

Chapter 57

Atlas POV

"Tell me, Atlas, why do you not want me?". The ultimate question. One that made sense until I met her. Everything about her was starting to scream home, and while one part of me hated it, the other part was stubborn and was going to stick to it. I could blame the stubbornness on Kai, but in the end, I know it's all me.

Ava Pov

He seemed lost in his head after I asked the question. He looked at me, and I searched his eyes for the slightest emotion, but he kept his face straight, giving nothing away. "Women killed my mother," he said, and my breath caught. I looked at Rose, who was sitting by the tree, looking at Atlas with a sad look.

"Tell me your story," I told him, taking a seat on the ground. He was still my mate, and even though I had a mission to find Brandon, I still had to sort things out with Atlas too. He looked at me strangely before sitting across from me and looking at the sparkling lake.

"Five years ago, my father and mother ruled this land. Our kingdom of Draconis. The realm we are in right now is called the Shadow Realm. We stay secluded from other realms, as is our custom. The kingdom you see across the barrier belongs to the witches. Our kingdom was always at war with the witches for as long as I can

remember. There was a time when our kingdoms were at peace, but that peace died when the queen of witches of that time died, leaving the dark witches to take over and rule. They were leaderless for years, attempting to attack our kingdom, until a new queen came along and the attacks stopped. Around that same time, my mother was kidnapped and remained missing. She was pronounced dead after months of searching. Being kidnapped, right underneath our eyes, takes someone with serious power. Something only a witch can possess. I was only 18 at the time. My brother met his mate a few months after it happened. Her name was Sorena. Strangely enough, you remind me of her. She, too, had purple eyes, but her hair was different," he said.

Sorena. Where have I heard that name before? Then it came to me.

"That was who you thought I was when I rescued you. You called me Sorena," I told him, and he nodded.

"Like I said, you remind me of her. Your resemblance could be uncanny. I was attracted to her for an unknown reason that, even to this day, I can't put my finger on, but her attraction to me was more than a simple crush. I always had reason to believe she was obsessed with me. She was married to Adam, my brother. The one trying to lay claim to you," he said with a low growl. I waited for him to keep going.

"She was a witch, like you. I hated the idea of a witch being in my kingdom, but she kept my brother's dragon at bay. When we go so long without our mates after mating, we get what is known as dragon sickness. It starts with scales appearing on the human skin. Then your eyes turn lizard-like. The final stage is when you turn fully into your dragon and are unable to change back into human form. Only one dragon in history has survived dragon sickness after full transition, but the mate he had was a witch, and she used dark magic to turn him back into a human. The dark magic consumed her, though, as it does all others, and she was killed. Dragon sickness is what my father had when my mother went missing, but he controlled it with the water from the lake. Anyway, one night she tried to seduce me. I turned her down. I would not betray my brother like that. She told him differently. She somehow convinced Adam that I raped her, and I believe it's where his hatred for me started.

He plotted with the witch of that time, who was the head of the witches. She made me believe that she killed my father before sending me to your realm. The vision also showed Adam killing her, though I'm not sure how true that is either." He explained. I motioned for him to keep going.

"That witch portaled me over to the demon you all fought against, and he kept me captive, stealing my looks for his agenda with your sister. He made his demons torture me and Jessica. Jessica was my only comfort through the years, as she did her best to protect me. Five years later, you found me, and you know the rest," he said. I nodded. I could never forget what followed.

"What happened to Sorena?" I asked. He seemed sad about the question.

"As it turns out, my father is not dead. Rather, it is in our prison for the murder of Sorena. For what reason? It's unknown, but I will be going to him to find out why after I take you back to your room," he said. I shook my head.

"I'm going with you," I told him.

"No, you're not. The only person who hates witches even more than I do is my father. It was him who instilled this in me," he said.

"Look. Yes, your reasons for hating witches are understandable, but that does not change the fact that you are still mated to me, and I am a witch. We may never know why my goddess mated me to you, but I intend to see this through and get all the facts before you reject me." I told him defiantly. He looked conflicted as many emotions played on his face, but in the blink of an eye, they settled back into his blank face. He nodded.

