

The Rejected Werewolf Princess by Didiadeyemi Chapter 161

Chapter 161

CAMILLA'S P.O.V

The physician was instructed to keep us in the loop and from what I heard, the man was doing better. He was still weak and couldn't walk on his own but he was healing. Ryker was still pissed about my little stunt and wouldn't let me see the man. I could have pushed but I knew better than to do that. His worry was not baseless or unfounded neither was he being overbearing. He wasn't preventing me from going anywhere, he just ensured that I stayed under the heavy and watchful gazes of Steven and Kevin. The only other person who knew what had happened was Loris and it was only so that he could help me train my powers, so far though, we were coming up empty.

"I think I want to stop," I said after another failed attempt and he frowned.

He had gotten a single ear of corn from the affected farmland and that was what we used to train. Whatever was in those plants was a lot stronger than me and I hated the constant reminder. I crossed my arms over my chest when I saw Loris' disappointed gaze. I should have been bothered by it but I couldn't bring myself to care.

"If you give up all the time, how do you expect to gain control over it?" he asked and I rolled my eyes.

"I haven't gotten full control of my elemental powers. The last thing I need is to have something else to master."

"Quite the contrary I believe, I think it is exactly what you need. Have you even used your powers in recent times?" he asked and I shook my head. He gestured forward and it took me a minute to realize that he wanted me to try. I immediately shook my head.

"No, I think I'm done for the day."

"We still have five minutes until your training comes to an end. Unfortunately your majesty, until those five minutes are up, I am in charge."

I raised a brow. "That is a bold statement to make."

"It is the truth, go ahead, do something."

I flicked my wrist and the lake rose up into a large wall. I glanced over at Loris who had the audacity to look unimpressed. I twirled it into the shape of a large horse and he yawned. I let it drop and crossed my arms over my chest before turning to

look at him.

“Water out of the ground,” he instructed and I scoffed. “I would like to believe that I am doing something right in my teachings.”

“I could argue that you aren’t,” I dusted the dirt off my pants. “Your five minutes are up, Loris. I will see you tomorrow, or not.”

I started to walk away and he said nothing until I had gotten towards the entrance of the palace. “Fearing your powers will do nothing for you, Camilla. You need to try. Failing doesn’t mean you are weak, it is the only way you will grow.”

I didn’t turn back or say a word. I just walked away.

Steven and Kevin were instantly flanking my sides but I ignored them. The only thoughts in my mind were of Loris’ words. Was he right? I wasn’t quite sure but I just needed some space. I wasn’t scared of my powers or of failing, I just had a lot to worry about right now and mastering water was not one of them.

“Your majesty,” a voice snapped me out of my thoughts and I looked up to see an unfamiliar man walking up to me. Steven and Kevin made their way closer but I held out a hand to stop them.

“Who are you?”

“I suppose you wouldn’t remember me,” he chuckled lightly. “The last time you saw me, I was one foot away from door’s death. You saved my life, thank you.”

As I looked at him longer, I noticed the similarities between him and the almost dead man who stumbled into the palace. He looked a lot better now that his skin had some color and he was standing on both feet without a hitch. He also wasn’t struggling for breath anymore.

“How are you?” I was still so stunned by the developments. I had no idea what I was expecting once he was better but this was not it. “Also, I shouldn’t be the one you thank. The physician did most of the work. We were able to find some herbs that worked-”

“Please don’t lie to me,” he cut me off and I went silent.

I cleared my throat and turned to the guards behind me. “Excuse me please.”

“Your majesty, we were told that you should never be let out of our sights.”

“It wasn’t a request,” I cut them off and they hesitated for a second before nodding and walking off. Once they were gone, I turned to the man in front of me. “I’m not

lying to you, the physician, is responsible for your health.”

“You have powers,” he said simply. “There was something inside of me, it was like a virus, it was eating at me, it was almost in control. I was there, I could feel, I could think but I couldn’t act. It told me that you could heal me and if I

got better then it would be because of you. I know you are the only one who could have done it.”

“You should know better than to listen to your own inward ramblings while sick. There was ni talking virus, it sounds like the thoughts of a man close to the doors of death.”

He let out an exasperated sound. “It wasn’t my thoughts, I know what I am saying.”

I feigned ignorance. “You should return to your family, you said you have a wife and a son. I am sure they are eagerly waiting for your arrival. I have things to attend to.”

I walked away without another word and I briefly got a glimpse of his frown before I walked away. Steven and Kevin were waiting a distance away from me and once they sighted me, they started following me again but I wasn’t focused on them, I needed to see Ryker. I made my way over to his office and walked in.

He was talking to a guard when he saw me. He took one look at my expression and dismissed the younger boy. I waited until the door was shut before I started speaking. I told him everything that man had said and once I was done, he fell silent. He ran his hands down his jaw in deliberation.

“What do you think?” I asked finally and he shrugged.

“You shouldn’t have healed him, I will stand and die on that hill,” he said simply and I frowned.

“What did you expect me to do? Did you want him to die?”

“If what he is saying is true, then that wasn’t normal, it could have been the witch lurking and controlling him. What do you think will happen once the witch realizes that you can truly undo what he or she has done?” I stayed silent but it was a rhetorical question because he answered. “They will come for you, they will try to take you. I would prefer to let one man die than to have you on some witch’s radar.”

“You don’t know if that will happen.”

“I do,” his voice was soft. “Look, there is no need talking about this. We just have to wait and see. He just went home, right?” I nodded. “All we can do is wait. Things

are only going to get worse from here, Camilla, I can promise you that.”

Ryker’s pessimism could be annoying a few times but the truth was that he was almost always right. I hoped that this wasn’t one of those times because I wasn’t sure how many people I could heal before burning myself out. Healing

that man had taken so much of me, if there were more then it was a sure way to drain myself to an early grave.

After my discussion with Ryker, I busied myself with work. Audrey had returned to school and I had Aurora playing in the center of my room while I worked. Christine wanted to watch her for me but Juan had organized a date for them. It was a secret and I didn't want to put a stopper in their plans. Aurora fell asleep sometime around noon and I left her in a small bed by the foot of my table while I finished up my work.

A knock on my door snapped me out of my work and I looked up only to see that it had gotten a little dark. I didn't realize I had been working for so long. My door opened and Caius made his way in. He looked concerned and that was enough to have my spine straightening.

"Is everything okay?" I asked but he didn't respond. "If it is bad news, you might as well just take it away right now. I don't want to hear it."

He smiled softly. "It isn't bad news, don't worry. It is about the man who was sick."

"What did he do?"

"He goes around telling everyone that he owes his life to you. Of course, I have sent men to put a stop to it and tag his ramblings as those of a sick man. I just assumed this was something that you would like to know. Is there a reason he says this?"

I thought about it. I could have told him everything regarding my powers but Caius already knew too much. He knew about Audrey's powers and I didn't want to risk anything by telling him more. I simply shrugged.

"He had been saying that since he was here. Like you said, it is probably just the ramblings of a sick man. There is no need to pay heed to it."

It was obvious that Caius didn't trust me because he frowned. "You know that you can trust me, right, your majesty?"

"Of course," I responded almost immediately. "But the truth is that there is nothing to be said. If you would excuse me, I have some work to attend to and I have to take my daughter back."

He pursed his lips but said, nothing and nodded. I picked Aurora up rousing her a little before walking out of the room behind him. I was making my way towards the stairs when I heard some commotion a few feet away. I started making my way over there but Steven was quick to jump in front of me.

"I don't think you should go there, your majesty," he said simply and I raised a brow.

"Is there any particular reason as to why?"

"It's just," he began but trailed off. "You're with your daughter and it might be a

bit loud.”

Kevin scoffed before speaking up. “There is a long line of people standing there asking to meet with you so that you can heal them. Apparently, they believe the ranting of the sick man. They want your magical healing touch.”

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CAMILLA’S P.O.V

I didn’t go out to see the people, it was a fool’s mission. I figured the best thing to do was to ignore them and they would leave but by the next morning, they were still there. According to the I from the guards, the line had increased reports HEF considerably and a few of them had slept there overnight. It was insane to say the least and it didn’t matter how many people came out to tell them that I couldn’t heal them, no one wanted to listen to it.

