

5 princes and I Chapter 66-69

Chapter 66 Dan's Shipping Rival

"Um...what about the 'friends' part?" Ren asked as soon as Darem disappeared behind the castle doors.

"You mean 'best friends' part." Dan corrected him with a frown. "Somehow I feel like I am not going to get along with Ace's brother."

"Why is that?" Ren asked his brother.

"It's a brother's intuition, Ren," Dan answered him with a shrug.

"You are all neither my 'friends' or my 'best friends.'" Ace said, looking annoyed. "And let's go. I think it's about time for us to leave."

As Ace turned the other way around, Nate was there blocking his way. "No, we are not. We came here to get you cured of whatever illness you have."

Ace and Nate had a staring contest then. With Ace half an inch taller than Nate and with his natural look of death I thought for sure that Nate would lose, but no. Nate held his ground and stood firm. I couldn't help but stare at this cool side of Nate.

"Fine." Ace finally said and headed for the castle. "But if things get bad, we leave." Then we all made our way to the castle door and got ourselves in.

Inside, I appreciated the uniqueness of the palace. Wall covered in vines curling here and there making the place look old yet beautiful at the same time. Different varieties of plants hung on walls, the stairs, and the corners of the room.

I would have described more of the palace if it weren't for the footsteps coming from the second floor. We all looked up to see Darem skipping steps as he made his way down the stairs. A huge grin plastered on his face as he looked behind him.

"There he is!" Said Darem and in a matter of seconds, I saw two figures coming down from the stairs. One is a woman with beautiful straight black hair and a sharp nose. Her skin was pale and tight and she had green eyes. She was wearing a purple silk flowy dress that has a connected cape of sheer purple. A golden cuff was at her upper right arm and a bunch of bracelets decorated her wrist. She was also wearing a golden crown. She looks like a goddess.

Next to her is another good-looking male elf. He seemed to be a few years older than Darem and had long silver hair that he pinned the sides to his back. He was wearing something more formal with a golden brown long-sleeved coat that has cuffs at the side and feathery designs that form a vest, black pants, and boots. The elf also wore a ring

around his head that has a curving design at the front. Golden ear cuffs glittered on each ear as he ran.

The two joined Darem as they made their way to us. Both elves looked slightly shocked and relieved to see Ace.

“Ace.” The woman said and clasped a hand to her mouth. “My son, is that you?”

“Mother.” Ace answered.

“Good to see you, little brother. Big brother misses you so much!” Said the elf with the white hair as he looked at Ace. “Can I hug you?”

“No.” Ace gave his brother a warning look when he attempted to hug him anyway.

“Mom, Eltur,” Darem called the attention of the two as he directed his gaze on me. “Ace brought a girl!” He beamed and rudely pointed a finger at me.

If I had a knife with me then I would have chopped off his finger, but the only thing I could do then swallowed and hide behind Ren when the two elves turned their attention to me. They gasped before looking at Ace.

“Ace.....” The woman said in disbelief and looked at Ace as if he were a stranger.

Do any of the princes have a normal family? I guess not.

“Way the go, little brother!” He said and leaned in to look closer at Ace. “Hey, wait a minute. Your ears. Did you get your magic back?”

“Yes.”

“I knew something looked different in him.” Muttered Darem and looked at Ace too.

A look of confusion crossed the elf’s face. “Why? I thought you hated it.”

“Something came up and I have to use it.” Came Ace’s reply.

“But nine years, Ace. You almost had it.”

“I told you something came up. Just forget about it.” He said irritably. “And it’s not something to worry about anymore. I’m old enough to protect myself.”

Somehow, hearing that Ace gave up losing his unwanted gift just to help me made me feel guilty all over again. Especially with his family standing in front of me. So I admitted, “It’s my fault. I ran away from the castle with a cloaked hood and there was no way to find me. PRINCE Ace used his powers to bring me back to Thalia.”

The moment I said it resulted in two expressions from the Feraden brothers; Ace looks like he was going to murder me while Eltur and Darem have sparked in their eyes. They were shining.

Um...was it something I said?

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“Our brother sacrificed killing his powers to save you?” Asked Darem. A huge smile on his face.

“..Pretty much?”

Eltur bellowed in laughing and wrapped an arm around Ace’s shoulder. “Oh, baby brother! I didn’t know you had it in you!”

“Shut up!” Ace said and pushed his brother away from him.

All of a sudden I was pushed back towards Ren, who then steadied me. “Are you alright?” He asked in concern.

“Yeah. Thanks.” I answered and smiled at him.

“Now that is cute.” Dan, the person who pushed me, said. He looked at Ace’s brothers with a smug look on his face, which Eltur and Darem did not appreciate.

“Who are you again?” Asked Eltur. His eyes showing his distaste for Dan.

“Prince Daniel from Sanver. A werewolf. The vampire over there,” he pointed at Nate, “Is prince Nathaniel Denver from Vertex. And the guy who looks just like me is my twin brother Prince Renevier Rutledge.” Dan grinned wickedly at Ace’s brothers.

“You look like me. I’m older than you by a few minutes!” Argued Ren.

Darem gave Dan a look. “You know it is not nice to push a girl.”

“My brother is capable so I don’t see what’s the problem?” Again with that smug look of his.

How about I deck him over the head then we’ll know what’s the problem?

“Dan, what are you doing?” Ren hissed behind me.

Dan looked over at his brother and gave him a wink. “It’s a brother thing, Ren.” Then looking back at the two elves he added, “Don’t you agree gentlemen?”

“Yeah.” They said.

