

To heal a Rogue

C 101-105

To heal a Rogue

LYSANDER

He took a measured breath before continuing.

"Being King doesn't make you invisible, Your Majesty. The late King was deeply beloved by a great many people in this Kingdom. Tarnishing his memory by breaking a promise he personally sealed would be a cruel thing for his own successor to do."

His eyes remained fixed on mine.

"Everyone knew how fond of you he was toward the end. That fondness is a great deal of why your reign, or rather, the prospect of your reign, has been palatable to so many despite the shakiness of how you came to it."

He tilted his head, studying my reaction.

"But there are only so many accidents, assassination attempts, and convenient escapes by rogues that can happen before the devout and the fearful start wondering whether the goddess has quietly changed her mind about you."

A faint smile touched his lips.

"The only reason most of them have remained tight-lipped so far is the return of the healer of legends. Your healer."

My fingers tightened around my phone.

"Without her..."

"You're one bold man," I cut in.

Amaranthine had gone pale. Her hands twisted together in front of her.

"Father, please. I'm so sorry, Your Majesty. He doesn't—"

"It's too late for apologies."

I raised my voice toward the corridor behind me.

"Sentinels!"

Two of them rounded the corner within seconds.

I didn't take my eyes off Yannis as I nodded toward him.

"Jail him."

He fought them for exactly two steps before it became clear the effort was pointless. His arms were wrenched behind his back, his composed authority collapsing into something far uglier as they hauled him away, but he was still shouting about contracts and the consequences that would happen if he was denied.

I stopped listening and I turned to Amaranthine.

"I assure you, you deserve better than a union with me. You'd be unhappy. You'd be without love. That's something I'm simply unable to give you, no matter what your father's contract claims I owe."

I made a mental note there and then to talk to Bradley about it and if there was a way I could wriggle out of it. Before it became a whole issue and unavoidable.

Her lips parted, but I continued before she could answer.

"Don't let his political ambitions cost you real happiness," I added, my voice quieter now. "You deserve more than being handed off to whichever royal happens to be sitting on the throne when your father decides it's convenient."

"I want this too," she insisted, desperation beginning to creep into her voice. "It doesn't matter if you think you can't love me right now. Given time, you'll come around. Everyone always does, eventually."

I stared at her for a moment.

Then I gave her the one truth she couldn't argue with. "I have a mate."

Her face moved through several expressions at once, disbelief first, then hurt, and finally something close to grief settling over everything else. I didn't stay to watch it finish playing out.

I turned and walked away, leaving her standing alone in the corridor with whatever remained of her father's carefully constructed plan crumbling around her.

Outside, the morning had fully broken. Gold light spilled across the estate grounds, and I spotted Fia's car coming to a stop just beyond the main gate.

I lifted a hand and waved.

She waved back.

Something in my chest loosened at the sight of her, the tension I'd been carrying since Yannis cornered me finally beginning to ease.

I waited until she stepped out of the car before turning to meet her.

"Thank you for coming so soon," I said as we walked. "I know I gave you almost no warning."

"I don't mind it at all," Fia said, matching my pace easily despite the early hour. "I'm happy to help. That's rather the point of the promise I made you, isn't it."

I filled her in as we walked, the whole tangled mess of it. The dreams bleeding into reality. The bite marks appearing on Bonnie's throat while she slept. The blood, the wounds that shouldn't have existed outside a nightmare but had. Fia listened without interrupting, her expression growing more focused with every detail.

"Have you ever had something like that," I asked. "A dream that transcended into the waking world?"

Fia shook her head slowly. "Never. Not like what you're describing."

She was quiet a moment, choosing her words carefully. "But it should not be an issue, I hope. My grandmother had abilities my mother never inherited. My mother has abilities my grandmother never had. That has lead me to believe that gifts like ours don't pass down cleanly, generation to generation. They shift. Some stay and some skip entirely, sometimes they warp into something new. Who knows." Her voice dropped lower. "Now my grandmother and mother might not have been born blessed and were actually victims of fleshcraft. So my theory might be wrong."

"But I think it holds," she added. "As a concept, it holds. There might be abilities Bonnie has that I don't. And likely some I have that she doesn't."

