with him. I love that he's mine and mine alone just like I am only his.

I snuggle closer to Oliver resting my head on his warm chest. Who needs a blanket when I have my warm prince. He says it's a werewolf thing - they are naturally warm and never get cold. He can be shirtless while it's snowing and still be warm.

Oliver wraps his arm around me when I shift closer. "Oliver," I whisper.

Failing to keep his deep voice down he asks, "What's wrong?"

"Are you awake?"

He caresses my arm and holds me tighter but he still has his eyes closed, "Get some rest, Steph we have to leave for RockNile soon."

"Let's stay in this place forever. Well, until I die. We don't need to leave this place - we can stay here and love each other all we want. I want my last days to be with you."

He exhales heavily, "Don't you want to see your family again, what if you miss them? Keeping you here will be like keeping you hostage - eventually, you will get tired of this place."

"As long you are by my side then I don't mind."

"But princess you can't take the Minder's mark to the underworld. They can still use your soul and I can't have that - I need you to be reborn. I don't think I can survive knowing that I might never see you again." he retorts.

"Okay then." I sulk.

I love it here and him being here makes it all better. I would really love for us to stay here but he is right, I cannot take the Minder's mark to the underworld. They will still use my soul for

bad deeds. I guess the person who said the dead are resting lied. There's no rest on mother earth not even when underground.

I look at my handsome prince one more time and smile by myself. How is it possible to love someone so much? To love someone so much that you'd lay your life for them without thinking twice. I almost died when he told me he no longer has feelings for me. I don't know how I was going to cope knowing that he had imprinted on someone else or that he loves someone else. He wasn't blabbing when he said I was born to love him. Indeed ours is a bond made in the spirit realm.

"Get some sleep, princess." Oliver gently strokes my arm. How does he even know that I am awake? Is it also a werewolf thing?

"I am not sleepy."

He lifts my chin and his warm lips find mine. We slowly kiss. He makes me get on top of him and holds me closer as our tongues do the talking. The disgusting lessons my fake mother gave me

are coming in handy. At the time she was teaching me how to handle a man, I rolled my eyes. Now I am using those lessons on Oliver. I have him moaning my name and it's music to my ears.

"Oliver," I yelp when I feel his claws dig into my skin. He needs to keep his animal side tamed because I cannot have his scratching me whenever he is too angry or too happy.

BRENDON

When Stephanie and Oliver fled, we were outnumbered. I can't fight, and neither Maggie. It was three against two. They were willing to go down with a fight but, Nathaniel grabbed Maggie and threatened to snap her neck if we try to fight them.

We surrendered although I could tell that Deanna wanted to put up a fight - I got myself a feisty wife there. I don't think it's

fair that they chose for me a wife that can rip me to pieces. Deanna is sweet and all but I learnt not to mess with her when she punched the Dashi spirit out of Maggie. Maybe we should try that with Nathaniel - he is definitely possessed because the Nathaniel I know would never harm a fly.

"Move!" Scarlet pushes me. Can't she see that I am moving? She should be glad that I don't have powers because we wouldn't be getting treated like prisoners.

They tied our hands and I don't know where we are going because we have been walking for hours. I could use a bathroom break. My hands are tied with a rope since no power works on me. They used a spell and ropes on Deanna

Henry, Maggie and Gwendolyn - yeah I am still angry at her for lying to us about Stephanie and our gifts.

"Where are you taking us?" I ask and Scarlet shoots a threatening stare at me. If looks could kill I'd be dead on the ground. Too bad she can't kill me...she can't, right?

"Shut up and keep walking," Scarlet pushed me hard I almost
lend on my face.

"Hey watch it," Deanna warns. Look at wifey fighting for me.
This is exactly why she and I would never work.

"Watch it," Scarlet mimics her.

Quick question, why are Henry and Wendy so quiet? Are they
enjoying all this? They are immortals and they should be
fighting for our freedom as we speak.

I pretend to be scratching my leg just to get close to Deanna. I
might not have powers but I watch a lot of television.

"Can't you free yourself?" I whisper to Deanna.

"I can it's just that I am enjoying being tied."

"You do?" I then notice her facial expression. She's being sarcastic, "You need to undo the spell what if these people are looking for a nice place to murder us?"

"Just help me untie the rope on my hands then I will perform a spell to break me loose."

Nathaniel turns to check if we are following them then continues walking. I try to undo the knots with my teeth and quickly compose myself when Scarlet or Nathaniel turn to look at us.

"It's loose," Deanna pushes the rope off her hands and whispers something then grabs my arm. In a flash, we are no longer where we were. She disappears before I can ask and comes back with Maggie. My head is spinning so I sit down. My hands are still tied.

We hear a scream followed by birds flying off. "What was that?" I ask Deanna but she's gone again.

