



The Blood Queen

KENYA
WRIGHT

USA Today Bestselling Author

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Table of Contents

[Copyright Page](#)

[the blood queen](#)

[Prologue | Eternal Love | Camille](#)

[Chapter 1 | The Royal Court | Camille](#)

[Chapter 2 | So Many Answers | Camille](#)

[Chapter 3 | Legend Says | Camille](#)

[Chapter 4 | Heart | Camille](#)

[Chapter 5 | Love | Camille](#)

[Chapter 6 | Never a Dull Moment | Camille](#)

[Chapter 7 | Death | Camille](#)

[Chapter 8 | Then, So Be It | Xander](#)

[Chapter 9 | Change | Camille](#)

[Chapter 10 | Oblivious | Ian](#)

[Chapter 11 | Near Death | Xander](#)

[Chapter 12 | Many Changes | Camille](#)

[Chapter 13 | Death Lingered | Ian](#)

[Chapter 13 | Battle Form | Xander](#)

[Chapter 14 | The Beginning of the Journey | Camille](#)

[Chapter 15 | Control | Camille](#)

[Chapter 16 | Two Kings | Ian](#)

[Chapter 17 | An Introduction | Camille](#)

[Chapter 18 | Naughty Queen | Xander](#)

[Chapter 19 | Surprising Connections | Xander](#)

[Chapter 20 | Friend or Foe | Ian](#)

[Chapter 21 | Worthy | Ian](#)

[Chapter 22 | Queen Power | Camille](#)

[Chapter 23 | Desire and Caution | Camille](#)

[Chapter 24 | Let it Burn | Ian](#)

[Chapter 25 | Triple the Desire | Xander](#)

[Chapter 26 | A Dream of Gods | Camille](#)

[Chapter 27 | The Power of Blood | Camille](#)

[Chapter 28 | The Heart Mage | Camille](#)

[Chapter 29 | The Power of a Queen's Blood | Ian](#)

[Chapter 30 | Soul Bond | Xander](#)

[Chapter 31 | Great Restraint | Ian](#)

[Epilogue | The Time is Now | Ian](#)

To my KW Patrons,

You all have been with me on this steamy and seductive journey of **blood**, passion, and fantasy. Through your generosity, I have been able to **explore new worlds**, push the boundaries of my imagination, and create stories that capture the essence of what it means to be truly alive.

Thank you for making this Patreon experience so much fun, I am excited to see where our connection will take us next, as we continue to explore the **dark and alluring** world of vampire romance together.

To my beloved Diamond Divas,

I offer my heartfelt gratitude and admiration. You are the pillars of this community, the driving force behind my passion, and the reason I continue to do what I love every day. Thank you for being a part of my journey, for supporting my dreams, and for inspiring me to be the best writer I can be.

L. Nichols N. Chatman

T. Cleaver S. Cohen

C. Carbon A. Burgett

A. Hush T. Paten

Prologue

Eternal Love

Camille

Once we returned, there were no more questions, no more time to talk nor ponder the Quiet King or anything else. My body ached and yearned for Xander's skilled fangs, tongue, fingers, and cock. It was this intense craving throbbing through me and not giving my body a bit of rest. Unquenchable in every way, pulsing and pounding.

I was beyond addiction, and long past caring about the consequences or repercussions that would come.

I had made up my mind.

I now knew that not only could I not be too far from Xander, but I barely could survive without him in my life. I would need him too much. Crave and yearn and drown into all-consuming obsession.

How could I think I could ever leave him? Why did I believe I had some choice?

The moment he pierced me with his fangs was the moment I became his to own, to dominate, to feed from, to fuck, to love in any way he desired.

The sewer was warm during the day, but in Xander's room, we were surrounded by the cool smoothness of his rainbow colored sheets.

"Finally, my queen." Xander moved over me like the sun moves across the sky, warm and embracing.

"Finally." I let out an eager gasp and moved my hands across his massive muscular arms, feeling each and every ripple of raw strength beneath my fingertips.

Is he really all mine?

Yes, queen.

I smirked at his being inside of my head.

I wish I could be in your head.

You don't.

Why not?

Because the many images of what I want to do to your body may scare you.

I tensed.

Tell me.

Not this day.

And. . .

And?

You're not mad about Ian?

That is a discussion for later today.

I could sense the power in his tone as his voice slipped through my head. I should have pressed on, but my need for him was too intense—too strong.

My hands were relentless as I explored him higher, slipping up his chiseled chest, brushing past his gorgeous face, and feeling the seductive smoothness of his obsidian horns against my palms.

Xander groaned in pleasure, his deep voice echoing in the air around us. His thick, heavy cock pulsed against my thigh, and his desire for me was palpable, hard and enormous.

With each stroke of my hands along his horns, I felt a powerful arousal stirring within me—a forbidden desire that begged to be unleashed.

His lids drooped over his eyes, half way shielding them from me. “You badly want something, my queen.”

“Do I?”

“I can smell the need all over you.”

My breathing picked up. “Rub them against me.”

His fangs appeared. Lust heated his gold eyes. “My horns?”

“Yes.”

Soon, he lowered and those horns caressed my soft curves, gliding them along my breasts. The craving in my body intensified. Their touch was electrifying.

I gasped as he slipped the horns along one nipple and then the other, gently coaxing them to harden in hunger.

“Oh, Xander.” I moaned and trembled with pleasure. “They feel so good on me.”

“How good?”

“Like you’re fucking me, even though you’re not. Like you’re licking my pussy, even though your tongue is nowhere close.”

What made his horns so deliciously erotic? Why did a simple touch of them send my body on edge? I didn’t doubt that his horns alone, their touch. .

.their smoothness, could probably bring me to ecstasy all by themselves.

Xander's lips twitched with a hungry smile. He rubbed his horns harder against my breasts and watched me writhe in pleasure.

"Oh! Oh!"

He lowered even further and began slipping his horns along my aching pussy.

"Dear Ambi!" I shivered.

The pleasure was so raw, so intense, I thought I might cum.

My erotic need for him was quickly growing too strong to hold back.

Unable to stop myself, I humped one of the thick horns, rubbing my clit against it and rocking my hips back and forth.

Xander's breath grew ragged.

"Oh! Oh!" My pussy creamed on his horns, coating them with my juices.

A deep growl left him.

Then he lifted his head. My arousal dripped from his horns. I slipped my fingers along the wet horns.

His fangs extended longer than ever before.

I widened my eyes.

He groaned. "Let me taste the juices on your fingers."

I placed my hand against his lips.

He licked my fingers. His fangs nipped at the tips, drawing tiny specks of blood. He licked that too.

I blinked. "Your fangs are longer."

"Does that scare you?"

"No. It's just that. . ."

"Yes?"

"You are both dangerous and captivating at the same time."

"Get used to it, my queen. I have no intentions of ever letting you go." He grabbed my hips and flipped me over in a blur that rocked me.

I blinked my eyes. "You're stronger and faster too."

"And you are the blood that courses through my veins." He lifted me up so that I was on all fours. "You are the very essence of my existence."

My greedy pussy drooled with wanton need.

Panting, I glanced over my shoulder.

Xander's mouth formed a smile as he looked down at my glistening wetness. "Without you, I am but a shell of a being, lost in eternal darkness. Just a shadow. Nothing."

I licked my lips. “And with me?”

“With you. . .” He began to stroke his cock and dear Ambi I swore that his length had grown bigger than ever before.

It’s enormous. . .

You see what you do to me, my queen?

I widened my eyes in shock and studied this gigantic new cock of his.

The base had grown exponentially in size, filled with a thick vein that pulsed and throbbed with each beat of his heart. The head of his cock was now bulbous and swollen, its color darkening to a deep purple, and two lightning-like veins snaked their way down either side.

Even his testicles were engorged with blood, fuller than I’d ever seen them before.

My body was on fire, an inferno of conflicting emotions that threatened to explode within me.

Fear and desire raced through my veins in a frenzy, an unstoppable force that made my heart pound with anticipation.

It was all a strange and conflicting mix of emotions spinning inside of my body.

I wanted that big cock inside me with an intensity that pushed my senses to the brink, yet also yearned to flee to escape the inevitable pain that it could bring.

Every fiber of my being screamed at me to go yet I stayed put, waiting in anticipation as if hypnotized by the mix of pain and pleasure soon to come.

I trembled again. “You are. . .changing. . .so much. . .and so fast.”

“But, still I must answer your question.”

I raised my view from his cock and put it on his face.

“What am I with *you*?” His gaze grew intense. “With you, my dark world is bathed in the light of your love, and I am reborn and forever changing.”

“Still. . .” A shiver of lust ran through me.

He leaned his head to the side. “Still?”

I swallowed. “You are also changing me.”

He slipped that huge cock along the opening of my pussy.

I gasped and no longer had my view on him. Instead, I looked forward and threw my head back, yearning for more of that huge, mushroomed tip along my pussy.

“How am I changing you, my queen?”

“You’re awakening my soul, unlocking the depths of it. You’re. . .” I shivered as he pierced me only an inch, expanding my pussy around him. My inner walls shuddered. “You’re showing me the beauty of *true* love.”

Groaning, he pushed that huge cock all the way into me.

And somehow I took it. Somehow I survived. Somehow I remained on all fours as exquisite pleasure and fiery pain ripped through me.

And as his cock entered me, so did his voice in my head. ***I am forever yours, bound to you in this life and the next.***

He gripped my hips and pushed his cock into my soaking wet pussy, spreading my lips even wider than ever before.

My pussy was hot and tight for him.

Letting out a desperate moan, I gripped the cool sheets hard, digging my nails into the soft material.

I am powerless against the pull of your embrace.

With that, he slowly slid back and thrust his length all the way into me again.

I am tempted just from your smile.

How could I respond? How could I even think with my pussy tightly clamped around his huge cock.

“Oh!” I cried.

I could feel him all the way in me, hitting the very bottom of my pussy and touching my heart if that were even fucking possible.

If someone ever tried to take you, oceans of blood would flood this world.

He pulled back again and thrust in, impaling my pussy.

A whimper escaped me.

He pulled back and thrust all the way in again.

Harder and harder he fucked me, slamming that enormous cock all the way into my depths.

“Oh!” I’d never felt anything like this before—so full, hot, and needy before.

My pussy was on fire.

The pleasure was unbelievable. I lost all sense of reality. I was cradled in the warm embrace of his cock, basking in the glory of our thunderous love.

“Oh! Oh!” I sobbed with pleasure. So many tears streamed down my face.

Oh, king.

Groaning out loud, his thrusts grew faster, harder.

The sound of his larger balls slapping against my clit and his huge cock ramming into my depths filled the room and echoed off the walls.

In my head, I saw glittering stars and explosions of color, shimmering magic and bright rainbows.

He slipped one hand around my hip and began rubbing my clit.

It felt so good I threw my head back and cried out. “Oh, my King!”

Surely, all in the sewer heard me.

“Oh! Oh!” I was so close, so damn close to exploding all over him.

Loudly grunting, he thrust in and out of me, his hand circling my clit.

You’re close?

Very.

To my shock, he yanked his cock out of me.

“N-no.” I shivered.

Before I could look back, he flipped me around. I lost my balance and fell backwards.

In a blur, he spread my legs apart and lapped at my clit, fast.

“Oh!” Ecstasy quaked through me. “Oh! Xander!”

And then he did an even more shocking thing.

He pierced the mound of my pussy with his fangs.

I screamed, and didn’t know if it was from pain or pleasure. Ecstasy or terrifying shock. I was no longer in my body. I floated somewhere else.

Levitated. Unable to truly see through the blinding light of a million suns exploded all around me in shockwaves of hot ecstasy.

Xander flicked those fingers against my clit, toying with the wet bud and driving me further to orgasm. Setting my body ablaze.

“Oh!!! Oh!!!”

And still he drank from my pussy.

“Oh!!” I whimpered. “Oh! Oh!”

I had no sense of reality. No idea of time or anything but his fangs and his fingers and the pleasure. The pure earth-shattering bliss. The spinning of my existence.

Finally, I didn’t cum. I unraveled. I broke apart into a whirlwind of pleasurable color. Twisting and spinning. Tumbling and flipping.

The only thing that anchored me was his voice in my head.

Our love is eternal, my queen.

Chapter 1

The Royal Court

Camille

It was time for answers.

The next night we stood at the castle's entrance in disguise—Victoria, Ty, Leeta, Ian, Xander, and me.

A vampire royal guard studied us. Brown straps wrapped around his whole body. A crimson cape hung from his shoulders to his feet, and a huge red-and-brown feathered hat sat on his head.

He raised his eyebrows. "And you all are?"

"We're the entertainment, of course. I'm Tyson the Incredible, the leader of this group, and best juggler in all the land." Ty clapped his hand twice and did a twirl. He wore a silver leather mask with a brass nose that jutted a foot out and held tiny bells on the tip. His costume was silver with white stars.

"And the rest of these people behind you?" The guard didn't appear impressed with Ty's two-second performance. "Who are they to you?"

"My musicians and assistants, of course." Ty gestured to us. "They're employed to help me keep the queens and dominas laughing."

We all wore black masks that had silver triangles decorating the space for the foreheads and cheeks.

Form-fitting full body leotards draped Victoria, Leeta, and I. they shimmered against our forms.

Xander and Ian's masks were silver and brown. Additionally, they wore baggy costumes similar to Ty's.

Victoria had come up with the plan to imitate entertainers. Since she'd been on the castle's management staff, she knew the queens constantly ordered performers to come to the castle and almost always forgot to notify the guards.

"Entertainers?" The guard smirked as if he didn't believe us. "Have one of the others perform something."

We'd been prepared for the guard to test us and had practiced several acts just in case. Victoria believed mine was the best one, but Ty was ready to juggle next if I couldn't convince the guard.

Stepping up in front, I hummed and sang out a slow tune my mother used to sing to me as a child on cold winters' nights, "Two moons decorate the sky, shining on those that are low and high. Seek truth in the golden sun, but the moons don't just pass by—"

"That's enough." The guard held up his hand and sniffed in my direction. "You have a lovely voice."

Yes you do. Xander's voice sounded in my head. ***Will you sing for me tonight when I'm inside of you?***

I turned my head to him.

If you can get sex off of your mind for a few seconds, then yes.

Xander grunted in response.

"Are you taken, sweet bird?" The guard tapped me on my shoulder. "You smell divine."

"Yes, she's taken." Xander's wooden dagger appeared at the guard's chin within seconds.

Oh no. Stop it.

Ty jumped next to Xander before the vampire could do anything further.

"I'm sorry, sir." Ty patted Xander's shoulder. "She's my youngest daughter and this is her very protective big brother."

Xander didn't step back.

Ty gave him a nervous smile. "As you can see, he's young and very foolish."

"This is your youngest daughter?" The guard's attention remained on me as if he couldn't care less that a knife was at his throat. He probably figured Xander was no challenge for him.

"Yes, sir." Ty bobbed his head and tugged Xander back. "I have two daughters. She's the baby."

In Capitol City, the youngest daughter and son were expected to remain at home to take care of their parents until their death. Therefore, most young children never truly courted or married until they were pretty old and their parents were gone. It was even frowned upon to show a romantic interest in them. People saw it as tempting the young ones away from their familial duties.

"You're a very lucky man." The guard sighed. "Carry on then."

Xander placed his dagger back into its sheath.

The guard unlocked the steel-barred gate and opened it.

With no further problems, we marched into the Quiet King's castle.

“Xander, you can’t kill every man who shows an interest in Camille,” Ty whispered. “She’s a beautiful woman with many talents. You’ll have a long trail of dead bodies if you kill them all.”

“Then so be it,” Xander hissed behind me.

Ian muttered behind his mask, “The joys of the ripening.”

I gazed at Xander.

Ty is right. Calm your temper while we are in the castle.

Xander silently asked me in my mind. ***Did I scare you?***

Yes. You could’ve given away our disguise or even worse, been killed.

I followed Ty and Victoria as we journeyed through an opulent red hallway. An intricate floral pattern, alive with crimson red roses and sharp green thorns, ran up the wide walls.

Ian walked along on my side while he moved his face from side-to-side, drinking in the whole area. I wondered how he felt returning to the castle, a place he’d once considered home.

I definitely had my own uncomfortable thoughts.

I can’t believe I’m back here, walking willingly into a place where I was enslaved.

I’d been down this path many times before and exited the castle for personal supplies or just to take a break for a few minutes from the rigid domina life.

The Quiet King provided dominas with a small budget of fifty pocs a month. Most spent their money on exotic candy, expensive chocolates, and wine.

I’d bought trinkets for my girls and mailed them home.

Stunned, I realized that I didn’t remember seeing any of the dolls or pictures I’d sent displayed in their bedroom the time I’d snuck in there with Xander.

What did Ethan do with them?

Xander stirred on my other side as we continued toward the passageway that led to the Royal Court. His movement made me think he’d read my thoughts.

Soon giggling and chatter soared greeted us. Music played as we opened the door. Everywhere the perfume of blooming flowers drenched the air.

Two Royal Guards flanked the entrance. They glanced at our group for a few seconds then returned to their earlier conversation.

The Royal Court appeared as we marched in.

A turquoise-stoned fountain decorated the corner of the courtyard. White doves sipped water at the top.

I knew that the mechanical birds would be released closer to midnight, to play the same songs they always did.

The color of the day must be purple.

Everywhere dominas lounged on satin-cushioned sofas and chairs draped in plum chiffon robes. Purple leather sandals covered their feet. Violets adorned their hair.

Maids hurried around them with trays, dashing back and forth from the kitchen to their assigned domina, bringing her whatever she desired.

A savory aroma of roasted meats merged with the flowery perfume.

Other maids brushed and combed their dominas' hair.

Young vampire children, the ones the Quiet King deemed as displeasing to look at, fanned the dominas with huge peacock-feathered fans.

The Quiet King owned over a hundred wives and five queens.

The queens began as dominas like me, but once they delivered at least sixty vampire children, they were given the title of queen, allowed more freewill, and could assert authority over a line of dominas below them.

I directed my attention to the center of the Royal Courtyard.

Five queens rested on blood-red thrones. Each woman's outfit was themed in a precious metal.

The Quiet King's first queen—not Phinova, but the first domina to be honored with the title of queen—wore a platinum-gold crown and was draped in a shiny platinum-golden robe. It hurt to look at her as she shined under the two moonlights.

Regular gold decorated the queen on her right.

Silver draped the third queen, who was Queen Regina and Xander's mother.

And she was a breathtaking woman to behold.

Sandy blonde hair, as thick as a lion's mane, flowed down to her knees. Once, I'd watched her maids brush the tangles out of her long tresses for an entire night. Queen Regina's eyes gleamed icy blue.

Although the other queens and dominas had pale skin, due to maintaining a vampire schedule of sleeping during the day and walking around at night, Queen Regina boasted a golden, tanned complexion.

Many dominas whispered that she never slept and wandered Capitol City during the daylight with secret lovers. I wondered if the rumors were correct.

“And there’s my mother.” Xander crossed his arms across his chest.

Queen Regina spotted Ty’s mask, scanned our group, and stood with a sleek grace that reminded me of Xander’s fluid movements.

I looked at Xander.

She knows it is you?

She always does. Leeta told me once that somehow dominas could always sense their kids several feet away. I still don’t know how.

That fact truly intrigued me. Was it a specific energy that ran through the domina when her child was near? Was it a smell or sound?

Either way, everything was working out as planned.

Yet, my nerves buzzed with unease underneath my skin and my blood raced in my veins.

I knew Queen Regina wouldn’t notify the guards that we were trespassing. It was her who told Octavia to help me escape. But I was still unsure of whether I should consider her my friend. Her goal for my escape was so I could trigger Xander’s ripening and probably birth a vampire army for him.

Never.

I had no intention of making vampire children to fight in a war against the Quiet King.

Ian seized my right hand.

Xander grabbed my left.

They both tenderly squeezed and encased my fingers in the warmth that only a vampire prince and vampire king could give. My pulse slowed down.

“Your heart’s hammering is driving us crazy.” Ian leaned my way.

“Relax. Nothing will happen to you while we’re here.”

Xander nodded. “I don’t like to agree with Ian, but on this topic I must.”

“Okay. I will calm down.” I blew out a long breath and squeezed their hands, allowing them to keep me anchored.

Up ahead, Queen Regina strolled in her elegant silver gown toward her sleeping quarters. Her two maids trailed behind her, holding the train of her gown.

We maintained ten feet behind the maids.

When Queen Regina approached her room she stopped in front of the guards positioned on the sides of her door way. “I’ll be enjoying my delivered-entertainment in private.”

One guard nodded and half-bowed.

The other guard quickly opened her door.

She was queen and had already displayed her loyalty and service to the Quiet King. Unlike the domina guards, her guards were there to protect her, not to keep her within the castle's gates.

"Thank you." Queen Regina strolled into her quarters.

Xander and Ian released my hands.

Silently, we all followed her into her quarters.

Will she truly give us answers?

Chapter 2

So Many Answers

Camille

Queen Regina's space was quite a site.

Satin sheets draped all the walls. Glittering gems shimmered along the drapes.

The room was dominated by a huge, cushioned throne, which looked like a high-backed chair with a silver headrest in the shape of a massive coiling silver snake.

Once the door closed behind us, we took off our masks.

Everyone except Ian. He kept his mask on.

Xander stormed to the front. "I want answers, *mother*. And I want them now."

"You smell different. My handsome prince is now a king." Queen Regina elegantly bowed before him. "My god, you're ripening as we speak. You also have that same electrical charge around you just like your father. I can feel it. Have you unearthed any of your abilities? What are they?"

"Enough, Mother," Xander growled. "Tell me everything you know, starting with why you chose Camille as my queen."

In that moment Queen Regina turned to me, her gaze traveling along my face and then down my body, assessing me. "I like *your* choice. But, son, as you remember, I sent *many* dominas your way, at least fifty. You chose this one as your queen, so only *you* can answer that question."

A rumble boomed from Xander's chest as he stalked a circle around her. "I have no patience for games. Camille's blood is different from the other dominas."

"No, it is not." A knowing smirk spread across her face. "Sure, Camille's blood is different than a regular domina's blood. However, all of the fifty dominas I sent to you for escape had this same odd blood type."

Does she know what a blood mage is?

I stepped forward. "And what blood type is it?"

"My son's queen speaks." She backed up and lowered herself onto her throne.

Ty, Victoria, Ian, and Leeta remained within the shadows behind Xander and me. No one wanted the Queen to know Leeta was now a vampire.

Honestly, Xander didn't want to bring her to the castle, but Leeta refused to be left alone in the sewers again.

Xander glared at his mother. "Did you hear her question?"

"I did, son."

Xander leaned his head to the side. "And what is the answer?"

"My husband has been experimenting with blood types for centuries and he won't reveal his intentions to anyone." Queen Regina crossed her legs. "But I believe this domina system doesn't produce soldiers fast enough for him. I think he is trying to find a way for a domina to hold more than six fetuses in their womb."

I cringed.

A six-fetus pregnancy was already difficult for dominas to come to term with. Many couldn't walk by the third month and were forced to rest in bed throughout their entire pregnancy. Once delivery arrived, many dominas died in surgery as the multiple babies were cut out of them.

"Okay. Lots of experimenting." Xander quirked his brows. "However, did he ever find this special blood type or create it?"

"I don't think so, but he found some new blood type that he named *Phinova*. My spies have managed to sneak some of his papers to me. The name *Phinova* shows up all over his ledgers and is always next to certain dominas' test results." The queen placed her hands in her lap and threaded her fingers together. "This *Phinova* blood type holds the answer. So every time I could, Xander, I asked you to help a domina with the *Phinova* blood type escape. Sadly, you never chose your queen from them. Meanwhile, my spies continued to monitor the King."

My breath caught in my throat, but I forced myself to remain stiff and not show my reaction.

Ian stepped to my side.

Somehow the Quiet King was able to discover blood mages. That had to be why he wrote *Phinova* next to their names.

I frowned. "Do you have any idea how he was able to identify these particular dominas?"

"All I know is that he created a secret test to find this type and discovered several human women who had it." The Queen's face shifted to a grim look. "For some reason, he became desperate with the town of Zumaya."

I parted my lips in shock. “What?”

“No one knows why, but he slowly and secretly began destroying the Zumayan families’ income.”

Xander growled. “How?”

Queen Regina looked at me. “He canceled all Capitol City orders on Zumayan mushrooms, but still, your town prospered. Next, he ordered slaves to sneak into your town at night and damage the Zumayan crop. They poured liquid metal into the earth and then covered it with soil. Then he waited, until the town was desperate for his help.”

Rage vibrated through my body so hard that I gritted my teeth.

All those deaths and hunger were due to the Quiet King?

There had been a drought. It hadn’t rained for months and by the time it did rain, the crops didn’t grow. We’d all assumed it was due to the shortage of water that season.

Months later, we tried again and again, but still no crops.

And we suffered all of this because he wanted more blood mages?

So many people died from hunger and illness. I’d lost most of my family.

“Your husband’s name was...” she held a finger to her forehead and then said, “Evan or Ethan, right?”

My mouth gaped open in disbelief.

Xander’s fangs emerged. “Ethan is his name.”

“Yes, Ethan was paid by the Quiet King to offer you for a sizeable amount, if I remember correctly.” She shook her head. “I found it such an interesting piece of information. I made a note with one of my spies to monitor you and notify me immediately when you arrived at the castle. I figured you would be perfect for Xander. Surely, your husband was a cruel man and that when Xander helped you escape, you would fall for my son instead.”

I just stood there, stunned. “Ethan? Are you sure?”

I’d thought that I volunteered, not been sold. What about the young girls? Did they really test positive or was it a situation that Ethan created?

But then. . .Ethan always knew me well. If there was a situation in which I could take the place of another and prevent them from being harmed, I would.

A heavy weight soared down on me and almost dragged my body to the floor. I wanted to crawl somewhere and curl into myself.

Xander shook his head. “Can I trust this information from you?”

“My spies have no reason to fabricate their observations. I reward them well.” The queen shrugged her shoulders. “Zumaya was given ten times the amount usually permitted and Ethan was delivered five human women to choose as a new wife. This was all a part of his deal—”

“Enough,” I whispered as my heart broke into pieces.

I was prepared for Ethan to move on when I left. I was okay with him having a wife to mother my children due to loneliness, but I had not been prepared for this much deceit.

Apparently, I didn’t know Ethan as much as I thought I did.

My eyes watered. Embarrassment warmed my cheeks.

I stared down at the ground.

You knew him, Camille, but your town’s people were slowly dying.

Xander’s voice seeped into my mind.

The most loyal people do the craziest things when death is at their door.

I cleared my throat, still looking at the floor in front of me. “So, when the King finally had me, why didn’t he impregnate me?”

“This was the most unclear part of all.” Queen Regina sighed. “Granted, he’d impregnated many dominas that arrived before you and were labeled Phinova.”

Xander asked, “What happened with them?”

“They either died in labor or birthed dead babies. I assume that is why he chose to pay such a high amount for you. Not only had you already had children, but he listed your daughters as having the Phinova type, too.”

I scowled. “My daughters were tested?”

She nodded. “Your daughters are on the future list of dominas to enter the Royal Court.”

Not while I’m alive!

Xander’s face snapped my way, telling me that he heard my thoughts. His golden eyes brightened with rage.

Don’t worry, we’ll do something. I’ll spend my life making sure they are safe from his harm, whether you stay with me or not.

His voice soothed me a little.

I nodded at him and held back my tears.

My girls’ faces flashed in my head. They looked like mini images of me, but most of all, they had that same blood-red hair.

No. Please, Ambi. Help me stop this.

My daughters had to be blood mages too.

Xander continued to watch me.

The Quiet King will be dead before your daughters are of age.

Confidence glazed over his eyes and mixed with rage.

Trust me, Camille.

I trust you.

Xander turned back to Queen Regina. “There’s something I don’t understand.”

“Yes, son?”

“The other dominas that you sent to me did not have red hair.”

“Nonetheless, your father labeled them the same as Camille.” The queen shrugged. “Personally, I think she may be the strongest of them all. Maybe the others had a diluted blood type whereas Camille’s is strong.”

“What do you think my father’s plan for Camille was?”

The queen laughed. “I believe he didn’t know himself. He took vials of her blood weekly and he lay in her bed, never touching her.”

I tensed at the knowledge of how much she had monitored me.

“My spies reported nothing else. Stupidly, he didn’t guard her enough and let her leave the gates, which was all I needed for Octavia to whisper thoughts in her ear of escape.”

I gritted my teeth.

“And then you sent Camille to me, hoping that I would fall in love with her?” Xander sneered.

“Actually, no. I hadn’t planned on that. I figured she would fall for you and freely give you her blood. I just needed your ripening triggered.” She chuckled. “But you seem pretty taken with her. Is that true?”

“Yes.” Xander formed his lips into a straight line. “For once you’ve impacted my life in a rewarding way.”

“I’ve sent you so many dominas. And all my spies say is that you just use their bodies and drink their blood.”

I blinked.

“You have spies with me?” Xander growled.

“Of course, my newly ripening king.” The queen raised her eyebrows. “Do you think it is a coincidence that my own *maid* and personal *guard* raised you?”

What?

I glanced over my shoulder and saw Ty avert his eyes to the ground. Leeta backed up farther into the shadows.

Victoria held a sad expression, but she didn't appear shocked.

Of course Victoria must've known Ty spied for the queen. She probably helped at one time or another.

Claws ripped from Xander's fingertips. He looked around at our surrounding friends. "So none of you actually cared for me all of these years?"

Ty and Leeta began to protest, but Xander snarled so loud it rocked the queen's walls and silenced them.

Her two guards from outside ran into her quarters, wielding sharp wooden swords.

"Queen Regina, is everything okay?" The biggest guard stomped her way. "We heard a threatening noise."

I hoped the guards wouldn't spot Xander's claws.

"This is all part of the performance." Queen Regina clapped at us. "I'm having an amazing time. Please leave."

Reluctantly, the guards backed out and departed.

I squeezed Xander's hand and edged closer to him so that our hips touched.

I actually care for you. That's all that matters.

I thought and prayed with all my heart that he could hear my thoughts.

Your queen is here and I'll always be with you.

Xander's claws retracted.

"Understand, son. They love you, but they are still expected to report to me." The queen gave us a warm smile. "Ty and Leeta have tried for many years to escape their service to me, but I would not allow it. They never liked the spying. But, you are destined to be king, and I would not allow it."

I spotted Xander rolling his eyes from my peripheral vision.

"I sent Camille to you so that you would drink her blood. I hoped that maybe this Phinova type would be stronger than all the rest." She turned to me. "I truly didn't think you would take his heart. I'm as mystified as the both of you must be. I expected a different fate."

"And what was that?" I asked.

"Well, like all the other dominas Xander has helped escape, they have all eventually been caught and thrown into the castle's dungeons." She glanced at her nails as if the silver polish were more important to her than these dominas' lives.

“What?” Xander stepped forward. “The dominas I saved were caught later?”

His mother nodded.

Dear, Ambi.

Meanwhile, she planned to let me wind back up at the castle eventually, but in even worse conditions.

Xander sneered. “How many of these dominas are in the dungeon?”

“Hmmm...perhaps twenty or so are trapped in the dungeon,” the Queen replied.

I turned to Xander.

We can't let these women sit there.

He looked at me and then his voice slipped in my head as he smiled.

Are you trying to take my place as the best pathfinder in Capitol City?

I'm serious.

A wicked smirk spread across the queen's face. “I could draw you a map to free the dominas.”

“And why would you help us?” Xander faced her. “Is there a reason why you're so willing to help me release so many?”

“It's time to begin the steps to become a king.” Queen Regina held out her hands. “Currently, a hundred guards seek your queen. There are dominas in a dungeon just waiting for you to breed with them.”

What?

She tossed her blonde hair over her shoulders. “These are the years you should begin your army, and get stronger, birthing many babies.”

My core shook with rage.

Camille, would you be upset if I tore her head off?

I swallowed down my anger.

Don't kill her, my king. She's your mother.

She hasn't been much of one.

We still need her.

For what? he asked, still scowling at his mother.

We need her to help us free the Phinova dominas.

Right now, the dominas are not as important as keeping you.

Still, we should save them. . .tonight.

Ian watched us.

Could he hear our exchange?

Xander's voice slipped back into my head.

What is your plan?

You'll see.

I approached Queen Regina until I was three feet from her.

Chapter 3

Legend Says

Camille

I gazed at Queen Regina. “You’re a wise woman.”

From that large, coiled snake throne, she looked down at me. “I am a very wise woman.”

“Then, perhaps you can help us.”

“In what way?”

“How should we free the Phinova dominas from the dungeon?”

Careful, Xander warned inside my head. ***My mother has been manipulating and playing games for one hundred and fifty years.***

“You all will remain as my guests tonight.” Queen Regina rang a bell that was on her throne’s right arm.

Two maids rushed in, draped in silver.

She turned to them. “Notify my guards that my entertainers will be staying in my guest area. I want them to perform for me during the daylight.”

She held up one finger. “Therefore, you must also prepare three rooms.”

The maids bowed and headed outside.

“Luck is on your side.” The queen beamed. “The Quiet King took most of his army with him. He’s planning a surprise attack on a territory full of mages.”

I tensed. “And he’s also sent Royal Guards to hunt me.”

“Exactly. I heard they burned Freemont to the ground.” Queen Regina directed her attention to Leeta. “I am glad to see you survived, dear Leeta. And without a scratch?”

Leeta mumbled, “Yes, your majesty.”

I was surprised that Leeta didn’t seize the opportunity to tell the queen she was now a vampire. I wondered why and if that was somehow for Xander’s benefit.

“There are only ten percent of the usual amount of Royal Guards on the castle grounds,” Queen Regina said. “Even less are around during the daylight. That would be the best time to smuggle the dominas to a secret area. I have property in the north that will serve as your kingdom, Xander. I’ve

been preparing it all your life. It's supplied with food and a human staff to serve you well."

"I'm sure you prepared for everything, Mother," Xander muttered.

How did she get the money or ability to do that?

"Daylight? It will burn Xander and everybody else." I shook my head. "Maybe we can leave through the sewers."

"The King provided all day guards with heavy leather uniforms. I've heard they are uncomfortable, but I'm certain these three can take the heat." She centered on Ian. "Is he also a vampire? I can't tell through the mask."

"I'm a vampire," Ian said.

She nodded. "So then we will need four uniforms."

"Actually. . .we'll need *five*." I bit my lip.

"Why?" Queen Regina's eyes widened as if she were a child receiving a new present. "Did you manage to sneak another vampire in without me knowing?"

Should we tell her that Leeta is a vampire or lie?

I gazed at Xander.

Being that Leeta has been spying for her all this time, she'll probably say it herself.

Xander shrugged. "Leeta is the fifth vampire."

I could hear the intake of breath and wasn't sure if it were Leeta, the queen, or both.

Silence proceeded for a few minutes.

We all remained still as Queen Regina's face showed utter shock.

Then, finally she shook her head. "No. That is impossible. She was not born a vampire."

Xander crossed his big arms over his chest. "Yet, she is one."

"But, that is impossible."

"Apparently, it is not."

"E-excuse me. What is this?" Queen Regina slowly rose from her throne. "Are you really serious?"

Xander frowned. "I am."

Queen Regina slowly let her through and strolled over to Leeta.

I turned around to watch them.

Leeta stepped out of the shadows and opened her mouth, displaying her fangs.

“No.” Queen Regina touched one fang. “Dear Ambi, you really have fangs! And your eyes. . .I didn’t even realize! How? No, this is not possible.”

Queen Regina backed up, covering her chest. “I want answers, now! Immediately!”

No one said anything. I think we were all waiting on Xander to lead.

She spun around and stared at her son. “Xander, what is going on?”

“Focus on assisting us with the dominas’ release,” Xander ordered. “Then we will meet outside of the castle and discuss *this* further.”

“No!” Queen Regina shrieked. “You will tell me this minute. Xander, did you wield this great power?”

He kept a neutral expression on his face. “No.”

She froze for a few seconds. “I don’t understand. How did Leeta become a vampire?”

“Xander is right.” I sighed. “If you can help us with the dominas and keep us all safe, then that would be a great display of your loyalty and trust.”

“My loyalty? I put you two together.” She pointed to us.

I nodded. “And for that we are grateful.”

“You don’t want to start our partnership on the wrong foot, son.” Queen Regina glared at Xander.

“I never said I would be king or unite with you,” Xander said. “I’m freeing these women because that is what I do and I do it well.”

“Remember that you’re in a castle surrounded by many guards who will crowd this room if I scream.”

A deep, bubbling laughter came out of Xander’s chest as he prowled toward his mother. His face was an inch from hers. His fangs expanded well beyond his bottom lip.

“You can scream and the room will fill with guards, but your blood will be down my throat before the guards take out their swords.” Xander’s gold eyes glowed. “And no one will remember Queen Regina. You’ll be forgotten and replaced by tomorrow night.”

She inched back. “You wouldn’t kill me.”

“I will rip your throat out in seconds if you endanger my queen.” Xander flashed a fang-filled smile. “Shall we put this to a test?”

Her bottom lip quivered.

I moved toward them and placed my hand on the center of his back.

“Let’s stop all of this nonsense and get back to the plan, please.”

If she puts you in danger, I will kill her.

Xander's voice echoed in my head.

You can't hurt her or any other woman. It's one of the many reasons why I'm falling for you. But I think your mother doesn't know it's a bluff.

Xander's fangs retracted as he stepped back.

Queen Regina's focus went to me. "You have a lot of control over him, don't you?"

I blushed. "No."

"I think you do."

Xander chuckled to himself. "My queen has more control of me than *you* will ever have."

Queen Regina glared and within an instant straightened her face to an unemotional look. "Well, she's your first queen. The first one begins the prince's ripening into full maturity and will always have the King's heart."

She sauntered back over to Leeta and touched the woman's now unaged face. "The Quiet King wasn't always a treacherous mute. He was once a fair prince like you, Xander."

"So, you were around during those years?" I asked.

Xander had figured his mother was just a child then and believed that she ingested lots of blood and potions daily to live so long.

Leeta and he had no idea how old she really was.

"Yes. I was just a baby, but my mother served as a maid for the Quiet King's family. She told me that the King and his brother used to rule with one queen, one with hair as red as Camille's." Queen Regina let her fingers travel over Leeta's cheeks.

Leeta stayed still, unmoving as if she were afraid of Queen Regina.

Ian's voice sounded hoarse as he spoke. "What happened to the King, his brother, and the queen?"

"There are so many stories that have spread in this castle." The Queen stepped away from Leeta and sighed. "But the similar details are that a greedy vampire king from the East Lands invaded the castle. He tied the Quiet King up with a rope that had wooden spikes all over it. None of the castle guards helped. My mother said the kingdom believed that he and his queen were abominations."

Ian growled. "Abominations?"

"The legend says that him and his brother shared her like a common blood whore." Queen Regina twisted her face in disgust. "None of his guards or soldiers protected the Quiet King. Therefore, the greedy king from the East

Lands had no trouble in seizing the castle and killing the first queen right in front of him. I'm not sure whatever happened to the brother. Some say he was the Greedy King. Others claim he ran away like a coward."

A dark growl left Ian's chest.

Everyone's faces snapped to Ian.

The sound carried throughout the room. Xander shoved me behind him as if Ian were going to hurt me.

One of the queen's guards peeked his face inside. "Is this also a part of the entertainment, mistress?"

The Queen's voice squeaked. "Yes."

Ian stormed over to the queen and stopped a foot in front of her. "What happened after this East Land king killed the queen?"

"Who are you?" She inched back.

He lowered down until his nose was a few inches from hers. "What happened?"

"They say that the greedy vampire king died by the hands of the Quiet King."

I cleared my throat. "How?"

She moved away from Ian and looked at me. "You see, his queen's death triggered this blinding fury. It heightened his powers."

Ian put his back to us.

I wondered what was going through his mind.

Queen Regina continued, "The Quiet King forced himself to use all of his power in one burst as he tore out all those wooden spikes from his body. And when he freed himself, he killed the greedy vampire in such a horrific manner that the Greedy King's soldiers and his own guards feasted on his blood."

Xander widened his eyes. "I've heard enough."

"Not me." I gripped Xander's hand. "Why did the Quiet King become mute?"

"Elders say that all of the power he called in that burst ate away at his senses." Queen Regina shook her head. "His sight, hearing, and vocal abilities burned away."

Ian clenched and unclenched his hands. The room thickened with power.

"Is that why the Quiet King killed all of the surrounding kings?" I asked.

"Maybe." Queen Regina shrugged and stared at Ian. "Perhaps it was revenge, or he killed them so that no one would ever invade Capitol City

again. It's even possible that as the years passed by, he continued to conquer more land and simply became drunk on the power."

Ian glanced over his shoulders. His voice was low and dark. "He never fell in love again?"

"Not that I know of." The queen spat out those words. "And I've been with him for a hundred long and lonely years."

"Queen Regina." Victoria cleared her throat. She avoided looking at Xander or me. "We should hurry with this plan soon."

"But, how did Leeta become a vampire?" Queen Regina frowned. "I must know."

Victoria opened her mouth but didn't say anything.

"Are you sure you want to start this way with me?" The queen frowned.

"Why would we reveal anything to you, *fake queen*?" Ian tore off his mask and pushed out his fangs. "I should kill you right here for even sitting on a throne."

What?

"You look. . .like. . ." Queen Regina's hands shook. "Guards!"

Oh no.

The doors opened and the guards burst in.

Chapter 4

Heart

Camille

Damn it, Ian.

Chaos was about to ensue. I didn't know how we would get out of the castle alive.

Xander turned to me. "Once the guards are inside, shut the door."

"Okay."

"We may get out of this."

"How?" My heart pounded in my ears.

"We just have to make sure these guards don't signal others, or even the whole castle."

"O-okay."

"Do as I ask."

"I will."

"And don't let them get near you."

I wrenched out my small wooden dagger hidden at the side of the robe.

"I'll be fine."

Five guards swarmed in, brandishing their swords.

Fast, I raced back to the walls, doing my best to stay out of their focus.

"Queen Regina?" The guard in front scanned the space. "Did you call us or is this more of the performance?"

I slipped against the wall.

Looking speechless, Queen Regina trembled in fear with her hand pointed toward Ian.

Please, Ambi. Get us out of here.

Fast, I managed to get behind the guards.

"Queen Regina?" Then, the guard turned to Ian and gasped. "Get him!"

I raced to the door and shut it.

Please, let this work.

Xander let out a furious roar.

The very walls shook and trembled.

With primal rage in his eyes, Xander charged forward, his feet pounding against the ground like thunder. His horns tore through his head. His claws sprang from his fingers.

Queen Regina screamed.

Ty yanked Victoria aside, getting them out of the way.

Ian barreled towards the guards too, his face contorted with rage. Dark talons grew from his fingertips, their razor-sharp points glinting menacingly. Monstrous black horns burst from his skull, curved and wickedly sharp, even bigger than Xander's. His copper eyes blazed with hatred.

A cold chill trickled down my spine.

Their nightmarish forms made me shrink with terror.

I trembled against the door.

Thank Ambi they are on my side.

With Ian and Xander after them, no guard would survive.

While the Quiet King's men were powerful, they'd clearly never fought vampire kings. Ian and Xander tore through them with ease.

The guards' armor was useless against their claws.

Their swords broke under their horns.

One guard got too close. Xander slung the guard several feet back from just the force of his back hand. The guard crashed to the ground. His armor split apart. Blood trickled from his forehead.

Xander is much more powerful.

Ian tore the armored helmet off another guard, plunged his claws into the guard's chest, ripped his black heart out, and bit into.

Dear Ambi!

I pressed my back harder against the door, secretly wanting to escape.

Ian's copper eyes turned red.

What?

"You're all going to die." He slung the bitten organ to the floor. "And I'm going to eat your hearts one by one."

The last two surviving guards tried to run away, racing in my direction.

No!

I placed my dagger in front of me.

Leeta screamed in horror and dashed up the wall.

How is she doing that?

Somehow, Leeta flipped over the two guards and soared in the air.

We all stared at her in disbelief as she landed a foot in front of me.

My mouth hung open in shock.

She is more powerful too.

“Get over here!” Xander roared at them.

One guard twisted around and advanced in Xander’s direction, stabbing the air with his sword. A whooshing sounded with each strike.

Xander knocked the sword out of the guard’s hand with a boom.

The guard stumbled back, clutching his arm.

Soon Queen Regina found her energy and began racing to the door. Surely, she was ready to flee.

“Not so fast, *queen.*” Ian blurred her way.

I shrieked.

Seconds later, Ian snatched Queen Regina back and covered her mouth with his hand.

I turned to Xander fighting the two guards.

Fast, Xander rammed his claws through one guard’s neck. Blood sprayed and shot to the ceiling.

Xander’s claws further sliced through his flesh. More blood burst from the guard’s neck, spraying Xander’s face.

Queen Regina jerked back in horror and struggled to escape Ian’s arms.

Ty and Victoria got next to me by the door.

“Back away, Camille.” Ty leaned his head against the door. “Let me check to make sure no one else is coming.”

I eyed him, unsure if I could even trust him. Queen Regina had pretty much revealed that Ty and Leeta were with Xander to spy for his mother.

However, she had also mentioned that they both kept trying to get out of their duties. Was it because they developed feelings for him? Did they truly love him?

“Camile.” Ty sighed. “You can trust me.”

I swallowed and moved away from the door.

Ty grabbed the knob, twisted it, and opened the door a few inches.

I glanced back to see Xander ripping the last guard’s chest open.

Queen Regina shrieked under Ian’s hand.

Ian’s face lit up with a malicious grin as a deep, throat laugh left his. His voice came out, darker than ever. “Pull his heart out and eat it, Xander. It will make your horns thicker.”

I blinked.

As if possessed by some evil dark spirit, Xander growled, broke the dying guard's ribs, and wrenched out the black heart.

The organ beat in his hand.

I whispered. "X-Xander."

I moved towards him, but Victoria grabbed my arm and yanked me back.

Xander brought the heart to his mouth and bit into it.

"Yes." Ian growled. "A ripening prince needs proper nutrients. It can't all come from your queen."

I gazed back at Ty.

He peeked his head out of the door, scanned the hallway, and then slowly closed it. "I don't think the rest of the castle was alarmed."

"How are we going to get out of here?"

Ty gave me a sad smile. "I'm not sure."

Slurping sounded from the center of the room.

I turned to Xander as he continued to eat the heart.

"That is enough, nephew." Ian's grin shifted to a frown. "No more. Only four bites. More could make you sick."

Xander continued anyway.

"Stop!" I widened my eyes.

Xander moved the heart from his mouth and directed his gaze to mine. He did not seem himself at all. His liquid gold eyes were glazed over with tints of glowing red.

Blood dripped down his chin and trickled onto his chest.

I swallowed. "Put the heart down, Xander. . .please."

He dropped it to the ground.

The heart smashed to the floor.

The stench of death lingered in the air.

I scanned Queen Regina's quarters. It was a chaotic mess. Blood pooled on the ground.

No one said anything, not even Leeta, who cowered in front of me.

"Now listen, fake queen." Ian sneered, knocked the crown off Queen's Regina's head, and seized her by the throat. "You're Xander's mother, so I don't want to harm you, but you'll find out everything *you* want to know once *we* decide. Will there be any more problems from you?"

Queen Regina whimpered under his hand, but shook her head no.

Ian released her.

"F-fine. K-keep your s-secrets." She cleared her throat.

Victoria let go of my arm.

I headed around Leeta and walked over to Xander.

Victoria called out, "Camille, be careful. He doesn't seem like Xander."

My hands shook at my sides. "He won't hurt me."

Blood continued to drip down Xander's chin. No words left his mouth as he watched me walk to him.

Ian gazed at us. "Camille is right. Xander could never hurt her."

Ty let out a long breath. "What are we going to do?"

Ian crossed his arms over his chest. "We're staying for a little while. I need to go through the castle."

I stopped in front of Xander and glanced Ian's way. "Why do you need to go through the castle?"

"I wonder if my brother still has Phinova's old things like her grimoires."

I raised my eyebrows. "What would we do with that, Ian?"

"My nephew isn't the only one who needs guidance." He turned to me.

"Your power is proving to be quite out of hand. My horns are back. It should have taken much longer for them to return."

I put my view on Xander and gazed up at him.

Silent, he'd been watching me the whole time.

Queen Regina cleared her throat. "The guest quarters should already be prepared by the maids. I can call them to take you there."

Ian snarled. "How nice of you?"

Queen Regina touched her chest. "What is your problem with me?"

"You are not a queen, and those other women on the thrones out there aren't queens either." Ian closed the distance and sneered down at her. "None of you could ever compare to Phinova or even Camille. You will see the truth of my words one day."

Queen Regina stepped back. "W-we are on the same side."

Ty headed over. "She is correct about that. At least for a while we are here. Queen Regina can keep us safe in the castle, until it is time to escape."

"You better not call anymore guards." Ian's horns slowly sank back into his head. "You saw what happened to these."

Victoria locked the door. "Speaking of the guards, they will be missed. We will have to take turns standing outside the door in their armor, so no one is suspicious."

Leeta raised her hand. "I can begin the first watch. I will just need armor and covering for my face."

Ty shrugged. "This could possibly work. By daylight, all will be asleep and quiet."

Ian continued to watch Queen Regina. "I will stay with you, just in case you feel like yelling for more guards."

She cringed. "You look familiar. Who are you?"

"Enough with the questions." Ian faced Xander and me. "What is the plan now, nephew?"

Xander only gazed at me.

Are you okay?

I am. I just need time to come down from the blood lust.

I calmed, happy to hear his voice in my head.

I turned to the others.

"Queen Regina has to make the map so that we can free the Phinova dominas." I'd almost blurted out blood mages. "And I'm sure that Ian will make sure she gets us leather uniforms and masks. For now, I think we should clean this up, go to these guest rooms, wash off the blood, and be prepared to travel to the dungeons at dawn."

Victoria crossed her arms over her chest. "If we stay, there will be extra guards by our door to make sure we don't explore the castle."

I shrugged. "Then, we will have to kill them when it is time to go."

Ian curved his lips into a smile. Those talons retracted back into his fingertips. "Spoken like a true queen."

Chapter 5

Love

Camille

Silver silks draped the walls in Xander's and my guest quarters. We'd been roomed together, of course. No doubt Queen Regina was hoping we would immediately start breeding soldiers. That thought made me sick.

Was it wrong for me to hate her? I didn't like the way she saw Xander. For her, he wasn't a son. He was a path to her freedom and power.

Would that have been my destiny, had I stayed?

I had taken off the costume, but wore the black leotard that had been underneath it.

When dawn came, I would put on the leather uniforms that the castle's day guards wore.

I scanned the space.

A silver canopy bed in a lavish room was nothing new to me since I'd spent enough time in the castle. The rest of the furnishings were quaint—a chaise lounge heavily carved with vines and flowers that reminded me of a winter's day, and washbasins made of stone set into the wall with pipes that led to who-knew-where. The queen's maids had brought trays of fruit, meats, and bread. I didn't dare eat any of it just in case she was still plotting.

