

Curse of the Wolves by Jane Doe Chapter 7

Chapter 6

Orion

Immediately returning to my study, I found myself once again lost deep within thought. Azrael's earlier words circled my head in an endless dance, but this time they weren't alone. Ismene's were there as well, a warning I hadn't bothered to take seriously until now.

"She will come bearing a gift. A shard of the soul mirror, tainted with Mirari's blood. This is the girl you have been looking for."

It wasn't that I doubted the goddess of wisdom and knowledge. I simply stopped believing that things would ever change. That our problem had any form of solution. I plucked the jagged piece of mirror out of thin air. Over the years, the most basic forms of magic were taking more and more energy. It was an omen; one I wasn't quite ready to face.

Faint pulses of magic clung to the scrap, tied within the dried specks of blood. Disbelief formed crystals of ice in my chest, muffling the flame the mortal had stoked.

I quickened my pace. Ismene's words weren't to be ignored. If this girl truly was the one we'd been waiting for, then she was here for a reason. Something was happening in the world. It had been for quite some time.

Were things truly changing?

Hope was just out of my reach and would remain that way until I knew for sure. I threw open the doors to my study. The magic of the house kept them from clattering against the walls. The rattle alone would send every potion I'd ever crafted tumbling to the floor. Who knew what kind of destruction that would cause?

The first thing I did as I crossed the floor of glowing runes was open the massive, leather-bound text I kept perched on a podium at all times. At

first glance, it was nothing more than a book depicting the history of the god realm and its creation.

It was the scrap of parchment concealed inside that I hunted for.

The hand that had written the prophecy was hurried, smearing the words in more than one line. Some were completely illegible. No matter how many times I studied it, I'd never been able to decipher the meaning. Magic failed to affect the piece of parchment, and only seemed to make the quality worse.

Hunched over the parchment for the thousandth time, I scanned the words that had long been burned into my memory.

Under starlight the curses will be broken,

A -- so ancient at long last awoken.

Embrace the thread of eternal night as it is seen,

and -- the -- to the -- --.

Blood corrupted in violence and spite,

A hidden tomb brought into the --.

Find the betrayer before the mortal's final breath,

or witness the -- of a ---- --.

"Under the hand of dawn she lies. Awaiting her freedom beneath starry skies." The last verse slid past my lips without warning, it's meaning a dagger twisted in my chest.

Raking my fingers through my hair, I pushed away from the text and darted over to one of the many shelves outlining the room. Thousands of books spanned these walls. Some were imbued with magic, charmed to keep prying eyes from reading their pages, others had enchantments that drew one in and messed with the mind.

There had to be some bit of information I was missing. Some hidden text or concealed passage that explained why all of this was happening. Curses didn't just appear out of thin air. They were a complex sort of magic, carefully crafted over the course of decades. Sometimes even centuries.

I lost count of how many I flipped through, devouring each passage as though I hadn't read it a hundred times before.

A low whistle pulled me from yet another book. It was followed by the soft thud of paws tapping against stone. I lifted my head and fought the urge to wince. My head was throbbing up a storm. Sunlight spilled through the windows, streaming past the gap in the curtains I almost always kept drawn.

Soon I'd have no choice but to sleep. I scowled at Azrael, who leaned against the wall. Draco sat beside him, the two of them thick as thieves. At one point in our immortal lives, we'd all been close. Our souls were bonded, but even the strongest of connections waver under incredible stress.

A knowing light danced in his eyes, dappled with hints of magic. "You really have to stop pulling these all-nighters. It may not be often, but we do need sleep eventually." Draco huffed impatiently, "Yes, Draco, I haven't forgotten. Where is Blakely, pray tell? She wasn't in her room this morning."

I pushed my fingers into my eyes until the cobwebs cleared from my head. "So, that's her name. Why am I not surprised to hear you using it?"

"She insisted I use it. What would you have me call her then?" Az shrugged feigning indifference.

The act was marred by the way his eyes creased at their corners. It was clear he'd managed to get himself attached to the girl. Not at all an uncommon thing, though it was much faster than usual.

"Don't tell me you've become fond of her already."

“She’s fun, Orion. You know how much I like fun. Besides, it’s not like you or Draco offer any sort of excitement or enjoyment. One of you can’t carry a conversation, and the other can’t be bothered to change his clothes, let alone sleep or bathe. Neither one of you have very good sense of humors.”

Draco’s lips peeled back revealing sharpened teeth. Azrael grinned as he always did, ignoring the pointed glare I sent his way. Murdering our youngest brother was a thought I had often.

Resisting the desire to smooth down the wrinkles in the shirt I wore, I growled, “She acts like a feral beast. And just because I’m not amused by snarling brats, does not mean I lack a sense of humor.”

“Then she’s right up yours and Draco’s alley. I’ve yet to meet anyone more beastly than you two. Now, where is she?” He flexed his arms high above his head, the wolves inked down his biceps leaping mid-run. “You’re aware that mortals need to eat frequently, right? She hasn’t eaten since I whisked her away.”

The thought of hearing her snarky, grating voice coaxed a growl from my inner wolf.

“She’s in the basement.”

Azrael’s head fell back as he groaned dramatically. He reached for me with grabby hands, and I side stepped out of his way. “You didn’t.”

“Do you really need a run down of everything she’s done? She disobeyed your order to stay in the room, and she attacked me in the hallway with that shard of hers. I say you leave her down there, show her a bit of respect. As it is, a few more hours won’t hurt anything. She’s been in there all night.”

The humor drained from his face. Draco’s growl was low and full of warning. I bit back a retort, thinking back to the last time Draco and I hashed it out. Azrael managed to pull us apart before we’d destroyed the mansion entirely. It took me a solid week, and every ounce of my magic, to rebuild the eastern wing.

“I got caught up in my work.” I said defensively, “You both know how important this is. How are we supposed to find her with these curses holding us back? If this mortal truly is the key, then there’s a reason she’s appeared at this point in time. What we need are answers. Coddling a disrespectful brat is a pathetic waste of our time.”

Azrael ran a hand down his jaw. “You know what happened to the last one that was trapped down there. She came out a drooling, incoherent mess.”

“That wasn’t my fault, and you know it. She entered the basement of her own accord.”

“Yes, but she wouldn’t have if you’d been watching her.” Before I could remind Azrael that I was not a nanny, he sauntered out of my study and shouted over his shoulder, “Why don’t we go and fetch her now? Hopefully she hasn’t lost her mind.”

Out of pure curiosity, and not because I cared for the sniveling mortal, I followed my brothers to the basement.

The door swung open, it’s creaking louder now than ever before. Staring up at us was the kind of never-ending darkness mortals tended to flee from. A tiny fleck of remorse pelted me in the forehead. I swatted it aside like an annoying insect.

She’d brought it on herself by attacking me.

I held out my hand and a ball of crackling flame appeared in my palm. Not commenting on the fact that it was smaller than it should’ve been, Azrael tipped his head and stepped aside, allowing me to take the lead. Since the basement was enchanted to keep all those inside trapped, we weren’t able to hear the voices until we reached the very bottom.

The mortal girl came into view. What we saw had Azrael throwing back his head and unleashing a deafening howl of laughter.