"I feel sick," Maggie moans. I also feel sick and may I say not a fan of this super-speed thing.

"Where's Deanna?"

"They are gone," and she's back. She helps untie Maggie and performs a spell to unbind her hands then united me too. Maggie instantly vomits - I also feel nauseated. I walk up to the nearest tree and throw up.

"I am sorry, I forgot you're not used to the speeding and stuff," Deanna mumbles.

"Where are mom and dad?" Maggie asks before throwing up again also making me throw up.

"I don't know where they are taking them but I doubt they will be alive for long so we have to find Oliver and Stephanie," Deanna answers.

"Find them where?" Maggie sits down on the dirty ground. How I wish I had my phone - it's not every day Maggie vomits and sits on the dirty ground looking like a drowned and harassed rat.

"I can track and werewolves can sense each other so let's get moving," Deanna helps Maggie up and we start moving.

"Since Nathaniel is now possessed, will he be his old self again?" I ask and man my stomach won't stop growling. I am hungry.

"Maybe we should get you guys something to eat first." Deanna flashes a smile. What would I do without this girl? "Okay, both of you give me your hands."

"No!" Maggie and I shift away. "Yeah, we'd rather walk we are not doing that again."

"Home is far, I can get us there in five minutes."

"Nope, we will walk or even run if necessary but we are not going through that super-speed trauma again," I take Maggie's hand. I am so going to write a long review to all the movies that make super-speeding look cool. It's not. I feel like my stomach threw up inside me. I look behind me and Deanna is slowly following. Can't she use her powers to at least get us some buns and water so that we don't faint.

STEPHANIE

"Why can't we stop?" I ask Oliver getting off him, breathing heavily. We can't stop, we can't get off each other - we have been in bed since last night. The sun is going down again. We eat and then get back to it again.

Oliver chuckles, "I told you once we start we can't stop. That's why we have to wait for you to be legal."

"What is being legal and whatever it is I am sure it's not in RockNile."

He gets out of bed, "Let's get cleaned up and get moving."

I get out of bed and stretch myself. My whole body is sore. I bathe first then Oliver follows because there was going to be no coming out if we went in together. We wear the clothes we came in, we washed them the previous day.

"What's wrong?" Oliver cups my face and pecks me on the lips. I don't want to leave. I love it here and what if I turn devil the moment we step off this enchanted ground. What if I hurt him? I think it's best I stay here where I am a normal person.

"I don't want to leave." I sulk and he kisses me again.

"Trust me I love this more than anything but we have to get rid of that mark then we have all the time in the world to love each other."

"We don't have all the time in the world because I am going to die," I remind him.

He leans over and kisses my lips, "Let's get rid of that mark then enjoy the little time we have left."

"Fine, let's go." He smiles but his smile disappears and his eyes glow. I ask, "What's wrong?"

"Deanna's here."

"I thought you said no one can find us?" I follow him outside. There's no Deanna here.

"It's a werewolf thing and she can track me."

I look in the direction he is looking and see Maggie, Brendon and Deanna walking toward the house. "Tell me, what other thing is a werewolf thing?"

"There's no privacy, we can hear each other's thoughts and truth me you don't want to hear the things Deanna thinks about. We can't control it, we just find ourselves in each other's heads."

"Does this mean Deanna now knows we mated?" I ask and he nods.

"Yes but right now she's complaining about being hungry."

"So you two can have conversations even from a distance?" I ask and he nods then burst into laughter.

"Now she's angry that she won't be able to bath here because only you and I can walk on this ground and the un-gifted one, of course."

We walk towards our border and Deanna pulls Maggie back poor Maggie doesn't know the difference between normal and enchanted ground.

"I am glad you're safe," Brendon hugs me then looks at Deanna and Maggie who are standing about two metres from us, "What are you guys waiting for?"

"That's enchanted ground, we can't walk there so please can you guys bring us some food and water before we faint," Deanna requests.

"Hey Deanna, how are you?" I wave at her, "Maggie!"

"Do I look good to you? I am hungry and I haven't bathed since yesterday. Then these two idiots wouldn't let me super-speed us here. Do you know how long we have been walking? I save their lives and they thank me by making me walk," Deanna is fuming and I am glad we are near her because I am sure she would have slapped us by now especially knowing that we mated while they were suffering out there.

Brendon whispers, "She's mad- mad."

"Shut up and thank the spirits you're that side because I would have snapped your girl arms by now," Deanna growls.

"I want a divorce," Brendon yells back.

Oliver pats his arm

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"Doesn't work like that, little man. You're stuck with her," he turns to Deanna, "Relax your husband will help you cross but your powers won't work once you're this side you are all equals this side."

"You want me to go to her when she threatened to snap me? Even without her powers she is not to be trusted." - Brendon.