Regardless, I felt confident that everything would be okay since Ian was watching the queen's every move.

We should take this time to find out more answers in this castle.

When would be the next time we would have this opportunity? Once the Quiet King returned, it would only be death and war, fighting and trying to survive. We would never walk through the halls of this castle again.

Where could more answers be? The Quiet King's lab? His room?

Xander stepped out of the bathroom, drying his hair off. Another towel wrapped around his waist.

Damn it. Now I can't think.

I directed my view to the princely markings on his legs. Dark black swirls decorated his thick thighs and soared down to his ankles. I swore they appeared darker today.

Wait.

I leaned forward.

Am I going crazy?

For a second, I thought that they moved a little as if pulsing with strange energy.

I blinked.

Xander let out a long breath. "Can you see it too?"

"Are the markings moving?"

"A little. Perhaps an inch every few hours." Frowning, he finished drying off. "I don't like it."

"Why not?"

"It puts me on edge. I don't like my body suddenly changing."

"Had you been growing up in a world where vampire princes could survive, you would have been prepared for all of this."

He sighed. "I hate to say this, but at least Ian is here to help me through my ripening."

"He is proving to be loyal to you."

"He better be. I'm still not over him tasting your blood."

I frowned.

Xander went over to the fresh set of clothes and took off the towel. His muscular behind greeted my eyes.

I would have loved to get up, go over to him, and grab it.

But we were in the castle. It was too dangerous to have my mind on anything else, but getting away. Or at least. . . I could be thinking about finding more answers.

Xander must have heard my thoughts. He gazed over his shoulder. A wicked smile appeared on his face. "Soon, my queen. Once we are gone. I will take care of all your needs."

I bit my bottom lip.

"Rest, Camille." Xander put on pants. "We have six hours until dawn. It's going to be chaos when we free these dominas and guide them away."

"Are you okay with helping the women?" I twisted my lips to the side. "I know I kind of volunteered you for that."

"I'm the best Pathfinder in the city. Who else will do it?" He pulled the pants up and turned around. "Besides, I thought I had already freed most of them."

My gaze journeyed to those curves of chiseled abdominal muscles as I licked my lips. His physique was truly magical. That all-encompassing need to be ravished by him sparked within my body. It was an inexplicable craving, and it blazed against my skin.

Damn it.

I gritted my teeth.

What was I thinking about before he walked in here half-naked?

I didn't know if I was being horny or if it was the powerful force of the blood bond buzzing inside of me.

"Camille?"

"Yes."

"Stop looking at me that way."

My body hummed with hunger. "I'm trying."

"Soon, I will not be good."

I gripped the edges of the bed.

He targeted me with his eyes. "You don't have to sit there and just look. You're definitely welcome to come over."

I swallowed. "And do what?"

"Touch and lick."

I rose from the bed and strolled over to him. "All I can do is touch and lick?"

"Well, I do have to save my strength. There are many dominas that I will be freeing during daylight." He stepped closer. "So many to birth with—"

I hit his stomach. "Not funny."

"I love that you finally understand that you are my queen."

"I'm still getting used to it."

"No leaving me? No thinking that you have some life far away from mine?"

"I'm staying. Always."

"Why?" He moved toward me. His hard chest touched my breasts.

My nipples stiffened under the heat drifting from his skin. "We have a long fight ahead."

"We do. Your daughters also will need to be safe."

I shivered in fear. "I plan to make sure that they never see this castle. They will not be his. . . dominas."

"And Ethan. . . my queen, you must allow me to deal with him."

I swallowed. "Let us first deal with the Quiet King."

“Then, I can handle him?”

My bottom lip quivered. “Yes.”

“And your daughters will be with their *true* mother.”

I tried not to let anticipation enter my heart. The very idea of having my girls back made me too excited to speak.

Xander studied me. “What is your plan after we free these dominas?”

“Why do you think I have a plan?”

“Because you are smart.”

I closed my eyes. “I have no idea what we should do. I’m terrified.”

Xander captured my chin and lifted it up. “Is my queen worried about *my* safety?”

“Yes.” I opened my eyes. “The Quiet King will not be happy about your ripening or even his brother Ian being returned to strength. He probably thought he was dead all these years.”

Xander smirked. “It feels good to have someone genuinely worried for my welfare and not seeing my every breath as a way to be their king and improve their lives.”

I smiled. “Is that really all you heard?”

“It is.” He leaned over and brushed his lips against mine. “I am falling in love with you.”

I blinked. “Xander. . .”

“Are you falling in love with me. . .*queen?*”

How could I not be?

The longer we spent together, the more I believed my place was with him forever.

I’d wanted to leave him and find myself, discover who Camille was.

Meanwhile, in these past days I’d learned that I was a blood mage. But, most of all, I found out that the man who stood in front of me would be on my side no matter what, protecting and loving me with every breath that left his lungs. And deep in my heart, I knew I felt the same way.

I would do anything I could to keep him safe.

I loved him and that love surged through my veins with a fierce rush of certainty. Now that I realized the people around him were just spies—Leeta, Ty, and possibly Victoria—my place was next to him, watching his back when he couldn’t.

I gazed up at him.

I love you more than you could ever understand, Xander.

“I love you too.” He crashed his lips onto mine, and a fire ignited in my soul.

And I will love you forever and ever.

Hot lust swirled within my core. His tenna fragrance wrapped around me like a sheet and blanketed my skin. His black polished horns drove through the skin on his forehead, stretching out and curling at the tips, dripping with heat and power.

His voice deepened to a low tone. “Who are you to me?”

I shivered. “Your queen.”

“Hmmm. . .I love hearing you say that.” Xander guided me onto the canopy bed. “We should be focused on remaining quiet and safe in this castle.”

“We should.”

He lay down and rolled onto his back. “But, I only want to be inside of you.”

I got on top of him, straddling his muscular waist. His cock became hard under me.

I licked my lips. “Perhaps, we could blame our irresponsibility on the blood bond.”

“Or the ripening.” His cock pressed up between my thighs, pleading with me to pull it out and stroke its length.

I stirred and licked my lips. My pussy grew wet with arousal.

“Take off the leotard,” he murmured.

“Just because you’re ripening into a king doesn’t mean you can order me around.” I winked at him. “Now *you* take off your pants.”

With a flick of his fingers against his pants, he opened the top. “Now your turn.”

I smirked. “My turn?”

“My pants are open. Your leotard is on.” He put his huge hands on my waist and slid my body up and down the span of his cock.

I moaned. My insides warmed and clenched in response.

His fangs erupted from his gums. “Tell me you love me. . .out loud.”

I gazed down at him. “I love you, Xander.”

A dark groan left him.

Lowering, I pressed my breasts into his chest and gently rested my elbows on his shoulders. “I love you.”

“Those are now my three favorite words.” He combed his fingers through my red hair. “While I love hearing your thoughts about me, nothing compares to those words leaving your sexy mouth. I love your voice.”

“What do my thoughts sound like to you?”

“A song. Not exactly a voice, yet more. . .a warm feeling of words.” He widened his eyes. “How do I sound in your head?”

“It feels like dark, black silk slipping through my mind.”

A smile spread across his face. He flipped me over on my back and held himself up above me so that his weight didn’t bear down on me. “Once this is over—”

“*This* being us overthrowing the most powerful Vampire King in history?”

“Yes.” He chuckled. “Once *this* is over, we should talk about kids.”

“Kids?”

“Yes.”

“Vampire. . .kids?”

“Yes.”

“Xander. . .”

“What?”

“It’s too soon.”

“Since my ripening, it is all I can think about.” He leaned down and kissed me. “I want to put at least five inside of you the first time.”

“What?”

His hands slipped along the outline of my hips. “Five.”

I stopped him. “I would like to put a pause to that conversation until after we survive. . .*this*.”

“Hmmm.”

“Since, we’re talking. Perhaps, we should discuss Ty and Leeta.”

He frowned.

“They were spying on you.”

A low growl sounded from his chest.

I tensed.

“There’s no need to discuss that.” He lowered, buried his head in the curve of my neck, and slipped his fangs along my skin.

“Xander.” I tapped his chest with my hand.

He rose from my neck and gazed at me with hooded gold eyes. “Yes?”

“Should we talk about them spying?”

“I already knew Ty and Leeta reported my movements to my mother. I followed Ty once, ten years ago, and watched him. Later I watched Leeta for a month and finally saw her sneak off.” Xander returned to tenderly nibbling my neck with his fangs. Waves of pleasure swam over me.

“Stop for a minute,” I begged, struggling to catch my breath.

“Can we talk while I take off your leotard?”

“No. I’ll need it—”

“Not for what I have planned.”

“The Quiet King took lots of my blood for two years. What do you think he used it for?”

“I need to be deep inside of you.” Xander yanked at the top of my leotard. Giggling, I smacked his hand away.

He ignored my protests and pulled some more, stretching the material.

“Blood is important to vampires. It makes sense he would start testing there.”

He slipped his hands into my panties. “Blasted! You’re as wet as an ocean. Spread your legs apart.”

“Was that an order?” I whispered.

“Please,” he whimpered.

Then, my thoughts from earlier came back to me.

Wait. That’s right.

“Xander—”

“Get naked.”

“I will only after we search the Quiet King’s bedroom. We have at least several hours until dawn and we’re on the highest level of the castle.”

Xander sat up, frowning. “I don’t like where this is going.”

“The Quiet King’s bedroom is on this level. All dominas get a tour of the castle when we first come. I know where it’s at and—”

“No.” Xander glared. “It’s too dangerous. There are probably guards there.”

“I doubt guards are protecting his bedroom while he’s gone. Especially with there being not too many guards around,” I insisted. “We could go in and search around for answers.”

“And what do you expect to find? Important blood results lying around, or even better, the Quiet King’s journal describing all of his plans?” Xander laughed.

I slipped off the bed. “I’m going to see. It’s the only time we’ll have a chance—”

“You’re not going.” Xander appeared in front of me in seconds.

“And are you going to stop me?” I adjusted my leotard.

“Yes.”

“Just come with me to check out his room and then I will spend the remainder of our time until dawn showing you how much I appreciated your help.”

“How?” He raised his eyebrows.

“With my mouth and,” I trailed my fingers over my hard nipples all the way down to my thighs, “and anywhere else you would like to bite or fill me with your cock.”

His horns, inch-by-inch, disappeared back into his head. “Then we should hurry.”

Chapter 6

Never a Dull Moment

Camille

We're really going to check out the Quiet King's bedroom.

I hope there're answers.

I quickly put on brown leather pants that earlier had been brought in by servants. I didn't want to be walking around in just a leotard.

Watching me, Xander shook his head. "This is probably a bad idea."

"Or it could be good." I headed for the door. "Do you think we should tell the others that we're going?"

"So they could laugh and tell us how stupid this idea is?" Xander got to my side. "No."

I rolled my eyes. "We are going to get real answers—"

"Or get killed."

"Then, why are you going if it is such a bad idea?"

"My cock runs my body, and it demands that I do everything you say."

"Well. . .I'll take that." I made it to the door and opened it.

A guard in a brown uniform gripping a long wood sword, slowly faced us and gave me a stern look. "Yes?"

I cleared my throat. "We. . .are going to check on Queen Regina."

"Visiting time is over with. At the moment, it is lights out for everyone."

Xander frowned next to me.

The guard turned his gaze to him. "As Queen Regina's guests, you will remain in your quarters."

Worried, I turned to Xander.

What should we do?

Kill him.

Do we have to kill him?

Yes, my queen.

"Excuse me?" The guard entered our room.

We stepped back.

The guard raised his eyebrows. "Do we have an understanding?"

Sighing, Xander shook his head. “I see there will never be a dull moment with you, my queen.”

The guard blinked. “What?”

Fast, Xander’s hand shot out to the guard’s neck. His claws burst out and pierced into the man’s skin.

Dear Ambi!

We can’t blame Ambi for this.

I edged back and watched in horror as blood dripped around Xander’s claws. Soon, Xander pulled the guard’s head off with a single, powerful yank.

The head dropped to the floor.

Xander kicked it further inside our room. “As I said, never a dull moment.”

“Trust me. I’m hoping for dull moments soon.” I went back to the door, peeked out of the hallway, and spotted a guard to our right, in front of another door.

Xander, there’s another one.

Guard?

Yes. Maybe, you’re right. We should forget this mission.

We have already killed one guard. We might as well continue and kill the other one.

Still peeking out the doorway, I cleared my throat and waved at the guard. “Excuse me, could you come here, please?”

The guard looked around and then touched his chest. “Are you talking to me?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

“What do you want?”

“I have an emergency. Please help me.”

Frowning, the guard stomped my way. “What do you want and why aren’t you in your room?”

“I have an emergency.” I backed into the room.

The guard followed me inside and looked around. “Where’s Ving?”

By the time the guard’s foot stepped in front of me, Xander’s claws had connected to his neck.

“Are you sure you know where the King’s room is?” Xander asked as he lifted the guard’s body and threw him into our guest quarters.

A loud crack sounded, and I wasn't sure if it was the wall or the guard's spine. Either way, the guard slid to the floor and remained there, unmoving.

I looked at Xander. "You really are much more powerful."

"I am." He gave me a sad smile. "Back to my question, do you know where the Quiet King's bedroom is?"

"Yes." I grabbed his big hand.

Together, we ran down several empty hallways. Apparently, the guards were just for our guest quarters.

Queen Regina probably still considered Ty, Victoria, and Leeta loyal to her.

Either way, up on this level where the loyal queens and the Quiet King resided, it resembled some sort of ghost town, abandoned and forgotten. Not even servants strolled by.

Everything from the walls to the floors seem to be aged and worn out.

I can't wait to get out of this castle.

I would even be happy to be in the stinky sewers again.

Soon, my queen.

I would tell you to stop reading my thoughts, but you wouldn't listen.

You are correct.

Minutes later, I pointed to a huge black iron door at the end of the hallway. "That's his room. It is down here. I will never forget that door."

Xander gazed at it.

I looked at him. "Do you still have that magic key that you used in Zumaya?"

"Yes. I always bring it with me." Xander's hands went into his pockets. "I almost forgot it when I changed clothes this evening, after my shower."

"I'm glad you didn't."

When Xander took me to my home in Zumaya, he was able to open up my front door with no problem. He'd told me that he once helped an old black mage escape the Quiet King's dungeon. The mage had made him three keys that could open any door not locked by magic.

Xander pulled out a long black key. "Are you ready for all answers to be given?"

"Are you being funny?"

"I am. However, I hope this will not be a waste of time." Xander pushed the key into the door knob, and jiggled it for a second. Finally, the key twisted with no problem, and the iron door squeaked open.

Xander's voice slipped into my mind.

When dominas tour the castle is the King's room the grand conclusion to the tour?

Actually, we never get to go inside. The tour guide just points to his door.

I stepped into the dimly lit room. The walls were black with no paintings or photos. There were no windows. Neither were there candles or lamps.

Meanwhile, something large and pale blue glowed far off in the corner. That was what was giving the room its small amount of light.

What is that?

I sniffed and smelled mold and something decaying as if food had been left out for years. My stomach twisted. My heart hammered in my chest.

We kept the door half-way open. Perhaps, we were both afraid to be in here and wanted a clear way out to run.

Xander's hand went to my arm and gripped it.

I looked at him.

What's wrong?

I think I see a candle over there. I'm going to get it.

Okay.

Xander blurred off somewhere to the side, easily seeing in the darkness.

Not knowing what else to do, I slowly tiptoed toward the massive blue thing that was around twenty feet in front of me.

What could it be?

Be careful.

Something snapped on my right.

I turned that way, but only saw shadows.

What was that? Is my mind playing tricks on me?

I waited for several seconds, but the noise didn't come again.

It was nothing.

I headed forward. The pale blue thing was now only ten feet from me.

Then the room illuminated around me. I turned to see Xander holding a candle and flinging the unlit match to the floor.

"This room is as big as three rooms put together." he walked back to the door, clearly feeling better about closing it.

I took in the space.

Xander was right. It was massive, but there was nothing on the walls or floor.

Shock hit me.

Almost everything seemed bare. Even the tiny tables only had a few candles and matches, nothing else.

What a sad space for a king?

The bed wasn't even big. I was sure that it could only fit the Quiet King and no one else. A tattered brown quilt covered it. One would have thought that the king's space was the most opulent room in the castle.

Xander slowly closed the door.

My nerves calmed a little.

There's nothing in here. Will we even find anything.

"Holy Ambi, what is that?" Xander's eyes opened wide as he looked in the direction behind me.

"What?" I turned around and faced the large blue glowing object. Now with the lights on, I could make it out better.

"That's a . . . person?" I slowly walked over.

For some reason, he remained at the door. "That's why. . . I smelled. . ."

"Smelled what?"

He widened his eyes, but never left the door. "You. . . but much stronger."

"What do you mean?" I headed over to this object-person glowing blue.

With each step closer, the image became clearer.

Oh no.

Xander sounded by the door. "Camille, let's go."

I stopped walking forward and just stood there, frozen in shock.

What?

The gleaming object was a woman, a dead one to be exact. Her brown skin had rotted with spots of green, gray, and even black. Yet, somehow her hair was intact. Those long red, thick strands flowed all the way over her decaying shoulders, along her cracking body, and down to the floor.

Meanwhile, the dead woman with red hair sat on a huge diamond throne, outlined in blue gems that emitted a haunting glow.

"I-is this?" I inched forward. "No. This couldn't be. . ."

Xander loudly sniffed the air. "It's Phinova. The hair—even from me here—smells like yours, just a . . . tiny bit different."

"No." I covered my mouth and nose from the rotting flesh smell radiating from the corpse.

Why would he keep her dead body in his bedroom like this?

Several black spiders skittered and crawled along her face. Webs had been built near her eyes and hair, but the spiders hadn't been there for long. If

they had, surely her whole body would be enshrouded in thick webbing.

This is. . .insane.

Tubes were stuck into her neck and arms. Red liquid moved inside the tubes.

“He’s pumping something into her corpse.” My gaze followed the line of the tube all the way down to the floor. They stopped at a bottle full of even more liquid. “But. . .what is it?”

Horror laced Xander’s voice. “I know.”

I glanced over my shoulder. “What is it?”

Xander loudly inhaled. His fangs burst from his gums. “It smells like your blood or a similar type. Very strong, but. . .so close to yours. So close. . .it makes me want to run over there and drink it all.”

I looked back at the dead woman. “Then. . .this is really Phinova.”

“Let’s go, my queen.”

I shivered. “This is the Quiet King’s first wife.”

“Yes, it is,” Queen Regina jumped out from the shadows, with a silver knife, and stabbed me in the back with a knife.

Pain bit through me. something slithered inside of my blood as if the blade had been poisoned with magic.

My mind went dizzy.

“No!” Xander roared.

“Stay there, son.” Queen Regina kept the knife in my back. “One step further and I’ll slam this into her heart.”

Chapter 7

Death

Camille

My blood boiled, and my body convulsed with a searing pain. It was as if a thousand red-hot daggers stabbed me repeatedly.

But it had just been one knife, held by Xander's cruel sadistic mother.

Trembling, I gazed down at my breast.

The cold steel of the blade started at my back, ripped through my insides—muscle and veins—and ended outside of my chest. My body shook as I stared down at the knife's point peeking out of my left breast and dripping blood.

I'm going to die.

Queen Regina's arm trembled as she held me up, her muscles straining with effort.

This. . .is. . .it. . .

Sweat streamed down my face mixing with tears of despair.

"No!" Xander screamed and tried to advance forward again.

Ty rushed into the room. "Xander, stop!"

Ty. . .what is he doing here?

Ty held up his hands and got in front of Xander. "Camille will be okay as long as the knife stays in her body."

Xander snarled.

Ty backed up. "The blade is dipped in mage blood. Once the knife is out, we have a potion that will heal all wounds by mage-created weapons."

Xander snarled. His claws, horns, and fangs emerged in seconds. Xander's veins bulged around his neck. The muscles along Xander's shoulders rippled. His gold eyes flashed to red. Second by second, those razor-sharp claws and obsidian horns began to appear.

Ty's hands shook. "Your mother will take the knife out if you listen to her."

I. . .won't. . .make it. . .

A searing, agonizing pain radiated from my chest, causing my body to quake and shake uncontrollably.

Leeta and Victoria hurried into the room and took in what was happening. Shock filled Leeta's eyes as she held a box full of something.

Victoria's bottom lip quivered. She didn't meet my gaze. Instead, she stared at the floor.

Help. . .please. . .

My breathing became labored. I tried to gasp for air, but all I could do was open my mouth. Saliva drizzled from my lips, mixing with the blood on my breast.

My chest burned.

With each passing seconds, my mind drifted away.

No. . .

I collapsed to the floor.

The knife and Queen Regina followed me down.

Where is. . .Jan? Did they. . .kill him?

Queen Regina wrenched my head back. "Relax, little one. As long as Xander does what I say, I'll let you live."

"Camille!" Xander's muscles rose two inches from his body and bulged, larger than I'd ever seen.

With each desperate breath, my lungs screamed for air.

I gazed at Xander through tears.

I'm still here.

Lazily blinking, I tried not to think of the sluggish way my heart beat, or the molten agony consuming my whole body. More blood began to leak from my chest. It spilled out warm and thick, oozing down my legs and pouring onto the floor in a pool of deathly crimson gore.

"The blood! It's priceless! Get it all up!" Queen Regina ordered. "Every last drop!"

Leeta rushed over with the box. I spotted tons of empty glass vials inside of it.

Victoria hurried over too.

Together, they quickly knelt in front of me, scooped up blood, and poured it into the vials.

I'm going to kill Ty. Xander's voice echoed in my head, taking my mind off the pain for a few seconds.

Be ready for me to catch you or. . .

It won't work.

I closed my eyes.

Queen Regina jerked my head back, waking me up. “Don’t go to sleep. We still need you.”

I wretched, a mouthful of hot blood spilled from my lips. A coppery slickness coated my tongue.

“No, Camille!” Xander shouted.

Suddenly, thirty guards thundered into the room, surrounding Xander.

He barely cared. Instead, he kept checking me.

Protect. . .yourself. . .

In several of the guards leather-gloved hands, they held a thick, wooden rope with wooden spikes sticking out of almost every inch.

No. . .No. . .get out of there!

I won’t leave you.

He began fighting some of them, easily killing most. Yet, no matter the ones that died, others were still able to wrap the spiked rope around Xander’s body as he fought them.

It’s like. . .the Quiet King. . .

Roaring, Xander tore one head off as the wooden spikes cut through him. But he couldn’t get them all out at once and several spikes punctured his skin.

They’re trying to get you to. . .power up. . .

I struggled to see what else was happening as my head swayed to the side.

Queen Regina shook me. “Not yet, little one.”

I blinked my eyes open.

“I still need you.”

Queen!?

I’m. . .still. . .here.

Queen Regina leaned against my ear. “The plan was to get you in your room tonight, but then my guards told me that you were sneaking off in the direction of the Quiet King’s bedroom.”

Pain blazed through me.

“You’re too smart for your own good, so I took the secret passageway in here and waited.”

Why is she. . .doing this?

“You see the first queen on her beautiful throne?” Queen Regina stuck the knife deeper into my back.

I screamed.

Queen?

Get out of here. Save. . .yourself. . .

Never!

Trembling, I looked down.

The knife's tip had sliced deeper through my chest and poked further out.

My teeth chattered against themselves. The overwhelming stench of my blood drowned the space.

“Did you know that once you become the Quiet King's queen, you're expected to dust and clean his first wife, Phinova, as if it wasn't bad enough that no one could ever replace her,” Queen Regina hissed. “As you can see, this is *my* week to clean her corpse.”

“Y-you didn't. . .do a. . .good job,” I murmured with quivering lips, trying to stay awake, but I could feel darkness calling me, luring me over, telling me how there was no pain on the other side.

“Phinova can drown in dust for all I care.” Queen Regina laughed. “I have a *new* king to serve. Open your eyes! Look at *my* son!”

Slowly, I raised my head.

The guards stumbled away from Xander. Many dead guards scattered the space.

Meanwhile, Xander knelt on the floor full of hundreds of wooden spikes.

No!!!

I'm okay, queen.

No.

I'm okay. Save your strength.

Blood and black mucus spurted out everywhere on his body, spilling out around the spikes and streaming onto the floor around him like this grotesque river.

Queen Regina whispered in my ear. “My son will be stronger than his father.”

Xander roared in pain. His golden eyes had already shifted to red, but now they were a bright, furious crimson.

Get the spikes out and run.

No. I'll get stronger and get us both out of here.

No, Xander. Don't change! That's what she wants.

I don't care.

D-don't. . .

His horns grew larger, twisting out like thick pointy serpents. They began to enlarge and become as big as Ian's horns.

Dear Ambi!

Howls echoed from his throat. His power drummed through the room. I could feel it slipping along my skin.

Then, he roared, and the air around us trembled into a current of cold power, threatening to consume me.

Xander's skin rippled and bubbled.

More power drenched the room, making everything shake—the bed, the chair, us, and even Phinova on her throne. We all moved from Xander's power.

Queen Regina shivered. "Yes, son."

This couldn't continue. I wouldn't let him turn into a new version of the Quiet King, burning away his senses from increasing his power—blind, deaf, and mute. This wasn't the life that Xander deserved.

Stop increasing your power.

I didn't think he was in my head. He must have been putting all his focus to powering up.

"S-stop!" The word burned my throat as I yelled it.

I screamed in my head.

Xander, please stop!

My queen.

Stop.

Xander glanced my way and stopped. His skin ceased with rippling and bubbling. His blood-soaked chest gently rose and fell.

"Why are you stopping?" Queen Regina yelled. "I'll let her go when you've increased all your power."

"No. . .she won't," I murmured. "And. . .she won't. . .share a throne with. . .another. . .queen."

The knife twisted in my chest.

Screaming, I slumped back on Queen Regina, my mind slipping away as agony tore through me.

Tears streamed down my face and mingled with my blood.

Xander roared and surged up on more power. Spikes pushed out of his rippling muscles. Many of the spikes fell on the floor, coated in his blood and bits of his flesh.

The remaining guards pointed sharp, wooden swords to his face.

"Finish increasing your power, King." Ty lowered down to his knees. "We're ready to serve you."

No! I shouted in my head. *Don't try and save me. I'm going to die.*

How could I leave?

It would break my heart if you became just another mute and angry king.
Xander ceased. He panted and collapsed down to the ground.

Then I will die with you today, my queen.

“What is he doing?” Queen Regina shrieked to anybody who could hear her. “We don’t have much time, Xander. Your queen is slipping away.”

I’m already close to gone.

My body shook.

I’m just holding on for you, to make sure you won’t follow their sick plan.

More blood spilled from my mouth.

Don’t use all of your power.

My heart beat began to slow. I knew my time would be soon. Tears left my eyes, knowing that Xander and I never had a chance.

Don’t burn away your senses. Leave.

My body spasmed and shook.

Escape.

“Help me hold her!” Queen Regina shouted.

Victoria and Leeta seized me, trying to keep me.

“Hold on, Camille,” Leeta whispered in my ear. “Please, hold on. We need him.”

“But he. . .needs. . .you.” I coughed up more blood and trembled.

My king!

“Yes!” Xander roared from across the room in response to my silent plea.

Stand up.

I tried to focus on him as his image blurred in and out of view.

Show them you won’t fall into their plan. Don’t let my death weaken and change you.

Xander’s voice boomed in the room. “And what if I just want to lay down and die next to your body?”

Queen Regina gasped. Her body stiffened behind me.

Then I would’ve died for nothing, I whispered in my own head.

My vision left. There was only darkness, the scent of my blood, the sharp stinging of the knife in my chest, the pounding of Queen Regina’s heart behind me, and Xander’s anguished cries in front of me.

“He hasn’t finished maturing.” Ty’s voice held worry. “What do we do?”

“Don’t do anything, just wait.” Queen Regina shivered against my back.

“Son, listen to me. Your queen is delirious right now.”

No!

I continued to sink within the darkness of my mind.

Kill them all if you must to get out of here. Save the blood mages if you can.

“Camille,” Xander cried my name out as if something were being ripped away from his chest.

Listen, my king. I couldn’t open my eyes, but I smiled with blood-covered lips.

I was so stupid to push you away in the beginning. I was wrong.

“No, you weren’t.” His voice was right in front of me. Strong hands grabbed my arms. I fought to open my eyes, but couldn’t.

Victoria and Leeta released me as if handing me over to Xander was the right thing to do. Queen Regina’s hand remained on the knife. I could feel the blade shaking in me.

I’m holding you.

I’d ask you to kiss me if I wasn’t so bloody.

He pressed his lips to mine.

Don’t go, my queen. I can’t do this without you.

There are dominas chained in a room just because they have blood like mine. . .save them. . .

He kissed my cheeks and chin.

His voice slammed against my head. ***I don’t care about them!***

My daughters need you. The guards may already have them. . .

The darkness descended with a crushing force, sending me spiraling into a void of nothingness as if I were being swallowed alive by the depths of my own being.

I felt my consciousness slipping away, helpless to its power.

Still, I tried one last time to speak to Xander, hoping he could hear my last thoughts.

Love again! My corpse doesn’t need a diamond throne.

I heard him scream in pain as cold shadows consumed me. In time his voice became nothing as everything shifted to silence.

Chapter 8

Then, So Be It

Xander

Camille thought to me as she passed out in my arms. *My corpse doesn't need a diamond throne.*

But her heart still beat, and her breathing was shallow.

She had to still be alive, for now.

“Hold her and don't let go,” I ordered Leeta. “Can I trust you to do this?”

Leeta bobbed her head. Tears fell from her eyes. “Your mother has my niece locked in the dungeon. She's the only family I have left. All these years, it's why I did it, when I never wanted to—”

“Then she'll be free today. If you help me,” I said through clenched teeth.

Carefully, Leeta took Camille.

Now you!

I grabbed my mother's hair, yanking her head back until the silver crown clattered to the ground. My other hand clamped down on her throat like a vice, cutting off her breath.

“Tell me the truth!” I shouted. “Is there really a potion that can heal this knife wound or was Ty lying to me?”

My mother screamed for her guards as I squeezed my hand around her neck tighter.

“Trust me, mother. You will die before they get to you.”

She widened her eyes in shock.

“Tell me. Is there really a way to heal the wound?”

“Y-yes,” she struggled to speak.

I slung her to the ground.

“Leeta!” She gasped in huge breaths of air and touched her neck. “Leeta has it!”

I stretched out my ears and strained to hear Camille's heartbeat, but all I heard was the sound of her heart struggling, gasping as it pulsed weakly and slowly. With every thump, it seemed as if time had almost come to a standstill.

But it still beats.

I held on to that thought, putting all of my hope into it.

“Queen Regina believed we should kill your queen.” Still gripping Camille, Leeta pulled out a large vial. It had dirt around the glass tube. Her fingers shook as she handed it to me. “However, I came up with the plan to make sure we had a way to bring Camille back.”

Queen Regina coughed on the floor, gasping for more air.

Walking closer, I gazed down at my mother and loomed menacingly over her. “You never intended for Camille to survive tonight?”

“I . . .” She shrank away, backing up as much as she could. “I didn’t think she would be okay with you. . .m-mating with others.”

“No.” Fury burned in my veins. “As Camille said, you didn’t want to share the throne. You wanted to be my only queen.”

“I . . .I would know more about running a kingdom than her.”

Fast, I soared down on her and closed my hands around her neck. Then, with one powerful heave, I smashed her head hard into the ground. Blood splattered around me.

Leeta screamed.

Victoria shrieked.

Ty whispered, “Dear Ambi. Help us all.”

I shook the blood away and rose.

So be it.

“And where is Ian?” I scanned the guards, searching for Ty and Victoria. Those two were the ones I would kill first. Next would be Ian.

“Ian is trapped in a bedroom with several dominas. . .serving him. I’m not sure he knows he’s even locked inside as he has sex with them.” Leeta’s hands trembled as she held the vial.

“Will this work? Will this bring Camille back to me?” I hung onto the edge of insanity; unsure I could rise back over the ledge and return to any form of life without Camille.

My queen.

“I don’t know if this will work for sure,” Leeta quickly muttered. “The mage told me that I would have to use one vial at a time.”

“How many vials do you have?” I yanked it from her.

“F-five. The mage said that would be enough.”

“And where is this mage now?”

Leeta frowned. “Your mother had her guards kill him.”

“Of course she did.” I tore off the vial’s stopper. A flowery scent rose in the air, reminding me of roses and daisies. I towered over Leeta and parted Camille’s lips. Then, I raised the vial over her mouth and poured the potion down her throat.

Please, Queen. Come back to me.

My thumb rubbed against Camille’s small neck, hoping to massage the potion down her throat.

My queen, can you hear me?

I delivered those thoughts to her head, listened for her heart, and waited. I didn’t know if I was imagining things or not, but Camille’s heart seemed like it was beating faster and stronger.

Leeta’s voice was shaky. “X-xander?”

I looked at her. “What?”

“We must take the knife out so that she heals all the way.”

“If this does not work, I will rip your throat out first.”

Leeta’s eyes watered. “I know.”

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

“Wait.” I leaned forward and listened.

Camille’s heart beat wildly like a drum in a battle, its pulsing energy racing through her veins.

It’s beating stronger.

Still, her body trembled as I wrapped my arm around her and slowly inch by inch took out the knife from her grip.

This better work. It must. I cannot live without her.

My hand trembled as I held the knife in the air. The cold steel glinted in the darkness.

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

It’s stronger and louder.

Several footsteps sounded from behind me, signaling the approach of more guards coming.

“Hold her.” I narrowed my eyes at Leeta. “Keep her safe.”

“I will, Xander.”

My view shaded to dark red and I assumed my eyes must have changed color again. My voice deepened and I could barely recognize it. “If she dies, Leeta, I will kill you. Do you believe me?”

Leeta’s lip quivered. “Y-yes.”

The thundering footsteps of the guards stomped closer. I was sure there were many of them behind me, wielding their wooden swords. There was no way that my earlier roars had not alerted the entire castle.

Everyone will die, except my queen.

In half of a second, I spun around and rose five feet in the air, touching the hard castle's ceiling with my horns. Stone crumbled down.

What?

I hadn't intended to jump so high.

This is too much power.

A chill ran down my spine as I landed with extended claws.

At least thirty guards barreled forward.

One guard took in my horns, stumbled back and raced out of the room.

Others staggered to the side, unsure of what to do with me.

However, many were brave. They remained in front with their wooden swords ready to fight.

My strange, dark voice left me. "You should run."

A few shivered, but they remained.

I cracked the left side of my neck. "Then, so be it."

Leaping back in the air, I soared onto the first two guards near me. Before they had time to scream, I tore off their heads with ease.

Too much power.

I smashed the heads into the floor. Pale skin, green mucous, and black blood splattered all over the ground.

How will I get used to all of this power?

The other guards jumped back. Some raced out of the room. Many rushed across the room and pressed their bodies against the wall.

I rose to a standing position and knew that I was somehow. . .taller.

What am I becoming?

I looked at Leeta.

Horror covered her face as she continued to hold Camille.

I leaned that way, straining to hear her heart.

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

I turned my view back onto the shaking guards. Tonight an odd sensation washed over me. In my heart, I believed that these guards were mine.

Never did that happen before. Usually when I saw guards, I only yearned to kill them.

But tonight, I expected them to bow and fall to their knees, knowing I was to rule them.

I snarled at them.

They all went tense.

That dark voice left me. “You all will either fight with me as *my men* or die tonight as the Quiet King’s guards.”

A few exchanged glances. Surely, they had no idea who I was or even more *what* I was.

They will soon know.

A surge of power quaked within me. My feet ached, but I didn’t know why. It felt like my toes were melting. I took a step forward and howled.

What is wrong with me? What is happening?

One guard whimpered on my left.

I must look like a monster to them. . .so be it.

I glared. “Those are your choices—my men or the Quiet King. Pick a side tonight. There are no other options!”

Shuffling ensued as many dropped to their knees and bowed.

And then a heavy pounding entered my mind.

Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.

I snapped my view back to Leeta.

Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.

Camille’s heart!

It beat with power and life.

My queen. I didn’t lose her. Now. . .I will live too.

I studied Camille’s chest. It went up and down, telling me she was breathing just fine. But I still couldn’t hear her thoughts.

Leeta pulled a second vial out and began pouring it down Camille’s mouth.

“Keep my queen alive and you won’t die tonight, Leeta.” I turned back to the guards.

They all knelt before me with shivering heads facing the ground. All of them waited for my next order. Even Victoria and Ty had bent their knees along with the guards.

But none of them could be trusted.

They were supposed to follow my father and immediately turned on him to follow my mother.

And Ty and Victoria. . .my supposed friends for decades. . .they yearned for freedom just like my mother and sister did. They probably were willing to do anything to get out of those sewars and live a life with no more hiding.

Yet, all I yearn for is my queen.

The pounding of Camille's heart sped up to a deeper booming that echoed in my mind.

Yes. Never again will my queen come close to dying. I'll get stronger and stronger if I need too.

With that, I let my head fall back and loudly roared. My claws hoped to rip out hearts and my fangs dripped with a craving for revenge.

More power surged in my veins.

I can feel it.

I roared some more, shaking the castle's foundation.

Come to me.

I roared again and it seemed to echo through the land, as if warning all of my enemies of the powerful vengeance I could unleash.

Do you hear me, father? Even you should fear me.

Everyone dropped lower to the floor as if they weren't sure if bowing on their knees was enough. Some lay on their stomachs.

Yes.

My heart swelled with pride.

Bow to your king.

The thought should have surprised me, but I no longer recognized myself.

Did all vampire princes go through this wicked metamorphosis? This need to not only protect their queen at all costs, but make everyone serve them.

And more important, could this audacious need be calmed?

I doubted it.

Now I understood even more why the Quiet King had made sure to kill them.

For already, I scanned this castle and believed it was mine. I knew it deep in my heart.

In fact, I couldn't imagine anything on this planet not being mine. And if anyone thought otherwise, I would battle them for it. I would rip out their hearts and pierce the beating organs with my fangs.

I roared.

Hot power soared through me.

My feet burned like they were on fire.

What?

An unbearable agony ripped through my feet. Then, the bones of my toes broke apart. My boots ripped away, exposing my bulging and bubbling feet.

Dear Ambi. What is. . .

I gazed down.

What is this? Not more. . .changes. . .

The flesh on my feet tore open. Solid black hooves as big as my feet pushed out. I rose four inches into the air as the hooves grew. The pain was excruciating.

No.

I howled in agony.

I'm becoming a monster.

My fangs erupted from my gums like knives. This time they grew longer than ever before.

Many raised their heads back. Horror covered their faces. Others gasped.

What do I. . .look like?

I sniffed. The air was thick with fear and anxiety.

Then. . .so be it.

I prowled over to Ty and Victoria and smelled wine radiating from them. They must've had to get drunk to follow through on their orders. I hoped they weren't too drunk to feel the pain that I would surely give them. They'd pushed me to be their king and tonight they and everyone else would see what happens when a king becomes angry.

Few will survive this night.

I stormed their way.

Ty held Victoria close to her.

"Xander!" Leeta called to me.

I stopped and glanced over my shoulder. "Yes."

"Camille's wounds are healing around her chest."

My mouth widened into a smile, forcing my newly long fangs to almost touch my chin.

My queen.

An overwhelming ecstasy burned brighter through me.

She was not taken away from me.

Never before had I felt such an intense surge of joy, like this raging inferno of hope blazing within me.

We will have our happy ending.

“Grab that blanket off of the Quiet King’s bed and cover her in it,” I ordered. “I don’t want her to get wet, because tonight, the castle will rain blood!”

Leeta blinked. “Yes. . .”

“Yes, what?” I glared.

She shivered. “Yes, King.”

You all wanted it. Then, so be it.

I turned back to the traitors of my queen.

“I forgave you for spying.” I stomped forward. My hooves boomed with each step. “But helping my mother to stab Camille. . .that is something I can never forgive.”

With a surge of renewed energy, I rushed to Ty and Victoria with extended claws and a taste for their flesh under my tongue.

They screamed.

When the Quiet King returned, his bedroom, as well as his castle, would be painted red with blood.

This would be my message.

A letter to my dear father.

Stand down. A new king is here.

Chapter 9

Change

Camille

I'm alive. . .and. . .hungry.

Clop. Clop. Clop. Clop.

My eyes remained closed.

I was too weak to open them.

My body swayed back and forth.

Clop. Clop. Clop. Clop.

A raging hunger devoured my body, tearing through my veins like a wildfire. My limbs felt like lead weights and every muscle in my body screamed for sustenance. I felt so desperate for something to satisfy this gnawing emptiness that threatened to consume me.

I lay slumped over a horse.

I think.

Many footsteps sounded behind me, but hushed ones, not the stomping of royal guards or the pounding of people fleeing danger.

Is Xander safe? What happened?

Fear seized my chest and my heart drummed heavily in my ears.

Clop. Clop. Clop. Clop.

Although my eyelids drooped over my eyes so that darkness remained my only view, I should have been soothed by those hushed footsteps behind me.

Yet blood's deadly perfume filled the air, and not the kind of scent I'd experienced from walking past Capitol City restaurants that served all types of the red liquid for vampire consumption.

No.

This was the odor of death and decay. The space around me flooded with it.

Clop. Clop. Clop. Clop.

A shiver of terror surged up my limp body. I prayed to Ambi and Ressi for the strength to at least move my hand, lift my head, and see where I was and who was around.

It was not possible.

My muscles sagged in defeat. They were so heavy like anchors of a ship, keeping me in place.

Clop. Clop. Clop. Clop.

A man screamed.

A slash sounded, and then the screams ceased.

What was that?

Only the clop-clopping of hooves could be heard now as the horse carried me farther.

I assumed it was night since I didn't feel the usual heat from the sun.

A cool gust of wind passed by, dried the liquid all over my skin into a hard shell, and lifted my hair in the air.

Clop. Clop. Clop. Clop.

After several minutes, I struggled to open my eyes and could only get the right one open for a few seconds.

I can see! A little. Wait. . .What's. . .that?

What I saw frightened me.

No. How can this be?

I'd thought I was on a horse, but instead, I lay over a man's bare shoulder, a huge man with muscles that ballooned out and creased with bulging veins. His leather pants were ripped at the ends. Big black hooves replaced what should have been his feet. Blood and pus caked his skin.

Clop. Clop. Clop. Clop.

And in the distance of my mind a faint voice echoed, ***Camille? Camille?***

What is that?

I focused harder and groaned.

The creature who was holding me stopped. I trembled, unsure of who this was and why he had me.

Where is Xander? What happened to everyone? Why am I still alive? Hadn't the knife drove through my back, pierced my heart, and sliced my chest open?

That odd hunger returned to me.

My stomach growled with an insatiable hunger that devoured my thoughts until my only desire was to feed.

"Camille?" A dark voice laced my name. It came out gruff and unyielding.

"She moved her fingers," a woman said on my side.

The dark voice growled, “Are you sure my queen moved or are you only hoping to save your life, Leeta?”

He said my queen.

I deeply inhaled.

Somewhere under the scent of blood and pus, death and the night’s air was Xander’s tenna scent.

It’s him. He’s the creature. My king.

I groaned again.

The creature, who I now hoped was Xander, lifted me off his shoulder and adjusted me so that I lay in his arms.

I focused all my energy on my eyes. Slowly, inch by inch, I opened my eyelids.

Xander’s face came into view.

A scream lodged in my throat from the sight.

Dear Ambi!

Tattered flesh painted his horns, and they were thicker and bigger. Blood trickled down his face. His fangs hung well past his bottom lip, dripping with blood. Rage glowed in his red eyes. He was bigger than ever and it terrified me.

“It is me, my queen.” He drew his fangs into his mouth with a snap. “I’ve become a monster.”

“No. . .” I tried to say more, but my throat stung.

“I released your Phinova Dominas.” He turned around with me in his arms and guided my view to a long trail of women behind us.

Xander. . .

Lots of them stumbled forward with their heads down, hair ruffled, ripped robes, and dirt-smudged skin.

Royal Guards walked among the women. Some let the dominas lean on their shoulders to travel.

Other guards carried the younger dominas in their arms.

“I gave most of the guards a choice,” Xander said. “Die or join with me. Most decided to live.”

“B-but—”

“It’s only been a few hours since you’ve been. . .gone, but now you’re back.” Xander hurried his pace and looked forward. “I killed the enemies. I clawed through their flesh and spilled their slimy contents inside. No one else will hurt you like that again. No one!”

I swallowed in fear as his skin rippled under me.

“For now I need to get you somewhere safe and far away from danger. And then I plan to kill the Quiet King.”

I parted my lips, trying to say something to change his thinking. He couldn't go after the Quiet King, especially not by himself.

Whatever happened to Ian? He promised me he'd watch over Xander. He promised. Did he help the Queen, or is he dead?

“Relax. You'll be safe soon.” Xander rushed off with me, quicker than the average pace of a man or vampire, faster than a wild tiger or well-bred horse.

Wind dashed by.

The clapping noise increased with his speed, racing us down the moonlit road. Pebbles and dirt kicked up under his hooves.

I bounced in his hard arms.

He tightened his grip.

Dear Ambi! He's so powerful.

My right eye fluttered, but still I battled to keep it open, if only to see him for a few more seconds and know I was secure in his arms.

He said he was a monster.

I disagreed.

He was my king, and nothing less or more.

And he has to remain safe.

I rocked in his arms and managed to screech out, “K-king.”

He sighed and glanced down at me. “What are you saying, my love? I can't hear your thoughts any more. I don't know what you're thinking or if it's you and not something else moving inside that delicate skin.”

It's me.

My eyes closed as exhaustion lured me into the dance of sleep.

“Are you truly back to me?” Xander asked. “Or. . .are you something. . .else?”

Chapter 10

Oblivious

Ian

What is better than a nude maiden widening her legs for me to fill her?

Two nude maidens widening their legs!

I hadn't been lucky enough to get two women yet, so I lured only one domina into the back. I was in the fake queen's room, Xander's mother, or Queen Regina to those who cared.

The woman loved oil paintings of herself. They littered every wall.

However, even her face couldn't prevent my disrespect of my brother's kingdom.

The blasted Quiet King.

I'd vowed to myself to violate all of the dominas on this side of the castle just to piss him off. If I were here tomorrow night, I'd penetrate the rest. By the time my brother Nai returned, he'd smell me all over them.

What other way would I pass the time? I should piss on his statue before Xander, Camille, and I leave.

A loud laugh escaped my lips.

"What's so funny?" The domina's face reddened as she lay down on the bed and untied the belt on her robe. She wore no bra or panties under it. "Am I funny to you?"

"No." I slipped off the black leather costume top and threw it on the floor. "This room is so dreadful it is funny."

Her mouth dropped open. "Do not let the queen hear you."

Queen? I know queens and she is not one.

The room was themed for the silver queen. A mockery of blinding counterfeit silver plastered against all the walls.

I'd put out most of the candles to stop the walls' reflection of light blinding my eyes.

Her silver-painted mascot the snake was carved in the metal walls, the steel posts of the beds, and even within the iron door of the room.

Cheap perfume drowned the small place—a blend of chemicals, dead flowers, and oil probably found in the shadows of *the bottom*, where the

lowest peddlers traded filth and garbage.

I imagined Queen Regina in that area, holding up her expensive gown with her hands as she slithered around with thieves and murders, plotting and buying scents worthy enough for a whore.

I didn't trust Queen Regina and knew I should be next to her now, instead of in her bedroom, but Ty and Victoria promised to stay near her for a few minutes.

They'd been her spies, but in the end I believed their hearts truly belonged to Xander.

Year after year, I'd done my own spying in the sewers.

Ty and Victoria whispered about Xander constantly, worrying and praying that he would someday be the king he was meant to be.

They wanted Xander to be king, but never considered how Xander would destroy my brother.

Honestly, I wasn't sure Xander and I could beat him.

The domina frowned. "Is something troubling you?"

I forced a smile. "Of course not. You're so captivating. I'm trying my best to concentrate on not spilling my seed right now from just the sight of you alone."

She giggled. "You lie. Do all you performers lie?"

We'd all snuck into the castle as performers in leather costumes, hats, and masks.

Ty and Victoria had provided the costumes.

The guards let us in with no problem and all believed us to be performers, except for Queen Regina and her trusted helpers.

Queen? She's no queen.

Outside the bedroom, my brother's dominas laughed and danced as a fiddler played an upbeat tune that made me want to scratch out my eardrums and go deaf to the sound.

Since I'd snuck in with the domina, the music outside had grown louder.

I could barely concentrate.

"Are you okay?" The domina opened her robe wider. "You look like you're scowling."

"This is how I look when I'm excited." I forced a grin and concentrated on how lovely it would be to pierce her with my fangs and cocks.

"Come to me, please." She stretched out her legs.

I climbed onto the bed, careful not to press down on her small frame.

Silver silk covered the pillows and sheets.

“Do you like my hair? It was all I could find.”

“I do.” I’d asked the domina to wear a red wig, and she’d humbly obliged, ran off for a few minutes, and returned to me with a ball of hair that was close enough to the shade I’d desired.

I ran my fingers through the wig and spread those scarlet strands out until they fanned across the pillows around her head.

If only this was real and she was truly my love.

I leaned down to taste her.

I miss you, Phinova.

She squirmed on the bed with dark brown nipples on top of huge cinnamon brown mounds that jiggled as she moaned. Those luscious points pebbled under the lapping of my tongue and tasted so sweet, like powdered sugar.

She whimpered, “Your tongue is made of magic.”

“If only that was true.” I rose, unzipped my pants, and pulled my two cocks out. They spilled forward like thick, long snakes ready to explore and pleasure. “What is your name?”

“Shana.”

She gasped. Her gaze shifted to my cocks. “You have two?”

“Yes.”

“W-why?”

“I guess Ambi blessed me.” I landed a peck on her lips. “Are you scared of them?”

She bit her lip and shook her head no.

“Are you sure? Would you like me to put one away?” I quirked my eyebrows and held in a chuckle. “I could hide one, but I fear the other would become jealous and sad. You don’t want either one of my cocks to cry now, do you?”

“Cry? You’re so funny.” She giggled. “Cocks don’t cry.”

“How do you know they don’t?” I kissed the tip of her nose. “Until tonight I was the first vampire you saw with two erections.”

“Don’t pick on me.” She pouted, but I knew it was a flirtatious one full of curiosity and playful wonder. “If they can cry, then I don’t want that.”

“I don’t want that either, sweet one. And I promise you that I’ll take it slow. One at a time.” I sucked on her bottom lip. “But I only have one request.”

“Yes?”

“Tonight, let’s pretend you are someone else.”

“Pretend?”

“Yes, little domina.” The tips of my cocks ached to be inside her. I lifted my body up and fisted both of them. Each lay in one hand. The contact of my fingers tightening around my lengths made me shiver.

The domina blinked. “And who will *I* be?”

