

Chapter 17 Forbidden Fruit

The women rushed through the castle, finally entering the last hallway to the side exit. They then planned to use the woods as cover. However, as soon as they reached the door, a smothering barrier collapsed around them. It was a trap.

Lucy pressed against the barrier and winced as searing heat attacked her fingers. Nita and Terra collapsed to the ground.

"Mom!" Elena cried out as her mother slid down to the ground. "What's happening? What is wrong?"

"We've been drugged." Terra spat out. "He planned for this. He laced our drinks with something at the meeting last night. That means Jasper and the others too."

"Damn it." Lucy's body shook as she felt her energy being drained. "What the hell is this?"

"Something strong enough to subdue all of us. Even me and Justice. It has to be the devil's fruit." Nita let out a shaky breath as she laid her head down.

"The devil's fruit was destroyed, right? Its use is forbidden." Elena's mind raced thinking about it. This fruit had been eliminated because of how dangerous it was. Depending on how much you

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consumed, it temporarily drained your powers and could even cause short-term paralysis. It could even affect deities if they ate it. But it was not supposed to exist anymore. That means that Alaric's grandfather would have stored them away in secret. The vampires never conformed with others. Even the demons were on board with destroying the fruit.

Elena wasn't in the meeting last night. Was she the only one besides Aba who wouldn't be affected? She looked at her mother's clouded eyes and knew she was communicating with her father.

"They have all collapsed too. Even Nora and Taric. Aba is the only one unaffected." Lucy rested her head on her daughter's lap. "The barrier is meant to keep you trapped here."

"This barrier can't hold me because it can't keep the shadows out." Elena looked over at the large columns that reached the ceiling. The shadows reached from outside of the barrier and into it seamlessly. The shadow was connected. It was a good thing she kept this skill a secret. "I'm pretty sure I can get out of here, but I can't leave you."

"Go! Elena, he plans to destroy your blood bond with Aba. He knows you are mates. You have to get out of here. Don't worry about us. He isn't going to hurt us. Aba is protecting your sister, and she will be safe with Taric once he recovers. But

there is no one to protect you."

"I don't need protecting." Elena smiled at her mother. "I can save you."

"Elena, he has thought this out well. Who knows what he has planned for you? You have to go." Her mother's voice became slow and faded. Paralysis began to set in, making her unable to speak. *Run Elena and hide. We don't want a war. We have to protect the innocent vampires. Please, go. I need to know you're safe. I'm begging you.*

"Mom." Elena pursed her lips together as she watched the tears stream down her mother's cheeks. How could she ignore her mother's pleas? But how could she leave them like this? She needed to reunite with her sister. The two of them together couldn't be stopped. She was sure the main entrance would be heavily guarded but there was no way that was the only way in. The vampires would have secret entrances and escape holes. They would never only make an underground kingdom with one way out.

"Mamma, don't worry about me. I'll escape." She wiped her mother's cheeks as she gingerly moved her head to the floor. She would leave and look for another entrance. She would unite with her sister and Aba and, together, confront Alaric. She leaned down and kissed her mother's forehead, forcing a brave smile. She would return and make her

grandfather pay for this.

She rose to her feet, looking at the shadow on the floor. *Please, let this work.*

A moment later her body connected with the shadow and was pooled over to the other side, no longer contained in the barrier. She stared at her mother and the others for a brief moment before she turned and ran. Her mother was right. If her grandfather had gone this far, he had something planned for her as well. How far would he go, exactly? Would he force her to be marked by another just to make sure she couldn't be with Aba? At this point, he was crazy and there was no limit to what he could do. She didn't care what his reasonings were. He had gone too far.

"Aba, stand aside!" Alaric glared at him as he blocked Lenore and Taric from his view.

"So this was your plan. You thought Lenore would leave the barrier and you would capture her. Then you'd do something with the demon prince. You probably planned to imprison him, right? You can't kill him because it's against Rogio's wishes. So you had something else in mind."

"Give me Lenore!" Alaric growled as a smirk crawled over Aba's lips.

"Come and get her." Aba grinned as the man

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remained frozen in place. "I guess everything didn't go according to plan, huh? You assumed I ate the food that was left in my room. But I didn't stay in my room last night. I'm surprised your soul servant didn't watch and make sure of this. Of course, you had the servant following Lucy, huh? Afraid she would call for backup?" He looked over

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at Taric, who was holding Lenore on the floor. Taric was weakened but not completely paralyzed like the others. Justice also wasn't paralyzed, but he was in no condition to fight. "You've been leaving food for Taric for years. So he never would suspect that it would get tampered with now. Very conniving and almost demon-like of you." He

looked back at Alaric, who stared blankly at him.

"Give me Lenore, or else Elena will be the one who suffers."

Aba growled and then scoffed at Alaric. "Very demon-like." He might have hurt his connection with Elena and his ability to pick up on her feelings by blocking the bond, but he still knew better.

Handing over Lenore would make Elena hate him.

"The demon side of me would give you Lenore in a heartbeat but I am not all demon. Handing over Lenore would hurt Elena the most."