If I was being honest, I didn’t blame them, they were terrified and this was the only slither of hope that they had. It was cruel to rip it away from them but it was a from them but it was a necessary evil. They were too disruptive and they were causing a lot of concerns around the palace. Even the elders were worried, that much was obvious the moment they called Ryker and I for another emergency meeting. “You have to find a way to get rid of them,” one of them said. He tried to hide it but he was tapping his feet anxiously and wringing his fingers. “They cannot be allowed to stand there for so long. If they stay, they will overpower us.” “What do you suggest I do?” I asked folding my hands in my lap. “I cannot just throw them away. I am one woman, and I don’t have the capabilities to heal them.”

“Don’t you?” he asked and I raised a brow.

“Is there something that you are insinuating?”

“How did the man get healed so quickly? We know you could heal people from the time of the vampires. You have been suspiciously quiet about your abilities since then. You know how to heal them, why don’t you just do as they ask and get it over with?”

I stretched out my hand to him. “If you want to take the blood right out of my veins then go ahead but I hate to tell you that it will do you no good. My powers died with the vampire king. They were given to me specifically to outsmart and thwart him. The moment he died, there was no use for it anymore.”

It was a huge bluff but one that I was willing to take. Under the table, I felt Ryker slide his hand over my thigh. It was a simple gesture but one that

meant the world to me. I kept my eyes fixed on the elder almost taunting him to say something. He was quiet for a full minute before sighing.

“We need to find something else then, something to make them believe that they are healed. Perception can be a far greater tool than reality,” he offered. “If you

could just pretend to heal them, if you could bless them then maybe they will leave.”

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“And then what?” asked. “What happens when they return to their homes and they are not healed? What happens when they realize that it was nothing but a sham? They will turn on,

and I will be the brunt of their anger. Angry people make for terrible subjects and I will not be the center of a mob’s rage. Feel free to do it if you want.”

He frowned. “You are the one they want.” The other elders began to whisper in agreement. “You need to do something to appease them.”

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“I am not a prized cow meant to be milked at the desire of the public,” I shot back and everyone fell silent. “I will not be pulled around like a puppet on a string. Your job as elders is to keep the peace, so do it and do not bother me until it is done. If there is anyone with a legitimate condition that seems out of the ordinary, bring them to the physician and he will heal them to the best of his abilities, if it is not then send them away. I do not care how it is handled, only that it is handled. Am I clear?”

No one dared to speak, there were scattered nods all around the room and I turned to see Ryker looking down at me with a proud and amused expression on his face. Once I was sure that they understood, I stood to my feet and Ryker followed suit. We walked out without another word and it wasn’t until we were safely out of the council room that I let out the breath I was holding.

Ryker was leaning against the wall with a small smirk playing on his lips and I couldn’t stop myself from laughing out loud. He followed suit soon after and we stood there like children giggling in the hallway of the palace. The sounds of our laughter echoed off the walls with no one to share in it but us.

“You definitely put them in their place,” he mused after he had calmed down.

“I guess they won’t be coming to you for advice anytime soon.”

I rolled my eyes. “I just want the people to go back home. We worked so hard to keep this under wraps, the last thing we want to do now is risk anyone finding out that I still have them.”

“That wouldn’t be a problem if you hadn’t healed the man like I suggested,” I didn’t bother responding because I knew his words held no bite. “It doesn’t matter now anyway, this is what we have been dealt with and we have to

make the best of it. Let us hope the elders are able to send the crowd away. I don't want to have to explain to Audrey why she cannot go to school tomorrow as well."

I grimaced as I thought about how sad she was when she got the news today. I couldn't risk her safety by sending her out in a carriage with the others. There was no telling what an angry mob would do to a child and I didn't want to risk it.

"Everything will be fine," I mumbled more to myself than him. I hoped that by saying it, I would believe it. "We have a lot of work to do today, will you walk with me?"

It took over four hours but the elders were finally able to clear the crowd. I didn't know what they said to them and I didn't ask because some things were better off left unsaid. I was just relieved when I looked out the window and there was no longer a long line of people waiting for me. It turned out that most of them were just paranoid, they weren't actually sick or dying- just terrified.

Once I was sure that the people were okay, I sent out some spies to keep an eye out for the man that I had healed. I wanted to be updated on his whereabouts, what he did and who he spoke to daily. From the feedback I got, he spent most of his time- indoors with his family. A few people had tried to visit him but he hadn't come out all day. I wasn't sure if that was a good or a bad thing.

I tried not to focus on it too much but it was hard. I wanted to know how it was possible for news to spread that quickly and why he spread it despite me asking him not to. I was so lost in my own thoughts that I went through the night time. motions on autopilot. I didn't even realize when I had finished dinner or taken both daughters to their rooms. It wasn't until Ryker put his hands on my shoulders and steered me to a stop that I realized what I was doing.

"I think you need to relax," he muttered and before I could ask, he started pulling me forward. "Come with me."

I tried to ask where we were going but he didn't answer me. He led me down the stairs and out through the back door. I could see the confusion on the faces of the guards but none of them dared to ask us any questions. Ryker led me deeper into the forest until we were far enough from the castle that no one could accidentally walk in on us.

"When last did you go for a run?" he asked as he undid the buttons of his shirt. "You have been strung up tightly lately. I think it has been two weeks to a month?"

It was three weeks but I didn't want to tell him that, it would only further solidify

his theory. I simply stayed quiet and crossed my arms over my chest as he took off his clothes. It wasn't until he was down to his underwear that I finally blushed and looked away.

"Take a run W

She said and I scoffed. "What is the big deal, Camilla? It isn't hurting anyone. No one is here. Why won't you do it?" I shrugged. "Even you don't have a good excuse, I'll race you."

"You're faster."

"You're smaller, you can weave through shortcuts."

I debated it for a second before sighing. "What do I get if I win?"

"Anything you want," I raised a brow but he quickly cut in. "If I win, I also get anything I want. Do we have a deal?"

It was a fool's errand but I was feeling highly competitive so I nodded. "Deal." The corner of his lips tipped up as I quickly pulled off my dress. It was a nightmare to maneuver but I managed to do it. He turned his back to me once I was down to my underwear and I quickly shifted. It felt good to be in my wolf form, it was like taking a stretch after being cooped up in a carriage for a long time.

Ryker's large black wolf sauntered over to me and he nuzzled my fur with his nose. I let out a small whine and sat as he licked my fur affectionately.

"Are you ready?" he asked down the bond but I didn't respond. I waited for the right moment before pushing him onto his back and taking off. I felt him laugh. "Game on, Camilla."

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RYKER'S P.O.V

The wind whipped through my fur as I ran, I wasn't going my fastest because if I did, the game would be over in seconds and I wanted to draw it out as long as possible. The chase was the most fun part of everything. It made catching her all the more worth it. I saw her light fur as she weaved through the smaller trees. She was truly taking my words into consideration and taking paths I didn't recognize but she didn't realize I had a better memory than she did, I came into these woods more than her and I knew them like the back of my hand.

I took a right and I felt her confusion down the bond because that was the completely opposite direction from where she was going. Regardless of that, she kept running. I could still see her out of the corner of my eye, my wolf

vision was something to be rivaled. I wasn't sure if it had improved since becoming prince but it was almost as if my senses were sharper
Once I started hearing the sound of the stream, I took a sharp left just as she was coming out of the trees. She ran into me but I turned us over at the last minute so I would absorb the impact of the hit. She let out a whine while I laughed. She was

on top

of me sporting what looked like a small frown and I leaned up to lick her face-technically, my wolf did but in this state, we were one and the same.

Our thoughts were always the same when it came to her, I never had to fight him, we just wanted her happy. A lot of people found it hard to control their wolves once shifted, it was the reason most people didn't do it often but I had learned from a young age how to become one with my wolf. We rarely argued or had differences, it was like having another living, breathing soul with the same thoughts and ideas..

"You cheated," Camilla complained still lying on top of me. I immediately flipped us over before slowly getting off her and nudging her towards the lake.

"You

ambushed me."