"Brendon I am tired, hungry and I am sure I stepped on shit on our way here trust me if you don't come to get us I will also rip you to pieces," Maggie fires. These people are mad- mad as Brendon said.

Brendon mumbles then go to get Maggie and Deanna.

"We are hungry," says Deanna.

"Follow me," I lead the way and un-bothered Oliver follows behind. Nothing bothers Oliver, he's always his chilled-out self.

Maggie opts for bathing first so I show her to the bathroom. I ask her, "Are you okay?"

"Honestly, everything is a lot to process. Being witches, having an older sister and now mom and Henry being captured."

"Everything will be fine, we will fix it and in no time you'll have your normal life back," I assure her.

"There's no normal life because we are going to die soon."

I sigh, "Well, we are paying for our parent's sins. Anyways here are some clothes to wear, they are from centuries ago so I hope you don't mind."

"Thanks, Steph you have a good heart and I hope one day we get to be great sisters."

I smile, "Bathe then join us."

SCARLET

"My lord!" I kneel with my face down not daring to look at his face.

"You had one job, Scarlet. Bring the mother confessor and make sure she's carrying a child. Isn't that the reason I released a dashi spirit from the underworld?"

"I tried everything but I was outnumbered but the dashi mated with her meaning she could be pregnant by now. Please just give me some time to right my wrongs," I answer with my head still down.

"What about you Gwendolyn? What is your excuse? You cannot even tame a little girl you gave birth to."

Wendy answers, "It's not easy my Lord not when even their father is against you."

"Don't act like you have a choice, Wendy. You owe me your life. Does your dear husband know that when you fainted the time you tried to leave RockNile for the first time you died?"

A little back story. Wendy and Henry fled RockNile running away from their crime but it killed Wendy since she's not a warlord. Only warlords can cross the border with just a spell but still, there are consequences.

Wendy didn't want to leave the love of her life alone so she took the Minder's deal and gave him the one thing that is capable of destroying him and that is Stephanie. When Steph was born a prophecy came in the underworld that as long as the mother confessor's pure heart beats then the Minder is bound to be defeated hence why Steph never makes it past her teens but Wendy offered Steph unknowing of the prophecy.

Stephanie was going to be gone forever if that stupid werewolf hadn't imprinted on her. Stephanie's fate changing also changed Brendon and Maggie's.

"Bring me that girl and I want no mistakes."

"Yes, my lord." Wendy and I chant in unison.

STEPHANIE

Oliver holds my hand as we step out of the enchanted ground. I look at my arm and I still have Minder's mark. We are on our way to RockNile and we hope this time no one or thing will try to stop us. We are splitting with Deanna - she's going to track Henry's scent and see if there are this side or in RockNile.

"Come back in one piece," Oliver hugs Deanna. He might not want to admit it but he cares about his little sister.

"I am sure Brendon would be glad if I were to die," she smiles and walks away.

"Hey don't say that, I'd never wish death on you. In fact, I am coming with you just in case someone tries to attack you," Brendon follows her.

I shake my head, laughing, "What is up with those two?"

"Every century Brendon acts like he doesn't care at first but waits until he falls in love with her. They are the most annoying couple ever," answers Oliver.

"Quick question, so everyone has a partner except me?"
Maggie asks.

Oliver lets go of my hand and goes to whisper something to Maggie who squeals and jumps on Oliver hugging him. She quickly composes herself, clears her throat then says, "Let's get going to this RockNile place."

"The other way," Oliver tells when she goes the opposite direction. She turns, all smiles. I look at Oliver who takes my hand and kisses it then we follow Maggie. I try to make Oliver tell me what he told Maggie but he won't say - no matter how much I kiss him.

"Another question," Maggie stops walking so she can talk to Oliver and me. We have been following behind her and being naughty every chance we get. "You're a werewolf, right? So do you fully transform?"

"Yes, Magret I do transform but I prefer my human state to my animal side," Oliver answers.

"Okay so have you and Stephanie..."

I interrupt her, "Okay Maggie we should get moving before it gets dark." I take her hand and we lead the way.

She whispers, "Have you guys ever done it before?" I nod and she squeals deafening my ears, "Oh my word! Details, how was it? Did he make you cum?"

"It was mind-blowing and I don't know what you mean by cum."

She looks to see if Oliver is nearby and he's slowly following behind us. Maggie says, "Did he take you to cloud nine? Did you orgasm?"

"He took me to places I do not even know. We did it until I couldn't anymore. We just can't stop once we start. Do you know that we started at night and did it the whole night and the whole of the following day?"

"I can't believe I am asking this but were you guys taking breaks in between like catching your breath?" she asks.

"We don't run out of breath."