I was so confused by what just happened that I dare look at Ren for some explanation, but he seemed as clueless as I am. I looked at Nate instead and found him looking back at me. Once he saw me looking, his gaze drifted down just below my nose and he blushed while looking away.

Is he angry?

The Queen of the Elves suddenly approached me and held my hands. “I heard a lot about you from the other kingdoms. My name is Queen Siera Feradin.”

I gulped. I slowly retrieved my hands and gathered my dirtied dress and curtsied. “It’s an honor, Queen Siera. I’m Princess Rosalie.” I said. She gave me a warm smile.

“How is my son back at the palace?” She asked.

I hesitantly glanced at PRINCE Ace to see him leering at me. I gulped. “He’s reading books. Lots of it.” I said. And I hope that the queen won’t ask any more questions or it might cost me my life. That was why I was thankful when Ace’s brother intervened.

“Prince Darem Feradin.” Darren introduced himself and grinned. Then Eltur appeared next. “Prince Eltur Feradin.” Prince Eltur grinned. “What do you think of our brother?”

Oh boy...”I-”

“Will you all just – Argh!” Our attention quickly focused on Ace who was clutching his head and stumbling back in pain.

“Ace”

“Little brother!”

We all rushed into him. Later caught Ace’s arm just before he fell and helped steady him.

“What’s wrong with him?” Darren asked as he watched Ace’s agonizing face. He was starting to turn pale as a sheet.

Suddenly, Queen Siera rushed to Ace’s side and cupped his face. She placed her forehead against his then looked back at us. “It’s his power.”

Elton looked over at his mother for an explanation. “Mom, what do you mean?”

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Queen Siera brushed Ace's hair back in concern. "When an elf attempts to kill his powers, it will be stored somewhere deep within his body and gather in one place. The longer it's not used, the more power it stores, but when an elf uses his powers it comes flowing out like rapid currents. Imagine filling a tub with water and pushing it all the way down with tremendous force. Normally, that amount of force would not kill the beholder and only make them puke, but in Ace's case, I am not so sure. His power is different after all."

"Can't you do something, Queen Siera?" I asked.

Queen Siera smiled at me, but it doesn't seem to reach her eyes. "I'll see what I can do. The other problem here is his body. It's not used to handling his powers anymore that it's breaking him. Perhaps I could absorb some of his power, store it within me, and giving it back to him at a slow pace."

Darem came to Ace's side and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Baby brother, we got you, okay? We'll help." Eltur assured him.

"Whatever." Ace managed to say.

The palace door suddenly opened. "Ais?" Upon hearing the voice, Ace suddenly regained strength and pushed Eltur away, and stood as if he were not in pain anymore. Curious upon seeing Ace's weird behavior, I glanced at the door to see who it was.

It was a 4-year-old kid with black hair and blue eyes just like Ace. A little sunflower, the same color as her dress, was placed on her hair and near her little elf ears. When she saw him, she let out an excitedly squeal and ran towards him. I never saw Ace smile before or show any signs of being soft to either an animal or a kid. But as of now, there was a softness in Ace's eyes as he bent down and picked up the little girl.

"Hey, Nora." He said.

"Brother Ais!! You're back!!" Scream the little girl in glee.

"Of course I came back." Grinned Ace making me look at Ren, Dan, and Nate to see if they were seeing what I'm seeing. Judging by the drop of their jaws and a few shakes of their head to see if they were dreaming confirmed my suspicion.

This was not a dream. Ace is smiling! And he looks good! Ew!

"Are you back for good now?" Asked Nora hopefully.

"Not yet. I still need to leave after a few complications are fixed."

"Can I help?"

“I would rather you not.”

The little girls suddenly looked around and saw that there are a few unfamiliar faces in the place. She beamed. “We have visitors?” She said excitedly.

Darem came over and patted her head. “You bet, Nora. They are the people who live with Ace back at Thalia. Why don’t you introduce yourself to them?”

“Okay.” She beamed and asked Ace if she could get down. As funny as it sounds, Ace looked reluctant to let her go, but he put her down anyway.

Nora then stood in front of us as she made a curtsy. “My name is Princess Nora Fwaden. My mother is Queen Siera Fwaden. My father is King Klaus Fwaden and my brothers are Prince Eltur, Dawen, and Ais Fwaden.”

Without even thinking of it, I pinched Ren’s arm because it was so cute hearing her say Fwaden instead of Feraden. Lucky for me, Ren did not react and I looked at him only to find that he also feels the same way.

She’s so cute!

“Hi, Nora. My name is Rose.” I said and pointed to myself. “These are Prince Ren, Dan, and Nate.” I pointed to each one of them.

Nora’s gaze darted towards the twins and tilted her head to the side. “They both look alike.” She commented making Nate snort burst out in laughter while Ren and Dan only exchanged looks.

“She’s so cute I wanna cuddle her,” Ren whispered to me.

“Me too,” I said making Ren grin. “But it’s best that we do not.”

“Why?”

Instead of answering him, I gestured towards Ace, who was giving us warning looks. “I think that look means to not touch his baby sister.”

“Selfish b*****,” Ren muttered. A bit disappointed that we could not cuddle little Nora.

At that moment, Eltur placed a hand on Nora’s shoulder. “Baby, why don’t you go upstairs? Get some rest?”

Nora looked up at her brother and pouted. “But I just got here after my training.”

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“That’s exactly why you need to go.”

“No!” She said stubbornly and ran towards Ace, who then picked her up and carried her again. “I wanna spend time with Aish! He just got back!”

“Nora, come on.” This time Darem tried to persuade their sister but with no luck.