"There was nothing against going through a short cut. My job was to catch you and I did."

She huffed and turned away from me. She wasn't truly upset, I knew that much so I waited until she had finished lapping up the water before I nudged her back to the ground and wrapped my large form around her. At first, she tried pulling away

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but she soon realized it was fruitless and she actually wanted it because she relaxed into my hold. The moon was high in the sky and we just lay there wrapped up in each other as the breeze it our skin. It was a different kind of bliss, one that couldn't be expressed in words

"Ryker," she spoke softly down the link and I hummed. "Thank you for this. I didn't realize how much I needed it until you brought it up. I feel more relaxed than I have in weeks."

"It's okay," I nuzzled her side. "We all need a break now and again. You work too hard and you work yourself too much. Come out for a run once in a while." She laughed softly. "I will, but I have a question. How are we going to get our

clothes back, I don't even know where they are right now?"

"We'll find it."

I wasn't bothered about clothes in this moment. I had my mate in my arms, I had my family safe in the palace, there was nothing more that I needed. Everything else was calmly situated in the back of my mind where it belonged. At least, it was, until I heard a twig snap. My spine stilled and my ears twitched as I tried to figure out where the sound came from. Camilla tried to rise but I put a paw on her side and let out a low growl warning her to stay down.

Even in her wolf form, she rolled her eyes at me. She had a problem with my over protectiveness, she always did but until I found out what that was, I wasn't letting her go anywhere near it. I lifted my nose in the air trying to take a sniff but what I got back nearly had me throwing up. It smelled like rotting flesh and death. Death didn't have a particular scent but if it did, this would be it. It was pungent and horrible, as if all the bad in the world had come together.

"What is that smell?" Camilla asked but I didn't respond. She rose on all fours but I nudged her until she was behind me.

"If I tell you to run then you run, am I very clear on that?"

"Whatever."

I would have hounded her more about that but some leaves shook in the clearing on the opposite side of the stream. I let out a loud growl warning whoever it was to stay the f uck back but to no one's surprise, they didn't. When the leaves cleared I was not expecting to see a man there. He looked even worse than the first man we

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healed, his skin was black, as if every cell in it had died. His eyes were hollow and they looked empty, he was fixated on Camilla and he stretched out a hand to her.

"Help me," he pleaded and the next thing I knew, he was falling into the stream.

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Camilla tried to go after him but I stopped her. "Get our clothes and get back here. I'll save him."

"But-

“Now!” this time she didn’t hesitate, she took off in the opposite direction while I jumped into the stream. It wasn’t hard to retrieve the man but he felt heavier than a person was supposed to. I managed to get him onto dry land and thankfully, he hadn’t drowned yet.

He coughed out water and looked around as if expecting to see Camilla.

“Where is she? Please, I need her help. She said that she could help me. She said that the Queen was my only hope.”

I nudged at his mind. If he was from the pack then I could access his mind link. His mind was different than most others I had come to relate with. It was like a deserted hallway filled with cobwebs, the scent of death lingered even in his mind also. I had never experienced anything like that before. I wanted to pull out of his mind but I needed to know.

“Who is she?” I asked. “Who told you that the Queen could help.”

“The woman who did this to me,” he responded with a voice softer than a feather. “She said that only the Queen could heal me. She said it was a test, she said she was helping her grow and I was practice. Please, I don’t want to die.”

Camilla returned with our clothes in her mouth. I reluctantly pulled away from the man so I could get dressed behind a tree. I was done first and went back to him. He hadn’t moved an inch, he looked too exhausted to move and that led me to question how he managed to get through the woods alone at night.

“What were you doing here?” I asked but he didn’t respond. “How did you manage to get here? Did she drop you off?”

I could feel Camilla’s confusion but I made a mental note to explain it to her later. My attention turned back to the man who managed to look at me.

“No, she left me in the town. I came here on my own. I needed- I tried-” even

speaking seemed to be hard for him. Camilla reached forward to touch him but I grabbed her wrist.

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“No,” I warned and she frowned. I explained everything the man had said down our bond. “Whoever this woman is, she is baiting you, you aren’t going to fall into her trap.”

“I’m not going to let innocent people die either. She is not going to stop, people are going to keep coming in the number and it will be our fault that they died. I am not like you, Ryker, I cannot live with the knowledge of that on my chest. Just let me touch him.”

“No, it drains you too much, why don’t you try using your blood?” I asked and I saw her hesitate. Since we discovered this new development, we never saw need to try her blood. I wasn’t even sure if it still worked. “Just try it, Camilla, there is no harm in knowing.”

She pursed her lips but realized there was no other way I was going to let her try it. She found a sharp rock and sliced her palm open on it. Watching that alone was hard but I stayed close to her as she lifted her hand over his lips and allowed the blood drip freely. I knew her hand would heal within seconds but hopefully it was enough to heal him.

At first nothing happened, he just lay there quietly when he suddenly started to convulse. His body shook badly and foam started to gather in his mouth. Camilla tried to reach out to him but I grabbed her by the waist and pulled her away from him. She screamed and fought trying to get to him but I couldn't risk her life for a stranger. It might have been cruel but it wasn't something I would do.

"Ryker if you don't let me go, I swear I will never forgive you," she cried out and I hated hearing her like that but I still wasn't convinced. "He is dying and this is my fault. Just let me make it right, please."

"You have given too much."

She let out an ear splitting scream. "Please, that is someone's son. If it were our girls, we would want someone to help them. Just let me do this one more time. Please, whatever I did is killing him. I am begging you."

Tears were free flowing down her cheeks and she looked at me with raw pain. I hated to see her like that, I wanted to take her as far away from this as possible but

I knew her better than anyone and I knew she wasn't bluffing when she said she

would never forgive me so I let out a sigh and released her.

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CAMILLA'S P.O.V

Panic rushed through me like flood as I rushed over to the man. I grabbed his wrist willing that gut wrenching reaction to take place but it didn't. It felt like I was completely empty but I knew that wasn't the case, I could still feel the power thrumming beneath my skin, I just needed a small push and he wasn't giving it. I concentrated all I could on that raw bright power inside of me, it was like a raging storm willing to erupt and I pushed. I willed it to flow out of me and into him and surprisingly it did. This time however, it didn't come with the pain or the nerve wrenching experience. Maybe it was because I had finally controlled it for the first time but it flowed out of me easily, like a small stream. I watched as the man's skin illuminated slightly and I prayed to the goddess that he would be fine.

There was a nudge in the back of my mind that told me when it was enough and I pulled my hand away from him. His skin was still black but it was slowly

turning back to its right color. My head swam as I struggled to balance myself. I felt arms wrap around me from behind as Ryker pulled me to a standing position. I had to lean on him because of how weak and fragile I was.

"I hope that was f u c k i n g worth it," he mumbled and I immediately knew he was pi s s e d at me. I couldn't blame him considering everything that had happened.

"What do we do now?" I asked and he scoffed.

"We don't do anything. We are leaving and we will pray that when he wakes up, he doesn't remember us."

I dug my feet into the ground to stop him from moving. "You can't expect us to just leave him here. What if something bad happened to him?"

"That isn't our problem anymore," I opened my mouth to protest and he let out a groan of frustration. He turned to me and placed both hands on my shoulders the way he would with a child. "I'm going to say this once and very slowly, I don't give a s h i t what happens to him. Imagine he wakes up with us right next to him, he will assume that you had something to do with it. We already had a problem with the people and trying to convince them that you don't have healing powers. The last thing we want now is for them to start up again."

I knew he was right but that didn't mean I wasn't worried about the man.

There was a possibility that what I did didn't work. If that were true then it meant

would die all alone and no one deserved to die that way. However, I knew how risky it could be if we were found here so I nodded and allowed Ryker lead me away. I couldn't help but watch the man until we had gotten out of range.

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When we got to the palace, the guards watched us with varying degrees of confusion. We left smiling and happy and returned deep in thought and contemplation. Ryker hadn't said a word to me since we left the woods and I couldn't help but imagine how pi s s e d off he was at me. His wall was firmly in place, I couldn't sense any of his emotions and neither could I read him. He rarely did that unless he was in danger or he had something to hide.