"Let's pick up our pace ladies it's going to be dark soon," Oliver walks past us. Maggie and I hold hands and follow behind him. She keeps wanting me to tell her about my night with Oliver. I am just glad that we are getting along. Maggie has always hated me.

We stop moving when we hear the sound of birds flying away. Did the RockNile border have to be in the middle of a forest? How come I landed on the road when I first came here?

"What's going on?" Maggie asks.

"It's Deanna and Brendon," Oliver yells still walking. We look behind us, Brendon and Deanna are back.

"The trail led to the border. I think they are in RockNile," says Deanna.

"I take back what I said about the super-speed thing. It's cool and the key is keeping your eyes closed and thinking happy thoughts." Brendon says before running after Oliver.

"You got one crazy husband right there." I nudge Deanna's stomach with my elbow

She sighs and shakes her head, "That's what I deal with every century. You have no idea how much I have prayed to the spirit that at least he gets reborn and comes different can't but they give me crazy Brendon Richards."

Maggie chuckles, "That's my brother for you

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forever annoying. I am just glad that we die because I don't think I can handle Brendon for centuries."

I scream when I feel a sharp pain shoot through my arm where the tattoo (mark) is. It is burning.

BRENDON

Oliver and I stop walking when we hear a scream. When I look next to me, Oliver is no longer there - he is now next to Stephanie who is screaming holding out her arm.

"We have to get her to RockNile. Let's get moving," Oliver demands and in a flash they are gone, Oliver, Steph and Maggie.

"Let go," Deanna stretches her hand towards me.

"What will happen when we cross over to RockNile?"

"It's either Steph is pregnant or she will turn evil and try to kill us," she answers not even minding her words. These people have normalised death as if it's nothing plus they know they are immortal so it's Maggie and me who will be dying. "Let's go they are waiting for you to help them cross the border."

So these people actually need me. Deanna takes my hand and this time she catches me off guard because I throw up the moment we get to where the others are. I help Oliver cross first followed by Maggie then Deanna.

"Relax, you'll be fine," I take Stephanie's hand and help her cross the border. We all look at her and she's not pregnant nor is she showing any signs of being evil.

"That's weird," Deanna says, "Isn't she supposed to be pregnant?"

"I also don't know what is going on," Oliver answers.

We all turn when we hear loud thuds. Four men are coming towards us riding horses. They are clad in matching clothes as if it's a uniform and they are carrying swords - things are really different in RockNile. They get off their horses and kneel - okay. I look at Maggie who shrugs.

"Welcome home, prince Oliver and princess Deanna." One of the men speaks and why are they all bald. "Welcome, ladies, friends of the prince and princess."

I am not a lady.

"Where is my father?" Oliver asks.

The man replies, "He and the queen went to the prophecy house to see if there isn't any new prophecy. They should be back before the sun comes up."

Surprisingly, the sun was setting on the side and here it was almost morning. Stephanie screams and her hand is glowing where the tattoo is. The four men draw out their swords and

one of them yells, "She has the Minder's mark." Ten more men appear surrounding us - what kind of witchcraft do these people do?

"Stand down, she's with us." Deanna orders.

"People like her are not allowed in RockNile," one of the guards responds.

"That was an order soldier," Oliver growls.

"The king gave us orders to kill the Minder's people if they cross the border," one of the men hits Steph with the back of his sword knocking her unconscious. When Oliver and Deanna try to fight they bind their hands with spells.

"Do you know who I am? I can have your head for just breathing next to me, and you dare to do this," Deanna yells.

"We follow the king's orders, princess," the man says. They are all bald and look alike, I can't tell them apart. They look at

Maggie and me, and we both raise our hands in surrender.
"Take the prince and princess to their chambers then take these two ladies to one of the rooms in the palace."

I am not a lady what is wrong with these people. Is it because I don't have broad shoulders and I am not bald?

"Lock this one up and put a metal choker on her neck," he commands and one of the men picks up Steph and tosses her on the horse.

STEPHANIE

I wake up with my hands and legs chained. I look around me and I am lying on the floor. I look at my arm to see if I still have the Minder's mark and it's still there. I stand up from the cold floor and go to sit on the bed. Luckily, the chain is long enough for me to move around. There's discomfort on my neck so I touch it and there's something. I don't know if it's another chain on a metal choker - the one that numbs powers in any being. I pull the bedspreads off the bed and wrap them around my body. I don't need an explanation to know that I am a prisoner now. Wendy was right, they won't let me live knowing that I bear the Minder's mark.

Some fate I have huh? As if it's not enough that I always die young now I have to suffer first before I die. I wonder where are Maggie and Brendon - I pray that Oliver is keeping them safe. My sweet Oliver... he's going to lose me again and wait for decades again. I know I sound like a dying person but it's no secret that they are going to kill me.