“No!” She said and turned to Ace and buried her face on his chest. Ace only brushed her hair back and kissed her forehead. A ghost of a smile appeared on his lips as he did. Looking at him and judging by the way that he acts with Nora, I could say that he has a soft spot specifically for his baby sister. He doesn’t look like a demon now.

Queen Siera came to Ace and Nora and tried speaking to her daughter, but looking at it, it doesn’t seem to work. Nora just wouldn’t listen.

“This is bad,” Eltur muttered under his breath but loud enough for us to hear. “We need to get Nora out of here.”

I looked at him. Confused on why he would ask such a darling to leave in our presence. “Why? She looks happy. And Ace looks happy too.” I said.

“Look at him,” Eltur said and we all looked at Ace. Despite the loving image that Ace was showing to his younger sister you can see a few droplets of sweat forming on his forehead, eyes seeming unfocused, and skin turning pale. “He’s suffering from the inside because he doesn’t want Nora to see him weak and worry.”

“Doesn’t make sense why he would pretend to be strong when he’s not,” I said.

At that, Eltur looked at me and smiled. “Well, that’s just that. When you have a sibling who’s younger than you, you do everything to become a good role model to them. You don’t show signs of weakness and would always appear strong when you’re not. You want them to look up to you. Since Nora is the only younger sibling of Ace, he loves her very much and would only smile and show some softness towards her.” And that’s when I did see that Ace is covering up his suffering from Nora.

Hearing his words made me remember something. My sister Stella. Only seven years old yet she already knows a lot. She’s always curious about stuff and would not stop until she finds a decent answer to things. I remember how I always struggled to answer her questions even though I have no idea what she was asking me about. I would just say clever things and pretend to be certain about my answers just to impress her. Sometimes I always find it annoying that she asks too many questions, but by the end of the day it will all be worth it when you look at me with admiration in her eyes and tell me that I’m the best sister in the world.

I miss her.

Somehow I wanted to kick myself for not seeing it. I suddenly felt guilty and decided to head to where Ace and Nora were. Once I neared them did I stop and leveled me to Nora who was still in Ace's arms. "Hey, Nora." I smiled.

"Hi." She replied.

"How old are you?"

"Four." She answered.

"That's nice," I answered. "Do you want to spend time with your brother?"

"I do."

"Do you love your brother?"

"Yes."

"And you know that he loves you, right?" At this, I felt Ace's gaze on me and looked up to see him studying me. He was probably wondering where I'm going with this conversation.

Nora nodded at my question.

I smiled. "Good then. Then you know that he won't leave you just like that. He'll still be here, but as of now he can't spend some time with you yet." I said and looked at her in the eyes for her to understand. "You see, your brother is tired and needs rest. It has been a long journey for us. And I bet that you need rest too."

Nora looked at me as she contemplated on my words. She looked at Ace next. "I'm going to sleep. You should too, Aish." She said.

"Alright." Said Ace as he gently set her down and kissed her forehead. At this, I have to cover my mouth with my hand at the sight. Ace is being affectionate. Right now at least. "Sleep well and take care."

I smiled down at Nora when I found her looking at me. She grinned. "Take care of my brother!" She said and hopped her way up the stairs to where I assume is where her room is.

She's so cute! I wish I could have held her.

"Well, that was easy," Darem said standing beside me looking up at the staircase where Nora went.

I shrugged. "Well, I do have a baby sister too." I smiled at the memory of Stella.

“Enough chit-chat. Let’s help Ace.”

Chapter 67 A Sick Prince

“In the garden. There’s a spring that can help with the healing. Take him there.” Queen Siera ordered.

In that instant, his brothers started to approach him but he waved them all away. “I can walk by myself.” He said but the moment that he took one step forward his legs gave out and he fell on the floor coughing. He groaned in pain and I could tell that he was trying to hold it on. His brothers were right there beside him and helping him up. As soon as Ace raised his head we all gasped.

Not only was his nose bleeding, but he was crying out blood too. My heart pounded at the sight. Are we going to lose Ace too? At the thought, my hands started shaking.

No. I don’t want that.

“Get him in the garden! Quick!!” The queen ordered.

We all rushed out and followed Queen Siera as she led us farther from the castle but not that far from the bark wall that surrounds Tordis. Eltur was carrying Ace behind his back and Darem was running close to his brothers. Just by looking at them, you could tell that they have a strong bond seeing as how concerned they are for one another – even though I don’t see Ace being all that caring for his sibling except Nora.

Finally, the path started to clear and the trees somehow looked thinner. We arrived at a dome-like greenhouse that was located just near the bark wall. We entered the greenhouse and I found myself staring at the trees and plants growing in it. There was a pathway made of stones lined together that leads to a rectangular solid in the middle of a pond. It was almost submerged in the pond with only an inch or so above the surface of the pond.

Ace’s brothers laid him on the stone bed in the middle of the pond– still bleeding and groaning in pain. Queen Siera headed for the pond and dipped into the water to stand beside Ace. The water reached her hips, but even though her clothes are now soaked she ignored it. She gently placed both of her hands on Ace’s head and Ace started screaming and thrashing. Vines started to appear out of nowhere and held Ace’s body in place.

His screams sent shock waves all over my body because I could feel every ounce of pain in them. On impulse Nate, Ren, Dan, and I made a move to go over to him but Eltur and Darem blocked our way.

“Sorry, but we can’t stay here and watch,” Darem said grimly through Ace’s screams.

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I started to protest, "But-"

Elton shook his head. "No. We need to stay outside. Let mother do her job to help him. As of now, we should wait outside." I wanted to argue and insist on staying but seeing the worried looks that his brother has I decided against it.

