

THE REJECTED WEREWOLF PRINCESS

Chapter 271



RYKER'S P.O.V

There was a buzzing underneath my skin, like a presence that didn't want to leave, it was a constant reminder of the magic flowing through my veins. It was unusual at first and a tad bit uncomfortable but now, it was just annoying. With everything going on, it was very easy to lose my cool but the moment I lost control of my emotions, I lost control of the magic too. If Camilla hadn't been with me in the council chambers, I would've lost control and I couldn't have that.

Not right now, not when we were fighting an enemy outside. The last thing I wanted to do was to make the people divert their attention from the real enemy and onto me. People tended to fear what they couldn't understand and I couldn't expect anyone to understand the fact that I currently possessed the same magic that Reina did. Even I found it hard to believe sometimes especially after killing that male siren but I did it for the right cause and that was more than enough for me.

I wasn't going to hide it forever, that was never the plan, I just needed to keep it hidden and controlled long enough until we had nothing to worry about. It was going to take some getting used to and slow acclimatization to get the people used to it but I knew it was something I could do. The people were reasonable and they loved us, but fear was a powerful weapon and right now, there was too much fear for them to think straight. At that moment, they were

in survival mode and threatened animals only knew how to do one thing—strike.

"I'm here," Juan announced as he walked into my office. I had asked for his help to try and figure out which sea the sirens could be in. There were three of them and I didn't want to risk sending innocent guards to their deaths. "I got all the notes you asked me to get on the seas and the areas around them. I hope you know what you are doing, Ryker."

I hesitated for a moment before responding. "I hope so too."

No one wanted the sirens gone more than Juan and I. He had a pregnant mate and I knew it had been worrying him badly that there was so much going on that could potentially put her in danger. I had told him that it was fine if he decided it was best for him and Christine to leave and settle somewhere else but all he did was snort in my face and ask what I needed for him to do. I had never thought I would have another friend in my life but Juan was someone I didn't know I needed until he came into my life. "I have been going through the books about sirens," I said gesturing to the stack of books I had taken from the private library. "They are a very secretive species so not much is known about them. It is said that once you go down to a sirens home, you will never return. All the information we have is from sirens who have been captured before but it is taken with a grain of salt because sirens are known manipulators."

"So it could either be completely true or completely false," he deduced and I nodded. "Alright then, I want to hear it."

"Excluding their supernatural strength, speed and regenerative habits, it is said that sirens love the clean and open water. They prefer to move in the deep waters which makes it difficult for their prey to escape. They can usually be found in the open sea and they prefer isolated bodies of water. They have tight familial bonds but they also are not good parents. Sirens will torture their

own kids so that they can remain with their respective spouses. They also mate for life."

"Does it say how to kill them?" Juan asked and I nodded.

"They can die like any other mortal creature. They can be decapitated and they can die from blood loss although the last is very tricky because of how fast they regenerate. In their human form, they are at their weakest. If you get a siren in their true form, they are almost impossible to beat. You can also turn a sirens powers back on themselves by singing their own song back to them. It heightens their animalistic tendencies and it causes them to lose control. They could even kill themselves."

"How do we sing the song to them if it is something that we cannot even hear ourselves? IF we listen to it, we are lost. How do we know what to sing back?"

"I don't know," I mumbled as I ran my hands through my hair. "But using this information, we are looking for the cleanest possible sea and the largest."

Juan walked over to the map that was open in front of us and dropped a pin in a spot. "That is the cleanest and largest sea that is close to this pack," he paused for a second and took another pin and placed it on the opposite side of the map. "But if that was all lies then that is the murkiest, the smallest and the most visited by people."

"If we choose wrong then," I trailed off, I didn't even need to finish my sentence, he knew. "What do you think?" "I think you have to make this decision by yourself. It isn't something that I can make for you, I'm sorry."

I thought about it for a second. I didn't know anything else about sirens except what was in the books and I was normally a stickler for the rules, it was in my nature to just go with what the books said but another part of me, a softer and quiet side told me to go with the opposite. It was like an impossible question because this wasn't just about me anymore, it was about everyone in this

entire palace. I couldn't make the wrong choice, I could be damning everyone to a death sentence.

I closed my eyes and exhaled deeply as I pointed to one of the pins. "This one."

We prepared to move by evening. Sirens had extraordinary eyesight from being able to swim underwater and while I should have been looking for something to our advantage, I was deliberately going with the opposite. I wanted them to feel safe, I wanted them to feel like they had the advantage over us. I wanted to avoid a war and I was going to do everything possible to make sure that it didn't get bloody although a part of me told me I was wasting my time.

Dinner was a tense affair, the women knew we were doing something but they didn't know what and that was exactly how I wanted it. They wouldn't even look us in the eye, Camilla just sat next to me with her expression set in a permanent frown. The tension was so thick and tangible that even the kids didn't speak, they just sat there in uncomfortable silence. I wanted to speak, to try and ease the tension but even I didn't know what to say.

By the time dinner was over, Camilla and I put the girls in bed but she didn't speak to me once. The moment we were out of Audrey's room, she tried to brush past me but I grabbed her arm. "Please stop."

She narrowed her eyes at me. "Stop what exactly? I haven't done anything so if you would please let me go."

"I need to do this," I whispered softly but that seemed to have no effect on her whatsoever. "I need to see if peace is an option."

"It isn't," she spat. It was at that moment I realized exactly what the issue was. She wasn't pissed off at me, she was worried. I cupped her cheeks and

stroked my thumb across her skin softly and I felt her shiver against me. "You shouldn't be going out there, especially not with guards."

"I don't want her to think that we are attacking them or coming there for an ambush. I want this to be on their own terms."

"This is insane, I will be the first to tell you that this is a suicide battle. She will kill you."

"Then the battle will be over," I couldn't stop the words from leaving my mouth and the moment they did, Camilla pulled back from me. "Baby-"

She held up a hand to stop me. "You are going out there with the intention to die, aren't you?"

"I don't want to die."

"Don't lie to me," she hissed. "It might not be your first choice but if it comes then you will accept it with open arms. You bastard. Would you have just left me here to wait for you to return home?"

"I'm sorry," I began but she was past the point of listening to me.

She slapped my chest hard repeatedly until I realized there were tears streaming down her face. I cursed and pulled her closer into my embrace. She mumbled something under her breath that was indiscernible but I didn't care in that moment, I was worried about her.

"I'll come back," I promised her. A few minutes ago, I wouldn't have cared but right now, I had to return. "I will do everything in my power to return."

"No, you will go above and beyond to return because I swear to the goddess, if you don't come back, I will go down to the afterlife and drag you back myself, do you hear me?"

The corner of my lips tilted up as I nodded. "I hear you loud and clear."

"This isn't funny," she mumbled but I could see that she was trying and failing to hide her smile. "I'll be waiting up for you."

"Don't," I began but she rolled her eyes. Content belongs to Nove/IDrâ/ma.O(r)g!

"I will be waiting," she repeated the words to let me know that she didn't give a shit about my refusal. "Christine probably will be too so you would do well to bring Juan back in one piece as well." "I will."

Camilla sighed before taking a step back from me. "You should go now, before it gets too late."

Chapter 272



RYKER'S P.O.V

There was a chill breeze in the air that felt unnatural. It was almost like a warning, telling me about everything that could go wrong. Juan was beside me, silent but equally tense. The horses moved slowly, almost as if they also could sense the danger. It was in the air, swirling around us, threatening to choke whatever good was left.

"What if you chose wrong?" Juan asked and I stilled. I had thought about it, debated it actually, the truth was, I wasn't sure. "Do you think they would know that you came looking or can we just head out to the other spot?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "I don't know them like I would love to. I don't make assumptions that I cannot back up by fact."

"This is a dangerous game you are playing, Ryker. We are facing an enemy that has nothing to lose and those are the most dangerous foes." "She has her child."

He snorted. "I don't know why, but I believe the idea of them not being great parents. A lot of us wolves would do the same thing," I opened my mouth to protest but he cut me off. "That isn't to say that we aren't good parents, we would just choose our mates over our children. She picked her husband over her child."

I thought about it for a second but I didn't even need to think about it for long, if it came down to it, I was going to pick Camilla. I wasn't sure if that made me a bad father or not, but it was what I would have done. I wasn't sure I could live without Camilla, I couldn't even imagine life without her.

"The mate bond is a powerful thing," was my answering response and he hummed in agreement. "How is Christine? How do you feel about the babies?"

"Honestly, I was preparing for one kid, two is a little more than I bargained for but it is exciting nonetheless. I want a family with her and it seems like it will be a good challenge, I just don't know if it is one I'm ready for. Were you ready for your girls?"

I snorted. "I found out about Audrey when she was three and I was not ready for Aurora in the least. I don't think anyone is ever ready for children, it is just something that happens. You will be a good father."

"I know I will," it wasn't over confidence or pride, he was just stating a fact. "I just hope there is a world for my children to come into."

"I guess we will find out," I gestured forward towards the sea. It was only a distance away, I could already see the marsh. "I think we should dismount here. I don't want to startle them."

"Somehow, I think that they already know we are here."