RockNile has rules and they stand by them. Not even the prince can help me on this one because if the royal house doesn't lead by example people will start doing as they please. Rule are rules. I won't pretend, I am scared....as much as I have accepted my fate, I am scared to die. What if things are worse in the underworld? What if this mark on my arm worsens things for me? Even worse, what if the king gives orders that I get killed and then burnt to stop me from being reborn. What will happen to my Oliver? What about my siblings? Poor Wendy...why does my fate have to be like this?

"We brought you some food," a voice startles me.

"I am not hungry," I don't even look at the person.

"Steph it's me."

"Daniel?" I get off the bed and throw myself in his arms. He has grown so much. I forgot the time difference between inside and outside the border. Wait...should I be dead by now? Or maybe my age counts when I am in RockNile?

"Steph why did you cross the border? Do you know how worried I was? I thought you had died."

"I am fine Danny, it wasn't that bad outside the border. I see you're still a royal guard," I say and he smiles. He has always wanted to be that since we were kids.

"You're still pretty and is it true that you bear the Minder's mark?"

I show him my arm and say, "I am just glad I am not pregnant."

"How are you not pregnant? The Dashi mated with you."

"I also thought so but...Daniel, how do you know the Dashi mated with me?" I slowly shift backwards.

He chuckles and scratches his head, "News travel fast in RockNile."

"Yeah it does," I fake smile then do a quick scan of the room. This is not Daniel, it's a shape-shifter. There's nothing in the room I can use to hit him with and if I scream I know it will take longer for the guards to get here.

If this person takes me to the Minder, RockNile could be destroyed along with some innocent people. Daniel walks towards me and murmurs, "Breek," I feel the metal choker loosen and fall on the ground and so do the chains on my hands. I look at Daniel once more and he has changed to Nathaniel. "Follow me."

"I can't let you take me to the Minder," I shake my head.

"Mother confessor don't make me apply force because I will," his eyes glow.

"I own you, remember. You're enslaved to me," I feel an aura take over me and say

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"Leave that body, I command you."

I feel my arm burn where the tattoo is and Nathaniel starts groaning holding his chest. He falls to the ground and lets out a loud shriek. Where are the guards of this place or did they just lock me up and leave? I hold Nathaniel's hand and cast a healing spell. He stops groaning and I open his shirt then sigh with relief. If he has my rune then it means the spirit has left his body. Usually one can't cast the Dashi spirit out of a normal human but Nathaniel is marked by the confession so he is safe.

"What happened?" he groans holding his head.

"Nathaniel look at me... you're in RockNile."

"Rock who?" he tries to stand up but groans holding his head. I heal his headache.

"You're in RockNile listen to me. I need you to go and get Oliver for me. I can't leave this cell because I don't know what I am capable of and I don't want to hurt innocent people."

"I am confused right now, what is this place and what are you talking about? And by Oliver do you mean your boyfriend?" he asks. We are wasting time and I hate doing this but I have no choice. I hold the back of his neck and stare into his eyes, "Command me, mistress." He mutters.

"Go and call Oliver....tell him I want to see him before anything happens to me. Tell him I want to see him while I am still me. Go and do whatever it takes to deliver this message but make sure you don't get caught or killed."

"Yes, confessor," he retorts. I ask him to help me put back the collar and then the chains. "I will come back for you, my lady."

"No, when you complete your task go to Maggie and Brendon. They will help you get home."

He asks, "What about you?"

"I will be fine. Live your life as you wish okay." I wipe off the tears that have fallen on my face. Nathaniel leaves the room

and I sit back on the bed. I guess this time I might not even make it to eighteen.

BRENDON

We are in the throne room with the King and Queen of RockNile. They gave us a change of clothes although it took a while to find my size since no boy is tiny as me in RockNile. Anyway, the king welcomed us as the prince and prince's guest - he has been nothing but nice to us but the only problem is that he won't tell us where Stephanie is. Oliver and Deanna suggested we don't tell him that we are his brother's children because it might get us killed since our father committed a huge crime. This man is our uncle and doesn't know.

"Father please!" Oliver pleads, for the hundredth time but his father has been ignoring him and asking us (Maggie and I) dozens of questions. We would be kneeling with Oliver but we

are guests and things are different in RockNile, one does not just speak to the King if not spoken to.

Deanna's eyes are glistening with tears. Her brother has been kneeling for the past two hours begging his father to tell him where Stephanie is but the King won't barge. Maggie is crying but hiding behind the sleeves of her 1700s dress.

"Stop making a fool out of yourself, Oliver. You're going to be the next King, start acting like one." the King roars, I see he's getting fed up. Deanna squeezes my hand and shakes her head when I try to speak. What kind of place is this? My sister could be dead where she is.

"Father you know she's my chosen one please let me see her. I promise I will fix it all." - Oliver.

