393 THE PROMISE

Bernice wept. 1

"I will save your family and give them protection. I give you my word as Queen Luna. Nothing will happen to them. Just tell me who it is."

Bernice continued to weep. "I swear your majesty. She is going to kill my family and everything I love. I never wanted to hurt you, but she made me do it."

She?

Rose felt a chill in her bones.

It was a woman?

Now Rose was truly troubled and wanted to know who had done this .

Rose decided to try a different approach.

Rose picked up Bernice's chin with her fingertips and forced her to look at her.

But Bernice turned her face away

"Look at me Bernice." She said very gently and Bernice did.

"I can understand that the person who did this

has a hold on you and has made you tied to tell for whatever reason, I don't know." Rose said very gently. "I am The Queen of this Realm. All wolves bow to me, even the King is not close to how powerful I am. No one is as powerful as I am. The mages fear me. I am not someone you or your family would want as an enemy."

Bernice swallowed.

"I am someone you want on your side and I would protect not just your family, but you also." Rose informed her.

Bernice seemed skeptical. "But why would you? I poisoned you all these years and you have been nothing but good to me. You are going to kill me even after all of this."

And Bernice continued to weep.

"I give you my word. I will not kill you. I swear on my crown."

Rose promised.

"But she still will." Bernice said. "If you don't kill me she would."

"What does this woman have a hold on you for?" Rose questioned wondering what on earth would make Bernice forced to do such a thing.

"My little girl." Bernice said. "Alice. She was dying about the year before you ascended the throne. I needed help, did everything I could. Sold everything I could. My husband and I have no money, we are poor wolves and so we were forced to look for. And then she came and offered to help us. She took us to a healer. A mage healer that we would never in our entire life thought we could afford. I know that it isn't allowed for us wolves to seek counsel from wages but your majesty I swear we had no choice. We were desperate."

"And so our little girl was healed. She survived and we were so grateful. We had no money to pay and she said it was a gift from her to us." Bernice said. "We accepted, thinking she was good. But then she came to me when I was chosen to become your meal taster and gave me the task to look away and never taste your meal as I had been asked to."

Rose was confused. "How did this woman know that you would be chosen to become my meal taster. It goes through a Very tight and strict process. How had she know any of this at all?"

Bernice swallowed. "She is someone closer than you think. She told me she had manipulated it and made me the royal meal taster. I told her

that I couldn't do it, but she told me that if I didn't, she was going to accuse me of treason and disobeying the laws. She was going to make sure that i and my entire family was dead. I had no choice. That was how I came to be in such a situation your majesty."

"You could have come to me." Rose said ignorantly.

And Bernice looked up at her, her eyes still flowing heavy tears. "You would Shevardnadze never believed the words of a mere servant to the words of your own." 2

And it hit Rose that was true.

There had been tensions between mages and wolves and a strict rule had been placed against not just mages, but also sirens.

There had been mistrust and rule had been placed not by Rose herself but by the other high ranking members of her court.

In some cases, she couldn't oppose laws that were about to be placed.

And she hadn't really known how much effect it would have on the people.

She looked at Bernice who had fallen into such a trap because of the law she had let pass

without any consideration for her people.

Guilt burned within the deepest parts of her soul.

She had said "over the words of her own."

This person was closer to home than she had ever expected.

This person was in her castle.

Rose was disgusted as to how someone could use Bernice's plight as a poor wolf to their own gain.

And even use their own family as leverage to make sure she did what they wanted her to.

And then Rose picked up the knife she had discarded earlier.

She cut through her arm and blood flowed.

"Your majesty what are you doing?" Bernice asked terrified.

"Once you tell me who did this to you, I will keep my word to you and I will send you and your family far away from this realm. You will start new lives, no one would ever know that you and you would be safe. I swear on my crown." Rose promise her.

Bernice's lips quivered in fear.

"You have no fear. Now tell me." Rose urged her.

Bernice wiped her tears and sniffed as she stood before the Queen.

"It was your-

"Rose look out!" Came a familiar voice.

Rose turned just in time to see her sister Cherry, standing in her night wear and throwing a blade at Bernice.

To Rose's horror the Blade went right past her and hit Bernice.

"Nooooo!" Rose screamed.

Bernice fell to the floor, the blade piercing through her heart.

Rose fell down to the floor and tried to resuscitate Bernice.

But Bernice was barely alive.

"Don't do this. Tell me! Tell me who she is." Rose pleaded.

Bernice's lips mouthed, but before she could say anything, in a matter of seconds, she was already dead 4