We had gotten to our room when I finally spoke. "Please say something. I hate the silent treatment."

He stilled as if debating his next words then chose not to say anything and instead made his way into the bathroom. I wanted to follow him and demand a response but I knew I didn't hold that privilege anymore. After the stunt I pulled today, doing that would have been a very stu p i d move.

When he returned, he had changed out of his clothes but his stoic expression hadn't eased one bit. He walked over to the door and opened it to reveal

Christine. I wasn't sure when he mind linked her but she held a small tray of fruits in her hands. He thanked her and brought it over to me. He gestured to the bed and I didn't even realize when my limbs started moving of their own accord until I was seated.

"Eat," he said simply placing the tray in my lap. "You used up a lot of your energy. You need to replenish it."

"Can you at least say something," I whispered but he said nothing. "Look, I know you're upset and for good reason to. I shouldn't have tried to-"

"Upset?" he cut me off with a humorless laugh. "I'm not upset, Camilla, I'm worried. I am worried about whether I can trust you not to make stupid decisions like these when you are alone."

"What are you-

"I know you want to help everyone, believe me, I do. I don't understand why but I know it is who you are. You have to realize that you cannot help everybody. Not everyone needs to be saved. It is like a game of chess, you have to sacrifice some pieces to win the game."

"He is a person, not a piece in a game."

"We are all pieces in someone's game," he shot back. "Someone is pulling the strings and you are going along with it like her puppet. Listen, Camilla, I want to protect you, I swear, I do but you are not making things easy for me."

I hated when he spoke like that, there was always an underlying sense of guilt that came with it. Did I understand what he was saying? Of course I did, I just didn't have to like it. I wanted to help everyone and I truly believed that everyone could be saved. Maybe it was a fantastical way of thinking, I didn't care, I just wanted to make sure that I did my best.

I knew this conversation was going nowhere because of our vastly different beliefs on the subject. I didn't want to spend the time arguing when he had a wonderful evening. I put the tray on the bed and moved over until I was seated directly beside him. I intertwined our fingers together but he still didn't look at me. His eyes were fixed on the wall in front of us like it was the most interesting thing he had seen.

"I can't promise not to try to heal everyone," I whispered. "I mean, why was I given these powers if I wasn't meant to help everyone? Why was I made into who I am right now if I wasn't meant to make life easy for people?"

"You can make life easy when it is not at your own detriment."

"Why don't we make a deal?" I asked and he raised a brow. "I can't heal everyone, I am sure about that but anyone that is in dire need of healing, I will help." He opened his mouth to protest but I cut him off. "When I say dire, I mean the person is on the brink of death with something that we can identify."

If there are too many suspicious healings, people will notice.”

He debated it for a second before nodding. “Deal.”

It was a good way to end the night especially since we weren't pissed off at each other. After eating, I changed into my night dress and crawled into bed by his side. It was a relatively dreamless sleep at first until sometime in the middle of the night, I heard my name being called. I didn't recognize that voice, it sounded old and distant.

I pinched myself to be sure I wasn't sleeping and although I felt the sting, my body didn't rouse. I was bathed in pure darkness, I couldn't even see what was in front of me. It was terrifying at best but I knew I was asleep, nothing could hurt me in my

dreams.

“Are you sure about that?” the same old and distant voice asked. “You should be wondering how I managed to get here in the first place?”

“Who are you?” I called out hating the way my voice echoed as if in a cave.

Instead of the echoes getting lower, they got louder to the point where I had to slam hands over my ears.

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There was a laugh, it was condescending and filled with mirth. I felt the presence of whoever was speaking, there was something ancient and dark about it, something almost primal. I could feel the power radiating from them, it was raw but also warped, as if it had been tampered with and was now made into something that it shouldn't have been.

“You are not fit to know my name, Camilla, but be rest assured that I know yours,” I recognized the voice as female but nothing more. “You have done better than I imagined you would. You are growing into a wonderfully strong young woman. I thought my tests would be too hard for you but you passed with flying colors.”

“You sent the plagues,” I deduced and although there was no verbal response, I knew I was right. “What do you want with me? I don't want any problems. Just leave us alone and no one has to know about it.”

“Oh, my darling girl, I am just getting started,” I felt a phantom hand run down my cheek gently and I tried to swat at it but there was nothing there. “We are going to have so much fun together. I cannot visit you this way again, but trust me when I say that we will be meeting soon enough and when we do, it will be the reunion of the century.”

“I still don't know what you want or who you are.”

“You will soon, but you have been asleep for too long, people are starting to worry,” before I could protest I felt an entire hand on my head. “Now, wake.”

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Chapter 165

CAMILLA'S P.O.V

I awoke with a gasp. The remnants of what was my dream swirled around my head ready to be taken away with the morning wind. I reached blindly for the dresser until I found my journal and ink and I started writing. I wrote down everything I could remember in a hurry. The sun was standing in the middle of the sky but I might as well have still been in the dark with how disoriented I was. I furiously scribbled until the blank pages were filled with words, half of which didn't make a lot of sense to me.

"Baby," I looked up to see Ryker staring down at me with concern in his eyes.

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wasn't sure how long he had been standing there, all I knew was that there was worry in his features.

He looked like he wasn't sure whether he wanted to pull me away or come to me. I slowly set down my pen and gave him the most easy going smile I could muster but that did little to ease his worry. He moved slowly, as if he were scared of spoiling me. I tracked every movement with my eyes until he was standing directly in front of me. He stretched out his hand to me and I took it. It wasn't until our skin connected that I realized just how cold I was.

"Fuck," he cursed as he pulled the nearby blanket and draped it over my shoulders. "Are you alright? You are ice cold. Do you want me to run you a hot bath?"

"No," I said too quickly and his brows furrowed. He was clearly taken aback because that wasn't the response he was expecting from me. "Can you just sit here with me?"

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I didn't want to admit it but the truth was that I was terrified. I never had nightmares like that, it felt so realistic, like whoever that person was, she was truly

my head. I had never felt so violated in my life and I wasn't sure how I was meant to react to it. I could still feel the coldness of her presence and the echo of her voice in the stillness around me. It was cold and eerie, like death itself and I recognized her presence, it was the same I felt in the withered crops and in the first sick man.

Ryker didn't know what to do with me, I could feel his confusion and concern as he sat by me. He wrapped his arms around me and all I could do was ease into him. He whispered soft words into my ears and although I couldn't make out most of them, his presence was more than enough for me. I wasn't sure

how long we stood there, it felt like hours but in reality, I knew it wouldn't have been more than a few minutes of us just intertwined with each other.

"Are you going to tell me what this is about?" he asked and I shrugged. "I haven't seen you like this in a very long time, Camilla, please don't make me push for an answer,"

I exhaled deeply and told him everything. It sounded absurd coming from my lips and if it were a different person, I would have found it incredibly hard to believe. Words couldn't properly capture everything I had experienced but I tried my best. As I spoke, I couldn't help but wonder if this was how Audrey felt after her visions. If it were, then I was glad that we locked her powers. No one deserved to go through this, it was a nightmare.

By the time I was done speaking, Ryker was quiet and contemplating. I risked a glance at him wondering if he thought I was crazy but there was not a single ounce of judgment on her face as he took me in. After a moment of silence, he leaned down and placed a kiss in the center of my head. No words were spoken but that was the loudest display of solidarity that I had ever gotten in my life. His hands ran up and down my back in a calming motion.

"I believe you," he said finally, "and I am right here."

"Thank you," I didn't know how much I craved to hear those words until he had actually said them. "I don't know what I would have done if you didn't. I can't do this alone."

"You won't have to," he assured me with a soft smile. "However, I am unsure if we can get extra help. It would be difficult to explain this to anyone else. For now, we are all we have."

"That's more than enough."

It might have sounded cheesy but it was true. I didn't need anyone else. We had dealt with so much and I knew we could do it. We stayed in the room for another half hour before finally deciding to get ready for the day. By the time I got to my desk, there was a mountain of paper work to be done and I was grateful. The last thing I wanted was to spend the rest of my day lost in my thoughts and trying to analyze the effects of my nightmare.