"But I imagine two heads are better than one, regardless," she said, a small, reassuring smile crossing her face. "We'll figure out what we're actually dealing with."

We reached my mother's old room, and I typed the passkey into the small panel beside the door. The lock released with a soft click.

I pushed the door open.

And stopped entirely.

Bonnie stood near the window, dressed in the pale dress I recognized instantly as one of my mother's. Her hair had been styled in soft, careful waves that framed her face in a way I'd never seen before. Morning light streamed through the window behind her, catching the edges of her platinum hair and making it seem almost luminous.

For one suspended moment, I simply forgot how to move.

How to speak.

How to do anything except stand there in the doorway and look at her.

She turned at the sound of the door, and her eyes found mine.

To heal a Rogue

JOHANN

"Johann, meet Willow Shelter."

Willow. It suited her somehow—something that sounded delicate but could bend without breaking. I found myself smiling before I realized it, the expression coming naturally as I extended my hand.

"A pleasure, Miss Shelter." I let my fingers linger against hers when she took my hand, her skin cool and smooth against mine. "Though I must admit, I'm surprised my mother has started collecting intriguing young women without at least giving me some warning."

Willow's lips curved into a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "I'm not so easily collected, Your Highness. And I'm not nearly as young as I look."

"Johann," my mother said, her tone carrying a familiar warning that I'd learned to recognize since childhood. She was not having any of this. "Behave."

"I always behave," I replied, not breaking eye contact with Willow. "I simply choose how to define the term."

Willow laughed then, a genuine sound that made something in my chest tighten pleasantly. "I see why your mother speaks so highly of your diplomatic skills. I have some faith working with you."

"Only my diplomatic skills?" I leaned against the edge of the table, deliberately casual. "I'm wounded."

"Johann," my mother repeated, sharper this time. "We have business to discuss."

"Of course." I gestured toward the chairs present. "Though I must say, this is an unexpected development."

Mother ignored that.

"You two will show up during your father's funeral," my mother immediately began, as if discussing catering arrangements rather than the start of a royal mutiny. "I will ensure it happens as soon as possible to sell a quick story. The mourning period will be brief, the succession swift. There won't be time for extended challenges."

We both nodded, though I felt a knot tighten in my stomach.

That was when Willow moved closer, her voice dropping to a whisper that barely disturbed the air between us. She seemed to enjoy the repulsed my mother had to how close she got. "It seems the Beta is suspicious of us."

I turned toward the door, and I hadn't caught it before, but I did now. There were footsteps in the corridor. Not the steady patrol of sentinels, but the softer, more deliberate steps of someone trying to be quiet while they were listening.

Willow's eyes narrowed slightly. "Should I kill him?"

"Do not be like that," my mother said with a sigh. "That would just be giving them what they want. Another dead body, another reason to question us and this time there would be no plausible deniability."

Johann watched her sigh, the gesture somehow both weary and calculating. "Okay then," she said finally. "But we can't have him listening to everything."

She snapped her hand in a sharp, precise motion, and what looked like a bubble of shimmering air expanded from her palm, quickly covering the entire room. The sound from the corridor vanished instantly, replaced by a profound silence that made my ears ring.

"That will be all," Willow said, her voice now sounding different in the enclosed space. "They can't hear us now. And I took extra precautions to ensure the bug that was placed in the room wouldn't pick up anything useful."

"What bug?" I asked.

She walked to a shelf near my bed and tore a tiny black machine from underneath the wooden overhang. It was no bigger than my thumbnail, perfectly designed to blend in with the shadows.

"That bastard," I breathed.

"He is clearly on to us," my mother said, her expression grim.

Willow turned to face me, her cornflower eyes intense. "You should be grateful that I'm here. Without me, they'd already have everything they needed to build a case against you and perhaps Eddie here."

Eddie? Was she close with my mother?

She then fully crushed the bug with what looked like a spark of green magic from her fingertips. The device dissolved into dust that scattered and vanished before it hit the floor.

"Of course we are grateful," my mother said smoothly, though I could hear the tension beneath her words. "It all brings us closer to our goal."

I looked from my mother to Willow and I stayed on her. "I understand our goal, but what could be your goal? Why are you with us? A witch of your power could have what you want. I imagine."