"She will be in excruciating pain. It is all part of the process, unfortunately. I can't stop that from happening to her. However, I can force a mate on her."

Aba's eyes flickered at him darkly. Minor panic set in until he caught the slight wink from Justice. A simple gesture letting him know not to worry. Whatever it was, he couldn't mind link or say but this must mean Elena was safe. He narrowed his eyes on Alaric as he assessed the man. Suddenly, he realized something. Something he should have already noticed.

"And there it is." Aba glared at Alaric and nodded his head slowly. "I know Alaric well. Very well. You have done a fantastic job all the way until just now. Alaric would never force a mate on his grandchildren. It's a very sensitive topic for him,

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considering the fate of his parents. You look like him, smell like him, and sound like him. But no matter how crazy Alaric might become... no matter how much he wanted to protect this kingdom, he wouldn't force a mate bond. So, the question is, who are you?" He was now convinced that Alaric wasn't mentally there. Sure, it was his body, but not him. This was someone who knew about the devil's fruit. Something he was certain Alaric knew nothing about.

"A possession." Taric muttered as his eyes fixated on Alaric.

Alaric began to change after the first shadow attack. But for a possession someone at the banquet had to have done something. And this would have to be someone strong enough to possess the vampire king. Aba furrowed his brows as he began to think. This wasn't making sense.

"Of course." Taric clicked his tongue as he put it together. "King Vladimir, I see you bound your soul to be brought back. But I think it's rather cruel of you to take over your great grandson's body. It's something my father would do. But who would you have trusted to hold on to your soul? Who's the traitor who betrayed King Alaric to do this to him?" He adjusted himself more upright as he held Lenore's body close. She wasn't able to move but she was listening to every word. He purposely voiced this so that Lenore's father and the others

could hear this.

"Don't listen to them. This is what demons do. They create doubt and prey upon it. Nice try, but no one believes this nonsense." Alaric said, as he looked at the guards. "Take my son and his men to the area that is prepared. They'll be safe from the shadows there." His guards moved to Derek and then began to pick each person up. "Go on. I am fine here on my own."

"Smart. Better lock up the ones closest to you who would notice you are not the same person. Are you locking up the queen too?" Taric smirked as he saw the man's eyes twitch. The last of the guards left, binding Justice so he couldn't move.

"I have the queen in a safe place as well. I won't risk losing her."

"Of course," Taric nodded sarcastically. "Alaric respects his deity and would not have tried to kill me. However, that was your plan all along. I wonder how my father would feel if he knew you were still waltzing around." His father and Vladmir hated each other. In fact, it was because of the demon king that Vladmir was destroyed.

A cruel smile spread over the vampire king's face as he relaxed on his heels. No one was around to hear them anymore. "Why don't you run to daddy and tell him?"

"So, you admit it?" Aba watched as the man sneered at him.

"What has this kingdom become when the likes of you live in the palace?" He stared at Lenore and then sighed angrily. "I guess there is no choice. I wanted them both, but at least I have Elena."

"What are you talking about?" Aba curled his fingers in a tight ball.

"Fvcking sick! Those are your great great granddaughters! What a bastard." Taric gripped Lenore tighter as he felt his powers stirring. The devil's fruit couldn't keep him down for long, and already his strength was returning.

"Two primordial females would strengthen the vampires. There is nothing sick about it. This is normal for beasts and monsters. We aren't humans. Animals breed with blood relations all the time. This is how the strong get stronger."

"You planned to make them your mates?!" Aba snarled, feeling his deadly rage returning.

"I never anticipated they would have found their mates so soon after I took this body over. A miscalculation and, because of it, I lost one." The vampire king clicked his tongue. It would be suicide to take Lenore from the demon prince. And this was his one chance to kill him. He wouldn't get another opportunity. At least he still

had Elena, though.

"What happened to Alaric?" Taric asked the question Lenore linked in his mind. Was her real grandfather dead now? She was terrified for Elena and needed to help protect her. But she couldn't move and didn't know how long she would be like this.

"His soul is being kept safe. I wouldn't hurt him."

My King! A guard's voice echoed in his mind. A moment later, two men flashed in front of him, kneeling.

"My King, Elena is nowhere to be found. She has escaped."

"What do you mean she has escaped?!" He growled angrily, looking around. She would most likely be heading in this direction, trying to get to her sister and mate. Was she out there listening? He didn't sense her presence.

"Find her, now! Hunt her down!" The king bellowed at the two men before he stormed back towards the castle. He had to at least have Elena. He needed one of them to produce a new generation of elite vampires. She would be used as breeding stock. He hated to do something like this to a relative, but it was a necessary evil to bring the vampires to power. Through her womb, he would create a new colony of vampires. Direct

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descendants of a primordial vampire. His plan was perfect. It would have been better with both twins, but as long as he had one, it would still work.

Aba felt his arms shaking with rage as the vampire

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king disappeared from his sight. There was no time to lose. He had to get to Elena. *Taric, how do I get out of here?* A black aura rippled like waves from his body as the demon prince rose to his feet, lifting Lenore in his arms.

Follow me.