I was so lost in my work that I missed both lunch and dinner. It wasn't until I got a knock on my door that I realized just how late it was. The door opened to reveal Audrey with Ryker walking directly behind her. She was struggling to balance a large tray in her hands but her tiny face was screwed up in concentration. I couldn't stop the smile that grew on my lips as she got closer. "I brought this for you," she exclaimed as she tried to lift it onto my table. I had to

help her with it so it wouldn't tip over. She didn't look happy about that but she managed to stay silent about it. "You didn't come for dinner with us. Daddy said it was because you had a lot of work and you forgot."

I tried not to feel guilty but it was impossible. That familiar disgusting feeling of guilt was already crawling up my arms as I took in my daughter's innocent face. I glanced over at my mate who was holding our youngest and he gave me a soft look of encouragement. He wasn't holding anything against me and neither was she, instead of fighting, I might as well just make amends and enjoy the opportunity I had been given.

I turned back to Audrey. "I did forget, I am sorry for that but thank you for coming to find me. You are the most amazing little girl ever."

I kissed her forehead and she giggled. "Can I sit with you?"

Instead of responding, I lifted her and placed her on my lap. Ryker took the seat opposite us while we ate. She stole pieces of fruit from my tray and sips of my drink. I couldn't even bring myself to mind because simply being with them was enough for me. She told me about her day at school and I listened eagerly. It was great to hear that she was having a good time adjusting and was making a lot of friends.

Her school experience was the direct opposite of mine and for that I was grateful. I wouldn't wish my experience on my worst enemy, much less my own child. I wanted her to blossom and be happy and everything I had done so far was for her benefit. She was oblivious to what could be brewing at the surface. I couldn't bring myself to regret my decision to have children but sometimes I wondered if maybe I should have waited until the world was a better place first because they somehow always ended up getting tangled in the web.

"Mummy, are you listening?" Audrey's question snapped me out of my thoughts and I turned to her with a small smile.

"Of course, I am, I always listen to you," I tickled her and she burst into a fit of laughter and squeals. It was a joyous sound, one that I hoped I would be able to listen to for the rest of my life. It was a sound of carefree joy and it was times like this that made me grateful that I had children.

I couldn't imagine being stuck in such a dark world without a beacon of light and hope to keep me going and that was exactly what they were. I couldn't stop myself from pulling Audrey into a tight hug. She didn't know what it was for but in her innocence, she just wrapped her arms around me and buried her face into me. I let out a sigh of relief as I inhaled her scent.

"I love you mummy," she whispered and I was so emotional that I couldn't repeat the words back.

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There was another knock on the door that had me stilling. It was late at night, not many people would have dared to visit me at this time. Ryker went to open the door and there was a guard standing out there. He looked terrified as he stood there. He opened and closed his mouth a few times but no words would come out. I couldn't help but notice that his eyes were more focused on Ryker than they were on me.

"What is wrong?" I asked but he couldn't respond. "Can you take me to it?" He nodded and turned on his heels. I lifted Audrey on my hip and followed him. I didn't know what we were going to see but I wouldn't risk leaving her alone. The guard expertly weaved through the halls until he led us out of the castle. Steven and Kevin were following behind me but that did next to nothing to ease my worry.

As we stepped out of the castle, I noticed a horse that seemed eerily familiar and standing next to the horse was a hunched figure. I reached forward but when the person turned to face me, I nearly stumbled over with a curse. I stood there in shock not believing what I was seeing. Their skin was as white as snow and there were pores all over, I almost didn't recognize them.

"Help me," even the voice didn't sound human. It was shaky and croaking, almost as if it was a chore to speak. "Please, I can't."

The person swayed and Ryker immediately rushed over to steady her with one hand. I was frozen in my place as I watched.

"Mummy," Audrey asked unsure. "Why does Aunt Riley look that way?"

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Chapter 166

CAMILLA'S P.O.V

Ryker had his hands full with Aurora and Riley. I put Audrey on the ground and reached out to grab her sister from his hold. The moment I did, Ryker steadied his sister and carried her into the palace. Audrey was asking questions that I couldn't

a minute. I held onto her hand and pulled her into the safety of the palace. I needed to be with Ryker right now but for that, I needed to make sure my kids were safe.

hear because my thoughts were going a mile was asking

I moved blindly until I was standing in front of Christine's room. I knocked harsher than I should have and waited impatiently. It took her two minutes to open the door and when she finally did, her hair was disheveled and the

sleeve of her dress was pulled down lower than it should have been. Her cheeks were pink and she was breathing exceptionally hard. I should have felt guilty for interrupting her but I couldn't bring myself to care.

"I need you to watch them for me, please," I begged and I wasn't sure if it was her general kindness or the desperation in my eyes, but she nodded immediately.

"Of course, what's wrong?" her voice was laced with concern and that spurred some movement from behind her because suddenly, Juan was at the door. He looked just as disheveled as she did. He looked down at Audrey and gave her a small smile.

"Hey pretty girl, what are you doing here?" he asked and she shrugged.

"Aunt Riley is sick and I think my mummy is worried about her. Daddy is with her right now," she offered up so innocently. Christine turned to me with a raised brow but I shook my head. I didn't want to discuss it, especially not in front of the girls.

"Well then," Juan broke the silence with a small smile. "Why don't we let your mummy go do her work? Come in, I'll show you a new game that I got."

I watched as Audrey was led in by Juan. Christine took Aurora from my arms without another word. The look in her eyes was encouragement enough and I forced myself to blink away the tears that had gathered there. I couldn't imagine what I would do without Christine. She was more than ready to drop her needs for mine all the time. It was a beautiful and selfless thing that sometimes I feel like I take advantage of.

your mate," she whispered and I nodded.
you, Christine, I won't forget this."

She waved me off and I rushed down the halls until I got to the physician's office. Ryker was pacing in the room when I got there while the physician was speaking to him. He didn't look like he was listening, he was lost in thought and it was obvious that he was one wrong word away from punching the physician. I cleared my throat to make my presence known and they all turned to me.

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"How is she?" I asked the physician and from his expression alone, I could already tell what he was going to say.

"I have never seen anything like this in my life. It could be something she contracted during one of her trips. I have given her something for the rash and something for the paleness, but these are merely symptoms and I don't think they will handle the underlying cause."

I hummed in understanding. "Just give her whatever you can and let her rest.

It just might be exhaustion from her trips and like you said, something she contracted. I am sure a night in the palace will do her some good."

He bowed and moved on to do as I had asked. I watched him fuss over Riley and prepare a potion for her. Ryker stood still by the corner but I noticed he kept tapping his feet anxiously. He watched as the physician fed the potion to his sister but all the while, he never said one word. I stood next to him just for support but he didn't even acknowledge me. Even when I tried to hold his hand, he immediately pulled away.

He hated being comforted, it was something I had come to learn. I thought that he was getting better but it seemed I was wrong. There were certain things that would never change and it seemed like this was one of them. When the physician was done, he bowed to us and excused himself to give us some privacy. I knew Ryker wanted space as well so I slowly made my way over to the bed where she sat and sat by the edge. What she had wasn't like what the other two did, but I was certain it was done by the same person- the one in my dream. She was peacefully sleeping and I reached out to hold her hand. Like the second person, there was no tug of magic in my gut, just silence. I wasn't sure if I was getting a hold of my powers or if it was an effect of what had been done to them.

"I could try to heal her," I offered up. "I'm not sure how that would work because I

don't fully have a grip on these powers but I promise, I'll do my best."

Ryker still didn't say a word and I turned to see that he hadn't stopped staring at her. There was something in his eyes akin to despair. It was rare to see him so broken, but here he was. He slowly moved from his spot at the wall and came to stand directly behind me, his eyes never once moving from his sister.

"I practically raised her," he whispered. "When my mother died, my father couldn't care less about her. I fed her, I cleaned her and I bathed her, I taught her to read, I saw her first steps and I had to convince my father to send her to school because he didn't think that females should be educated."

He hadn't told me this part of their story yet. I knew they were all each other had

but I never knew it was this bad.

