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Malachi tilts his head, his eyes roaming over my naked body almost thoughtfully. "I knew that woman was an old witch, didn't realize you were," Malachi adds as his eyes trail over the glowing marks down my arms; his hand reaches out to touch them before he notices what he is about to do and clears his throat.

"I'm not a born witch. But I had an excellent teacher." I answer him before my eyes flick to Neil the leech. "But we can test that, Neil, and I'm sure everyone here knows how easy it is for a Witch to send an entire species into extinction, well, almost." I sneer at the man.

Grandma was the witch, so in a sense, it is in my DNA, but I am taught, not a born witch; my father was a human man before the Lycan killed him before I was born, and my mother was also only half witch.

"I guess she is right then, Neil. I'm sure we all remember just what a witch is capable of," Malachi smirks at the vampire man, who snarls and saunters back to his undead groupies.

"Though, here in the King's kingdom, being a witch will only get her killed quicker. You best pray that you die in that maze. The Kings have hunted all Witches into extinction, or I thought they had until I found you and your grandmother. Besides, parlor tricks won't work on the Kings or help in the maze. And since you aren't a born witch, it means you hold no true power." I tilt my head to the side.

"If that is what you want to believe," I tell him. Though he is right, I am not at all powerful like granny was, but I can still do damage. Maybe not to anyone here, but all energy can be manipulated.

"Maybe the King is right, and you do stand a chance, not that you will have one once you meet the king. Witch or not, no magic taints the Kings or will save you from them, and you best pray Regan doesn't see those markings. He hates witches the most." Malachi chuckles darkly. I shake my head, uncaring for his words. Turning my head, I find all the women staring at me. Well, not at me, but at the runes burned into my flesh.

Nothing hurt more than when I received those brands. My arms are covered in them. Afterward, grandma crushed and dusted crystals and mixed water lily petals. She then crushed them into the fresh burns while cleansing and blessing me; they looked more like a tattoo. They sliver up my arms in intricate patterns. I screamed and even fainted when the one on my lower back and the one up my spine was pressed against my skin.

Granny said they were for protection, to awaken my chakras, enhance my senses, and give me a fighting chance. I was just shy of eight years old when I received them. I step in line behind the women. They shuffle their feet to move away from me, as if I carry a plague, and they just realized.

Now I am the predator to these human women, yet they would never be my prey; I value all life, unfortunately, even the dick wad with wandering hands. Sighing, I wait for my turn. Clearly, even when walking to my death, I wouldn't be granted a friend.

My skin is scrubbed raw by the woman's harsh hand when it is my turn; I watched her face, which seemed to make her uncomfortable. I don't think she liked that I am not sobbing and crying for her to loosen her tight grip. Instead, she manhandled me, almost as if she was trying to gain a reaction from me or maybe see if my runes would scrub off.

The other women stood wrapped in towels, their hair now straight and dripping on the floor, while the human maid hurried to give them clothes.

I snatch my clothes from her when I hear drunken slurring coming from outside. Deep baritone voices fill the air, and Malachi smirks at me. "The King's sons have arrived to see this year's tributes," he chuckles, moving toward the enormous doors; he pushes the massive doors open even more before stepping back.

Malachi glances back at me. "I would dress quickly; the Kings don't like witches, born witch or not. Your skin screams you practice the art."

I slip the thin white, long-sleeve dress on, the fabric clinging to every part of me, leaving nothing for the imagination. No wonder no one survived the mazes. Who the heck could run in a dress this tight? It clings to me like a second skin. I am just pulling down the skirt when two men stagger into the room, smelling heavily of liquor.

"Well, well, what have we here?" One man says, his suit a little wrinkled and his brown hair tousled like he has spent a good chunk of the night running his fingers through it.

The other women cower, backing away as he saunters into the room, followed by another man who had equally dark hair and piercing blue eyes. It is apparent they are brothers, though the first one is a little older, yet they have the same color hair, the same eyes, and equally strong builds.

The other man didn't seem as drunk as he eyes us and sneers in disgust, his eyes roaming over us like we are bugs he wants to crush. He purses his lips, and it is clear he is disappointed at this year's sacrifice. He turns his head to look at Malachi, who motions toward us. Yet, as he does, a third man enters the stables. I notice everyone instantly straightens as he strides in, eyes straight ahead and hands behind their backs.

This man even makes my heart flutter in my chest. There is something sinister and disturbing behind his demonic gaze. His aura is just as dark and exudes more power than that of even the King. I swallow down the urge to whim. Auras never really affected me, but his aura is absolutely menacing.

His aura is demanding and threatening. My eyes roam over him, taking in his black slacks, and black button-up shirt that clings to him, showing off the bulk of muscle that is hidden beneath it. His smoldering eyes are burning with hatred. Somehow they are as equally alluring as they are terrifying, his black hair coal, kept short, blending into the stubble that creates shadows on his face. His face appears cruel yet handsome.

It is a strange combination, some part of me calls out for the man, and it is more than attraction because despite how attractive he is, there is something sinister, lethal beneath the facade of sophistication that tells me I should run from this monster. He stops next to his brother, but this man is far taller by almost half a foot. Despite his intimidating height and bulk of muscle, he moves gracefully, like a lion stalking its prey, about to rip out its throat.

He did not even try to hide his disgust for us. The man glances at us as he moves toward us, each step calculating and predatory. It sends an ice-cold shiver up my spine and fills my stomach with dread.