"You really should stop flirting, Prince."

My mother's eyes widened almost imperceptibly. "Johann, can I have a moment with you?"

She took my arm and led me toward the bathroom, shutting the door behind us. The small space immediately filled with her scent—something expensive and floral that had always reminded me of the gardens in summer.

She began whispering immediately, her voice low and urgent. "Do not trust her. We have a reason to hold hands for now and she is currently a witch, and—"

"Currently?" I interrupted.

"Yes. Currently." Her eyes darted toward the door as if Willow could somehow hear through walls. "But do not give into her. Do not trust her, and especially do not let her get your blood or convince you to use your blood for anything. She for some reason wants royal blood, and I promised her she would get it when she gets you to the throne. That is all that is to happen. And trust me, it will make sense when you are on the seat and Willow out there gets the blood."

I nodded slowly, even though the pieces were not clicking as I would have wanted them to. "Of course. Understood."

When we emerged from the bathroom, Willow was examining one of the books on my shelf, her fingers tracing the embossed title as if she could read the history of its ownership through the leather binding.

"Everything settled?" she asked without turning around. "Told him not to trust me, I assume."

"Everything," I replied, watching her carefully now. The girl who had intrigued me minutes ago suddenly seemed dangerous in a way I hadn't fully appreciated before.

"Good." She turned then, and her eyes met mine with an intensity that made me want to take a step back. "Because we have work to do, Your Highness. And time, as your mother so delicately pointed out, is running out."

Something in my mother's expression tightened at that, the practiced smoothness slipping just enough for me to catch it.

"Before that," she said, "we need to do a soul kiss. All three of us."

Willow's eyebrows rose. "That isn't necessary. Not unless trust is genuinely in question."

"There isn't enough trust," my mother said, flat and immediate, no hesitation in it at all.

I looked between the two of them, the tension in the room shifting into something I didn't fully understand yet. "What's a soul kiss?"

Neither of them answered me directly. Willow's jaw tightened, something almost offended flickering across her face before she smoothed it away.

"Edie, you're being needlessly cautious," she said to my mother.

"I've survived this long being needlessly cautious," my mother said. "I don't intend to change that habit for you. Especially you."

They almost sounded like bitter ex-lovers if I ignored the age gap and gender.

Willow studied her for a long moment, and I watched something calculating pass behind those cornflower eyes, some private weighing of costs against benefits that I clearly wasn't privy to.

"Okay, then," Willow said finally. "You win."

She crossed the room toward my mother, unhurried, and lifted one hand between them, palm facing outward, fingers spread.

"Explain it to your son first," she said. "He deserves to know what he's agreeing to."

My mother turned to me, and something almost apologetic crossed her face, the first genuinely soft expression I'd seen from her all night.

"A soul kiss binds intent," she said. "It's an old practice, older than most witch houses currently standing. When two parties can't fully trust each other's word, they exchange a piece of truth through it instead. Neither of us can lie to each other or play the other once it's done. Not to each other, not about anything directly tied to what we're building together."

"So it's a lie detector," I said.

"It's considerably more binding than that," Willow said, a thin smile pulling at her mouth. "A lie detector only tells you when someone's lying. This makes lying about our shared goal physically impossible. My magic, and all three of us words and desires will be bound to the same truth. I will not be able to betray you, neither can you do the same."

"Sounds invasive," I said.

"It is," my mother said. "That's precisely why I want it done before we go any further with you, Ly— I mean Willow. I need to know you'll hold up your end exactly as promised, once Johann sits where he's meant to sit."

Willow held out her hand toward my mother, and after a beat, my mother took it, their fingers lacing together with a familiarity that suggested this wasn't the first time either of them had done something like this.

Willow leaned forward and pressed her lips briefly to my mother's, and for one strange, suspended second, the air in the room seemed to hum, some current passing between them that raised the hair along my arms even from several feet away.

Then it was over, both of them pulling back, my mother's breath coming slightly unsteady.

"Satisfied," Willow said.

"For now," my mother said.

I stood there, watching the two of them straighten their composure like nothing unusual had just occurred, and found myself wondering, not for the first time today, exactly how many more secrets my mother intended to keep tucked just out of my reach before this was finally over.