"Fine then. Let's go," he said, leading me to his prisons, which were made out of the same black brick. Rose walked behind me. I could tell some of the guards here were not humans, but another creature. I was unsure of what they were. They wore black shirts and black jeans with weapons on their belts. They had three eyes in the shape of a triangle on their faces, and all eyes looked towards us as we went inside before

retreating back to their stance. I followed Atlas, who led me to a security room with cameras. He cleared the room and gave me a headset, setting it in his father's room. "Stay here," he said, and I nodded. I watched him through the cameras as he made his way to the deep part of the dungeon until he came to a cell. Inside, leaning against a wall with a book in his hands, was a man who looked like an older version of Atlas, except his eyes were hazel. His black hair flew in every direction as it framed his face. His face had small scales on it. His eyes went to Atlas. Rose stood beside me, watching. His father's eyes went wide. He stood up and went up to the cage, grabbing the handlebars, which seemed to burn him.

"Neon crystal handlebars. The only element that can harm dragons," Rose said, and I nodded. She turned her attention back to her mate.

"Dad," Atlas said, and I could see his relief all over his face. It matched his father's, who returned the same look.

"I thought you were dead. Adam told me he sent you to die," his dad said, reaching out to grab Atlas' hand. Atlas held his hand, careful not to touch the bars.

"He lied. I have so many questions, dad. I thought you were dead, too. That witch showed me a vision that she had killed you and that Adam had killed her. I grieved you for years," Atlas told him, with his sad eyes looking sad. Same as his father.

"Before I reached her, Adam sent me through a portal back into the castle. I don't know what happened between him and that witch. All I know is that she was never heard from again after that day. Adam said he killed her, but if he said you were dead too, then he must also be lying about her as well," his dad said. Atlas nodded.

"I came." Atlas started, but his dad held up a hand.

"I know why you are here, Atlas, but the answer I have for you won't make sense. No one believed me when I told them, and everyone, including my own brother, locked me down here because of it," he said.

"I need you to tell me anyway. Killing Sorena. That does not make any sense. What could she possibly have done to you?" Atlas asked him. His father shook his head.

"That thing who claimed to be mated with your brother was not a person. It was not a simple witch, either. It was not even human,' he said, growling. Atlas and I were both puzzled. His father continued.

"When Adam portaled me into the castle, I ended up near his room. I heard chanting from inside his room. Spell casting. Sorena knew it was prohibited in the castle. I opened his door and found her covered in blood with a book in front of her. She was using dark magic, but this seemed different from any dark magic I had ever seen. A man lay dead at her feet, with a knife in his chest. I have yet to figure out who the man was. She looked up at me, not even surprised that I was there. It was like she was expecting me. She gave me an evil smile, and her eyes shifted from purple to black. The mark of a demon," he said, and Atlas growled.

"Fucking demons," Atlas said in annoyance.

"Exactly. I acted quickly, grabbing my sword and stabbing her to death. As soon as I did, the man's body, along with her book, disappeared in the dark smoke. I killed her, but at that moment, Adam returned to his room. His dragon took over when he saw what happened. We fought, but my own brother sided with Adam after seeing what happened.

I was imprisoned and have been here for years, without even a visit from Adam," he said, looking defeated. My head started putting pieces together as everything played in my mind. I looked at Rose, who seemed to always know what I was thinking.

"It was her, wasn't it? Sorena. She killed you," I said, confirming my theory. Rose nodded.

"But why? What could she have against you?" I asked her.

"It was something I did to her. Something long ago, that I regret, even now in death," Rose said, not really answering my question, but I could tell she was not going to give me more than that. We watched as Atlas filled him in on the events that took place after he was captured. He left me out, though, which would not have made sense if I had not heard his story earlier. They were silent for a while, both in their heads. After some time, his dad spoke.

"Adam challenged me to the Serpent Selis, " Atlas told him.

"I know. That challenge was felt by every dragon within a radius. They will be coming to see it, you know," his dad said, and Atlas nodded.

"I wish it didn't come to this," Atlas said.

"You are both my sons' and I love you both very much, but only you were born to rule Draconis after me. This kingdom is yours by birthright, and betrayal from our own blood does not sit well with any dragon. Especially yours.

"What do you mean by that?" Atlas asked, but before I could hear his response, someone grabbed me from behind and pulled me through a portal.