“A great queen, one with magic and power.” I leaned down and guided my tongue along her flat stomach. My fangs erupted from my gums. I dragged the sharp points around her belly button. “Your name will be Phinova tonight.”

“Who is that?”

“Someone I knew.”

The domina’s playful smile shifted to a frown for a second. “Do you love this Phinova?”

“I did, but now she’s gone.”

The domina sighed in relief and I wondered why. Surly, she didn’t think this moment would result in anything more than ecstasy.

A cage of ice and stone locks imprisoned my heart. Only two women had the keys to unlock it and the sledgehammers to break the stone away. Unfortunately, one was dead and the other taken by a selfish vampire prince who wouldn’t want to share.

The domina smiled. “I’ll be this magical queen for you tonight.”

“And I’ll take my time each moment making sure you come hard and stronger than any other time you’ve come before.”

Fake Phinova gasped as I lay the heads of my cocks on her thighs.

“Are you sure you’re not scared, little domina?” I slipped my fingers up the shafts.

“No. I want to feel them inside of me.” Her voice could be a song. It was so smooth and harmonious. “Please fuck me.”

“And what is your name?”

“Phinova.”

I grunted. That word was all I needed to spark my erections. Blood rushed through my cocks with a fury—hot and inciting lust—that seared my skin.

Thankfully, this domina was easy. Most needed more coaxing. Others had seen my cocks and fled the room in tears.

But not this one. She must be adventurous or another spy for the queen, one that listened to secrets and lured them out with her pussy.

She'll get no news from me, only two hard strokes, pounding into her with no mercy.

“Do you crave to have both my cocks inside of you at the same time?” I licked my lips.

My cocks twitched at the thought of being soaked with her. I shifted my view to her buttocks—a soft mass of brown flesh enclosed over two curvaceous bulbs and in the middle of them, a blossoming hole drenched in arousal.

The folds above the hole moistened.

I touched her secret lips with my finger, slid it through them, and discovered her warm and wet opening, beckoning me to push my finger in more, but I didn't.

She shrieked as I pulled back, gathering her wetness and guiding it down to drench her ass.

“Maybe. I-I don't know if I can handle both.” She raised her ass to my finger.

“Trust me then. Maybe I can somehow convince you later.” I pressed my fingertips at the opening of her ass, making sure to be gentle and not push too hard. “Maybe I'll even have you beg for them both.”

“M-maybe. . .”

I flashed a wicked grin, yanked off my pants, and moved down closer to those spread-apart thighs.

The bed creaked under us.

A scream sounded within the fiddler's song outside the bedroom.

What was that?

I froze.

The music continued.

“What's wrong?” she asked.

“I thought I heard something.”

“It's only the entertainment outside.” She tweaked my nipples with her long nails. “Do you yearn for music or me?”

“Only you, Phinova.” I moved her nails away from my chest, never one for having my chest groped like a woman.

“I like that name.”

More screams sounded off in the distance, but the music continued to play and people clapped and laughed.

Am I imagining this or maybe it's my conscious telling me to go back to my duty? No. I can't be around that fake Queen for more than a few seconds.

Lounging with Xander's mother triggered me to dark, murderous thoughts.

Every time she talked, the urge to kill her pounded in my chest. I'd fled her sitting room after an hour of dealing with her. Higher up in the castle, I assumed that Xander and Camille rested in their own bedroom.

If they even slept? I know what I would be doing if I had Camille to myself.

I rubbed the tips of my cocks against fake Phinova's moist cunt. No hair lay on her folds, just soft brown flesh that swelled from my touch.

A tiny bit of pre-cum spilled out and I traced the pink liquid along her opening.

She arched her body up. "Fuck me."

"In time, Phinova. In time." With my first cock, I drew circles along her throbbing clit.

The sensitive bud puffed up at my attention and glistened under her arousal.

I shuddered with desire.

My second cock, I dipped it in and out of her damp opening, only letting it go in to the rim before sliding it out, only to pierce her again.

She cried out and grabbed the sheets next to her. "Please."

"You were never patient when it came to our secret moments. Were you, Phinova?"

Phinova, my first queen, was always so hungry for more.

I doubt my brother and I ever truly fed her desire enough.

We were a perfect three.

We slept together in one bed, washed in one massive tub, ate at the same table, and lounged in the reading area, all three of us enjoying the same book.

Most dusks we woke to her holding our cocks in her hand and begging us to take her.

I'd only had one cock then. It was before Phinova cast a spell that doubled my amount and increased my yearning for her.

We made love to our queen for hours, Nai and me. Many times we didn't leave our bedroom until midnight, starving with hunger for blood and food.

We were kings of Capitol City by then, but unfortunately the territory's needs fell to the bottom of the list when it came to our priorities.

We barely ruled.

Our only focus lay with Phinova's desires and pleasure so much so, that when Nai left a few times to meet with a council or committee, Phinova and I escaped outside of the city and made love near the Lake of Purity.

It was there she decided that I needed two cocks.

She no longer could be satiated by one.

It took a week for her to find the magic to wield such a miracle, another week to gather the ingredients, and three innocent men's deaths to bind the spell.

When Nai discovered the murders, the spell, and what we'd done, he'd tried to execute me.

He never said a cruel word to her the whole time.

You couldn't punish her, Nai? Could you?

And it was not the murders that boiled your blood. It was the fact that I'd been making love to our lovely enchantress for so long behind your back?

"Please." Fake Phinova writhed under me. "Put them inside. Stab me with your cocks."

Bells rang all over the castle, loud and shrill. I covered my ears with my hands. "What is that?"

"Those are warning bells." She shot up into a seating position and climbed away from me. "We've had practice drills, but I've never heard them actually used. Something is wrong."

"Blasted Xander." I searched for my pants, grabbed them, and hurried to dress.

It had to be Xander.

Who else would cause the castle bells to ring?

He'd done something rash and stupid, no doubt at the order of his queen.

What trouble have you both gotten yourselves into now?

Chapter 11

Near Death

Xander

The two moons stood in the sky in a line that signaled the coming of dawn.

We reached the sewer opening in no time.

I ordered the guards to guide the dominas down the ladder.

They followed my instructions, nodding and trembling every time they glanced at my horns. The scent of their fear flowed to my nostrils and I relished in it.

Should I take pleasure in their fear?

Camille lay asleep in my arms.

I still could not hear her thoughts, just the thumping of her heart inside her chest, but that would be enough for now, to know that she was alive and her heart beating.

Thank you, Ambi.

“Hurry!” I roared.

Tired dominas and guards rushed into the sewer hole, faster than before.

A few women shrieked.

They didn’t know why I’d freed the dominas and what I desired from them. I’d simply raced into the dungeon covered in blood and yelled for them to follow me.

Camille wanted them free, and free they shall be.

They probably thought I was their new king. Maybe they figured I yearned to breed with them.

I leaned back and laughed.

The noise lifted in the night air and soared over the city.

Bats scattered from the trees that hovered over the sewer opening.

Shivering, Leeta hugged herself as she stood next to me. Her bottom lip quivered.

Earlier that day, I’d considered her my mother and now I barely thought of her as an associate.

She’d helped my real mother stab a dagger into Camille’s heart, and thus piercing my heart as well.

Because any harmer of Camille is my enemy.

“Go ahead down the sewer, Leeta. I don’t need you to shadow me.” I looked back at the long line of guards and dominas.

“You do need me, Xander.”

I pushed my fangs back out. “Leave.”

“Xander—”

“Is that my name now?”

“I’m sorry, king.” She twisted the leather uniform shirt she wore in her hands.

“This is what my mother and you wanted, but no one seems pleased. Have I not killed enough for you tonight?”

Her fingers shook. “You have.”

“Then leave me alone before I kill more.”

She reached out for Camille and I hissed.

My fangs extended farther down.

How long will they grow until they finally stop? Would they reach my chest before my ripening was done?

Even my father the Quiet King’s fangs barely passed his lip.

Mine lengthened farther.

Will I be a monster before the time is done?

The last guard and domina pair hurried into the sewer.

Leeta sighed. “Camille. . . I mean your queen will need someone to hold her going down the stairs.”

My frown deepened.

Leeta continued, “Now that I’m a vampire, I can help. When we get below, your queen will need to be cleaned, the healed wounds must be checked, and her chest should be bandaged just in case.”

I growled. “I’ll nurse her.”

No one will touch her but me. No one will be close enough to hurt her again.

Leeta scowled. “You don’t heal wounds, you make them.”

“Be careful, Leeta. You only live because you saved her. Once you betrayed me, you lost the right to talk to me any way you want.”

Leeta stared down at the ground. “Your mother threatened my niece and kept her in a dungeon for all these years. I had to—”

“I’m a Pathfinder. I would have freed her.”

“But, you were destined to be king.”

“Go!” I stepped closer with sharpened claws decorating my free hand. The other arm held on to Camille.

“Okay, but if you need my help, please tell me.” Leeta wiped at her eyes, probably swiping away tears.

My heart twisted, but I refused to allow myself to care.

“I’m. . .sorry, Xander.” Leeta lowered herself down into the opening, leaving me alone.

You’re not sorry enough.

I didn’t lower into the sewer yet.

Instead, I gazed into the sewer hole.

Guards and dominas crowded the sewers tonight. I had no idea how I would feed and take care of them all. That was usually a job for Victoria.

Wake up, my Queen. I need you. I’m surrounded by strangers, unsure of what do next, and scared to death I’ll lose you.

Camille stirred in my arms as if she heard my thoughts. And then suddenly, heat spread over her skin.

Her hair brightened and gleamed orange and red as if it were on fire.

Camille?

I touched the warm strands. Her brown skin darkened to almost a black complexion. White circular shapes bled through her flesh and shimmered under the moons’ light.

“Camille?” I whispered.

Her eyes opened. “Blood. . .I need blood.”

Earlier she’d been unable to say a few words. Now she talked with clarity.

She really is back.

Terror merged with exhilaration and coursed through my veins.

I peered into the sewer hole and saw that no one remained on the ladder.

I roared into the sewer. “Clear the way!”

Everyone scurried to the left and right, giving me ample space at the bottom.

I had to get down as fast as possible.

I know I can make it. I feel the power inside of me.

I tightened my grip on Camille and jumped into the hole.

Wind ripped by, raising the bottom of my tattered leather pants and Camille’s beautiful hair. The tresses still glowed like fire. Her gaze remained on me. She never blinked. It thrilled and scared me all at the same time.

She asked for blood. Why? It doesn't matter. She's here.

I planned to get as much blood as possible to her, but a tiny thought in the back of my mind twisted and unwound into fear.

Is this still Camille, or something else? Why does she need blood?

I landed on the sewer floor. Vampire waste splashed my hooves. Dominas scattered away and hid within the shadows of a new campfire that sat in the middle.

It was hard to breathe with the area so packed. Too much fear and sadness radiated from them.

“Open those doors.” I pointed to Ty and Victoria’s room as well as the one Leeta had slept in. “There are two bedrooms that way. Surely all can’t fit in there, but I have lots of blankets and pillows for occasions like these behind the green door inside of there.”

Two guards rushed to it.

I should learn their names.

“Blood,” Camille whispered.

My heart racketed in my ears as I headed to my bedroom door. “Yes, my queen.”

“Xander?” Leeta called.

I stopped and turned to her. “What?”

“What about food, new clothes, and water?” Leeta carried more wood to the fire in the center. “Do I have your permission to search around for it and let them use the rooms to take care of their needs?”

“Yes.”

“And can I go to your sister?”

“Octavia?”

I raised my eyebrows. “For what?”

“She’s been hoarding money and valuables from your father for years in anticipation of a moment like this. She’ll have the money to help and the resources that we don’t.”

“Go ahead.” I walked off. “And take one of my guards with you, just in case.”

“Thank you, Xander.”

I gritted my teeth at her thanks, opened my door without looking back, brought Camille in, and slammed the door behind me. “I’m going to lay you on the bed and then go get you some blood. I have a few liters in a cooler farther down the sewer in a hidden—”

“Your blood,” Camille screeched. “I . . .need yours.”

Mine? Why?

I tensed.

“Give it to me.” She licked her lips.

My cock twitched with the movement.

I shook my head and struggled to think of something else, to get my mind off of the images of her body under me and those lush legs wide open.

What is wrong with me?

“How do you want the blood?” I extended my hand out to her lips, noticing for the first time that my fingers shook.

She kissed them. Her gaze never strayed from mine.

Although her body remained limp and her strength waning, all of her attention stayed on me.

Is this truly her? Or. . .something else?

My mind pushed outside of itself, searching and reaching for any of her thoughts.

Nothing.

A growl fled from my lips. Her eyes widened in fear.

“I can’t hear your thoughts.”

“Good. You’re . . .always. . .in my head. . .anyway.”

That’s Camille.

“Blood. . .” Her eyelids drooped over her eyes and then shut completely as she fell asleep.

What do I do now?

I stared at my hands, arms, and chest. Blood and rotted flesh painted me. I had to clean all the death off me before I could even consider touching her again.

Damn it.

Locking the bedroom door to make sure no one came in and touched her, I rushed into the bathroom, yanked off my clothes, and stepped into the small shower in the far back of my bathroom. I had a huge tub in the center of the room, but used the shower for quick cleaning right before helping someone escape. The tub was for relaxing after helping people flee. It was one of my many pleasures in this life.

And now it will be her tub, the place where I’ll bathe and make love to her until she forgets about this night.

I scrubbed the dried flesh from my horns. The rough edge of the sponge scraped it all off. The muck dropped to the floor around my hooves. I paused to stare at those big black things that had replaced my toes and feet and looked as though they belonged on a mammoth horse rather than a vampire.

Will my feet ever return? And if they do, will I ever really be me again?

I returned to washing the muck off me.

And what of Camille? She said she needed my blood. Why would she say something like that? Where did this need come from?

But if it was my blood she needed, then fine. I'd give it all to her, every drop, until I couldn't live any more. I'd fill the liquid to the top of buckets and barrels, tubs and pots. She could have it all, if she promised to never leave or get into harm's way like that again.

"King?" The soft voice sounded behind me.

"Queen." I dropped the sponge and turned around.

She barely stood, more like leaned her body on the edge of the tub at the center of the room. Her leather costume hung off her body in tears and rips. That fiery red hair swung back and forth as her head drooped low. And her hair was longer and brighter.

She's changing too. . .

Her eyes fluttered as if even blinking required a lot of strength.

I rushed over and grabbed her. "You can't stand up yet. Let's lie you back down."

"Blood." She enclosed her arms around my neck. They trembled on my shoulders. "N-now."

"I'll give you my blood. I just wanted to wash the death off of me." I undressed her.

Inch by inch the leather slid down her now black skin. Bright glowing symbols marked her flesh and shone within the candles' light.

What is this?

I paused around her thighs, where the marks seemed to form symbols of some sort, ones that swirled and curved outward and inward.

What's happening to her? Is this a bad reaction to the knife's magic?

I turned the handles and put some of the bath soap into the tub. Water poured out of the faucet and spilled into the marble tub. Steam rose from the stream as it filled the space.

I lowered Camille into the water. In the middle of her breasts lay smooth flesh with a triangle as bright as white light.

What do these marks mean? Who could tell me what's happening to her? Ian maybe?

According to Leeta, Ian had been locked in a room making love to dominas. I had no time to check. After killing so many guards in the Quiet King's room, exhaustion had drained my body.

I rushed off with the few guards who swore service to me, raced down to the dungeons to free the Phinova Dominas, and fled the castle with them all.

An exasperated breath fled my lips as I climbed into the water and sat next to my love.

The whole time, she gazed at me, her view staring at my huge horns and traveling down to my blasted hooves. The water enveloped those monstrous things that replaced my feet.

They'd been sore from the journey, maybe because they were new. The liquid's warmth soothed the bottoms and the throbbing area near my ankles where skin met the solid hardness of the hooves.

"Blood." Camille leaned her head back on the edge and closed her eyes. My arm smoothed against hers. Those flaming red strands splayed across the tub's edge and draped down to the floor.

Within an instant, I cut one of my wrists with a fang and held it over her parted lips.

"Here you go, my queen."

Dark red blood dripped out and leaked into her mouth.

She shuddered and groaned. Her tongue licked her lips. Her chest rose and fell. After several minutes of drinking my blood, she held her hand up as if to say stop.

I moved my wrist away. Blood still spilled out and mixed with the soapy water, but in less than a few minutes, the wound would heal and the blood within my veins would replenish inside my body.

I centered all of my attention on her. "Camille?"

A soft giggle escaped her mouth. "Am I no longer your queen?"

She can talk better now. And it is her. . .truly her. . .just. . .different.

I moved closer to her. Water rippled and spilled out of the tub's edges. I captured her, dragging her little frame onto my lap and pressing her soft body against mine. "Queen?"

Her heart beat louder and stronger in my ears. I rubbed my face against her cheeks. "How do you feel?"

"Better."

“Do you think it was my blood?”

“Yes.”

She turned and pressed her breasts into me, her nipples hard points against my chest. “Your blood hummed this long, soft tune that never ended. I don’t know why or how I knew it was your blood. It just—”

“Sung to you.” I kissed her skin, nipping at the succulent flesh. “I know the song of blood. I hear yours when I’m near and hungry for you.”

“Something said I should drink it, or maybe it was a gut feeling, but I knew your blood would make me feel better.”

“And are you still feeling weak?”

“No. I’m starting to feel more like me.” She sat up and leaned away from me.

No more space between us. No more.

I pulled her back to me.

She giggled. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“No. You’re not.” I moved my hands down the sides of her body. The water swirled around me. “How do you truly feel?”

“I already told you I feel fine.”

“I can’t hear your thoughts.”

“Good.”

I guided the tips of my fangs against her skin. “I think our bond may have been broken when you were. . .hurt.”

“Killed.”

“Do you think you truly died?”

“Yes. I saw Ressi and Ambi before me. I floated in the sky above the planet covered in a gown of glittering stars. Ambi said, ‘Go back. Join with your *kings* and unite them all.’ I turned to Ressi. Her hair flowed out in hot flames of fire, just like the sun. She pointed her finger back to our world and said, ‘Tell them.’”

“Tell who? And tell them what?” I tensed and pulled back to look into her eyes.

“I’m not sure. I opened my mouth to ask them questions, but my body floated away from them at their command. I traveled back to you. They wanted me to do something for them. That’s why they let me return to you.”

“No, Camille, you came back because of the potion.”

“No.”

Symbols lit up all over her body. Every inch of black skin boasted a glimmering mark as if her flesh were a canvas for a mad artist obsessed with stars or maybe even a map to find some treasure within the universe.

Her bottom lip quivered. "I saw them. It happened."

"But—"

"I'm not crazy, Xander. The gods stood before me, together, and pushed me back to you."

If she believes this, then I'll have faith in it, too.

I widened my eyes.

Does it really matter as long as she's back with me? And what about these symbols? Did the gods do this?

"Okay." I touched one of the symbols. Warmth radiated from her.

She gazed down at her body for the first time and gasped. "My skin looks like hers."

"Ressi?"

The very thought triggered fear to rise in my chest.

"Yes." She clasped her fingers into her hair and pulled it in front of her, staring at the fiery red strands. "My hair is brighter now, too."

"I noticed."

Yet this could be the potion or a bad reaction to mage magic.

Doubt swam in my head.

I'd never witnessed a bad reaction to magic that seared bright symbols into skin.

She studied her body some more and then shifted her gaze back to me. "I love you."

"I love you, too." But, still, I could not hear her thoughts. The annoyance tugged at the back of my head. I shouldn't need to hear them, but I craved it. I relished being inside her body as well as her mind. I couldn't get enough. "I think your death severed our bond."

"Good. And we won't be re-linking the bond, either."

A dark growl erupted from my chest.

Chapter 12

Many Changes

Camille

Xander's fangs pushed out as he narrowed his eyes. "We won't be relinking the bond?"

"Yes. We won't." I tried to climb off his thighs, but he yanked me back. His voice was a dark growl. "Why not?"

"I didn't like not having my thoughts to myself."

"I did."

"Too bad."

"We will do the bond again."

"We will not."

His thighs stiffened under my behind. "Camille."

"No. In fact, you can keep your fangs away from me if you continue to insist on it."

Our eyes met. His eyes held rage tinged with madness, but if he expected me to cower away in fear then he'd be disappointed.

I stared back with confidence and determination. I loved him more than any man, but my brain was mine alone, along with my privacy. He'd have to understand. My thoughts belonged to only me.

He didn't say anything, but his eyes flared with anger.

I gave him a sad smile. "I won't share my thoughts with anybody."

"They are mine along with your heart, body, and blood."

A shiver ran through me. "I love you, Xander."

"I love you too."

"Let's not fight." I leaned forward and kissed the tip of his nose. "We have so many things to plan and decide. And even more, I need you inside me, not my head, but my body. I need to feel you moving within me tonight."

"And my fangs?"

I slipped my hands along the top of his horns where they curved backward. He shuddered. Drops of water trickled from my fingers, ran down the horns' black paths, and dribbled off at their sharp tips.

I grinned. "You want your fangs inside me?"

His angry look remained. “You shouldn’t have to ask.”

I moved toward his fangs and kissed them, tasting his own blood at the tips. Sweet like sugar, yet bitter like cinnamon.

My stomach grumbled with hunger. His eyes widened in curiosity. His cock hardened under me.

I repositioned myself, lifting my leg over to the other side of Xander so I could straddle him the way I wanted to.

He groaned.

His cock pressed against my stomach and grew right before me.

Oh my.

I blinked as the thick length expanded a few inches longer than I remembered. The width expanded even more too.

I widened my eyes.

His cock is so much bigger than before.

A tiny bit of excitement and fear shivered through my spine. “You’ve changed a lot.”

“I think this is some other form.”

None of the dominas ever saw the Quiet King’s other forms, although it never stopped people from imagining it and creating stories of horns and hooves, spiked flesh and metal skin. It was said that battle was the only time the Quiet King rose from his wheelchair and shifted into his other form.

I never talked to the soldiers that fought with him, so I had no idea how close Xander resembled him.

I wondered if the Quiet King could see, speak, or hear in this other form. He was mute, blind, and deaf. When he spoke, he did so through our minds. When he saw, it was through his fingers scraping over our skin.

I slid my hand up his cock all the way to the mushroomed tip. It vibrated against me. My body swelled with heat and need. “When did the hooves come?”

“In the Quiet King’s bedroom, right before I killed Ty and Victoria.”

I blinked.

“Seeing you bleeding out in so much pain. . .my whole body filled with rage. My feet broke apart. My skin ripped away. Hooves pushed out and raised me high into the air.”

My bottom lip quivered. “You killed Ty and Victoria?”

“Yes, and my mother.”

“Leeta?”

“No. Queen Regina. Leeta gave you the potion, so I kept her alive.”
My mouth dropped open in shock. “You. . .killed Queen Regina?”
“She tried to kill you. If anyone ever tries to hurt you, I’ll kill them.”
Xander has more changes than his physical form.

Ty, Victoria, and even his mother Queen Regina had been his family for so long, but in the end they pushed him into murder. They took a good vampire, one that only wanted to help others that couldn’t help themselves, and they tried to force him to be a king by killing me.

“No.” I landed a kiss on his cheek. “Don’t kill for me anymore. I’m here now.”

“It can’t be helped. This feeling is in my veins now. I can’t get it out. I have to protect you. I’m insane with it.”

“I’m here. You don’t need to protect me.”

“I’ve changed, queen.”

“I know.”

“You don’t.”

“No?”

“Not at all. I’m not the vampire that walked into the Quiet King’s bedroom earlier tonight. I’m not him anymore. This form changes me.”

“How?”

Xander closed his eyes. “I walked out of there. . .a monster.”

“Stop saying that.”

“Do the hooves disgust you?”

“No.” I leaned my head to the side. “Why would you say that?”

“No man should walk on hooves.”

My eyes watered. “Stop it.”

“It is true.”

I tightened my fingers around the head of his cock and squeezed. He grunted. My clit throbbed at the sound and the possibility of his newly-sized hardness inside me.

“Xander.” I licked my lips. “You’re not a man. You’re a vampire king. That means you get to walk on whatever you want to—hooves or feet.”

“And what about my queen?”

I quirked my eyebrows. “What about me?”

“Does she do whatever she desires?”

I smirked. “Of course.”

He growled so loud the walls shook. The candles' lights flickered and wavered.

My heart boomed in my ears.

Another growl left him.

"What's wrong?" I released him and edged away.

He caught my arms and yanked me to him, pressing my breasts against his chest. "You can't do anything you want, not if it's something I don't like."

"Who says you won't like what I do?"

"You can't be away from me, either."

"Will we be going to the bathroom together, too?"

"Maybe."

Why is he acting this way? Before, he was possessive, but battled with keeping his demands back. Now. . .now he's scaring me.

"I need the bond back." He pressed me harder against his massive chest as though I were no more than a little doll.

"Let me go." I shoved at him, but couldn't break free.

"No." He grabbed the back of my head hard and gently tilted it away, exposing my neck.

I trembled. "Xander, what are you doing?"

"This change. . .I want all of you."

"You have me."

"Not your thoughts."

"Those are mine."

"No, queen." The tips of his fangs slid against the hollow of my neck. Even though I didn't want to, I shuddered in desire from their touch.

Dear Ambi. I don't want him to bite me, but I do. . .

Memories of his bite danced in my head—the sting of them slicing into my skin, the burst of pleasure as they sank deeper, and the all-consuming bliss as he drank.

My blood hummed.

The marks on my skin gleamed, illuminating the space around us. My body yearned for his bite, but my mind wanted its privacy. "Put your fangs away."

"No."

"P-please."

"I must. The need burns within me."

“Fight it.”

“I almost lost you. I can’t fight it.” He pierced me with them, hard and unyielding. They ripped into my neck.

I screamed.

Stinging pain exploded in the area. My blood rushed to him within seconds as if at his command.

“No!” I beat at his chest, scratched his face, and struggled to get away.

His arms locked around me like steel. And then my traitorous body reacted with lust.

Dear Ambi. It feels so good.

My nipples perked. My clit ached with desire. But still I fought against him as a longing for sex rose in my core. “Don’t do it! Don’t even—”

It’s done. His voice sang into my mind, laced in beauty and harmony.

I hated it. Tears spilled out of my eyelids.

He retracted his fangs and leaned back. A neutral mask cloaked his face. Dots of my blood decorated his lips.

I shivered.

He licked his lips.

I peered at him through a blurry view of tears. “Are you happy?”

His gold eyes shifted to red. **Yes.**

“You’re right. You’re not the vampire that walked into the Quiet King’s bedroom.” I slapped his face as hard as I could.

Boom.

His face tilted to the side and then he turned it back to gaze at me.

I climbed off of him, feeling weak again, like I could pass out in seconds.

“You are a monster!”

A dark growl left him.

“I cannot believe you did that!”

“I needed to.”

“You didn’t.”

“I lost you.”

“It was my right. My mind.”

He roared, “Your mind is mine!”

Shivering, I stumbled back.

“Where are you going?”

“Why not plunder through my brain and figure it out?” Shivering, I staggered away, grabbed a towel, and wrapped it around me. “That’s the last

time you bite me without my permission.”

Fast, he leaped out of the tub in a blur of motion.

Oh no!

Terror ripped through my heart.

I backed up as he landed before me with a thump.

Don't hurt me.

He stepped my way.

Clop. Clop.

His muscles ballooned. Water dripped from them and the long cock that hung between his legs.

“X-xander?”

He roared. “Be careful, queen!”

“Or what?” I stepped back. “I think you’ve done enough for tonight. Don’t you?”

He sneered but said nothing else.

“You bit me without my permission.”

“I needed the bond!”

“And I needed you to respect my privacy.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, you’re not.”

“You’re right. I’m not.” He ran his fingers through his sandy blond-and-black strands. “And I’m not myself anymore—”

“No, you’re not,” I said through clenched teeth, turned around, and headed away. “When you’re Xander again, then come back to me.”

He called after me. “And if he’s gone forever?”

“Then I’m gone, too.” I disappeared through the doors.

His rumble came from behind me so loud I almost stumbled from the quake of the ground.

His voice stabbed into my head. ***Not even death will keep me from you!***

“Then I hope I don’t have to put that to a test!” I called back.

Weakness overtook me. I had almost died. Surely, I needed to rest.

I stumbled to his rainbow-covered bed and collapsed onto it.

I’ll just rest for a minute.

Water coated my waist and below.

I yawned.

Just a few minutes.

In the tub, adrenaline had burst through me from one taste of his blood, but now I was weary and full of dread.

He bit me without my permission. He held me to him, ignored my struggling, and drank until the mental connection reformed.

I traced a huge rainbow at the center of the bed with a lazy finger, struggling to keep my eyes open.

What else will he do? How much more will he take? Will I ever stop him if he goes too far?

No. Xander's voice slid into my thoughts. ***Not if I don't desire it.***

Chapter 13

Death Lingering

Ian

How many Vampire Kings does it take to change the oil in a lantern?

Five. One King to kill the other and the other and the other and the other, until the last one is standing covered in blood and ready to change the lantern's oil.

Smiling to myself, I put on my leather costume and stormed out of Queen Regina's bedroom.

The sitting room's coarse carpet scratched my feet.

Where is everyone?

The fake queen had left. Only dominas and musicians remained in the sitting room, their faces creased with worry. The dominas huddled in the corner as the musician strummed his guitar with shivering fingers.

"Sir." A half-naked male servant jumped up and came to me. "Queen Regina asked me to keep you here."

I slammed my fist into the center of his chest. He traveled through the air, screeching. His body crashed into the floor.

I continued. "She's no queen of mine."

"Lord and ladies dance under the moons," the musician sang. "Come to all and—"

"Sing another lyric or pluck another cord and I'll rip your throat apart!" I formed my hands into fists. "Where is the *fake* queen?"

"S-she left as soon as you went into the room," the youngest-looking domina said from the corner. "A-and then the screams came."

I'd been inside the room for a while due to waiting for the domina to get a red wig and return.

But how long had that been?

I scanned the room. "And where are the other two vampires, Ty and Victoria?"

"They left with her." The musician set his guitar to the side. "Queen Regina ordered us to play the music louder if we heard noise and to keep you in here as much as possible."

“Did she now?” I pushed through the door.

A freezing breeze hit my face, carrying the scent of blood and death.

What happened?

I covered my nose with my arm.

The smell is worse than in the sewers.

The royal court was empty and dark. Silent. Deserted. The few candles I saw lay on their sides.

Platters of food had been left untouched. Robes were slung across turned-over lounge chairs.

Headless bodies of royal guards formed a path out of the Royal Court into the city, as if some deranged vampire had sliced and killed his way to freedom.

Dear Ambi, let the deranged vampire be Xander and not an enemy.

Screams and cries rose higher up in the castle.

I raced that way, sniffing the air. A sour fragrance greeted my nostrils. It seemed similar, yet unique.

Hold on. What is that?

I inhaled again.

Odd.

I couldn't place the smell, but I knew it. The scent sung to me, drawing me to it.

But. . .what is that?

I should have went the other way and continued to investigate.

But that smell. . .

I rushed toward that sour odor.

Perhaps, the scent held a clue of what happened today.

As I rushed forward, I spotted bloody footprints across the ground.

What happened?

There were so many bloody prints. Some of the shapes were small feet. Others were big feet. Then came boot prints, ones from sandals, and even a horse's hooves, huge ones, the size of a massive horse perhaps.

Wait.

I slowed down.

Massive hooves?

I lowered to the ground and stared at the hoof prints.

Not a horse at all. A vampire king walked these halls, but. . .in battle form.

I sniffed the air again.

Not Nai either.

I knew my brother's stench. We were twins, after all, and had lain inside the same mother's womb. I grew up with him and could find his scent in darkness with my nose covered by cloth.

That is the sour smell.

I sniffed again.

The scent of a newly formed king.

Since Nai had killed all vampire prince babies in the land, it had been years since I'd caught the scent of a prince at the end of his ripening. No more vampire princes traveled the land. At least none that I knew besides Xander.

Dear Ambi! Xander has hooves? How could this be? It should have taken years for him to get to battle form, unless.

More cries filled the air. They rushed all around from high in the castle to all outside the gates.

I must figure out what happened.

I ran through a hallway shrouded in gray stone.

It took many years to ripen from prince to king and a hoard of his first queen's blood to nourish him.

There was only one other way that I'd heard a prince ripening too soon and that was what had happened to my brother.

I thought back to what the fake queen had said.

A greedy king had broken into the castle, taken Phinova from my brother, and made Nai watch as they tortured and killed her. Nai had filled with rage and sparked the hormones to work overtime, growing into a vampire king before their eyes. His senses burned away, too. He lost his eyesight, ability to hear, or utter another word with his lips.

However, Nai had gained too. His body drummed with power.

When he resided in the city, his magical influence could be experienced anywhere, even in the grimy sewers under the castle.

It rattled my teeth, raised the hairs on the back of my neck, and waved against my skin.

I doubted others reacted the same way.

It was because I was a vampire king, too, and just couldn't deal with one so powerful and so close to me.

Xander? You're a matured king now?

In the old days, mature vampire kings never strayed too close to other kings. It had even been set into law that no more than five vampire kings at a time could visit one city and when they did, space needed to remain between them.

We were competitive beings, possessive, domineering, and some would say savagely psychotic at times.

When kings met, more rules controlled the sessions.

All kings could not bring their queens for fear there would be battles over the women.

Each king limited the amount of guards they brought to equal what the others brought.

If the kings sat in chairs, servants and helpers measured and analyzed the seats to make sure that all equality remained.

That was how illogical we could be.

Almost anything could trigger our anger.

Once Nai and I had been forced to set the table for one of our father's meetings with several kings, it took us hours to measure the place settings, test the quality of plates, and taste the food, assuring that all kings received similar portions of meat and rice, blood wine and bread.

And still a fight ensued that night over one king having more butter.

*If Xander is now a king, does he understand how different he will be?
Does Camille know too?*

I'd wanted time to prepare them both.

Damn it.

Steps appeared at the end of the dark hallway.

No. It isn't Xander. I can't be. Something else is going on.

I raced up them toward the cries and reached the highest level of flights in moments. Here the perfume of rotting corpses soaked the area.

A hint of vampire king scent drifted my way, but it was old.

This king had left.

If it was Xander, I assumed he fled to the sewers.

But how could it be Xander? He wasn't close to the end of ripening. Even with Camille's powerful blood, he had years to mature. Unless. . .

I inhaled the air and caught it.

No.

The fragrance of Camille's blood crashed into me.

Growling, I increased my speed. Rounding the corner, my foot smashed down on something cold and wet.

What was that?

I looked down.

Bloody gunk and mucous splattered the floor. A few fingers rolled near the tip of my toe.

A hand perhaps.

I gazed before me.

Rows of heads torn from their bodies sprawled out in front of me.

Okay.

I could barely breathe, for the place was dripping in rot and decay. Shrieks and screams sounded farther down.

I continued there, slipping on murky liquid each step.

I entered the room and looked up. "My god."

Queen Regina dangled from the ceiling by her own intestines. Her body swung back and forth. Her last expression was one of confusion.

Behind her, a mountain of corpses rested, its peak reached the ceiling.

Blood painted the walls and floors.

Somehow I recognized the room through the horrific scene. It was where Nai, Phinova, and I read books, long before we'd made love to her and during the time when we were just babbling princes trying to get her attention.

We'd sneak up here and hide her from her guards.

I scanned the room in disbelief. "My god."

Guards without legs, arms, and hands screamed over and over. I would have put them out of their misery if not for the glowing image far off, the one that sat on a diamond throne.

Phinova!

I froze.

No. No. No.

My queen sat on that gleaming throne. She'd been dead for all these years, almost a hundred, yet some parts of her flesh seemed fresh and new.

Phinova.

I stepped closer.

Spiders had built webs over her face and arms. They crawled in and out of her nose. Her brown skin had an odd glow. That red hair flowed down and draped her shoulders.

I approached.

Phinova.

I stopped in front of her.

You couldn't bury her, Nai? You wanted to what? Preserve her? But how?

I extended my hand and touched those strands. So soft and silky. She wore a crimson gown. And then I realized that it was a mistake; she wore an ivory gown drenched in blood.

How could it be? She's been dead for so long.

Then the craziest thing happened. Something odd. Insane. Impossible.

Phinova's voice seeped into my mind. ***Ian.***

I jumped back.

Ian, can you hear me?

My hands shook at my sides. "This is. . .impossible."

It's not. You can hear me.

"No." I shook my head. "This isn't right. This can't be."

In this body I still live. With the life liquid of blood mages, I remain.

"Phinova?" My legs collapsed under me.

Slime splattered all around—a mixture of blood, mucous, fluids, and death. I wiped the stuff away. My gaze remained on Phinova the whole time.

"My queen. Phinova? No, you didn't say anything."

I did, sweet Ian.

"You're dead."

I live.

"P-prove it."

How?

"Tell me something that only you and I would know."

Silence came.

I frowned. "You are something, but you are not her."

I am your queen.

"No. No. No." I covered my face and shook my head over and over.

"You're darkness. You're some evil spirit, but you're not her."

Give me blood from the mages. Feed me.

Behind me, the guards shrieked. And between their screams I could hear the dripping of murky fluid as it dripped down from the fake queen's ripped legs.

This is insane. I have to get out of here.

I jumped up, searched the room, and didn't spot Camille, nor did I smell her.

Take me, Ian. Don't leave me here, my only love.

My face snapped to Phinova. Her corpse didn't move. Those lips were shut tight.

"If you're Phinova, tell me what I gave you the last time we saw each other."

Silence.

"Exactly." I turned around and rushed away.

Ian!

"There is evil in this room. That is all." I left and turned into the hall.

Ian, please don't leave me! Not again! No!

I wanted to turn around.

Part of me. . .wanted to even. . .pretend that it was here.

"Death." I forced myself to keep moving forward. "W-whenever death lingers for too long, bad magic rises."

Ian, my king. My only love.

I bobbed my head up and down. My feet dragged along a little at a time. "Phinova told me that herself long ago. Get rid of the dead thing fast or evil will sprout."

Ian. I'm trapped in this corpse.

I stopped in the doorway.

I'm imprisoned in here!

I fell to my knees, covered my face, and rocked. "Get it together, man. Get it together. She can't be alive."

I am alive!

"Shut up!" I roared. "Dark spirit!"

You said you would never let harm come to me. You said only the sun and moon gods could stop you.

I had and I meant it.

But, Nai said the same things too, and probably had been saying it to this corpse for all these years.

This couldn't be Phinova.

What magic was this? How could she still be alive?

She was inside my head.

Was it due to our bond? Did it somehow live past her death?

Phinova's voice slithered into my skull. ***Magic is complicated and unknowing.***

I rubbed my eyes. "I won't let you trick me."

Give me blood from the mages. More and more. Take my body.

Against all logic, I rose. "And where shall we go?"

Wherever blood mages are. Their blood keeps me alive.

"And if you don't get it?"

Then I slowly sink into myself and. . .

"And?"

We shall not talk of those things.

I returned to the room. "And what happened here, Phinova?"

A young vampire prince became king tonight. They tortured his queen. He ripened, broke free, killed all but a few, and escaped.

"It must be Xander you're talking about."

Dear Ambi, I'm talking to a corpse.

I am alive.

"You haven't proven that."

I gave you more than a spell to keep you alive. I gave you a spell to grow another penis.

"Nai could have told you that, and Phinova would have said cock." I wiped away webs and spiders from her face. "Was Xander's queen hurt?"

I'm not sure. One woman said that she lived.

"Then I know where he ran off with her." Against even more logic, I lifted Phinova up into my arms and raced out of there.

A few dominas peeked out from shadowed corners and shrieked when they spotted Phinova's corpse in my arms. I didn't see any royal guards. It seemed that all had fled or died tonight.

"Nai will return to this chaos, ready to bring war to whoever ruined it."

Do not worry, my love.

Phinova's voice vibrated through my head.

Nai can be controlled.

Tell me how.

He listens to me and has been for a century. When he fills my body with mage blood, it sinks into my veins, preserving me, and then Nai drinks from my neck as we make love.

Cringing while still running off to the sewers, I gazed down at the corpse so fresh and full of life, but dead just the same. "Maybe that has been the

problem all along. He is drinking darkness over and over.”

Her voice played like a smooth musical instrument, gentle and soothing.

What do you mean, my love?

“Nai has ruled the territory like a crazed man. Maybe it’s because he gets his orders from. . .you? Dear Ambi. You’re dead and he’s making love to you. He’s madder than I thought.”

I’m alive. It isn’t wrong.

Phinova chuckled in my head and I wanted to pause right there and kiss those lips to see if they would move.

Ambi, help me.

My arms trembled as I carried her.

This is wrong.

This is only wrong if you think so.

She used to say that. . .She did. Maybe, it is her.

It is.

I ignored her voice and tried to think.

Or perhaps, I simply yearn for it to be her.

It is me.

Why am I even carrying her away?

You’re saving me.

What madness is this? Why did I take the dead body?

Just like when you, Nai, and I would make love, you always worried it was wrong. But was it, loyal Ian?

Increasing my speed, My bottom lip quivered. “After all these years, I still don’t know.”

Chapter 13

Battle Form

Xander

Camille slept.

I stood in front of the bed, naked, hard, and dripping soapy water.

Her dream performed a play in my mind. Ambi and Ressi hovered over Camille as she kneeled in the sky before them. All three floated above the planets. The gods blinked in and out of form, never truly in a solid image, but more like transparent wisps of mists, magic, and color.

I'd never seen anything like it before.

They resembled something of great power.

Even through her dreams, I could feel their influence vibrating against my skin.

Ambi gleamed white and bright like the moon. The only other color was the dark blue in his eyelids and the blackness of his horns that curled back like mine and boasted sharp points at the end. His mouth moved as he talked to Camille in a language I could not understand. With each foreign word, fiery stars flowed out of his lips.

What is he saying to her?

As soon as I thought the words, Ressi turned to me.

I froze.

This is a dream. How can she see me?

Terror pulsed with the rapid beating of my nervous heart.

Calm down. This is only a dream.

Ressi formed her burning lips into a smile and continued to watch me as Ambi talked to Camille. Strands of flames swayed back and forth around Ressi's head. Coppery-colored skin covered her.

Bright symbols marked her flesh and looked just like the ones Camille now wore on her body.

Ressi nodded at me and directed her attention to Camille.

Suddenly, a booming came from the door.

"Xander!" Leeta yelled, "We have a problem!"

Women screaming burst from the other side of the door.

What is going on?

The dream vanished.

Camille rolled over and faced me, rubbing her eyes.

The fear from Ressi's peculiar look aimed at me in the dream had not gone away.

In fact, the fear heightened to dread as Camille's face shifted from relaxed to terror.

Our gazes met.

Through my eyes I tried to show her how sorry I was, how much I'd regretted forcing the claim.

Her scared expression transformed to a glare.

I stepped back.

"Xander!" Leeta knocked at the door again.

I sneered. "Yes!"

"I need to talk to you now. We have a problem."

Problem?

I doubted it. No one knew the way to my sewers but Ty, Victoria, Leeta, and me.

Being that Ty and Victoria were dead, I didn't figure anybody else would dive into the area for a surprise attack.

Granted, the Quiet King may find out about my destruction to his castle and freeing of dominas by tomorrow's dusk.

Many guards had fled.

The sound of horses stomping away could be heard all night.

I was confident one of those horses carried a messenger to my father.

I'd have two days to battle him and was no longer scared. Since maturing into this new form, the idea of killing another king tasted sweet on my tongue.

Weeks ago I would have pissed myself at the thought.

Now I yearned for it.

"Xander?" Leeta banged again.

"We're coming, Leeta." Camille sat up. Her luscious breasts jiggled.

I grunted.

Her brown nipples hardened from the sound.

"You don't plan on opening the door naked, do you?" She folded a sheet around her and headed to the door. "Why don't you focus on covering yourself?"

I read her thoughts.

His cock is so big. How will it feel?

She snuck a glance.

I peered further in her head and saw what she saw. My image in her mind.

It might hurt me.

She shuddered.

“Only pleasure would come.” Blood rushed to my cock, readying it for her. I longed to lay my queen down and push inside her moist pussy.

“Xander. . .cover yourself.”

“Why?”

“We have an emergency.” She bit her lip and rose from the bed.

“Come here.”

She went over to the door. “No.”

“Now, queen.”

“You are becoming insane.”

Am I?

Camille waited by the door with her hand on the knob. “Put some clothes on.”

Fast, I closed the distance between us and pressed my cock against the curve of her succulent ass. “No. We can talk to Leeta through the door.”

“Stop.” She tried to slip away.

I seized her waist to stop her. “I’m so sorry.”

“You don’t get to touch me anymore.”

I held my growl in. The deep animal sound lodged in my throat. My fangs exploded out of my mouth, but luckily her back was still to me, so she couldn’t see.

I pushed my way into her head.

I just need him to calm down. He’s scaring me.

Frowning, I backed away.

Camille sighed and cracked the door open. “What’s wrong, Leeta?”

“You look better and you’re up,” Leeta said.

“What do you want?!” I asked through clenched teeth. My cock begged to be closer to Camille, to have me rub the throbbing tip against her. I imagined kneeling down behind her, parting her ass with my hands, and licking that sweet pussy from behind.

Hot flesh would surround my tongue.

Her arousal would pour down around me and I’d lap it up.

“Ian is our friend.” Camille shrugged. “If he says he was trapped in a room with dominas, I believe him.”

Leeta’s voice rushed out in a strained tone. “But he’s demanding to see you.”

“Ian? What about Ian?” Claws ripped through my fingertips.

“Did you not hear a word?” Camille glanced over her shoulder. Her gaze snapped to my hand as I caressed the head of my cock.

Hold on. When did I grab it? I don’t remember touching myself.

I released my cock. “I didn’t hear anything.”

“Get sex off of your mind, Xander.”

The muscle in my jaw twitched. My groin heated. For an odd reason, the more she fought me, the more I yearned to fuck her.

Lust rippled through me. “I’m fine.”

Camille turned back to the cracked open doorway. “Leeta, tell the guards to stop pointing their swords at Ian and let him into our room.”

Part of me was thrilled she said *our* room.

The other part plummeted into rage at the thought of Ian, another vampire king, so close to her.

Why did she want him inside here?

Rage bubbled through me.

Is she planning on breeding with him?

I’ll kill him right as he steps over the threshold! I’ll spray his blood all over the room! And then I’ll take her right there! I’ll fuck her on top of his body, so she will know never to push me too far!

Leeta whispered, “I don’t think that’s a good idea, Camille.”

Camille let out an exasperated breath. “Why not?”

“He’s carrying a dead woman in his hands. The corpse from the Quiet King’s bedroom.”

“His first queen?” Camille edged back. “Uh. . .Don’t worry about that. Let him in.”

The door closed.

Camille turned to me, stepped a few feet forward, and adjusted the sheet so it covered more of her. “Xander, why do you have your claws out?”

Because you’re about to flaunt your lover in front of me.

I retracted the claws and stalked around her. My hooves banged against the floor.

Clop. Clop.

Panic spread across her face, but she remained where she stood and formed her hands into fists.

Clop. Clop.

I picked a feisty one. She'll never stand down, even when she's supposed to. I'll have to teach her.

"Xander, what are you doing?"

"Who is he to you, queen?"

"Ian is only Ian to me." Her bottom lip quivered. "Nothing else. Why don't you go into the bathroom and put a towel on or—"

Within seconds, I picked her up, slung her on the bed, and got on top of her. "And what will you do with him when I'm gone?"

A sharp point pierced my stomach. The bite of her dagger burned into my flesh.

I cried in pain, "Ah!"

When did she grab it? Where did it come from? She's so fast now. She got to that dagger too quickly.

"Get off of me and I'll remove it." She pushed the dagger deeper into me.

Dark blood spilled out.

I bellowed. "Ah!"

The door crashed open behind me.

"Holy Ambi!" Ian yelled. "What are you both doing?!"

My breathing raced. My heart staggered. A tear spilled out of my eye and dropped onto her cheek. "I'm sorry."

She closed her eyes. "Climb off of me and I'll remove it."

Why did I get on her like this? Why did I? What is going on with me?

Movement erupted behind me.

Ian placed his hands on my shoulders and helped me back enough where the dagger didn't cause more damage.

"Let go of the dagger, Camille," Ian ordered.

She trembled. "Not until he's off the bed."

I gritted my teeth and climbed away. The dagger glided out of my stomach. Inside my core, veins stitched back together. Blood singed. The wound, little by little, healed. I knew I'd be fully recovered by next dusk.

"Don't ever grab me like that again." Camille wiped the wooden blade off on the sheet she wore with shivering hands and scooted farther to the end of the bed.

I'd given her that dagger over two weeks before to learn how to protect herself from vampires.

How ironic that she had to use it on me.

What is wrong with me?

I turned to Ian, full of embarrassment and shame.

Until, that is, I spotted the corpse he clutched in his arms.

What in Ambi's name?!

When Ian grabbed and pulled me away, he must have put her down, but once he released me, he must have quickly returned her to his hold.

Ian stared at my hooves. "Why are you in your battle form?"

"Why are you holding a corpse?"

"Her name is Phinova."

Dear Ambi and Ressi together. Is this my future? A deranged vampire clutching his only love? Is this what I could be?

"I'm sorry." It seemed like I'd been apologizing all night. "Why are you holding Phinova?"

Ian frowned. "It's a long story, but not as significant as to why the Quiet King's castle is soaked in blood and death, or why most of his dominas and royal guards are resting in your sewers, or even more significant. . . why in the moons' god's name are you still in your battle form?"

"Does it matter?"

"Yes!" He spat the word out in disgust. "That form is madness formed of flesh. I barely shift into the form unless I'm faced with an emergency so dire I may die. How long have you been like this?"

"Not long."

"Several hours at least." Camille edged off the bed and stepped Ian's way.

My claws exploded from my fingers.

Does she think she will be breed with him, right in front of me?

Ian held his hand up to her. "Stay there, Camille."

I leaned my head to the side. "You command my queen now?"

"No." Slowly, Ian laid the corpse down on the carpet next to him. "I thought it would be better if she stayed next to you."

My heart boomed in my ears. "Good."

Ian glanced at my hooves. "Could I suggest something, king?"

"She is mine."

"I know."

“You better.”

“You should change back.”

“Because it causes you fear to be near so much power.”

“Yes.” His cheeks twitched as if he were laughing inside of himself.

I raised my eyebrows. “Are you mocking me in your head?”

“Never. . .Your Majesty.” Ian bowed. “Do you remember how I helped you push your horns back into your head?”

“You touched them.” I lifted the right side of my lip into a sneer. “You won’t be touching them again.”

I’ll kill him first.

“Well, it wasn’t just my touching them that made them withdraw. It was me disgusting you by touching them.”

“You won’t be disgusting me.”

“I’m sorry, but I must.” Ian unbuttoned his leather pants and opened them with a snap.

What is he doing?

Two huge cocks plopped out in front of me.

“No!” I drew back and cringed.

The first thing I noticed was how my body lowered.

My hooves twisted with a crunch and broke into pieces of bone that cracked with a sting and reformed into the arch of my foot.