Then Willow turned to me and smiled. "You next."

That was when I noticed blood at the lower part of her lips and she immediately lapped it up.

Chapter 103: Divine move 1

BONNIE

The door opened, and I turned to find Lysander staring at me.

Panic seized me first.

I was standing there in his dead mother's dress, my hair carefully styled by Delta's hands, and I braced myself for something ugly to flicker across his face.

Instead, warmth slipped through the bond, steady and immediate.

My shoulders loosened before I could stop them.

"You look very beautiful." His eyes never left mine, even as he said it.

Heat climbed my neck. "Thank you."

"How's the rogue situation?" I asked, mostly because I needed somewhere else to put my nervous energy.

"We've got it handled." He replied.

But the bond told me otherwise. His words were smooth, almost too smooth, with a tightness underneath them that made the lie obvious. I let it go for now.

Then I noticed the woman standing just behind him.

Something about her caught my attention so completely that I nearly forgot the conversation altogether.

I recognized her instantly. It was the woman from the great hall. The one who had smiled at me while everyone else in that room had looked at me as though my fate had already been decided.

That same strange stillness clung to her now. If I was to describe it, it would be something settled and quiet that didn't feel entirely human.

The glow I noticed in the hall still surrounded her.

She gave a small, deliberate cough and that seemed to do the intended work that she wanted it to do.

Lysander blinked, then cleared his throat, looking faintly embarrassed.

He had completely forgotten she was there.

"Bonnie, meet Fia. Fia, meet Bonnie."

Fia stepped forward and extended her hand. "Hello, Bonnie. I'm Fia. A healer, like you."

I slipped my hand into hers. "I know. I've heard so much about you."

Her mouth curved. "Good things, I hope."

"I'll leave you two to talk," Lysander announced, already glancing toward Delta.

Delta caught the signal without needing an explanation and followed him out.

The door clicked shut behind them and that left just Fia and me in the room.

I turned back to Fia. I was still nervous. This was someone I had heard so much about. So I settled for a compliment. "You're really pretty."

The words escaped before I could think of anything better to say, but they were true.

A soft laugh escaped her. "Don't flatter me."

She looked me over, her smile widening.

"You look pretty good yourself."

I smiled faintly.

Then she cleared her throat, and the warmth in her expression gave way to something more focused. Her shoulders straightened, her attention sharpening as though we'd crossed an invisible line from pleasantries into something that mattered.

"Lysander tells me you've been having dreams that bleed into reality."

I nodded. "He also told me you've never had that happen."

"That's true." Her fingers brushed absently over her wrist. "But I never say never. I'm still figuring things out myself, even after everything I've lived through."

She glanced down at her hands, then back at me.

"Sometimes I think this whole blessing works like a lottery. You never quite know what you'll get once the day passes." A small shrug lifted one shoulder. "My mate calls it my lucky gacha."

I couldn't help but scoff at a single word she uttered. The reaction was so instinctive that I barely noticed it happening. It slipped out before I could catch it. "Blessing."

Her brows rose. "You don't feel that way?"

I looked away.

The word sat badly in my chest, too polished for something that had turned my life inside out. "This feels more like a curse if I am being honest."

My fingers curled into the skirt of the dress.

"Didn't you ever feel that way? Having to hide what you are all your life?"

I met her eyes again.

"I might be out in the open now because I never really had a choice. But you..." My voice softened. "You get it."

"*Oh...* I didn't grow up knowing I was born this way." Fia's thumb brushed absently over the back of my hand. "There was no warning, no strange signs I could point to afterward and say, *There it was*. It started surfacing properly when I was already an adult, and it didn't fully manifest until after an accident."

"I could do this since when I was a child."

She gave a pained look hearing me say that and then reached out to hold my hand. I let her.

I glanced down at our joined hands. "Maybe if it had come later, I would've seen it differently. I might've called it a gift."

Fia's fingers closed more firmly around mine.

"I understand why it feels like a burden." Her voice softened. "Even now, I can't always look at what I am and feel proud of it. There's always that little question in the back of your mind, wondering when it'll turn on you."

Her gaze dropped to our hands.

"And after what happened to healers like us in the past..." She paused. "That's not something either of us can afford to forget. Especially when people understand what we're capable of."