"Stephanie Richards has the Minder's mark and by the rule of RockNile, she should be sentenced to death and burnt so that her soul does not get used in the underworld. My word is final," the King stands up and the room goes silent. This man is feared on this land - it's like everyone is holding their breath. He exits the room followed by six guards and the Queen.

"Damn it!" Oliver roars now punching the wall hard and destroying everything in his way until the guards hold him back and take him out of the room. I try to stand up but Deanna

whispers, "You're guests here just lay low and don't sell yourself that you're from outside the border. Our parents don't know that."

I whisper, "Are they really going to kill Stephanie?"

"The king's word is final so I don't know."

"Then why did you guys suggest we come here?" I raise my voice, "You knew they were going to kill her yet brought us here."

"Uncle Henry was going to talk to father...only he can reason with him." Deanna answers.

"That was your big plan? Even with all the power you guys have, you couldn't even save my sister. If she dies I will never forgive all of you. You and Oliver for bringing us here knowing that it's not safe for Steph and my mother for messing up our lives," I storm out of the room. I don't care about their rules they might as well kill me too.

BRENDON

I think now I understand the term life isn't fair or that our lives were planned before we were even born. Magic/ powers or not, life is not fair. Does this mean some people don't have a happy ending? Does it mean it doesn't matter whether one is good or bad - fate is fate? I have never met a kind-hearted soul like Stephanie. She has a pure heart yet her fate is messed up. Why do bad things happen to good people? It's not fair and it's not right. Why didn't the Minder mark my mother? She's the one that started all this or me...I have done so many bad things in my life and went against the bible but Stephanie is innocent. She didn't do anything - her only crime is being born.

"Brendon wait," Maggie runs after me. There are so many rooms in the palace, I am failing to find the exit. I don't want to be in this place - I don't think I will be able to witness Stephanie die. I think now I understand what they mean when they say her death affects me. I can already feel it. If I lose her then I will die too.

"Brendon you need to calm down, we have to be strong and we have to be strong for our sister." - Maggie.

"I don't want to be strong. Why is this happening to us? If Steph dies then we are following too...I don't want to die Maggie. Why does it have to be us?" I yell. "I am tired of this and I want to go home."

"Brendon I am scared too but we have to be strong. Mom is not here and we only have each other. Let's go to Oliver and hear the way forward. I know you're mad at them but we need to stick together now than ever, for Stephanie."

I inhale and exhale then wipe the tears off my face, don't judge me I am going through a lot. I know I am always the one making everyone feel better but I just can't take it anymore. Everyone has a breaking point and I guess this is mine.

Maggie and I walk back to the bedrooms looking for Oliver's room but I think we are lost. Everything looks alike here and the guards don't answer when we talk to them. Steph told me that people in RockNile are strict and different but this is not what I

had in mind. We see a guard walking toward us, he's wearing a metal helmet.

"Brendon, Magret," he calls our names when he gets closer

Maggie and I look at each other. No one can be trusted with Dashi spirits moving around, "Should we run?" I whisper to Maggie and she nods.

"Guys it's me," he removes the helmet. It's Nathaniel.

"Dashi spirit!" I scream and the guards get on standby ready to attack. Nathaniel covers my mouth and pulls me into the nearby room. I don't know how Maggie got here when she should be running for her life

"Dashi...." Nathaniel covers my mouth again.

"Brendon will you stop screaming it's Nathaniel," Maggie tells.

"It's Nathaniel possessed by a Dashi," I kick him in the private part and grab Maggie's wrist but she doesn't move, "Maggie let's go."

"It's Nathaniel, he's no longer possessed."

"And you know this how?" I shift away from her. No one is to be trusted. Anyone can be possessed.

"I can feel it because he's my chosen one. Oliver told me," she retorts.

"Did you have to kick me that hard," Nathaniel groans with his head pressed on the wall.

"My bad, man. In my defence when I last saw you, you were possessed and how are you no longer possessed?" I ask.

Maggie responds, "Stephanie broke it and she sent him to get Oliver."

"What is going on with you, how do you know all this?"

She shrugs, "I don't...It just comes on its own."

"Maybe your powers are coming back. You're in RockNile land of witches and sorcerous."

"What are you guys talking about? Even Stephanie was being weird." - Nathaniel.

I say, "Long story short, we are one weird family now let's go find Oliver."

We hear a loud bang on the door. That is not a normal knock. I look at Maggie and she tells me she got it. She yells, "Who is it? I am getting dressed."

"Are you okay in there your brother screamed?"

Maggie answers, "My brother was being silly we are fine." She pinches me so I can talk.

"I am fine," I yell.

"Please open the door so we can check. We saw your brother being forcefully dragged into the room."