"The only reason I knew I would be a good dad was because of her, because I felt if I could do a good job with her then I could do a good job with my own kid," his eyes finally met mine and the sheer force of the emotion there nearly knocked me off my feet. "Please, don't let her die. She cannot die. There is still so much for her to live for. She is the only other family I have left."

I nodded as I tried to blink away my tears. "I will do everything in my power."

As I turned back to her, I muttered a small prayer to the goddess. If Riley died, I would never forgive myself, if I couldn't heal her, I would never recover. I healed two random strangers, I should be able to heal her. I closed my eyes and focused on the thrumming power inside of me and I willed it to flow out. I focused on pushing as much as I could into her.

My powers were like light and a gently flowing stream but like the water, it hated to be controlled. Lucky for me, I had more than enough experience wielding water and I knew just how to apply pressure. I pushed hard and let out a gasp as I felt it leave me. It flowed in controlled waves and as power went from me to her, I realized that I had just learned to control it.

I peeled one eye open and watched as the spot between our hands glowed a bright white. I just watched it flow until I figured it was enough. I didn't know how I knew, there was just an awareness in our subconscious and I severed the connection. I pulled my hand away from hers and the dizziness hit me at once. Ryker was immediately by my side with his hands around my shoulders. "Are you alright?" he asked and I nodded which proved to be a terrible mistake

because my head began pounding even more. "Do you think she will be alright?"

"I don't know," I admitted softly. "I did what I could but there is no way to know until she wakes

up or-

I trailed off because I didn't want to say the words but Ryker understood. He nodd

and helped me to my feet. "Thank you, regardless, you did your best and you tried to save her. I cannot begin to tell you just how grateful I am."

"She is my sister too," I assured hi,. "I would do the same for anyone else."

I managed to rise to my feet but I swayed. Using my powers took a lot out of me and I was yet to recover. Ryker picked me up bridal style before I could even realize what was going on and walked me up the stairs towards our room. I tried to protest that I could walk but I could barely form a single sentence without my head feeling like it would split open.

When he got to the room, he gently lay me on the bed. "Will you be okay on your own here or do you need help changing?"

I waved him off. "I'm fine, you can go and stay with her. I know you want to and I know she would be happy if she woke up with you by her side."

"Are you sure?" he looked a little hesitant. "If you're not feeling okay, I can stay here. I should stay here. She might not wake up tonight but you need my attention."

“Ryker,” I groaned as I sat up straighter. “Go to your sister, I’ll be fine, I promise.”

He hesitated for a split second before pressing a lingering kiss to my forehead and rushing out. I watched him disappear and waited for the moment the door slammed shut before I stopped pretending and flopped against the bed. I managed to undo my dress and was about to dump it when I felt something drop on the floor. I looked down and saw blood. Another drop fell and I felt something run down my nose.

I reached up to touch wary of what I would see and gasped when my fingers came back red.

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Chapter 167

RYKER’S PO.V

I sat in the physician’s quarters with Riley. She looked so peaceful as she slept, her lashes fell to her cheeks and the steady rise and fall of my chest was the only thing that signified to me that she was alive. I watched the tiny movement for what felt like hours fearful that if I even blinked too long, she would never wake. The physician had come in a while ago to check on me but when he realized I wasn’t going to leave, he excused himself and turned in for the night.

A normal person would have done the same considering there were guards outside the room and Camilla had healed her but I couldn’t bring myself to leave. Just the thought of being away right now filled me with dread. I was the only family she had left and I wasn’t going to leave her at a time like this. For as long as I could remember, it was me and her, that was how it had always been and I would be damned if I allowed it change at such a perilous time.

“We haven’t spoken in a while and I thought I would catch you up on things,” I began remembering something Camilla had told me about being able to hear while in a coma. “You already know about Juan and Christine, according to Camilla, they’re contemplating starting a family. I think Christine would be an amazing mother if she decides to go down that path. I am also thinking of making Juan the second in command. The official title is duke and I know he hates titles but I think he would like it.”

She didn’t move or even breathe deeper to show me that she heard. I should have stopped talking but I couldn’t. Going silent would have meant that I was giving into my thoughts, it would have meant me thinking about everything that was going wrong. For a second, I wanted to pretend like I was speaking

to my sister, like we were having a normal conversation and things were great. I wouldn't have to think about the possibility of her never waking up again.

"It's a good thing you're here now, you'll be able to see Aurora walking. She prefers to be carried like the little princess that she is but she walks now. It is a nightmare trying to make sure that everything is out of her reach because she has very fast and grabby hands," I paused for a second before sighing. "I missed you, I know why you had to leave but damn, I wish you didn't. I can't wait for you to wake up and tell me all about your adventures until I think my ears are about to bleed. For one, I really hope you can hear me because you're not allowed to leave. You are the only good thing I got out of that shi t hole and I am not letting you go so easily."

I didn't realize my eyes had started to water until a lone tear slipped out. I wiped it

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away quickly and squeezed my sisters hand softly.

"Just wake up, Riley, please," I whispered before laying my head on the edge of the bed.

I must have fallen asleep because I woke up to a hand on my shoulder. I jumped immediately thinking it was an intruder but there was pure shock on my face as I looked up at Riley. Her eyes were open and although she wasn't completely healed, there was some color back on her face and her eyes didn't look as dull or as dead. I blinked twice hoping that it wasn't an apparition and she was really awake.

"Are you going to sit there staring at me all day? For someone who claims to have missed me you are doing a shitty job at showing it," she croaked out. Her voice was hoarse from lack of use and exhaustion but she still managed to have a small smile on her face.

I pulled her into a hug and she let out a slight groan of pain before relaxing into my hold. It felt surreal, even holding her, I wasn't sure if I believed it. A part of me had resigned to the fact that she might have died seeing as Camilla couldn't say for sure or not if she was healed. I could almost picture Camilla's excitement at knowing that she was awake.

"Are you alright?" I asked as I pulled back and she nodded. "How do you feel? Do you think you're getting better?"

She nodded immediately. "Yesterday I felt like death itself, today, I feel amazing. I still feel drowsy and a little weak but it feels like someone breathed life into my body. Was it Camilla? Did she heal me?"

"Yes, but not the way you're thinking," I explained everything that had happened recently and she listened with rapt attention. By the time I was done, her eyes were wide and her mouth was open. "We don't really know

how it works but I think she is getting the hang of it now.”

“Your mate is so cool,” Riley said finally and I couldn’t stop the slow smile that on my face. “Where is she? I would like to thank her personally. I feel great compared to last night.”

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“I’ll go get her but first, do you remember how this happened or who did this to you?”

At that, her entire face fell and her body stiffened. I immediately knew something was wrong and took the seat in front of her. I held out my hand to her and held onto them tightly. She wouldn’t meet my eye and as much as I knew I could force her, I also knew it would be better to let her just come to terms with it on her own

and speak to me whenever she was ready.

A faraway look took over her and after a full minute of silence, she finally turned to me. “I don’t know how exactly it happened. It was slow, I think. It started with a little white patch and some general weakness. I called off my trip immediately I started to feel weird and the day I arrived, I woke up looking like that. I was barely able to get here. The coach men on the train thought I was a ghost.”

I thought about it for a second before humming. “Was there anything different about the day the first symptom happened?”

She shook her head. “I can barely remember what happened. All I know is that I had a weird dream. It was pitch black but there was an eerie feeling there, as if someone was watching me. When I woke up the next morning, I had the white patch on my arm and somehow I knew that I had to come home. It was like something was driving me back here, to you guys. It was probably just my subconscious.”

I didn’t buy that it was just a subconscious thing for one bit but for her sake, I hummed in agreement. I cleared my throat and stood to my feet needing to talk to Camilla immediately. She was the only one who would understand the millions of thoughts going through my head at the moment.

“A maid will bring you something to it. I’m going to call Camilla,” I turned to leave but she stopped me.

When I turned to her, she didn’t speak, almost as if she was embarrassed about her next words. “You didn’t really think I was going to die, did you?” I didn’t respond. “I don’t plan on leaving anytime soon, you’re my family, I would at least give you a goodbye first.”