“Ah!” I screamed and balanced my weight on the wall in front of me. Smaller bones pushed out into toes. Blood bled through the bone. Flesh skated up the bone and sewed together with crimson sparks.

A weird clarity rushed back to me as if a thick fog had seeped out of my brain.

All the thoughts I’d had earlier now seemed irrational, from the need to force the mental bond to thinking Camille would ever breed with Ian.

How could I ever think those things? How could I ever hurt her? What have I done?

Inch by inch, my horns submerged themselves into my skull. My fangs snapped into my gums. My legs gave out under me. I crashed to the floor, exhausted.

A smoldering ache painted my skin.

Sweat glazed over me.

Ian picked up his dead queen. “He’ll need to feed from you tonight.”

“He already fed from me by taking advantage of my weakness. He won’t feed from me again.” Camille got off the bed, came over to me, and kneeled.

I should comfort him. Her thoughts merged with confusion. ***I can’t. What if he. . .takes advantage of me again?***

I shut my eyes. “I hurt her.”

“You hurt who? Camille?” Ian asked.

Camille explained what happened from me killing everyone in the Quiet King’s bedroom until the moment when I forced the bond. The whole time she talked, I rose from the floor and maintained distance between us.

Ian lowered to the ground with his queen cuddled in his lap. Every few minutes Ian directed his attention to the dead woman as if she’d said something.

Camille stared at him. “Ian?”

He cleared his throat and looked at me. “So you bit Camille without getting her permission?”

We’ll have to address the corpse once. . .once what? Once Camille leaves? Once Camille decides that I took it too far and vein-raped her?

My hands shook at my sides. “I’m sorry, Camille. I didn’t even. . .realize. . .”

A sad expression spread across her face.

“Being in that form for so long is dangerous.” Ian’s fangs peered out from his top lip. “You should never be in that form around Camille unless you’re trying to protect her.”

“He’ll never get that chance again.” Camille averted her eyes.

I won’t be with someone who scares me.

Her thoughts lingered in her head as she traced her thumb along the dagger’s blade.

I really did become a monster.

Ian gazed at her. Then, he looked back at me. “We must fix this.”

I stared at my feet. “Camille shouldn’t be around me, until I figure out this new. . .”

“You’re a king now.” Ian sighed. “Too damned soon and with no chance to fully comprehend it all.”

I rose, yanked another sheet off the bed, and wrapped it around my waist. “Take Camille somewhere safe. I can’t do it and I don’t want to risk. . .hurting her again.”

Camille stared down at the ground. I forced myself to leave her mind to herself and slipped out of her head.

“Are you talking to me?” Ian touched his chest. “You think the vampire holding the rotting body is a good choice to take her away. Why not Leeta or —?”

“You know mage territory. At least that’s what Camille said before, that you would take her there.”

“That was the promise. Clearly things have changed.” He waved his hands in the air. “For one, you have over fifty dominas in the sewers tonight. Will you replace one of them as your queen?”

Anger flashed in Camille’s eyes as she parted her lips.

I wanted to read her thoughts, but I stayed out.

Even though the sheet wrapped around her, I could still make out her sexy curves and wished I could touch her.

“Yes, little queen?” Ian smirked. “Do you have something to say?”

“Um. . .No.” She bit her lip.

“Camille can leave some of her blood here.” I ran my fingers through my hair. “I’m not making anyone else my queen.”

Ian snorted. “You think you’ll be satisfied with drinking a tube of her blood?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll need to take on a domina for more than feeding. You’re a young king now. Your hormones will surge with the desire to breed—”

“We’ll discuss this after she’s gone.”

Camille never sat back down.

Several feet stood between us.

What did I do? Did I really. . .take her blood?

I stayed in my spot due to anguish and regret and was sure she stayed in her area because of fear.

Ian interrupted my thoughts. “And are you planning to fight my brother?”

“There’s no other choice. He’ll go after Camille and if he can’t find her, then he’ll grab her daughters.”

Camille glanced at me with sad eyes. How I wished to know what she was thinking, but I didn’t try to break her mental walls.

Instead, I put focus on Ian. “What are your thoughts on my battling the Quiet King?”

“You and I in our battle forms may be able to take on my brother.” Ian combed his fingers through the dead woman’s red hair. “But who will hold back his army while we’re fighting him?”

I considered the few royal guards that had followed me from the castle. I counted barely ten and who knew if they would remain loyal to me once the king returned.

“You need an army.” Ian spread out his hands. “You’ll need one twice the size of my brother’s army to even increase the odds against us.”

“What do you want me to do?” I went to the bed and sat down. “The king makes sure to keep all strong vampire men in his army. The only people left in the vampire cities are weak men, scrawny aristocrats, and the old. Where will I get an army?”

“The same place we will take Camille.” Ian shifted his lips into a huge smile. “Mages can be your army.”

“What?”

“They have no problem killing vampires, and I’m sure they’ll be happy to dethrone the Quiet King.”

“Mages.” I laughed. “Why would they follow me into battle?”

“They won’t follow you. A *vampire*, king or not, cannot rule mages, but they will race into battle with you as your equal. If you ask and say please.”

My voice laced with skepticism. “That’s it?”

“Well, I’m sure you’ll make promises of land, money, and whatever mages want these days. You’ll say you’ll give it to them if you’re king.”

I directed my attention to Camille as she sat down on the bed. Space still flowed between us, but her scent rushed to my nose and calmed me enough. “Camille?”

She looked at me.

“What do you think?”

“I think that Ian is correct. We should get the mages to be your army.”

“If you agree, then I will do it.”

Her bottom lip quivered. “I do.”

“I know you hate me right now.” I gritted my teeth and forced myself to look into those hurt eyes. “Sorry won’t be enough for what I did. But. . .I promise to get you to safety. And. . .I’ll break the bond between us.”

She whispered, “Okay.”

“I just ask that. . .while you’re near me. . .you’ll let me drink from you.”

She returned to fingering her dagger. "If you drink, it will be from a place on my body of my choosing."

I bobbed my head.

In other words, there will be no sex. I'll be lucky to drink from her wrists.

"You force yourself on me again and I'll stab you in the heart." She didn't blink or avert her eyes. Again, adrenaline surged inside of me. Her determination and confidence turned me on. My cock clenched.

Calm down. We won't be touching her tonight. . .

Ian cleared his throat. "And the mage army? What do you think? My thoughts are that we barely have two to three days before Nai begins searching for you. As I ran here, whispers swirled the city about the Horned King who conquered the kingdom."

I blinked. "Who is the Horned King?"

Ian pointed to me.

I groaned in annoyance.

"Nai will hear of it by next dusk or the dusk after that. When he does, murder will swim in his head and he won't calm down until your heart is beating in his hands."

"We can't let that happen." Camille's fingers shook in her lap. "We must protect Xander."

Even though I hurt her, she still worries for me.

Nervous, I stared at her. "Camille, do you really think it's a good idea to recruit mages for my cause?"

"Don't ask her." Ian shook his head. "Look within yourself for the answer."

"Says the vampire snuggling a dead body." I turned back to Camille. "What do you think?"

Ian snarled.

"Ambi believes that we must all unite against the Quiet King." She set the dagger on the bed. "He's blessed you in this war."

"What do you mean Ambi believes?" Ian studied her as if for the first time. His gaze traveled down her body. The glowing marks on her arms glimmered in the light.

"Hold on. Your skin." His hand went to his mouth. "You died and returned?"

We put our attention on Ian.

My nerves flared. "What did you say?"

“Or are my new eyes playing tricks on me like my mind tonight?”

I leaned my head to the side. “What are you talking about?”

“For as long as I’ve lived. . .I’ve heard legends about *the Returned*. People who die and come back with stars in their skin.”

Camille raised her arm and studied it. “I think I died or came close, but I definitely returned. And my skin. . .I don’t know.”

Ian gazed down at Phinova. “Shut up. I won’t do that.”

I blinked.

Is he talking to her?

Ian looked back up at me and cleared his throat. “Anyway, we should go to mage territory.”

She nodded and put her view on me. “I really think connecting with the mages is a good idea.”

I sighed. “Then we’ll sneak into mage territory at dusk.”

“No.” Ian held up his hand before him. “We’ll do it during daylight. We don’t have time. We’ll rest in Tribe Flame’s land. They’re the closest and Phinova’s old tribe. They held connections with my father and will be the most willing to talk to vampires compared to the others.”

Camille spoke, “If the other tribes won’t talk to you both, then maybe they’ll talk to me.”

“No. You’re out of this.” I got up and headed to the bathroom. If we were leaving soon, I’d need to shower again and release the ache inside my cock from being next to her yet unable to touch her. “When we arrive at Tribe Flame, you’ll remain with them. Ian and I will continue to build the army. You’ll be far away.”

Camille stirred. “I can’t stay with them, when I need to help you both gather the army and fight along with you—”

“*You will not be fighting!*” I roared, backed up, and made myself calm down. “You won’t be near that battle or me. I’m done with you being hurt or harmed.”

“I’ll decide what I will and will not do.” She crossed her arms over her chest.

I yearned to fuck her right there, to lay her down on the bed, spread open those thighs, and enter her with no mercy.

“Silence. Stop the back and forth. This is ridiculous.” Ian rose with the corpse in his arms. “Let’s just plan on each day and not think too far ahead.

You both acted already with this castle debacle. No more moves unless you talk with me.”

“We didn’t act on anything,” Camille argued. “His mother surprised us in the Quiet King’s room and stabbed me. I told you this.”

“You shouldn’t have been in my brother’s room to begin with.”

“I needed to find out information.”

“Well, now you have it.” Ian displayed Phinova’s spider-webbed face to us. “Nai is insane and has been filling up Phinova’s body with domina blood to preserve her.”

Camille stood as if to get a better look at the dead woman. “And why do you have her?”

“I just do.”

“For what?”

“You wouldn’t understand.” Ian hugged Phinova close to him. “Trust me. I’m not crazy. You. . .you just wouldn’t understand. Now focus on the plan!”

Neither Camille nor I took our eyes away from the dead queen.

Ian backed up to the door. “Have we all agreed?”

“Yes,” Camille and I both said.

“Shower, eat, and pick some of the dominas and guards to journey with us. I will gather all of my men in the sewer. They are still skeletons, but with all the domina blood down here we will be able to change them. Once Xander promises to be their king, they will be released from the sewers.” Ian opened the door. “We’ll also need hands to carry things to trade. We’ll need women to peak the interests of mage chiefs. Camille should be clean, calm, and enchanting as always, since she is mage-kin. She may, in fact, be the person who speaks for us most of the time. Ambi help us.”

“What does that mean?” Camille placed her hands on her hips. “I’m possibly the only sane person in this room. I have no problem speaking for us.”

“Sane? I don’t know about that. I think we all have lost it in the past twenty-four hours. You died and returned. Xander fast forwarded several years of vampire puberty.” Ian retracted his fangs. “It will be a wonder if you two don’t kill each other before we reach the mage territory.”

I frowned.

“You two are crazy.” Ian shook his head and then glared at the corpse. “And that is enough from you.”

Camille widened her eyes. “Is she. . .talking to you?”

“What?” Ian backed up as if we were about to grab the corpse from her. “You just be ready, woman. You and your king. We’ll need to leave in two hours.”

Chapter 14

The Beginning of the Journey

Camille

Xander severed our mental connection as soon as Ian left the room.

I couldn't deny that an emptiness filled my head. Most of me was happy that my thoughts now belonged to me.

The other part yearned for his presence back in my mind.

I didn't see him any more while we all prepared to leave.

Hours later, I stood on a dirt road that led into Blue Spirit Park.

The sun showered golden rays onto my skin.

Tons and tons of copper wagons remained within a long line. Before dawn arrived, Ian had purchased them with vials of my blood.

The wagons were small, round and had no windows. Sunlight sparkled along their shiny sides. They would help us make the long journey to mage territory.

It was around thirty of them.

An ex-royal guard sat in most along with dominas who'd volunteered to come with us.

The women knew they would be traded for soldiers in mage territory. None cared. All were happy to be rid of the Quiet King's dungeons and help with destroying him. They were ready to give up their bodies for the revolution, the oldest of them had said. The others cheered in agreement.

Let's hope we don't have to trade too many dominas. I don't like putting them into more slavery.

Then there was Ian's newly healed men from the sewers. There were excited to fight with us.

I checked in front of me.

Several dominas brought over stripped horses and slowly put on the reins to attach them to the wagons.

Will this all work?

I moved my view from the wagons and looked down the winding dirt path. Tons of trees lined the road.

Far off a mountain loomed over the path.

What will the mage territories look like? And will they let us enter or will that be another battle?

A lot would happen once we arrived there.

I had a dream in the sewers before coming out. The gods—Ressi and Ambi—had come to me with specific instructions. It was crazy to think that was possible, but I knew deep within me that it was true. Those gods were real, and I truly had a way to communicate with them.

I wish I could talk to Xander or even Ian about the dream, but. . .

I glanced back to the wagons.

Octavia, Xander's sister, arrived with more food, blankets, and trunk loads of money. It didn't seem like she cared about her brother killing her mother. I wondered about the cruel childhood she must have had.

Presently, more dominas packed the copper vehicles with those supplies and trunks of gold, diamonds, and other valuable items that we hoped would peak the interests of mage chiefs.

Leeta had showed us where Queen Regina's stash was, and that was what we planned to use to convince the mages to work with us.

It was time to end the Quiet King, not just to save my daughters, but to conclude his horrid dictatorship. Then, hopefully, we could build something new, something better. Something that didn't involve the slavery of human woman and the slaying of vampire princes.

Please Ressi and Ambi. Protect us.

I headed to some of the other copper wagons and assessed that everyone would be safe during the ride. The walls were tough layers. No weapons would pierce them. Each had water, food, blankets, and medical supplies for the journey.

Currently, all the vampires remained inside the wagons.

I'd been the person designated to manage the journey to Tribe Flame, being that none of the others could come out in the daylight.

Leeta and Octavia slept in a wagon together with some of the younger dominas. I'd already checked on them to make sure they were safe.

Ian had his own wagon. Unfortunately, he brought Phinova's corpse in there.

He'd refused to answer any questions about why he was walking around with a dead blood mage.

I sighed.

I'll need to talk with him again and push the matter.

Meanwhile, Xander was in my wagon. While we may have had an uncomfortable tension bridging between us. . .I couldn't be without him.

I let out a long breath. "This is really going to work."

A wind blew through, carrying the perfume of daisies.

When Xander had first escorted me to the sewer opening weeks before and late at night, darkness blanketed the space. I'd thought the opening existed on the outskirts of Capitol City.

However, the park encircled the opening. Daises from blue to violet cast shadows over the area. Birds chirped a song in the trees.

The horses attached to our wagons snorted, neighed, and a few even blew long breaths into the morning air.

Vampires considered the park ripe with magic. Many spotted the ghosts of dead relatives, according to hustlers that stood in the main square and provided tours of the park to newcomers.

I'd been one of the hustled when I was a domina. I'd paid three pocks to be taken to the park in the hopes of seeing my dead mother and asking her if my service to the Quiet King was the right thing to do.

I never saw her.

Once we got deep enough into the park, my tour guide escaped with my pocks and I'd been lost for hours, trying to get back to the castle.

That whole time, Xander may have slept in the sewers under my feet.

Now that moment seemed so far away and the woman I was then was someone I no longer recognized.

My little girls' faces flashed in my head.

I'll see them one day soon.

Once the Quiet King died, I'd return to my hometown of Zumaya, get my girls back, and try my best to not stab my ex-husband Ethan in the heart. Ethan knew way more than I thought about my enslavement with the Quiet King.

He'll have to explain himself.

Hopefully, while I'm not holding any weapons. I couldn't trust myself to not injure him. I imagined his shocked face as I stepped toward him wearing pants and wielding a dagger.

I'm not the same woman any more, Ethan. In just a few weeks, I've become something else.

I gazed at the wagon Xander rested in.

A nervous sensation washed over me.

Even though I hadn't decided to have Xander with me, Ian demanded it. Ian believed Xander and I should travel in the same wagon together, so that Xander could feed from me and not be stricken with anxiety that I was far away from him.

Xander and I agreed.

Still, I could feel the space between us widening.

How tense will this trip be with Xander?

A short human man with chestnut curls and green overalls approached me. He was part of Octavia's day staff. "Queen, all is done. Are you ready to begin the journey?"

I blinked. "Please call me Camille."

"The Horned King requested that we call you queen."

The Horned King. I'll never get used to that.

"Okay. Feel free to call me Queen then. And your name is?"

"Tote."

"Nice meeting you, Tote." I held out my hand.

He stepped back. "The Horned King also requested that we not touch you either."

Of course he did.

"Well, nice to meet you anyway, Tote." I lowered my hand. "Let me check something really quick and then we can start."

Tote bowed.

I tensed at the formal movement and headed to Ian's wagon. It stood behind Xander's and mine.

As I got closer, I could hear Ian talking.

Dear Ambi.

"I can't, Phinova. I simply can't." Ian's voice drifted out from his compartment.

I leaned in closer and strained to hear what else he was saying.

"I'll give you no blood unless the dominas agree!" Ian's voice rose. "Other than that, we'll have to wait and see what the mages say about your condition!"

He's talking to her. The corpse.

This was worse than I thought.

"Enough. I'm going to sleep. I won't talk to you anymore. Stay out of my head!"

I gently knocked on the wall. "Ian? Are you okay?"

He cleared his throat. "I'm fine. Are we going to begin? We've wasted too much time already."

"We're leaving in less than five minutes. I just wanted to let you know."

"Fine."

I scanned our line of wagons. Human drivers climbed on each one, waiting for my signal.

"Enough, Phinova." Ian growled. "Enough!"

I have to stop this. We need him.

I knocked again. "Ian?"

Annoyance singed the word. "Yes?"

"Are you sure you're okay, Ian?"

"I am perfect. Let's begin."

"But. . .do you need me to ride with you on this journey?"

"You come in here, little queen, and you'll be riding more than my wagon."

I rolled my eyes. "There's no need to be crude."

Ian chuckled. "It seems you're barely able to handle one king. You come in here and I won't mind my manners. Especially not today."

I rolled my eyes again. "Then get some rest."

"You just focus on taking care of Xander and try not to slice him open until after he's helped me kill my brother."

"Then you better pray to Ambi that Xander doesn't step out of place."

Ian's laughter soared out of his wagon. "You're *his* queen."

"Which means?"

"I don't need to pray to any god. The queen rules the king's mind and heart as well as his cock. *You* put him in line."

Could I?

I stared at his wagon. "Ian?"

"What now, little queen?"

"Why are you talking to Phinova?"

Silence served as his only response.

I tapped against the wagon. "Ian, please talk to me."

"Camille." He let out a long breath. "I will figure this out by the end of our journey. Do you trust me?"

I did. . .before you started talking to a corpse.

"Camille?"

"Yes?"

“Do you trust me?”

I gritted my teeth. “Yes.”

“Then, let us begin and while we are on this journey, get proper control of your king.”

“I’ll try.” I headed back to where Tote stood. When I stopped a foot in front of him, I nodded. “We can go now.”

“Okay, Queen.”

I gritted my teeth.

Queen. I doubt I’ll get used to that, either.

I stepped onto the copper steps that arched out near the wagon’s door.

Next, I opened the entrance and quickly climbed in, trying not to let any sunlight in.

A bell chimed behind me and then a long line of bells rang out in unison.

This must be the human drivers’ method of communication.

Inside my wagon, dimly lit darkness mingled with Xander’s luscious tenna scent.

A small candle glowed within a glass lamp that hung from the ceiling.

With his eyes closed, Xander lay on a small makeshift bed that took up the entire area. It was a mattress covered in rainbow blankets. To my surprise, they didn’t look like the ones from his bed.

He must have a bunch of rainbow stuff.

A smirk spread across my face.

Look at my king.

Shadows flickered back and forth on Xander’s bare chest as it rose and fell. Cords of muscle encased his waist. He wore nothing. A sheet draped over one leg and concealed the sumptuous area below his belly button. Still, I could make out his erection underneath the material as it bulged and tilted upward.

“Do you have room to sleep?” He kept his eyes closed. “I can scoot over farther for you.”

“I’ll have enough space.” I kicked off my leather sandals and crawled onto the other side of the bed.

More bells chimed.

Then I felt our wagon move forward.

The floor rocked a little and then vibrated as we began our journey. The noise of wagon wheels cracking over the dirt road as the horses sped off lifted high in the air.

Will we be able to do this? What will become of us?

Chapter 15

Control

Camille

I have to fix this between us.

The wagon continued forward.

Xander put his back to me. “If you need blankets, there are several folded near the end of the bed.”

“Thank you.”

I considered the statement Ian said, that a queen ruled her king. I was willing to put that theory to the test. Anything seemed better than sitting in the wagon all day nervous and unable to truly talk to him.

Do I have more power than I think?

Having power didn’t matter. I just wanted *us* back.

I pulled off my top and slipped out of my pants. The only items that remained was my bra, panties, and a dagger that rested in a leather strap tied around my right thigh.

He’s so powerful and there’s this new rage that has come with his change.

I slid the wooden dagger out of its sheathe, admiring its beautiful craftsmanship, before holding it up to my face and running my thumb along the blade.

The point was not sharp, but the flat side had a serrated pattern etched into it, allowing the knife to both cut into vampire flesh and act as a saw.

I lowered the dagger and slid it back into place.

Just in case. I’ll keep the dagger on my thigh.

Xander still had his back to me, yet a loud inhale came from him.

Is he smelling me?

A dark groan throbbed from him.

My heart raced.

Power emanated from Xander and surged through me, sending a dizzying current through my veins.

What is this?

Then, the power took control of my body.

Am I imagining this? No.

As if being pulled by invisible string, I glided forward, immovable as stone and deaf to the world outside.

His hunger was a beacon.

I was about to speak and then suddenly didn't want to anymore.

Instead, I felt nothing but this compulsive drive to give my blood to Xander.

He must feed.

I didn't have to think about anything else. I didn't have to breathe. All I had to do was move forward.

His fangs. I need them.

His power called me closer and closer, until I was lying next to him on the bed with no other thought but to satisfy his insatiable need.

I grabbed his arms.

Xander growled. "Fuck."

Then, his power over me snapped away.

I blinked.

The tugging of those invisible strings disappeared. That need to feed him vanished too.

What happened?

Xander tensed. "That was my fault. I didn't mean to lure you over. I am still figuring out my powers."

I kept my hand on his arm. "But. . .how did you. . .turn it on?"

"I just smelled your scent and wanted you."

I swallowed. "And then. . .your power just pulled me over to you?"

"Is that how it felt?"

"Yes."

"That wasn't my intention."

I shivered. "How much power do you think you have over me?"

"Not as much power as you have over me."

I pressed the side of my face against his back and breathed in his tenna scent. "I want *us* back."

"Me too."

"We're both changing. . .so fast. . .and there's so much going on."

"Yet, *we* need to be stronger together."

"We do."

“I’ve been thinking about this. If we are united, then the Quiet King couldn’t come after us.”

“What makes you say that?”

“He is a mad man without his queen. I have mine. . .if I could just learn how to. . .be with you properly.”

I closed my eyes and continued to relish in his warmth.

Outside of the wagon, I had been on edge. My nerves were all over the place. So many worries and doubts had raced through my mind and collided into one another.

But, now that I was next to Xander, calm came.

His dark voice slipped along my frame. “I’m sorry, Camille.”

“I know.”

“I don’t ever want to hurt you like that again.”

“You were in battle form.” I shivered. “Now we know what can happen.”

“You may need to stay away, when I’m in that form.”

“Let us see what Ian thinks.”

“Hmmm.”

“What?”

“He should have been around, watching my mother.”

“She kept him busy.”

“Or did he want my immediate ripening to happen too?”

“I still think we can trust him.”

“We will see.”

Silence filled the space. The sound of his breathing and the beat of his heart against my ear filled my mind like a beautiful melody.

“There are rainbows on these blankets.” Keeping my eyes closed, I slipped my fingers along his arm. “Are these from your bedroom?”

“No. Octavia bought them for everybody. She’s fascinated with them too.” Xander sighed. “When we were young, Leeta would read me books about rainbows and show me pictures of them. She sent the same books to Octavia.”

I opened my eyes. “Are you ever going to forgive Leeta for helping your mother?”

He growled. “No,”

“You should.”

“She messed up.”

“You messed up.” I looked up at the shadows swaying back and forth on the ceiling. “I forgave you.”

He drew in breath. “Perhaps, you shouldn’t forgive me so easily.”

“I do.” I closed my eyes. “And I want you to forgive Leeta.”

“I don’t want to.”

I curled the edges of my lips into a smile. “I command it.”

A deep rumble left him.

“Am I not your queen?”

He let out an exasperated breath. “Yes. You are my queen.”

“Then, forgive her. We *all* will need to be united if we are going to beat the Quiet King.”

“I . . .agree. Then, I forgive Leeta and will tell her.”

That easy?

I opened my eyes. “Are you serious?”

“I am, queen. I can’t deny you anything that you would want.”

Calm washed over me.

He really is my king.

Desire surged through my body.

Next, my skin warmed, and my veins sang out to him. They vibrated under my skin.

I gazed down at my body, knowing that it was not just mine. . .it was truly his too.

“Camille.” Xander’s voice darkened to almost unrecognizable. “Stop it, Camille.”

Then, those symbols on my skin glowed. My veins vibrated more. “I-I am not trying to do this. Maybe, this means that you should feed.”

He stiffened. “I fed already.”

I frowned. “How?”

“I’ve drunk enough blood to satisfy any starved vampire.”

“But, how? Did you drink from one of the other dominas?” Jealousy unfurled inside my core.

I ran my nails across his skin.

“No. I drank some bottles of blood that I kept in a cooler.” He trembled under my nails and then moaned. “What are you doing, Camille?”

My desire shifted to a raging fire blazing through my veins, shoving desire and anticipation throughout my body.

My skin tingled and ached, pulsing with life as if I were connected to him by some invisible force.

A sudden rush of power swept through my soul.

“You must feed from *me*.”

“I want to, but part of me worries about going crazy over you again. That’s not the kind of vampire king I want to be.”

“Ian basically said that next time you get out of line, I could put you in line because I’m your queen.”

“That didn’t happen last time.”

“I was weak and terrified. We didn’t know what was happening.”

“You also shouldn’t take advice from a vampire that carries around a corpse.”

Ian is talking to her, too.

I yearned to tell Xander, but he had enough on his mind. I’d have to deal with that problem myself.

I scooted closer to Xander and pressed my body against his.

Xander shuddered. Heat radiated from his flesh.

My nipples hardened and pressed against my bra, begging to be released so that they could dip into his wet mouth. “You think Ian is wrong?”

“I think Ian should tell us why he is walking around with Phinova.”

“The fact that he is carrying her around at least points to the power of a queen.”

“I’m well aware about the power of a queen.”

I smirked. “Oh really?”

“If you could see the things in my head sometimes. . .”

I moved away from him, sat up, and slipped off my bra and panties, but kept the dagger in its sheath and around my thigh.

“What are you doing, Camille?”

“You should feed.”

“No. Your body wants my fangs.”

I blinked and gazed down at my nudity. “Yes. That’s true too.”

With his back still to me, he sniffed the air and groaned. “Are your clothes off?”

“Yes.”

A tortured rumble fled his chest. “Put them back on. I’m trying to behave.”

“We should see if I can control you.”

“We did in the bathtub and failed when I forced the bond.”

“You were in that battle form. Now you’re not. And let’s not forget that I was recovering from dying.” I opened my legs, wondering if he could smell my arousal.

Xander sniffed the air and then whimpered.

The area between my thighs moistened some more. “Turn around, Horned King.”

He complied without any hesitation. His gold eyes brightened in the dimly lit wagon. His right lip lifted into a sneer. “Are you trying to have me hurt you?”

“Do you desire to hurt me?”

His voice came out in a whisper. “No.”

“Then let’s see if I can stop you from going *too* far.”

“And if I don’t stop?”

In half a second, I slipped out the dagger and had it an inch from his heart. “I can protect myself.”

“I’ve taught you too much.” His gaze shifted to the dagger and he chuckled.

“Teach me some more.” I put the dagger in its sheath. “Get on your back.”

“Be careful.” His voice boomed in the cabin. “Since fully growing into a king, I don’t like being ordered anymore.”

“I’m your queen.” I considered Ian’s words. “I’m the only person on this planet who gets to order you around.”

Xander paused as if thinking about it for a few seconds and then rolled over on his back.

I slipped the sheet off of him. His cock sprang up and pointed to the ceiling. The mushroomed tip blushed with hunger.

Ambi, I want him.

My body overheated with lust. I had to battle with myself not to jump on top of his cock. I craved to feel him sliding into me, rock-solid and slick with my arousal.

Moving over to him, I straddled his thighs and made sure to keep space between me and his erection.

“Get on my cock.” He licked his lips and glided his hands up my thighs. “Right now.”

“No.”

He grumbled in protest. “Then have you decided to torture me?”

“I’m not sure what I’m doing.” My bare breasts hung heavy in front of me. My aching tips tingled and stiffened until it was unbearable.

I moved up and leaned all the way over in his direction so my breasts dangled in front of his lips. “Suck on my nipples. But don’t bite my breasts.”

“And if I *do* bite?”

“Then you don’t get your reward.”

He squeezed my behind. “What is my reward?”

“Just suck.”

Slowly, he circled his tongue around my nipple and then drew the sensitive point into his mouth.

Dear Ambi.

Dampness enclosed it.

My veins vibrated some more. “Xander.”

Slowly, he guided my body forward.

I had no power to stop him. Again, I realized that my body was his as much as it was mine.

Still sucking on my breast, he slipped my body up to his cock. But instead of trying to put his hardness inside of me, he slipped my pussy over his rock-solid cock. The wet center smeared my arousal all over the length.

A loud moan left me.

He continued to slowly slip my body up and down along his cock.

“Oh, Xander.”

His cock vibrated against me, sending my clit into a frenzy. Pleasure waved between my thighs and spread across my skin.

I bit my lip and held in a moan. The tips of his fangs pressed against my breasts as he sucked on the nipple, but he didn’t pierce it.

I licked my lips. “Don’t bite.”

A rumble left his chest, but he complied and didn’t bite. Still, he rubbed my pussy along his cock.

Holy fuck.

So consumed by my desire, it was hard to focus on the mission. “Now. . .let go of my breast.”

He did, but his fingers squeezed my behind and pressed me harder against his cock.

Blazing hunger covered his face. His lips parted, showing off those erect fangs. “Okay.”

I raised my eyebrows.

“I’ve proven that I can be good.” Xander rolled me over.

I bounced a little on the mattress. The softness of the bed smoothed against my back.

Get control.

I placed my hands on his chest. “No.”

“Yes.” Xander spread my legs apart. His eyes shifted from gold to crimson. His fangs extended further out. A groan so deep escaped his lips that my heart skipped a beat.

Calm down. You can do this, Camille.

“You’re not listening.” I shoved at his chest.

“If I’m not inside you, I fear I’ll die.” He guided the tip of his cock to my opening.

My body reacted in a trembling fit, part fear and desire.

I wanted him, even though he was out of control, even though his horns were beginning to cut through the skin on his forehead and slide out in thick paths of obsidian.

He’s turning. . .

The horns fully came out. His chest pushed against my hands as the muscle began to inflate under it.

Dear Ambi.

“Xander.” I swallowed and looked back at his face. “Shift back. Right now.”

He closed his eyes. “I yearn for you. It hurts to have my cock this close and not go further.”

The area between my thighs throbbed. “Just wait a little longer for me.”

He opened his eyes. Gold replaced his red pupils. “How much longer?”

“Get on your back.”

“No!”

I shivered. “Y-yes.”

To my shock, Xander let out a loud roar. The wagon’s walls vibrated and quivered.

Our wagon stopped.

Bells chimed around us, letting me know the drivers were communicating.

Xander’s chest rose in and out at an irregular pace. “I am a king, I don’t take orders—”

“You will get on your back or you won’t bite or make love to me anymore.”

He leaned down until his face rested an inch from mine and his huge chest bore down on my breasts. “Be careful, queen. I’m on the edge of insanity right now.”

“All because of my pussy?” I forced a smile.

“Yes.”

“I’m so sorry, my king.” I rose a little and kissed his fangs. “Calm down.”

A soft groan left him. His fangs slid back into his gums.

He lowered to my lips, kissed me, and pushed his tongue into my mouth. The tip of his cock still remained pressed against me, so close to entering.

I moved my mouth from his lips and lay back down. “Get on your back.”

Xander whimpered.

“Now.”

Slowly, he lifted off me and collapsed back on his area of the bed.

“Good job.” I rose and returned to straddling him.

A knock sounded at the door.

Tote’s voice sounded on the outside. “Queen, is everything okay?”

Xander snarled. “Leave!”

“Stop that.” I shook my head and turned back to the wagon’s wall, where I was sure Tote stood outside worried. “Yes. I’m fine, Tote. The king and I are just playing around.”

Tote stayed silent for a few seconds and then said, “Okay. Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“Okay, Queen.”

I waited for the wagon to start and then returned my attention back to Xander.

His horns remained, but his body was back to normal. I glanced over my shoulders and noticed his feet were still there and had not transformed into hooves. “Were you changing into your other form earlier?”

“Yes, but I changed back.”

“I noticed.” I caressed the length of his hardness with my fingers as it leaned against my stomach.

“I still don’t trust myself.”

“Me neither, but at least it’s a start. You stopped when I asked, so you get your reward.” I mounted him and slid his cock inside me.

I was so drenched with arousal that he slipped inside me in seconds.

We both moaned in unison.

The wagon rocked under us as it sped up.

Perhaps, our moaning confirmed to Tote that we were fine.

Xander captured my waist with his hands and directed my body up and down on him. I loved it, but I reeled my excitement in. I had to make sure he could maintain control. "Move your hands and place them next to your sides."

He snarled. "I will not."

"Xander."

"Please," Xander growled. "I have to touch you."

I grinned. "Your cock is touching me."

"Damn you." He set his hands on the pillow above his head. They lay near his horns. Meanwhile, his claws appeared and sliced through the pillows as he growled in disappointment.

"Thank you." I rocked up and down on his cock, my breasts bouncing.

His gaze glued to my nipples.

I licked my lips. "Do you like that?"

"Fuck yes." Those gold eyes glowed bright.

Smacking noises prevailed as I rode him harder. My sex swelled. He met my riding with his own strokes as he lifted up to me, hitting my clit with just the right pressure. Sensual ribbons of lust unraveled inside my body and whipped out around me. "Xander!"

"Yes, queen. Cum for me." He ripped the pillows apart. Goose feathers exploded around and rained down on us. Some stuck to my damp skin.

"Bite me!"

In a haze of movement, he sat up and sank his fangs into my neck.

Orgasms ignited in my body.

I screamed in delight and was sure all the wagons could hear me.

Xander drank from me, drawing in my blood at a hasty rate.

"Oh. Oh." I let my head fall back and pushed my breasts into him.

Groaning, he pulled his fangs out and bit me again, sinking his fangs into the lush curve of my breast. Heat spread across it. He grumbled into my skin and I knew he was coming too. His hands tightened on me as he took his fangs away.

I slammed down hard on him and clenched my insides around his big cock.

Moaning, I whispered, "Who are you to me?"

“Your king!” he roared in a deep voice.

Cold liquid spurted within my moist tunnel.

I shuddered in his arms. Blood trickled down my neck and breasts.

He gently rolled me over, lay my body down on my back, and licked the blood off my skin. “I love you.”

Catching my breath, I stared into his gold eyes and whispered, “I love you, too.”

He hovered over me. “I want more.”

My lids drooped over my eyes. “More?”

“More.” He thrust his cock back into me.

Dear Ambi.

Chapter 16

Two Kings

Ian

What is the best way to cleanse a vampire king's cock?

Stuff a soapy washcloth inside the queen's royal vagina and hope he doesn't notice the difference.

I told Nai that joke when we were nine years old. Of course, we looked like men due to vampire children growing from baby to adults in only three years, but in our heads we were so still very much like little boys.

He'd thought the joke was so funny he told my mother, which triggered her blushing and punishing both Nai and me for three weeks.

We spent those days doing the laundry for all the women in the castle.

She just didn't like the truth of the joke or didn't want to admit to her twin boys that a vampire king spends most of his early days inside his queen.

"Perhaps Xander will be done in a few minutes." I rubbed my eyes. "How many times can a king cum? Surely it's been five times already."

Xander and Camille's wagon rocked back and forth under the moons' light.

Camille's moans ripped from the walls and tore through the air around us. The whole camp heard her cries of pleasure and Xander's pounding into that supple flesh.

What will I do with these two?

We all stood outside of the mage territory's border and had been waiting for the past fifteen minutes for them to come out and join us.

Dark blue sky stretched over the planet, displaying thousands upon thousands of glittering stars.

Two full moons swelled above us like massive glowing balls. It was the brightest I'd ever seen the night sky, but all ignored it due to Camille and Xander's lovemaking.

Leeta crossed her arms over her chest. "You'd think there was no war or Quiet King coming."

I ran my fingers through my hair, excited to have those blonde strands back. "It's the very nature of a vampire king to take care of his queen in

every way.”

“They’ve been having sex all day.”

“Really?”

“Octavia’s and my wagon traveled several feet behind them and still we heard Xander’s and Camille’s moans as if we were right inside.”

I spotted Octavia helping dominas out of the wagons. A rush of wind blew her long blonde hair and made her amber robe ripple. “Does Octavia know that I’m her father’s brother?”

“Yes.” Leeta looked at me. “Was it supposed to be a secret?”

“No. I was just wondering how many people you’ve run your mouth to.” I frowned at her. “Let’s make this clear. I don’t trust you anymore.”

Leeta pursed her lips together. “I’ve only told Octavia.”

“You haven’t sent messages to my brother?”

“You’re being paranoid. I have no connection to the Quiet King. I want him overthrown like everyone else.”

“You betray Xander and Camille again and I’ll do bad things to you.”

“Bad things?” Skepticism glazed over her expression.

“Yes. Bad things,” I repeated. “You’re a vampire now so each cut will heal in hours, each peeling of the skin will bring new skin to peel. Each hole that I dig in your flesh with a wooden knife will fill up for me to dig again and again, until I get bored.”

She stepped back.

“And by the way, I never get bored.”

“I had my reasons for the betrayal. Queen Regina imprisoned my niece.” Her hands shook. “I won’t be disloyal again.”

“I will decide that.”

“Since we are having this conversation.” She stepped back again. “I don’t quite trust *you*, either.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

“You have a spy that you send messages to.”

I quirked my eyebrows. “And who is this spy?”

“I don’t know, but I heard you talking to him or her in your wagon an hour ago.” Leeta placed her hands on her hips.

“Oh. That?”

“Yes. That.”

“I was talking to no spy.” I laughed. “I was simply talking to the dead woman I have lying next to me in the bed.”

Horror covered her face. “You think you’re so funny, don’t you?”

“When I was young, I’d planned on being a royal court comedian, but . . . things changed.”

Phinova changed it all.

Being that Nai was older than me by a minute, the crown went to him.

As the second son, I could do anything I desired and possessed a good amount of wealth to ensure I could take care of myself while I pursued my dreams. I figured comedy was the place for me, either as a royal performer or the writer of comic plays.

I would have been happy to do anything.

But Phinova came along with that taunting scent that snared me like rope around my neck and dragged me along wherever she strolled by.

Phinova’s voice filled my head. ***And now I’m here with you again.***

I frowned. “Shut up.”

“I won’t.” Leeta glared.

“I’m not talking to you. I’m talking to the dead woman.”

Leeta shook her head. “Xander and Camille are having sex every minute and you’re taking none of this seriously. Perhaps I should join the Quiet King’s side. At least he is serious and has all his wits.”

“His wits?” I chuckled.

Nai has been listening to our Phinova for all these years. No wonder he’s covered the land in blood, slavery, and poverty.

As I guessed when I sat in the sewers for so many years, Nai was no longer my brother. He was just a shell of him—one that moved around like a puppet at the command of a corpse.

And I feared I’d be listening to her for even more years if I didn’t figure out a solution soon.

I’m not dead, Phinova shrilled into my head. I just need more mage blood. Once I’m fed, we can make love.

“Quiet, Phinova.” I pulled out my metal binoculars and directed my attention at the border.

A large part of mage-vampire wars occurred here and destroyed the land.

Although my brother exhausted years in trying to cross over, he never succeeded and had lost hundreds of men each year.

The line between vampire ground and mage territory was clear.

On our side, the rough, deserted land served as the ground due to their being more ash and decayed vampire soldiers’ dust than dirt. It sunk in some

places and hardened in others.

No animals existed in this area either, not birds, wild tigers, coyotes, or even vos snakes that slithered in the grimeiest places like the sewer.

No sensible beasts ventured this way but us.

Clearly, Xander, Camille, and I lost our sensibilities a long time ago.

Meanwhile, on the mage's side, lush grass grew high and leaned in the direction of the wind.

Tulips as red as cherries scattered along the field.

On our side, various scents lingered in the cool night air—the bitter odor of blue kotaki vines as they hung from battered trees and the sweaty stench horses earned from riding for a long time.

In contrast, the aroma of magic and enchantments drifted from *their land* whenever a breeze blew my way. It charged my nostrils and sparked against my skin.

We must get over there.

Since dusk arrived, I'd been monitoring the mage territory, waiting patiently for Xander and Camille to finish.

Surely, Tribe Flame was aware of our arrival.

Hundreds of brown-skinned men and women wearing loincloths made of wolf hair stood a mile ahead of us.

Tribe Flame commanded fire.

Therefore, balls of raging fire hovered over their heads. They were the worst tribe for vampires to approach in any manner, whether for diplomatic reasons or battle.

Vampires couldn't heal magical burns and Tribe Flame guaranteed that a blaze would result if they believed they were being disrespected.

Leeta turned back and stared at the mages. "We should go stop Xander and Camille now. What if this tribe attacks."

"They won't attack right now."

I considered the next steps.

We could have approached Tribe Stream in the west of this region or even Tribe Wind farther north.

But Tribe Flame ruled them all. They established mage law and supervised the chiefs in each tribe, making sure the chiefs didn't squander their power or harm others.

If we convince Tribe Flame to follow us into war against Nai, all the other mages will trail behind.

I put the binoculars back in front of my eyes and assessed them.

In front of the tall men wielding flames were short men and women that stood barely three feet high.

What is this?

These shorter people held sticks and these odd dirt swords in their hands. For some, bulky boulders floated above their heads.

Tribe Rock.

Although they were the smallest ones over there, their ability to control nature's weapons placed them in a dangerous category.

I didn't fear their rocks or dirt, but the sticks they could propel several feet away caused anxiety to raise in my chest.

"Tribe Rock just arrived." I continued to scan the mage flanks for the other tribes. "I'm sure Wind and Stream are either here or will arrive soon, but I don't see them yet."

"I've never met a mage, but these don't look friendly."

"Twenty wagons full of vampires and humans who serve vampires just approached their border. They probably think we're here to invade." I hadn't planned on them being ready for us.

They must've discovered the news about Xander destroying the Quiet King's castle. And if the mages found out the news by dusk, surely my brother knew by now.

Behind us, Xander roared, "Who are you to me?"

"Your queen!" Camille moaned.

We don't have time for this. We need to be dealing with whatever chief is ruling Tribe Flame and find out if they'll help us or not. If not, we need to run far away.

Leeta turned to me. "Are you going to tell them to stop?"

"Back in my time the easiest way to get your throat ripped away was to separate a vampire prince or king from his queen. I would've never considered it unless it was a serious emergency." I set the binoculars down on a table Leeta had pulled out of her wagon. "Now is definitely the time."

"King!" Camille moaned.

I headed over.

Dear Ambi and Ressi. I'll have to get buckets of cold water and splash them with it before they stop.

Tote sat on the ground near the wagon and jumped up when he noticed me approaching.

I stepped around him and slid open the door. A cloud of red mist drifted out of the wagon.

Xander's hormones.

They were drunk on them. Camille lay on her side, facing me with her eyes closed. Those succulent breasts bounced as Xander slid in and out of her from behind.

She looks so good. No wonder he's not out here dealing with the oncoming war.

Both of my dicks swelled into erections. My breath lodged inside my throat. An animalistic hunger unfurled within my chest. My fangs exploded from my gums and ached to be inside Camille's brown flesh. Symbols shone all over her skin.

What is this? She has more symbols than the ones I saw before on her arms.

I stepped closer as if drawn in by a string that pulled me to them. They were letters from the old language, one many vampires had ceased using. I barely made out all the words as Camille groaned and Xander grunted.

I read the ancient words out loud, "Unite as one and you will conquer all."

Camille opened her eyes.

Xander too.

In that moment I noticed that my hand lay inside my pants, groping my cocks.

"Is there something I can help you with, Ian?" Xander thrust hard into Camille.

She bit her lip, but still, a tiny moan escaped.

"We've arrived." I kept my hand in my pants.

If they weren't going to stop, I wouldn't either.

Frankly, he should count himself lucky that I didn't try to kill him for Camille right now.

She looked so damned good—perky nipples that made my tongue throb with want.

Drops of her blood decorated her neck and breasts.

I longed to lick it off.

It would've almost been worth Xander ripping my throat out, to taste her again.

“Are you just going to stand there and ogle my queen?” Xander’s voice deepened. His gold eyes transformed to crimson.

That’s right, nephew. Get angry and shift. Maybe you’ll stop fucking for a few seconds.

“I figured you were tired.” I smirked. “At the bare minimum, you may need some help with her.”

Get her blood. Phinova’s voice was thick with hunger. ***Bring her blood to me.***

I ignored Phinova as Camille’s gaze trailed to my hand moving inside my pants. A blaze sparked in my groin just from her stare.

She bit her lip again.

What are you thinking about, little one?

I squeezed my hands against the rim of my closest cock. “Can I suck on that pretty little blossom peeking out between your folds?”

“No!” Xander bellowed, slipped his hand around her waist, and massaged her clit himself. “You can’t.”

“Relax, my king.” Camille rocked into his hand. “He’s trying to get you to stop. . .and. . .we should.”

“I’ll stop when you cum.” He sped up, slapping into her from behind.

She cried out.

I stepped closer. “I can help.”

“Quiet!” Xander’s eyes shut tight as he sank his fangs into Camille’s shoulder. He groaned and moved his hands to those jiggling breasts, pinching her nipples and tenderly pulling at them a little.

My dicks shifted to rock-hard.

Dear Ambi, she must feel so divine. Xander, you lucky bastard. If you hurt her again, then she’s mine.

A moan slipped from her parted lips.

Against all logical reason, I closed the distance between us, reached under her, and placed my hand on Camille’s pussy, right at the swollen bud.

“Oh!” she whimpered. Desire shined in her eyes as she directed her attention to my hand. “Yes!”

You like my fingers. Don’t you, little Queen?

Her slippery clit glided between my fingers. Her body spasmed under my hand and against Xander’s cock.

Still with his eyes closed, he growled and increased his speed to an insane pace, one that impressed me.

Don't hurt her, Xander.

He rammed into that pussy.

She shrieked. Her breasts wobbled back and forth in a blur.

He's more powerful than I thought.

I kept my finger on her clit.

Surely, uncomfortable Tote rushed away.

How strong is Camille's blood?

“Queen!” Xander howled. His voice rose in the air.

I glanced over my shoulders to see a crowd of dominas and guards forming behind me, watching in awe.

Xander's mist of hormones drifted throughout the group.

Oh damn it.

Lust soaked the air. I was sure an orgy would come soon if the situation didn't finish immediately.

Let's hurry this up.

I circled Camille's clit.

“I'm coming.” Her gaze remained on me. “Don't stop. Neither one of you.”

“Neither one?” Xander snapped his eyes open.

I winked at him. “Calm down. She is coming like you desired.”

He looked from me to her and then whimpered as he pushed inside her just enough for her to shiver in pleasure and ride an orgasm so strong I flushed with jealousy.

“Have you cum, my love?” Xander lapped at the blood on her shoulder.

“Yes.”

I removed my hand and licked my fingers.

Xander pulled out and released Camille.

She rolled onto her back with a whine.

I readied myself for Xander's anger, surely he wouldn't forget my hand fondling the royal pussy.

Come on. Let's get it over with.

Within seconds, Xander jumped up into standing position and charged my way, soaring out of the wagon's opening toward me.

I ducked and pushed out my claws.

My horns slid out with a snap. My muscles enlarged and ripped my shirt and pants.

My hooves broke out of my feet.

I lowered to the ground on all fours, my claws dug into the dirt.

I galloped his way, seeing the expression of shock on Xander's face as I rammed the hard curve of my horns into his stomach.

Boom!

Xander crashed to the ground.

I leaped on top of him. "You're going to need to calm down."

He pushed his own claws out. The sharp tips ripped through his fingertips. Flesh and blood sprayed out. "You touched her!"

I held his arms down.

He struggled.

I could barely hold him as he began to shift and had to admit his battle form was bigger than mine. "Listen! Do you want to protect her from death or do you want to fight me for touching her?"

"What?" he said through clenched teeth.

"Look over there." I pointed a mile away to the hundreds of mages twirling fire and wooden sticks. "While you've been making love to Camille, mages have gotten in formation to kill us. Maybe we should agree to fight about her later."

"You touched her."

"Mages."

"Later, then." He climbed out of my grip and punched me in the face. My jaw cracked and reformed in seconds. The best thing about this form was that one could heal fast.

I collapsed onto the ground next to him. "What I did was no disrespect, but—"

"Then what was it?" Xander sat up and brushed the dirt off his shoulders and arms.

"You need to get ahold of your hormones. They're everywhere." I gestured out at the red vapors moving along the dominas and guards around us. "You'll have everyone humping each other by dawn."

"I did this?" Xander's horns drove back into his skull. His claws vanished. His body decreased into his normal muscular body. "How do I control it?"

"Try not to be horny so much."

Camille strolled out of the wagon and gave orders to Tote, pointing this way and that.

A red robe draped her curvy body. Her hair flowed around her and merged so well with the robe that it was hard for me to know where her hair ended and the robe began.

She captivated me.

“Try not to be horny, huh?” Xander laughed. “Look at her and tell me if there’s any hope for me.”

“There’s no hope.” I smelled Camille’s sweet scent on my fingers and stifled the groan that tried to flee my lips.

Jealousy mounted in my gut, but I shoved it back down.

In the end, Camille belonged to Xander. I could not let my feelings get deeper.

After this war I should travel away from them, and maybe. . .find my own queen.

I sighed. “You’ve probably planted your seed by now.”

“Do you think?” Xander’s eyes glittered under the two moons. A large smile spread across his face. “When would we know?”

Dear Ambi. He’s trying to breed with her. He’s definitely matured into a king.

“We’ll know soon.”

But, does she know?

Tote rushed off after Camille finished giving orders and gathered dominas everywhere.

What is Camille doing?

Leeta went to her.

They whispered.

A shiver of fear crept up my spine.

Any time women joined together and whispered, something foul was bound to come.