Neither of us said anything as we got off the horses. The air almost seemed colder the closer we got to the edge of the water. I convinced myself that the water had something to do with it, but I couldn't help but know that it was something else. There was old magi running through the veins of the waters and it almost seemed to sing out to me. We were only a few feet away from the stream when I heard a piercing scream.

I slammed both hands over my ears trying to rid myself of the sound but it was coming from somewhere deep within my mind. It was inside of me and I couldn't get it out. I felt Juan's hands on my shoulders as he tried to figure out what was happening but I couldn't hear him, the sound was too much. I looked up at him, relieved that he had his ear plugs in. I knew that whatever I could hear was coming straight from the sirens.Cntn

"They're here," I managed out and he must have read my lips because his eyes grew guarded. "I need ear plugs."

He handed me some and despite putting them in, I could still the reverberating scream in my brain. It wasn't as bad as before, but it was there. Juan was watching me with concern and apprehension as I slowly made my way towards the edge of the water. It wasn't the cleanest I had seen but it also wasn't the nastiest.

"Please," I whispered as I put a hand in the water. I wasn't sure how I knew what to do. "I know you're grieving and I know I am arguably the last person you want to see right now but I want to talk to you."

The scream stopped almost immediately and I felt relief for the first time in minutes, that was until I felt the air shift. It went dark, and I felt a tension in the air that hadn't been there before. The hair on my hands stood on edge and I felt something bitter and tart bubble the siren. It was her anger and it was directed

at me.

up in my chest. I knew instantly that it wasn't mine, it was coming from someone else, something else. I looked down at my hand still submerged in the water and pulled it back. Almost immediately, the feeling stopped. I knew instantly that it belonged to

I instantly opened the mind link between Juan and I. "Step back, now. She is coming."

"What are you talking about?" "Step back!"

No sooner than I had said that, the water erupted in a huge wave. It splashed everywhere, getting all over my skin and clothes. I was drenched from head to toe but I didn't sway, didn't move back at all. I couldn't cower, not now and not in the face of her anger. For the first time, I took in the female siren. She had hair that looked like it had been spun straight from the depths of the ocean. Her eyes were bottomless pits the color of the waves of the sea and I noticed her bottom half was no longer that of a man, it was a tail, the same color as her hair.

"Why shouldn't I kill you right now?" she snarled as she stared so hard, it felt like she was seeing directly into my soul. "You took something from me."

I realized as she spoke that her lips didn't move once, she spoke directly into my mind. I wasn't sure if it was an after effect of hearing her voice or if it was just a power that she possessed.

"You would have killed me if I didn't kill you," I said simply and I expected anger from her, but all I got in return was cold amusement. "I defended myself."

She shrugged. "That doesn't change the fact that you killed my husband and I will have my revenge."

"You have no moral high ground for revenge."

The corner of her lips tugged up into a smirk. "Who said anything about morality? I have take everything you hold dear and I will make you watch as I drain the life from your-"

"Do not threaten my family," I snarled and for the first time, I saw something akin to worry flash across her eyes. "You came to my family when you didn't need to. You attacked us unprovoked, you tried to have me killed and you used your magic on me." "You are one to talk about magic. Why are you here?"

"I don't want to fight you, I have no interest in adding one more defeated foe to my history. Our species do not need to be at war, we have peacefully coexisted without having to interact with one another. I see no reason why there should be a fight."

Her lips curved. "It is only a fight if both parties have equal chances of winning. I have no interest in fighting your pack or your species. Neither does my species have any interest in a war. We sirens are people of peace, we only attack strays who wander into our territory."

"I am no stray and you know that."

"You are right about that," she hummed flicking her tail in the water. "You were brave for coming here. Most men wouldn't dream of coming to their place of death yet you walked in willingly."

"Because I have no interest in dying, and I know you have no interest in killing me."

"You are smart," she laughed humorlessly and sat up straighter. "My daughter is asleep right now. She would love to receive a gift from the people who murdered her father. You came here for peace, right? Let me give you my

conditions for peace. I want you to hurt the way I do. I want you to feel my loss. I want your mate."

"That will never happen."

She looked behind me and nodded towards Juan. "I want his then. I know you won't give up yours so easily, but he wouldn't have to know. I can come in and pretend like it is a battle, I will kill her and leave."

Her voice was almost calming, like she was singing to me. There was a lull in my brain until I felt something like a charge and I knew exactly what she had been trying to do to me. I knew what she wanted. I moved before she could speak. One hand shot out and shadows slithered out wrapping around her throat. Her words were cut off mid-sentence and in that moment, I would have killed her with no hesitation. She knew that too because the next thing I knew, she was diving under the waves again. I couldn't see her and I couldn't kill what I couldn't see.

"What happened?" I heard Juan's voice in my head. "What did you talk about? What did she say?"

"Nothing," I lied. I couldn't tell him what she had asked of me. "We need to get out of here. There is no hope for peace."

We walked off towards our horses and I was one step away from mine when I heard her voice again.

"You should have taken my offer when you could, Ryker Caine. I will destroy you and I will take both women and you will do nothing about it."

Chapter 273



CAMILLA'S P.O.V

I sat anxiously in Christine's bed with her head in my lap. I hadn't even been able to protest when she did it because the Christine I knew wasn't big on being touched but for her to go out of her way and request physical contact, then it was clear that she was worried. Her baby bump was bigger now, she couldn't hide it even if she tried. I figured it had something to do with the fact that she was having twins because she was bigger than I was at her stage.

She was absent mindedly running her hand over her stomach and murmuring words under her breath. I couldn't figure out what she was saying, I just knew that she was speaking to herself and with each passing second, the worry grew so thick that it felt like I could reach out and cut it up with a butter knife.

"Have you discussed baby names?" I asked and her movements ceased. It was clear she didn't hear my question so I repeated it again. "Have you thought about the gender or where you want to put the nursery?"

"We've spoken a few times, but we never came to an agreement. SO much has been happening that I haven't even had time to sit and-"

"You don't have to worry about everything going on. We can handle ourselves. This is your first child, you should be basking in the feeling of pregnancy."

She snorted. "I love the idea of having children, I swear I do, but I do not like being pregnant and if I am being very honest, I would rather think of anything else right now. My boobs hurt like hell, my feet are always swollen, I am as unstable as the weather in spring and I cannot fit into most of my clothes."

"It does have its bad sides," I murmured in agreement. "But I guess it helps to have something to look forward to. You're going to have your own babies- two of them. Do you have any preferences on the gender?"

"Audrey said I was having a boy and a girl and I have learned that Audrey is almost always right so, boy and girl it is. I haven't thought about names yet. Neither Juan nor I have any familial relations we would like to name our kids after. You had Ryker's mum and yours, but I have- well I have no one."

I had never stopped to realize just how truly sad Christine's life was. She had come to live at the palace from a very young age, she had no family excluding us. It was incredibly lonely and I couldn't help but feel bad for her. Many sentences in this chapter have been removed because you are not reading them on Jo b nib.c(o)m. She looked up at me and she must have seen something in my expression because she cursed and sat up. Within seconds, she was wiping tears from the corner of her eyes.

"This is why I hate being pregnant," she mumbled as she grabbed a handkerchief from the side drawer. "You start looking at me with pity and I start bawling like a f*****g baby."

"I wasn't looking at you with pity," I lied and she shot me a withering look. "It wasn't my intention at least."

"it never is, it is just who you are. You feel bad for people, you want to help them, even when they don't feel bad or want to help themselves. I'll think about baby names, I just- I'm scared." Now, her wall was cracking a little, I could practically see it crumbling before my very eyes. "What are you scared of?"

"That I won't get to enjoy this," she whispered. "There is something you and Ryker didn't tell me, I'm not asking you to tell me now, I don't even want to know to be honest. Fear is a greater killer than death itself sometimes but I know there is something. I'm just scared that I won't be able to enjoy it and I am scared that if I start trying to, I won't get to."

I frowned and reached out to her. She didn't hesitate, she allowed me hold her and run my fingers through her hair. "Audrey saw you having two amazing kids. There is nothing for you to worry about. Our kids are going to grow up together and be best friends." It was clear she didn't believe me and I knew I was lying to her, but I didn't care. I was going to say whatever was necessary to make her feel better about everything. It was unfair for anyone to go through this level of worry and unease during their pregnancy. It was meant to be a time for enjoyment and a time to reflect on the beauty of life giving, it wasn't for her to worry or fret about what could possibly go wrong.

I shot up from the bed and gestured for her to come with me. "I have an idea." Content from

"I don't want to go anywhere, Camilla," she mumbled but I wasn't about to take no for an answer. I pulled on her hand until she was standing and pulled her along with me.

We all lived on the same floor, just in different wings of the palace. She stayed in the west with Juan while Ryker and I stayed in the East. There was an assortment of rooms next to hers so I picked the one closest to hers. It was large and empty, it hadn't been used for a while and there was nothing in there save for a small table. She had her hands crossed over her chest as she followed me in and a look of unease on her face.