I knew without a doubt that she had heard me. I leaned forward and placed a soft -kiss on her forehead. “I’ll be back soon.”

I went to get the maid first. Christine was already in the dining room with the

girls and the moment I mentioned Riley's name, Audrey let out a loud screech that shook the chandelier. I raised a brow at her and she flushed pink while reminding herself to use an inside voice. I assured her that she could see Riley but after she got the chance to rest and eat. She didn't like that but there wasn't much she could do.

I was a bit confused as to why Camilla wasn't at breakfast with the others but I figured that she was just taking a late morning, after all, she used up a lot of her energy to heal Riley. I debated on whether I should check on her or just leave her

to rest and at the end of the day, I settled on the latter. I freshened up in one of the guest rooms and took from a pair of the casual clothes lying around after which I went to my office.

Riley was taking a nap and I just assumed everything was fine until there was a knock on my office. Juan walked in looking a bit confused and on edge, I was immediately worried because it took a lot to unsettle Juan, he was the most care free person I had met in a while. If he was uneasy then it meant there was something wrong.

"What is it?" I asked immediately I noticed his expression.

"Lyla just arrived and she is demanding to see you."

My brows furrowed. "Are you talking about the seer?" he nodded and I immediately stood to my feet. "What does she want? Did she say why she is here?"

"She won't talk to anyone but you."

I immediately rushed out of the office after him. Lyla was pacing in front of the palace and yelling at the guards who wouldn't let her pass. She kept screaming something about me and Camilla but I couldn't make out her words.

"What's going on?" I asked as soon as I was close enough and she let out a sigh of relief.

"Finally, I have been waiting for you. Where is your mate?" she had her arms crossed over her chest and she was tapping her foot anxiously.

"She is resting."

"Have you seen her today?" she asked and I slowly shook my head. Her eyes widened and she cursed before taking off into the palace.

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Chapter 168
RYKER'S P.O.V

The guards made to grab her but I stopped them. I didn't know why I did that, it just seemed right as I took off after her. I didn't know how she knew where to go but she was expertly weaving through the intricate halls as if she had lived here all her life. I followed

Susu her, not wanting to interrupt whatever was happening but also wanting to keep a close eye on things.

She finally stopped in front of the door to our room and ran her hands down the wood. "This is it, this is the one I saw," she turned to me. "I need you to brace yourself."

"What the f uck is going on?" I asked but she said nothing as she pushed the door open.

Everything looked normal, at least until I realized that Camilla wasn't in bed. I muttered a curse immediately thinking of the worst. Did someone grab her? Did she leave somewhere without telling me? Was she hurt? I was so lost in my thoughts that I didn't realize her scent was still in the room. It wasn't until Lyla walked over to the other side of the bed and cursed that it dawned on me. I rushed

over to see what she had found and my entire world came to a screeching halt as I took in Camilla.

She was lying on the ground with crusted blood coming out of her nose. She was still in her clothes from yesterday meaning this happened at night. I felt like a failure for not realizing something was wrong earlier. I pushed past Lyla and picked her up slowly. She was breathing but barely and she was cold to touch. I lay her on the bed unsure of what to do next.

"Camilla, can you hear me?" I asked but I got no response and I cursed.

I didn't know what happened so I didn't know what to do. The first thing I did was clean up the crusted blood from her nose and check for any signs of a head injury or something that could have made her bleed but there was none. She was fine, her breathing had evened out now that she was in bed but she wouldn't wake. Her skin was still a bit cold to touch but that was the extent of it.

I became aware of Lyla's presence again when she moved to stand next to me and in a second, I had her pinned to the wall by her throat. "How did you know she was lying here like that?"

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"I'm a seer remember," she didn't look panicked despite the fact that I held her life in my hands and could snap her neck at any second. "I know you're

panicking but let me help her, please. I saw it for a reason, I am here to help, I won't cause you any trouble."

"How do I know that I can trust you?"

before," she reminded me. "If I wanted to hurt you both, I would have done it my roof and helpless. Why would I wait to do it now?"

"Because I helped you do then when you were under

She had a point whether I wanted to admit it or not. I released her and her hands. immediately flew to her throat. She didn't look upset with me, merely annoyed and uncomfortable. She straightened up and dusted invisible lint off her clothes. I turned to Juan who was still standing by the door. He had followed me earlier but he made no move to walk into the room. He raised a brow in my direction silently asking if I was okay and I shrugged. I wouldn't be okay until Camilla was fine.

She had been lying here helpless for the entire night and I didn't even notice. She could have been hurt more, she could have died, she could have been taken and I would have never known. I was so busy with my own thoughts that I didn't realize what was happening to my own mate. It was so confusing that the mate bond didn't recognize or alert me to the fact that she was hurt. It was normal for me to feel her every emotion and whenever she was in pain so it didn't make sense that I couldn't even figure out that she was lying unconscious.

"It isn't physical," Lyla said suddenly making me turn to her. "I can't read your mind, it is just obvious what you were thinking and the answer is because what happened to her wasn't physical. It is more like a tear on the inside."

"I don't understand."

"I tried to warn you before. I said there were numerous paths to the future and I couldn't say anything then so as not to solidify them and make them happen but this was one of them. Her powers are fragile at best and explosive at worst, you think she has the powers to heal but she doesn't, what she holds is far greater than that and with great responsibility comes great sacrifice. It is all about the balance of the world. She cannot hold such power and not pay the consequences for it."

"You're speaking in riddles," I cut her off. "if you have something to say then say it directly. I have no time for all this rubbish. Tell me what is wrong with her and how to fix it?"

2/5

A

Chapter 168

"There is nothing you can do to fix this, she needs time to heal and special attention. I will prepare a poultice. I am not the best at potions but I know how to do this. She will be fine before tomorrow. She will wake but you need to be

very careful. The person you are fighting against isn't one to be trifled with. I haven't seen them yet but I can sense their power. You are walking into something you don't even understand."

"Then help me understand, walked over to her and grabbed her shoulders.

"Tell me what it is that I need to know in order to keep my mate safe."

"Camilla doesn't hold the power to heal, she holds the power of life. The very essence of it seeps into her soul and her spirit. That is why it manifested in her blood all those months ago," my jaw went slack. Of all the things I thought she would say, this wasn't one of them. "When the vampires came to be, it was as a result of trifling with death. The first turned became the embodiment of death because he had lost his soul. To combat that, the goddess gave her the gift of life, now that the vampires are gone, she needs to balance it out."

"Life is a powerful thing and if she controls it, that makes her equally powerful. To balance it out, she made the powers come with a price. For each person she heals, she takes something out of herself, a chunk of her own life force you could say. I cannot see how many she has healed in the past but those were experiments. In those cases, she wasn't giving the life, it was being taken from her. She healed someone yesterday, did she not?"

I nodded slowly at her words unsure of where she was going with it. "That was my sister."

"Well, when she deliberately healed your sister, she was willingly giving life and it came with a price. It is the same way when the vampire willingly gave life back to his lover, it took something out of him. If she continues to heal people, she will reach a point where she exerts herself and she loses her entire soul."

After her cryptic and almost terrifying words, she went with Christine to get some herbs from the forest. I made sure they had some guards with them and I sat in the room with Camilla. She was still sleeping peacefully, from just looking at her there was no way you would have realized that she was trying to recuperate from the missing part of her soul. The entire thing was bizarre and insane. I couldn't understand why the goddess would do something like this. Wouldn't it have been more worth it to just take the powers away?

3/5

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A

Chapter 168

"Ryker?" Riley's voice pulled me out of my thoughts and I turned to her. She was leaning against the wall for support and I cursed when I realized she was one wrong move away from falling over. I immediately grabbed her and led

her to the chair. She sank against it with relief and I frowned at her.

Rile

“What are you doing here? You should be resting. Don’t you realize that?” I asked but she said nothing. for f ucks sake, I love you

but you need to go back. If you don’t want to be in the physician’s quarters anymore then I can have you moved to another room but you need to rest.”

“Is this my fault?” she asked quietly and I stilled. “I overheard Juan and Christine while I was still in the physician quarters. They said something about Camilla being hurt because she healed me. I thought it was a joke because you had said she was fine. I knew I needed to come here and find out. Is it true?”