I stood and helped Xander rise. “Did you tell her that you’re trying to give her kids?”

“Does it matter if it’s already done?” Xander headed to his wagon.

A few dominas got a good glance at his cock and blushed. He didn’t even notice how more dominas formed near the wagon he climbed in, drawn to the power only a king could radiate.

Only Camille existed in his head.

Xander closed the door and I hoped he went inside to clean and dress, instead of rest in preparation for more sex.

The blood mage comes, Phinova announced in my skull. ***Bring her to me.***

Quiet.

I should have ended this by now with Phinova. Put her body somewhere.

The more she talked, the less she seemed like my love.

It was just her voice, but not her soul or mind.

I knew Phinova, and this was not her.

I am me, Phinova declared.

“Ian.” Camille strolled my way. “You can’t touch me like that again.”

“Why not?” I leaned my head to the side. “You enjoyed my fingers. There’s no need for you to lie.”

“Not the point.”

“Then what is?”

“I’m *his* queen.”

“Xander could learn to share.”

“He will never need to share me.”

“In the end, he only wants to please you and if both of us made you happy, he would understand.” I leaned in closer, pressed my lips against her ear and was shocked that she didn’t back away. “Do you long to have us both?”

She averted her eyes. “No.”

I inhaled her luscious fragrance. “You’re lying.”

“Why were you talking to Phinova in the wagon earlier?”

My stomach clenched into tight knots of stress. “You imagined that.”

“I didn’t. You were talking to her dead body.”

“Regardless, there are bigger things to worry about, Queen.” I motioned to the mage tribe.

Camille nodded. “I already have a plan for them. Ambi and Ressi told me in a dream that the mages would be ready for us. They told me what to do.”

Now Camille is crazy. Will any of us conquer Nai?

I talked to a corpse.

Xander was ignoring the war and planning a family.

And now Camille conversed with gods in her dreams.

I sighed. “Ambi and Ressi?”

“Yes.”

“Why should I believe this?”

“I don’t care if you believe me or not.”

I crossed my arms over my chest. “Let’s say that you did talk to the gods. What did they tell you to do?”

“When I died, they told me to join with my kings and unite them all.”

I grinned. “Your kings?”

“Yes. I assume they’re referring to you and Xander.”

“Because we’re *yours*?”

She looked away. “Yes. Because you both are mine.”

Interesting.

“When did you decide I was yours?”

“When I gave you my blood and you swore to protect Xander and me.”

She moved her view back to my face and pierced me with her gaze.

“Anyway. Once I returned from death, Ambi and Ressi came to me in a dream. They warned me that humans fled Capitol City and rushed to the mage tribes, seeking a safe haven and spreading a message that a Horned King has risen to take over the whole land.”

“So, what are we supposed to do?”

“We aren’t supposed to do anything.” She shook her head. “Ambi told me to approach the tribe myself—”

“No.”

She sighed. “Yes.”

“They’ll see your hair and recognize that you’re a blood mage. You’ll be on fire before you can make another step.”

There weren’t a lot of blood mages in my time with hair as red as Camille’s, and such sweet blood.

Tribes murdered them due to the power of their blood. It could heal most creatures quickly and turn a human into a vampire overnight.

Tribes didn’t want more vampires flooding the planet.

They believed that their lives’ purpose was to kill them all.

According to mage religious texts, Ambi showed up, spotted Ressi, and was overtaken by her beauty.

He desired her, but she refused him.

And so one night when she was fast asleep among the stars, Ambi attacked and raped her for sixty days and nights, filling her body with his seed.

And when he finally finished, darkness bathed the world for seven days and vampires clawed their way out of her womb, spilling onto the earth.

Ambi was exhausted, so Ressi seized the opportunity to kill him.

But a god can't be killed, only stopped by separating him.

So, she filled him with light, which for some backward mage reason, paralyzed him.

Then she split him in two halves with her teeth, rolled him into two balls, and trapped him among the stars. The two moons that bathed the land in light were supposed to be two halves of Ambi constantly trying to reform.

But mage theory went further. They believe that when Ressi looked down on planet Dos, she cried in shame at the sight of the vampires, the products of her brutality. She wanted us dead, but couldn't do it herself, because we were still part of her.

So, she formed mages with her tears, dirt from the land, and fire from her breath. She gave each of the mages power over an element so they could exterminate the vampires for her.

Then she left.

According to mages, when all the vampires are gone, Ressi would return.

I shook my head. "You're not going to the tribes by yourself."

"I am." She shrugged.

"They will kill you."

"I have a plan."

I snarled. "And what could this plan be, Queen?"

"This is the first part."

Several sharp points pressed against my back. I glanced over my shoulder. Twenty guards stood behind me.

Leeta and Octavia got in front of me next to Camille and held wooden daggers.

"What is this?" I growled and shifted my gaze to the wagon where Xander had disappeared into, hoping he would be done soon to help me.

Tote positioned himself in front of the wagon and clamped several locks down along the hinges of the door.

He's locking Xander in.

It wouldn't keep him inside the wagon for long, but it would give Camille enough time to run over to the mages and die.

"This is dangerous." I moved an inch toward her. In a blur, Leeta's dagger smoothed against my throat. I tensed. "You're already on my bad side, Leeta."

"I'm just following the queen's directions."

“Queens are trouble,” I said. “Perhaps you should consider only taking orders from kings.”

“Enough.” Camille took off her robe. The crimson material fell to the ground. Her hair floated around her as if magic radiated from her skin.

Maybe it does.

Those symbols brightened all over her flesh again. I still couldn't make out all of the words, only the one sentence written along her navel.

“Unite as one and you will conquer all,” I read the symbols and directed my attention to her eyes.

Her hair rose above her head and brightened so much it looked like fire.

Just as shocked, she gazed at her arms with the glowing symbols. “They said this would happen.”

“Who, Camille?”

“In my dream.”

“Dear Ambi. You look like one of the Returned.”

There were a few people who'd died and returned from death with symbols on their body and a bit of magic moving around in their core.

It was said to happen every hundred years or more, but no one truly knew if it was true or not.

No Returned existed anymore.

I'd only seen discussions of it in children's books and bedtime tales.

“I told you.” Camille smiled. “I did return.”

“O-okay, but. . .this dream.”

“Yes?”

“When did you have the time to dream about this?”

“The dream came in the sewer.”

“When were you going to tell us?”

“They told me not to.”

“Camille.” I sneered and gazed back at the soldiers. “You know that I can kill them fast.”

“But, you won't because you know that we need them for the war against the Quiet King.” She walked away naked with that now flaming hair that streamed and wavered around her. “And I'll return to you and Xander with mages ready for war and the taste of the Quiet King's flesh on their tongues.”

Chapter 17

An Introduction

Camille

With each step toward the line of mage, my nerves flared on edge and threatened to send me flying into pieces. I feared I would disintegrate into nothing, like the bits of myself fluttering away with each gust of wind.

Goosebumps sprouted all over my bare skin.

I'd gone naked so they could see all the marks and understand that when I approached them, I held no secret weapons on me.

The cool grass rose to my knees and smoothed against my skin with every step.

Warm dirt pressed against the soles of my feet. Out here the fragrance of nature rose in the air—herbal perfumes from wild red tulips, the unsullied scent of untraveled soil, and the peculiar aroma of supernatural power that the hundreds of mage exuded as they gathered ahead.

Oh my.

Their magic smelled like fresh mint and the birth of a fire. The more I came near, the more their magic lingered my way and lulled me forward.

“Please Ambi and Ressi. Use me to do the right thing.” I struggled to not form my hands into tight fists. I didn't want them to see that and think I'd come to battle. Not that one naked woman was anything to fear.

The gods' words floated in my head.

Tell them what you saw. Show them the symbols. Peace will come if you help them believe.

Strength and confidence flowed through my veins, yet I still shivered as the mile between the mage and myself transformed to several feet.

Suddenly, my flesh brightened, illuminating the markings on my skin even more.

I kept my head straight and forward as if I were looking right at them, when really I stared off in the distance, too afraid to meet any of their eyes.

I knew they spotted my hair.

How could they not?

My hair danced around me in the wind like flames swaying in a trance. I had no idea why, besides the fact that Ambi told me when I returned, all would recognize the truth of my journey through death and back to life.

Clucking ensued in front of me.

The mages are laughing?

I almost paused.

Well. . .that is better than them attacking.

Instead, I pushed on as the short people holding sticks and rocks clucked their tongues against their teeth and beat their sticks against rocks.

A shiver ran through me.

Keep walking.

The fireballs that hovered over the taller people's heads decreased from huge as the size of boulders to small like apples.

They'd tied cloth made from wolf hair around their bodies to hide their genitals.

Unlike the short people, who represented men and women, the tall people were only big men. I should have been calmed by them lowering their fire.

I wasn't.

My heart boomed against my chest harder than ever before.

A light voice rushed out from the front of their line. "Stay where you are!"

I stopped and held my hands behind my back. Finally, I directed my gaze on all of them in front of me.

The short people wore dark green beaded wraps around their waists and chests. Red mud painted half of their brown skin.

The tall men were dressed in wolf hair.

Off in the distance, a rich forest loomed. Lush green leaves coated the branches. Bulbs of huge fruit dangled.

White glimmering birds flew above, chirping and hooting. They sparkled and glittered with light. I wondered if the bird possessed some sort of magical firepower, too.

Forget the birds. Focus on the task ahead.

"Hello!" I held my hands behind me. "My name is Camille. I would like to talk to your leaders."

"Are you sure about that, blood mage?" A woman stepped forward. Her eyes glowed bright brown. Her long, curly hair was thick, cobalt blue, and fell down to her slim waist.

Instead of simply a beaded wrap, she wore a full beaded blue gown that dragged along the ground behind her. Crystal earrings framed her beautiful face.

She was enchanting, yet something inside me yelled danger.

I listened and kept my mouth closed.

She sashayed my way with a smile and stopped four feet in front of me.

“A-Rock Non!”

The short people in green lowered on their knees and dropped their weapons to the side in unison.

“A-Rock Non!” They yelled back.

Doe she lead everyone? Is she a queen?

I remained quiet and forced myself to maintain eye contact.

Footsteps approached us.

The line of tall people holding the flames separated.

A tall man with sun-kissed white skin and luminous blue eyes strode over. He had wavy dirty blond hair, tied up in a topknot and secured by leather straps.

A cloak made from wolf hair hung on his shoulders.

His loin cloth extended to his knees and possessed thicker fur than the others.

These two must be the leaders of their tribes. Or perhaps they're the tribes' representatives.

The man's voice came out as a thunderous rumble. “Why did you come, blood mage?”

“I've come to ask for help.”

“Yet you don't bow?” He frowned. “You disrespect us by standing in front of us like our equals.”

Oh no.

I swallowed. “I don't know your customs.”

The woman tilted her head to the side. “You're one of us, but you don't know our way?”

“She's not one of us,” the man hissed. “She's one of the vampires' whores.”

“No.” I shook my head. “That is not true.”

He stepped closer. “Are you not the Horned King's blood whore?”

“No.” I gritted my teeth. “I'm the Horned King's *queen*.”

Whispering began among the line of mages.

Meanwhile, the black woman with blue hair smiled, and the man scowled.

I didn't know if I'd gained friends or enemies just by my answer, but I refused to lie to either of them.

"And do you think you and your...Horned King will trample through our land, raping our women of their blood, and seizing our worth?" The man spat on the ground in front of me. "You'll die tonight if you try it."

I shook my head again. "We're not interested in conquering mage territory."

The woman raised her eyebrows. "Then what are you interested in?"

"Killing the Quiet King."

They both stepped back in shock and exchanged curious looks with each other.

I extended my arms out to the side and did a small turn. "Do you see my markings?"

"You have *returned*." The woman continued to smile, but I wasn't sure yet if that was a good sign. "Those words are ones that our people don't read any more."

"They're written by Ambi and Ressi—"

"Do not place our goddess next to the rapist god!" the man yelled.

A circle of fire surrounded me and rose two feet in the air.

I had no doubt that the man had made the fire.

How powerful is he?

My skin warmed from the flames.

I trembled, but stood my ground.

Just like the vampires, I figured fear would only make the mage more excited versus compassionate for my feelings.

I am so glad I made sure Xander was away. He would have killed this man.

Shivering, I kept my voice calm. "I died."

The woman touched the man's hand as if to calm him. "Go ahead, blood mage."

I swallowed. "After I died, my spirit flew into the dark sky. Stars glittered around me. Ambi and Ressi stood next to each other, holding hands."

The woman shrieked, "You lie!"

The ground under my feet quaked.

I stumbled back.

The flames burned my ankles. I cried out and jumped over the circle of fire.

Some of the flames followed.

I rushed away.

The ground in front of me opened up with a crack.

A hole formed.

I almost fell in and jumped back, barely avoiding the blaze behind me.

I was trapped now between a hole and fire.

Ambi. Ressi. Help me. Please.

“I’m not lying! Please believe me!” Trembling, I slowly turned around to face them. “They floated in front of me and they were together. Ressi gave me a message to give to you.”

“You come to us as a blood mage with no knowledge of our customs looking like one of the Returned.” The woman stomped my way. Her beaded gown slipped along the ground. Her curly blue hair fluttered around her. “You wear words and symbols we do not understand. You lay with a vampire that thinks he’s a king. Why should we believe you?”

I opened my mouth, but no words came out.

Make them believe, Ambi had said.

How? How do I get them to believe me?

I held my hands out. “I don’t know what else I can tell you. I saw them when I died. They told me to come to you, to unite my kings and the mages. That if we were all joined together then the Quiet King would fall.”

“And when the Quiet King is dead, who shall take his place?” she asked.

“I do not know. My king is not interested in castles and land.”

Her face held a dubious look. “What does he desire?”

“Me.”

“You said that Ambi said to unite your *kings*.” The man pointed to the metal wagons a mile away. “Are there more than one king over there?”

“Yes.” I nodded. “They are the Quiet King’s brother and son. They are both fully grown kings and willing to help you kill the Quiet King.”

“Help us?” She laughed. “I believe we would be helping *you*.”

“You would.” I considered something and just went with it. “But tell me, do you believe that your tribes can kill the Quiet King by yourselves? Surely, you long for him to be dead. He’s brought war and strife to the entire planet and although you’ve managed to hold your territory together, soon one day in the future, you’ll lose and he’ll step on this land and take over.”

“Never!” Rocks burst from the woman’s hands and floated above her fingers. “Not while my heart beats.”

“Join us and you’ll be right.” I turned to the man. “You may not believe that I’ve returned and saw Ressi and Ambi, but you must believe that the Quiet King will conquer all your tribes one day. Maybe not now or next week, but the time will come when you or your children will die under his claws.”

Silence passed.

The rocks disappeared from above the woman’s hands.

The flames lessened around me.

All remained still.

Even the hundreds of men and women were quiet behind them.

Seconds later, the woman and man walked off together without signaling the other. They simply moved away from me and whispered among themselves.

Can they communicate in their minds too? If yes, how? Are they. . . mates? Or is it something else?

I stood in the same spot while they conversed and waited to hear what their decision was.

If I couldn’t get their help, then I didn’t know what we would do. How could we ever beat the Quiet King and his army without a large number of fighters ourselves.

Finally, after a few minutes, they walked back towards me.

Hope swelled in my heart.

Please, we need them.

The woman spoke first, “What do you expect from us?”

I have no idea.

“You say you want us to fight with you, but how and how many of our people?” the man added. “And where will this battle be?”

“I’m not sure of any of those answers, but one of my kings can discuss all of this with you.” I held my hands together. “I’m sure you all could come to a compromise where everyone would be happy. Can my kings and people come into your territory? The only weapons we have are the swords that my twenty guards use.”

“It does not matter how many weapons you have.” The man chuckled. “We have the numbers and power.”

“On that I agree and respect.” I bowed my head low to them in gratitude and then lifted it.

The woman extended her hand. “I am Tru, the chief of Tribe Rock and daughter of the Ground Mover. This is Spenrik, the Wanderer. He is also the chief of Tribe Flame.”

Just to be safe, I bowed at her and him again. “Nice to meet you both.”

Tru gave me a sad smile. “All talk of war must wait for a few days.”

My nerves flared. “I am afraid that we may not have days.”

Spenrik frowned. “It must.”

Tru took in his hand. “It appears that you have come to us at an interesting time.”

“Why is it an interesting time?”

For the first time, Spenrik’s angry face brightened with joy.

Tru smiled at him. “We are to be married.”

“Oh.” I widened my eyes. “Congratulations. I hope that our appearance has not interrupted any of the festivities.”

“Most happen at night and. . .” Tru gazed off at our wagons. “Your kings and you may be invited.”

Spenrik’s joy left. Now he glared at me. “I will allow you to bring no more than five guards each with you.”

I nodded. “Thank you.”

“Your kings and people are welcome on our land for now,” Spenrik sneered. “But if we do not like what your kings say, or if we believe that you mean us harm, then all of you will die.”

I stiffened.

“Do you understand, blood mage?” Tru asked.

“Please call me Camille, and yes, I understand.”

Tru leaned in closer to Spenrik. “Then go get your kings, Camille.”

Chapter 18

Naughty Queen

Xander

After getting dressed, I decided to head out and realized a startling fact.

Someone locked me in the wagon.

“Eh!” I punched the copper walls. “Camille! Ian! Leeta!”

Pain stung my fingers and bit through my flesh, but still I beat against the metal.

I had no idea how long I’d been trapped inside. It seemed like forever, or at least hours.

Anger crested inside me.

The metal formed into the imprint of my fists. Holes emerged, but not enough to free me, just enough to piss me off even more.

I roared.

My heart thudded in my chest.

Hot bile surged into my throat.

Who did it? Ian or Leeta? Surely it couldn’t have been my queen.

I wished I could speak to her mind and tell her to free me.

I shouldn’t have broken the connection.

My body rippled with rage. The desire to shift into king form bubbled within me.

I can’t.

I slowly trusted Ian more and more.

What he’d said had been right. Wearing *battle form* had shoved me into madness. The last thing I needed to do was go insane within the wagon.

More time passed.

And then footsteps sounded and locks clicked.

Growling, I shoved my claws out, ready to rip my prisoner’s arms out of his or her body.

“King?” Camille peeked her head in.

I retracted my claws. “I was locked inside of here.”

“I know.”

I realized that not one hint of shock or surprise covered her face.
“Camille?”

“Yes.”

“Did you lock me in the wagon?”

She bit her lip. “Yes.”

I snarled. “Why?”

“I needed to go over to the mages and talk without you or Ian scaring them and inciting a war.”

Tension gathered in my shoulders.

I drank her nude image. “You walked over there like that?”

“I needed them to see my symbols and realize that I didn’t bring weapons with me.”

Anger hit me.

It took all of my energy to contain the boiling fury threatening to escape. I couldn’t bear the thought of anyone else seeing her naked.

Calm down.

I gritted my teeth.

We had already been through a lot. She also did not have to forgive me after I took her blood and forced the bond.

But, she did. Don’t mess this up.

I did my best to rationalize it all in my head.

Many people had already seen Camille when Ian opened the wagon door and exposed our lovemaking. Part of me wanted to kill them too. However, I knew that we needed them in this war.

Kill everyone later?

Hope filled my chest.

Then, logic came to me again.

No. I will not be that type of king.

I shifted my thoughts away and returned to calming myself about Camille.

My queen locked me in a wagon and walked off naked into the mage territory?

While I did not want to anger her again, someone needed to give me answers. Preferably, a person I could kill.

I stepped around her. “Tote!”

“What are you doing?” Camille asked.

“Come on.” I left the wagon, turned around, and lifted my hand to help her out.

“Xander, I need you to be able to maintain your temper.”

This odd sensation washed over me as if her very words could command me to do anything.

She eyed me. “Xander, do you understand?”

“Is that an order, queen?”

“Well. . .yes.” She stepped on the ground.

“Then, I will do my best to remain calm.” I wrenched off my shirt and wrapped it around her.

Naughty queen. I'll take care of that when you're under me again.

She grinned and tightened my shirt around her.

I scowled.

It appears the only time I have control of you is when I'm inside you, and I'm not sure of myself even then.

Tote arrived at my side with shaking hands. “Y-yes, sir.”

He must've been scared of my wrath. There was no need for him to worry. I, myself, was slowly learning that the queen was in charge.

“Get her a robe.”

“Yes, sir.” Tote bowed.

Ian called from several feet away. “Camille, it's time to call them off!”

I turned that way.

Very naughty queen.

Guards surrounded Ian and pointed their swords near his back and chest. My sister and Leeta stood in front with daggers targeted toward his head.

I put my view back on my queen and snarled, “You trapped Ian, too?”

“Of course,” Camille said as Tote arrived with a beautiful crimson robe.

She took the robe and slipped it on.

“I'll have to catch Ian and you up.”

And you will have to further explain yourself for locking me in the wagon.

Camille straightened the front of the robe. “But, first I have to get you dressed.”

“Why?”

“We have been invited over for tonight's festivities. Two of the top mage leaders are marrying.”

Pissed, Ian headed over and stopped at my side. “Marriage?”

Camille nodded.

I turned to him. "What do you think?"

"Mages do not always get married for love, most of the time it is because the union would strengthen the tribe." Ian crossed his arms over his chest. "We will need to be very careful. Mages are very tricky individuals. If you think something is coming by easy with them, then you will find that it is double the difficulty and beyond dangerous."

Camille walked over to us. "Both leaders were very strong. The woman named Tru, could open up the very ground in front of me and separate it."

Terror rushed through me. "What?"

Ian's eyes glowed. "Did they harm you, Camille?"

"No." She raised both of her hands. "I am fine. I just wanted to tell you about their powers."

They threatened her.

Ian frowned. "Tell me more."

"The man, his name is Spenrik. He can make fire appear around us."

I looked to Ian. "That could help us against the Quiet King's army."

Ian shrugged. "If we gain their trust."

"We will." Camille turned and gazed at the mage territory. "Since Ian has dealt with them before. . . maybe he should talk for us. What do you think, Xander?"

She put her view back on me.

I studied my beautiful lover, wanting to kiss her.

Ian snapped his fingers in front of me. "Pay attention."

I blinked. "Damn it."

"It is fine." Ian frowned. "You are still getting used to being a king. You're not used to how much more your queen will hypnotize you."

"She's pissed me off, but I am scared to yell at her."

Ian nodded.

Camille widened her eyes. "What are you both—"

"Not now." Ian shook his head. "We need to focus on the present problem ahead. I agree. I should talk to the tribe leaders. However, I am shocked that they are just going to let us enter their land."

Camille sighed. "I think I convinced them, but. . . I'm not sure."

Ian checked the territory. "Or this could be a trap."

I stared at Camille. "I don't care as long as my queen is safe."

Ian rolled his eyes and headed off. "I will get dressed. Let us see what comes."

Hours later, the mage removed the line of troops from the area, but no one witnessed where they went.

Camille and I rode on a striped horse toward the two mage leaders.

Our wagons trailed behind us full of our people.

Ian refused to ride a horse. Instead, he sat inside his wagon.

A mile in front of us, only two mages stood—a black woman wrapped in a beaded blue gown and a tall man decorated in wolf skin.

Camille whispered, “Remember, the man is called Spenrik, and the woman Tru. They are Tribe Flame and Tribe Rock’s chiefs. And the ones that will be getting married.”

The fact that the chiefs stayed there without their members demonstrated to me that they believed they could overpower us.

They were wrong.

The king within me rose to the surface as if to sniff the air.

I inhaled them—rich mint and the smoky fragrance of fire.

Their power flooded the land. It was an invisible force pushing against me, trying to keep me back.

Hmmm.

Once we traveled over their territory’s borderline, the air thickened with it. Power pushed against my skin, clogged my nose for a few seconds, and buzzed across my flesh. It took several seconds for me to adjust to the jarring sensation of immense energy. Every nerve ending screamed in response.

There’s old power here.

Suddenly, Ian’s whispering floated from the wagon’s walls.

I quirked my brows, trying to figure out what he was saying. The words were too muffled.

I glanced over my shoulder at Camille. “Who’s in there with Ian?”

“His dead queen.”

“Are you joking?”

She rested her head on my back. “I wish I was, but no. I heard Ian talking to her during the day.” Camille sighed. “He refused to talk about it, when I asked him later.”

“And this is the vampire you think should deal with the tribal chiefs?”

“Ian understands their customs and is familiar with vampire-mage politics. I’m sure he had the opportunity to witness it with his father. And even better, he was king himself for a period of time.”

“This talking to a corpse worries me,” I said. “He’s crazy.”

“Don’t say that.”

“He is.”

“We’ve all done things in these past days that many would consider insane.”

I gritted my teeth as the vision of my forcing my fangs into Camille’s neck returned. “You’re right.”

“Let me handle Ian. I’m going to sit him down tonight and make him talk to me about it.” She let out an exasperated breath. “Maybe he’s so heartbroken and lonely from her death that he can’t help himself from talking to her body.”

Which is insane.

“Then there is another option,” Camille added. “One that may be harder to conceive, but true.”

“What’s that?” I raised my eyebrows.

“What if she’s talking to him through their mind-to-mind connection? The one that he surely would’ve created through the blood. . .?”

“You’re forgetting that she died.” I urged the horse to go faster. The distance between the two mages and us quickly closed. We would be there in a minute. “When you died, our bond severed. That is the same thing that would’ve happened to them. If something is talking back to him then it’s—”

“Evil.”

“Yes.”

No. Ian, we need you to be sane.

A throb emerged around my temple as a headache dawned.

I’d already been stressed about the upcoming fight with the Quiet King, dealing with the mages to gain their support, and trying my best not to harm my queen.

The one constant normalcy with us had been Ian.

When I was in doubt about being a vampire king, I knew I could seek his help.

If it hadn’t been for Ian, Camille would’ve never entered that wagon this morning and tamed me.

Yet he has been acting out of character.

Ian’s hand between Camille’s legs played in my head.

A growl broke through my throat.

I don’t like that he took advantage of the situation when I was coming inside of her. I’ll have to watch him.

Camille lifted her head from my back. “What’s wrong?”

“I didn’t like Ian’s hands between your thighs.”

She stiffened. “Let’s worry about all of the other hundred things that we need to deal with and forget about that.”

“Did you feel disrespected?”

An exasperated breath escaped her lips. “No. . .I know I should have, but. . .no.”

I gripped the reins of my horse tighter. “Did you like his fingers there?”

“This is a dangerous conversation, Xander.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Then let’s stop talking about it.”

We approached the two mage.

I stopped in front of them.

Camille hopped off as if trying to escape further conversation on that subject.

You’re safe for now, but at dawn we’ll discuss this more.

Chapter 19

Surprising Connections

Xander

Ian's human servant rode the wagon my way and then stopped it by my horse.

The copper door opened.

Ian stepped out with a scowl on his face as he brushed his fingers through his hair.

I didn't think he'd slept much during the day.

Bags lounged under his eyes.

Red tinted the whites of his eyes.

He headed my way with a grumble ripping from his chest. "What are you looking at, Xander?"

"How's your queen?"

"Chatty."

He passed me and went to Camille as she shook the tall mage's hands.

Then, he is talking to her.

I jumped off the horse and followed him.

Ian twisted toward Tote and whispered something in his ear. Tote's face faltered for a second and then he nodded, rushed to Ian's wagon, climbed in, and came back out with a tiny wagon three feet high with two wheels on the side.

I raised my eyebrows. "What's in that little wagon?"

"Just focus on not pissing off the mages." Ian left with Tote pushing the wagon behind him.

When I approached Camille, she grabbed my hand and held it. "Xander, this is Spenrik and Tru. They said that they'll be taking us into their territory."

Tru stepped in front of me. Her nostrils flared as she inhaled. "You smell lovely, even though you're a child of rape."

"Excuse me?"

"They believe Ambi raped Ressi to make vampires." Ian held out his hand to her and they shook. "Just go with it, Xander."

“Come with me, kings.” Tru hooked her arms on each of ours, so that Ian was on her right and I on her left. “Spenrik will guide your queen.”

They are separating us. Why?

Tru continued, “Your servants and warriors can follow, but make sure they remain several feet behind me.”

Ian nodded. “I’ve already instructed our people to keep a distance of five feet from all the tribal chiefs and to kneel when spoken to.”

Tru paused, forcing us to cease walking with her. “You know our way?”

“Yes.” Ian nodded.

“Hmmm.” Tru grinned. “I like you already.”

My flesh prickled.

What is that?

Something seeped inside my skin. It was hard like tiny little pebbles. The sensation came from Tru.

She did something to me.

I yanked my arm away from Tru. “What was that?”

“I put a little bit of nature into your body.” Her brown eyes twinkled.

“Just in case you’re considering sinking your fangs into me.”

“I’m not interested.”

“Are you sure?” She quirked her brows.

“I only want your help to keep my queen and her daughters safe.”

Ian cleared his throat. “What he means is that his queen is the only woman he’s interested in now. And he hopes to create a friendship with your tribe and our people.”

I frowned at her. “Do not put anything in me again.”

“Did you think we would just let you inside of our territory without some safeguard.” She flicked her index finger.

My arm rose without me commanding it.

Tiny pebbles traveled through my vein. They looked like little bumps sliding under my skin.

I gestured at the pebbles. “That’s your safeguard?”

Tru frowned at me. “It is.”

A dark chuckle left me. I thrust out my claws and ripped into my arm. A hard burning pain saturated the area.

Still, I forced myself to tear through my arm, searching for those veins.

Tru recoiled in disgust.

Several feet away, Camille drew in a long breath and looked away.

Spenrik flinched.

Ian shook his head and cursed under his breath.

I rummaged within my arm some more and with a stubborn determination I pushed past the searing pain until I felt the smooth pebbles beneath my fingertips.

Once I gathered them all, I slung the bloody things at her.

They fell to the ground.

Blood dripped down my arm. The ripped flesh slowly began to heal.

“You should keep your rocks.”

Tru looked at them. “It seems someone has a temper.”

“I don’t appreciate being filled with anything but food and wine.” I glared. “You want your rocks inside of me then you’d better ask and hope I comply.”

To my shock, a loud laugh bubbled out of her mouth.

She walked forward, gesturing for us to come along. “I’ll be sure to remember that in the future.”

I glanced over my shoulder to make sure Spenrik was behaving himself with my queen. Spenrik didn’t hold her hand.

Good.

However, he did talk to her about something and pointed to the stars in the sky.

Camille noticed me watching and winked.

The urge to read her mind hit me.

I shoved it back down in the dark corner of my heart. I had to come to grips with the fact that she would never want the mental bond reformed.

Still, I missed her thoughts. They surged through her brain on a vibrant current of joy and pure bliss. Even her sad thoughts seemed soothing to me.

Tru nudged me. “Have you ever been in mage territory, Horned King?”

“Although I’ve assisted many mage in fleeing the Quiet King’s dungeons and guided them here, I’ve never stepped on mage soil.”

“Interesting.” She eyed me. “You were what vampires called a Pathfinder?”

I nodded.

She dragged her gaze over my body from head to toe. “What is the name that you were born with?”

“Xander.”

Gasping, she ceased with walking. “I’ve heard of this Xander.”

“You have?”

“You. . .you freed my father.” She held her hand to her chest. “The Ground Mover. The Quiet King trapped my father during his travels to mage territory. The king caught him by surprise with hundreds of men, killed my aunt who’d come with him, chained my father in sage chains—ones that stung his skin—and imprisoned him in the dungeon.”

There had been so many men and women that I had helped. I couldn’t figure out who her father was.

“Why did the Quiet King want with your father?” Ian released her arm and got in front of her. “Did your father tell you why or what happened to him while he was imprisoned?”

“No.”

She shook her head. “Father does not talk about those years. Perhaps, he’ll talk to you tonight. He’s in his hut resting. I’ll take you there.”

“What does your father look like?” I still couldn’t picture the man that Tru had said I’d freed.

“He’s short with skin as dark brown as mine, but he has green eyes.” Tru smiled as she described him. Her eyes gleamed in the moonlight. “Father talks of you constantly and honors you every sun festival. He says that he wished he’d had his riches to give you at the time, but instead he formed rock into enchanted keys that would allow you to open any door that’s not locked by magic.”

“Oh. The Sorcerer.” I’d never learned his name and simply labeled him that. “Dear Ambi.”

Ian watched us with a curious look.

My expression brightened. “Well, your father owes me nothing now. Those keys have served me well in freeing others and getting into places I needed access to.”

After leaving the Sorcerer, I’d given one key to Leeta. At the time she was the one woman I trusted in life, the one woman who I’d dedicated my life to.

How things have changed.

Leeta was no longer that significant to me, and now I had a new woman to dedicate my life to.

Camille.

I’d even used the key for Camille.

I took her to her hometown Zumaya in the middle of the night when all the humans there were asleep. The enchanted key slipped into the keyhole and unlocked the door with ease.

I had also used the key to free the Phinova Dominas from the dungeon.
Wait a minute. The Phinova Dominas.

“Your father never told me that he was a mage,” I said.

“No. One doesn’t tell vampires who we are.” Tru shrugged. “It is our way.”

I gestured to the many wagons that the Phinova Dominas stepped from. “Then maybe some of these women I recently freed from the king’s castle are mages, too.”

She twisted around. Her beads clanked against each other. “I thought I smelled kin among you, but thought that smell mainly came from your . . . queen. She has great power running through those veins. Her parents must have been great mages.”

“Tote!” I yelled.

The human arrived next to me in seconds.

Where in Ambi’s name did he come from?

I turned to him. “Gather all of the Phinova Dominas and inform them that we’re on mage land now and that they are free to safely go wherever they desire. No Quiet King travels this land.”

Tru’s smile widened until I spotted her perfect teeth shining back at me. “It seems like the Horned King is not what we assumed. Spenrik!”

“Yes, Tru.” Spenrik strolled our way with Camille.

“There will be a change of plans. I’ve learned many things in just a few minutes.” Tru raised her hands in the air. “No vampire blood will be shed tonight.”

“Are you sure?” Spenrik quirked his eyebrows.

“Yes. The Horned King is the great Pathfinder that my father slaughters wolves for.”

Silence filled the space for a few seconds as Spenrik looked me over.

“Are you sure, my love?”

Tru nodded. “I am.”

“Fascinating.” Spenrik slowly bowed to me.

I tensed, unsure of how to respond.

Ian gently tapped my back and so I bowed back to Spenrik.

“Good.” Spenrik rose and crossed his hands in front of him. “Now for an uncomfortable conversation.”

I raised my eyebrows. “Uncomfortable?”

Spenrik spoke, “We were not sure if we could trust you, so we had other plans when you entered.”

I tensed. “What other plans?”

“Don’t be startled.” Tru clapped her hands. “You’re surrounded by our best. We’d planned to kill you all, but that was a slight mistake. Now we truly welcome you as friends.”

Ian and I exchanged looks.

What? NOW, we are friends. What is this?

Tru clucked.

Spenrik whistled.

The ground quaked.

I stumbled back.

Cracks formed all around us and discharged a stifling heat.

What is this?

I drove out my fangs, readying myself to attack. Green steam shrilled out of the ground at a high-pitched tone. Dirt and rocks exploded into the air, yet none hit us. Hundreds of short brown men and women draped in green beads rushed out of the soil and dropped around us.

The minty fragrance swamped the space.

I coughed from the all-consuming smell.

My claws shredded through my skin.

This is madness.

They all clucked and whistled back to Spenrik and Tru.

They were going to kill us.

It should have been obvious to us.

They had too easily welcomed us into their territory. Even if my queen had been convincing, it would make no sense for them to simply invite two vampire kings within their land if they did not plan to kill them.

We almost died.

Camille placed her soft hand in mine. “Settle down, my king. No one is challenging you.”

“Please stay next to me.” I drew in my fangs and claws. “If they hurt you —”

“They won’t.”

Tru motioned to us. “Hear me now! These are our friends. None shall be harmed without our order.”

Without their order?

The king inside me didn't like that.

I tightened my hold on Camille.

Maybe I should rip out the chiefs' tongues to guarantee no orders are spoken to harm us.

“Are you calm?” Camille asked.

“For now.”

All of the hundreds of mage lowered to their knees. For some reason, the king within me sank back down into myself and was soothed.

They weren't bowing to me; they lowered for their tribal leaders, but still, they lowered, and that was enough.

“We should head to our feasts.” As if they had not intended to kill us, Spenrik strolled past and gestured for us to follow. “We'd planned on the feast to celebrate our annihilation of you and your people. But now it seems you really shall live tonight and rejoice with us on our union and even the possibility of destroying the Quiet King.”

Is this for real?

I turned to Ian.

He kept his voice down. “Just go with it, and remain calm.”

They're too confident. I should slice their necks open and drink all that confidence away.

As if Camille sensed my unease, she wrapped one of her arms around my back and hugged me a little while we walked with them.

Let's hope aligning with these mages is worth it.

Chapter 20

Friend or Foe

Ian

A flame mage, rock mage, and a vampire king stood around a fire out in the woods by themselves.

The flame mage boasted, "I can make that fire rise to the moons and all will know that I am great."

The rock mage countered, "With one enchantment I'll build a tower of dirt, rocks, and sticks to touch the moons faster than you raise that flame, and all will know that I am great."

The vampire king extended his arms out in a blur, seized both of the mages' necks, and ripped their heads off. "I am great."

It was the only mage joke I knew.

I decided to keep that one to myself as we journeyed through a forest rich with fruit and huge leaves that looked like big fans when the wind blew through them.

An herbal perfume flooded the forest and blocked out the bitter scent of magic emitting off the mages.

Trees towered above us, shielding us from the moons' light and casting shadows on our skin. They were tall and thick with shiny bark.

I was glad Tote walked several feet behind me as he pushed the wagon. I'd placed Phinova in there, hoping to find a medicine mage in one of the tribes that could possibly analyze her.

For some reason, the farther I was away from her the less she could talk to me in my head. No matter how hard I concentrated, her words became fainter and fainter until they faded completely, leaving me engulfed in a deafening silence.

It was never that way before.

Does that mean this is not my true Phinova?

Even many years ago when I first got to the sewers, Phinova talked to me in my head and sent soothing thoughts my way.

It was how I knew the night she died.

Her thoughts had been screams.

Her last words were *I love you, Nai and Ian.*

I just never knew why she had screamed and what had made it the last time.

She'll be back. There will be a medicine man here that can help.

White birds chirped above our heads. Their sound was unlike anything I had ever heard before. Their chirps floated on the breeze like a prayer.

How fascinating?

The birds must have been three feet long. Their feathers shimmered with colorless light.

I pointed to them. "What type of birds are those?"

"Doons," Tru replied. "Our sun goddess Ressi gifted all mages with the birds so that we can see in the night and have light to kill vampires."

"So I see that all mage still believe their religious texts."

Better known as lies.

"It is the words of the goddess that decorate the ancient tablets at the center of our prayer area. We will believe those words until the goddess sends another messenger." She kept her pace with mine.

"Do you think that Ressi will ever send you a message?"

Tru let out a long sigh. "My father received a dream two nights ago, symbolizing that change will come for our tribes."

"How?"

"In my father's dream, Ressi appeared and said that someone will come to speak her message."

Annoyance hit me. "Then why give us such a hard time? Clearly Camille is *this person*. She came to you as one of the Returned with the symbols of the gods embedded in her skin."

"You must understand that after my father had the dream, many came."

"Who?"

"Humans fleeing from the Horned King. They were scared and worried that a war would begin right in Capitol City."

It will.

Tru continued, "So when the Horned King arrived, we did not take his presence lightly. We considered him a possible threat."

"I can understand that."

"Camille is clearly one of the Returned, but I must also think of my people."

I nodded.

“Regardless of Camille’s markings, we need to be careful and make sure her Horned King didn’t come to bring us harm too.” Tru glanced at Xander as he trailed behind Spenrik and Camille.

Xander’s gaze remained on Spenrik’s hand as it gripped Camille’s.

We need to get to their resting area soon before Xander fights Spenrik.

Ambi only knew why Xander ripped into his own arm earlier. It would’ve been better to just keep the few pebbles inside his flesh and take them out later when no one was looking.

I will have to teach Xander a lot about being a king.

“I have a question for you, Ian.” Tru looked at me.

“What is the question?”

“Do you think your queen has a message for us?”

“She told me that she died and saw Ambi and Ressi together—”

Tru snorted. “Ressi is a forgiving goddess, but not *that* forgiving.”

I shrugged. “There is writing in the ancient text all over Camille’s body. Are we going to ignore that too?”

A sigh escaped her lips. “But what does it say?”

“It is hard for me to read. I can make out a few words here or there.”

“It would not matter if you can understand the words. One of us must be able to translate it.”

They will not trust what a vampire translates.

She continued forward and put her view ahead of us. “My father may be able to read those words on her body, but I doubt it. And if he cannot, then no one can.”

“Why do you say that?”

“He is the oldest of us all.”

The grassy path between the trees shifted to shiny violet rocks.

Tru stopped us there.

I looked at the path, trying to understand why Tru would stop us here.

What is this place?

The path led between tons of trees, which were covered in purple leaves. The trunks of the trees were a light blue color and rusted at the top. Fuzzy moss grew like hair on their smooth bark.

Stone statues of faces outlined the path on both sides. Flames rested on top of the statue’s heads and lit their path.

It was then that I noticed Camille and Xander’s shoes were by the path next to others’ sandals.

Tru gestured to my boots. "Take off your boots."

"I understand."

She turned to the guards near me. "When we enter our sacred land, we do not wear shoes. We let the land touch our feet to decide if we're worthy. .and if *you* are worthy."

"And if we are not worthy?" I scanned the ground and spotted thousands of shoes around trees.

"Then the path opens and the dirt swallows you whole."

I widened my eyes.

"This is your last test."

"I understand."

These mage are more backward than I earlier believed. There is no way a ground can tell your intentions.

I took off my boots.

The order to take off shoes and sandals spread behind me.

All complied.

Let us see if we are worthy.

Smirking, I walked off with Tru.

The shiny rocked path pressed smooth and cool against my feet.

As we walked on, I was able to get a closer view of the stone statues.

Smoke and heat rose from the flames on the statues' heads, but it didn't have the same smell of fire I was used to. The scent seemed sweet, reminding me of bakery bread that had been toasted and covered in cinnamon. It made me want to lick the flames to taste how sugary they must be.

Suddenly, men screamed behind me.

What is wrong?

I quickly turned around to see several of my brother's ex-vampire guards sink into the ground.

I counted three in all.

What?!

I tensed at the sight.

Like Tru had said, the ground swallowed them whole as they cried and shrieked.

No one helped them.

Everyone seemed shocked and unsure if it was okay to step close to their area.

As soon as the last royal guard's head lowered, dirt and rocks rolled over his head and covered it. The smooth violet rocks returned.

Mage walked on the path as if nothing had happened.

"They were not worthy." Tru gave me a sad smile. "But, it appears you are."

I turned around.

Up ahead, Xander glanced over his shoulder and his gaze met mine.

They were my brother's men. Surely, they had done too many things to be worthy anymore.

I shrugged. There was nothing we could do about it.

As if hearing me, Xander nodded and continued walking behind Camille and Spenrik.

We needed the men to fight my brother's army, but according to the spelled stones, they may have never been truly faithful to our cause.

Perhaps the mage did us a favor by taking them.

Or, were the mage taking our men to fight us easier?

I scanned the long trails of flame and rock mages and tossed away that thought.

If this is a trick, we can do nothing about it right now.

There were just too many of them. There was no need for them to kill five men when they had ten times enough people to kill us all.

I kept Tru's pace, hoping the rest of us were worthy.

Minutes passed as we continued down the enchanted path.

No further incidents occurred.

With each step, the flat stones became wider on the path. Some were larger than my feet.

We must be close.

A rush of magic blew my way and with that many scents assaulted my senses—the minty fragrance of Tribe Rock, the smoky perfume of Tribe Flame, and to my surprise the playful berry aroma of Tribe Wind and the salty sea bouquet of Tribe Stream.

They're all here. Is that good or bad?

Tru and Spenrik would be getting married. From being in their presence for this short time, I could already tell they had great power. It would make sense for all the tribes to attend an important ceremony, especially one involving the union of two powerful tribes.

Will we be able to get all the tribes to follow our cause?

I tried not to get too excited. With all four tribes behind us, we had a major chance of destroying my brother and his army.

We may win.

Chapter 21

Worthy

Ian

I took in the land as we headed on.

Huge gray stone huts bordered the path and were stacked on top of each other. They must've been six levels each.

Beaded curtains served as the doors.

Flower and vegetable gardens grew in front of most of them.

The area appeared like a stone city with hundreds of these six-leveled stone huts extending as far as the eye could see.

From where I stood I could see that more forest bordered the outskirts of the city.

The few kids and people that were outside, spotted us and then scattered back into their huts.

I would have thought the city was deserted if not for the lovely fragrances of cooked stews and meats flowing out of the windows or the whispers that lingered in the air as we all walked by.

When is the last time they have seen vampires? Probably never.

The further we went up, the more mage poked their heads out of windows, pointing, whispering, and staring.

Their skin was different shades of brown—dark to tan.

Yet the colors of their eyes and clothes varied.

Most of their eyes glowed orange or green, but many changed to dark blue and turquoise.

I considered that and thought back to what I remembered of the mage.

I think the last two colors were the eyes of Tribe Stream and Wind.

We went deeper into this stone hut village.

Some of the other tribes walked out and watched us.

Tribe Wind's clothes consisted of thin white fabrics tied around their bodies and heads.

Meanwhile, Tribe Stream wore slick body suits that glimmered blue.

When I was a kid, my father took my brother and me to Tribe Stream's land in a long boat. There was no other way to get there. An ocean

surrounded Tribe Stream's land and was commanded by the tribal chief.

He ordered the waves to crash against boats if he did not desire the person to come too close.

If the boats had permission, then the chief sung to the water and the water brought them there.

Tribe Stream called it the Wave Wakening song because the mage believed that the ocean slept and the chief's notes provoked it to stir.

I remembered the soothing sound of the tribal chief's song that evening long ago. His notes soothed my blood and caused it to vibrate within my skin.

Later, my father explained that the tribal chief's powers controlled blood in some ways too, which was why my blood reacted.

I looked at Tru. "Tribe Stream and Wind are here also?"

"Of course. We don't take the news of a new vampire king lightly."

I blinked. "The two tribes are not here for the wedding?"

"They are not."

Then, this may not be a good thing.

I looked at her again. "Do you think Tribe Stream and Wind will fight with us?"

"I'm not even sure *my* tribe will fight."

I paused at a sort of intersection of stone paths. "Then let's discuss this now. We don't have time to waste with you if you're not interested in aligning with us."

"Relax and come." She rounded the corner. "Bring your queen and Horned King."

My queen. If only that were so.

I motioned for Camille and Xander to separate from the other group and tag along with Tru and me.

They came.

Spenrik continued to guide the others farther in the opposite direction.

My nerves flared, on edge at our group being divided, but there was no other choice.

We required their help and had to do what they said for now.

When Camille and Xander got to us, Tru and I continued forward.

Up ahead, a large violet stone hut stood at the end of the path. A cascade of feather strands, meticulously crafted from rich hues and buffed to a lustrous, gem-like finish, draped over the entrance of the stone dwelling.

There, an old man rested outside with his legs crossed and eyes closed. His long white beard flowed over his chest like waterfalls. His eyes were closed behind thick circular glasses.

“Father,” Tru hurried to him, “Why are you outside?”

This is her father, the Ground Mover.

His eyes opened to reveal nothing behind them but darkness. “I had a dream and Ambi said to wait out here because a Returned woman comes with red hair and skin as dark brown as the ground.”

Camille stepped forward. “I am her.”

Xander stopped next to Camille. “And it seems we know each other as well.”

“Xander the Pathfinder!” The Ground Mover’s dark eyes shifted to green light. The effect was odd, as if a green flame sat inside the core of his body. “You’ve changed. I knew you were more than you seemed, but not a vampire king.”

Xander kneeled in front of him and offered his hand. “Yes. It seems we both kept our secrets to ourselves.”

“Yes, we did.” The Ground Mover nodded. “I hope you understand why I kept my secret.”

Xander smiled. “And I hope you understand why I kept mine.”

“I do.” The Ground Mover put his attention on Camille and sniffed the air. “And you are a blood mage. A powerful one at that.”

Camille slowly sat down on the ground next to him. Her crimson robe spread out on the black stone, looking like spilled blood over soil.

Even in simple movements, she was captivating.

I yearned to brush my fingers through her hair, slip the robe down those small shoulders, and run my fangs along her brown skin.

She turned to me.

Our eyes met.

She blushed as if she knew exactly what I was thinking.

I licked my lips, hoping she did.

Did she hear that?

She cleared her throat and turned back to the Ground Mover as the old man spoke.

“If it weren’t for you, Xander, the Quiet King would’ve drained me dry.”

A shiver ran up my spine. I stared down at the Ground Mover. “Why do you think he took *your* blood?”

“For his queen.”

Shock hit my chest. “H-how do you know this for sure?”

“Because first he begged me to bring his queen back. He took me to his room and had me analyze her. He claimed she talked to him.”

Camille looked at me and for some reason I felt embarrassed and ashamed.

Did she know I talked to Phinova in my wagon a lot and longed to believe she had come back alive?

I frowned and returned my view to the Ground Mover. “But. . .did you analyze his dead queen?”

“Yes. I was forced to assess her dead body. The whole time I did, the Quiet King kept this silver dagger near my throat.” Ground Mover’s fingers shook. “The first time I saw his queen, I knew who she was.”

I leaned forward. “You did.”

“Phinova, Chief Heart Burner’s daughter. But this. . .dead corpse was no longer Phinova.”

I trembled. “How can you be sure?”

“Her scent vanished, the one that identifies the blood mage from any other. It left her body the day she died, I supposed. All I could smell was growing darkness.”

My body tensed.

Her scent is different. It isn’t her. How did I not remember this?

I lowered to the ground and balanced on my knees. “But is there *any* chance that she returned and somehow was trapped inside her core?”

He shook his head. “I didn’t hear her voice, although the Quiet King claimed she was talking to him in that moment. I never heard anything. And then suddenly he howled, seized me, cut my wrist, and poured my blood all over her skin.”

Dear Ambi. Nai is as mad as I figured.

I rose and stepped back.

But, am I any better?

I knew immediately that it couldn’t be Phinova, yet I carried her dead body along and lay next to her anyway.

I’d hoped that for one moment I could have her back, but. . .

It isn’t her. Phinova is truly dead.

My heart shattered like a thousand pieces of glass, stabbing and slicing through me.

It was like she'd died once more. I held my hand to my chest. Heat bubbled through my blood.

Camille directed all her attention to me, displaying a sad look.

If that is not Phinova. . .then what. . .or who is it?

And all that time Nai fed her corpse with innocent domina blood, he sank his own fangs into her dead flesh, drank, and made love to her as if she were alive. I bet this made him even more evil and insane.

Dear Ambi!

How many years had my brother desecrated her death and his body?

He is really no longer my brother.