"We can make this into a nursery for you," I said gesturing to the massive space. "There can be two cribs right next to each other and two rocking chairs for you and Juan. Your kids will have a massive f*****g closet and more toys than they can possibly use." With each word, she smiled softly and moved a little closer into the room. "I could see the vision. It would have to be painted and cleaned because there is no way in hell this room can be used like this."

"You can discuss the vision with Juan and have it cleaned so you can start decorating. It might make the whole process a lot easier or more pleasurable for you."

She sighed and leaned against the wall. "I just want all of this to be over. I want to have the kids and just enjoy it."

"I think you'll be crying for the pregnancy stage again once you have to deal with not one but two screaming newborns at midnight," her eyes widened as she thought about it and I couldn't help but laugh at her comical expression. "You'll be fine, you have Juan and you have Ryker and I. You helped so much with our girls and there is no doubt in my mind that we will help whenever you need us. All you have to do is call for us."

"Thank you," her eyes welled up with tears but she was determined to blink them away. "This has just been a very emotionally exhausting time and I wasn't sure if I was allowed to like it because of everything going on. It's just-it feels too much."

"It will be fine," I assured her, taking her hands in mine. "You deserve to be happy and this is your chance so you need to take it with both hands."

We stood there for a while, just talking about probable designs for the nursery when I heard movement outside. I gestured to Christine to wait while I went to investigate. There were very few people who wandered into this part of the palace which was why I wasn't completely surprised to see Ryker and Juan coming out of the bedroom. Juan sighted me first and he let out a sigh of relief as he brushed past me and into the room to find his mate.

I met Ryker halfway and I didn't need to read his mind to know that there was something bothering him. I reached up to stroke my fingers down his cheek when he pulled me into him and kissed me deeply. There was something desperate in that kiss, something urgent that tasted a lot like panic and relief. I

kissed him back, silently trying to remind him that I was here and I wasn't running anywhere. That I was here with him and he didn't have to worry. He pulled back and rested his forehead against mine. He didn't speak but the silence said volumes. I ran my hands gently down his face and hair until the tension had slowly bled out of his shoulders.

"You smell like ocean water," I noted and he couldn't help but chuckle. "Did you take a dip or something?"

"No, I had an angry siren throw a wave onto me," he took a step back leaving me cold. "We should give them some privacy," I looked over my shoulder to find Christine animatedly telling Juan some of the plans for the nursery. He was watching her with a small smile on his face and I could have bet that he was just staring at her and not even listening.

"You're right," I agreed, letting Ryker lead me with his hand on the small of my back.

We walked in comfortable silence and the moment we were behind closed doors, his lips found mine. He wasn't as panicked as earlier, but there was something frantic about his actions, something that spelled out worry for me. Still, I couldn't stop myself from kissing him back, he was my mate, I loved the feel of his lips on mine. He only pulled back so we could catch our breaths and I took that opportunity to speak.

"What happened out there?" I asked and his eyes darkened considerably as he looked away. "You cannot avoid this question forever, you need to tell me."

"I will," I knew he wasn't lying. "I just don't want to do it tonight."

I rolled my eyes playfully. "You never want to do it tonight. Why though? You always tell me the next day."

"Because I would rather spend time with my mate and not have her worrying the entire time she is in my arms. I will tell you tomorrow, just trust me, please."

Chapter 274



CAMILLA'S P.O.V

I woke up to fingers running through my curls. I made a sound underneath my breath and nestled closer to the source of heat that I knew ultimately belonged to Ryker. He chuckled under his breath before pressing a soft kiss to the top of my head. I was fully awake by this time, but I had no intentions of opening my eyes anytime soon. "It's morning," Ryker's voice was soft and teasing by my ears. "We need to talk, Camilla."

"I know," I mumbled as I moved closer to him. "I just want a few more seconds, can you give me that?"

"I could, but it is very late in the morning and if you don't get up now, you might be pissed with me later," he whispered and I groaned but ultimately knew he was right and pulled my eyes open. He had a small smile on his face. "Good morning, baby."

He leaned down and kissed me softly. There was always something heart warming and calming about waking up next to him. It was my own calm before the storm, my own brief moment of peace before the drama of the day began. It was that little piece of bliss that I could count on every day of my life and I lived and breathed for it. I smiled up at him and he stared at me like I had hung up the stars.

"We need to talk," his voice was soft but there was an edge in his eyes, something that had me knowing that whatever he was about to say had the potential to wreck my day. I sat up slowly, pulling the blankets up to my chin with it. "I need to tell you so that we can get our stories straight before we talk to Juan and Christine."

"Is it that bad?"

"It is and fuck, Camilla, I don't even want to talk to you about it but I made a promise last night and I have to," the way he was speaking terrified me and with each passing second, I could almost feel an impending sense of doom.

It was kind of ironic that we were having the conversation with him fully clothed and me stark naked but I was used to us having the weirdest conversations in the weirdest of places. I sat up straighter and cleared my throat.

"I'm listening," I said trying to keep the fear and worry out of my words. "I'll try to keep a clear mind but forgive me if I am unable to."

"She wants Christine dead."

I paused, blinked at him twice and then rubbed my ears wondering if I had heard him wrong. I blinked again wondering if he was going to disappear or laugh and say that he was joking but he didn't. It didn't matter how long I stared at him, he didn't move, he didn't flinch and I knew deep in my heart that I heard right.

"Why would she want that?" I couldn't understand the reasoning behind it.

"What does Christine have to do with anything?"

"She wanted me to offer up Christine in exchange for you. She said she would attack the palace, kill Christine and leave. That was her condition to leave you alone."

My eyes widened to the point of saucers. "What did you say?"

"Of course I said no, what do you think I said?" he sounded a tad bit annoyed that I even had to ask. "I think this is more than just getting revenge at this point. She wants to hurt us, she wants to make us feel the hurt." "Christine is in danger then," I finished and he nodded. "What do we do? Do we talk to Juan about it? He has a right to know, right?"

"Juan is going to panic and that is the last thing he needs right now. All I told him is that she is going to attack, but I didn't tell him about her ultimatum with Christine. I don't want him to look at me differently." "He wouldn't."

Ryker snorted. "Even you took a second to ask what I had chosen when I told you. It is normal for a mate to pick his own over the others. Most men would have picked the ultimatum and I wouldn't blame him if he did." "So you want me to lie."

"I want you to be aware because no one else will be. I can also hear her in my head. I was right about that. She was talking to me inside of my head. She never said a single word."

"How does that even work?"

"I think it happened when I heard her voice for the first time. I don't think it is something I can get out."

"So what do we do?"

"There is nothing we can do," he sighed. "We sit and prepare for them to attack."Contentt belongs to N0ve/IDrâ/ma.O(r)g!

He pressed a kiss to my head and got out of bed. I watched as he started to get dressed for the day but I didn't move from the bed. It wasn't until he had gotten to the door that I realized that there was something I wanted to ask.

"Why did you tell me all of this?" I asked and he stilled with his hands on the door. "I understand you telling me about Christine, but the other, why? You didn't have to."

"I don't know," he admitted after a minute of silence. "I did it because I wanted someone to know. I am tired of trying to figure it out myself."

"What happened to wanting to protecting me?"

"It is easier to protect you if you know what is happening. If you are trying to figure it out on your own, then you will get hurt."

After our heavy conversation that morning, we spent the rest of the morning tending to our kids and meeting with the elders. They had nothing more to offer other than what they already gave to us. I ended up leaving the conversation more frustrated than before I started. There had been no signs of the sirens, not even at the same sea shore where Ryker had found them the night before.

We were in the middle of the meeting with the elders when there was a knock on the door. Neither of us were expecting the interruption, it took us all by surprise. When I saw the guard behind the door, I knew instantly that it was bad news. The look on his face hel fear and apprehension. Even before he opened his mouth, I knew what I was going to hear.

"There is something you need to see," he said and we were immediately on our feet.

We followed him as quickly as we could and watched as he led us straight to the front of the palace where there was a man standing. He was fighting against the hold of the guards who were keeping him in place. He was repeating a phrase over again and it wasn't until I got closer that I realized what he was saying.

"I need to see him!" he screamed trying to get out of their hold. He sighted Ryker and I and strained against their hold even worse. "I need to see him."

"See who?" Ryker asked when he got closer. "See me?"

"No, see him. The one who knows the mistress, I need to see him."

I turned to Ryker with confusion etched in my brows. I didn't know what he was talking about and apparently neither did Ryker because his expression perfectly matched mine. He stepped forward towards the strange man and he didn't seem to calm, his behavior only got more erratic. "Do you know where he is?" Ryker asked and he nodded. Ryker stared at me, a silent question in his eyes and although I didn't quite know what he wanted to do, I trusted him and nodded. "Release him."

"Your majesty," the guards began but Ryker held up a hand to stop him.

"If he knows where he is going, then let him lead us there."

The guards shot each other wary looks before releasing him. For a second, there was peace before he took off down one of the hallways. It was absolutely absurd that we were letting a complete stranger roam round the palace but I trusted Ryker and if Ryker trusted that this was the best idea, then I was willing to go with it.