We all headed out of the greenhouse to wait outside. Everyone sat together on the ground, but before I could sit Nate pulled me back and laid down his cape on the ground before me. He gave me a look and motioned for me to sit. Before I could even thank him he suddenly left and moved to the opposite side to sit.

Seriously, what is up with him? Did I do something that made him mad?

Deciding that there would be time to ask him later, I sat on the cape that Nate had laid down for me. Ren sat beside me and Dan just next to him. Eltur and Darem just stood there and were both casting worried looks at the entrance to the greenhouse.

"So what is up with Prince Ace's powers anyway?" Ren said, addressing both Eltur and Darem. "You make it sound like whatever this gift he has is something special."

We all watched and waited for Ace's brothers to answer, but they only said nothing but exchanged wary glances with each other. They were hiding something and I bet that whatever it is, it is something important.

"Your highness," Said Nate as he addressed them formally. "If you know something that might concern Prince Ace then we have the right to know. Something like this is unnatural. We all live in one palace and if ever something similar happens to him again we want to be well informed so we would know what to do."

Between the two, Darem was the only one who still seemed doubtful while Eltur looked slightly convinced as he stopped frowning.

"Please. We want to know." I added.

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Prince Eltur sighed and ran a hand through his hair before looking back at us. "Alright."

"Eltur!" Darem protested.

"It's okay, Darem." Eltur said reassuringly to his brother. "I do think that they have the right to know." Then he looked back at us again. His eyes blazing with intensity as he did. "I'm going to trust you all on this so long as you give me your word that you will not tell another soul of this."

For a brief moment Nate, Ren, Dan, and I caught each other's gaze as if on the silent agreement. We looked back at Eltur once again and agreed to this condition.

"Alright."

"You have my word."

"Mine too."

"So is mine."

"Very well," Elton said, satisfied. Darem, on the other hand, was still having his doubts seeing as he avoided making eye contact with any of us. Not even his brother. But any thoughts of trying to change his brother's mind quickly disappeared once Eltur started talking. "To make things more understandable, I am going to start from the beginning."

"There were legends and rumors that the very first elf was loved by the spirits so much that he has been given a special gift. He can see through the eyes of animals and feel his surroundings through the forest. He can control the animals as long as they allow him and restore dead plants to life. Rumor has it that he can control vines and make trees move. It is a powerful and dangerous gift that his fellow elves feared if it fell into the wrong hands. Lucky for them, King Grubert was a kind man."

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"King Grubert? The first elf king? He doesn't have a gift!" said Dan.

"He does."

"I read books and records about previous kings and it all says there that he doesn't have any!" Dan insisted on making us all give him funny looks. "What? I read books too!" He said defensively and crossed his arms over his chest. He's pouting.

"Your information would have been accepted if you were given the real information about King Grubert."

"Real information?" This time, it was Nate who spoke and he raised an eyebrow at Eltur. "You mean to say that the information that you have given about King Grubert was false?" Nate frowned as he said all these things to Eltur. "Do you know the consequences for you and your people for handing out false information about your rulers? You could make an enemy of the whole kingdom!"

Elton nodded. "That is why I am asking you to keep this a secret."

Nate didn't seem pleased at this but shut his mouth as he listened. Eltur continued, "Actually, King Grubert was not the only one to have such a gift. King Lyorr too." At this,

Nate opened his mouth to scream at the false information of the elf people again but was cut off by Eltur with a raise of his hand. "These two kings were the only ones who ever possessed this gift in the past centuries. Ace is the third."

"Ace!?" We all screamed in unison.

"It's PRINCE!"

Chapter 68 Inheritor

All of us looked at Ren who only smiled sheepishly from our stares. "Sorry. Just got used to it." In my irritation, I slapped Ren at the back of his head. "Ow!"

And to think that I felt relieved because I thought that it was Ace! Stupid Ren.

"Yes," Eltur confirmed. "Ace is the third one who possesses such a gift. Imagine our surprise when mother, Darem, and I found him in the garden bringing dead flowers back to life." Eltur grinned at the memory. "At first we didn't have a clue what his gift was, but after a few trips to the library we finally figured it out. Ace was only 5 when his gift manifested."

"That is so unreal," I muttered.

"Yeah. Imagine our cute baby brother obtaining such a rare gift coming from previous kings. Great kings if I may add."

"Er...that too, but I was kind of talking about Ace reviving dead plants," I said.

"Ohh."

"I don't get it. If Ace's gift is this powerful and ancient why would he wish to be rid of it?" Wondered Dan.

"Oh, it's not his gift that Ace hates," Darem said for the very first time. "It's the restrictions that he hates."

"Restrictions?"

"As a prince and as the one who possesses such a gift Ace is prone to different sorts of danger especially when he's only a child. Our father didn't know of Ace's gift because his father has a weak heart and his mother doesn't want him to worry. Ace was always being kept inside and wasn't allowed to leave unless he was e*****ed by one of our palace guards. Eltur and I would often sneak him out to play with us when we were young. Looking at him back then, I could see the happiness in his eyes as he chased us. Only during those moments that Ace felt like he was a kid."

“But it didn’t last long.” Eltur patted Darem’s shoulder as he continued. “Mother found out that we had been sneaking Ace out of the castle. She was so furious that she slapped my brother and me in front of Ace. And, I guess, Ace did care for us because he started crying and begged our mother to stop. He promised her that he would never leave the palace unguarded again. Ever since then, Ace would not come with us whenever we ask him to sneak out again. He dedicated all his time to training and studying. Every morning he would be in the library to study and every afternoon he and the palace guards would go out and practice his skills in either sword fighting or archery.” There was a pause before Darem said in a very low voice that resemble a whisper, “As you can tell, Ace wanted to get rid of his powers to be rid of these restrictions....these fences that our mother had to build up for him. All because of his gift.”