His mind had been gone for such a long time. And perhaps this was why he had so much power. He'd been drinking cursed blood enchanted with death and wicked magic.

"He drained me every day since that moment," Ground Mover continued. "And then one night, Xander came to free the elf in the cell across from me."

"I'd been paid by the little elf's family," Xander added.

"Yet without any money or offer of treasures, you broke through as many cells as you could, including mine, and freed us all on that level." Ground Mover clamped his hands together. "I will never forget that."

Xander looked uncomfortable with the praise.

The Ground Mover quirked his brows. "How is it that you've come to *my* land? And more important. . .how can I help you?"

"Father?" Tru stepped forward and gave him a sad smile. "You are no longer the chief. I am—"

"This man saved our tribe by bringing me and others back." The Ground Mover held up his hand. "Due to that, we *will* help him."

Tru nodded and stepped back.

I appreciated the deep respect she had for her father.

We just might get their help after all.

And it was thanks to Xander being a decent vampire.

I smiled at him.

This is why I wanted you to be king. You will be a worthy king.

"Speak to me, Xander. There is word of a Horned King that spilled blood in the Quiet King's castle. I can see power in you, but. . .are you the Horned King?"

Xander frowned and gazed at the ground. "I am. . .apparently. . .this Horned King. However, I had reason to spill blood there—"

“I am sure you did.” The Ground Mover raised his view to his daughter. “Then Tribe Rock and Flame stands behind you. My daughter Tru will be marrying Spenrik. While they will soon be ruling both tribes together, I am the eldest of them both.”

Tru crossed her arms over her chest, but remained silent.

“Therefore, I can lead when I choose.” Ground Mover gave us all a warm smile. “I, too, would like to spill blood on the Quiet King’s land.”

Yes. I think we have Tribe Rock and Flame’s help.

Now hopefully all of the other tribes would follow.

“Thank you. All help will be appreciated.” Camille smiled.

Ground Mover’s gaze shifted back to Camille and then gazed at the words on her hands. His mouth dropped open.

The glow in his eyelids turned from green to white. “You’ve returned from death?”

“Yes.”

She began to open her robe a little to show him some of the writing on her shoulder.

Xander growled. The noise shook the ground around him.

She cleared her throat. “Perhaps I can show you the symbols on my body later.”

Ground Mover chuckled. “Is this your queen, Xander?”

“Yes.” Xander’s fangs appeared.

“I told you that one day you will meet a woman that you could not turn away from. You said never, but I knew.” Ground Mover formed his lips into a mocking grin. “I’ll have my daughter Tru write the symbols on paper. Maybe I can read the language. I’ve been familiar with many old texts, but am not sure if I can still read it after all these years.”

“That would be good.” Camille bobbed her head. “Ressi talked to me when I died. I believe she wanted these writings to be the new religious text for all of our people.”

Ground Mover’s hands rose in the air. Then, he tilted his head up to face the sky. “As Ressi wishes, then it shall be so.”

Noise sounded behind us.

We turned to see Spenrik arriving.

The tall man headed over to Tru and held his hand out.

She took it.

He gazed at her looking like a man that was absolutely in love. “Did I miss anything important?”

“We are joining the war,” Tru said through clenched teeth.

A neutral expression passed over Spenrik’s face.

It appeared that Ground Mover truly was the leader when it mattered.

“Well then, let’s begin planning this.” Spenrik sat down and fanned his wolf skin out over his legs.

“And as you all plan, I will excuse myself.” Camille rose to a standing position and strolled over to me, her robe sliding against the black stone.

“Ian, can we talk for a few minutes?”

Xander snarled. “Queen?”

She sighed. “It will just be for a few minutes.”

Alone with Camille?

Like Xander, I was not sure if it was a good idea either. With this sad news of Phinova, I would take her just to relieve myself from the pain.

Can I be trusted?

Camille repeated, “Can we talk, Ian?”

My voice sounded hoarse. “Yes.”

I’d like to do more than talk.

My groin heated.

Why does she do this to me with just a few words?

Camille glanced at Tru. “Is there a private place we can talk?”

“Go inside my father’s hut, and up the stairs to the third level. No one is in there right now.” Tru pointed. “That area is designated for you and your kings to sleep during the day.”

Could I be trusted in the same room with her during the daylight sleeping?

Even with Xander there, I would possibly try to touch her.

Chapter 22

Queen Power

Camille

Silence flowed between us while Ian and I climbed the steps.

A sense of dread coursed through me.

From the moment the Ground Mover talked about Phinova being dead, I could feel this all-encompassing sorrow radiate off him.

I felt helpless, knowing that no matter what I did nothing would bring back his beloved.

How am I going to help Ian with his dead queen?

The stone staircase swirled around and around as it rose to the top of the stone hut.

Ian led the way as if to protect me from a possible attack, but I was sure no one else existed in the hut but us.

It possessed that sort of quiet one gets when no one's around.

Smooth gray stone served as the walls. I slid my hands against them with each step and relished the cool surface under my fingertips.

An herbal fragrance hung in the air and lingered near the long green candles at each level's entrance way.

"This must be where she wants us to stay." Ian took my hand and guided me into a spacious room coated in rugs formed of knotted soft fabrics dyed in many colors.

The weave pattern appeared to have no set design. The pale blue fabrics merged with avocado greens and sunshine yellows. Knots of deep pink and midnight-black decorated the center.

I walked on the rug, the soles of my feet sinking into the spongy fabric.

There was no furniture, just a large vase full of water with cloths, a stack of folded blankets and pillows in the corner, and a small fireplace within the grove of a stone wall.

I walked over to the fire.

Silent, Ian followed me.

Only the crackling of wood could be heard in the room.

I lifted up the ends of my robe and turned his way. “What did you think when the Ground Mover talked about your brother and how he gave the blood to Phinova’s. . .body?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“I am curious about your feelings on. . .Phinova.”

“Just say it.”

“Say what?”

Shadows painted half of his face. “Phinova’s corpse.”

“Fine. Her corpse.”

He leaned his head to the side. “How do I feel about Nai feeding blood to Phinova’s corpse?”

“Yes.” I nodded. “Tell me how you feel.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to be there for you.”

“You are not *my* queen. If you need to go back and forth about feelings and emotions, then call Xander in here.” Ian put his back to me and headed to the door.

“You’re mad.”

“Of course.” He paused, but didn’t turn around.

I cleared my throat. “Did I say or do something to make things worse or —?”

“This was a bad idea.” He faced me and formed his hands into fists by his sides.

“What was a bad idea?”

“Us being alone and talking.”

I swallowed. “Why?”

He rushed to me in a blur of motion. One second he was near the doorway, and before I could even blink he stood barely a few inches in front of me.

His warm breath tickled my forehead.

His gaze seared into my skin. Heat vibrated between us and something else. Another feeling. A more powerful emotion tugged at my heartstrings.

“It is not a good idea for you to be in a room alone with another king, especially one that no longer has a queen.” He kissed my forehead. Warmth unfolded where it shouldn’t have. “I knew better of course, but I never get alone time with you.”

“This is not about alone time.” I took two steps back.

“But, it is.” He closed the distance.

I backed up until I hit the wall. “Ian, I just need you to talk to me about Phinova.”

“Take off your robe and I will say or do anything you desire.”

I shivered. “I have a king.”

“You said I belonged to you.”

“You do.” I almost bit my lip from the determination in my tone. “I mean. . .”

“You said it right. I belong to *you*.”

“Because of your promise and our blood exchange.”

“That’s it?” He placed his hands on my waist. “There’s no other reason?”

I moved his hands away. “Ian, stop.”

He did and took a step back, yet a smirk spread over his face. “Are you *my* queen then?”

“No.”

His cheeks vibrated as though he were holding in a laugh. “But I belong to you?”

“Is Xander your king?”

“He is.”

I nodded. “Then, if I am his queen, then I am your queen.”

“Only in that way?”

“Yes.” I sighed. “We should discuss Phinova’s corpse.”

“Let us make a deal.”

I twisted my lips in confusion. “Deal?”

“Let me drink from your neck and I’ll talk to you about anything.”

Inching forward, Ian seized my waist, pulled me in, and placed his lips at the curve of my neck. “One bite?”

In his arms, a pleasurable shudder rushed through me. “Y-you’re not hungry.”

The tips of his fangs gently dragged against my skin. “Still, can I drink from you?”

I can’t let him touch me this way. No matter how good this feels. It’s wrong.

I cleared my throat. “No.”

“Please,” he begged.

“Ian, I love Xander.”

“You do love him, and you are his queen. That I believe. But. . .”

My heart boomed in my ears.

“Can you not be my queen too?”

“Where is this coming from?”

“You know where it is coming from.”

“I do not.”

Sadness filled his eyes. “I am lonely. I want to be soothed.”

I looked away. “I can soothe you in other ways, but not with my blood or body.”

“But you are enjoying my hold on you?”

I remained silent, not willing to tell him how true he was.

“You don’t have to say anything, little queen.” He left a trail of kisses from the curve of my neck to my shoulder and then stepped away. “I can hear how fast your heart is beating. Your blood is singing to me too and not a soft humming song. It’s throbbing hot in your veins, demanding I taste you.”

“But you won’t.”

“No.”

I slipped away from the wall and placed more space between us.

Ian watched me, but didn’t come my way. “I am not sure two kings can share one queen.”

“Me either.”

“I doubt it’s in our make-up. And even if it was, one of the kings will always be left alone, wondering if the queen ever truly loved him.”

“Is that how *you* felt, when Nai and you shared Phinova?”

“At times.” Ian lowered down to the ground and gestured for me to come with him. “I must admit that Phinova and I spent a lot of time away from Nai. Surely they must’ve did the same while I rested or was busy.”

I got down on my knees. Surprisingly, the carpet was as comfortable as a mattress.

He wrenched his shirt off.

My blood had done him well.

Like Xander, he boasted an impressive display of abdominal and pectoral muscles, like some ancient sculpture chiseled to perfection. A wide valley of tanned chest, tapering down to a narrow waist.

Ian folded the shirt, lay it next to him, and scooted over to me.

I looked at him. “Do you regret Nai and your sharing of Phinova?”

“Yes and no.” Ian lay down on his back. “We. . .in the beginning. . .we were engulfed in a powerful and seductive love that constantly swirled

around us. Our desire was palpable, radiating from us like a white-hot heatwave that left us entangled and completely lost in each other. Time seemed to stand still as we became one, a single body united in the throes of passion.”

I parted my lips. “In the beginning?”

He laughed. “You caught that. Yes. In the beginning it was all great.”

“Then. . .later?”

“Then Phinova’s tribe was getting ready to leave as planned. All three of us became worried that we’d be separated.” Ian pressed his lips together. “We did things that we shouldn’t have. Things that changed us on the inside forever. It. . .irrevocably altered us.”

“What things did you do?”

Xander’s voice boomed through the room. “They killed their parents.”

Ian and I looked his way.

Xander entered. “Ian, Phinova, and Nai wanted to be together so bad that they killed their parents.”

Ian looked at his hands.

Xander directed his gaze to Ian’s shirt on the floor and then to Ian’s bare chest. “Am I right?”

I looked at Ian.

Ian remained silent.

“Last time when we were in the wagon leaving Octavia’s party, you told us that Phinova made a potion and poured it in the soup at the goodbye feast.” Xander crossed his arms over his chest. “Then your father died the next morning and you and your brother became kings. You never said what happened to everybody else.”

I watched Ian. “What happened to the others?”

“It happened so long ago.” Ian shook his head.

Frowning, Xander walked over to us. “We should still know. What did Nai, Phinova, and you do?”

Ian closed his eyes. “Everyone who drank the soup died in their sleep.”

“What?” My mouth went dry. I put my hand on my chest. “You never said that. You told me Phinova’s tribe left and—”

Ian sighed. “There were tribal members still alive—guards, a few of her protectors, and one or two members that didn’t drink the soup. The surviving tribe fled with their dead and never looked back. They knew Phinova did it,

but now that she had become *our* queen, they couldn't challenge her on the murders."

I rubbed my face with shivering hands. "Your mother, aunts, cousins, they all died too?"

"Correct, Queen." Xander sat down beside me and rested his huge hands on my thighs. "They were murdered."

I centered all of my attention on Ian. "Was that truly the plan? Did you know that what Phinova put into the soup would kill them?"

Ian nodded. His eyes remained shut tight. "I did not know, but I should have figured it out. Honestly, I never paid attention to their plans. I only wanted Phinova. I never considered any of the consequences. My only focus was my queen, her blood, her body."

I blinked. "But. . ."

Ian spoke, "At the end of the week, we did the mass funeral and then held the coronation directly after. Nai thought it was best to do it all fast. I wasn't so sure. You see. I still didn't know that everybody dying was Phinova's and Nai's intention from the very start. I thought it was a magical accident that maybe we added too many herbs or ground gems—"

"When did you find out?" With no notice, Xander pulled me to him, gently lifted me up, and set me on his lap.

I blinked.

Ian snapped his eyes open and directed his gaze to us. "I'd been crying throughout the funeral and even the coronation. There's a famous painting called the Somber Prince."

My heart ached. "I know that painting. I saw it at the Capitol City historical gallery."

In the image, a prince stood on a platform wearing a long black robe that was too big for his body. Tears painted his face. He stared down at the ground while someone placed a crown on his head.

I remembered the most interesting part of the image was that the artist had done it all in black, white, and gray, except for the crown.

It was the only thing in the painting that held color.

Xander moved his view to Ian. "You were the somber prince?"

"That was of me." Ian rose to a sitting position. "Gloom had overtaken me. The last place I desired to be was a damn coronation when I'd just lowered my parents into the ground. After the ceremony ended, I went straight to my bedroom and lay under the covers, weeping like a child. I

would've stayed there all night if not from the laughing and celebrating coming from the top room in the castle."

"The top room?" I tilted my head to the side. "Was it. . .the same room where Xander killed everybody nights ago?"

"Yes. That space was Nai's favorite place to spend time in," Ian said. "I am not surprised he made that room the place where he kept Phinova's. . .corpse."

"What happened in the top room?" Xander asked. "You said you heard laughing."

"I arrived there, bumping into maids with trays of chocolates and wine. Their faces showed fear as they scurried down the hallway." Ian brushed hair away from his eyes. "Phinova and Nai lounged in the center of the room, laughing and smoking Zumayan mushrooms. When they spotted me, they paused in shock. Phinova offered me some wine and said, '*Did we wake you?*' They didn't even have the courage to admit the truth."

I leaned back on Xander. "So you don't know for sure if they united together and killed everyone?"

"Camille, you're so good. You hear all of this and still inside your heart you think there's a chance they didn't conspire to murder so many." Ian gave me a sad smile. "But the truth is. . .they did. Nai and Phinova shed no tears for the dead. By the next dusk, all of my family's items were burned, destroyed, or given to the poor. Our custom requires thirty days of mourning—we must wear all black, ring a bell in their memory each dawn, hold a feast for the city in their name, and give gifts to Ambi in order to gain his favor over their spirits."

Ian switched his view to Xander's hands as they caressed my thighs. "On the third dusk, Nai took the custom from our law books and forbid anyone in the city to do the thirty-day mourning. We fought about it all night. Our claws and horns emerged and for the first time I came close to killing him."

I gently moved Xander's hands away.

A low growl left Xander.

I ignored him. Ian's story was too sad. He needed our undivided attention. Old pain swam in Ian's eyes and I yearned to hug him.

"That night was the first time I saw Phinova cry." Ian lowered her voice. "She never liked our fighting."

"But did she ever cry over her parents?" I asked.

“No. Remember, she was a *blood mage*.” He shook his head. “Although her tribe didn’t kill Phinova and raised her like she was a princess, she was still treated as evil even from her birth. They drained her like cattle weekly to make medicines. Her parents gave her the title of *princess*, but any stranger could see that her parents preferred her siblings over Phinova. Even her guards’ duties were not only to keep Phinova away from vampires, but away from her family as well. She lived a lot in seclusion.”

Poor Phinova.

At least I had experienced love from the people I thought were my parents.

My birth parents must have realized how hard my life would have been, when they realized I was a blood mage.

Then. . .they gave me away? Did they know my life would have been difficult around mages?

How would I have ended up if I had remained in a tribe?

Ian continued, “After we fought, I didn’t sleep with Phinova and Nai that day. I moved my things into another room.”

“Did Phinova come to you?” Xander asked. “She was your queen. It seems she would have checked to make sure you were okay.”

“She *did* come, bearing chocolates and whining at me to eat one. I complied. She was my queen, after all. I fell asleep immediately and when I woke up I no longer was sad over my parents or mad at my brother. In fact, a kind of cheerful mood washed over me.”

Xander quirked his brows. “How did that happen?”

I frowned. “She drugged you?”

“Definitely. I returned back to them with a foggy head and a glassy view. Phinova led me around and anything she demanded, I obeyed. We snuck off many times to be alone and make love. And in those sessions. . .” Ian paused as though he didn’t want to confess anything else.

Xander tensed under me. “Tell us.”

“She whispered about killing Nai while I moved inside her.”

“She was always evil,” Xander concluded.

I elbowed him in his gut. “Don’t say that.”

“Xander’s correct.” Ian waved my comment away. “Evil moved within Phinova, but I chose to ignore it and every dusk when I woke up I ate those drugged chocolates and kept my mouth closed.”

“If you chose to ignore how evil she was. . .” Xander eyed him. “Then, what stopped everything?”

“Nai discovered us having sex one day. He tried to kill me right there. Phinova stopped Nai and begged him to just let her spell me to the sewers. Of course he agreed. She was his queen. However. . .Nai didn’t know that Phinova added an immortality spell to it.”

“So can you ever die?” I asked.

“I believe the spell only held for the sewer. Once Xander broke the spell by proclaiming to be my king, the immortality spell left too.”

“Nights ago, my mother said that the land believed you, Phinova, and Ian were abominations,” Xander said. “That the Greedy King traveled from the east, seized the castle, and killed Phinova in front of Nai.”

Queen Regina had even said that the Greedy King had tied Nai up in rope with wooden spikes all over it. None of the castle guards or servants helped.

Now I knew why.

I considered all the information.

The castle staff had probably figured out that Phinova and Nai killed so many people.

They must have been terrified of them.

But, then the Greedy King didn’t count on Nai maturing from his queen’s death or how the building fury would heighten his powers.

“Phinova would have never died if Nai had not ordered me to be spelled to the sewers. Two kings—no matter how young—could still take one king,” Ian admitted. “But I wonder how bad the land would’ve been if I’d remained above ground with them, ignoring the evil rising within them.”

“You might’ve made Phinova and Nai better,” Xander said to my shock. “You’ve done that for *us*. When I took Camille’s blood. . .she may have never come back to me if not for *your* words. And eventually I might have hurt her again, if you didn’t tell me to not stay in my battle form for too long.”

“I like to think that I would’ve stopped Nai from becoming what he is now.”

I swallowed.

“The blasted Quiet King, the killer of baby princes and enslaver of human women with traces of blood mage in their system.” Horror covered Ian’s face.

To my shock, tears left his eyes.

“Or. . .was it all inevitable.” Ian twisted his face in rage. “We were abominations. Our love killed our families and ruined the land, triggering more families to be harmed and thousands of vampire prince babies to never live.”

“Stop that.” I climbed off Xander and hurried to Ian. “There was no way for you to foresee all of that just from acting on your love with Phinova.”

“The signs of evil were there, but I chose to ignore them.”

“She was your queen,” Xander added. “It’s hard to think clearly when it comes to your queen.”

“But you will have to think through this *now*.” I frowned and wiped the tears that spilled out of Ian’s eyes. “Her corpse is speaking to you as it must’ve spoken to your brother. It *will* make you insane.”

“And I need your mind clear,” Xander said. “I can’t kill the Quiet King by myself.”

Ian stared at us.

I wiped the last tear. “You cannot talk to her.”

Xander spoke, “And she should not be with you.”

“Since getting Phinova’s corpse, my mind has fogged at times.” Ian put his gaze on my hands.

I leaned in closer. “What does she say?”

“She begs me to fill her with blood. *Your* blood at times.”

I ran my fingers through my hair. “This is bad, Ian.”

“I knew it was, but. . . I still didn’t destroy her. I had hope. . .”

I shook my head. “This isn’t Phinova.”

Ian let out a long breath. “She’s here in this camp, you know, in the wagon that Tote pushed behind me.”

“I figured.” Xander’s voice sounded close.

I glanced over to see him right behind me.

Xander stared into my eyes. “Evil lives in Phinova’s body.”

I put my view back on Ian. “You must bury her or—”

“He can’t just bury her now. The evil could sink into the earth and grow within the mages’ territory.” Xander shook his head. “You will have to set Phinova’s corpse on fire and make sure her flesh turns to ash. There is no other way.”

Ian whispered, “I cannot,”

“Maybe I can do it for you,” I offered.

“No. Ian has to do it himself, but we will be next to him the whole time.” Xander moved closer to me and twirled the ends of my hair. “Phinova is your past. You have more in your future.”

“Only death rests in my future.” Ian frowned.

“No.” An exasperated breath escaped Xander’s lips. “My queen has feelings for you, Ian.”

I tensed. “No. That is not—”

“While it is not as deep as her feelings for me.” Xander’s voice darkened. “There is something between you both.”

I looked at Xander. “What are you saying? Where is this going?”

Xander kept his view on Ian. “I can’t say I will ever let her be in your future without a fight, but. . .I cannot ignore the energy flowing back and forth between you both.”

I stirred. “I don’t know where this is. . .going.”

Ian studied me. “You still do not understand the power of a queen?”

I frowned. “I don’t think what we are talking about should be discussed any further.”

“There is something between you. I can smell when you are aroused by him. Don’t be afraid, my queen. Ian won’t die tonight.” Xander returned his gaze to Ian. “Earlier, did you like his hands on you?”

I gritted my teeth. “We were talking about the Quiet King and Phinova, not. . .what happened earlier.”

“But now we will talk about that?” A deep growl left Xander. “Did you like his hands on you, while I was moving within you?”

I bit my lip and tried to yank up the courage inside me to answer the truth.

Instead, I kept quiet and pushed away from Ian.

Fast, Ian grabbed my waist and tightened his grip. “Don’t ask her, Xander. She will never want to displease you. Look to her body. What does *her blood* say, Xander?”

“She loves your hands.”

My body heated.

“But. . .” I swallowed. “I love *you*, Xander. That is it. End of discussion. Enough.”

“This is not about love, my queen.” Xander gathered all my hair, tossed it over my shoulder, and kissed me on the back of the neck, sending delicious shivers through me. “I know that you love *me*. When *I* touch my queen, her blood sings even *louder*.”

“Aww. I hear it.” Ian bobbed his head. “It’s even more melodious than Phinova’s blood. Maybe your connection is *deeper* than ours could’ve ever been.”

What are we. . .talking about?

I moved my view to Xander and then Ian. Both of their eyes glowed as if they were drowning in arousal.

Ian widened his eyes. “Xander, do you think that you can share your queen?”

“I am not sure.”

I shook my head. “I don’t think. . .we should go down this road. Let us leave this topic alone.”

Xander frowned. “Yet, your blood says differently. I knew it was happening when you first gave him your blood, but. . .”

“No. I’m not sure about this. Who cares about my blood?”

“It is important to please you as much as possible.” Xander licked his lips. “That means that I must listen to your body and blood, even when I don’t want to.”

“Then. . .” Ian leaned back. “We shall see, if. . .I die tonight from truly tasting your queen.”

I shivered. “But. . .”

Ian placed his hands on my robe’s tie and began to unravel it from the knot.

My body perked up, excited to be between two captivating kings.

Ian opened the robe.

Cool air brushed against my skin.

Ian groaned as his view traveled over my body. “Can I taste you, Queen?”

Yes. No. I don’t know.

I looked over my shoulder at Xander, searching for an answer. I needed to know how *he* felt about this if he was heartbroken.

I couldn’t just go with my body’s cries for desire.

I had to listen to my heart and my heart resided with him, my king.

“Xander, how do *you* feel about this?”

“I am not sure.” Xander slipped my robe down my shoulders and dragged it to the ground. “I will not be dishonest. Part of me wants to cut out Ian’s throat right now.”

My bottom lip quivered. “And. . .the other part?”

“The other part yearns to hear you moan and experience great pleasure.”

I exhaled.

“When I see Ian’s hands on you, I am not mad *right now*. Maybe I will be upset if he touches you again, but for now. . .I am content.”

Ian inhaled me. “This is the power of a true queen.”

I looked at both of them, unsure of what to do.

My body wanted them both, but my heart belonged to Xander.

I needed to make a decision, and I needed to make it fast before things got out of hand.

Xander watched me. “What do *you* want this evening, Camille?”

Chapter 23

Desire and Caution

Camille

What should I do?

Xander somewhat gave his blessing for all three of us to have sex. Ian appeared more than happy with the possibility of this arrangement.

However, I knew what it felt like to be emotionally disrespected. I understood the pain of being tossed to the side without another thought.

My husband had done it so easily.

I could *never* break Xander's heart that way. He was my king and I would protect him in all ways.

Meanwhile, I also had to make sure that I treated Ian with care and respect too. With this news of Phinova truly being dead, Ian was at a low point, needing love and compassion.

I have to be careful.

The moment was simultaneously monumental and terrifying, like standing on the edge of a cliff and looking down into an endless abyss.

I took a deep breath, feeling the weight of their gazes on me. "I want you both."

Xander's eyes widened in surprise, while Ian's lips curled into a smirk.

Still a deafening hush enveloped the room.

Tension gathered in my shoulders.

Finally, Xander broke the quiet. "Then you shall have us both, my queen. Tonight."

"But. . ." My heart boomed in my ears. "Are you sure. . .we should do this *tonight?*"

Xander groaned. "I like the way your blood is singing."

I widened my eyes and then looked to Ian.

"I am not sure if tonight is a good idea, Camille." Ian leaned forward. "I just want to."

Xander turned to Ian. "Just remember that Camille is *my* queen."

I went still.

“Yes, my king.” Ian slowly nodded. “That is one thing I will never ever forget.”

“Good.” Xander ran his fingers along my cheeks. “Also remember that this may be a *one-time* moment, Ian. I do not know if I could share my queen other times.”

Ian let out a deep groan. “I will take Camille any way I can get her.”

Unable to help myself, I ran my gaze over Ian’s muscular chest. He was irresistibly sexy. His abdominal muscles curled into that oh-so-perfect V-shape, tapering down to a narrow waist.

My heart raced.

Unspoken desire lathered the space.

I could feel the heat rising inside me as I looked back and forth at them. Their bodies were so close to mine.

I knew I wanted this, but the gravity of what we were about to do was not lost on me.

“Okay, but first. . .” I took a moment to collect my thoughts. “We need rules.”

Ian licked his lips. “I can understand that.”

“After hearing what happened with Phinova, Nai, and you. . .I don’t want any of that to come our way.” I shrugged. “Rules could help us.”

Xander moved his hands to my hair and twirled the ends. “What would be the rules?”

“We have to talk to each other if. . .something happens where someone feels disrespected.” I swallowed. “I could never hurt you or Ian.”

“You won’t hurt me.” Xander inhaled the end of my hair. “We have had our problems, but you love me just as much as I love you.”

In that moment, I knew that our bond was more than just fleeting moments of lust. It was a deep connection that would guide us through any darkness and into the light, where we would embrace our destiny as one.

“Are there other rules?” Ian asked.

“Yes. There should be total trust and loyalty between us.” I cleared my throat. “Ian, when I heard your stories about the past, it sounded like there were times when Phinova snuck off with you to have sex without your brother being around. Other moments, she secretly plotted with Nai to kill your family, and you had no idea.”

Xander frowned. “Phinova was an evil queen.”

I blinked. “Xander, don’t say that about Ian’s queen.”

“No.” Ian shook his head. “I am not crazy enough to think that Phinova wasn’t evil. But. . .as my queen, I didn’t care.”

“Still,” I eyed Xander. “We will have respect for Ian’s first queen.”

Xander smirked. “Yes, my queen, and I like when you order me.”

I blushed at his words, feeling warmth rise to my cheeks. “Also. . .this *situation* is. . .something I didn’t plan for.”

Xander’s expression went neutral. “What do you want from us?”

“I think we should start slow.” I lowered my voice, the weight of the situation pressing down on me. “Maybe just kissing and touching at first. Then, we separate and see how that goes before doing anything else much later this evening.”

My words were a careful dance between desire and caution, a testament to the complexity of our entwined fates.

Honestly, I still wasn’t sure Xander wouldn’t kill Ian, afterwards. The primal, protective instincts of a powerful vampire king like him could easily eclipse all the logic in his head.

I couldn’t let that happen.

“I believe we have an alliance with at least two mage tribes.” I let out a long, measured breath, my mind racing with both the possibilities of pleasure and the dangers that lay ahead. “We should not rush into having sex, and become enemies due to desire.”

Not only did I deeply care for Ian, but I also knew that we desperately needed him against the Quiet King. And nothing could get in the way of destroying that horrible monster. The end of his reign would mean that my daughters would be safe, as well as other blood mages.

Our quest was not only for personal redemption, but for the very fabric of our fantastical world to be safe.

The air thickened with anticipation.

If we did this, our hearts would be tethered to one another. I just hoped that we could form an unbreakable bond.

I considered the rules that we would need to follow, pledging to be smart and protective, to navigate the treacherous waters of our new intimate connection with both passion and pragmatism.

“We start very slow.” I cleared my throat. “We must be mindful of the delicate balance between us.”

Xander studied me as if his eyes were searching for answers within the depths of my soul. But he remained quiet, a stoic sentinel guarding his

emotions.

Now... I wish I could hear his thoughts.

What complex whirlwind of feelings stirred within him?

“You are thinking with a clear head, Camille,” Ian said, his voice gentle and reassuring. “Kissing and touching as a test is smart.”

“I agree too.” Xander leaned over and inhaled the back of my neck. His breath was warm and tantalizing, as it brushed against my neck. “However. . .I cannot promise that *I* will be able to control myself around you, my queen. You have full dominion over me.”

The raw vulnerability in his voice tugged at my heart.

“Plus,” Xander growled, a primal declaration of his hunger, “I may not want to stop.”

I shivered at the intensity of his gaze, feeling the undeniable connection that bound us together. Despite the uncertainty and the challenges that lay ahead, I knew that our love was strong enough to face this challenge.

I turned to Ian.

“If Xander wants to take the full lead and go beyond kissing and touching,” Ian’s gaze didn’t leave me, his eyes filled with adoration and acceptance. “Then, I will proudly retreat to the shadows and watch our king help his queen reach the heights of ecstasy.”

A rush of lust washed over me.

Ian’s eyes glowed. “I believe that Camille likes it when I watch.”

My body hummed.

Xander groaned. “Can you hear that, Ian?”

A devilish smile spread across Ian’s face. “I hear her blood singing, Xander. So beautiful.”

Xander groaned. “I want her blood to sing more.”

Ian quirked his brows at me. “Queen?”

“Then. . .if Xander wants to do more. . .” I shuddered. “Ian will watch.”

“Good.” Ian slowly raised his hand and ran it through my red strands. “I just want you both to know that I am committed to making this work. Whatever *it* ends up being. . .I care about you both deeply.”

My heart warmed.

Ian’s words touched me more than his hands ever could because in the end, I wanted this union between us to be not based off lust, but love.

My voice was barely above a whisper. “Then, let’s see.”

“I want to see now.” The low growl of Xander’s voice made goose bumps rise on my arms. “How loud can we make your blood sing?”

“You are naked.” The tip of Ian’s fangs peaked out below his top lip. “We can take off our clothes too.”

I swallowed down my nervousness. “Not all of your clothes. . .”

Ian’s fangs fully revealed themselves. “Then, I respectfully ask my queen to reveal any of me that would please her.”

I gazed over my shoulder at my king.

Xander watched us, his eyes darkening with desire.

I turned back to Ian. “You want *me* to take off your clothes?”

“I want you to do whatever you crave.”

With slow, deliberate fingers, I reached out and touched Ian’s chest. His skin was warm to the touch.

Dear Ambi.

I slid my hands over his body, feeling each muscle shift beneath my fingers as they traced lines over his pecs and sides to his abdomen. When I got so close to the top of his pants, Ian sucked in sharply, telling me that I was turning him on.

That was all the encouragement I needed.

With a trembling hand I opened the button of his pants and pulled down the zipper.

Am I really going to do this?

I shoved the material down and gasped.

The sight of his two hard cocks made my heart race with excitement. Their tips glistened with need.

I was glad that I had only committed to kissing and touching. Ian was bringing two big cocks to the situation.

Xander already had a huge one and knew how to use it on my pussy without mercy.

Would the addition of Ian be entirely too much cock?

A dark groan rumbled from deep within Ian.

I looked at him.

Ian’s eyes were closed and his mouth slightly open, like he was in an erotic trance.

Xander relaxed his grip on my waist, allowing me to draw closer to Ian.

My body burned with this intense longing.

I tilted forward and captured Ian's luscious lips with mine. The heat between us ignited like a wildfire, consuming us both with raw passion.

Our tongues tangled together.

Groaning, Ian grabbed my waist tightly and pulled me closer to him, deepening the kiss even more. His tongue explored the depths of my mouth.

I could feel his fangs grazing across my bottom lip and I shivered with anticipation.

"Yes, my queen." Xander pressed his muscular chest against my back, while I kissed Ian. "Your body is buzzing out a symphony."

An insatiable appetite for more coiled through my veins.

Groaning, Xander bit down on my neck, piercing and searing me in carnal need. Sinking into my flesh as if it were an apple ripe for the taking.

Oh!

Intense warmth radiated from his bite.

My whole body vibrated.

I moaned, not sure what was causing it—Ian's kiss or Xander's bite.

And then our bodies united in a fiery embrace.

The three of us slowly became one.

While neither king pushed his cock inside of me, our dance of passion knew no bounds. Our inhibitions shattered like glass.

Ian's strong hands roamed over my breasts with abandon, each touch sending waves of carnal electricity through my veins.

Breathless, I broke away from Ian's lips, left gasping for air and trembling with desire.

Ian began kissing my neck and then slipping his lips down to my nipple. Tenderly, he sucked on the sensitive point, flicking the tip of his tongue over it.

Pleasure rippled through me. "Oh!"

The raw intensity between the three of us was palpable.

Something caught my attention.

I looked up.

Dear Ambi. . .and Ressi.

The whole space sparked and throbbed with my kings' magic. A red fog of mist cloaked us in a swirling pattern of flecks and stars that swirled and rippled like fire. The magic was so thick I could've cut it with a knife.

What is this? Is it good?

I parted my lips.

The magic was as sweet as strawberries.

Xander pulled his fangs out of my neck and placed his finger on my chin.

“Come here.”

I turned to him.

My blood dripped from his lips.

I kissed him, savoring the taste of my own life force on his tongue.

Then, Ian’s hand slipped between my legs and all I could do was surrender. I had never felt so alive, so powerful, and so loved. They worshipped me like a goddess and, I knew that I had made the right decision.

Then, suddenly, someone knocked at the door.

Xander stopped kissing me and let out a violent growl.

I stiffened. “Don’t. We are guests here.”

Ian pulled away from my nipple. “Still, in this moment, I understand Xander’s anger.”

I scowled. “No more growling.”

On the other side of the door, the Ground Mover’s voice sounded.

“Xander, there is much more to discuss before we fully align.”

Xander frowned. “We can discuss this at a later time—”

“No.” I slowly moved away from my kings. “We are coming to finalize the details of our alliance.”

A hint of humor laced the Ground Mover’s voice. “Thank you, Camille.”

Xander and Ian reluctantly let me go.

Once they did, I picked up my robe and wrapped it around my naked body. It was the hardest thing I had ever done. Surely, I yearned to drown in them.

First, win the war. Then, fuck your kings.

Rising from the floor, I could still feel their magic tingling under my skin, but I had to focus on the matter at hand.

The alliance was crucial to our survival, and I wasn’t going to let anything get in the way of that.

Chapter 24

Let it Burn

Ian

We spent hours in intense negotiations with the Ground Mover, Tru, and Spenrik.

Fortunately, the mages decided that they would commit their battle units from all four tribes to help destroy my brother. This was a monumental move on their part—one that Xander, the Horned King, would have to greatly reward.

The air crackled with tension and anticipation as we delved into the heart of the negotiations.

It appeared that the mages not only sought peace but also yearned to expand their territories and strengthen their weapons. Their ambitions were evident in every word, every gesture.

Tru demanded that no more mages or other creatures be enslaved under Xander's rule.

Knowing how much he had saved and helped others escape, it was an easy request for Xander to agree to. His eyes burned with determination and commitment as he sealed the promise.

To my shock, Spenrik hoped that trades between vampires and mages would return.

The atmosphere in the room shifted, as if a gust of wind had swept through, heralding a new era.

This served as an even bigger move toward mage and vampire relations. The very idea of mage and vampires uniting again, sent ripples of excitement through me.

Can this all be really happening?

The negotiations continued well into the night, lit by flickering candles and fueled by the hope of a brighter future. In the end, we forged an alliance that would not only alter the course of our own lives but also the destiny of the entire planet.

And now to solve the other problem.

Three hours before the moons would recede and the sun rise, Ground Mover, Xander and Camille walked with me to the wagon that Tote guarded for me.

The night air hung heavy with sorrow. The silence punctuated only by the occasional rustle of leaves and the distant hoots of Luminara owls.

As we journeyed to the wagon, I caught a glimpse of those night birds. Tons of them crowded the trees. They had these iridescent feathers with eyes that were deep and mysterious as the cosmos themselves.

Luminara owls never ventured close to Capitol City. Most believed that they could not be in the presence of vampires due to being created by Ressi.

Throughout the ages, Luminara owls became a symbol of hope.

Tonight, I leaned into that hope, needing my future to be as good as possible.

Xander had considered sharing his queen with me for a moment or two, and it was a thought that filled my heart with a warmth I hadn't expected.

Did that really happen?

Being that he was such a young king and would be prone to jealousy and violence, I took his consideration seriously. Xander's bringing the proposal up was a testament to his willingness to put her passions before his own.

It showed how much restraint he truly had with his power, as well as his undying love for Camille—a love that was so strong it could challenge even his most primal instincts.

Please, Ambi. Let this be possible.

The thought of being part of such a powerful bond—even if only for a fleeting moment—was both humbling and exhilarating.

Ambi, show me how to share properly this time.

I would not squander this precious opportunity that Xander had gifted me with. In those moments, I planned to completely respect him and the love that he shared with Camille.

I would honor their connection and tread carefully, cherishing the trust they placed in me. I was determined to prove my devotion to them both.

But. . .dare I hope that. . .there would be some room for me to feel her hot passion. . .on cold, lonely nights.

The Luminara owls hooted as if telling me that all would be perfect.

Ground Mover spotted the owls and frowned. "This is not good."

"What?"

“They are never here at this time. And from the look of their feathers, many owls are coming from the West and seeking out our forest to hide in.”

I looked at him. “What does that mean?”

Ground Mover sighed. “Many more vampires are heading our way.”

“The Quiet King?”

“I pray to Ressi that it is not him. We still must learn how to fight together.”

When we made it to the wagon, Tote rose, looking exhausted.

“You were correct to tell me about this.” Ground Mover’s eyes glowed bright. “There is great evil inside of there.”

I ordered Tote to leave and get some sleep. He hurried away.

Ground Mover whispered a prayer and then motioned for me to open the wagon.

Under the somber glow of the twin moons, I unbolted the wagon with a solemn expression and revealed Phinova’s dead body to Xander, Camille, and Ground Mover.

Silent, they stood beside me. Their expressions were a mix of shock, disgust, and sympathy.

They must think that I have gone insane.

The sight of Phinova was more haunting than ever.

Once a vibrant queen. . .now reduced to a lifeless husk.

Phinova whispered in my mind, ***I am alive.***

I shook my head and saw the truth of her.

Since her corpse had been unhooked from the blood supply in Nai’s castle bedroom, her body had begun rotting. Many of her lovely red strands had turned gray, a stark contrast against the remaining crimson tresses. The rich brown flesh on her face cracked, turning into a gruesome mosaic of decay that spoke of the relentless passage of time that had occurred.

Phinova’s voice slipped into my head. ***Yes, my love. You finally brought a blood mage to me.***

I pursed my lips.

Now, slice her neck and spill her blood into my mouth.

A shiver ran down my spine.

The air grew thick with the sickly scent of decomposition.

“I am glad that I brought my amber stones for this. It appears the Quiet King increased the corpse’s power to great lengths.” Ground Mover stepped back. “So many have died to preserve this body, yet. . .the evil within it also

drank the spilled blood. And that evil, it lived and grew strong within that castle.”

I am not evil, Ian. Kill this mage. Then, feed me his blood.

Xander turned to me. “Is she talking to you now?”

I slowly nodded.

Camille stepped forward. “What does she want?”

“Your blood and the Ground Mover’s blood too.”

“The Quiet King must have a very wicked bond with this. . .cursed spirit.” Ground Mover shook his head. “I imagine that he will bring the full force of his violence our way due to her absence.”

Camille widened her eyes. “We think so.”

“My daughter must marry soon.” Ground Mover let out an exasperated breath. “Because war will come earlier than we thought.”

Xander crossed his arms over his chest. “We should handle this before the sun comes up.”

My nerves flared. “Or. . .perhaps. . .we could wait a day or two to maybe assess the corpse and find out—”

“We cannot, Ian.” Camille shook her head. “Remember. . .this isn’t Phinova.”

“Pure evil moves in that body.” Ground Mover spat at the ground. “There will be no need to assess anything.”

Xander frowned. “And even if it was Phinova. . .would that be a good thing?”

Camille scowled at him.

Xander cleared his throat. “I am sorry.”

An evil eagerness slid over Phinova’s voice. ***Bring me this blood mage, and many more. Kill them all.***

Silent, I went into the wagon to get the love of my life.

Once inside, I couldn’t help but stare at the corpse, remembering how beautiful she had been.

I must say goodbye to you, Phinova.

No, Ian. We are to be together forever.

I’m sorry, but I have a new queen.

No!!!

I gently lifted her up, cradling her stiff body in my arms.

No!!! Think of our love. Do not have me die again, Ian!

My eyes watered as I carried her out of the wagon.

You already died, Phinova.

I did not!

Several minutes later, Camille, Xander, Ground Mover, and I stood around a bonfire.

Phinova burned within.

Clouds of red smoke hovered over the bonfire as the wood tied to Phinova's arms and legs crackled and snapped and her skin sizzled into a husk of ash that had begun shifting from brown to black then to white and gray.

Ground Mover had placed amber stones around the fire to keep in any evil that strayed from the body.

Orange flames lapped at Phinova's rotted flesh and chewed through. Her hair rose high above her head in one long light that pointed toward the moons. Those fiery strands shifted to hot blue, then streaks of red and yellow, until the fire eventually melted away the hair into black liquid.

No! Please, my love! Phinova's voice echoed in my skull as she burned.
I'm alive! It's me!

I thought back to my mother.

She used to say, "*Ian, goodness! There are times when a joke is not proper. There are times when people don't want to laugh.*"

For years, I believed she was wrong, until the day I lowered her body into the ground.

The day of my parent's funeral, tears had fallen from my face and landed on her burial's metal box, and I whispered she was right.

Later that day, I sank even deeper into depression when I realized my queen and brother were the reason my mother and others had died.

That night was the only night no jokes ran in my head.

Until tonight.

I am your love! No, Ian! Don't do this! You're killing me!

Sorrow encased my heart.

You're killing me! No!

Streams of violet smoke rose in the air and then danced in swirls toward the stones.

The amber stones lit up and sucked the smoke in. To my shock, the stones began to expand and get bigger and bigger.

"That body held *great* evil." Ground Mover kneeled by one stone that was slowly enlarging. "My enchanted amber stones are eating a lot tonight.

They haven't feasted this well since the Great War. Years of evil were in this corpse."

Many years.

Nai kept Phinova's dead body for close to a hundred years and propped her on a diamond throne.

How many times did you seek her evil counsel, Nai? How many times did you make love to her dead body? Whose idea was it to kill the vampire prince babies—hers or yours?

I bet that had come from her corpse too. At least now I understood where the need to enslave dominas came from. Nai used the dominas to make babies, but also to feed Phinova. Wickedness grew within Phinova's dead flesh.

No doubt she'd already possessed some while she lived. It hurt me to admit that. Yet when she died, the malevolence festered into a corpse that spoke to all who dared to listen.

Or did it just speak to Nai and me?

I thought more about my brother.

Was she the reason for killing all the other vampire kings and starting war after war?

Ground Mover rose from the ground and turned to Camille. "Have you ever had an Emerald Elixir?"

"I have never even heard of it."

"Dear Ressi." Ground Mover shook his head. "We must solve this problem immediately."

Camille smiled.

"It is a legendary concoction, crafted by an ancient earth mage named Tarnis the Verdant. As a skilled potion maker, Tarnis sought to create an enchanting beverage that would not only invigorate the senses but also celebrate the natural world and its bountiful gifts."

Instead of paying attention to Ground Mover, Camille gave me a worried look.

"Do not worry about your kings." Ground Mover gestured for her to come. "Let us go and make Emerald Elixirs."

"Oh." Camille shook her head. "I should stay here and—"

"Go ahead." I held in my sadness. "I like the sound of a drink tonight."

Ground Mover led Camille away from the stones, and I was left alone with Xander.

The amber stones continued to pulsate and grow into small boulders, feeding on the evil that had been trapped inside Phinova's corpse for years. It was unnerving to think that so much darkness had been contained within her body.

I took a deep breath and tried to clear my mind, but memories of my brother and Phinova kept creeping in.

Xander put his view on me. "Now, I understand the Quiet King better."
"Do you?"

"Yes." Xander directed his view to the Phinova's burning body. "The moment I came close to losing Camille. . .I understood."

I closed my eyes, not ready to think of what had happened to Camille. The loss of one queen had been a devastating blow. The loss of two queens would have been an unspeakable tragedy.

We must keep Camille safe.

My heart sank into my gut. "Whatever the reasoning behind Nai's actions in these many years, he will die soon, and by both our hands."

Xander turned back to me. "And how do you feel about that?"

"About what?"

"Killing your twin brother."

"I have dreamed about killing Nai for many years. The moment he kept me in the sewer was the end of our brotherhood."

"Then, when the time comes and we are on the battlefield, there will be no hesitation?"

"None at all."

That could be the only answer.

I would shed no tears.

Nai had terrorized people all over the land, unfairly persecuted those he conceived as wrong, enslaved the weak, killed the young, and impregnated slaves to build his army and murder more.

The last part of him that represented my brother died the night Phinova perished.

I frowned. "He is not my brother."

Xander watched me. "But, that *is* your brother."

"When you and I kill him, it will be a monster that dies, an evil power that should have been struck down long ago."

Xander slowly nodded.

The cool night air began to warm, signaling the rise of the oncoming sun.

I walked up to the fire. Now Phinova was only a small pile of burning ambers and ash. The weight of the night's events lay heavy on my shoulders. "We should get some rest today. Tomorrow is another night."

Xander got to my side. "But will we be getting any rest on this day? Or will we be doing other things?"

Hot anticipation surged in my chest. I tried not to get too excited, but it was difficult.

I faced him. "That is up to you. . .King."

Xander lowered his voice. "Her blood. . .it tastes different when she is aroused by you."

I smirked. "That is the power of a blood mage, my friend."

"That happened with Phinova?"

"Yes. Nai and I drank from many women in our lives, but Phinova was the first woman that could change her blood like that. I am sure Camille has no idea that she is doing it."

Xander eyed me. "These women that you and Nai had. . ."

I leaned my head to the side. "Yes?"

"Did you share them all with your brother?"

"Definitely."

"Why?"

"I never knew I shouldn't. It was only later that I learned that vampires didn't share."

Xander frowned. "I liked the way Camille tasted when you turned her on."

I nodded. "I used to love the way Phinova's blood tasted when Nai fucked her."

Xander blinked.

"With me, Phinova's blood was a spicy honeyed liquid."

"And with Nai?"

"Cold and lemony. Something perfect for quenching an intense thirst on a sweltering night."

Xander gazed off into the distance. "How does Camille taste to you?"

My body hummed with need. "There's a smoky, herbal flavor to her blood."

"That was how she tasted when you were with us tonight. Usually, it is different."

Unable to help myself, I licked my lips. “How does her blood taste with you?”

“Creamy and sweet.”

My cock jerked in my pants. “Hmmm.”

Then, Xander’s eyes glowed. “If I allow this. . .”

“Then, I must be careful to not trigger your battle form.”

“She is mine.”

“Always.”

Chapter 25

Triple the Desire

Xander

Hours later, Ian, Camille, and I stumbled back to our lodgings, drunk off Emerald Elixirs and chuckling the whole time.

Ground Mover had shared these potent concoctions with us. The dark green liquid had bubbled and shimmered in our glasses. Once I drank it, the potion imbued my senses with an otherworldly warmth that made everything feel surreal.

Next, Ground Mover regaled us with stories of ancient battles, mythical creatures, and lost kingdoms. His words painted vivid images in our minds, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of awe as I listened. Each tale was more fantastical than the last, transporting us to distant realms where dragons soared through the skies and mermaids sang enchanting melodies.

I almost hadn't wanted to end the moment, but the Ground Mover became tired, and the sun was peeking in the sky.

Now it is time for my queen.

As I guided Camille up the stairs, she swayed and then chuckled. I tightened my grip on her hand. "Careful, Queen."

"Don't worry. I am alright."

Ian swaggered a little, yet remained behind Camille, probably ready to catch her if necessary.

I couldn't help but grin at the sight of them.

We had all needed this night of revelry—a break from the trials and tribulations of our horrid journey.

When I reached the door to our room, I fumbled with the key, but finally managed to unlock the door.

We stumbled inside.

The air was thick with the scent of roses and a hint of something earthy, like the freshly turned soil of a mystical forest.

Soon, I collapsed onto the cushioned floor.

Someone had brought tons of fur blankets and satin pillows into the room. The bedding felt like clouds beneath my body.

Ian shut the door and then helped Camille onto the bed.

“I shouldn’t have had that second glass.” Camille snuggled up next to me and rested her head on my chest.

I chuckled and wrapped my arm around her, feeling the warmth of her body against mine.

Ian sat down on the other side of Camille, his eyes heavy-lidded and content. “Apparently, Ground Mover’s true magic lies within those elixirs. Tasty, yet highly intoxicating.”

My mind swirled with the enchanting images and captivating stories that Ground Mover had shared with us.

I gazed up at the ceiling. “The world that Ground Mover described—a world before the Quiet King. . .it sounded amazing.”

Ian spoke, “And we will return this world to that.”

Camille nodded. “We will.”

We could.

I felt a sense of contentment and joy that I had never experienced before.

“Mmm.” Camille brushed her fingers along my neck. “You’re so warm.”

The heat rose in the room—a warmth that was both comforting and arousing all at once.

I looked at Camille, and her eyes were blazing with desire and anticipation. Spell-binding energy crackled in the air.

Then, her blood began to sing a haunting melody, and her heart beat in a slow, lulling pulse.

