



Bride of the Traitor

HAYLEY FAIMAN

BRIDE OF THE TRAITOR

A Prophecy of Sisters Novel



HAYLEY FAIMAN

HAYLEY FAIMAN BOOKS, LLC

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Life is just a journey.

— PRINCESS DIANA

WORDS AND PHRASES OF BUNAFI

- Sard – Fuck
- Intercurse – Intercourse / Sex
- Anchovy – Insulting word for vagina
- Dideys – Slang for Breasts
- Fopdoodle- When someone is up their own ass.
- Jobbernowl – Idiot
- Queynte – Vagina / pussy
- Tallywags – Testicles
- Wimble – Slang for penis
- Chancery – Office
- Frauenhaus – Brothel

GEOGRAPHY OF BUNAFI

- Bunafi – Country
- Aerilon – Capital of Bunafi
- Kelna – City
- Irragin – City
- Beallenau – City
- Llyne – Bordering country

ANIMALS OF BUNAFI

- Elephant Bird – Flightless bird, similar to an ostrich.
- Arion – Greek mythological large horse, with wings that can speak.

THE PROPHECY

Four sisters.

Four sisters will be born. They are not of this world.

Four sisters who are born of the same mother and father, yet do not share the same appearance. They are the only ones of their kind in the entire universe. Across our world and all others.

Four sisters will marry and love the fiercest warriors from all four corners of our world. Once all four relationships are consummated, the events foretold in the prophecy will be set in motion, becoming unstoppable.

If the four sisters come together once their fate has been sealed, they will absorb all of the powers this world holds.

Four sisters will be the most powerful creatures in this world. It is not known if this will be used for good or evil.

The future is uncertain and unknown if these sisters gather together in our world. Only the fates know what the final outcome will be.

PROLOGUE



SYBILLA

A chill ran over my body as I started walking faster toward my apartment. I usually avoid this route home. It's riddled with vivid memories. None of them good. All of them about my ex. It's a drizzling, dreary day, not that it's different from any other day of the year. Portland isn't really known for its bright sunshine days, anyway.

Licking my lips, I reach for the handle of my building and slip inside. My phone rings in my pocket as I approach my door and I quickly take it out, glancing at the name on my caller ID. I shouldn't be surprised to see that it's Drusilla, my youngest sister.

"Hello?" I greet, sliding my key into the lock and opening the door.

"You sound funny," she announces.

Closing and locking the door behind me, I grunt. "I just got home from work. It's cold and raining."

She snorts. "You just described every day in that city. Why don't you move to Florida with me? A condo just went up for sale two doors down from mine. We could be neighbors," she squeals.

My little sister is the epitome of a happy blonde cheerleader. I don't know how we're even related. I have dark blonde hair, really, it's more brown than anything, but I'm living in denial. Even when

I'm happy, I don't bounce around as much as she does. She's got to be the happiest person I know.

"I'll think about it," I lie.

"He's not coming back, please, move here and start over. You need a change," she says.

Her voice is less excited and oddly serious. It's not like her, and I narrow my eyes as I sink down on my sofa. Pressing my lips together, I wonder exactly what is up with her. I don't ask, she wouldn't tell me.

Dru may be a happy cheerleader, but she's also a closed book. She keeps her personal life extremely closed off to the rest of us. I'm one of four girls, I have two older sisters, then Dru is the baby. We're all close, but we've all chosen jobs that have us spread out across the states.

"I don't want him back," I lie again.

There's a moment of silence before I hear Dru release a heavy sigh. "Think about it. Seriously, think about it. He's a loser and you deserve someone magical."

Pressing my lips together, I shake my head. "Magic doesn't exist, Dru. Sometimes we have to settle for adequate."

"You should never have to settle, and not for adequate. Ever."

We talk for a few more minutes, then I come up with an excuse to hang up. Even if Dru doesn't buy it, she allows it, with a promise to call her in a few days. I agree before I lie down on my sofa and curl up into a ball.

Staring at my powered off television, I wonder if she could be right?

Could there be something magical out there?

For me?

ELIAS

I STARE AT MY FATHER LYING IN HIS COFFIN, IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS SELF-built tomb. Apparently being buried with the rest of the kings and queens of our country wasn't good enough for the traitorous bastard.

He was just that too. A traitor. Not only to his crown, but to his country and to me. Licking my lips, I wonder if anyone is going to visit him or can I just have him buried beneath the stone and be done with it?

"Elias, Your Majesty," a voice calls out.

Turning my head, I look to see my father's head of counsel standing at the mouth of the tomb entrance. He has his hands folded in front of himself, his head tipped, but his eyes are on me.

"We must plan the coronation, Your Highness," he calls out softly.

I grunt in annoyance. "Would this land truly accept a traitor's son on the throne?" I ask.

His body jerks back from my words and he takes a step toward me, but moves no farther. "It is your duty, Your Majesty."

"Duty." I snort as my gaze drifts back to my father. "Duty is the only reason I do not ride with my soldiers and leave this hell."

Turning my back on my father, I lift my hand, my eyes focused on the counsel. "Bury him."

Without another word, I leave the tomb. It's time to take my rightful place on the throne. The son of a traitor, a tarnished reputation before I've even begun. It is time for me to rule people who hate my family's legacy.

It is time for me to be swallowed by the depths of hell in the name of duty.

CHAPTER ONE



ONE MONRTH LATER

ELIAS

“**Y**ou must choose a bride,” Cornwall, my head of counsel, demands.

I hear Merek chuckle deeply behind me. He is my closest friend, my cousin by blood, my brother in battle. He can also *sard* off. With a growl, I push the sheaf of papers away from me.

Tilting my head to the side, I press my lips together. “I mustn’t. I’m the King, focusing on my country, which already doesn’t trust a single bone in my body. I do not have time to take a wife.”

“You must produce an heir, and quickly. It is essential to your position.”

“By gods bones, Cornwall. I do not *want* a wife,” I snap.

Merek takes a step closer to my side. He’s looking at me, but I know that he will not utter a single word in front of Cornwall, for I know that he does not trust the man. How *can* he be trusted? He was counsel to my father, a traitor to his crown and country. A traitor to me, to my men and their families.

“That is all Cornwall,” I say, lifting my hand, dismissing the man.

He opens his mouth to speak, but my gaze is trained on his and I hope it is clear that this conversation is over.

"Think on it, Your Highness. Think on a wife, on creating an heir."

Without saying anything else, he stands and leaves the room. Rowan and Henry open then close the doors behind him, moving to set the wooden lock in place so that nobody can bother us. I am now surrounded by my men, men that I trust wholeheartedly.

"Speak freely, Merek, I know that you have been patiently waiting to insert your opinion on the matters at hand."