"I am getting dressed

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" Maggie tells.

"You're getting dressed in front of your brother? Open the door or we break it down."

There's no peace on this land.

"Guys let's go out the window," Nathaniel who is standing by the now open window calls. Maggie does not wait for me she rushes to the window and we all get out. I didn't realize the

palace is this high. Luckily, there's a balcony so we go to the next room.

"Holy spirits," Deanna screams and holds her chest, "Brendon you scared me and why are you coming into my chambers through the window?" she picks up a vase when she sees Nathaniel and throws it at him but he ducks down just in time.

"Why is everyone attacking me today?" Nathaniel asks

"It's Nathaniel, he's no longer possessed. We need to find Oliver," Maggie says.

Deanna looks at me, she's not convinced. She picks up another vase but Maggie stands in front of Nathaniel. "He's no longer possessed," Maggie assures her. She puts down the vase and leads the way to Oliver's room but we avoid the guards.

"You need to take off that uniform," Deanna says as we enter some room. Oliver is lying on the bed with a pillow covering his face.

"Go away all of you," he says without looking at us but quickly stands up and growls.

"He's no longer possessed and Steph sent him to call you. She wants to see you," ain't Maggie Miss Translator today.

"You saw Stephanie? Where is she and is she okay?" Oliver asks.

"She is in one of the dungeons on the east side of the palace. She said she wants to see you," Nathaniel retorts.

"Take me to her." - Oliver.

An army of soldiers barges into the room. One of them steps forward and says, "The king summons all of you."

"The royal seers might have sensed or seen something," Deanna whispers to me.

"We are coming," Oliver retorts.

"We were told to use force if needed."

This place is just too much.

SCARLET

"Here's some food, stop starving yourself," I push a metal plate toward Henry.

"Where is my wife?"

I laugh, "I thought you and Wendy separated. It's funny how she always says she doesn't want you but always comes back when she needs children. Can't you see she's using you?"

"Just tell me where Wendy is, I promise to put in a good word for you with the King."

I kneel next to him and gently stroke his face - he is tied up, "You're so handsome and do not deserve Wendy. For the record, the Minder takes good care of me that's why..." I stop talking when he spits on me

"Go to hell."

I place my hand on his neck and tighten the grip, "I can kill you for that."

"I am immortal plus you need your little boss's approval."

I take out a Kai - it's a little star knife only pristine gifted ones possess and it can kill immortals. I stab it to his heart, "See, you're killable after all."

I watch him gasp for air until he takes his last breath.

"Scarlet you need...." my sister Lori walks into the dungeon. She rushes to Henry and checks his pulse, "What have you done?"

"Relax, I'll give him the breath of life."

"The breath of life doesn't work on warlords, silly. Don't you think they would have used it on Stephanie to stop her from dying if it worked," she yells.

Holy spirits what have I done.

SCARLET

"What were you thinking, Scarlet? Why would you kill him knowing very well how much Wendy loves him," Lori stands up and goes to check if no one is coming. This changes everything - I didn't know that the breath of life doesn't work on warlords. We kill people all the time and bring them back just to teach them to respect us.

With Henry dead then if Wendy's kids die they won't be reborn. She can't have kids with another man, just Henry. But I am sure the Minder will be happy that if the mother confessor dies this time, she is gone forever.

We hear footsteps coming from down the passage. I whisper, "Help me hide the body, Lori."

"Hide it where? He is dead and there's no..." she doesn't finish talking we hear someone gasp. We both turn and it's Wendy.

She rushes to her man, tears streaming down her face, "What have you done? Who did this?"

She tries performing a spell to bring back Henry but fails - she doesn't give up. She notices blood on the floor then checks Henry's body and sees the star knife. "Who does this belong to?"

Both Lori and I don't respond. She stands up and holds the knife in her hand and clenches it, we can see it cutting her hand, "Do you realize what you have done? You've killed the only hope and link to see my children. WHO DID THIS?"

Her eyes go dark and Lori whispers, "It's the blood rage."

We hear the dungeon doors closing and locking. Lori and I take out our star knives. I say, "Wendy calm down."

"Why did you kill him?" she charges toward us and Lori throws the star. knife and it lands on Wendy's chest causing her to fall to her knees. I guess the underworld will be receiving two more souls today.

Wendy looks at Lori and Lori falls to her knees and utters, "Command me, confessor."

No way...Stephanie isn't the only living confessor. Could it mean that Henry was confessed that's why he listened and did everything Wendy asks?

While I am still trying to wrap my head around everything, I hear Wendy say, "Kill her!"

"Yes, mistress," Lori punches me in the face knocking me to the ground. Before I can catch my breath a kick lands on my ribs. I would use my powers on her but they don't work on her. She gets on top of me and starts unleashing punches on my face. She stops and looks at me then I feel something stab into my heart. She is confessed so she follows her mistress's rules and Wendy confessed her under the blood rage. It means the bond won't break even if Wendy dies - Lori will carry out her wishes until she (Lori) dies.