Yes, queen.

I moved my head closer to hers, and our lips met in a passionate kiss that seemed to last an eternity.

When I pulled back, I put my view on Ian.

His fangs were out, and his eyes glowed with animalistic need.

Let us see if we can make my queen cum. . .without my wanting to kill you.

Surely, this was uncharted territory, and that scared me. But, her blood told me to see if this could work.

Meanwhile, we three had been through so much together. Deep in my soul, I knew that Ian would always be a part of our lives.

Smart and respectful, Ian remained calm as he waited for my signal.

It will be fine.

Slowly, I nodded.

Ian crept toward Camille and nestled close to her.

Together, we sandwiched my queen between us, forcing her body to mold against mine.

A deep groan left me.

Raw, erotic sensations coursed through me, unlike anything I had ever experienced with Camille before.

What is this special magic?

Every nerve ending in my body sparked to life.

She widened her eyes.

Does she feel the difference too?

Next, her blood's melody shifted to an adrenaline-fueled symphony. The beat of her heart was now a thunderous crescendo that reverberated through her veins, making her every fiber sing.

Like I'd learned before, Camille's blood song differed from the one that I'd been acquainted with since I first pierced her skin long ago. The harmony strummed unusual notes. Some climbed high and rung my ears.

There in that silent, warm room, Camille's blood sang for Ian and me. My fangs burst out, unable to contain themselves. My cock went rock hard.

Camille gazed up at me with lust-soaked eyes. "Xander. . ."

"Yes, my queen."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." My body hummed with a potent energy that was almost too much to contain. "Enjoy yourself."

Behind her, Ian slipped his hands over the curve of her hips.

Camille's breathing picked up, and her blood's song further rose in the air with a tune of love and sensuality, passion and desire.

My voice went husky and low. "Can you hear that, Ian?"

The melody vibrated within her body, purring in her veins and teasing for my fangs.

"Yes." Ian inhaled the curve of her neck. "It is a captivating song."

Tonight her blood sang and all I longed for was to feel the warm liquid on my tongue, her hot flesh under my fingers, and her wet arousal dripping down on me.

I didn't care how, where, or why. I just wanted it now.

"Xander. . ." Camille parted her lips. "Are you sure you will not kill Ian if he touches me, kisses me. . ."

“You desire Ian.” I tasted the words on my tongue and didn’t feel any disgust. “I want you to have him just because it will make you happy.”

“But. . . will it make *you* happy, Xander?”

“If my queen is happy, then I am overjoyed.”

Ian spoke, “It is the power of a queen, Camille.”

I groaned. “Turn around.”

She blinked.

“Now, Queen.”

She trembled and then turned around, putting her back to me.

“What will you have us do, Queen?” Slipping her red hair to the side, I nibbled at the arc of her neck. Next, I brushed my fangs along her shoulder.

She shuddered.

I walked my fingers down the delicate path of her spine and then caressed the lush curve of her ass. “We’re at your command tonight.”

She gasped as I dipped my fingers between her ass.

My cock jumped in my pants. I had to free it and enter her soon, so soon.

I gestured for Ian to kiss her.

He leaned in and pressed his lips to hers.

She trembled and glanced back at me. “Xander?”

“It’s okay.” I tenderly squeezed her ass some more.

All mine.

I longed to bite her everywhere. “We’ll stop when *you* tell us.”

“But—”

“Xander is correct.” Ian gently took off her robe, giving us more access to her body. “*You* must lead this moment. We’ll go as far as you desire.”

She whispered, “I’m still not sure this is something we should do.”

“If you could hear your blood the way we do, you would recognize that there is no need to deny this.” My skin prickled as soon as I caught the scent of her arousal. “Your pussy is hungry for the both of us. Let us feed that sweet warmth.”

Finally, she surrendered, and we began exploring her body, taking turns to experience different parts of her skin. Ian kissed and licked her neck while I ran my hands down the small of her back.

She whimpered.

What is he doing to her?

I glanced over her side. Ian had scooted down until his head rested between her legs.

Hmmm.

His tongue flickered between her pussy like a starved vampire on the brink of madness.

How long has he dreamed of licking my queen?

A sly smirk came to my face, knowing that her pussy was all mine. There would never be a need to dream or yearn about. It was all mine to take. Mine to please.

With that endearing fact, I seized her full breasts and circled her nipples with my fingertips. They'd been soft, but now they hardened.

She moaned.

I squeezed both nipples at the same time. My fangs ached in my gums as I slowly twisted those stiff points from side to side. "How does that feel, my queen?"

"Oh Ambi! So good."

I yearned to get in front of her and suck on her nipples.

Grumbling exploded from Ian's chest. He remained between her legs. His licking transformed to lapping. The sound of his tongue slapping against her clit flooded the space.

"Oh! Oh!"

Hmmm.

Even though it wasn't me making her moan, I relished in the noise, nonetheless. My cock stretched the fabric of my pants.

"Be careful, Ian." I grinned. "Your tongue may never desire anything else but that taste. It'll be disgusted with wine and blood."

He ceased and licked his lips. "I was already addicted from just one lick."

"Then you're more hopeless than me." I pushed my claws out of my fingertips and let the sharp points circle her nipples some more.

Camille shivered.

Ian revisited his feast while I pondered how I could get those stiff nipples in my mouth.

Camille's body quaked as I fondled her breasts and Ian devoured her pussy.

My desire swelled as I felt her body's shivers. "Are you enjoying this?"

"Yes, King."

Grinning, I nibbled at her neck and scraped it with the tip of my fangs until she shivered. "What do you want from us now?"

“Take your cocks out.” Hunger coated Camille’s voice. “Please. I have to feel them in my hands, on my skin, and inside of me now.”

Dear Ambi!

I quickly moved away, unbuttoned my pants, and wrenched down my pants at the rate of a vampire insane with blood lust. Then, I lay back down.

Rustling sounded from Ian’s direction.

I peeked over.

He sat up. His two huge cocks pointed her way.

My heartbeat faltered for a second.

Hold on. Where will everything go?

Camille cleared her throat, no doubt wondering the same thing. “I’ve never done anything like this before. How will I...manage with so many cocks? I’m only *one* queen.”

“It is your decision.” Ian stroked both of his cocks with his hands. Each time he reached the swollen tips, he paused for a few seconds and squeezed.

Shivering, Camille twisted my way, lying on her back. “And where do you want to put *your* cock?”

A growl emitted from my mouth, not one that signaled fear, but a noise that told her I’d be happy to enter her any way possible.

She smirked. “That’s not an answer.”

“You’re a naughty one.”

“Yes, I am.” Her gaze fell to my cock.

Ian spied my length and chuckled. “By Ambi, you’re more like Nai than I thought.”

I frowned. “What?”

“He was hung like a wild horse, too.”

My frown deepened. “Stop admiring my cock.”

Camille drew her wet tongue along her bottom lip, inciting a wave of lusty desire to tremor through me.

I licked my lips. “Open your mouth, queen.”

She obeyed.

I sat, moved up to her face, and traced her lips with the mushroomed tip of my cock, drawing tiny circles around her plump bottom lip.

Ambi, she’s perfect. Even her mouth causes me to harden.

My erection had already been stiff, but now it expanded even more until I thought an explosion would occur in my groin.

Moaning, she opened her mouth wider and stuck her tongue out.

I entered her mouth and groaned. “Dear Ambi and Ressi together!”

Her mouth radiated the perfect heat and moistness.

I yearned to push all the way through, to ram it hard into her mouth, and make her scream, but I took my time, inch by inch, shivering the more her wet heat encased me. “Fuck!”

Her arousal’s perfume lifted higher and clogged my nose with the yummy smell.

I looked Ian’s way. He spread her legs wide open as he thrust his fingers in and out of her. His index finger pushed into her pussy. His thumb readied the opening at her ass.

Hold on.

My nerves flared on edge.

I pulled out of Camille’s mouth. Drool glistened all over my length and spilled out the corners of her mouth.

I tenderly wiped the wetness away and put my view back on Ian. “Do not hurt her with those cocks, Ian.”

“I’m fine.” Camille tickled the sensitive rim around my head with her tongue.

I swayed, unable to keep myself up. “Are you sure?”

“I want to be full of the both of you.” My wicked queen sucked on the tip and tugged on it hard.

Helpless, I mumbled incoherent words. A blissful sensation drummed in my cock and pulsed throughout me.

“I’ve dreamed of this since I first sniffed your scent long ago.” Ian guided his first cock toward her ass.

She still teased my cock with her mouth.

Meanwhile, I watched him, making sure he would not hurt my queen.

A soft groan left Ian as little by little he entered her with the lower cock, pushing into her ass, stopping halfway, and then pulling out.

She purred. Her mouth vibrated against my cock.

That reaction triggered waves of ecstasy to wash over me.

Grunting, I forced myself to maintain my balance. “I love when you purr. Ian, make her purr like that again.”

Ian groaned as he pierced her with his second cock, the one on top.

His fangs exploded out of his mouth.

He thrust into her hard.

A moan ripped through Camille’s mouth.

She began sucking on my cock harder, so hard I let my head fall back and howled.

I could barely take it.

It wasn't just how talented my queen's mouth was, it was the entire effect—Ian's throbbing cocks, wet with her, pushing into her with ease, her breasts bouncing back and forth as her body moved up and down with Ian's mesmerizing rhythm, and her hands, dear Ambi, my lovely queen placed her hands under my balls and massaged them with delicate fingers.

I feared I would blow apart into pieces.

Soon, the room pulsed with the sheer power of our magic, intensifying the moment. A red fog of mist enveloped our bodies, casting a warm, seductive glow across our entwined forms. The intricate patterns of flecks and stars danced around us like a mesmerizing, fiery ballet, their movements synchronized with the rhythm of our heartbeats.

The magic was so dense and tangible, it felt as if it were a living, breathing entity, embracing us in a warm, protective cocoon.

Its presence seemed to seep into our very souls, binding us together in a way that transcended the physical world.

And I surrendered to the extraordinary sensation, I couldn't help but feel overwhelmed by the undeniable depth of the love and passion we shared.

A deep, throaty moan exploded from my queen as the three of us moved in tandem.

My legs quivered.

Pleasure poured out of me in overwhelming torrents, and it kept coming, intense and overwhelming.

“Oh! Oh!” Camille's moans were heaven.

I rode pure bliss, never wanting it to end. The pleasure was so intense, I could feel it moving deep within my soul.

We moved together as if we were one entity, pushing every cell of our beings to the absolute limit until finally, we fell into a delicious abyss.

The room filled with our combined pleasurable noises.

Surely, the whole mage village heard us.

Yet, we kept going, giving into the euphoria of the moment.

The ecstasy soon became too much, and finally, I came undone.

My hands clenched tightly onto the sheets as my body shook.

“I'm coming.” I tried to pull out.

Moaning, Camille clamped her mouth on my cock harder and centered her gaze on mine.

Our eyes met.

Love pooled in hers.

“Can I come in your mouth?” The words left my lips before I could truly think about them.

She nodded, stirring an inferno of pleasure within me.

“Camille.” Scorching-hot liquid spurt out of the tip and sprayed her mouth. I roared and drove deeper, until I swore I hit the back of her throat.

My body trembled as I felt her swallow every last drop of my essence.

Groaning, I pulled out.

My cock fell heavy and wet against my thigh.

“Don’t stop, Ian,” she cried.

Marveling at my beautiful queen, I watched her get fucked.

Ian rocked into her. “Are you close, little queen?”

“Yes!”

A strained expression spread over Ian’s face.

It seems Ian is closer.

I formed my lips into a smile. “It’s not so easy to please her. Is it?”

“Only Ambi knows how you’ve done it with just one cock.” He slipped his hands to her thighs and pushed them apart more. He had no idea how flexible she was.

Sweat trickled down Ian’s chest. The muscles in his arms and thighs flexed as he worked.

Camille’s heart pounded against her chest. Her blood song increased until that was all I could hear. . .the drumming of her pulse and the beauty of the melody.

“Widen her some more.” I pinched both of her nipples. She screamed and I loved it. I leaned down and sucked on the right one as I fondled the left.

“Go deeper, Ian.”

Camille’s voice came out in a blissful shriek. “Xander. . .lick. . .me. . .please.”

What was it about my queen that made me desperate to please her?

With no hesitation, I soared down to the top of her pussy, stuck out my tongue, and touched the tip of her clit. She shook so much I had to hold her waist down so I could lick some more.

Although Ian's cocks going into her were too close to my face, the view screamed beauty. I discovered that I loved to see his cocks plunging deep into her. They slid in and out, in and out with precision.

Make her cum hard, Ian.

Her legs collapsed to the side.

There we go.

He shoved into her.

"Yes!" she screamed.

I stopped licking and turned to her.

Tears leaked out of her eyes. "Oh Ambi! Oh!"

I must taste her.

Delirious, I pierced the mound of her pussy. Again, her blood tasted even more different than other times. The warm liquid flowed into me, sweet and tangy like oranges in a summer orchard, ready to be picked.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Clear liquid squirted from her pussy, coating Ian's thighs and navel.

What was that?

"It seems our little queen has cum." Ian closed his eyes and pumped in her. Groaning, he let his head fall back, and bellowed so loud it shook the walls.

I slipped my fangs out of her pussy and rose. Her sweet blood dripped along my lips. I lathered up that liquid with my tongue.

Camille twisted in ecstasy. "Oh. . .my. . ."

Ian sped up, pushing and pulling until finally he wrenched himself out, collapsing next to her. Sperm spurted out of his cocks and spilled down his thigh.

I was glad he didn't fill her with his seed. I might have killed him if he did.

I must make sure he knows that is a rule. . .if we ever do this again.

While I shared my queen tonight, recognizing that she desired him, all the children in her belly would be from *me*. She would breed with no other man.

On that I will not budge.

Chapter 26

A Dream of Gods

Camille

In my dream, I stood in the epicenter of a cloud.

The golden sun hung low on the horizon, casting a warm glow on everything it touched.

Dusk would soon be approaching.

The misty air shimmered and swirled along my skin, light and cool, as if caressing me with the gentlest of breezes. I couldn't help but marvel at the beauty of this ethereal realm, suspended between day and night, a moment frozen in time.

What is this place?

As I looked around, taking in the breathtaking landscape that existed outside the realms of reality, I noticed two towering figures standing twenty feet before me.

Oh.

Their presence, both awe-inspiring and humbling, commanded my full attention, amidst the swirling mists and golden light.

Ambi. Ressi.

The gods were giants, emanating a powerful presence that took my breath away. Their divine aura left no room for doubt.

First, I put my view on Ambi.

The god of vampires was a sight to behold. His skin glowed as pale as the two moons. His long, flowing black hair cascaded down his back like a silken river of shadows, framing the sharp, regal features of his face.

Ambi wore an enchanted robe crafted from the very fabric of the night sky. The ethereal fabric draped elegantly around his form, adorned with countless stars that twinkled.

I directed my attention to Ressi.

The radiant goddess, exuded an aura of warmth and light. Her golden hair flowed like rays of sunlight. Her brown skin, smooth and flawless, seemed to absorb and reflect the very essence of life and vitality.

I gasped.

Her robe, reminiscent of the clear blue sky dotted with pristine white clouds, wrapped around her elegantly, flowing and billowing like a gentle breeze.

As I stood before the two gods, I felt a sense of deep reverence and awe. These were not mere mortals, but beings of immense power and wisdom.

Why had they chosen to reveal themselves to me in a dream for the *second time*?

Without a word, Ambi beckoned me forward.

I took three steps towards them, feeling a rush of excitement.

Divine power lathered Ambi's voice. "We have been watching you, Blood Queen."

I shivered at this new name he called me.

"We have seen greatness within you."

Ressi nodded in agreement, her eyes glowing with a warm, welcoming light. "You are destined to unite all creatures under one throne, Camille."

"I-I don't know if I can do that."

Ambi and Ressi exchange knowing glances before turning back to me.

Ressi gave an encouraging nod. "Believe in yourself, Camille."

Ambi added, "You have already aligned with the mage tribes, and surprisingly also united your kings in one passionate bond."

I listened intently, my heart pounding in my chest at the mention of my kings. I had not expected the gods to be aware of the *intimate details* of my life. And I definitely didn't think they would bring it up.

A blush hit my face.

But they were right.

I had formed a bond with my two kings. And with the mage tribes at our side, we could truly become a force to be reckoned with.

But could I truly unite all creatures under one throne?

Ambi seemed to sense my doubts, and he spoke again, his voice soothing and reassuring. "You have already taken the first steps towards greatness, Blood Queen. Now, it is time to take the next step."

"And what is that?" I asked, feeling a glimmer of hope ignite within me.

Ambi slowly came my way.

I tensed.

Each step Ambi took was akin to witnessing the heavens in motion. His movements were fluid and hypnotic, effortlessly blending grace and power.

“You have the potential to do *even more* great things, to achieve feats beyond what others believe is possible.”

He stopped barely five feet in front of me.

I raised my chin to take him all in.

The air around me thrummed with energy, charged with an electric current that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.

Ambi gazed down at me. “But you must prepare yourself, and be ready to face the challenges that will come. You must be strong, brave, and be willing to go against your kings when necessary.”

My nerves frazzled. “Why would I need to go against my kings?”

Ressi’s voice was gentle as she spoke, “Because your power will scare many, even your kings.”

“My power? What power?”

Ambi stepped even closer, his eyes glowing with a fierce intensity. “Your power over the vampires, the ability to command their loyalty and obedience, is unprecedented. But there is much more power within you.”

“What is it?”

“Do you really not know?” Laughter left Ambi—loud and booming.

I inched back.

What is so funny?

Frowning, Ressi came over. As she moved, the clouds on her robe drifted. She had an effortless grace, as if she were an extension of the air and light around her. Each gesture was in harmony.

Ressi stopped next to Ambi.

With her so close, he instantly stopped laughing and turned to her. His gaze intensified, as if he were clinging to Ressi with an invisible force that only she controlled.

Ressi smiled at me. “Blood Queen.”

I blinked.

Why do they keep calling me that now?

Ressi spoke, “Your power will be revealed to you soon.”

“How?”

“When you wake up, go to the village. There is a Mystic Market in the center. Your answer will be dressed in red and standing among the white cats.”

“I . . . don’t understand.”

“You will be a force to be reckoned with.”

Ambi nodded. “Many will seek to harness your power for their own purposes.”

Ressi added, “You must be prepared for the challenges ahead, and for the enemies that will come. But do not fear, for we are here to guide you, to help you unlock the full extent of your potential.”

I felt a sense of gratitude wash over me, knowing that I had the support of such powerful beings. “Thank you, but. . .”

“Yes, Blood Queen?”

“Why did you pick *me*?”

“We did not pick you.” Ambi laughed. “*You* came to us, guided by your power.”

What?

Ressi’s golden hair flowed around her face. “Remember, Blood Queen, you are a queen for a reason. Embrace your power, and let it guide you in all that you do.”

The misty landscape around us began to wane with each passing second. The blue sky and clouds faded.

“No.” I slowly shook my head. “Please don’t leave yet. I still have so many questions.”

Ambi stepped forward, his piercing gaze locking onto mine. “We have seen your potential, but it is up to *you* to fulfill it. We can offer guidance, but ultimately, the path you choose is *yours* to walk.”

Too much responsibility weighed heavy on my shoulders.

Ressi gave me a sad smile. “Do not be afraid. We will watch over you, and truly guide you on your journey.”

With those words, the mist began to clear.

I felt myself being pulled away from the gods and into a dark void.

No.

The gods disappeared.

Suddenly, I tumbled through nothingness, my mind swimming with questions and confusion.

I woke up in bed, lying between Xander and Ian. Their naked bodies molded against mine. Xander’s arm lay around my waist. Ian’s hand rested on my shoulder.

The smell of sex lingered in the air.

I put my view on Xander and then Ian. Both of their faces held peaceful expressions. Their muscles were relaxed, their breathing steady.

I took a deep breath and slowly moved Ian's hand and then Xander's arm. Quietly, I snuck out of bed, making sure not to wake either of them.

I had to see what the gods had meant by my power, and I needed to do this on my own.

I got out of bed and hastily dressed, choosing a red robe that would allow me to move with ease and hopefully blend with the rest of the mages.

I slipped on my boots.

As I grabbed my red cloak and wooden dagger, I steeled myself for the journey ahead. I knew that discovering the true extent of my power was crucial, not only for me but for the fate of those I held dear.

I hope I can really help in this oncoming war.

There was no doubt that war was coming our way. I could sense the inevitable violence in the air. I could feel it on my skin, pulsing like a heartbeat.

When the Quiet King arrives, we must be ready.

That included me too.

I was sure Xander and Ian believed I would sit aside while they fought that monster.

But I wouldn't.

I intended to fight right by their sides, I would not be some weak woman on the battlefield in need of their saving.

I will be just as strong as them, truly helping wherever I can.

I gave one last glance at Xander and Ian. Their faces remained serene in slumber.

Then, I quietly opened the door, went downstairs, and stepped out into the sunlight.

And with a determined heart, I set off on my quest for knowledge and self-discovery.

Chapter 27

The Power of Blood

Camille

The Mystic Market was a fascinating labyrinth of hundreds of tents and tables, each spread with baubles and trinkets.

The sound of chimes and bells hung in the air, and the smell of incense wafted through the crowd.

The tents that made up the market were adorned with signs of age, giving off an aura that hinted at stories from far away. Some of the signs were written in a language I could not decode, while others contained vivid imagery that made me grin. Wares were held up with wooden stakes in the ground, each object tagged with a price, hand painted, on a label.

Tons of mage milled about. Plumes of dust rose with their steps.

Everywhere I looked, I saw something new and exciting.

There were stalls stacked with colorful fabrics and intricate objects that glimmered with a mysterious light.

Food vendors lured customers with the smells of exotic spices and fragrant sweets.

Strange music and laughter filled the air, and I found myself drawn in by the unique atmosphere.

This is amazing.

I walked over to where one woman dressed in green was performing for a crowd. She had dark brown skin. A shimmering green snake floated in the air in front of her, hissing and twisting.

Whoa.

I gasped.

The snake had eyes like opals. The scent of jasmine hung in the space.

People clapped and slung copper coins into the green pot in front of her.

Oh my. How is she doing this?

As she twirled around in the air, the woman's long black locks fanned out like a halo behind her, mimicking the motion of the snake that was spinning above her.

A haunting pull came over me.

Instead of continuing to walk on my path, I headed down the lane where more women cloaked in green danced with writhing, floating serpents.

This is mesmerizing.

It soon became apparent that these serpents weren't physical beings but some sort of illusion crafted by earth magic.

This is real power.

I walked on.

I want that.

While my blood had shown that it could do marvelous things, I yearned to have a greater ability, something that could truly be used in this oncoming war.

Okay. Where is the answer?

I thought back to Ressi's message.

"When you wake up, go to the village. There is a Mystic Market in the center. Your answer will be dressed in red and standing among the white cats."

I walked through the narrow paths, checking each tent for cats.

Magic thickened in the air.

Everywhere I looked, I saw people wearing strange clothes and carrying odd objects.

The ones in solid blue tended to be merchants selling their wares. On this lane, the fabrics and objects on display glimmered with a mystical green light, and the stallholders called out in languages from far-away lands.

I spotted two women with red hair, smiling and talking to each other.

Those are Phinova dominas.

My heart warmed.

Did Xander save these two? Or were they already living here?

Although the day was coming close to dusk, the sun beat down on the market. Which was why I found it odd that both the dominas wore heavy gloves on their hands.

Are they really cold now?

I headed in their direction to ask them if they knew where the cats were at in the market.

Instantly, they gazed my way, gave me sad smiles, and then quickly hurried in the other direction.

O-kay. Did they have to rush off or. . .are they afraid of me?

Confused, I scanned the space.

That was when I realized so many people were watching me.

Two little boys stood in front of their mother. One of them lifted his hand and pointed at my hair. *“Mommy, why does she not have on the gloves?”*

I looked down at my hands.

“Come, Ezra.”

“But she is a blood mage.”

“Go now.” His mother shoved him off in the other direction.

Gloves? What is he talking about?

Something was off.

Alright. I will find the cats on my own.

Continuing forward, I paid attention to everyone’s reaction as I walked by.

Whenever people spotted my red hair, they tensed up, averting their gazes and quickly hurrying away.

Other mothers with their children grew nervous when they caught sight of me. Most quickly gathered their children and hurried away.

Everywhere I went, people steered clear of me, and I began to regret ever setting foot in this market.

They think I am dangerous, but why? Due to my kings?

I swallowed.

And the gloves. . . what is the connection with that?

I was a stranger in a strange land. But I wouldn’t let that stop me from finding the answer I was looking for. I could not leave this market empty-handed.

Determined, I kept walking down the lanes, searching for the white cats that Ressi had mentioned.

As I walked, I heard whispers and murmurs from those around me.

“No gloves. She can kill us all.”

“What was the Ground Mover thinking?”

“Maybe, it was Tru’s decision.”

“Never. She is too careful.”

I did my best to hide my hands within my red cloak. Now I wished I had covered up my hair.

The gloves must. . .stop the magic for a blood mage somehow.

As I continued my search, my mind raced with questions, trying to connect the dots.

Why were blood mages being treated this way? What was the significance of the gloves? And why did the dominas hurry off when they saw me?

I approached a tent with a sign that read "Fortune Telling."

Maybe they could provide some answers.

Sighing, I drew closer and saw that the tent was filled with a thick smoke that smelled of lavender and cinnamon.

A woman with eyes as green as the forest stood outside, beckoning me in with a crooked finger.

I touched my chest. "Me?"

She nodded.

At least this woman isn't scared of me.

I hesitated for a moment before stepping inside, but then yanked up my courage.

The inside of the tent was dark, with candles flickering in every corner.

The woman motioned for me to sit at a small table in the center of the tent. She had a huge red scarf wrapped around her head.

"On your own? Without your kings? Do not let that happen again." She produced a deck of cards from her cloak and began shuffling them with a rhythmic precision. Without looking up, she spoke in a voice that was both soothing and mysterious. "You are searching for something, my dear."

I nodded slowly. "I am looking for white cats, but everyone in the market seems to be afraid of me because I don't have gloves."

The woman chuckled softly, her green eyes glittering in the candlelight. "I can tell you why, but I would want something."

"What?"

"The cloak."

"Why?"

"It is from Capitol City. Right?"

"Yes."

"Then, I could trade this one cloak and get two months' worth of supplies." She shuffled the cards more. "I will give you answers and tell your fortune."

"I don't need my fortune told."

She gazed at some of my marks near my neck. "You are Returned?"

"I am."

“Then, you would not need the cards. You have the very audience of the gods.”

I blinked. “They come to me.”

“And they will continue to come, as long as you need their guidance.”

I slowly began to take off the cloak, took the dagger out of the pocket, and handed it to her. “And the gloves?”

She set the cards down and took the cloak. “Ah, the gloves. They are a symbol of the blood mages’ power. Without them, they can control their magic. You do not wear the gloves, so many fear you.”

“But why do people fear blood mages in the first place?” I asked. “What is so dangerous about them?”

The woman paused, her expression growing serious. “Blood magic is a powerful and dangerous force. It can manipulate life itself, and when used improperly, it can lead to destruction and chaos.”

“All because our blood can create vampires.”

She blinked. “What did you say?”

She doesn’t know that.

I cleared my throat. “What sort of . . .chaos could a blood mage create?”

She perused my cloak and ran her fingers along the soft fabric. “Do you know why you were truly allowed into our village?”

“Because I showed Tru and Spenrik my Returned marks.”

“No, my child.” She grinned. “You showed them that you did not know your power.”

“How did I do that?”

“You didn’t use it. Many say that you came up and *asked* for them to allow you and your kings to come onto our land.”

“What is wrong with that?”

“Blood mages do not have to ask.”

I widened my eyes.

“They just make it so.”

“How?”

She rose from the table and put on the cloak. “Very nice.”

I stood and placed the dagger in my robe’s pocket. “Please, tell me how I could have made them do it.”

She walked off and gestured to the opening. “Keep moving forward. Then, you will stop at a dead end. There you will see tons of white cats in cages.”

I let out a long breath. “Thank you.”

“Be careful of the cats, and which ones you choose to buy.” She brushed down the front of the cloak. “Not all of them stay cats the whole time.”

“What?” I leaned my head to the side. “What do the cats become?”

She chuckled. “Welcome, Camille.”

Annoyed, I hurried out and headed in that direction.

Minutes later, a dead end appeared.

Finally.

I caught sight of caged white cats. Many of them stared at me with these piercing blue eyes. I approached them slowly, not wanting to startle them. They continued to stare at me, and I felt a strange sensation wash over me.

I remembered Ressi’s message.

“When you wake up, go to the village. There is a Mystic Market in the center. Your answer will be dressed in red and standing among the white cats.”

I scanned the cages, looking for any clues or signs that would lead me to my answer.

Where is the answer?

Suddenly, a white cat caught my gaze. It was larger than the others and had an air of regality about it. When I approached the cage, the cat stood up on its hind legs and reached out with its paws.

“Hello.” I slowly reached out to pet it. The moment my fingers touched its fur, a strange sensation coursed through my body.

Images flashed in my mind of a tall feminine being with a feline body.

Who is that?

Shocked, I pulled my hand away and stumbled back a few steps.

The cat mewed as if urging me to return.

What is going on?

Despite my shock, I couldn’t help feeling drawn to the cat. I looked around at the other cages, but none of the other white cats had the same effect on me.

And then I saw *her* among the cages.

Is that the answer?

A woman with a bald head and no eyebrows stared at me in shock. Her skin was dark brown. She had a round face and wide brown eyes. She must have been close to my age or younger.

I wondered if she simply was born with no hair or if she shaved it all off, including her eyebrows.

She caught me watching her and looked away.

It's her. She's the answer.

I slowly walked over.

But how do I ask this woman questions without her thinking I'm insane?

Gulping down fear, I approached her.

She turned her head towards me, and widened her eyes in surprise.

I cleared my throat. "Hello."

She looked at me with a mixture of fear and curiosity.

Let's try this again.

I kept my voice soft and gentle. "Hello."

Inching back, she hesitated for a moment before responding. "Hello."

"I'm sorry if I. . .startled you. My name is—"

"I know who you are." Her bottom lip quivered.

"Do I scare you?"

"It is not you." The woman gazed around us.

People watched us talk and whispered to each other.

She edged away.

I remained where I was and kept my voice low. "You don't want to be seen talking to me?"

She nodded.

"But. . .you would talk to me. . .in private?"

She looked away.

Two women walked by, glanced at us, and whispered.

When they headed off, I spoke, "Please, I need your help. I'm not here to hurt you or. . .get you in trouble. I just need answers."

"What do you want from *me*?"

"I want to know anything I can about blood mages. What power do they possess? How can it be used?"

She looked away again, her expression unreadable. "I don't know anything about that."

"I also want to know why the blood mages are wearing gloves in the market. And I think *you* can help me."

"Shhh." She edged away. "I cannot help you. Stop talking to me, please."

I could tell that she was lying, but I didn't want to push her too hard. "Do you know that a war may be coming soon?"

“All are talking about the Quiet King heading this way.”

“I am on *your* side, and I want to help us win.”

The woman frowned. “Do you truly know what side *you* are on? Or even what side *I* am on?”

I stepped closer. “What does that mean?”

She pursed her lips together.

“I need your help.”

“I cannot help you.”

“I think you can.”

“Why?”

“Because. . . Ressi told me to come here and speak to a person wearing red around a lot of white cats.”

She smirked. “Have you been smoking Zumayan mushrooms?”

“I need your help.”

She chuckled.

“I will not leave you alone.”

She stopped laughing.

“Please. . .”

She let out a long sigh. “It’s dangerous to speak about this here. The wrong person could hear us.”

What is going on?

“Okay.” I bobbed my head. “I understand. Is there somewhere we can go to talk?”

She tapped her foot over and over, telling me that she must have been nervous. “There’s a place not too far from here. It’s safe. We would need to go through the forest.”

“You lead the way, and I will follow several feet behind you.”

“Okay, but please do me a favor.” The woman slowly pulled out a black scarf from her pocket, placed the scarf behind her, and dropped it on the ground. “Use this to cover your hair.”

I picked up the black scarf and wrapped it around my head, hiding my red hair as much as possible. “How about this?”

The woman nodded and headed away from the cages.

Waiting, I kept my gaze on her and made sure several feet was between us before I followed.

Please, let this help me.

Chapter 28

The Heart Mage

Camille

Keeping a good distance away from the woman, I followed her through the Mystic Market.

All around male fire mages performed for crowds. The heat from the fire mages' displays warmed my skin. Flames snapped and crackled as they leapt through the air and came to life around their wrists and arms, spitting and clawing at their flesh.

The darkening sky lit up with bright orange explosions, and trails of thick white smoke billowed in their aftermath. Their shows were both captivating and terrifying.

Fire will be helpful in the war.

Far in the back of the market, the woman began to lead me away from the festive atmosphere.

We're leaving the market.

My nerves flared, but I continued forward. I must find the answers to my questions. I checked the darkening sky, aware that if my kings had not woken up yet, they would be awake soon.

Everything will be fine.

We stepped away from the market, and the flavors and sounds that had drawn me in earlier were starting to disappear from my senses.

The once vibrant scents of spices and fragrant sweets gave way to the earthy aroma of damp soil and the fresh scent of leaves.

The musical laughter and lively chatter faded, replaced by the soft whispers of the wind rustling through the trees and the distant hoot of an owl.

Soon, the bright colors and dazzling lights were gone too, transformed by the muted shades of a darkening forest.

My heart raced.

Is this some sort of trap?

Doubts swirled in my mind, and I couldn't shake the feeling that this might be a trap. I placed my hand in the pocket of my robe and gripped my dagger, its familiar weight offering a small comfort.

The trees around us seemed to reach for the sky. Their gnarled branches twisted and tangled like ancient guardians. Shadows danced on the ground, and the forest floor was carpeted in a soft layer of moss and fallen leaves, which muffled our footsteps as we ventured deeper into the woods.

A subtle glow emanated from luminescent plants and insects, casting an eerie, otherworldly light on our surroundings.

The air was cool and damp.

Every breath I took tasted of the rich, loamy earth.

The further we walked, the more I realized that this forest was not only dark but steeped in magic, its secrets waiting to be discovered.

“Where are we going?” I asked hesitantly, my voice barely audible. The sudden change in scenery made me uneasy, and my nerves began to get the better of me.

The further we went into the woods, the more serene and tranquil it became.

There is no one here. Why hasn't she stopped to talk?

Up ahead, she continued, never glancing over her shoulder.

I found myself teetering on the edge of terror and excitement. With every step we took deeper into the unknown, I knew that the stakes were rising.

Ambi. Ressi. Did I pick the wrong person?

I tried to calm my racing thoughts, reminding myself that I had come this far and could not turn back now. But still, fear gnawed at me, and I wondered if I would come to regret following this mysterious woman into the heart of the dark forest.

Then suddenly, I lost sight of the woman in the dim light and shadows.

No.

I stopped and pulled my dagger out, readying myself to fight if necessary.

Where did she go?

Panic gripped me.

I tried to search for her.

The darkness of the forest closed in around me.

My breathing quickened.

This was a trap. How could I be so stupid?

My heart pounded in my chest like a frantic drumbeat.

The air grew colder.

A sense of dread washed over me.

The snapping of a twig echoed on my left.

I turned that way and strained my eyes to peer through the gloom, desperately trying to catch a glimpse of the woman.

What is her plan?

Fast, the woman appeared from behind a tree and making me jump in surprise. Then, she tried to grab me.

My fear surged.

In a blur, I spun around and slammed her hard with my fist. It was almost like I had vampire reflexes—quick and deadly.

She shrieked and fell into the grass.

How did I do that?

I blinked in shock and got into a defensive stance.

Still laying on the ground, the woman spat blood on a leaf and dragged herself up. “Interesting.”

I narrowed my eyes. “What is interesting?”

“They say you do not know anything about your kind.”

“I don’t.”

“But, I didn’t believe it.”

“Why not?”

“You walk with two powerful vampire kings at your command. Surely, you must know something.” She snarled and charged for me.

Terrified, I threw a punch at the woman’s stomach, slamming harder than I ever had in my life.

Oh my.

She fell back, stunned by the force of the attack.

Taking advantage of the moment, I lunged forward with the dagger and tried to stab her in the arm. I didn’t want to hurt her, but I couldn’t let this woman harm me.

I went in for the attack.

But the woman quickly lifted her hands.

An actual cold chill penetrated my skin and raced through my veins.

What is that?

A tingling sensation began in my fingertips and spread like wildfire through my limbs, reaching deep into the core of my being. The sensation was both terrifying and exhilarating, as if icy tendrils were snaking their way through my bloodstream, controlling every beat of my heart and every movement of my muscles.

My entire body froze in place, unable to move.

No. What is this?

My heart sank.

I wanted to scream, but couldn't. Instead, my breath hitched in my throat, and I felt a growing pressure in my chest, as if my heart were being squeezed by an invisible force.

Keeping her hands in the air, she slowly rose from the ground. "You really don't know."

Stop. Please. . .stop.

The air around me grew heavy.

I struggled to draw even the smallest of breaths. My senses were heightened—I could hear the blood rushing in my ears and feel the thump of my heart struggling to maintain its rhythm.

Please.

Had I maintained the blood connection with Xander, I could have told him that I was in danger. Like a silly fool, I worried about my mental privacy, yet never considered the benefits to the connection and how much we could save each other.

So stupid. I will not make that mistake again.

With her hands in the air, the woman took a step forward and watched me. "However, you are fast like a vampire. I wonder why. Could it be due to the bond you have with one of the kings. . .or both?"

I was helpless—a prisoner within my own flesh. My eyes watered as my vision blurred. My grip on the dagger loosened. The weapon fell to the ground.

She frowned. "You want to know why the blood mages must wear gloves?"

Tears left my eyes.

"Because of *this*." She flickered her hand.

I involuntarily stepped back.

Dear Ambi.

It was clear she had complete control of my body and could make me move at her fingers' commands.

She's a blood mage.

My head felt like it was about to explode with the reality of what was going on.

Hold on. . .blood mages can control blood!!?

"Is this not scary?" She wagged her thumb.

What is she doing now?

Quickly, my hand raised.

Then, I slapped myself hard in the face.

How did she do that?!

“No one wants a blood mage around.” The woman’s bottom lip quivered. “Which means that we have to hide who we are, not march around with our red hair flowing in the air and propped between two vampire kings as if they could truly protect us.”

How do I get out of this?

The woman frowned. “If you see me again, *do not* approach me.”

I strained against her hold. Still, my body did not budge.

“I did not kill you because your king saved me from the Quiet King’s dungeon. But, I do ask that you keep *my* secret safe, until I leave here in the morning.” She stepped back and slowly lowered her hands. “I wish you and everyone the best with this war, but. . .if I were *you*. . .I would run.”

With her hands at her sides, I began to get control of my body back. First, I was able to move my fingers, then hands, and arms. Next, I wiggled my feet.

“Dear Ambi.” I blinked and wiped away my tears. “How did you do that?”

“That is not your concern.”

I stared at her. “It is.”

“Do not come near me again in public. I have gone through great lengths to keep my power hidden—”

“That’s why you shaved your eyebrows and hair?”

“I leave tomorrow. I cannot be here for this war—”

“Why not stay and fight?”

“I have lost enough.” Her voice grew shaky. “I will not continue to lose more.”

“If the Quiet King wins, then you will never be safe.”

She snorted. “And if the mages win, what? You think we are safe then?”

“Yes.”

A dark chuckle left her. “Just like everyone has said, you know *nothing* about mages.”

“Then, tell me.”

“I don’t have the time.” She inched back. “I need to gather supplies and —”

“When I spotted you, all you were doing was standing around those cats. You weren’t gathering supplies. What did you need?”

“Money to get it.”

“How about I get you all the supplies and more?”

Her frown deepened. “No.”

“But, I have so many questions.”

“I cannot help you, Blood Queen.”

“Why are people calling me that?”

“That is a very long answer.”

“We have the time.”

“We do not. I must get my supplies.”

“I will give you a horse and wagon full of food, water, and all the comforts you would need for a long trip—blankets, pillows, a small trunk of gold.”

She blinked.

“But, I need all of your time until tomorrow morning.”

“To answer questions?”

“And teach me how to use my magic—”

She laughed. “You think I can teach you that in a few hours?”

“I want to know what you know.”

“That is years upon years of study and practice.”

“What can you teach me by the morning?”

She smirked. “I can teach you how to *run* from the Quiet King.”

I scowled. “I won’t be running. I have two young girls to protect.”

The woman widened her eyes. “Do they. . .?”

“What?”

“Do they have red hair?”

“Yes.”

She shook her head. “You must protect them not only from the Quiet King, but the mages too.”

A cold shiver ran through me. “The Ground Mover has been nothing but nice to me.”

“Because they think you are ignorant to your power, which. . .you are. The other dominas that you brought to this village have all been stunted.”

“Stunted?”

“The gloves. They stunt our powers, and slowly drain them. It hurts when you take them off. . .like. . .you are peeling off your skin.”

Tension gathered in my shoulders. “The mages put those on the dominas I freed?”

“All of them. In fact. . .the only reason why those blood mages are still alive is because you are here.” She gave me a sad smile. “Regardless of who wins this war, in the end those blood mages will be dead, if not by the Quiet King, then. . .”

“What if I talked to Ground Mover or Tru?”

“They are the ones that will order the executions of the blood mages. There is no need to talk to them.”

I shivered. “No. There has to be another solution. The Ground Mover would never.”

The woman whispered, “You really. . .don’t know. . .”

I turned back in the direction of the Mystic Market. My stomach twisted. “Then, will the mages really help us with the war?”

“To get rid of the Quiet King? Yes. They will unite and help you with that.”

“And once they help us. . .they *may* kill us.”

“That is without a doubt. Your kings will be the first to go, because they would pose the greatest danger. Then, you will die right after them. They may kill you three right on the battlefield and pile your dead bodies along with the Quiet King.”

“But. . .they have been nice and welcoming—”

“It is not that they are evil, it is because they are terrified.” She shrugged. “Were you not scared just now when I had control of you?”

“I was.”

“From childhood, other mage children are taught that blood mages are evil. They learn that we are practitioners of dark magics, able to manipulate life-forces in ways thought impossible.”

“I want to learn how to do this.”

“To even talk about it, is to be executed.” She touched her chest. “And you want me to teach you among *our* enemies.”

“We all do not have to be enemies. If they knew more about blood mages and understood—”

“Know more? All know more than you, Blood Queen.”

I sighed.

“Blood mages are powerful beings that can control blood,” she said, her voice low and serious. “They are so powerful that in ancient times, even

vampires feared them.”

“But, vampires nowadays no longer know about their power?”

“Because so many blood mages have been killed.” She glared at me.

“And who do you think killed them?”

“Other mage tribes.”

“Correct.” She nodded. “The same ones you have aligned yourself with. They all have spilled our kind’s blood, including the Ground Mover.”

It horrified me to think of that sweet old man harming people.

“Throughout the years, grimoires containing secrets of blood mage power have been destroyed or hidden from us. I do not know as much as you think. It would be smarter for you to exercise your leg muscles to run for long amounts of time.”

“I won’t be running.” I shivered. “And, I still want to learn from you.”

“It takes years of practice and study, sometimes even decades before one can master the power of blood magic.”

“But those who do, have great power.”

“But that power comes with a price. Are you not listening to me at all? Our kind has been hunted and persecuted for centuries.” Her eyes darkened with anger. “We have been labelled as evil, cursed, and unnatural. And for what? For simply being born with a certain ability.”

I could feel the weight of her words on my shoulders.

“People fear what they do not understand, and they hate what they fear.”

I took a deep breath. “But I still want to learn. I want to be able to protect myself and my people.”

The woman looked at me with a mixture of pity and understanding. “And who are your people?”

“Anyone who is oppressed and mistreated. Anyone who’s village has been destroyed by the Quiet King or even mage tribes. My people are the unprotected.”

She parted her lips. “They said you were crazy.”

“Then, *they* are correct.”

“Run.”

“Stay.” Sadness washed over me. “Teach me and then fight by my side.”

“They will never let people like us fight on a battle field.”

“This woman pulled me into her tent at the market today.” I picked up my dagger from the ground and placed it in my robe’s pocket. “She said something odd to me that now, makes so much sense.”

“What did she say?”

“She said that I was allowed into the village because I showed Tru and Spenrik that I did not know my power.”

She nodded.

“And. . .she said that. . .blood mages do not have to ask. They just make it so. I want *that* power.”

“Who was the woman?”

“She was in the fortune teller tent.”

“She probably was a blood mage hiding too, trying to help you.”

I studied her. “What’s *your* name?”

She crossed her arms over her chest. “We are not friends, and I am not helping you—”

“What’s your name?”

She sighed. “Seraphine.”

“Where is your family?”

“I came from a blood mage village that had been. . .overtaken by a coalition of earth and fire mages. I was just a kid.”

My heart ached. “I’m sorry.”

“They killed all of the adults in front of us. My mother, father, grandmother. . .my older brother. . .I was just. . .a kid. . .” She hugged herself. “After they spilled so much blood all over our village, then they burned our homes down and placed us in the wagon.”

“Why?”

“They sold me and other kids to the Quiet King.”

“They did?”

“They spent years killing our people and giving the kids to vampires to be fed from and drained. Years and years.” She grinned. “The only thing that is funny about that is. . .when they ran out of blood mages to give to the vampires. . .the vampires began grabbing them.”

“Was that how they grabbed the Ground Mover?”

“That is how the story goes. He came with a wagon of blood mage children, and the Quiet King decided to keep him too.”

How could I have been so easily tricked?

I considered my life. Now that I knew what I was, I also knew that my biological parents must have snuck off from a village and given me to the people who raised me.

They had been trying to save me.

Would I ever. . .meet any of my blood relatives? Or are they all dead?

I focused on Seraphine. “If you were put in the dungeons at a young age, then how did you learn so much.”

“A Heart Mage named Reye taught me how to—”

“Heart Mage?” I shrieked. “That is a . . .thing?”

“It is the highest level of blood mage powers. When you can control a living being’s heart, you have become a master.”

Dear Ambi. No wonder everyone is terrified of us.

Seraphine continued, “Reye spent years in the dungeon teaching me everything she knew—”

“So that you can run away and hide?”

Seraphine rolled her eyes. “Who are you to judge me, *Blood Queen?*”

“I need your help.” I pointed at her. “Do you not want to be safe?”

“I just want to be free.”

“You are not free, if you have to run and hide all your life, shaving off your hair and eyebrows to simply survive.”

Seraphine blinked.

I continued, “But if we work together, we can fight for our freedom. We can protect ourselves and others who have been oppressed. We can show the world that blood mages are not evil, cursed, or unnatural. We are just like everyone else, with a different ability.”

Seraphine looked at me, then turned away. “You are brave.”

“I have to be.”

“Thank Reysi, that I don’t have to be brave at all.” Seraphine headed off. “I wish you luck, *Blood Queen.*”

“No!” I extended my hand. “Please, don’t leave!”

Suddenly, leaves rustled around us, creating a soft, almost musical sound as they swayed gently in the breeze.

The cool air of the forest grew heavy, as if charged with a strange energy.

Seraphine paused and scanned the forest. “Someone is. . .here.”

I quirked my brows.

Then, Xander, Ian, Leeta, and six other vampires stepped out from behind different surrounding trees. They moved with a fluid grace, their silent footsteps barely disturbing the forest floor.

Shadows danced on their faces, momentarily concealing and revealing their expressions.

I widened my eyes in shock.

Ian prowled over to Seraphine and stopped in front of her. “Did you hear my queen? She said to stop.”

“How. . .how long have you been here?” I stammered, still trying to wrap my head around their sudden appearance.

Xander got to my side. “Long enough.”

The other vampires gathered around us with their wooden swords out.

Ian watched Seraphine. “Camille, we should get back to our hut, before the Ground Mover or anyone else notices that we are missing.”

Xander put his view on Seraphine. “And we should sneak *her* in the back.”

Seraphine shook her head. “I. . .I am not. . .going with you.”

Ian sneered. “You are.”

“I do not have to do anything.” Seraphine began to raise her hands.

“No.” I hurried over. “Don’t hurt him.”

Ian watched her. “I saw your magic trick, little one.”

Seraphine hissed. “Then, you should step back.”

“What is your plan?” Ian smirked. “Perhaps, you can freeze me. But, can you control *everyone*’s blood out here? And. . .when you use your power, do you not get exhausted?”

She leaned her head to the side. “Would you like to see?”

“If you could, you would have already done it.” Ian gestured to Xander. “Remember. You now have one king in front of you and one king behind you. How powerful are you?”

Seraphine slowly lowered her hands.

Leeta scanned the space and put her wooden sword up. “We should go now.”

“Come on.” Frowning, Xander tenderly grabbed my hand and guided me away. “We have a lot to discuss, Queen.”

Chapter 29

The Power of a Queen's Blood

Ian

Why did the vampire king get so angry with his queen one night?

Because she invited a carpenter over for dinner.

When I was young, that joke used to be a hit at small parties. Not only did vampires hate wood, due to its lethal nature, but we abhorred anyone who worked with wood.

I doubted anyone would laugh at such a simple joke in these times, especially with the low amount of vampire kings around.

And surely no one would laugh in this moment.

The moons' light streamed through the hut's small kitchen's windows.

Several lit candles stood at the center of the metal table.

Seething, I sat at one end of the table. My anger grew more and more toxic by the second. My heart felt like a wild animal trying to escape from my chest.

Somehow, I remained calm. I had to. Xander was still a young king with too much power. Someone would have to maintain a clear head as we dealt with our queen.

I looked at the other end of the table, where Xander sat. His face was a mask of rage. Fury blazed in his eyes.

Anger radiated off our bodies and thickened the air with a threat of violence.

I turned to the target of our fury, sitting at the middle of the table like a spider in the center of its web.

You are in a lot of trouble, little queen.

Camille uneasily shifted in her seat. Upon returning to the hut, she had changed into an impossibly white dress that clung to her curves.

Did Camille know how enchanting it made her?

Already, I imagined piercing her neck with my fangs and dripping blood all over that white fabric.

No. Do not fall for her sexy trick.

I moved my view to the back of the kitchen.

There, Leeta bustled around the kitchen, making our breakfast.
Good. I hope she cooks something thick and hearty.

Due to this so called heart mage's discussion about the Ground Mover and others possibly double crossing us after the war, we would need heightened strength. That meant adding solids to our diet to bulk up our power and muscle.

Blood made up a good eighty percent of our diet. It contained a wide range of nutrients that were essential for our body's survival. We could consume large quantities in one sitting because our bodies quickly absorbed the nutrients from the blood and eliminated any excess waste.

However, despite our dependence on that red liquid, we did eat solid foods from time to time.

Certain vegetables and grains boosted our immune system and protected against illnesses. Many herbs and spices helped regulate our blood flow. Additionally, a small amount of meats gave us necessary vitamins and minerals that blood alone could not provide.