It took a while for me to realize that he was going towards the dungeons. He led us down towards Ansel's cell. Ansel looked like a shell of himself, he was bruised all over and there were open wounds and sores all over him. I nearly flinched when I saw him but the stranger didn't as much as blink.

"Why do you want to see Ansel?" I asked once he stopped. "Also, how did you know where he was?"

He looked at me and it was at that moment I realized that his eyes were a bit glossy. He was looking in my direction but it seemed more like he was looking

through me. He opened his mouth to speak and what came out was an ear splitting scream. It was also at that moment that I realized that he was not wearing any ear buds.

"Someone grab him, he might be under her control!" Ryker yelled out but before the guards could get to him, he turned towards Ansel and reached through the bars to grab him. His skin was burned in the process but it was almost like he didn't realize what was happening.

He managed to grab Ansel by the shirt and pulled him towards the bars. Ansel didn't even fight, he had lost whatever energy he had left during the days of torture he had undergone. The stranger stared at him and it happened in slow motion. One minute, he held Ansel and the next, he was twisting his neck and a loud crack reverberated through the air.

I stared with my mouth wide open as Ansel's body slumped to the ground. His chest didn't rise once. The guards managed to get to the stranger but it was too late. He had done what he came to do. He turned towards me and blinked once. "What am I doing here?"

Chapter 275



CAMILLA'S

P.O.V

"What do you mean what are you doing here? You just killed a prisoner," Ryker took a step towards him but I held out my hand to stop him.

The strange man looked confused and a little frightened and the closer I looked at him, the more I noticed little differences. Now, he stood a lot

straighter and taller, he also didn't have that glazed over look in his eyes. He seemed so demure and quiet, like the kind of man who wouldn't hurt a fly if given the chance. I slowly made my way over to him. Ryker tried to reach out to me to stop me but I slid out of his reach, I knew the stranger wasn't going to hurt me.

"Let him go," I said to the guards who shared a confused and worried expression. I couldn't completely blame them, if I were in their shoes, I would have thought of myself as insane too, but there wasn't much they could do except do as I had asked. They released the stranger and thankfully, he didn't move or try to run. "Would you like to take a seat?"

"I don't know where I am or how I got here," he whispered. "You're the Queen, why are you here?"

"Take a seat and we can talk," I gestured to the far corner of the room where there were some benches. They weren't typically used to sit down but I still led him over and sat next to him. I could feel everyone's eyes on me but the most intense were Ryker's. "What do you remember?"

"I- I was taking a walk by the stream. I am a fisherman," he explained. "I had my ear plugs in like we were instructed but then I saw a little girl, she looked like she had been hurt. There was blood on her hands and she was crying."

"Do you remember what the girl looked like?"

"She looked very average, she had dark hair and dark eyes. I can't remember much, I was more focused on trying to get her help. She looked sick."

I knew it was a far stretch and I could have been reaching considering there were thousands of people who matched that description but considering what happened after, it was only logical to assume that was the siren's daughter. I nodded slowly. "What happened after that?"

"I picked her up, I wanted to take her to the town physician. She was so cold to touch, I swear she felt like she had been dipped into ice. While I was trying to take her, she wouldn't let me, she kept screaming something but I couldn't hear her so I took out the ear plugs."

He trailed off after that and I stared at him expectantly waiting for something else but nothing came. He just had a faraway look in his eyes, as if he had been transported to a different time.

"I cannot remember anything else," he whispered before turning to me with wide eyes. "Why can't I remember anything? Do you know how I got here?"

I tore my eyes away from him and glanced over at Ryker who had shut his eyes and ran his hands through his hair in what I assumed was frustration. He murmured something under his breath before cursing loudly. I could tell his reaction scared the stranger because he jumped and wrapped his hands even tighter around himself but almost immediately, he hissed. I glanced down and realized he had unintentionally grabbed the part of his skin that was burned with silver.

"How did I get this?" it was clear he was talking more to himself than to me and I knew in that moment that I needed to find a believable story to tell him or else everything was going to potentially fall apart.

Ryker was no help, he was dealing with his own panic and I knew it was only a matter of time before two and two was put together and the stranger realized that he had killed Ansel.

"You took the girl to the physician," I lied. "You were waiting for her and you must have fallen asleep because when you got to the palace, you were sleep walking."

His brows furrowed. "I have never sleep walked before."

"It must be something new, have you been stressed lately? Has anything new happened in your life?"

"Well, I haven't been getting as much fish as I should have lately."

He mumbled a few words under his breath and I felt bad for him because I was lying to him and ultimately making him believe something that wasn't true but it was to protect my family and I was going to lie my fucking ass off if I needed to.

"You sleep walked in here and none of us wanted to wake you, I hear it can be bad. You burned yourself and that was how you woke up. You are fine, you didn't hurt yourself or anyone but I will send you off to the physician to get you something for your burns. He will also give you a poultice for the sleep walking."

He rushed to his feet and bowed. "Thank you, your majesty. I am beyond grateful, you didn't have to-" "Please, it is the least I could do," I turned to the guards. "Take him to the physician and have his burns treated."

The guard bowed although I could see the confusion on his face. He started to walk away when Ryker grabbed his upper arm. I couldn't hear what was discussed but his face slowly contorted to reveal fear. His eyes widened to the point of saucers and he swallowed deeply before nodding and rushing off. Once he was gone, it was just Ryker and I with Ansel's unmoving body.

"What happens now?" I asked and for a full minute, he was speechless. "He was the only tie we had to the sirens."

"He was useless anyway," Ryker shrugged. "I'll have someone get rid of the body. The guards won't say a thing either. We need to enforce the earplugs rule and we need to find a way for people to communicate without having to take them off." "How do we explain to the people that they ended to wear earplugs every second of the day, even while sleeping."

"We have to tell them," he whispered and I stilled. I was scared, not for them, but for him. If they found out what happened, they could turn on him. People didn't think when scared, people always acted out. "It is the right thing to do."
"No, they don't need to know."

"They do, they have to know what they have to deal with. They cannot keep going in blind. We don't have to tell them everything, but they need to know about the sirens."

I thought about it for a second trying to figure out any other way out but I couldn't, there was quite literally nothing I could say to combat his words. He was right, I knew he was and I hated to admit it. I let out a resigned sigh and buried my face into my hands. "Can we at least do it tomorrow?" I asked after a brief moment of silence. "I just don't want to talk to them right now." "Do you want to know the beauty of being a royal?" he mused coming to sit next to me. "You don't actually have to talk to them, you can send one of the elders to do it for you."

"Won't it be disrespectful considering it was our fault?"

"It was Ansel's fault and he is dead. The dead don't tell tales, he cannot defend himself."

My brows rose in amusement and something akin to pride. I wasn't sure why I hadn't thought about it. "Do you think it will work?" "There is only one way to find out."

"No," Caius said the moment I told him and I raised a brow in his direction.

"You cannot ask this of us. It is cruel and I will not do it."

"You seem to be under the impression that you have a choice," I drawled as I leaned back into my chair. "I was not asking you, Caius, I was telling you. One of you five will make the announcement to the people. I am not blaming all of you, only Ansel, the people deserve to know."

"No, they don't," another elder spoke and I turned to him with furrowed brows. "They are subject to you and not the other way around. All they have to do is obey the instructions given and anyone who doesn't will bear the consequences. You will not be blamed because you did your job. The rest is on them."

I stared at them in shock and disgust. I could not believe that they would act like that and risk the lives of others simply because they didn't want to take accountability over something that people might or might not blame them for.

"Can you hear yourselves?" I asked sounding almost exasperated. "Let me make one thing clear, like you said, you are subject to me, just like everyone else here. You will get off your fucking asses and go out there to speak to the people. You will tell them what Ansel did and that there are sirens on our doorstep. I don't care how you spin the story to keep it out of your names but the people deserve to know and they need to know before the end of tonight."

There was silence before a collective. "Yes, your majesty."

"Have letters sent out. I don't want to risk people taking out their earplugs to listen to a speech," I stood to my feet and walked over to the door leading out of the council room. I had one hand on the door knob when I turned to face them again.

"If any one of you ever says or suggests something like that again, I will banish you without another thought. I do not have space for selfish leaders on my council. If you want to rule, then you rule with the interest of the people in mind. If you cannot do that then you do not deserve to be there."

I paused to make sure they heard me before adding.

"You all disgust me. I expected more from you," I turned to Caius so he would know I was specifically referring to him. "All of you."



RYKER'S P.O.V

There was a shift in the air- I knew it. I wasn't sure who else could feel it, but it was there the moment I woke up. It was grossly overwhelming, it threatened to swallow my senses whole. It was a sense of impending doom, a knowledge that something was undoubtedly going to go wrong, I just didn't know when and I didn't know how. "Are you okay?" I felt Camilla's hand on mine during breakfast and I managed to give her a small smile. "You haven't touched your food."

"I'm fine, just thinking," it wasn't a complete lie but it was clear that I was hiding something and she knew it too. Her eyes narrowed in my direction so I squeezed her hand softly, her lips curved ever so slightly but that didn't take the worry out of her eyes. "I think it is best if we stay indoors today and keep the girls close," I immediately changed the subject, not wanting to give her time to remember why she was worried about me. "The news just got out, the people might be a little agitated. I want to make sure everyone is safe, that includes you and Christine."