There's a moment of silence, but I wait because I know that Merek has something to say. As my first cousin and my highest-ranking officer, he has my ear. I trust him more than I trust anybody else in this world.

"As much as I detest agreeing with *Cornwall*," he spits. "You need to take a wife, even if you only lay with her to produce an heir and then send her away. Your throne must be secured."

Rowan and Henry both cough and avoid my gaze. I know that Merek is right. I know what I need to do, but I am loathe to actually go through with it. As King, I cannot just marry whomever I wish. The marriage must be political, and gods bones, but I despise politics.

"There are several prospects. What about Lady Rose of Kelna?"

Henry makes a noise in the back of his throat that sounds much like a horse's neigh. "Speak freely, Rowan and Henry, it's just the brotherhood right now," I grunt.

"I'm sorry to tell you, but Lady Rose's face resembles that of your stallion, Storm," Henry says, his voice even and calm, his eyes focused on my own.

Lifting my hand to my eyes, I drag it down the rest of my face with a groan. "I have a feeling most of the *Ladies* will have similar attributes," I mumble.

"Lucky to be the King, you can bed any maiden on the side." Rowan grins.

"Yes, lucky," I snort.

Merek's hand claps down on my shoulder and his fingers squeeze. "You do not need to decide today. Send for several prospects, put them up in the castle, see which one you can live with."

Nodding, I must admit that it is not a terrible idea. There are only a handful of Ladies in this part of the world that fit the criteria to be-

come my betrothed anyway.

My father honestly should have found one decades ago, but for some misguided reason, he didn't. Perhaps he was too busy bedding any woman that would spread her legs for him to think about the future.

Now it is up to me to forge an alliance, save my country, create an heir, and try not to be miserable as I do all of the above.

"Send a missive. I want all of them here."

"Are you going to throw a gala?" Merek asks with clear laughter in his voice.

"Apparently," I grumble.

All three men are unable to hide their laughter at my expense. "Bring on the Ladies' maids," Rowan crows.

"You bastards," I snap.

Their laughter turns into loud howling guffaws at my expense and I can't help but join in. It feels good, laughing with my brothers again. I've missed this, with all of the stress of the past four weeks, I have missed my life before. When everything was simpler. When I simply led the best knights of the land.

"Your Majesty," a woman cries with a pounding on the door.

Rowan and Henry unsheathe their swords before they unlock and wrench the heavy wooden doors open. The woman standing before the double doors bustles into the room and I blink at the sight of her.

She's wearing a long, faded, worn, dull-colored dress. Her white hair is in a messy wild pile on top of her head and her bright-blue eyes are focused on me and me only.

"Your Highness." She bows.

"Who are you?" I demand.

She straightens and turns her head to the side slightly, dipping her chin, her eyes still on me. "I am Aleida, the castle's witch."

I curse. My father. Of course, he would have a witch under his command. "Close the doors," I growl.

The men do not leave me as the doors close. I'm glad for it, I've never talked to a witch in person before and they're on guard as much as I am.

"Speak, witch, tell me why you've come to my private rooms."

She lifts her chin, her eyes looking down her nose at me. "I need you down in the dungeon. Something has happened. Something fan-

tastical and magical, the likes of which I've never encountered before."

"Explain, witch," Merek demands.

She shakes her head once. "You must see to believe."

"If this is a plot to cause harm to your king, you will suffer," Merek growls.

She lowers her chin, her eyes still eerily focused on me. "Never, Your Highness. I watched over you as a child, per the request of your sweet mother. I was requested to ensure your safety into manhood. After your mother's passing, your father sequestered me to a corner of the dungeon, but my charms have always been to protect you, Your Majesty."

The words cause me to stand, immediately. My mother. Nobody speaks of her, they haven't since the moment she died. I was five years old. When she passed, my father pretended as if she'd never existed. Now, this witch speaks of her as though she knew her.

"Why did you not protect her then?" I softly demand.

"She requested that I not heal her. She knew it was her time, as a woman of the crystals, she could have saved herself. Yet, she could see her fate had she lived and only desired one request from me, that you fulfill your future as the rightful heir to the country of Bunafi."

Swallowing hard, I nod. I will demand more from her, more information on my mother, but for now, I want to know what she is so insistent that I see.

"Take us to your dungeon. Show us what you wish me to see, witch," I demand.

SYBILLA

I ROLL TO MY BACK WITH A GROAN. IT FEELS LIKE I'M SLEEPING ON A hard concrete floor. Inhaling a deep breath, my nose wrinkles. It smells, really bad. I mean, I didn't take the trash out last night, but I didn't think that it would stink so quickly.

Opening my eyes, I push up so that I'm sitting. I glance around and as soon as my vision collides with a woman, I scream. She's wearing a big flour sack kind of dress; it looks like it's even possibly made from burlap. Her white hair is wild, and it looks like she's

tried to contain it in a bun, but then she forgot that she even had hair and it's all over the place now.

"Calm, child," she whispers.

That doesn't make me calm. I scream again, I can't stop. Crawling backward, I slam into what feels like a stone wall, all the while screaming my head off. She shakes her head once, lifts her hands and then says something that I can't make out.

A few seconds later, my screaming stops and my eyelids grow extremely heavy. "Help," I whimper.

She shakes her head; walking up to me she touches my shoulder. "Rest child, I'm sure all will be revealed in due time."

I hear voices. Men's voices and I open my eyes, my back still against the stone wall and still I'm in the fucking crazy-assed dream that I was in earlier.

The men stop talking. They stare at me as my eyes look over them. They're all really tall, and wearing what looks like old medieval knights' costumes. Lifting my gaze from their costumes, my lips part when I look into their faces.

They're hot.

Like H-O-T, hot.

All four of them.

But my gaze stops on one. He's sexy too, but in that totally rugged way. He has a scar that starts above his eye at the top of his forehead and travels down to the middle of his cheek, as if he was cut all the way down his face, over his eye. It's sexy as shit. As is the week-old scruff he has on his face.

Licking my dry lips, my breath hitches when I see his steel-blue eyes focus on me. They aren't just blue, they're so bright blue that they are almost clear. It's the most vibrant color I've ever seen.

"What is your name, witch?" he demands, looking directly at me.

I blink.

"Do you not understand Bunafian, witch? Your King demands an answer," one of the other hot guys growls.

My gaze shifts to the woman with white hair and she only holds her hands up, which isn't helpful at all. My breath starts coming out in pants as my heart starts to pound in my chest.

Holy fuck.

I've been kidnapped by cosplayer renaissance people.

"Name," the super-hot rugged guy rumbles.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I inhale a deep breath before I speak. "Sybilla," I whisper.

"You say you know not of how she arrived? Where she hails?" Super-Hot Rugged Guy asks, his eyes leaving mine to focus on the white-haired woman beside me.

"No, Your Majesty, she just appeared."