That I agreed with.

"When I stitched Lysander up in that hall, I saw the way some of them looked at me afterward." The memory made my stomach tighten. "Not like I'd done something remarkable. Like I'd become something they could claim."

I swallowed.

"If I hadn't had royal protection, I think a war would've broken out over who got to keep me as a trophy."

"But that didn't happen." Fia's gaze held mine. "Why live inside a version of the world that isn't even your reality?"

"You never know when it might become *my* reality. I know it sounds strange. But I would have killed to have it as easy as you. An easy life."

She squeezed my hand gently.

"Believe me, you don't want my life." A crooked smile touched her mouth. "My history has enough bumps in it to keep me humble."

She released a quiet breath before her expression turned more serious.

"And let's skip the oppression Olympics."

Despite myself, I smiled.

"Your life is in danger right now, Bonnie. I need to understand what's happening to you if I'm going to have any chance of helping."

I nodded and told her everything.

The first attack. The moment I'd healed Lysander and collapsed. Waking up choking on water, with my mother's face hovering over me, wrong somehow, shifting and changing until I could barely recognize it.

Then the second attack.

The creature in the meadow, which was furious as it kept telling me I deserved to die because I kept reaching for it, even though it was never meant for me. At least, not in the strange dream world it had made its own.

Fia listened without interrupting, her expression growing more troubled with every detail.

"So he's trying to call out to someone." Her brows drew together. "Why would he do that?"

"Because he was cursed. I think."

"What makes you think that?"

"I do not know if it even makes any sense. I can't fully explain it." I rubbed my thumb against my palm. "He had the chance to kill me. He could have done it, but at the last second, he stopped."

I looked at her.

"Somehow, I think I got pulled into his head. I saw a memory. He's a man, I think, and someone cursed him. Maybe he's trying to reach whoever did it."

"I don't have an answer for that, unfortunately." Fia shook her head. "I've never dream-walked myself."

"What are your gifts, then?"

A faint blue light gathered in her palm.

"The usual, for us. Healing..." She tilted her hand, watching the glow move across her skin. "And then, there is the gift of small miracles."

I frowned. "What's that?"

Chapter 104: Divine move 2

BONNIE

Her eyebrows lifted. "You don't have that one?"

I shook my head.

Fia glanced around the room until her eyes settled on the hairbrush resting on the dresser.

She reached toward it.

But she was never even close to reach or even touch it.

I watched in awe as a faint, translucent bubble formed around the brush instead, shimmering softly before lifting it from the dresser and suspending it in midair.

My mouth fell open. "Wow."

Fia grinned.

The bubble dissolved, and the hairbrush dropped neatly back onto the dresser with a soft click.

"If you're creative with it, you can even use it to fly." She gestured toward the brush. "It works well for defense too."

I stared at the spot where she had used what she just called the gift of small miracles and chuckled. Meeting her was indeed necessary.

I could ask about anything... Most things and she would have answers for me.

Then I hesitated.

There was something I needed to ask her. Something that had been sitting at the back of my mind since that night.

"Do you have one that glows red?"

The question came out quieter than I'd intended.

Something about Fia made me think she'd understand. If anyone could explain what had happened to that cruel Beta, to the sentinels, to my mother's body, it would be someone who understood this power from the inside.

Fia's expression brightened.

"I do."

She called it forward.

Red bloomed across her hands and the sight of it slammed me straight back into that cell.

The room turned crimson at the edges. The walls, the floor, the bodies, all of it swallowed by that same terrible red until everyone inside was simply gone aside me.

I scrambled backward as though she'd struck me.

Fia released the power immediately.

"I'm sorry." Her hands dropped into her lap. "Did I frighten you?"

I forced myself to breathe.

"I just haven't had the fondest memories with that particular power. But I am curious... What exactly does it do?"

"There are seasons in a mortal life." Fia looked down at her hands. "It's the same for us. A time to heal, and a time to destroy."

Her fingers curled slightly.

"The red doesn't just injure whatever it touches. It disintegrates it completely."

"I used it once," The words caught in my throat. "On my mother."

Fia's breath caught. "Goddess... I'm so sorry."