Leeta hummed while she cooked.

A warm glow came from the clay oven.

Two shelves were above the oven, stacked with various herbs and spices.

The oven was small but well-used, with a sturdy iron door and a chimney that let out puffs of smoke.

Made of copper and iron, the mage pots and pans clattered and clinked. Thick wood served as the handles, forcing Leeta to wear gloves to protect herself.

What is she cooking for us?

I tried to consider the many things that she could make.

Blood Pudding would have been nice. The mage had pigs in the village. Leeta could have gathered fresh blood from one of the dominas and mixed it in with pork fat, oats, and spices.

My stomach growled.

Suddenly, Xander broke the unsteady silence in the kitchen. "Camille, what were you thinking?"

She cleared her throat. "I had a dream with the gods that—"

"Damn the gods!" Xander slammed his fists on the table. "You are to *always* remain by my side and never leave!"

Camille flinched.

Xander hissed. “Should I chain you to me this dawn? Force you to be right by my side?”

I scowled at Xander.

Careful. Do not upset her too much.

She placed her hands on the table. “I am sorry, Xander. I didn’t mean to cause any trouble, but I thought I could simply go to the Mystic Market and —”

“Get yourself killed!”

I stiffened and turned to her.

Sizzling sounded from one of the copper pans. Leeta was definitely frying something.

I sniffed the air.

Yes. Blood sausage.

The aroma of spices filled the space. It was a heady mix of cinnamon, ginger, and onion.

My mouth watered in anticipation.

Xander yelled, grabbing my attention. “Should I chain you or not?”

I put my view back on her.

Camille whispered, “Again, I am sorry.”

“I don’t want apologies, Queen!” Xander’s voice rose in the kitchen. “I want you by my side and safe! At all times!”

She pursed her lips together.

Tension gathered in my shoulders.

I could see the worry etched on Xander’s angry face. I also knew he was right. We couldn’t afford to *ever* lose Camille. This meant that she shouldn’t venture by herself while we slept away from the sun.

Plates clinked, letting me know that Leeta was probably almost finished with cooking.

Xander continued, “And I will not compromise on that!”

Me either.

Camille let out a long breath. “King. . .I understand your concern, but I am your *queen*, not your *servant* and in some moments, I will do what I think is best for us.”

Camille. . .

I tensed, knowing what would come next.

Had I not been a fiercely protective king in my day?

More than once I had irrationally roared at Phinova for being too far away.

A low growl escaped Xander's lips. Slowly he rose, looking more deadlier than ever. Black pointed horns emerged from his skull while razor sharp claws burst from his fingers.

With a predatory stare, he locked his gaze on Camille. "What did you say?"

It was subtle, but I could hear her heart pounding faster in her chest. Hopefully, Xander couldn't hear it. That would only drive him more wild.

Okay.

I leaned back in my chair and took a deep breath. It was time to calm him down before things got out of hand. I spoke in a firm but level voice, "Xander, put the horns away."

"Leave us, Ian!" His fangs burst out. "I am having a conversation with *my* queen."

The king inside of my core did not like the way he worded that sentence, even though he was fully correct.

But I could also see the fear in Camille's eyes. I would not leave her alone. She was already on edge and Xander's behavior was only making it worse.

I stood up and kept my voice steady. "Xander, she is scared. We need to calm down and talk this through."

Xander snarled. His gold eyes flashed to red. "She should be scared! She put herself in danger! If that heart mage wanted to kill her, she could have."

Camille spoke, "But Seraphine did not. She was only trying to get rid of me so she could escape."

Xander glared. "And you were not leaving which means that she could have exploded your heart or anything, and we would have never known."

I took a step around the table. "What is done is done. We need to focus on moving forward and keeping *everyone* safe."

"I don't care about everyone else." Xander's fangs pushed out further. "I only want my queen and her daughters to be safe."

Camille looked at him. "Today. . . I was thinking that we should re-establish the blood bond."

I blinked.

Xander widened his eyes.

Good play, queen.

She continued, "Surely, that would ease your mind, and if I am in trouble I could talk to you in my head."

I looked at him and held in my smirk. I bet his cock was getting hard in his pants.

Oh, the power of a queen's blood.

Xander swallowed and softened his glare. "When would we . . . put the bond back in place?"

"As soon as *this* conversation is done."

Very, very good play, queen.

Camille was slowly learning how to tame her king, and I was happy for it. Only Ambi knew if I could truly hold Xander back when he was in battle form and trying to possess her.

"Alright then." Xander took a deep breath and I could see him visibly calming down. His horns and claws slowly receded as he lowered into his seat. "Fine. But you must understand the gravity of your actions."

Camille nodded. "I do, Xander. I promise to always inform you of my intentions before taking any action."

Nice touch.

Xander reached out his hand to hers.

She took it with a shaky grip.

A moment of silence passed between them, and I knew that they were physically communicating something that only they could understand.

Leeta came over with two steaming plates of blood sausage and omelets lathered in red sauce. "Breakfast is served."

Xander didn't move his hand from Camille's. "Thank you, Leeta."

She set a plate near his seat and then put the other by mine.

"That is correct." I nodded. "Thank you, Leeta."

While this human-turned-vampire had betrayed Xander before, Leeta was slowly trying to gain back his loyalty and trust. I hope she succeeded because I enjoyed having her around.

Eager to eat, I sat back down, placed my hands on the table, and knitted my fingers together. "Now that we have an understanding, we need to discuss what our next move is."

Camille directed her attention to me. "What are your thoughts, Ian?"

"I think we should heed this blood mage's warning." I picked up my fork. "I had no idea how much power your kind had. I doubt even Phinova knew."

Camille eyed me. "Why do you say that?"

“If Phinova knew how to control blood in others. . .”

Xander frowned. “She would have definitely used that power among many.”

Instead of answering, I took a forkful of the omelet and ate. Once the food hit my tongue, a groan left me. The blood sauce on the eggs doused my tastebuds in rich flavor.

I swallowed it down and forked up more. “Well done, Leeta. Well done.”

“You are very welcome, Ian.” Smiling, she carried over Camille’s plate of eggs and slabs of fresh bread lathered in butter.

Camille nodded at her. “Thank you very much.”

Xander ate some of his sausage. “I do not think we should let Seraphine go.”

I shrugged. “That is assuming we can actually keep her held here. We do not know the extent of her power.”

Camille didn’t grab her fork. “The Quiet King already imprisoned Seraphine for most of her life. I will not trap her too.”

Xander and I exchanged glances while we ate our food.

When Camille saw Seraphine, she clearly spotted a fellow blood mage—harmless and eager for a sisterhood.

Meanwhile, Xander and I recognized how dangerous Seraphine was to not only Camille but us too.

Our queen sighed. “The Quiet King has fought *many* wars. He has a massive army and battle experience.”

My stomach twisted.

I set the fork down.

Camille continued, “But if we trained the blood mages—”

“Hold on.” Xander held up his hand. “You are talking about gathering a group of women who are already considered highly lethal to the mages, and you want to do that in *their* village? If the Quiet King doesn’t kill us, then the Ground Mover will.”

Camille shrugged. “According to Seraphine he may do so anyway.”

Xander looked at me. “Ian?”

I swallowed down bits of blood sausage. “Gathering the blood mages and training them is very risky—”

“They were born with this magic. It is their right to use it.” Camille shook her head. “Who are the mages, you, or even I, to say they can’t?”

I sighed. “They are dangerous. I saw her make you freeze. It almost made me piss my pants, and I have lived a very long time and seen a lot. Not much could terrify me on this planet.”

Camille raised one finger. “Seraphine has a role to play in our war as well as the other blood mages. They need to be able to move about freely without their gloves, and she must train them.”

Xander spoke, “Seraphine’s focus is on getting out of here, before the Quiet King arrives.”

Camille touched her chest. “I can convince her.”

“Yes, Queen.” I grinned. “We saw your effective convincing out in the forest. She almost killed you.”

“Again, she was just trying to scare me.” Camille leaned back in her chair, ignoring her food altogether. “Seraphine, me, and the other blood mages will be a powerful asset in this upcoming war. Admit it?”

“But, at what cost?” I gritted my teeth. “We have just aligned with the mages. If they discover what we are even talking about, there may be a war right here in this village.”

“We keep it quiet.” Camille shrugged. “We find a safe location in the forest away from the village and train them.”

Leeta cleaned up in the kitchen. “I think Camille is right. We will need the blood mages if we want to beat the Quiet King.”

Xander rolled his eyes. “Of course Camille is right. The blood mages could give us a definite edge in the war. However, it could also be a double-edged sword.”

I nodded. “The blood mages are just as likely to turn on us as they are to help us.”

“Just like the other mages.” Camille shrugged. “I say that we first win the war against the Quiet King, and then. . . plan to battle anyone else that comes for us.”

I stiffened. “Very risky.”

Camille held out her hands. “What else can we do? This is about oppression and survival, freedom and violence. For my daughters, I would learn whatever I need and deal with the consequences later.”

It was hard to not admire her bravery and determination. She was willing to take risks and make sacrifices for the greater good.

Meanwhile, I couldn’t say the same for myself. I had finally been freed from the sewers, returned to being a healthy vampire, and had a taste of her.

I did not want to lose this new life or her.

Xander leaned forward. “We cannot afford to make any mistakes. The cost of failure could mean the end of all of us.”

Camille nodded. “I understand the risk. But there is no other choice. We must secretly train the blood mages and bring them on.”

“We would need to be very cautious.” I checked the windows, worried that the Ground Mover may have spies monitoring us.

If I were him, I would.

Xander set his fork down on his now empty plate. “How can we get the blood mages and train them without Spenrik, Tru, or even the Ground Mover knowing?”

“We will figure out a way.” Camille shrugged. “But for now, I will talk to Seraphine, convince her to stay, and start training everyone in secret.”

We are really going to do this?

I tapped my finger on the table. “Alright. I will make sure our defenses are strong in case of an attack from the mages upon hearing about our plan.”

“I have been. . .talking a lot to the remaining guards of the Quiet King.” Leeta walked over to the table. “I want to help as much as possible. I could gather information on the Quiet King’s army and their tactics.”

Xander put his view on her. “But, can I trust you?”

Leeta frowned. “You know you can.”

Camille smiled. “I can trust Leeta, and I forgive her for what happened. Xander, it’s time to do the same.”

“You almost died, Queen.”

“And yet, I live.”

But for how long?

A shiver ran through me.

If the Quiet King didn’t destroy us, then the mages would surely do the job.

“It’s settled.” Camille stood up from the table. Determination filled her eyes. “We will make this work.”

I rose. “Please, be careful.”

“Hold on.” Xander stood up as well. “Where are you going, Queen?”

She gestured to the door. “To talk to Seraphine and—”

“We need to establish the blood bond.” He licked his lips and headed her way. “The war and everything else must wait.”

“Xander, the bond can wait for a little bit as I—”

“It cannot.” Fast, he grabbed Camille’s waist, lifted her up, and stormed off.

As I watched Xander whisk Camille away, a grin spread across my face. It was always a sight to behold, watching the connection between a vampire king and his queen in action.

Xander strode toward the stairs leading up to the sleeping quarters, his pace quick and determined. I could feel the intensity of his desire, his need to claim his queen and bind himself to her in every possible way.

Soon, they disappeared.

Oh, the power of queen.

I chuckled to myself and turned back to Leeta. There was much work to do if we were to emerge victorious.

The war with the Quiet King loomed.

Chapter 30

Soul Bond

Xander

Camille chuckled in my hold. “This could have waited.”

“I already told you that it could not.” Holding her closely, I made my way up the stairs.

My heart raced with anticipation. I was eager to make love to her, to feel the warmth of her body against mine, and to bask again in the glow of our deep and powerful bond.

But at the same time, I couldn’t shake the nagging worry that had been haunting me for days. The impending war with the Quiet King weighed heavily on my mind, and I knew that the outcome would determine our fate.

And then there was Camille going off by herself and stepping right into danger.

How could she have been so reckless? Does she not know that I am nothing without her?

As if hearing my thoughts, Camille hugged me tight. “I am sorry about today. I will never do it again.”

I trembled. “I woke up scared. Terrified that the mages had taken you or someone had—”

“Don’t finish it, Xander.” She placed a kiss on my cheek. “I am still here.”

When I reached the top of the stairs, I kicked the door open and carried Camille into our private chambers. The scent of rose petals and jasmine flowed in the air.

The door slammed back behind us.

She chuckled. “Xander, just the bond, nothing else.”

My voice crackled with desire. “And what do you mean?”

“No sex. Just—”

“I *will* have my cock inside of you too.” I placed her on the bed, crawled on top of her, and captured those perfect lips.

Our mouths melded together in an urgent embrace.

Our tongues intertwined in a dance of passion, speaking a secret language that only our hearts could translate.

She moaned into my mouth, sending shivers down my spine.

Breaking the kiss, I slowly roamed my hands over her body, exploring every inch of her skin, feeling the heat of desire rising like a flame between us.

Her pulse quickened beneath my touch.

A deep growl left me.

I wanted my queen.

I needed her in the most primal way.

I ached for her with an intensity that shook my body.

It transcended mere physical longing and consumed my soul.

Ending the kiss, I rose and gazed at my queen. Her soft features illuminated by the moons' light streaming in from the windows. A surge of love and passion moved through me.

My veins burned with a fierce energy. "Queen. . .you know that I would do anything to protect you, to keep you safe from harm."

"I do know that, and I would do the same." She raised her head a little and tried to kiss me.

I tilted away. "This bond. . .it must *always* remain."

She leaned her head back against the pillow and widened her eyes.

"It cannot come and go whenever you want it." Wild lust washed over me. "Do you understand?"

She swallowed. "Yes."

"Our blood bond feels so good when it is in place." My fangs pushed out of my gums in anticipation of what was to come. "And when the bond is taken away. . .it is like. . .I am close to death."

She parted her lips.

"I need to be in your mind, your body. . .as much as I can." I inhaled her skin. "If there was any other way to be inside of you, Queen, I would do that too. Step into your heart. Live within your rib cage. Sleep within your soul."

Her blood began to sing a new melody to me.

I raised my eyebrows, listening.

This song was loud and melodic. Dipping and rising. Teasing and inviting.

I groaned.

The air grew thick with her blood's intoxicating scent.

Huh?

I breathed her in and realized this scent was new too. It tingled against my skin, shoving me off the edge of insanity.

My sweet blood mage.

“I. . .” Her bottom lip quivered. “I promise to never take the bond away again.”

“You must. I do not know. . .if I could ever *let* you take it away again.”

It is a miracle that I allowed us to go this long without it.

Camille gave me a sad smile. “The bond scared me.”

“How?”

“I felt. . .so desperate for you and obsessed and. . .my thoughts were not my own—”

“Those thoughts are mine, Queen.”

She blinked.

“They are.”

Her heartbeats increased.

The sound drove me mad with pleasure.

“But, as you know. . .the bond makes me just as obsessive too.” I looked at the white dress that hugged her curves lovingly.

Hmmm.

I pushed my black claws out of my fingertips. The sharp tips glimmered dangerously in the moons’ light.

With a swift motion, I tore at that dress with frenzied energy, shredding the material until it was nothing more than ribbons and tattered fragments of cloth.

She gasped under the noise of fabric ripping. “Xander. . .”

Soon, her perfect body was revealed.

Camille’s eyes searched mine, and I knew that she longed for me just as badly as I longed for her.

Our passion was a wildfire, consuming everything in its path.

Tenderly, I traced my claws down her body.

She shivered underneath those sharp tips.

With one hand, I cupped her breast, feeling the hardened nipple against my palm.

With the other, I caressed her inner thigh, moving ever so slowly towards her center.

Her breaths became shallow as I teased her with light strokes around her pussy's sensitive folds. "You are mine, and I am yours. Nothing can ever change that."

Her blood hummed. "Nothing."

I gently parted her folds with my clawed fingers, making sure to not cut her, yet. . .savoring every shiver that rippled through her body.

As I spread her open, I feasted my eyes on her swollen clit.

A dark guttural growl escaped my lips.

She stirred. "Take off *your* clothes too."

I couldn't move my gaze from that clit. My mouth watered. My cock stiffened. "Patience, Queen. First, we must re-establish the blood bond."

"Do it while you fuck me."

My head grew foggy with lust at the request.

Her voice lowered to a soft plea. "And I want to touch your horns."

My body was hers. Those horns came out without my needing to trigger them.

She had simply incited their reveal.

Inch by inch, they spilled out of my head, thick and hard. Pleasure waved through my body as the sharpened horns began to curve.

I groaned.

She blinked. "Does it feel good when they come out?"

"It feels good when you touch them. Therefore, my body is eager."

She raised both of her hands and gently grabbed them.

I groaned again.

Her soft fingers caressed them. "How good does it feel?"

I went delirious as she moved those fingers up and down over the horns. "Almost as if you are sucking on my cock."

"Oh my." She gripped them hard.

I grunted. "Be careful, Queen."

"Why?"

"I am close to devouring you whole."

She smirked. "You would not."

I placed my view back on that clit. "I just might."

Slowly, I moved lower and lower down her body.

"Come back." She tenderly stroked my horns. "Where are you going?"

My focus remained on her pussy.

Hmmm.

My queen's clit was a perfect jewel. The soft hood exposed the tip with a hint of wetness. The fragrance of her arousal soared up to me.

Drool dripped from my fangs.

Did she have any idea what I yearned to do?

If Camille did, she gave me no clue as she continued to slip those fingertips up and down my horns, driving me crazy.

Groaning, I faced her pussy.

She stirred. "Xander?"

I moved my sharpened fangs toward that pulsating bud of pleasure and pierced through the swollen flesh.

"Oh!" Her body shuddered with each sip I took. "Oh!"

Wildly groaning, I drank deeply from her, filling my mouth with her heated honeyed essence.

Sweet and sublime.

I felt bits of her soul slide into me. It was glorious, a nectar like no other, addictive, overwhelming, and all-consuming.

It was wrong for her to taste this good. When it came to her blood, there was no way I could ever quench this unquenchable thirst.

Still drinking, I opened my mouth wider and dove my tongue into her silky, wet pussy.

"Oh!!!" Camille let go of my horns and writhed under me.

Mine! All mine!

Her blood was a symphony of coppery and cinnamon, lush floral notes and a ripe fruitiness.

Dear Ambi.

The heady mixture sent shivers down my spine.

I drank some more, almost getting deliriously drunk.

"Oh, Xander!" She shuddered over and over. "Oh! Oh!"

Her heartbeat quickened, racing with excitement and fear.

My body thrummed with her energy.

Now.

I released my hormones into her. Glints of shimmering scarlet light flickered, twirled, and danced on around us.

Yes.

Slowly, my hormones moved deeper within her veins binding us together.

She gasped as our connection was forged.

Ambi, yes!

Our souls molded together, forever bound by the crimson rivers of passion flowing in our veins.

“Oh! Oh!”

Warmth spread through my body, telling me that our bond was stronger than ever.

Slowly, I slid my fangs out of her clit and took my tongue away.

Her blood dripped from my fangs and spilled down my lips, leaving dots on her pussy.

Grunting, I soared down and lapped at the drops.

She rocked her pussy against my mouth. “Oh, Xander.”

I pushed my thoughts into her head. *Xander? Who am I to you?*

Her voice moved inside of me. It was ribbons of silk unfolding in my head. ***You are my king.***

Forever.

With one hand, I caressed her mound. With the other, I inserted a finger deep inside of her pussy, allowing it to slide in and out with ease.

She placed her hands back to my horns.

Pre-cum spilled from my cock.

She gripped them hard. “Take off your clothes and fuck me.”

There was a light slur in her words, telling me she was drunk off my bite.

Then, her beautiful thoughts filled my mind.

I want him so bad. I must have him.

I smirked and plunged two fingers into her, eliciting a ragged moan from her lips.

Still holding onto my horns, she rocked her pussy to my fingers’ rhythm.

Dear, Ambi. He knows my body so well. It is all his.

I pumped my fingers in and out, finding that sweet spot that made her hips buck and her body tremble with pleasure.

I need his cock. Now. Dear Ambi, why won’t he give it to me.

Here it comes, my queen.

I pulled my fingers out and licked them.

She eyed me and pouted. ***Hurry.***

Quickly, I took off my clothes, blurring with some of the movements and slinging the garments around the room, not caring where they landed.

Once naked, I pressed my body on top of hers. My cock pushed forward, searching for her tight entrance.

“Oh, Xander.” She wrapped her legs around me, and I pushed deeper inside her with a powerful thrust that sent ripples of pleasure through us both.

“Oh. Oh. Oh.”

I came closer and sank my fangs into the curve of her neck.

She screamed, “Oh, Ambi!”

I shoved my thoughts into her head. *He is not fucking you.*

“Oh! Oh!”

I whispered in her mind. *Who is fucking you?*

My king!

My body quaked with erotic intensity.

I pulled my fangs from her neck and slammed my cock into her some more. Camille’s blood dripped down my chin and dotted her breasts.

She shuddered as I plunged deeper, moving in a slow, sensuous rhythm. Her body heated more. Her breaths came out in ragged gulps.

We moved together in perfect harmony. Our bodies intertwined as one. Our blood bond perfectly linked and stronger than ever. So strong, it seemed to transcend reality.

“Xander!” She moaned and writhed against me as I continued pleasuring her body.

Our movements became wilder and wilder as time passed, until finally a strong, powerful orgasm ripped through us both. Her wet pussy hugged my cock.

We soared in ecstasy, the power of our bond amplified by the mystical magic of our blood.

Sparkling energy swirled around us and we drowned in an orgasmic trance of euphoria.

Camille! My Queen!

Wave after wave jerked my body. I gripped her hard, terrified that she would slip away.

We had to stay connected for eternity, united in passion.

Divided by no one and nothing.

Queen!

Both of us moaning, our eyes locked in a deep gaze of love and passion.

I could not tell you how long our orgasms went on. So long, my limbs shivered and numbed. So long, I collapsed against her, out of breath and exhausted.

Completely satiated, my fangs rushed back into my gums.

My horns left too.
Silent minutes passed as we remained connected.
When I finally lifted my head and pulled out of her, it was as if I was waking up from a dream.

Dear Ambi.

I rolled off her and fell back onto the bed.
Her lush thoughts slipped into my mind. ***I can't believe he is all mine.***
Panting, I whispered back into her head, *and I am yours for eternity.*
She turned my way and placed her hand on my chest. "I am going to have to get used to you back in my head."

"You must." I looked at her. "Because I love being there so much. It is addicting."

Coming closer to me, Camille pressed her body against mine and rested her head on my chest. She was an oasis of soft curves and smooth skin—my own personal paradise.

A long sigh left me.

If only we could lay like this forever with no worries, no problems coming our way. Just this happy bliss of peace.

Then, my thoughts turned dark.

The Quiet King was out there, heading our way and ready to strike.
War was coming, and I couldn't shake the obvious feeling that we were all in grave danger.

I stiffened.

"Xander?" Camille's voice brought me back to the present. "Is everything okay?"

I took a deep breath and forced a smile. "Everything's fine. I just. . .I can't lose you, Camille. You mean everything to me."

She ran her fingertips along the muscle on my stomach. "I will be safe, Xander. I promise."

I kissed her forehead, harder this time.

She pushed her thoughts in my head. ***It will all be okay, Xander. Relax and enjoy this moment.***

I curved my lips into a smile.

And just like that. . .despite the looming threat of war, I experienced an immediate sense of hope and relief.

How does she do that?

Her visions played out in my mind. And I had no idea if she knew I was looking at them. But in her head, Camille, Ian, and I stood on a war-torn battlefield and gazed at the Quiet King's dead body.

I pushed my words in her head. *Yes, Queen. You are correct.*

You can see that?

I can.

Good. That is our future.

Together, we would overcome any obstacle and emerge victorious.

I held my queen closer in my arms, lost in the depths of our love and passion.

As each minute passed I knew that nothing could ever break the bond between us. In her arms, I had found my true home, and I would fight to protect her, no matter what challenges lay ahead.

Her voice entered my head. ***Xander?***

Utterly in peace, I closed my eyes. *Yes, my queen.*

I am glad the blood bond is back.

A huge smile spread across my face. *Me too, Camille. And it is stronger than ever.*

Why?

I don't know. Perhaps. . .because. . .we are stronger. . .

She tensed against me. ***Earlier, when I was out in the woods with Seraphine, I moved fast like Ian and you. Like a very powerful vampire.***

I slowly opened my eyes as she delivered those visions to me—there she was fast and blurring to Seraphine. I couldn't help but speak out loud, "Are you sure that is how you remember it? The brain is a tricky organ."

"I was so fast I shocked her and me."

I nodded. "Then, good. I want you as powerful as possible."

"I thought the same thing. However. . ."

I quirked my brows.

She shifted the conversation back to our heads. ***To be safe, you should also establish a blood bond with Ian.***

I frowned. *My fangs will not be entering his body.*

It can be his arm or shoulder.

Never.

King. . .we must be strong for the days to come. The ability to speak in each other's minds will give us an advantage over not only the Quiet King, but the mages too.

I considered that fact, and hated that she was correct.

And. . .

My frown deepened. *And?*

Her voice slipped back into my head. *Ian and I should have a blood bond too.*

A dark growl left me.

The walls vibrated around us.

She lifted her head off my chest and looked up at me, “What if you are on one side of the battlefield and I am on another side, in danger, and near Ian? I could call out for him with my mind to save me.”

“You will not be on the battlefield.”

“If my kings are there, then I am there.”

I snarled at her.

She curved her lips into a smile. “We will beat our enemies *together.*”

“You will remain hidden and safe far away from the war—”

“I will not.” Sudden rage blazed in her eyes. “King. . .I want to fight next to you—”

“No.”

“It is what *I* want.” She scowled. “Do *not* fight me on this.”

Instantly, a foreign pressure pushed through my chest. I had no idea what the source was, I just knew I could not stop it.

What is this?

She watched me. “Do you understand?”

I strained against this pressure. I wanted to fight her on this. But this. . .sensation. . .it was all inside of my core, building.

What is going on with me?

I could not form the words to disagree, and even when I tried to say the thoughts of *no* in my mind, my head began to hurt.

Why can't I argue back?

“Good. Thank you for understanding, Xander.” Camille rested her head against me and closed her eyes. “I love you so much.”

She loves me.

And suddenly I forgot whatever it was I wanted to say as I gazed down at my beautiful queen.

All mine.

Next, I slipped my view down to her stomach and imagined all the babies I would put there. I wanted many—six at a time if possible.

And there I saw them everywhere—our children. They played and ran around us. Tons of them—thirty. Maybe even forty. They laughed. They giggled. Many climbed over me as they chased after their siblings.

Hmmm.

Someone knocked at the door.

Frowning, I opened my eyes. “Yes?!”

Ian’s voice sounded from the other side. “The Ground Mover is here.”

“Tell him that we are still sleeping, I am not done making love to my queen just yet—”

“We are done, Xander.” Camille slowly rose.

I glared. “We are not done. I was resting for a few minutes—”

“We are done.” She slid away.

I tried to grab her.

In a blur, she dodged my hands and left the bed.

I blinked. “You *are* fast.”

“Get dressed. Let’s see why the Ground Mover is here.”

Chapter 31

Great Restraint

Ian

Come on, Xander. Put your cock in your pants and get down here.

I leaned against the wall.

Standing by the opened front door, the Ground Mover watched me in silence. Last night, his face had held a friendly and welcoming expression. He had given us a wealth of funny stories.

Tonight, there was no hint of humor. Just a neutral expression. A mask that clung tightly to him, not giving away his thoughts.

What has changed? Does he know about Seraphine and the blood mages? Did his spies possibly overhear our plans?

Leeta came over to the Ground Mover. "Can I offer you some tea?"

He waved his hand. "No, thank you. I will not be having tea at this time."

Something is definitely wrong.

Leeta half bowed and then stepped back.

I studied him, wondering if I could defeat the old man if necessary.

It may not be that easy.

They called him the Ground Mover. I doubted it was a fun little nickname. I guessed that he could in fact make the ground move under his command.

If I shifted into battle form and rushed to attack him, would he open up the very ground under my feet and watch me fall in?

How dangerous is he?

Xander and Camille finally came downstairs and stood next to me.

The Ground Mover turned his view to Xander. "We must go and talk."

Xander leaned his head to the side. "Just me?"

No. We cannot let them separate us.

The Ground Mover let his gaze fall over Camille and then me. "Yes. I think that would be best."

I looked at Xander.

Do not go with him.

He gazed at me. "Protect my queen."

We should be protecting you too. You are our king.

I gritted my teeth. “Ground Mover, it is such a nice night. I believe we *all* should come.”

“You are correct.” Ground Mover put his view on the window. “It is a nice evening. We have moved our wedding festivities up to this evening so that all of you could participate.”

I quirked my brows. “We are invited to the events?”

“If we have agreed to possibly die together in war.” Ground Mover gave me a sad smile. “Then, surely, we can laugh and celebrate together. So yes, you are invited.”

My nerves did not relax. “Still, it would be nice for all of us to take a walk.”

“Soon.” Ground Mover nodded. “But not now. It must only be Xander and me.”

I don't like this.

Xander watched me.

Do you know what I am thinking? What are your thoughts?

Xander turned back to Ground Mover. “Then, let us go. You appear worried and not like your usual calm self.”

Alright. Xander is at least paying attention.

Xander walked over to the Ground Mover. “You are my friend. We took a journey long ago to make sure you were free from the Quiet King and back with your family.”

Good. Remind him of what you have done for him, Xander.

Ground Mover bobbed his head. “I would not have seen my daughter, Tru grow up if not for you. In fact. . . I would not be here to see her wedding. I owe more than my life to you, Xander. I owe my loyalty.”

Only then did my nerves calm. And even then, I still wasn't sure if the mage was not being deceitful.

Mages were known for their cunning nature and ability to manipulate others. Long ago, my father told me that they had the ability to lie and deceive with ease, making them particularly dangerous to deal with if one was not careful.

He also added that the mage elders were even able to use their knowledge of magic to read the emotions and intentions of those around them, allowing these mages to tailor their lies to fit the situation.

Can we really trust him?

“I will be back soon.” Xander kissed Camille’s cheek and headed off.
Be cautious, Xander.

I watched as Xander followed the Ground Mover out of the house.

Please, Ambi. Let this be okay.

The door closed behind them.

Camille came over and placed her hand on my shoulder. “You’re worried that the Ground Mover could be leading Xander into a trap?”

I stared at the closed door. “Now that we know about the blood mages and their power, we need to keep a closer eye on the other mages.”

Leeta went by the window and gazed out of it. “I also don’t trust the Ground Mover anymore.”

“Me either.” I frowned.

Camille nodded. “I agree. But we also need to be careful. We don’t know what he’s capable of.”

I clenched my fists. “I won’t let anything happen to Xander or you. We have come too far.”

Camille got in front of me. “I think we are safe for now. There’s no way he learned about what happened to me with Seraphine.”

I put my view on her. “How can you be so sure?”

“Because the gods ordained my finding Seraphine in my dream. It means that we are protected.”

“But, it does not mean that they don’t know.”

Leeta sighed from the window. “From my small knowledge of mages, if they felt a threat. . .we would already have been attacked.”

“Good point.” I looked at her. “Still, I think you should follow Xander and the Ground Mover, Leeta. If you pass any of our other men, have them come with you too. But stay far behind.”

“I will.” She hurried off.

Camille and I went over to the window, watching as Leeta disappeared into the night.

A sense of unease washed over me.

The Ground Mover’s words echoed in my mind, reminding me of the upcoming wedding festivities.

Why did he feel the need to invite us? Does he truly see us as aligned? Or is it like Seraphine said, they will fight with us against the Quiet King in the war, and then kill us later?

My mind raced with many questions.

Or could Seraphine be wrong? She only sees them as enemies, but could they truly be our friends?

Camille placed a hand on my arm, bringing me back to the present.

I whispered, “Something was off about the Ground Mover tonight.”

“I noticed it too. He’s not the smiling man from last night.”

“He is not.”

“But, do you think he is worried or are we in danger?”

“I do not know.” I scanned the outside space of our window, searching for other mages around and saw nothing.

Granted that meant nothing.

Earth mages could hide themselves in the soil and appear later.

Further away, I spotted tons of mages decorating the village. Fire mages shot small heart-shaped lights from their fingers. To my shock, the lights connected to the trees and dangled as if it was the trees’ fruit. They twinkled in the night.

On other trees, colorful lanterns hung from the branches, casting an enchanting glow over the entire village.

Some of the streets were lined with flower petals of all colors and aromas.

Camille spoke, “We may be paranoid. They truly are planning to celebrate.”

“Perhaps, mages can multitask—kill us and then get married.” I moved away from the window and placed my attention on her. As soon as I did, Xander’s scent caught my nostrils. It was all over her body.

Dear Ambi. Did he leave any part of our queen untouched?

I curved my lips into a smile. “The bond is re-formed?”

She blushed. “It is.”

I tilted my head to the side. “And how do you feel about that, little queen?”

“For the first time. . .I welcome it.”

“You finally see the significance of the connection?”

“I do.” She glanced back out at the window. “I just think it is a little unfair at times.”

“Unfair.” I eyed her. “Why?”

“I wish I could read *his* thoughts too.”

“Oh.” I shrugged. “You can. A first queen has the power to read her king’s thoughts if she wants.”

“I can?”

“It would be a simple task.”

“How? I want to do this.”

I tensed. “But, Camille. . .a new king’s thoughts. . .”

“What?”

“His thoughts about you and even his visions of you. . .they may scare and give you nightmares.

She blinked. “What do you mean?”

“We are primal, dangerous creatures. It may be better to not read his mind.”

“Ian, why would his thoughts and visions scare me?”

“Kings are *extremely* obsessive of their first queens.”

She grinned. “I already know that.”

“Yes, but with the bond, you will see things. . .moments in his mind that . . .could terrify you.”

“What things?”

“You chained up naked to his bed, pregnant and breastfeeding *him* or . . .worse. . .”

She widened her eyes. “What would be worse than that?”

“A vision of your chest split wide open and him drinking from your heart.”

She gasped. “What?”

“It is just a king’s thoughts on his queen, Camille. Nothing more. Fantasies that make his cock hard, but ones that he would never play out.”

“Maybe. . .you’re right.”

“I am.”

Putting her gaze back on the window, she looked unsure of how to proceed. “But, maybe. . .”

I studied her. “What would you do, if you saw something horrific about you in Xander’s mind?”

Her bottom lip quivered.

“You would be scared, but could you leave?”

“No.”

“Not at all.” I shrugged again. “It would be better to leave that part of the bond alone for now.”

“Maybe, you’re right.” She sighed.

I chuckled. “I am always right.”

She rolled her eyes and gazed back at me. “And what if I read *your* thoughts when we re-establish *our* bond? Should I have those same fears too? Or would you be better with keeping your visions calm?”

What?

My cocks jerked in my pants. “You want to reform the connection?”

“Yes.”

I shivered with need and my view went to the curve of her neck. I could already see where Xander had bit her. The two tiny wounds glittered under my gaze.

It would be so easy to turn her head to the side and sink my fangs onto the other side of her neck.

Last night, I had already tasted her blood within the rapture of passion, and dear Ambi I wanted more. Being inside her stoked the fire instead of put it out.

An inferno of desire for Camille moved within me, bigger than the bonfire that had consumed the evil in Phinova’s dead corpse.

I yearned to be inside her again.

Camille was everything that was good—that harmonious tune one hears on the first evening of spring, aged blood wine in a crystal glass spilling onto my tongue, the fragrance of flowers right as they bloomed, and wet flesh enclosed around my cocks.

I yearned for more.

I longed to push my face against the vein and suck it dry.

I needed to drown myself in its warm ocean of red.

No.

I blinked my eyes several times.

She tilted her head to the side. “Ian?”

I cleared my throat. “We should not re-establish the bond. At least not now.”

“Why not?”

“I want you so bad, yet. . .I have been behaving myself. I have been able to taste from you and still step back to let your connection with Xander strengthen. Let us not stir things up.”

She parted her lips. “I think the bonds with my kings will keep us more powerful.”

I smirked, loving how she included me as hers.

Camille continued, “What if during the war I have to tell you something in your mind?”

“Camille. . .” I gazed at my queen, knowing I may have loved Xander and her even more than my brother and Phinova.

Because with Phinova, I would do all that she wanted without thinking of the consequences for her and me. Many times, she wanted to fuck away from Nai. And I did her bidding, knowing that if my brother ever found out, there would be a huge price to pay.

I never cared about his feelings or what could result.

It was all about my body’s needs.

Had he not discovered our deception. . .I may not have been in the sewers when the Greedy King came to kill Phinova.

She would have been alive.

And the Quiet King would only be Nai. He would have never become a monster.

No. I am older, wiser, and. . .

I gazed at Camille, slowly getting lost in the beauty of her.

With Camille and Xander. . .I will be clear-minded.

I would do the right thing as much as possible.

In the end, she was Xander’s queen. For him to be so young and new in his powers, yet still share her with me. . .it spoke of great restraint.

I stepped back. “We will not do the connection for now.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am.” I swallowed.

She ran her fingers through that red hair. “Perhaps, you are right.”

“I am.” Vibrating with hunger, I dragged my view away from her. “I am. . .”

“Then. . .I will listen, and not push the bond on you.”

“Thank you, Camille. Maybe in the future, the bond will be required, but for now. . .we must protect all things in this. . .strange *threesome* we have created among ourselves.”

Her blood hummed, singing a sweet song that I could not get lost into right now.

Concentrate. Think of Xander.

Even if he were safe with the Ground Mover right now, I could not touch his queen without his being here. Surely, he would be upset and feel betrayed.

This time, I will do this right. . .for as long as Xander allows me to be a part of them.

The heart was a precious thing, a delicate and beautiful treasure that beat within us, driving us to love and be loved. It was an organ of wonder. A vessel that held our hopes and dreams, our passions and desires. And now, as I had been given a chance at a new love and a new life, I vowed to protect it with everything that I was, even from myself.

“Oh.” Camille pointed at the window and smiled. “They’re coming back. Xander is okay.”

I looked in the direction she was pointing.

Talking to each other, Xander and Leeta walked our way.

A long breath left me.

Good. He’s safe.

But, still I wondered what the Ground Mover could have wanted.

Epilogue

The Time is Now

Ian

Xander and Leeta entered the hut.

The door remained open.

“Thank Ambi.” Camille went over and hugged him. “How was it?”

“Good.” He sniffed her as if making sure my scent was not on her body.

I am not stupid, Xander.

I smirked.

Camille let him go. “What happened?”

Instead of replying to her, Xander put his focus on me. “We should talk.”

I touched my chest. “You and I?”

Xander nodded.

Camille gave a weak smile. “And what are we going to discuss?”

“No.” Xander stepped to the side. “I need to talk to Ian by myself first.

Then, you and I will have a conversation.”

“What are you going to talk to Ian about?” Camille asked.

“It’s between us.” Xander gestured for us to walk off.

What could he want to talk about? What had the Ground Mover said to him?

Leeta turned to Camille. “Also, I bumped into them on the way back, and the Ground Mover told me that he wants to try and decipher the writing and symbols on your body. He believes there is a message from Ressi about how to proceed in the next days. I promised to take him to you.”

Camille looked at Xander and then me. “Should I let him?”

Xander spoke, “It may be helpful for us, but you would have to be naked. Therefore, wait until Ian and I get back. I would rather be in the room when you’re naked with another man.”

I cleared my throat and held in the many jokes that rushed to my head.

As if knowing what was on my mind, Xander frowned at me. “Are you ready?”

I nodded. “Let’s go, Xander, so you can get back to her.”

We headed out of the hut. Cool night air brushed against my skin.

Xander led us down a path covered in pink and blue flower petals.

The aromas of delicious food wafted through the village, tantalizing my senses and creating a mouth-watering sensation.

Are they also making dishes for vampires too?

I swore I caught the savory aroma of blood sausage. The scent of roasted meats, freshly baked bread, and aromatic spices filled the air, mingling with the sweet fragrance of the flowers and the subtle hint of lingering magic.

Xander let out a long sigh.

“What is this private conversation about?” I asked as we headed through two stone huts.

Barefoot children wrapped in beads played throughout the pathways of the community.

Xander remained quiet as we continued.

Further in the village, I spotted green lanterns shaped like birds and wolves.

More children chased each other, giggling and shrieking with joy each time they found one another.

“Xander?” I paused near a hut where the bitter aroma of roasted wolf drifted out. “What do you want?”

“I need to talk about two things.” He faced the sky and stared at the two moons, inhaling the air around him. “It’s a beautiful night tonight. I hope it’s not our last.”

“Me too.”

“Come on.” Xander guided me further along until we approached the violet stone pathway we’d first entered before coming in the village earlier. “What you, Camille, and I did last night. . .”

Oh. . .this is what he wants to talk about?

Did something change when Xander and Camille re-established their blood bond?

Did that mean the end of our odd threesome?

My heart twisted with sadness.

I did my best to keep the disappointment within my core silent.

Xander continued down the path. “I’m not sure if we’ll do it again.”

“O-kay.”

“But. . .”

“But?”

“I will look to her blood if it should come up and then I will let her body dictate what’s next.”

“Sex?”

Xander picked up his pace. “This is hard for me to discuss because. . .I have never navigated anything like it.”

“I understand that part.” I nodded. “But. . .I truly need to understand if there are more rules to *this*. What do you want me to do or not do from here on out?”

“Tan, I don’t think we should have *more* rules. Frankly. . .what I am saying is that I won’t say yes to your being with Camille, but I also won’t say no if she desires you again.”

I nodded slowly, trying to absorb Xander’s words. “I think I understand that. What I will do is look to you before I act.”

We walked in silence for a few moments. The sounds of the village faded behind us.

I looked at him. “How did *you* feel about last night and the moment that we all shared?”

To my shock, a silly grin spread across his face. “While I worried that you would hurt my queen with those unnecessary cocks. . .I also enjoyed her being pleased by you. I also loved the taste of her blood, when aroused by your cocks.”

Very good. He was not hurt or uncomfortable.

Keeping his pace, I bobbed my head. “I understand that too. I always enjoyed tasting Phinova’s blood right when she came from my brother.”

Xander stared at me. “Was there ever a point in your relationship with Phinova and your brother. . .where you didn’t like him in your bed? Did you ever hate sharing her? Did you get jealous?”

“I didn’t, but I believe my brother did get jealous from time to time. In that sense, he and I are different.”

“Hmmm.” Xander continued guiding us away.

I scanned the space. “Where are we going and why?”

“You will see soon.”

We arrived at the end of the pathway and walked on to the beginning of the forest.

I thought Xander would stop there, but he kept traveling through the darkened forest.

White owls soared above our heads and loudly hooted.

Xander spoke, "Well, Ian, let's make one thing clear."

"Okay."

"Camille is *my* queen in every way. She belongs to me and no one else."

I slowed my stepping forward a little. The king within me vibrated. I gritted my teeth and formed my hands into fists. It had been decades since anything stirred my king like this. He didn't like being told that Camille was not his.

Stay calm.

Thankfully, I was also an old king now.

Slowly and gently, I tucked the hardness of my inner king away.

Be happy with what you are getting, my friend. Months ago we were blind, bony, and in the sewer.

"I won't battle you for Camille." Xander's fangs pushed out from his lips. "I'll only *kill* you. There will be no fight or gentle vampire dispute, no discussion or debate."

Power rippled through my body.

Stay calm. It is okay. He is right. That is his queen.

Xander glared. "Do you wonder who would win if we battled? Who would be alive once all the blood and skin rained down?"

I had age and experience on Xander. That was true.

But Xander had no limits when it came to Camille.

His mother Queen Regina's corpse swinging back and forth flickered in my mind.

No. I could never harm my mother over Camille.

Even if my mother had connived and stabbed Phinova, I couldn't have killed her. Perhaps because she had raised me like a mother should and given me a big, loving family.

Xander had never received that sort of love. Therefore, if the situation presented him to be a monster, then he would.

I shook my head. "I will not debate who would win a fight, Xander. My focus is for us not to fight over Camille or anything else. You are my king. As I told you long ago in the sewers, I am here to serve you, because I have seen for many years the goodness that is deep in your heart."

"Still, if you come between Camille and me, then be prepared to die," Xander growled, a deep primal sound.

"Relax," I said through clenched teeth, knowing my inner king would soon want to challenge him. "I won't lie to you, Xander. I crave Camille, but

I'm no longer a king from the ancient times. I would never kill a queen's mate and make her mine through force. I know where I stand with the both of you, and I will obey your rules."

"Good." Xander nodded. "Then maybe you can touch her again. *If* that is what *she* craves."

She will.

But I also wondered if Xander was testing me with those statements. Making sure that I didn't argue the point or try to fight him for his queen.

Had that been some test? If so, then he has quickly mentally matured too.

I smirked. "I serve you, king, and I serve her."

He sighed. "Good because. . .I. . ."

I quirked my brows. "Yes?"

"I *actually* like what we all have. . .whatever this is."

My smirk deepened. "Then, I will respect and protect it with all that I have inside of me."

We began to leave the forest and start heading to the far end of mage territory.

Annoyance hit me. "But, why are we out here? What is going on?"

Xander frowned. "I think it's better if I showed you. The Ground Mover didn't want to come out this way. He was. . .nervous."

"Nervous?"

Xander nodded. "He pulled me away to deliver a message from Spenrik, and then rushed off to finish the plans for his daughter's wedding."

"And what did that message say?"

We arrived at the end of the forest toward the place where the mages had mounted in defense the night before.

"Look. That is the message." Xander pointed forward.

Oh no.

My stomach dropped to my feet.

A dark silhouette of hundreds upon hundreds of vampires shielded in thick leather and wielding swords flanked the border of mage territory and vampire land.

A mile lay between us.

A shiver hit Xander's voice. "The Quiet King has arrived."

Fear sliced through me. "And my brother has brought friends."

I could not make out too much detail. Yet, I knew for sure that masks covered their faces—the ones that vampires wore when they fought during

the day.

They're practicing for battle.

Wagons rested behind them and probably held more armor and swords.

Xander shook his head. "This is why the Ground Mover is rushing the wedding ceremony. He wants his daughter married and the tribes united before. . ."

"The war."

Xander stared off at the threatening vision. "Had Camille not got us to safely align with the mages. . ."

"We would have been outside of mage territory and dead tonight."

"He was barely a day away from us."

"And surely ready to kill us too." My hands shook.

"I am just happy the Quiet King hasn't stormed into these villages."

"No." I shook my head. "I know Nai well. He thinks we still have Phinova. Tomorrow night, he will send a messenger to try and have a meeting with us."

Xander looked at me. "A meeting?"

I nodded. "He will want to sit down and talk with us. . .try to negotiate her return. That will at least allow us to stretch this out for a few days as we rush to train and prepare to fight."

"And when he discovers that Phinova is truly gone?"

"We will battle like vampires have never battled before. It will be a war that many will write in the history books."

Far out, I spotted a massive platform on the side of the battle units. It stood high in the air. My father had used one of these platforms before to see deep into enemy territory as much as possible.

On that huge platform, a bulky frame hovered above the royal battalion.

Dear Ambi.

It was a vampire king. Even in the shadow of night, I spotted the outline of huge muscles and gigantic horns.

"Hello, dear brother." I pushed my fangs out of my gums. My battle form threatened to rush out too.

Xander's voice grew shaky. "Can we truly beat him?"

"It is not about *can*. We simply *must*."

"And that's his battle form?"

"Granted, it is hard to see him from here, but I believe it is him in his form."

“It looks like he has three horns twisting and soaring above his head.”

“Blasted brother.” I scowled. “I thought we had more time. There was word in the city that he was far out. If that was true, then he should have approached from the north of mage territory. Not here from the south.”

“Or it means he went to the castle to most likely check on Phinova’s corpse.”

“Yes.” I stiffened. “Then, he saw her gone. Your scent and hoof prints were all over his castle. He tracked you here.”

“He has many soldiers.”

“Therefore, we must have strategy and elements of surprise.” I scanned more of the area in front of us. “Once we have met him to discuss Phinova’s return and he discovers nights later that she is gone, he’ll come for us sometime during the day.”

“Do you think he knows you’re here, too?”

“Nai is more familiar with my scent than his own. We’re twins, after all. I am sure he caught my scent in his castle too.”

“The Ground Mover said that the Quiet King has never been able to pass over into mage territory before.”

“That’s what the hundreds of men in front are for.” I centered my view on the many lines of metal wagons behind the tons of flanked soldiers. “I bet the wagons have more men inside, resting and eating. The mages will burn these frontline troops or stab their hearts with sticks. While those mages are busy, Nai will come over to kill us with his real soldiers.”

“You know your brother well.”

“No.” I shook my head. “I know my father very well. These are *his* tactics. In the sewers, I would listen to people talk about all the past wars of the Quiet King.”

“And what did you learn?”

“Nai has never improved or expanded my father’s strategies. Why would he when he has always been victorious? I’ve heard descriptions of *all* his battles. Each one has mimicked my father’s.”

“And how do you know your father’s strategies so well?”

“We were made to study our father’s war movements most of our princely years in the hopes that we would take his place in future wars.”

Xander glanced my way. “Then what should we do in these next nights?”

“Get the Ground Mover to give us a spell or enchantment so that we can fight during the day. There must be something. If we can figure that out, then

Nai will be unprepared for us.”

Xander crossed his arms over his chest. “And what about the negotiations for Phinova?”

“Oh, we will meet and negotiate with him.” A wicked smile spread across my face. “We will even give him Phinova.”

Xander quirked his brows. “What?”

“He will think it is her. Surely, the mages have a dead body of a prisoner or traitor somewhere in their village. Let us dress it up like Phinova and put on a red wig.”

“What of the scent?”

“We will do what we can. Perhaps, Seraphine could change the fragrance with her blood mage powers.”

“If Camille can convince her to help us.”

“Yes. That too. Either way, as much as we can, we will have the fake corpse buy us some time by giving it to him.”

Xander wore a skeptical look.

“And on the inside of that corpse, we will put something harmful in it. A spell. A curse. Anything to get rid of his men and level the playing field.” Not wanting to see this lingering threat anymore, I turned around and walked back to the forest. “There will be much to plan.”

Xander followed me. I could feel the nervousness radiating off him. This would be his first war—one that he was not prepared for.

While he had youth and goodness on his side, Nai had everything else.

Will we win?

Can we truly kill my brother?

And if we can't. . . .what will happen to us all?

DEAR READER,

As I wrote this on my Patreon in the prior month, many wanted the point-of-view of the **Quiet King**. Also, I figured this war should be epic and much more than a few chapters. It needed to be a book of strategy, violence, and of course a whole lot of steamy scenes.

Some Patrons want **Ian** to have his own queen.

Others want **Camille, Xander, and Ian** to rise as a powerful loving throuple.

I am going back and forth on what to do as I continue to write the next book on Patreon.

1. To get information on the next release in the Immortal Saga, [subscribe to my newsletter](#).
2. To continue reading more, [join the first tier](#) to read the story as I write it.