"She is indecent. Are you a whore?" he asks, his chin dipping to me again.

I gasp at his question. "Absolutely not," I snap. "How dare you."

One of the men makes a whistling sound. Super-Hot Rugged Guy tilts his head to the side, his eyes roaming over me and suddenly my little pink and gray satin pajama shorts and tank top do seem rather indecent.

Crossing my arms over my chest, I try to hide the fact that I'm braless. His lips twitch at the move and he licks his bottom lip. "No need to hide your charms, witch. I've seen all you have to offer this moment."

"Why don't you go fuck yourself, asshole?"

All four men freeze. They stare at me as if they're deer caught in headlights. I wait for them to rough me up, or yell at me, or call me a bitch or something, but they just stare.

"What did that mean, Aleida?" one of them asks.

She makes a noise. "I do not know. I have never heard those words before."

Looking back at her, then swinging my gaze over to the men. "What do you mean you guys haven't heard that phrase before. Man, you're taking this shit seriously," I murmur.

Super-Hot Rugged Guy takes a step forward and crouches down in front of me. His gaze is focused on mine, holding me hostage as he stares at me. My eyes break contact with his, traveling his scar as I lick my lips. I want to kiss that scar and I don't know why.

"Put her next to my room," he announces as he stands up. "Rowan, you and Henry will stand as her guard. Nobody goes in, or out, unless they are approved by me. And for the gods sakes cover her," he snaps, his last words are on a roar and I yelp with a jump.

"Merek, put the witch in a cell until I know what kind of sorcery she's created," he snaps.

Two hot men make their way toward me and reach for my biceps. I expect their grips to be hard, unforgiving and bruising, but

they aren't. Instead, they are firm but gentle as they pull me up to my feet.

"Come with us, milady," one of them murmurs.

Looking between them, feeling their hands on my skin, I realize that this isn't a dream. The stone floor against my feet is undoubtedly real and if they're into cosplay, they must have a fuck of a lot of money, because everything around me looks seriously legit.

"Where the hell am I?" I whisper.

One of the men looks down at me in a short glance before he continues to forge ahead. "You're in Bunafi, milady."

He says it matter-of-factly, as if he truly believes that's where we are. I press my lips together, following them up a narrow, stone spiral staircase that opens up into a large hallway.

It's here that I know without a doubt, these dudes have money. Serious money. They're also fucking crazy.

There are tapestries on the walls. There are paintings and huge arched wooden doors at every single room we pass.

"Do you think he knows what he's doing putting her in the Queen's quarters?" one of the hot guys asks the other one.

One of them chuckles, his finger flexing against my bicep. "Elias knows exactly what he's doing," he announces as he stops us in front of a rounded, gorgeous, wooden door. Without any fanfare, he tugs the door open and gently pushes me inside.

Spinning around, I'm surprised to see both of them standing just outside of the room. "You'll stay in here, milady. You will not attempt to venture anywhere or cast any spells of any kind. His Highness will be with you shortly."

I don't miss the smirk and tip of his lips as he sends his warning that Super-Hot Rugged Guy will be around to visit me. Opening my mouth, I try to gather the words to ask just what the fuck is going on, but I'm unable to as they slam the door closed.

Holy fuck. Holy shit fuck, *fuck*.

CHAPTER TWO



ELIAS

“I did not summon her, Your Majesty,” Aleida says. She isn’t begging, isn’t trying to convince me of anything. She is just telling me the facts that she truly believes. She is far too confident in her own words, but I can’t believe her. Nobody just falls from the gods sky like that.

“Whether or not you summoned her, I demand you find out how she got here. Gods damned, she could have been sent by an enemy,” I growl.

Aleida frowns, then lifts her gaze to meet mine. “She was not dressed as any other maiden I have ever encountered through my travels of this world.”

“No, she was not. A newfound enemy, perhaps?”

The witch nods. “I will see what I can discover, if there is anything to be discovered, Your Highness.”

Turning from her, I start to walk out of her new home, a cell in the dungeon. “If you discover anything, you will tell one of my men immediately.”

Spinning around, I walk away from the witch. She will prove her loyalty to me with this mission. If she is successful, I will have no issue installing her in the castle. If not, she can spend her days in the dungeon for all I care.

My heart twists at the thought of my mother, of how she asked not to be saved by Aleida. Then the idea that she begged the witch to protect me.

There were many times that I should have perished on the battlefield, dozens actually. It's possible that her enchantments saved my life, protected me. I cannot brush that off, no man could.

Jogging up the spiraling staircase, I make haste as I walk toward the guarded room where this stranger lies. A maid plasters her back against the wall, a handful of folded linens in her grasp. Turning my gaze toward her, I watch as her gaze shifts quickly to the floor.

"I need a warm bath, two lady's maids, and proper attire brought to the Queen's chambers, immediately," I bark.

"Yes, Your Majesty," she whispers, giving me a small curtsy.

My feet carry me toward the woman. I know not what made me put her in my mother's chambers, in the Queen's chamber which is connected to mine by only a sitting room between. It felt right in the moment. Maybe I was bewitched, I'm unsure.

Rowan and Henry are standing guard, just as I've instructed. "A bath is being brought to her, along with proper attire," I announce.

Both of the men dip their chins, but I can feel that they have more to say. "Speak freely," I grunt.

"In the Queen's chambers, really, Elias?" Rowan chuckles.

"I know not," I admit. "It seemed right at the time."

"I'll bet it did," Henry mumbles.

Inclining my head, I look down my nose at him. "Say it," I demand.

"She was wearing less than a night chemise, Elias. I've never seen anything of the like in my entire life. There is something not right about her. Perhaps she is a siren, sent to lure you. I do not think you should sleep so close to her, or *with* her."

My jaw clenches and I feel a muscle jump in my cheek at his words. "I will pray on it, I will ask the witch to block this one's powers, but I will not have my men accusing me of thinking solely with my cock. I am not some rutting boy."

Rowan's brow arches. Henry clears his throat. Merek appears at my side just as the boys carrying the bath and water hurry toward us. We all step to the side to allow them entrance, and I fight looking into the room.

I will go in there. I will see her and talk to her. What I will not do is any of that in front of these men who think I only want to bury my cock inside of her, consequences and crown be damned.

"Fetch me the witch. I've changed my mind about something," I murmur, shifting my gaze to Merek.

"Talk to me, Elias," he rumbles.

I dip my chin, my eyes focused on my brother. "I want her powers blocked. Whoever she is, I do not want her to be able to cast enchantments on me or any of the people residing in the castle."

Merek's chin jerks, one of his brows raising inquiringly. "You're going to bed her," he states. It isn't a question. I don't dignify his words with a response.

"Fetch the witch," I grind out.