There was silence as we let all the information sink in.

No wonder Ace is such a bitter prince and a bookworm. Ren spoke in my mind, making me slap him behind the head again. “Hey!”

Insensitive mutt!

We all fell into silence as we waited outside for who knows how long. The silence was deafening and suffocating that it gave me time to think about how we all misjudged Ace. Sure he’s a grumpy pant, but there was a reason for all of his actions. People always misjudge others without even knowing them that well.

As I was busy pondering over my thoughts, Queen Siera finally came out of the greenhouse and we all stood up and watched her in anticipation as we waited for news about Ace.

“Mother, is Ace..-?”

“He’s fine, Eltur.” Queen Siera rea**ured him. “Your brother is fine. He’s just resting. Although whether he will wake up soon is up to him. I’ve already done my part on calming down the flow of energy from his body.” The moment she said it made me that dark circles were forming under Queen Siera’s eyes. Also, her eyes were a bit puffy, which I a**ume was that she cried while trying to help Ace.

Everyone let out a sigh of relief at the news, but not fully because there is still the matter of when Ace will wake up.

Queen Siera let out a tired sigh. “We need to get back and explain things to your father. I think now is the time for us to explain some....matters to him. I’m afraid it is going to take some time.” She looked at her two sons then.

“But, mother. Who will stay here with Ace?” Darem asked.

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"I'll stay and watch." Nate suddenly said and we all turned our attention to him. Nate gave us a look as he nodded. "You three go ahead and get some rest."

Ren and Dan nodded. "Alright. We'll be back to take your place later." Said Ren.

"Thank you." Queen Siera said to Nate who only bowed his head respectfully at the king. As he started walking towards the greenhouse I followed him.

"I'm staying too," I said. I wanted to see how Ace is doing and I also want to have a word with Nate about his behavior.

At this, Nate turned back with wide eyes. "What? No!" He protested making me frown at him. He and I need to talk.

"Are you sure, Rose?" Dan asked. I nodded. "Well then. Ren will stay too!" He suddenly declared.

"What?!" Ren. "Why?!"

"Because," Dan answered, which makes no sense at all.

"No. You guys need rest for you to take over watch duty. Nate and I will stay." I said.

Ren suddenly has a weird look on his face that I couldn't point out. "I don't like leaving you here alone."

"What are you talking about, Ren? I'm not alone. Nate will be here and so is an unconscious Ace."

"It's just..." Ren paused and looked away. "Sorry. I don't understand why I said that."

"Ren, if you want to stay, then stay!" Dan insisted.

"Actually," Darem spoke. "We need you two to come with us and help explain things to our father."

"Oh...sure." Said Ren. At this, Dan glared at Darem, who looked away and blinked his eyes innocently.

"Well then. You two take care and keep an eye on our brother," Eltur said and he, Darem, and Queen Siera gave us their thanks before leaving with Ren and Dan.

As soon as they were gone I heard Nate letting out a frustrated sigh as he marched into the greenhouse hurriedly. I was about to follow him when I remember his cape lying on the ground. I went to pick it up before following him in.

I saw him standing by the edge of the pond as he looked at Ace. I walked and joined him. Ace was still laying down on the platform. Vines wrapped around his arms and legs loosely as if the vines themselves were protecting Ace from outside danger.

His skin was starting to return its color. He was becoming tan from being exposed to so much sun during our travels. His hair has also grown a bit longer and has become messy. His ears were now sharper and his face somehow becoming more defined in shape. He looks like a real elf now. Beautiful and elegant.

“So Ace didn’t have a proper childhood. No wonder he’s so stingy and strict.” I commented as I looked at Ace and willed him to wake up soon.

“Yeah.” Came Nate’s reply as he moved back and walked to sit on the stairs.

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I followed and sat beside him. “You know, you are never getting his cape back.” I grinned and showed him his cape. “I kinda like it.”

“Sure. You can keep it.”

“Are you mad at me?”

This time Nate looked at me in surprise. “What?”

“You seem to have been keeping your distance lately and it makes me wonder if I angered you or something.”

“Oh sorry.” Nate looked away and stared at the ground. “It’s just that something has been bothering me.”

“What is it? You can tell me anything. We’re buddies after all.”

Nate gave me a side glance and I couldn’t help but notice that he was looking at my lips. He quickly looked away. “I’m not sure if I should tell you.”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “Why not?”

He shrugged. “Because it’s embarra**ing and silly.”

“If you’re worried that I will laugh, then I promise that I won’t.”

Nate studied me. An unsure look appeared on his face. "Yeah....No."

"Fine. Suit yourself. Then you won't get awesome advice from me."

That made Nate chuckle. "Whatever you say, Rose."

And that ended our conversation seeing as how Nate seemed to block any of my attempts to start one. I don't know how long we sat there but I was pretty sure that it was long enough that my back started hurting that I had to lay down Nate's cape on the floor and sit on it. From time to time we check up on Ace for any signs of him gaining consciousness. Nothing. All we have in the assurance that he's alive is his even breathing.

I got so impatient that I unconsciously reached out to shake him awake. The vines around him started to react and wrap around my hand and pulled me to the water. I almost drowned if Nate wasn't there to pull me back. Because of that, I sat farther away from the pond as possible. I almost drowned yesterday in a lake and now a pond? What's next? The bathtub?

I was starving. It was starting to get late and the sky was already dark when the twins returned holding out a basket that they handed to me and Nate. "Dinner."

"Yes! Thank you." I said and grabbed the basket from Dan and ran back to Nate as we split the sandwiches evenly among us.