"Well... she wasn't exactly alive when I used it." I swallowed. "The others were. But it was an accident and it still hurts."

For a moment, I stared at nothing.

"So I suppose they're all dead now. Not floating somewhere in a pocket dimension, the way some secret part of me kept hoping." I said as a shaky breath left me.

"I still wanted to bury her properly." My gaze dropped to my hands. "I guess her memory will have to be enough."

Fia squeezed my hand. "I am so sorry."

"I'm fine," I assured her before she could say anything more. "I've had plenty of time to grieve."

It wasn't entirely true, but it was close enough.

"It's just hard." I rubbed my thumb over her knuckles. "I believe everyone has a purpose. I just don't think I know mine. I do not think I will ever know mine."

The words came easier once they'd started.

"I've begged the goddess for an answer more times than I can count. I've prayed until I had nothing left to say, and all I've ever gotten back is silence."

"You've never had a divine encounter?" Fia queried.

I shook my head, a small laugh escaping me at the absurdity of the question.

Then I caught her expression. She wasn't joking.

"Goddess. You have?"

"Twice."

I stared at her.

"Well, that settles it, then." I gave a humorless little smile. "She really doesn't give a damn about me."

"Lady Selene?"

"Yes, Lady Selene."

"That isn't true." Fia's voice was gentle but firm. "Perhaps it simply isn't time yet."

"I wish I believed that." My smile disappeared. "But I'm past hoping for it."

Fia studied me for a moment. She clearly didn't believe me, but, mercifully, she didn't argue.

"Is there no fix for these dream attacks?"

She took my hand fully between both of hers.

"I can try something." Her thumbs moved slowly over my knuckles. "I also have the gift of foresight. Sometimes I get glimpses of what's ahead."

My skin prickled.

Willow's throat flashed through my mind, the memory of my invisible grip around it so sudden that I almost pulled away.

Now that Fia had showed me, was that me using the gift of small miracles? On the witch to end her life?

I had to ask... "Are those futures set in stone?"

A soft laugh escaped Fia. "No. I once saw my mate die."

My breath caught.

"But thankfully, it never happened. So I know that it can be prevented."

I relaxed slightly.

Fia then closed her eyes.

The silence stretched.

I filled it the only way I knew how, with small talk, because now that I finally had someone sitting in front of me who understood what I was, I couldn't seem to stop talking.

"I know a little about you," I murmured.

"What's that?" she asked, her eyes still closed.

"Your story was fairly well known."

"Which part? That I stole my late sister's intended?" She said as one eye cracked open.

"That was cleared up. Wasn't it?"

"Eventually." Fia said. "But *lies tend to stick around longer than the truth.*"

Her mouth twitched.

"Well... I did not buy the lie. My question is a bit more simple. Or at least I hope it is. It's still unusual for an Omega to end up an Alpha's bride." I hesitated. "Was love enough? Against everything political stacked against it?"

Fia opened her eyes fully.

"Love wasn't there at the beginning." She told me.

That surprised me.

"He half believed the lie my step mother and half sister sold for a while. He even hated me for it."

She looked down at our joined hands.

"But time changed things. So did the truth. And eventually, the bond softened him."

Her gaze lifted to mine.

"If this is about Lysander, you have nothing to worry about."

I blinked.

"He's absolutely mad about you." She assured me.

Heat touched my cheeks.

"Love isn't always enough on its own, I know," she continued. "But trust me, he will be. And I've seen it."

"Seen what?"

"His future."

The certainty in her voice made my chest tighten.

"The two of you have what I know, in my heart, will be a beautiful story. Whatever your past looked like, don't let it keep you from building something new with someone the goddess clearly meant for you."

I nodded, though something had lodged tightly in my throat. "Thank you."

"It is no problem at all. Now let me try my foresight shenanigans again."

I gave her my hand once more and Fia closed her eyes.

She drew in a slow breath, held it, then released it.

When her eyes opened again, something troubled had settled across her face.

"I can't touch anything."

My brow furrowed. "What does that mean?"

"You feel like my daughter." She swallowed. "I can't get a read on her future either. It's the same with you."

A slow breath escaped me as I dropped my head down in disappointment. "I hate that I had hope for a second there."

Fia's hand rose to my face. Her fingers curled gently beneath my chin, tilting it upward.