She rolled her eyes and out of the corner of my eye, I saw Christine turn to me at the mention of her name. She was very visibly pregnant and only a few weeks out from her actual delivery date. It was nerve wracking to say the least and I could only imagine how she and Juan felt about the entire thing. I heard something about them building their nursery but with everything going on, I hadn't been able to fully focus on it and give them the help they probably needed.©

"Why are we the only ones you worry about?" Christine crossed her arms over her chest. "If anything, we should be worried about you. You are the one more likely to throw yourself into trouble headfirst."

I raised a brow. "I take offense with that."

She started speaking about something but I zoned out. It felt like I was thrust into the back of my own mind and watching everything with a different pair of eyes. It took me a second to get used to what I was seeing and in this state, the impending state of danger seemed to linger a lot heavier on my heart. Many paragraphs are missing. Read the complete book on Jo-bn-ib.c(o)m. I could see their auras again and the first person I turned to was Christine, wondering if there was something wrong with her babies again, but this time, everything was normal.

I looked between all of them and my eyes finally settled on Aurora. She looked normal, as normal as she did the last time but there was something clinging to her aura, something I didn't notice before. Something dark and grey, I knew it wasn't something I could remove like the way I did with Riley. Whatever this was, it was a part of her. She was still too young for me to figure out what it was but it was there. As bad as it was, I knew that wasn't why I was in this state.

I managed to drag myself to my feet, at that exact moment, the door opened and a maid walked in. I knew immediately that she was the problem. Her aura was dull but I felt magic emanating from her, the kind of magic that felt like a song. She had her ear plugs in, but I already knew what had happened to her. I walked over to her ignoring everyone's eyes on me and grabbed both of her hands. Her eyes met mine and she screamed.

The shadows slithered out of me and onto her, encircling every inch of her. I had no plans to kill her, I just needed her fucking quiet because her scream was like nails on the wall. As the shadows covered her, her sounds became

more like muffled whispers. She was completely covered and I knew that if I so wished, I could have snuffed out the very essence of her life there and then. I could have blamed it on her being under the sirens influence and no one would bat an eyelash. The thought was appealing but somewhere on my inside, I knew I couldn't.

I forced myself to take a step back, pulling my shadows with me as I did. As soon as I released her, she crumpled to the ground and I was snapped back into reality. Her chest was rising and falling but she was unconscious. When I turned to face the others, they were all watching me with wide and wary looks.

"She was under the sirens control," I explained. "She is still alive. I don't know if she is still under the control or not. You should have guards keep her under constant surveillance," I started to leave when Camilla stood to her feet but I stopped her. "I need some tim alone please."

"But-"

"Please," I stressed on that word. "Just an hour at least."

When she didn't move, I took that to mean that she has agreed, turned on my heels and walked out.

I found myself in my office, I had come to hate the four walls of the office but it was a safer bet than going outside. I knew someone was going to come after me, and soon, I didn't want to put anyone in danger by going outside. It only took ten minutes before my door opened and to my surprise, it was Audrey who stumbled inside.

She had her hair up in a bow. She had begged Camilla to do it for her this morning because it looked cute and despite having nowhere to go, she wore her best pink dress. She closed the door behind her and rushed over towards me. I watched her as she climbed into my lap and pulled her ear plugs out. I

wanted to tell her to keep them in but she didn't have her wolf yet, I couldn't communicate with her through the mind link. I sighed and pulled mine out too.

"Your mother can't know that you have these out," I told her carefully. "She will have both our heads."

Audrey giggled. "The bad woman isn't here yet, but she's coming."

"How do you know that?"

She looked around and dropped her voice to a whisper. "I can feel her. You can too, can't you?"

"I can," I agreed slowly not knowing where the conversation was going.

"Audrey, is there anything you know that you aren't telling me?"

She fell silent and I saw something akin to guilt on her face. She turned away from me and buried her face into her lap, suddenly getting interested in my fingers. I used my free hand to gently push her hair out of her face willing her to look at me, but she wouldn't. "Audrey," I probed gently. "What aren't you telling me?" "I can't tell you," she whispered, there was something like fear in her voice. "If I tell you then and things are going to happen. She told me so, she said that if I tell you then it has to happen and I don't want it to happen."

I vaguely remembered Lila saying something about that but that was an adult and this was my terrified child. I didn't give a shit what was going to happen as long as it didn't happen to her. She deserved a lot better than this and I was going to make sure I did everything possible to keep her safe.

"Are you going to get hurt if you tell me?" I asked and she shook her head.

"Then tell me."

She looked terrified and I couldn't imagine what she had heard or seen that could have made her this scared to talk to me.

"I saw the palace again," her voice was soft and almost wary, as if she knew she shouldn't be saying it but as much as I wanted her to speak, she also needed to. She was a child and this burden was too much for her. "There was so much blood and you were there. There was blood on your hands and mummy too, her dress was red."

"Was your mum hurt?"

Audrey shook her head. "She wasn't but aunt Christine was. Everyone was screaming and crying and-" she trailed off and swallowed deeply. "I don't want to talk about it anymore."

I pulled her into my chest and wrapped my arms around her. I couldn't imagine what seeing that had done to her, as an adult, I knew how it would wreck me. She wasn't crying, she just relaxed into my embrace and melted against me. All the tension in her tiny shoulder bled out and I pressed a soft kiss to the top of her head.

"Everything will be fine," I assured her. "I will make sure of it, I swear it."

She sniffled and nodded against me. "I need to wear those back."

I stared at the earplugs on the table then back at her. "You don't have to worry about that right now, okay?"

"But mummy said-"

"I know, and you will put them on later, your mum was right, you need to have them on, but you can forget about them for now. I'm right here and I have you."

She looked up at me with a small smile. "Thank you, daddy."

"No, thank you for telling me. You can always tell me whenever something scares you."

"Anytime?" she asked with wide eyes and I nodded. "What if you're sleeping or you're tired?"

"I am never too tired for you," I brushed her hair out of her face. "You are my little princess, I don't care if it is the middle of the night, you come to me and you talk to me or your mum about it, okay?"

"I don't want you to get hurt," she whispered in a broken voice. I hadn't realized just how deep this worry went.

"We won't. It isn't your job to worry about us, okay? We can handle ourselves. Now, promise me you will tell us."

She nodded. "I promise."

Chapter 277



CAMILLA'S

P.O.V

"How did he know that she was affected?" Christine asked as soon as Ryker had walked out of the room. "I also think now would be a good time to put the ear plugs back in, I don't want to take any chances."

I murmured in agreement before putting mine in and doing the same for the girls. I hated doing it, it felt like stripping myself of one of my senses but it was a necessary evil. I still had the rest and they were working perfectly fine. Once our ears were blocked, I opened up a mind link between myself, Christine and Juan because I knew there was a lot they had to say and no sooner than the link was opened, I heard her voice in my head.

"How did he know, Camilla? Do his powers inform him?"

"I don't know," it was as close to the truth as I could get. "There is a lot we don't know about Ryker's powers- Ryker inclusive- and I don't want to make guesses unless he tells me himself. We are all just figuring it out as it goes."

"What now? Did he manage to break the effects of the sirens? What he did was terrifying, Camilla, one second he was seated and the next-

I didn't need to hear it from her, I saw it myself and I had been glued to my seat in shock and slight fear. I didn't fear Ryker, that was never going to happen but there was a part of me that feared the powers that he possessed. Magic was a cruel thing and it always came with a price, I wasn't sure what the price of this was yet, but I knew it couldn't be good. He had the girl engulfed in shadows from head to toe, I was barely able to shield my children from seeing that, I didn't need them seeing their father like that, I didn't need to terrify them and to make matters worse, he didn't want me to follow him.

I think he did that because we both knew that he almost killed that girl. His wall was firmly in place but there were times when certain emotions slipped past. He must have been feeling them intently for them to be able to slip through the cracks. There was frustration and there was the deep dark abyss that was murder. He wanted to kill her, he debated it too, but he didn't and I tried to focus on that because it was the only thing that mattered.

"Camilla!" Juan's voice snapped me back to reality and I blinked back my thoughts. "Are you going to him?" "I will, he just needs some space right now and I am willing to respect that.."

"For how long?" Christine asked knowing me instantly.

"At least half an hour, I need him clear headed when I do go to talk to him. This is a lot to process, anyone could be under the sirens influence and we wouldn't know."

"What do we do? How do we figure out who we can trust and who we cannot?"

That, unfortunately, was where the problem lay because I didn't know. There was no way to tell- except using Ryker of course, and the last thing I wanted to do was use the magic that he hadn't learned to control yet. We were playing with fire and someone was most definitely going to get burned badly.

I broke the mind link so I could collect my own thoughts and that was when I noticed the empty seat. I looked around hoping she was just wandering around the dining room but the door was open and Audrey was gone. Aurora sat in her high chair with a small giddy smile on her face as she watched my expression shift from fear to horror and back in an instant.