"How's Ace?" Ren asked.

"Sleeping. It doesn't seem like he'll be waking up soon."

"What if he doesn't wake up? What then? Are we going to"

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"No, Dan," I said. "If you think that we're going to leave him then you are wrong. Ace is going to wake up soon and we will all return to Thalia. Together."

Dan looked down at me and smiled. He reached out and ruffled my hair. "Yeah, you're right, Rose. Sorry for doubting his recovery. Why don't you and Nate finish your food so you can go back and get some rest?"

"Okay."

Nate and I finished our food. Once we were done, we bid the twins goodnight before walking out of the greenhouse and headed for the castle. It was dark but the moon gave us enough light to guide us through. On our way to the castle, Nate and I didn't speak to each other and kept our distance.

I was so lost in my thought that when I turned in Nate's direction he was gone. I stopped and started looking around for the idiot vampire. "Nate?" I called out to Nate.

No one answered.

"Nate? Hey! Where are you?" I turned 360 degrees in search of him. "Nate? NATE-!"

"Shh!" Nate suddenly appeared behind me and clasped my mouth. Stupid vampire stealth.

I turned around to face him and let out a sigh of relief. I removed his hand from my mouth and glared at him. "Where did you go?"

Despite my unpleasant mood, Nate grinned and extended a closed fist to me. "Look." He then opened his hand and two fireflies flew out into the night.

"Wow. Nate, where did you-"

"Come on. This way." Nate grabbed my hand and pulled me to the side and past the forest into another clearing. "See?"

I gasped when I saw the scenery in front of us. The clearing was covered in night flowers and they bloom only at night. The flowers themselves are already beautiful, but what made it more magical are the swarms of fireflies dancing. Casting a glow to my left then to my right. One perched on my nose and Nate laughed and waved the firefly away. "Beautiful isn't it? Good thing I was able to see it before we pa**ed it completely."

"Yeah." I agreed and tried to catch a firefly with my hands. I missed it. I tried again jumping and reaching up when they flew higher. Behind me, I heard Nate chuckle.

"Wow, you s*** at this." He said. I ignored him as I continued to catch some fireflies. I felt myself smiling as I did. You can't blame me. It was rare to see fireflies at home. I could only see a few of them at night and they were only about five or four fireflies. This was something new. I have never seen this many fireflies before. Sure I have seen them on television, but not in real life. Somehow it makes me feel light as I twirled around and danced with the fireflies – no longer interested in catching them. "Hey, slow down. You're going to-" My foot caught on something and I fell back. There was a whooshing sound behind me and suddenly Nate was there. "-fall."

"Sorry," I said and he turned around to make me face him. Once he did we he froze. Nate and I were only inches apart. His eyes then lowered and trained to my lips.

"Um..." He pushed himself away and cleared his throat. "We should go." He said and walked away without even waiting for me. Just before he walked away I heard him mutter, "Stupid Mermaid."

I stared at his back for a while as I thought about his words. Mermaid? What does the mermaid have to do with his mood?

“Stupid vampire,” I said as I followed him back.

As we walked, my mind drifted somewhere in the greenhouse and I suddenly thought of Ace. I sure hope that he wakes up soon. Fred already left and I just can't imagine losing another face again when we go back to Thalia. Even though he and I don't get along I would still miss his presence. Especially in the library. Somehow, seeing him in the library seemed comforting and natural. I couldn't imagine entering it and finding him missing.

“You good for nothing PRINCE,” I whispered in the night as I gazed up at the stars. “Wake up soon or I'll burn every book of 79 clues and P*cry J*cks*n back at the palace. And I'll make sure you'll never get a copy again. Ever.”

Chapter 69 Mr

The next morning, I woke up early because of the loud chirping of the birds outside of my room. Normally I would throw a fit because I am not a morning person. But as of now, I could barely sleep because I am still worried about a certain prince.

I took a shower and got dressed for the day. One of the things that I love about this place is that the Elves respect your privacy – not sure if this is the right word. When I woke up, they simply had everything prepared for me. From the dresses to bath essentials, but I have not seen any Elf in my room. Then I thought about yesterday how a group of Elves simply appeared before the princes and me.

The dress that I got was a very silky peach that looks like an evening gown but more flowy and elegant. Somehow it reminds me of what the Romans back on Earth used to wear – according to books and movies anyway. I started pacing in the room as I brushed my hair in trying to distract myself.

The room that I am currently staying in is very different from the others that I visited. It was circular with glowing orbs floating in the room serving as lights. Furniture was made of polished wood and the bed has curving branches as side posts. Gla** windows and a door leading out to the open balcony and you can hear different birds singing outside.

I stopped pacing and placed the brush down on the table. How is Ace doing? Did he wake up? Maybe I should go and see for myself. The twins might still be there.

Having that thought in mind I headed out. I don't exactly remember the details of the place and I certainly don't have the time. I tried to remember the directions from last night on how to navigate myself to the exit.

Well, that was supposed to be my goal but I think I took a wrong turn and ended up somewhere that is certainly not the exit.

“Um...” I wondered out loud as I stared at a large spacious room with a long table and chairs. Silver plates and sp***s lined the table and in front of each chair. Without meaning to, I think I must have ended up at the dining hall.

Wow, Rose. Even without thinking about it, I looked for food. AMAZING.

“Rose?” Someone called and I turned to see who it was. I found Dan standing outside of the kitchen door and carrying a basket. He was looking at me curiously and was probably wondering why I’m out so early. “This is new.” He grinned and started to head towards me. “Morning, Rose. What are you doing up so early?”