"Lori, why?" I cough out blood.

"That's what my mistress desires," another blow to the face and its lights out.

LORETTA (LORI)

"Mistress! Stay with me, mistress," I pull the knife out of Wendy's chest and tear my dress then apply pressure on the wound.

"Lori," she coughs out blood, "It's too late, the underworld is waiting for me."

"No, my lady. I can heal you even if you die I will give you the breath of life."

"It's my turn to go...please watch over my children for me. Tell Stephanie that I am very sorry and that she should live her life well because this would be the last one. Since I am going she will live past her teens. Tell her to keep her pure heart. The

world is evil but needs people like her. Tell Maggie that life is too short to be angry and tell Brendon that I love him very much." With that, she takes her last breath.

I stand up and unlock the dungeon gates with my powers then head over to the King's palace. Wendy's children are there and I have to deliver the message. It's a day's journey but I have to deliver.

BRENDON

The guards wouldn't let us follow behind them and when we refused they applied force. I have never seen a kingdom that doesn't respect the prince and princess. These people only listen to the King. And, why doesn't the Queen speak? Is it also a rule that she doesn't?

The King frowns seeing us being dragged into the throne room. We all kneel. In front of the King including Oliver and Deanna. They are strict indeed.

"Oliver I have let you live your life how you please

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" the King states, "I let you chase that girl of yours but enough is enough. It's high time you start acting like the next King. There are many girls in RockNile, chose a Queen so we can get on with the ceremony... it's high time I give my soul to the Creator."

"Father I have said this and I will say it again, I will not be King of RockNile if Stephanie is not my Queen." Oliver kneels at his father's feet, "Please don't make me take someone I don't love. I know she always dies but father please use one of your wishes on her."

The King scoffs, "That girl is cursed and I cannot let anyone like that sit on the throne. She also possesses the Minder's mark. You will forget that girl and marry someone else."

"I will not do such," Oliver responds.

"Then watch her die and not be reborn," the King fires.

"If you do that then I will throw myself in the pits of the underworld and never be reborn too."

"Oliver how dare you embarrass me in front of people?" the King roars, "Guards!" a group of men stand in front of him knee on the ground, "Get me, Stephanie Richards, we are throwing her in the pits of the underworld where she dies - I see my son wants to challenge me."

"Father please don't do this," Deanna stands up.

The King responds, "I will have you thrown in there too if you talk while I am talking."

"My King!" the Queen stands up wanting to protest but the King shoots a stare at her and she quietly sits down. Stephanie gets dragged into the room and when Oliver tries to get to her they hold him down but he fights back. We also try to interfere but the guards are too strong.

"Enough!" The King roars and the room goes dead silent, "Take Stephanie to the pits of the underworld and call the whole of RockNile to come and witness this."

The King exits the room and everyone follows. We are heading to the pits of hell and everyone is crying. We all have metal chokers in case we try to use our powers to help Stephanie. We need a miracle. The journey to the pits of the underworld is a day and a half - we take breaks but it doesn't change that we are leading Stephanie to her death.

We have tried sneaking out and looking to see which courage Stephanie is in but the Queen and King are keeping a close eye on her. Finally, we get to the place and it looks like hell indeed - not that I know what hell looks like but I can feel the heat from where we are. Stephanie is standing in plain sight in front of the large blazing fire. We are not even allowed to say goodbye.

"Father can I please say goodbye," Oliver kneels at his father's feet. The King ignores him and he starts weeping, "Father I am begging you."

We all kneel and beg the King to let us say goodbye, poor Nathaniel is confused.

"Stop begging me only one person at a time can say goodbye."

Maggie goes first followed by Nathaniel then Deanna. I follow after Deanna and hug her Stephanie.

"Please don't cry," she wipes the tears off my face, "This is my fate."

"This is not fair."

She sniffles, "Life isn't fair. Be good to Maggie okay. I love you, little brother."

"I love you too," hug her once more then go back- it's Oliver's turn.

STEPHANIE

I fail to hold my sobs when Oliver gets closer to me. His eyes are bloodshot evident that he has been crying. He gets closer and smashes his lips on mine.

"I love you very much," he cups my face and wipes the tears off my face.

"I love you too and please am happy, for me."

He shakes his head, "I only live for you, princess and if you're not coming back then I don't want to live."

He shifts closer and kisses my lips then pushes me backwards, I can feel the heat from the pits of the underworld getting hotter. "Oliver don't!"

"This time we die together," he tightens his grip around my body and then kisses me before throwing us into the pit of hell.

.....**THE END**.....

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