I leaped to my feet and instantly rushed out to ask the guards at the door but they were either useless or completely blind because none of them had seen her slip out and no one had walked in but I couldn't quite take their word on it. Panic gripped every inch of me, my throat threatened to close up with worry and I couldn't breathe.© 2024

Ryker's wall was firmly up as well. I didn't want to panic until I spoke to him because it was possible she was with him but I didn't know where he was. I tried not to worry as I made my way down the halls and checked the plausible places he could be. I checked the library and our room before finally walking into his office. He was seated in his chair with Audrey curled up in his lap, her eyes were closed and from the steady rise and fall of her chest, I knew she was asleep.

Relief poured through me and tears gathered in my eyes. I hadn't realized just how badly I was panicking until I found that she was safe. I saw Ryker's mouth start to move so I pulled my earplugs out of my ears and rushed over to them. I ran my hands over her hair wanting to make sure that she was alive and real.

"She came to me," Ryker explained. "I thought you dropped her off or brought her here at least. I didn't know she snuck out, how did she sneak out?"

"I don't know, I was talking to Christine and Juan and I looked and she was gone. It was one second, Ryker, and it scares me because if I couldn't notice her leave then I might not be able to notice someone else walking in. the earplugs are helping us but they are also putting us in a shit ton of danger."

"I know," he sounded tired and worn out. "But we don't really have a choice, do we? You saw what happened with Ansel, you saw what happened earlier."

I was glad that he had brought up what happened earlier because it meant I could finally ask what happened. I opened my mouth to speak but had barely gotten any words out when he sighed.

"I know what you want to ask," he cut me off. "I don't know how I knew, I just did. I'm still navigating these powers- you know that. And yes, I almost killed her, I wanted to, but I didn't, and that is what matters."

I took a seat at the edge of his desk. "I am worried about you, Ryker. You've been very different since all of this started. I just want to make sure that you are okay. I want you to talk to me, you keep your wall up and-"

"I know, I just-" he let out a deep breath. "The thoughts I have sometimes, I don't- I don't want you to think differently of me."

"That's not possible," I snorted. "I know you."

"You are telling me that there wasn't a split second where you felt fear?" he asked and I went silent. "Are you saying that for a minute there, you didn't feel unsafe?"

"Not because of you," I tried to explain but he wasn't having it. "I knew you wouldn't hurt me but-"

"But the magic," he finished for me. "I don't want to give you more reasons to fear me, Camilla. I can take it from anyone else, but not you, I cannot bear to have you look me in the eye with fear. I won't survive it."

I let out a sigh and leaned forward so our foreheads touched. Neither of us said a word, we just stayed there, basking in each other's presence and offering silent solidarity. I understood his argument and while it wasn't what I wanted, it was what he was comfortable with and I was willing to give that to him, just for a while, just enough until he felt comfortable enough to share with me.

I wasn't sure how long we stayed there until I heard the sound of a bell ringing in the distance. I knew all about that bell and Ryker did too because we both shot to our feet in an instant. We had barely rushed out of the office when I saw Christine and Juan running up to us.

"What is going on?" Christine asked but I couldn't answer, I didn't know. "I can-"

"You will do nothing," I cut her off a tad bit too harshly. "You will take Audrey and go to the safe room." "I can help."

"You are pregnant. You should focus on getting to safety."

She crossed her arms over her chest. "I don't have to be on the battle field, I can be useful, I swear it. I just need to-"

Juan grabbed both of her shoulders and kissed her. She fell silent and I had to look away because it felt like I was interrupting something. When he pulled back, he dropped his voice to her ears and whispered something in her ears. I saw her frown but she nodded and whatever he said was enough to change her mind because she nodded.

Audrey was already awake, the jostling had stirred her. Ryker put her on her feet and after a swift kiss on her head, she was gone with Christine. Once we

were sure that they were headed on their way to safety, we rushed out to the front of the palace to see what was going on. The guards were already poised for battle but it was Caius who shocked me because he never went near the battle front.

"What is going on?" Ryker asked once we were close enough to him and the look on his face alone told me that I wasn't going to like his answer.

"The towns folk- they just stood up like a massive army and they are marching onto the palace. No one can reason with them, they have struck down five guards."

"We can't fight our own people," I argued. "It would make us no less than monsters."

"I believe the sirens have a hold on them. We can't even afford to hold them off. They will be upon us within minutes and we need a strategy, something to hold them off."

As he spoke, I took a few steps back. I could feel everyone's eyes on me but I ignored them as I walked over to the front of the palace. "Where are they arriving from?" "From the South but-

I ignored him and made my way over to the South side of the palace. I had never tried magic this strong before

and I knew it would drain me of all my energy but I knelt to the ground, placed my hands on the damp soil and pulled.

Chapter 278



CAMILLA'S

P.O.V

I felt the thrum of the water beneath the ground as if it were under my fingertips. It was one thing to rip water out of the ground, it was another to do what I was trying to do. I vaguely heard Ryker's voice in my head asking me to be careful but I couldn't back out now, not when so many lives were in danger. I exhaled deeply, trying to calm my racing heart before tugging. It took a few seconds of silence before the ground exploded beneath me.

I heard screams of fear and worry as a large wall of water erupted in front of us. My hands shook from the sheer force it took to restrain and control it but I couldn't falter- not now- not when it meant risking so many lives. I breathed through my nose, focusin on erecting the water like a wall around me. This was like nothing I had ever done before and a small part of me had expected to fail but to my surprise, the water found its way around the palace, in a form of protective dome before freezing all over creating a perfect wall of ice.

As soon as it was in place, I pulled my hands off the ground. A wave of dizziness so strong hit me. I nearly toppled over my own feet but Ryker was at my side instantly. His hands came around me, pulling my earplugs out as he picked me up and carried me inside. If it were another day, I would have protested and demanded that he let me walk but I couldn't be bothered, not when it felt like someone was dancing barefooted in my head.

"I don't know how long it will last," I mumbled softly. "First of all, it is very sunny outside and sirens have some form of control over the water. If the sirens are out there then-"

"Then it'll fall," Ryker finished for me as he placed me on a nearby bench. I wanted to nod but I couldn't even bring myself to move. "It doesn't matter, what you did out there was breathtaking. It was beautiful but scary and now you have to go in too."

I turned to him with an incredulous look hoping that he was joking or at least being a tad bit unserious or worried due to my weakness but he wasn't, he just stared at me and I knew that this was something he had been thinking about for a while. "You have to be insane if you think I will sit this one out. You need me."

"She wants you dead," Ryker hissed out, his voice cracking on the last word. "I will not give her a chance to get to you. I will not allow you die because of this palace." Many paragraphs are missing. Read the complete book on Jo-bn-ib.c(o)m. He reached out for me but I snatched my hand back. "I am the Queen, it is my duty to die for this kingdom."

"Then don't be the Queen," I was shocked by his request. "Just fir today, just for the next few hours, be my mate, be Camilla, I don't need you to be the queen."

He was genuinely worried, that much was obvious from the crease in his brows and the frown on his face. His thumb made slow circles over the back of my palm and I thought about how nice it would be to just go into hiding, to not have to worry about anyone else to not have lives dependent on me, but the longer I thought about it, the more unattainable I knew it would be. I sat up straighter and turned away from him.

"I'm going to be out there, no matter what," I said simply. "You need my powers, this isn't your typical battle. We have to fight out own without hurting them. That is practically impossible and you need all the help you can get."

He muttered a curse under his breath before running his hands through his hair. He opened his mouth to speak but no words came out because at that moment, a maid walked over with a plate of fruits in her hands. I knew Ryker must have called for it knowing I would need the energy after using up that much of my powers. I thanked her and the moment the plate was out of her hands, she rushed off.

"Think about it," Ryker's voice had taken on a pleading tone. All that was left was for him to go on his knees and he would have been begging. As if sensing the direction of my thoughts, he stepped closer. "I would beg you if it made you listen. I would do anything." "Ryker," I kept my voice soft and calming. "I cannot turn my back on my people not now. I refuse to let them win."

"If they get you-"Contentt belongs to N0ve/IDrâ/ma.O(r)g!

"They will not," I assured him. "I need my earplugs now. We have a battle waiting for us outside."

Despite the frown on his face, he dug into his pockets and handed me what I needed. "Just be safe, please. None of this will be worth it if I lose you."

By the time we walked out five minutes later, Juan was barking orders at the guards. As soon as he saw us, he let out a sigh of relief and opened up his mind link. "I have most of the guards protecting the exposed sides. They have orders not to hurt the people. We are trying traps and inconveniences to keep them away."

"How long do you think that will last?" I asked and he shrugged.

"Half an hour tops," he admitted reluctantly. "The wall here is our best option but even this will melt."

"I could try to-"

"NO," both men cut me off at the same time with such ferocity that the hair on my skin stood on end. It was Juan who cleared his throat before adding, "it took so much out of you, I wouldn't dare ask you to give any more." "If it is for the well being of everyone involved then I will-"

"We will find something else, I promise you, Camilla," he gave me a small smile before turning to Ryker. "What we need is to find the sirens. If they sent

the people then they are here somewhere and we need to find them. If we kill them, then we can break the effect of their voice."