I smiled. “Morning, Dan. And um...I can’t sleep. Not with all that had happened yesterday.” I shrugged and shuffled on my feet.

Dan nodded. “Yeah. I know how you feel.” He sounded solemn. Silence fell for a few seconds between us before Dan broke it off as he offered me the basket. “Hungry? I brought a lot of food for Ren.” He reached into the basket and handed me an apple. “Here.” He said.

I gladly took the apple from him because it looks delicious. “Thanks,” I said and took a bite of the apple. “By the way, where is Ren?” I asked after I swallowed the bite.

“Back at the greenhouse. He’s guarding Ace while I grab something to eat.” He said and his face suddenly changed as though an evil thought entered his mind. He was grinning mischievously at himself that when he looked at me I couldn’t help but take a step back. “Say, Rose. Would you like to come with me to the greenhouse?” He asked and inched his face closer to mine.

“S-Sure?” I stuttered. Feeling uncomfortable at the sudden closeness and, also, because of Dan’s weird behavior. “Um...how about I go get Nate first to switch places with you and Ren?”

“Great!” Dan beamed and handed me the basket, which was a little heavy for me. “Here.”

“Dan, what-?”

“You go on ahead. I’ll just catch up to you later, alright? And don’t bother with Nate. I’ll make sure he’s busy – I mean – he’ll come right after you. Be quick though. Ren’s hungry and he might pa** out. See ya!” And with that Dan turned around and started to run away from me.

“Wait!” I called out to him. “How do I find my way out of the castle?” I yelled at him but it was already too late. That b***** already left and was nowhere in sight.

Honestly, I don’t even know how I managed to survive this kind of life with them.

It took me a while but one of the maids in the palace was kind enough to show me the door out of the castle. I remembered the way back to the greenhouse and it only took me a few minutes longer than the last to get there with the heavy basket and all.

As soon as I arrived, the first thing I did was to go near the pond to see how Ace was doing. As I got closer to the pond I noticed a figure sitting down on the stairs with his head buried in his arms. It was Ren and he was sleeping. He must have been tired of staying all night to watch over Ace. If so then he needs that sleep.

Very slowly I lowered the basket on the ground. I decided that I would leave the basket here and leave afterward after I see how Ace is doing. I took off my shoes and carefully tiptoed my way up the step to reach Ace.

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Almost there~

“Rose, is that you?” I froze with one foot in the air and slowly turned to my side to Ren, who still had his head buried in his arms. When I didn’t answer he lifted his head slowly to look at me. His eyes were still drowsy from sleep and he looks adorable as he rubbed his eyes. “What are you doing here? And..” He looked up to the gla** ceiling of the greenhouse and frowned. He looked back at me. “...why this early?” He finished.

He placed his half-raised foot down and stood up properly. “You know Dan said the same thing earlier. I came here bearing gifts hidden in that basket-”

Ren sniffed the air. “Roasted beef, bread, apples, and mangoes.”

“-and also came here to check up on HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS Ace Feradin.”

At the mention of Ace, Ren and I turned our heads towards the pond where Ace lays. I went a little closer as I stood just at the edge of the pond and looked down on him. There has been no change in him at all since Nate and I watched over him last night. Still the same lightly tanned skin, even breathing, and shaky hair. Without even noticing it, Ren was beside me and watching Ace.

“Still no sign of him waking up. I’m afraid-”

“Don’t.” I cut him off and gave him a firm look. “Don’t even think about it. If you believe that he won’t wake up soon then he really won’t. Believe that he can and he will.”

Ren looked at me and studied me. He smiled. "Yeah, you're right. I'm sorry for doubting." He said and looked back at Ace.

"You better wake up soon, Ace because I will keep on calling you Ace and there's no one stopping me from calling you that."

I chuckled. "Yeah, you stupid menopausal jerk, wake up or I'll put chopstick up your nose."

Ren laughed and looked at me. "What are chopsticks?"

It was my turn to laugh then. "You laughed and yet you do not know what chopstick is?"

He shrugged. "It sounds funny." He said and when I continued to laugh, he blushed in embarrassment and looked back at Ace. "Maybe these vines are too tight. Let's loosen them up." He said and started reaching for the vines.

That alarmed me and I stepped forward to stop him. "Ren, don't-" Too late. Ren got too close and the vines started to come alive. They wrapped around Ren's wrist and started pulling him to the water.

"What the-!?" Before the vines could fully drag him down I grabbed him by the waist and pulled from behind. Although I think the reason why Ren isn't drowning in the pond yet was because of his werewolf strength. I'm just here for backup.

Other vines came alive too as if sensing that the opponent is stronger. Vines started twisting and wrapping around both of Ren's legs. He was starting to slip. "Ren you idiot! Why would you do something as stupid as that!?"

"I didn't know!"

"Well, I warned you!"

"Too late for that." He said as he tried to pull his body away from the pond.

"Idiot," I muttered completely forgetting that Ren is a werewolf with sensitive hearing.

"Hey, care to enlighten me how you knew that this would happen if I reach out for Ace?"

"Uhh..." I stopped pulling as I thought of an excuse. "Oh wow! What a pretty b***erfly." I was suddenly distracted at the sight of the emerald-winged b***erfly flying above us.

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"Hey! Don't stop pulling," He yelled as he started to slip again.

“As if my strength is helping!” I went back and dug my heels on the ground to pull him back. “And um.....Nate told me about it?”

“Lie! You pulled the same stunt, haven’t you? You’re the stupid one.”

“You’re calling me stupid, stupid?”

“I’m not stupid. You’re stupid.”

“Well you’re not only stupid but you stupid.”