I stayed silent not knowing how to respond to her. I always prided myself in being able to tell the truth no matte

the situation but this was one of those times where it seemed like a lie would be a better option. It wasn’t her fault, but there was no denying that it happened because she healed Riley. If anything, it was my fault, I allowed Riley leave putting her within firing range of whoever was behind these attacks and I asked Camilla to heal her.

“It is the fault of whatever which was behind this,” I said finally but she didn’t look too convinced. “I don’t want you to worry about this. We have it covered. All you need to focus on is getting better. Camilla will be fine and when she is, she will come to see you.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered but I shook my head. There was nothing to apologize for. “Maybe I should just go back home after this, I seem to be causing a lot of trouble here.”

“You’re not,” I assured her, “and you’re not leaving until we figure out who is behind this for real. For now, go back and rest, I’ll have a guard take you.”

Just as I was about to leave, Lyla walked back into the room. She looked at Riley first and there was something about her expression that I hated. Before I could ask, she turned back to me. “I got the herbs.”

4/5

A

Chapter 169

CAMILLA'S P.O.V

I was standing in a completely dark room and I came to the conclusion that I hated it. I was standing in front of a mirror and when I looked up to it, I saw myself but with a gaping wound in my chest. Out of instinct, I reached up to touch my chest but there was nothing there. My brows scrunched as I took in the mirror, the image wasn't moving, the mirror was solid, so why was there a hole in my chest when I couldn't see one? I had spent

what felt like forever trying to figure out what the hell was going on.

When I started bleeding from my nose in the room, I had tried to call out for Ryker down the bond but for the first time in a long time- I couldn't. It was like something was blocking me from my wolf. I tried to get to the door hoping I could find a guard to call for him but I passed out before I made it two steps. At first I was worried but I knew that Ryker would find me sooner or later, it just might take a while because he was with Riley.

Tain

was

After spending more time analyzing the mirror, I decided that it was broken and the mirror, I decided that it was broken and took a seat cross legged on the floor. It slowly driving me mad and that was the last thing I needed. I needed to concentrate on waking up. I closed my eyes and

willed myself back into my body. I tried to cold ground, I

There was a slight tingling in my toes but that was it- I didn't move. I cursed and tried again and again but nothing. I was just about to give up when I heard a voice. It was familiar but I couldn't put my finger on it. I tried to listen out for it hoping to hear more but nothing.

pictured the smell of the room and Rare my body on the

Scent

"Hello?" I called out hoping they could hear me but I got no response. "Please help, I want to leave."

hands

Only my voice echoed back to me. I let out a groan and ran my my hair. I turned back to the mirror and was shocked to see that the hole in my chest was healing itself, almost knitting itself closed. I watched with equal parts horror and fascination until it became as small as a penny but it didn't close completely. It remained open just a little and it stopped. I didn't know how, but I knew that hole would never close no matter what I did.

"She should be awake soon," I heard that same voice from earlier. "I can tell she is trying to wake."

"Who are you?" I yelled out but I got no response. "I'm trying but I can't wake up. Tell me how!"

I came to realize that it was a one way street. I was probably hearing what was going on outside of my body and they couldn't hear me. I let out an exasperated sigh wondering how the hell I was going to do this. Just as I was giving up, I saw a bright light appear overhead. I had to shield my eyes from the brightness. There was no essence in the light, no sign of life, it was just light. I knew I was to reach out for it so I did, my fingertips barely brushed it when I felt myself getting sucked into it. There was a sharp pain in my head and my body and I let out a groan.

I felt something soft like feathers beneath me and I forced my eyelids open only to find a face staring down at me. It took me a second to realize it was Ryker. He let out a sigh of pure relief as he took me in. I was back in our room, laid on the soft bed and surrounded by pillows. I knew there were other people in the room but my attention was solely on him. He looked like he had been through hell, his hair was sticking up at the ends and his eyes were heavy as if he hadn't slept.

"You found me," I croaked out and he nodded.

"I took far longer than I should have and I wouldn't have noticed if not for Lyla," he admitted and I turned to the side confused as to who Lyla was for a second until I saw her. She was the witch who had helped Audrey. As soon as I recognized her, fear gripped my heart.

I sat up straight despite the pounding in my head and the protests from Ryker. "Is something wrong with Audrey? Is the protection already wearing thin?"

"Your daughter is fine," she assured me and my shoulders immediately went slack with relief. "I am here about you, Camilla. You are toying with things that you do not understand. Every witch within a knowledge of the arts has been able to feel what you have been toying with."

"I don't understand," I groaned placing my hand on my head in an attempt to ease the splitting headache that was forming. I barely managed to hide a wince when it started to get worse.

Ryker noticed and lay me back gently in bed. I realized I had been changed out of my dress and into a more comfortable nightgown and I couldn't have been more grateful. He walked into the bathroom and returned with a warm washcloth that he placed on my forehead. It did not completely take away the pain but it eased it a lot.

"I don't know what you're talking about, what am I toying with?"

"Life and death," she said simply. "Someone has been bleeding death into the land and you, my dear child, are bleeding life. This is more than a witch, this is the embodiment of death and you are trifling with it like some common adversary."

"Did you come here to tell me to stop?" I asked. "If you did, you're too late because Ryker has been asking me to do that for days now."

"Yet he asked you to heal his sister, did he not?" she shot back and I went silent. Even Ryker stilled next to me, I could feel the guilt radiating off him but he kept his expression carefully neutral. "I will only say this once, Camilla. I don't care who is dying next, you cannot heal them. You cannot toy with life and death, there will be consequences and it might be something that you cannot pay."

It was obvious that her words were not empty. There was something she had seen or something she knew that prompted this kind of response. Was there someone else I would want to heal? Was Christine or someone close to me going to get hurt? I stared at her trying to get a read on her but she was good at keeping her emotions at bay.

"Who is it?" I asked but she stayed silent. "Can't you at least just give me a hint?"
"If I tell you then it has to happen. The best I can give is a warning, Camilla, I hope you do right by it," she bowed. "I will be staying in a cottage just outside the town. I have a feeling I will be needed here more than you might think."

She walked away leaving both Ryker and I alone. I tried to speak to him but he cut me off by demanding I rested. I wanted to refuse but he handed me a glass of water. I drank it and immediately began to feel drowsy. It took me a minute to realize he had drugged me but before I could protest about it, I was out like a light.

I woke up a few hours later with the sun about to set. My headache was almost completely gone and I felt a lot better than before. The room was completely empty which I found a little weird but I managed to drag myself out of bed and into the bathroom. The bath was already full which I found suspicious but I was too tired to ask questions. I dipped into the tub and relaxed. The warm water hit all the right tendons leaving me a mess of bones inside.

I was so relaxed that I didn't realize when I started to drift off. It was a panicked shout that had me jerking up in the tub. Ryker poked his head into the bathroom and when he saw me, he let out an audible sigh of relief. I was so stunned that I

didn't realize what had just transpired.

"I thought something had happened to you," he admitted as he made his way over to me. "I left to find something for you to eat when you woke up and you were gone when I returned."

"I just felt filthy," I mumbled but the tension still didn't leave his shoulders. He helped me out of the tub, his eyes never once straying down to my body. He wrapped the robe around me and led me back to bed. "I need to get dressed though."

"We aren't leaving the room, don't worry," he assured me. He handed me a steaming tray of food and my stomach grumbled. I hadn't eaten since last night and my body was reminding me of the consequences of my decision. "How are you feeling?"

"I should be asking you that."

He smiled. "You're the one that got hurt, Camilla. I see no reason why you should be inquiring about my own well being. I am fine, I am alive."

"Why did you drug me?" I asked and he stilled. There was no use beating about the bush, he had crossed a line by drugging me and he knew it.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I just needed you to rest and I knew you wouldn't unless you had to. You have risked so much of yourself already, I did the only thing I knew how." His words were thick with self loathing and guilt. It was almost hard to hear.

"This isn't your fault," I said but he wouldn't look at me. "Ryker-"

"I asked you to heal her, I made this happen. Say whatever you might, but this was my fault."