I can feel all three men smiling as they look at me, but I ignore them all. Thankfully, they don't stare long. Merek turns and walks back toward the staircase that leads to the dungeon.

Rowan and Henry take their stations next to the door, one on each side and their chins lifted as they watch the flurry of maids carrying linens and clothes in and out.

When the hustle and bustle is concluded, I knock on the closed door. A maid answers, her eyes wide as she looks at me, then quickly shifts her gaze to the floor.

"I'll be in my chancery, find me when madam is finished with her bath," I softly demand.

"Yes, Your Majesty," she breathes.

Turning from the scene, I force my feet to carry me toward my chancery. My desire is to watch her bathe, to see if the promise of what lies beneath her strange garments is exactly how I imagine it would be.

I wonder if her body is warm, soft and inviting?

Sinking back in my leather chair, I pinch my eyes closed and I try not to imagine this strange woman with her long light-brown hair, riding me. She must be a siren, she must, otherwise I would not lust after her as if I was a boy who had only felt the touch of his hand and not a woman's *queynte*.

By gods bones I hope that Aleida can break this spell.

SYBILLA

THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN AND I OPEN MY MOUTH TO SCREAM WHEN I SEE that it's three young teen boys carrying what looks like an old-fashioned metal tub. They set it down, wordlessly, then disappear before reappearing shortly after with buckets of water.

I watch as they fill the tub up with water, never once saying a word to me or one another. I take a step toward the large tub and pause when the door opens again and three women walk inside. They eye me warily, but none speak to me.

One is carrying what looks like white cloths folded and the other has a long dress made out of a deep burnished golden fabric with black lace trim along the bottom of the skirt and at the wrists of the long sleeves. It's beautiful, but I don't know why it's being brought to me.

"Excuse me, what's happening?" I ask.

Two of the three women keep their gazes focused on the stone floor, the third lifts hers up to meet mine.

"I am Jasmine and we are here to bathe you as per the orders of His Majesty," she says, dipping her chin to the side.

I frown, unsure of what is happening. I'm completely confused by every single person here. "Please, help me. I think I've been kidnapped. My name is Sybilla Collins. I live in Portland, please help me," I beg.

The woman takes a step back, a frown playing on her lips. "I know not of what you speak, milady. King Elias is a fair king. If he holds you under guard, he must have good reason. Please disrobe so that we may bathe you."

Bathe me?

I balk at her words, all of them. She is just as brainwashed as everyone else in this creepy fucking building. There is no way I'm stripping naked in front of these people. She has clearly lost her ever-loving mind.

"I think I can bathe myself," I snap.

Her chin jerks and she takes a step back. She shifts her gaze behind her at the other women and I ignore the shared looks that they give one another. I'm sure for whatever reason they wanted to *help* me, but I'm going to have to decline allowing them to get their rocks off by bathing me.

"As you wish, milady," Jasmine whispers.

Pressing my lips together, I watch as all three of them back out of the room before closing the big wooden door behind them. Looking from the door to the tub, then back to the door, I wonder how much privacy I really have here.

I don't know how to lock the thing, and supposedly there are guards posted outside. Chewing on my bottom lip, I release it with a shrug. Who knows when I'll get another bath, especially if I try to make a run for it, I should take advantage of the clean water.

Stripping out of my pajamas, I leave them in a pile next to the basin tub. There are a couple bottles placed at the end of the oblong tub and I pick them up to inspect them.

Taking the corks out of the top, I smell them. They are strongly scented oils. I choose a eucalyptus scent and tip it so that a few drops fall into the water.

Picking up what looks to be a bar of soap, I lift one foot and dip my toe into the water. It isn't hot, but it's not cold either. Slowly, I sink down into the water and start to lather the soap in my hand. Lifting it to my nose, I inhale and am pleasantly surprised to smell the scent of vanilla.

I don't take too long to wash myself, too afraid that someone is going to burst in and see me in all of my naked glory, plus the water is cooling at an alarming rate.

Once I'm washed, and seriously wishing that I could stay in here for a while longer, just to smell the delicious scents that swirl around me, I let out a heavy sigh before I stand. On my way up, I grab a white linen cloth that is pretty thick, so I assume it's a drying towel of some kind.

Stepping out onto another thick white linen, the water soaks the fabric immediately at my feet and I hurry to dry off the rest of my body, wrapping it around my nakedness as quickly as possible.

"Milady," a voice calls as the door opens just a crack.

I freeze, before slowly turning in a circle to face the doorway. Jasmine's head peeks around the door's edge and her eyes find mine.

"I don't mean to disrupt, but you cannot dress yourself, milady. We have to help with your ribbons."

Ribbons.

I can only think of one type of clothing that needs ribbons and that's a corset. Blinking, I nod my head woodenly as the three

women quickly hurry into the room. They go about their business, ignoring my existence. Until one of them brings a thin white fabric toward me.

"Your undergarment, milady," she offers, her voice quiet and soft.

Taking the fabric in my hand, I pull it on over my head, allowing it to fall to the floor. Only when it's covering me do I release the linen towel wrapped around my chest. I step away from the towel and bend down to pick it up, but Jasmine swoops down and snatches it before I get the chance.

The neck of the undergarment is cut extremely deep, I reach for the ties to close it, but Jasmine appears and bats my hands away. "Arms up, milady," she gently orders.

Lifting my arms up straight, I hold my breath when the dark gold and black dress is lifted over my head by the other two ladies and slowly lowered. Slipping my arms into the long sleeves, I bite the corner of my lip as it drags over my body to touch the floor.

The inside is so soft, as if there is some kind of fur lining. I wish that I could look in a mirror, I've never worn a gown before and this seems like something that I need to see.

It still feels like a weird dream, but as something is strapped around my waist from the inside of the dress, my breath hitches and I know that it is still not a dream.

"What's that?" I ask on a wheeze as it's pulled tightly.

"It's your inner stays, milady, your ribbons," Jasmine announces, pulling it tighter. "It's a bit small for your... erm... endowments," she cautiously explains.

In other words, I'm a fat ass with big boobs. I also have a big booty, but I guess it doesn't matter in this full-length skirt. Once they've pulled and groaned, I've gasped and moaned, they finally stop and I feel them tugging on the outer part of the dress.

I'm panting, short of breath as this dress is so tight that I'll be lucky if I don't pass out in the next five minutes. Sliding my palms down the skirt of the dress, I moan at the texture, velvet. It's so soft and supple. The arms are tight to my elbow and they thankfully bell out to deep points at the bottom, edged in gorgeous black lace.

"Your shoes, milady," one of the girls offers, crouching down in front of me.

Grasping my dress, I tug it up and hold out one foot, she slides on a slipper that is at least half a size too small, then helps me put on the other.

"Please, have a seat so that we can pin your hair," Jasmine says, pressing her palm to my back.