They continued speaking but my attention was torn from them and focused right in front of me. Through the ice, I could see some of the people walking towards the palace. Neither Ryker nor Juan had noticed and I made no move to alert them because I truly wanted to see how this was going to go. They didn't turn around, they didn't try to find another entrance. I watched as the first townsman walked over to the ice, reared his fist back and punched it.

I tugged on Ryker's arm finally dragging his attention towards the townsfolk as they all repeated the same action of punching the ice wall. It wasn't going to shatter that easily, that much was sure but if all of them collectively took turns trying to break it then it was going to shatter.

"That is weird," Ryker noted and I couldn't help but agree. "We need to find the siren, now."

"Where could she be? In the forest?" I asked but he shook his head.

"Knowing her, she is probably already in the palace, come with me, Camilla."

He took off without giving me another chance to speak. I glanced over at Juan who just shrugged. I knew he could handle himself so I took off after my mate. If there was anyone I trusted wholeheartedly with my life, it was Ryker. He knew what he was doing and whether I did or not, all I had to do was trust him.

"Where are we going?" I asked after we had been walking around the palace aimlessly for five minutes but Ryker didn't respond despite the fact that I spoke directly into his mind. "Ryker, can you even hear me?"

When he didn't respond again, I grabbed the bottom of his shirt to keep him in place and he finally stopped. He turned to me, holding up a hand to signal that I should wait. He paused and listened as if he was trying to hear something. I

paused as well but with the earplugs, there was little I could actually hear. He, however, must have heard something because his lips pulled up into a smirk and he gestured for me to come with him.

I figured it was that thing where he could hear the siren, so I just went with it. I still wasn't sure how that worked and I truly didn't have plans of asking, seeing as I was never going to understand. He led us down the halls and I started to recognize the turns that we were taking. We were going towards Juan and Christine's rooms. I couldn't understand what the hell could have been happening there until I saw the door to Christine's nursery ajar. Ryker slowly pushed the door open and I saw Christine seated in the rocking chair. She looked fine, but her eyes were screaming something at me. A tear slipped down her cheeks and she mouthed 'I'm sorry'.

"This is a trap!" I tried to scream into Ryker's mind but it was too late, I felt a presence behind us and I turned to find the siren already standing there. She had a crazed smirk on her face. I would have tried attacking her until I saw the person behind her- Audrey, being led in by her daughter.

'Take out the ear plugs,' she mouthed and when I hesitated, her eyes flashed with anger. 'Do it or I will kill everyone in this room, either way, I get my revenge?'

"Don't do it," Ryker spoke into my mind but I couldn't risk it- I couldn't risk my children.

I pulled out the earplugs. "Where is Aurora?"

"I don't kill babies, your youngest is asleep in her bedroom with a maid watching over her," she said as if that should have been any form of consolation. "Now, we have a lot to discuss, don't you agree, Ryker?"

"He can't hear you."

She laughed. "I can speak into his head as clearly as I am speaking to you now, or did he not tell you that part of the story? I guess it doesn't matter, what matters is that my voice will be the last you ever hear. Now, are you ready to play a game?"

Chapter 279



CAMILLA'S P.O.V

I glanced over at Ryker but he said nothing, his lips were pursed as he looked directly at the siren. I could almost see the wheels turning in his head and I tried to speak to him through the mind link but his wall was firmly in place. I glanced over at Christine who had tears in her eyes and worry etched on her every feature. "I'll get us out of here," I whispered in her head. "I promise you, I will."

"Come, Camilla," the siren said gesturing for me to walk with her over to the window. She wasn't singing to me yet so I was still in control of my limbs but I found myself following her. The window had a direct view of the front of the palace, I didn't realize that until now and I couldn't help but muse about the impressive ice wall I had built. It was already melting and cracking but somehow remained strong and sturdy despite the people repeatedly slamming into it.

With each slam, I winced because what was one an ice wall was now getting stained with blood on all sides.

"Stop this," I told her but she ignored me. "They will hurt themselves."

"Then pull it down," she shrugged and I frowned. "If you don't want them to keep hurting themselves then bring the wall down."

"If I do that, they will kill everyone in their path."

She sighed. "Difficult choice, isn't it."

She turned back to face the others in the room and I couldn't help but wonder how nice it would feel to push her off the balcony but there were three problems: the first being that she wasn't close to the balcony, the second being that she was a shit ton faster than I was and the third being that Audrey was still in her daughter's hold and I wasn't going to do anything to risk my child's life.

"Now that we are all here, let us play the game, shall we?" she clapped her hands in glee before grabbing my arm and pulling me down to the ground in front of her. Her claws dug into my upper arm and Ryker made a sound of protest but she ignored him and lifted one very sharp claw to my throat. "You have to make a choice, Ryker."

"What kind of choice?" he snarled. "What do you hope to achieve by this?"

"Clarity, I guess, or maybe, I just want to have fun," her claw dug deeper into my neck and the metallic smell of blood hit me in the nose. "You can save one of three people- your mate, your child and your friend's mate." "That's absurd," I began but she used her free hand to tug my hair back hard.

"You would do well to stay f*****g quiet, Camilla. I might just get upset and kill you either way," she whispered harshly into my ears before turning back to Ryker. "I promise to release the one you choose, but know this, the others will die."

Ryker frowned, he didn't say a word but his mind was spinning, that much I could tell. The siren stared intently at him and raised a brow, I wasn't sure how I knew, but I knew they were communicating in each other's minds, shutting

the rest of us out. It didn't matter though that her mind was elsewhere, her grip on me was tight and if I moved wrong, she was going to rip my neck apart with that claw.

I muttered a small curse under my breath before looking up and my eyes locked with her daughter. The little girl looked tired, almost drained, as if she wanted to be anywhere but here. There was a light sheen of sweat across her forehead and her chest was rising and falling a little fast for my liking.

"Are you okay?" I asked softly and her eyes met mine but she said nothing. "If you need some water then you can get some in the bathroom. You look like you're about to pass out."

Yes, she was holding my daughter hostage but she was a child and I wasn't about to have a child pass out under my watch. She looked over her shoulder at the bathroom and back at her mother and I knew what the reason was. I muttered a small prayer before tugging on the siren's dress and her attention was on me like a torch.

"Your daughter needs water," I managed out. "Let her get some."

"And risk you taking advantage of that? Please, Camilla, I am not stupid. Besides, all of this will be over soon. Ryker and I managed to meet an agreement. He can save two of you, and the third will be condemned to die. Isn't that fun?" "What do you get out of this?" I asked her. "It won't bring your husband back."

Her eyes darkened. "No, but it will soothe the pain in my heart. Now, make your choice, Ryker, or I will make it for you." Exclusive content © by I could tell that Ryker was torn but a plan was brewing in his mind. He looked between the three of us and let out a sigh. "I'm sorry, Camilla."

My brows furrowed. "What are you sorry for?"

"I have to make a choice and I know you will not agree with it."

"What are you going on about?"

"I choose my family," he whispered and my spine straightened. Christine's eyes widened when she realized what that meant and the tears that she had struggled to keep at bay poured freely. "I'm sorry."

The siren smirked, a cruel and evil smirk. "Good choice, Ryker."

With her hand still holding my hair, she flung me back against the wall so hard that I heard something crack. My back and sides burned as I watched her speak to Christine. I had seen this in person before but watching it again was mesmerizing and terrifying as Christine made her way over to the cupboard by the window and retrieved a pair of scissors.

Neither Ryker nor I was armed or tied and she seemed to notice that too because she waved her hand and I heard a loud crack. I knew what it was before she even mentioned it and so did Ryker because he rushed over to the window, the fear in his eyes told me everything I needed to know- the wall was coming down.

"You said you would let us go," I hissed out ignoring the pain in my side as I did. "You lied to me."

"No, I said I would let the other two go. I never said anything about the pack. You better go help your pack, Camilla, because if you stay here, you will all die."

I knew what she was trying to do, take us out of the room so we wouldn't try to save Christine. It was a difficult position she had put us in, where we either had to save our family or help the pack. Either way, we were all going to die-unless.

I locked eyes with Christine and looked away. "Help me up, Ryker, we have to go."

"What?" he asked but I ignored him.

"Audrey, run to your room, now," with each passing second, the wall cracked even more and I knew it was only a few seconds before it shattered. "Go, stay with Aurora and get into the passage that's attached to your room. Do not come out until you hear my voice, okay?"

Her eyes watered but she did as I asked and dashed out of the room. Ryker was by my side in an instant and he helped me to my feet.

"Are you really going to leave her?" he asked but I shook my head. As he helped me to my feet, I locked eyes with the sirens daughter.

"You can get that water now," I whispered to her. I wasn't sure if she knew what I had planned, but she nodded, turned on her heels and walked into the bathroom. The siren had her back turned to us and I knew that was my only chance so I spoke into Ryker's mind "Attack her, Ryker, but keep her close to the window."

"What do you have planned?"

"Something insane."