"Hope is good," she said.

I gasped.

Her eyes had changed.

The warm brown I'd been looking into only a moment ago was gone, replaced by a brilliant silver that seemed almost to glow from within. And it was not reflected light. It looked and felt like something deeper. Something that looked as though it had been burning behind her eyes all along, waiting for the right moment to break through.

I scrambled backward, putting as much distance between us as the room allowed.

"Who the fuck are you?"

Fia's face remained the same, but something about her presence had shifted completely.

"It's me." Her voice was still hers, but it wasn't only hers anymore.

Two voices seemed to occupy the same sound, one carrying Fia's familiar warmth while something older moved beneath it, deep and distant and impossibly calm.

My heart slammed against my ribs.

"The one you've reached out to so many times."

I stared at those silver eyes and it was like it just clicked.

The prayers I'd whispered when no one was listening. The questions I'd thrown into the dark. Every desperate plea for an answer that had been met with nothing but silence.

My mouth went dry. "Lady Selene."

Chapter 105: The whole truth

BONNIE

I locked eyes with that silver gaze and forgot how to breathe. The color rippled, alive and ancient, like mercury came to life, and a sharp, aching clarity told me exactly what I faced.

"Why now?" The words tore out of me before I could stop them. I scrambled to my feet, my legs unsteady but my anger steady enough. "After all these years. Every single time I suffered. Every night I prayed until my throat bled and my voice disappeared. Where were you?"

Fia sat utterly still, that alien light blazing behind her eyes. Something flickered across her face. It looked like pain, perhaps, or the ghost of it.

"I was there." The voice came layered, Fia's warmth wrapped around something vast and hollow, like wind moving through caverns deep underground. "In the corner. Watching. I wanted to help. I wanted to fix things. But there is a law I cannot break. An oath I swore because of your blood."

"My blood?" I laughed, but it came out broken. "My blood that you let spill? My blood that you let them take?"

I shook my head and backed away until my shoulder blades hit the wall. The wood pressed cold and solid against my spine, but it didn't ground me. Nothing could ground me while those eyes tracked my movement, seeing everything, missing nothing.

"Then why are you here?" I spread my arms wide, gesturing at the room, at Fia's borrowed body, at the whole rotten situation. "If you couldn't break your precious law, then what makes now so special for you to break it?"

Selene tilted Fia's head, but the motion felt off. It was too precise, heavy with the weight of centuries-old habits.

"I am breaking the law." She said it simply, as if she were admitting to taking an extra roll at dinner. "In a way. I also broke it then when you were dream walking."

I gasped. "That was you?"

"Yes, and it was a splendid way to reach out. Because the others will not catch on if you were dream walking, or if I was using another body. If they did, there would be consequences."

"Consequences." I tasted the word. It felt bitter. "For you. Not for me. You get to break rules when you feel like it, and I'm just supposed to what? Fall to my knees? Finally grateful that you bothered to show up?"

"Do not fight me, child." The temperature in the room dropped. Not much, just enough to raise the hair on my arms. "And listen to what I have to say. The things I am allowed to say because I am still bound by oath in this form. You might not see me again until you do what you were supposed to do."

I pushed away from the wall. My hands trembled, so I tucked them behind my back, hiding the evidence.

"I understand nothing," I said, flat and hard. "About who I am. About why you abandoned me. And now I'm supposed to do something for you? I don't care if you're divine. I refuse."

Selene rose. Fia's body moved with a grace that belonged to someone else—fluid, terrible—and I caught the strain in the taut line of her mouth. She closed the distance in three strides, and I stood my ground, though every instinct screamed at me to flee.

"I cannot stay in this body long." Her voice had thinned, stretched tight. "Lest I break this sweet girl's mind. She is stronger than most, but she is not a vessel. And she is not built for this."

"Then leave her alone." I reached out without thinking and grabbed Fia's wrist. The skin was warm, human, fragile. "Get out of her. If you want to talk to me, use your own damn body."

Selene glanced down at my hand. An emotion flickered across her face, unreadable and fleeting.

"The reason I have never reached for you," she said slowly, each word careful, measured, "is because I made a vow to a god that I would never. You are not supposed to exist, Bonnie."