Nodding, I walk over to a small vanity and sink down on the bench there. The good news is that I can sit in this too-tight dress, the bad news is that I may pass out at any second. One of the quiet girls takes a step up behind me and I look at myself in the very small, rustic mirror.

The dress is a straight slash across my chest, but my breasts are barely contained. They are practically exposed for the world to see. So much so that I have to glance down to ensure that there is no areola showing.

Once I'm satisfied that nobody can see every single inch of my breasts, I lift my head back and look in the mirror again. Raising my eyes to the girl behind me, I smile in the reflection. She has white-blond hair and green eyes, she's simply beautiful.

"What's your name?" I ask.

"Katrina, milady," she whispers.

"And the brunette?"

"Ellyn, madam," Ellyn answers.

"I'm Sybilla," I offer.

They all dip their chins but don't say anything else. Katrina fiddles with my hair and when she's finished, my lips part in awe. From what I can see, it's fantastic.

There are twists and braids all over that come up to a high ponytail. The pins that hold it all in place are gold with little black accents on the ends.

I open my mouth to thank them, but there is a loud pounding on the door. Jasmine hurries over, and I hear her whisper, then she opens the door to one of the hot guys and the woman with the white hair.

CHAPTER THREE



SYBILLA

The woman, a witch is what they called her, eyes me warily. She takes a step forward. Hot Guy at her back doesn't move, but he's watching every single moment and it's clear that he's on the alert.

The maids, I assume that's what they are, disappear. I'm now alone with Hot Guy and the witchy lady. She continues closing in on me. I don't move, my legs somehow stuck to the stone floor beneath me.

"I've cast a simple spell to keep you in your place while I do what's been asked of me."

Gulping, my eyes lift from the woman to Hot Guy, but he's glaring at me so I decide that the witchy woman is a better view in this moment. She circles me, murmuring unintelligible words beneath her breath.

Stopping in front of me, I watch as she lifts her hands and then gold sparks fly from her fingertips and swirl around me. Something washes over me, my back arches pushing my chest out, and my head snaps back, causing me to cry out in pain.

Then, as quickly as it started, it disappears and my knees give out, my entire body falling to the hard stone floor. Nobody comes to my aid, and I'm okay with that as I attempt to catch my breath.

"The enchantment is in place. If she has any magic at all, I have suppressed it," she states coolly.

Hot Guy nods his head once, then takes a step to the side. "Back to your cell, witch," he growls.

She stares at me for a moment, unmoving, her eyes focused on me. Something flashes in her eyes but she shakes it off and turns around, walking right out the door. I stay frozen to my spot, feeling too weak to move when the door opens again.

Thankfully, it's Jasmine who enters. She hurries over to me and helps me stand to my feet. "Oh milady, are you injured?"

Shaking off my strange feeling of exhaustion, I look to the woman. "No, I'm all right." I nod.

"His Majesty would like to speak to you in his chancery, please, follow me. We must hurry without delay."

I don't know what the hell a chancery is and this whole thing is freaking me the hell out. I bite the inside of my cheek, praying that it isn't a sex room. I can't handle medieval sex. I don't even know what these people would want and all I can imagine is a bunch of rudimentary torture devices.

Her hand is in mine as she quickly leads me out of the room. I stumble as soon as the two other hot guys close in behind us. I can hear their heavy boot falls with each step that they take, but they don't say a word or make a move to restrain me, so I guess there's that.

Jasmine stops in front of a closed door and knocks before stepping to the side. There is a long silence and I clasp my hands together in front of me, wringing them with a flicker of apprehension that fills my entire body.

"Enter," a deep voice rumbles.

I don't move. I can't. I know that it isn't because of some weird witch lady this time, no, this is because I'm terrified of what will happen to me beyond those doors.

One of the hot guys leans forward and pushes the door open with a grunt, while the other one places his hand on the middle of my back and pushes me into the room. Before I can spin around, I hear the door slam closed behind me, the noise echoing all around me.

"Sybilla," a voice rasps.

Turning to face the direction of where I heard the voice, I lift my eyes to find him sitting behind a desk. My face heats because I realize that we're in an office, not a sex chamber. He stands slowly, moving around his desk almost elegantly.

I take a long look at his clothes, something that I didn't do the first time that I saw him. He's wearing what looks to be thick black tights, man tights. He has a burnished gold sleeveless tunic on, the hem brushing just above his knee and has a cut on each side, all the way up to his mid-thigh, I assume so that he can walk easier.

He's wearing a long-sleeve tight shirt of some kind beneath the tunic, again in black. We look super matchy and I'm completely confused by this. His vibrant steel-blue eyes scan my entire body, lingering at the exposed cleavage for longer than should be acceptable before he takes a step toward me.

"You look lovely in my colors," he murmurs.

Taking a step back, avoiding his advance, I shake my head. "I don't even know what that means," I breathe. "Take me home, please. I'm scared."

He doesn't stop his advance. Instead, he continues until I slam against what I can only guess is a bookshelf. He lifts his hand, immediately wrapping it around the front of my throat. My eyes widen and my breath hitches.

"You cannot leave without my permission. Your powers have been blocked until I give an order to *unblock* them," he rumbles. "Including any powers of seduction that you hold."

"Seduction?" I ask.

He tilts his head to the side, his fingers flexing against my neck, his eyes focused on mine. "If you've come here thinking to use powers of seduction on me. You've been blocked. Whatever secrets you're trying to discover about my position, my people, or my crown, you will be sadly disappointed."

Shaking my head, I narrow my gaze at him. "Look here, asshole," I snap. "I don't know why you kidnapped me. I don't want to play your freaky game. All I want to do is go back to my apartment in Portland."

He jerks back slightly, confusion clear in his eyes as he studies me. "I do not understand all that you have said, and yet, you speak Bunafian."

Lifting my hands between us, I place my palms against his chest. "Please, take me home," I whisper. "I'll do whatever you want me to do, just take me home."

ELIAS

SYBILLA'S EYES WELL WITH UNSHED TEARS AS I WATCH HER. IT HITS ME IN a part of my chest that I don't recognize. There's a squeezing sensation and I attempt to blink the feeling away, but it's there, and as her lips tremble, it grows more uncomfortable for me, almost painful.

Releasing her, I take a step back, never breaking contact with her light-gold eyes. The dress makes them more pronounced, as it does with the gold in her hair as well. She wears my colors from head to toe, and I can't deny that they look fantastic on her.

"This place you have mentioned, Portland, is it?" I ask.

She nods, breathing shallow quick breaths, no doubt partially because her gown is at least a few sizes too tight around her bodice. Her endowments are struggling to stay contained in the fabric of the dress and I can't deny that it's a sight I will not forget easily, if ever.

"Yes, why are you acting like you don't know where it is. This game is getting really creepy. Use me for whatever you're going to use me for, then please, *please*, send me home," she begs.