“Ha. Who’s stupid now? There is no such thing as stooooopid. Just stupid. Like you.”

“You’re not from my world so you don’t know our slangs, stooooopid.”

“That word doesn’t even make sense, stupid.”

“Ren is stooooopid. Look at me. Vines wrap around my arms and legs because I am so stooooopid to ignore Rose’s warnings about Mr. Creeper vines. Now I am hanging on for dear life and having Rose to help me not to pummel to my death.” I said mockingly.

At that moment Ren let out an animalistic growl and started lashing at the vines. His arms and legs are now free from it. Once the vines retreated, he looked back at me with a smirk. “You shouldn’t anger a werewolf.” He said.

“You shouldn’t anger Mr. Creeper Vines.” I pointed out. It doesn’t matter what he says. I will win this argument.

“Forget it.” He sighed. He went to pick up the basket below the steps and motioned for me to come. “What do you say we put this argument to rest and eat?” He offered. Looked into the basket, grabbed a cloth, and looked at me with a grin.

“You don’t need to ask.” I grinned.

Ren and I then had a small picnic farther away from the pond and yet just close enough so we can keep an eye on Ace. Even though the food was all for Ren, he split them evenly and gave me a plate of my share. At first, I told him that I could get half of the half because I felt bad eating the food that Dan prepared for him. But Ren wasn’t having any of it and insisted that I eat. He said that he doesn’t like girls with small appet**es and that it is rude if I don’t eat when I am offered food. In the end, we started eating.

“So my brother sent you here huh?” Ren asked as he bit into his slice of bread. “Well, where is he?”

"I don't know. He said that he'll go and get Nate so we can switch places and have you guys rest." I said. It has been two hours now and Dan still hasn't returned. "Maybe he fell asleep or something."

"Nonsense. With you here my brother would surely come." Ren said and frowned at his bread.

I sighed. "Is your brother always this weird?"

"He wasn't." Ren insisted.

"What did you do to him?" I asked when he looked at the bread with dislike and I could not get why. Does the bread taste bad for him?

"Oh, sorry." He said with a shake of his head and started munching on it. "I don't even know why I did that." He mumbled, swallowed his food before looking at me again.

"Rose? Have you seen that little spirit wolf lately since we were in Sanver?"

"Um...yeah. I saw him by the stalls in Hazel and the other day in the cave where the mermaid took me. He helped me escape the cave when he dug a hole for me." I said and remembered the little wolf back in the mermaid cave. Come to think of it. I haven't seen the little guy since the mermaid incident.

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"The wolf helped you out?" Ren looked surprised.

"Yeah. Why?" I asked.

Ren shook his head. "Nothing. It just seems unusual that a spirit would help someone out. Or even follow you to Hazel. Strange." He said and we fell silent afterward and continued to eat.

Once we were finished, we placed the plates back in the basket. We didn't place the cloth back yet for we were still using it as we sat and waited for Dan and Nate to get here. It's already been four hours and still, the two did not arrive.

"What is taking them so long?" I asked impatiently.

"I don't know." Ren yawned. "Maybe Prince Eltur and Prince Darem have them."

I looked at Ren. His eyelids were starting to fall and he had bags under his eyes. He still needs sleep and I bet that since yesterday he didn't even get a full 8 hours of sleep. "You're tired," I said and started to get up. "You wait here and I'll call for Nate so you can get back and have a rest."

“No.” Ren grabbed my hand before I could leave. “If you think I’m going to let you walk out there alone then you are wrong. Who knows what kind of trouble you’re going to get into.” He said.

Something about the way that he said it was offensive and insulting that I pulled my hand away from him and glared. “Are you telling me that I can’t take care of myself and that I am a walking disaster?”

Technically I am. But I don’t want others to point out the obvious for me. I have pride!

“T-That’s not what I meant!” He looked surprised at my reaction that he seemed to panic a bit.

“Then what?” I glared.

“It’s just that.....I don’t want you to get hurt and it worries me when I can’t find you right away.” His voice was getting softer and softer as he said it and he looked at the ground. “It already happened twice. The first was during the time that you ran away. The second was with the mermaid. I can’t explain how useless it always makes me feel when that happens. And during those times, Prince Ace is the one who always finds you. Does it s*** you know? Dan and I are the werewolves in the group who are supposed to be good at these things but it was always Prince Ace that finds you. I mean, not that it matters any more than your safety. I don’t care about it. I just want to...I don’t know. Be there to protect you I guess.”

Somehow Ren’s words were touching and beautiful. It doesn’t seem like an insult anymore. Instead, I hear in his words that he cares for my safety. I couldn’t help but smile. Now, this is the Ren I know. Caring and kind. A little crazy and weird, but whatever.

I bent down and started patting his head making him look up at me. I grinned. “Now that’s a good boy. Who’s the good boy? Ren is!” I cooed.

At that Ren immediately frowned and tried to reach for my hand but I already drew it back as I laughed. “Bad dog.” That infuriated him more as he got up and that was my cue to run.

“Damn it, Rose! I said stop calling me a dog!”

“Bad dog, bad dog. Show some manners, pup!” I looked back and laughed at Ren’s expression. He was getting close and I sped up, but I didn’t reach far because Ren already grabbed my wrist, pulled me to him, and gave me a noogie. “Sit boy! Play dead! Hey! What does a dog say when he’s hurt? Ow ow ow! Ren that hurts stops it. Bad dog!”

“Keep making those jokes, Rose.”

I laughed anyway because it was so fun teasing Ren about being a werewolf. He gets worked up so easily. "Did I offend the little doggy?"

"Seriously, Rose, I'll-"

"Aish?"