I released her wrist as if it had scorched me.

"But you needed to exist." She continued before I could speak. "To give those victims of circumstances a chance to be saved. When I cursed your father for what he did, the way out was so simple. A test of character. A lesson in humility. But I neglected the fact that he was a prideful man. For decade after decade, he let the suffering continue. He skewed

history even. For what? To show that he would never bend the knee or his tongue. As long as he could keep that pride, he was fine with people suffering and dying."

My father. She was talking about my father. The word felt foreign in my mind, like a language I'd never learned to speak.

"He was supposed to end their suffering." Selene's borrowed eyes flashed, and for a moment I saw the goddess behind them, vast and burning. "But he would not. He watched them suffer... He watched them suffer and did nothing. Until somewhere along the line, he fell in love. I didn't think it was possible. Not for him. Not after everything. So I begged to edit something out of that curse. I begged the gods and the universe."

"You begged?" My voice sounded small. I hated it.

"Yes, and the consequence for that was I had to abandon you." She reached toward me, and I flinched back. Her hand hung in the air between us, unfinished. "It was what they wanted in exchange for letting him procreate. To see if you would become a mini him or another person, a good person entirely, without divinity involved. The caveats were clear. I could not intervene. I could not guide. I could only watch."

I turned away. My chest felt too tight, like someone had wrapped bands around my ribs and pulled.

"And you have persevered, child." Her voice softened, and that was worse than the cold. "You have become something neither of them expected. Something I did not even expect. But it is hard and nearly not enough. I had to try. Make moves and take moves because I believed you just needed a push in the right direction. Cornelius had to die."

I spun back around, ignoring what she had said about the late King and the dominoes his death caused for me. There was only one thing that mattered. "You know my father?"

The question hung there, heavy and sharp.

"Who is he?" I stepped closer, close enough to see the individual flecks of silver swimming in Fia's eyes, which were supposed to be brown and not silver. "Is he alive? Why did you curse him? What did he do that was so terrible that you—"

She opened her mouth to answer.

The sound that came out wasn't words. It was static, a buzzing crackle that made my teeth hurt, and I pressed my hands over my ears, but it didn't help because the sound wasn't coming through the air. It was coming from inside my skull.

"I didn't hear." I lowered my hands. My heart was hammering against my ribs. "Say it again."

Selene tried. Her lips moved, forming shapes I couldn't quite catch, and the static came again, louder this time, building like a pressure behind my eyes. It felt familiar. Too familiar. Like the dream place, that nowhere space where I'd almost been killed by that creature before it let me go and I was transported to what I believed was a memory, where words had slipped away from that female figure, and reality had bent.

She tried a third time, and this time she coughed.

Blood followed. Bright red and shocking against Fia's pale lips. It spattered her chin, her hand when she raised it to cover her mouth.

She gazed at the blood staining her palm, resignation settling over her features.

"I can't stay anymore." Her voice was barely a whisper, Fia's voice, human and strained. "It seems the vow I made to the others is preventing me from breaking a rule. Even through a vessel. Even like this."

"Wait." Panic clawed up my throat. "You can't just leave. You can't just drop all of this on me and leave. Who is my father? What am I supposed to do? What victims? What circumstances?"

"Listen." She grabbed my shoulders, and her grip was iron. Not with Fia's strength. Something older. "You do not need to fear your power. It is everything you need. It is everything you are."

"That's not an answer." I tried to shake her off, but she held fast. "That's just... I do not know... fucking poetry. That's nothing."

"It is the only answer I can give." Her eyes were dimming, the silver receding like a tide pulling back from shore. "Do not fear the red. Do not fear the small miracles or your walk in your dreams. They are yours. They have always been yours."

"Stop." I was begging now, and I hated myself for it, but I couldn't stop. "Please. Just tell me his name. Tell me what I'm supposed to do. Tell me anything real."

But she was already gone.

Fia's body seized, her spine bowing backward, and I caught her just before she collapsed. She felt too light in my arms, and her chest hitched as she fought for a ragged, desperate breath.

Her eyes snapped open.

It was brown, warm, human, and confused.

"Bonnie?" Her voice was rough, scraped raw. "What happened? Why am I on the floor?"