Ignoring her, I turn around and walk over to the map shelf. Tugging out my world maps, I take them over to my desk and search the index for the city that she's insistent she wishes me to deposit her back to.

"I see no city or village with that name," I say, lifting my gaze to her.

She's still plastered against the bookcase, but like a scared little foal, she slowly teeters toward me. "You are free to look, then show me. But, milady, I have traveled far and wide and I have never heard of such a place."

She slides beside me and I can't suppress my grunt at her scent as it wafts through my nostrils. Eucalyptus and vanilla, it's incredibly enticing. She points a finger along the index, then turns her head and lifts her wide eyes up to me.

"What the hell is this? Where is the real map?"

My lips press together, and I shake my head once. "This is the world's map as it currently exists, milady. I'm not quite sure what you think that it should read, but this is no jest, this is the map of the world," I explain.

She takes a step back, then turns toward the window and I watch as she runs toward the draperies. Normally they would be open, but it's rather chilly today, so I've kept them closed to ward off the cold.

Sybilla wraps her fingers in the velvet material and wrenches them open. I hear her gasp, then she turns around, her eyes wide with what I can only describe as terror.

"Sybilla?" I ask.

She lifts her hand to her parted lips and gasps again right before her eyes roll in the back of her head and her knees buckle. In two wide strides, I make it to her before her body crashes to the floor and I lift her in the air, sliding one arm beneath her back, the other beneath her knees.

Carrying her out of my chancery, I pass Rowan and Henry, who I can feel watching me. Ignoring them, I make my way to my chambers. Slamming my door, I take Sybilla to the bed and gently lower her onto the mattress and pillow before I walk back to the door and lock it.

Then, with little delay, I roll her to the side and unhook the back of her dress until I find her ribbons. Unlacing her, I tug on the thick ribbon to give her room to breathe, but leaving her gown on, just unlaced in the back.

Walking over to the fireplace, unable to stay still, I start a fire to warm her bones. Pacing, I wait for her to awaken. It seems as though hours have gone by, and I am debating on finding a healer, when she finally begins to stir.

Striding toward her, I sit down on the side of the bed, next to her hip. Reaching out, I cup her cheek with my palm.

"You are well, Sybilla?" I ask, trying to keep my voice low.

Her golden eyes look up at me, her gaze is soft as she licks her lips. Her voice is soft, almost timid sounding.

"Where am I?" she whimpers.

My heart, it does that clenching painful sensation again as I search her watery eyes. "You're in the country of Bunafi, sweeting."

"What the *fuck* is Bunafi? Why does the snow outside glitter? What were those *giant bird things*? Why are the leaves of the trees

blue? Did you dye them?" she hisses.

Frowning, I slide my thumb across her plump lip. "What has happened to you, Sybilla? Where are you truly from? *What* are you?"

She pushes up on her elbows, her face only inches from my own. "My name is Sybilla Collins and I'm from Portland, Oregon in the United States of America. I don't know what you are, where I am, or what the hell is happening here." She gulps, her watery eyes meeting mine before she whispers, "I'm terrified."

My heart shatters at her words. She means them. She believes she is from this mythical land that she speaks of, and I have no doubt deep in my bones that she is indeed terrified.

"Never mind, sweeting. There is no reason for you to fret. You are safe here within these castle walls. Aleida has blocked your magic, but she's also given an enchantment to keep you safe from outside harm. Naught shall hurt you here, I swear that on my sword, on my life, on my crown," I vow.

Her hand wraps around my wrist and I feel a jolt fill my body, an energy that I have never felt before in my life. "I don't know half of what you just said to me. Nobody has swords unless they're just for display on their walls.

"I've never met a witch and I don't believe in witchcraft, but I can see in your eyes that you promise me no harm and you mean it. I'm probably a huge idiot for believing you right now, but I have no other choice. I must trust you, Elias."

My name on her tongue sends a surge throughout my body, straight to my shaft. Leaning forward, I'm unable to restrain myself as my lips brush against hers in a chaste kiss.

She doesn't push me away or scream and yell, and I feel like the victor of a battle when I lift my head and she's staring up at me, her plump lips parted and her eyes wide.

"Trust me, sweeting. No harm will come to you under my protection."

CHAPTER FOUR



SYBILLA

Elias is so close to me, so damn close that I stupidly wish he would kiss me, again. How crazy is that? This is some serious Stockholm syndrome shit happening. He jerks his chin, his eyes narrowing slightly.

“How did you know my name?” he demands.

Gulping, I blink. “I heard your guys say it,” I admit.

He sits up and back, the spell broken as he looks at me under a scrutiny that I’ve never witnessed before. Then he stands and I watch him walk over to the window.

I wonder if he’s looking at the dozens of gigantic ostrich type birds that I saw running around. I’ve never seen anything like them before in my life.

They aren’t tropical birds either, I don’t know what they are, but I’ve never seen anything like them. They look similar to an emu or ostrich, but they aren’t. Their faces kind of look like a duck, but with a sharper beak.

Shivering, I decide they’re just as terrifying as the fact that the snow actually glittered. I watch as he puts his hands behind his back, clasping his palms together as he looks out at the terrain.

I try not to think about the trees in the background, either. There was a forest of trees beyond the rolling hills of glittery snow and the

leaves of those trees, they were blue. Yes, *blue*. I freaked the fuck out, and rightfully so.

"I know not what to do with you," he rasps.

Staying in my spot on the bed, I don't move. He's talking to himself, not wishing for an answer, at least not from me. Slowly, he turns his head and those bright-blue eyes focus on my own. My breath hitches. His scar appears almost a bright red, instead of the deep burgundy color that it was earlier.

"I know you aren't a siren, if you were, your powers have been stripped. And yet..."

"And yet?" I ask when he doesn't speak right away.

He dips his chin, his eyes never leaving my own. "And yet, I've never wanted to strip a woman and bury my cock inside of her more than I do you, right now. It's quite unexplainable."

I stare, completely frozen in breath and body from his blunt words. Pressing my thighs together beneath the flowy gown, I wait to see what will happen next.

There is something about Super-Hot Rugged Guy, Elias. I feel something when he looks at me, when he's near me that I've never felt before. It's more than just excitement, more than fear or unknowing. It's bigger than anything I've ever experienced.

I don't know what is going to happen next, if I've been kidnapped or maybe he's telling the truth and I've somehow out of thin air ended up in this place that I've never heard of before. I should be curled in a ball in the corner rocking back and forth in horror, but I believe him when he says that I am safe under his protection.

"I'm not a witch, Elias," I breathe.

His head jerks, his eyes turning a darker shade of blue, almost indigo, and I exhale at the sight, my nipples tightening. My body is begging to be touched by this stranger, and it's as if I'm not in control of myself.

