



113 THE TRUE HEIR

Belle watched her mouth widely ajar. 1

In nothing but utter disbelief.

"You're lying to me," Belle said.

No, they were definitely lying to her.

They only wanted to scare her, nothing more than that.

"It's just a lie," Belle said.

She tried to convince herself it wasn't true, but her heart was beating so fast, and something within her told her that it was, in fact, the truth.

She saw her mother and Aunt Cherry's face and swallowed hard.

"It's not true!" Belle snapped in rage. "Why are you two looking at me like that? Mother, why is grand aunt telling me such absurd lies."

"Belle, it's the truth." Her mother said. "She isn't lying. We wouldn't lie to you about such."

She closed her eyes to ensure it was a simple dream or joke.

"Look at her." Aunt Cherry said.



Belle refused to look down at the castle gate.

"I said look at her Belle." Aunt Cherry repeated with such emphasis.

Belle found herself turning down to look at the gate of the castle.

There, Jasmine was still well nestled in Xaden's arms as the high priestesses used something from a bowl to mark them both, and her grandparents watched on.

"Her hair is red." Aunt Cherry started.

"She isn't the only one on earth with red hair, is she?!" Belle spat. "Or wait!! You are telling me these lies because of what happened with Grandma? She is a scam and a fraud! You, of all people, should know that."

Aunt Cherry shook her head. "Look at her, Belle. Look at her. Take a good look at her."

Belle was forced to look down at her again, and she saw her again.

"She is what her mother would have looked like if she was alive. She looks like you." Aunt Cherry said.

Belle shook her head, trying not to accept it.



She pressed her hands down on the balcony, and then her knuckles went red as they pierced down the rough railing.

"But you said that Aunt Scarlet died," Belle said.

"I thought so too. We all thought so too. But we were wrong." Her mother said.

Belle watched as she lay nestled in Xaden's arms.

It was supposed to be her there, not that witch!

It was supposed to be her!

She couldn't stand seeing any of this!

She turned around and went into the room.

Her mother and aunt followed her.

"How long have you known?" Belle demanded, trying to maintain her calm. "How long?"

"A while." Her mother said. "But your grand aunt knew it before I did."

Belle swallowed, and then it occurred to her! Did her grandparents know?!

Were they already aware?!"

She jumped and turned to the other women. "Do they know? Grandpa and Grandma? Do they know who she truly is?"



"No." Aunt Cherry said.

Belle breathed a sigh of relief.

"And it will remain that way if you keep your mouth shut!" Aunt Cherry chastised.

"What if they find out?" Belle asked.

"They won't find out." Aunt Cherry snapped.

"Unless you give us up with these your attitude. We've managed to keep it secret, so keep it that way. Moreover, this is the last day of the ritual. We are leaving today."

Belle swallowed. "Well, even though they find out? What? She won't be made queen. She is nothing like me and doesn't even know how to behave like royalty. Just look at how miserable she is."

"You have reason to be scared." Her mother said. "You don't even see it yet, do you? We made a spell that would make Xaden choose you as the maiden. It's one of the darkest magic your grand aunt has made in a very long time, yet it didn't work."

"And my spell always works." Aunt Cherry said.

"Maybe there was something wrong about it. Maybe you missed an ingredient, or perhaps you



didn't mix it well enough-

"My spells are always perfect." Aunt Cherry cut in. "I've never made a mistake with any of my spells! Ever!"

Belle fidgeted. "Yes, so?"

"So?" Her mother laughed in disbelief. "You're really both long and short sighted aren't you? Okay let me put it out like you. I will tell you this, and you will take it to your grave."

"What do you want to tell me, mother?" Belle asked, scared of her mother's tone.

"I did it." Her mother said. "I killed my sister Scarlet. It was me."

Belle's mouth dropped.

"Oh, shut up. You always order people's executions, so how is this any different?!" Her mother snapped back, and Belle shut her mouth. "I killed her. Or so I thought. But somehow, she lived enough to have a child. And that child has come back into our lives to be a torn in our flesh." 1

"The thing is. My sister. The perfect and almighty. The one without sin was meant to be Queen, as you know. The true power of the



Crown resides with her. But I took it, and I passed it down to you when I had you." Her mother said.

"Yes, but my powers only manifest when I hit the age of twenty," Belle said. "I've seen only nineteen summers."

"And that's where I'm getting at. Jasmine, even though they lived far away from us. Isolated and unaware of who she truly is, she grew up with her powers. It grew within her. She is the same age as you, but yet hers manifested." Aunt Cherry said.

"It's because, just like her mother, she is the one who is supposed to be next in line with the throne. I suspect that that's why the spell didn't work. Her powers are already manifesting." Her mother said.

"So what is going to happen to me?" Belle's lips quivered.

"If they discover that Jasmine is the true heir, they will turn their attention to her. She will become Queen, not you. You would be forgotten." Aunt Cherry said.

And the words dropped like a bombshell on her.