He helped me lean against the wall before rushing over to her. She saw him before he hit and I saw firsthand, just how fast she was as she easily dodged his hit. I rushed over to Christine who still had the scissors in her hands but she wouldn't let go, no matter how hard I tried to pull it away from her. My hands were bleeding from how tightly I was holding onto it to prevent her from cutting herself.

"You little bitch!" I heard the siren yell, probably calling for her child. "Help me, come out here and do something useful for once." "Christine," I whispered hoping she would hear me and it would break the spell. "You can't die, not right now. Please, nap out of it." "It's too late, Camilla, she is mine now," she sing songed as she dodged Ryker's hits.

What she didn't realize was that Ryker was backing her up to the window. I knew I had one chance to make this right and I muttered a small prayer to the goddess as I left Christine's side. At that exact moment, she managed to cut Ryker with her claws, blood spilled down his cheeks and in the midst of her victory, she didn't see me coming until it was too late. I pushed her out the window and all I heard next was the sound of glass shattering, her screams and the final crack as what was left of the wall gave way. There was so much commotion as the water slowly sank back into the ground from where it came and her body slammed into the hard pavement.

There was silence as all the people stopped. The spell on the people was broken along with her mangled body on the ground. Blood pooled out of it mixing with what little water was left. For a second, I basked in the victory that we had. We still had her child in the palace but that could be easily dealt with- or so I thought until I heard the sound of squelching flesh.

I turned back to find Christine with a knife to the center of her stomach. The knife was held by none other than the little sire. Her eyes welled up with tears as she looked at us. "I had to."

I couldn't even pay attention to her, choosing to rush over to Christine's side before she crumpled to the ground.

Chapter 280



RYKER'S P.O.V

There was a deafening silence. The kind that made you want to check if your ears were truly working. Everything almost seemed to move in slow motion- the younger siren stabbed Christine, Camilla rushed over to her and I could

have sworn I heard a deafening scream coming from downstairs and I knew it could only have been Juan.

Camilla was mouthing some words but I couldn't hear her, not clearly at least seeing as I still had the earplugs in. I almost didn't want to take them out, didn't want to face the carnage that was unfolding in front of me. The little siren girl didn't move, she just stood there staring at the blood on her hands and then she turned to me. There was something in her eyes, something small, something broken, something fearful that had me snapping into action.

I pulled the earplugs out and grabbed her by the arm before turning to Camilla. "Apply pressure on that- do not let it go, no matter what anyone tells you. I'm going to get the physician."

I dragged the little siren with me and heard Camilla's voice. "Where are you taking her? She did this!"

"I know she did, but if I don't get her out of here, Juan is going to rip her to pieces and we both do not want that."

I saw a war in Camilla's eyes, part of her wanted it. A tiny part of her wanted justice and I would have been lying if I said a part of me didn't want it too but I wasn't going to kill a child- at least not without very good reason. Even then, I wasn't sure if I would be able to bring myself to do it. I mind linked the physician telling him where to go and what was going on before taking the girl to one of the guest rooms.

"Why aren't you locking me up?" she asked and I thought about it for a moment. It was what she deserved.

"You can get out of there as easily as you can get out of here."

"Why let me leave at all? Why not kill me?"

"How old are you?"

She pursed her lips for a second before replying. "Ten."

"Well, I don't kill ten year olds, and there are many people in this palace who don't hold the same sentiments especially if they find out what you did to the woman upstairs."

Her face fell. "I had to do it. I had to make my mum proud."

"You had a choice," I cut her off in a cold voice. "Your mother made her choice and she died for it. You made your own."

I turned to leave when I heard her voice. "What happens to me if she dies? Will you let them kill me too? I need to know." Exclusive content © by "My advice is for you to stay put," I said simply before adding. "And if you have anything that you pray to, now is the time to start."

I shut the door behind me, making sure to lock it and slipped the key into my pocket before rushing back up the stairs. I could feel the commotion in the air even before I got there. Something had shifted in the atmosphere, the desperation and fear was so thick, it felt like a weighted blanket pressing down on my very being. It was almost too hard to move.

Christine had been moved to her and Juan's room and she was lying on the bed. Her forehead was slicked with sweat and there was so much blood. I couldn't help but think back to what Audrey had said all those days ago. I could sense a foreboding feeling in the air, as if it were warning me of the horrors yet to come.

Juan spotted me and without leaving Christine's side, his eyes turned to daggers. "Where is she? Where is the siren that did this?"

"The child, you mean," I corrected. "She is being safely held for now."

"She should die," he spat and although I didn't agree with his words, I didn't disagree either, I just stood there staring.

Anger had consumed him like a fiery beast. It was all over him, I could almost reach out and taste it, reach out and warp it to my own desires. I could feel the pulsing inside of me, almost beckoning me to use it.

I pushed aside the urge and made my way over to Christine's side. "What is going on?"

"I'll have to take the babies out," the physician mumbled more to himself than to any of us and we all stilled.

"But she isn't due to deliver yet," Camilla exclaimed. "She could die, the babies could die."

"This is the only way I can save her. I also don't know if any of the babies have been hit, I need to find out and that means taking them out," he looked up at Juan. "It is your choice ultimately. I can risk saving her or risk saving the babies." He didn't even hesitate. "Save my mate, whatever you do, make sure she doesn't f*****g d-"

He couldn't even finish the sentence, his words caught in his throat and he placed a soft kiss on Christine's sweaty forehead. I looked up at Christine, shocked to find that she was actually awake- barely, but there. Her eyes were fluttering closed with each passing second and I could see her fighting it.

I could see her aura, strong but it was flickering, she was clinging to the very last dregs of life. The physician was right, there was no way he could save both the children and her. I looked over to her stomach, watching with refined eyes as he made an incision over her to take the children out. Their life forces were still strong, neither had been hit but I knew it wouldn't last for long.

As he took them out, the white started to fade to a muted grey. I heard a sob that I knew came from Christine. The babies were handed to Camilla and I because all Juan wanted in that moment was his mate, and it wasn't as if I

could blame him. She wasn't out of the woods yet, there was still a lot they had to do.

While they worked on Christine, Camilla and I stepped back, babies in arms. They were small, only a few more weeks and they would have been ready to come out. They weren't going to survive, I knew that and I could feel the very essence of their lives calling out to me, I could almost touch it, almost pull it away- it would be mercy-

No! I caught myself just in time. I didn't know what the hell was coming over me. I trailed a finger over the little child in my hands. It was her son, he was fighting, trying his hardest to live and I knew I had to do something. I dug deep within me, surely if I could take lives then I could give it too. Reina had taken so many lives, so many souls, surely there was more stored deep somewhere, there had to be.

I didn't know what I was doing, all I knew was that I wanted them to live, so instead of pulling their life force to me, I pushed out. At first, nothing happened, then I felt something hot in the center of my gut as energy seemed to pour out of me. It took everything in me to remain standing as it poured out in waves. I could see it flowing straight out of me and into the babies as well as Christine.

No one else could see what was happening and for a second, I wondered if it hadn't worked until in front of my very eyes, I saw the baby take a deep breath and start to cry.

"What is happening?" Camilla asked in utter disbelief as she turned to me.

"What did you do?"

"How do you know it was me?"

I could hear Juan asking some questions but I couldn't pay attention to him, not when I looked down at what used to be an obviously premature baby but

was now a full term child in my hands. I didn't know how it happened, I didn't know it COULD happen, I was staring at what was obviously a miracle. Both babies were screaming, evidence of the life thrumming in their bones.

"Your children are fine," I said after a moment of silence and I saw Juan's brows crease in confusion. "Focus on your mate, your babies are here."

It took almost an hour for the physician to be done with Christine and by then, she was knocked out. He gave her something for the pain so she was sleeping soundly and Juan hadn't left her side once but we brought his children over to him and he had stared at them in disbelief for a full minute as tears rushed down his face.

"They're alive," he whispered and I nodded. "How are they alive? I had condemned my own children to die- how could I?"

"You saved your mate," I cut him off. "You were in a difficult position that no one should ever have to be in. You did what you thought was best and no one can fault you for that."

"they're perfect," he sounded almost in awe as he reached out to stroke his son's cheek. I held him out to him and Juan picked him up with such care that I knew without a doubt, he would be an amazing father. "Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me-"

"I do," his voice was firm. "You did this. I don't know how and I don't know why but I know you did. You are the only one with the power to do so. I owe you my life, Ryker."

"You owe me nothing. You would have done the same for me. You and Christine are family. It is what we do for each other."

His eyes welled up with more tears as he stroked his son's cheek. Camilla was still holding his daughter but she gently laid her into a bassinet by his feet

and the tears Juan had been holding back slipped free as he spoke in whispers to his children.

I turned to my mate who's hands and clothes were stained with blood even more so than mine because she had held onto Christine for so long. I reached out for her, intertwining our fingers as we stepped out to give Juan some space. Once the door was shut behind me, she turned to me. "You have to tell me what you did."

"I can't explain it. I just felt like if Reina could take life forces then surely I could give one back so I tried and it worked."

She stared at me for a second before throwing her arms around my neck. "Thank you, you saved a lot of people in there. If you ever needed any confirmation that you are good, Ryker, this is it."