"What are you, Sybilla?" he asks, taking several long strides to my side.

He doesn't sink down and sit next to me again, instead he looks down at me, his gaze dropping and focusing on mine as he licks his lips. It's hot as hell, so damn sexy. My entire body heats at the sight, I feel like I'm going to die if I don't come.

"Something is wrong," I say, my voice not hiding my sudden fear.

Elias' head jerks as he lowers slightly, his hand shooting out and the back pressing against my forehead.

"You are clammy. You've a fever," he murmurs.

Lifting my own hand, I wrap my fingers around his wrist and hold him to me. Just the touch of his skin against my own feels fantastic. "I feel like I'm going to explode, I've never felt like this before," I breathe.

Something flashes in his eyes, but I can't focus on that, I'm too busy trying to keep my fingers around his wrist at the same time shimmying out of this fucking ridiculous gown.

"Sybilla," he breathes.

"I don't know why, but I need you to touch me, Elias. I need to feel you, I need you to make me come," I beg breathlessly as I rise, allowing the gown to fall down my body and pool at my knees.

"Gods," he hisses through clenched teeth.

His hand moves from my head, down to wrap around the side of my throat. It's not enough. I whimper, the need filling me, heating me to the point of combustion.

I don't know how I haven't imploded at this point. I need his touch, instinctively, I know that his touch will ease the pressure and ache of my entire body.

Elias slides his thumb along my bottom lip and I peek my tongue out to taste his rough digit. He tastes like salt, his skin is calloused and it's sexy as fuck. Everything about him is sexy as shit. I want to drag my tongue along the scar on his face. I want to ride him until we're both screaming.

Basically, I want to fuck his brains out.

My stomach clenches with nausea, my face heats, and I lift my hands to touch my cheeks. I'm completely humiliated by my feelings, by my brazen actions. I've never done this before. I haven't even had sex for over a year.

When I left my ex, I busied myself with work and tried to heal from allowing myself to be with an asshat like him, even though I was secretly hoping that he would come back because I was *that* lonely.

"I need you, Elias. I need you inside of me," I whimper.

He shifts his head to the side, cursing beneath his breath, my humiliation suddenly vanishing as I beg this stranger to fuck me. When

he brings his gaze back to meet my own, his eyes are indigo blue again.

Licking my lips at the sight of him, I release his hand and place my palms on the center of his chest. He lets out a growl when one of my hands slides up his shoulder and around his neck to slip through and grab ahold of the hair at the nape of his neck.

"Gods, by the gods, what are you doing to me?" he breathes.

Shaking my head, I lean forward, my mouth just a hairsbreadth away from his own. "I don't know, but whatever it is, you're doing it to me too," I admit.

"I should not want you, witch."

"I'm not a witch."

He growls, baring his teeth. "You are, Sybilla. You are a gods damned witch," he announces right before he slants his head and crashes his mouth against my own.

Finally.

I let out a moan from deep within me, it bubbles out, Elias swallows it, releasing his own growl when he does. My fingers flex in his hair, pulling him closer to me, needing him so close, needing him to melt into me.

"You're my witch," he grunts against my lips.

One of his hands slides around the back of my neck, twisting around the fall of hair from my ponytail, twice, before he tugs my head back, exposing me.

His lips move down my chin, nipping me there before they press against the front of my throat. His other hand slides down the center of my chest and down my belly.

His hand doesn't stop at my stomach, instead he cups my pussy with a growl against my neck. I let out a sigh at the feel of his hand right where I need it.

"Gods, your *queynte*, is drenched, Sybilla."

My body jerks from his word, one that I've never heard before, but I can guess his meaning as he grinds his palm against my clit. Shifting my hips, I rub against him, needing more. He hisses, just as he slips a finger inside of me.

Magical.

Clenching his hair in my grasp, I lick my lips as I continue to look into his eyes, riding his hand unabashedly. His lips tip right before

his hand tugs my neck back farther, my back arching and my eyes looking across the room, upside down, at the stone wall behind us.

"What a sight it would be that you would ride my cock so expertly," he rasped, his breaths coming out in uneven pants.

"I want that," I say, unsure of why I've just told him this.

He releases his hand from between my legs, the loss of his touch almost too much for my body to bear. He almost violently straightens me, still gripping my hair before he tugs me against his chest. He's still clothed, the rough fabric of his tunic rubbing deliciously against my aching breasts, teasing my nipples.

"You wish to ride me, witch?"

Letting out a trembling breath, I look into his now deep indigo eyes. "Stop calling me a witch, that's not what I am," I whisper.

He shakes his head once. "My witch, remember? That's what you are and that is what you'll continue to be until I've figured out what you want from me or until I've grown tired of taking your body."

I should detest him, just for those words alone, but my body craves him, his touch, his promise of release so much that I can do nothing but nod without speaking.

"Disrobe me," he gently demands.

I have no clue how his clothes work, but I reach for his belt first. Nimble, I unbuckle the fastening before I let it fall to the floor with a loud clamor. Grasping the hem of his tunic, I drag it up his body, exposing his black tights and tight long-sleeve shirt.

Once his tunic is over his head, I drop it to the floor to join his belt. His brown hair is now messy from the action, he looks younger, his scar is still redder than it was earlier, but it isn't off-putting, in fact, it's sexy.

Elias releases my hair before he reaches for the hem of his shirt. I watch as he slips it up his torso, exposing his bare chest to me. My mouth goes dry at the sight, right before it waters.

Shifting forward, I can't deny myself the taste another second longer. I touch my mouth to a scar at the top of his pec, then another inches below that one. In fact, his entire chest is littered with scars, some larger than others, but there are several dozen.

"Not just a king," I murmur against his stomach. His muscles clench as I reach for the ties at the side of his pants.

"No," he grunts, his hand wrapping around my ponytail.

"A warrior," I breathe, tugging his tights down his legs.

"Sybilla," he warns as his cock springs free.

Reaching for him, I wrap my hand around his impressive length. He's not just long, he's thick, too. He's perfection. His body is tanned and toned, his skin tastes like sweat and leather mixed with cedarwood.

Touching my tongue to the tip of his dick has Elias cursing his gods before he tugs my head away, his dark indigo eyes turning black.

"You do this?" he asks, his tone almost lethal sounding instead of turned on.

Biting the corner of my lip, I can think of nothing but having him inside of me, filling me, fucking me, taking me to the edge and pushing me over. In that, I want to make him happy too, and every woman knows that every man loves a good blow job.

"You don't like it..."

He shakes his head once. "Like has naught to do with it. Ladies do not do this, Sybilla. Not in this world. Only whores take a man in their mouth."

Blinking, I pull back in surprise. Then, my lips turn up into a small smile. "It seems that we are indeed in different worlds then, Elias, because where I'm from, ladies do this. Especially when they want to give their man something extra in the bedroom, or maybe just because they want to make their partner happy."

"It seems we are from different worlds, witch."

ELIAS

SYBILLA HUMS AS SHE OPENS HER MOUTH, SHIFTING FORWARD TO TAKE ME down her throat. I cannot take my eyes off of the sight. Witch or not, I have never wanted a woman as I want Sybilla in this moment.

It seems that she is just as aflame for me as I am for her. I do not know what kind of sorcery is afoot, but at the moment, I cannot seem to overly care.

I fight the urge to close my eyes as she sucks my cock. Her eyes are focused on mine, they're burning gold, the same color as my coat of arms. It's breathtaking. Using my grip on her hair, I guide her along my dick, her lips parted and wrapped around me.

Sybilla's hands reach around the backs of my thighs as she lets out a groan. Tugging her off of me, I breathe heavily, so close to exploding in her mouth that I am forced to close my eyes and regain my self-control.

I pull her roughly toward me. Slanting my head and touching my lips to hers. She melts into me, her body molding perfectly against mine. I need to be inside of her, to feel all of her and know if this power is real or imagined.

Not allowing her to have any more control, I slide my hands down her back until I reach her rounded buttocks and wrap my fingers around the tops of her thighs, I tug her, lifting her knees from the bed so that her back falls against the mattress.

Wrapping my hands around her curvy hips, I pull her closer to me, my eyes dipping down between her legs and seeing her slick *queynte*, pink and ready for me. I don't question the lack of hair between her legs, though I must admit that seeing all of her glory is indeed appealing.

Guiding the head of my cock toward her slick opening, I shift my eyes to hers as I brace my hands next to her head and hover my chest above hers. Dipping my chin, I open my mouth and wrap my lips around her nipple, sucking her sweet breast into my mouth.

"Fuck," she moans the moment I'm completely seated inside of her tight sheath.

I know not what this word means, but it must be good as her thighs tighten around my waist and she lifts her hips to meet my own.

Flicking her hardened nipple with my tongue, I suck her deep, my teeth sinking into her soft flesh. She lifts her head, her eyes looking down, beneath her lashes, her lips parted in awe. Her *queynte* clenches around me. The move causes my cock to twitch at the new-found tightness.

Grinding my hips against her small nub with each downward thrust, I continue to suck and bite her sweet breasts, marking them as my own.

All of her body is now mine, even if she doesn't realize it yet, even if she thinks to just seduce me in hopes of gaining something, she will not succeed, only I will be the victor in this coupling.

Moving my mouth to her neglected breast, my hips move faster, slamming against her harder with each thrust. Not once does she

whimper or plead for me to stop. Instead she tightens her thighs, over and over as she lifts her hips, rolling them with each stroke, matching my fever with her own.

"I'm close, oh my god, Elias," she cries.

I can feel her clench around me with the evidence of her truths. She trails her nails up my back, then with surprise she lifts to an almost seated position and buries her face in my neck as she cries out against my skin.

She tightens her thighs and *queynte* to an almost painful level and I can do naught but grunt with a few more thrusts as she takes me to my climax. Closing my eyes, my cock twitches inside of her and all too late I realize that for the first time, I did not pull out of a woman.

Her arms are wrapped tightly around me, her legs around my hips and then she lifts her face from my neck and I look down into those golden eyes.

I realize that I would not mind overly much if she were indeed impregnated with my seed. It would not be a hardship to have someone so beautiful carry my heir.

CHAPTER FIVE



SYBILLA

My face feels as if it's on fire, I'm so embarrassed by my actions. I've never thrown myself at a man before, especially one that is a stranger, who is most likely mentally disturbed.

I mean, he's dyed the leaves of his trees blue for heaven's sake. No normal person does that. It feels like he's more along the lines of the crazy queen in *Alice in Wonderland* and the cards painting the roses red.

Elias lifts his hand, curling his rough calloused fingers around the back of my neck, the other wraps around my lower back to hold me seated and against his chest, his cock still buried inside of me.

"That was unlike any coupling I've ever encountered, Sybilla," he rasps.

He seriously is good at this cosplay thing, I mean not even post-coital does he break his character. Giving him a small smile, I try not to die of embarrassment.

He probably thinks I'm some kind of slut, because well, *why wouldn't he?* I don't even know his last name, I haven't even known him for twelve hours and I threw myself at him, not taking no for an answer.

His fingers flex around the back of my neck and his again steel-blue eyes search my own.

"I must see to my duties. You will meet me to dine together this evening?"

His smile inclines with his head as he looks down his nose at me, looking comfortable and demanding all at the same time, all while being buried inside of my body. He is playing the part of a king to perfection.

"I guess a girl has to eat," I whisper.

He dips his chin, his mouth touching mine in just a brush of a kiss. "Indeed, Lady Sybilla must keep her strength up. Especially as I intend to do this again this evening after we've feasted."

"Elias," I breathe.

He hums, his fingers flexing again, his mouth moving to my ear. "I very much liked your land's use of their ladies' mouths. Perhaps, milady will do that again and take my seed that way?"

A shiver breaks out over my entire body at his words. I liked it very much too, and just the thought of pleasing him in that way, turns me on and I don't even know why. Before this, before him, it was always a chore. I've never craved it like I did earlier. Honestly, if he asked me to drop down and do it right now, I would without issue.

"I will, Elias. Any way that you want," I shamelessly admit.

His hand moves around my neck, then shifts down between my breasts, stopping in the center. My breath comes out shakily as I stare into his steel-blue eyes. He arches a brow, just one, and for some reason even that move is downright sexy.

"Anything I desire?" he asks.

Licking my lips, I nod once as I clench my pussy around him. He groans, his lips parting and his eyes closing for a moment. Slowly, his eyes open and find mine again. His palm stays pressed against my chest.

"Your heart beats rapidly, Sybilla. Are you scared of what your king may ask of you?"

Smiling, I shake my head from side to side. "For some reason, I'm not. I'm excited."

"You seem to be a formidable match, at least during *intercourse*." He grins.

I blink, unsure that he's just said what he has. "Ew, don't say that word *ever* again," I snap.

His head jerks back, as does the rest of his body, which causes him to slip from inside of me, along with forcing my arms and legs to uncurl from around him. He takes a step back, tugging his tights up when he does.

"What is wrong with that word?" he asks, crossing his arms over his beautifully strong chest.

Reaching for the undergarment, I tug it on over my head, covering my nakedness. I leave it untied at the chest, knowing that he can still see my expanse of skin there. His gaze flicks down before it lifts to my face.

"It just sounds icky."

"I do not understand this word, Sybilla," he mumbles, his eyes searching mine and clearly puzzled by our language barrier.

If he would just quit the act, even if this is some weird kidnapping Stockholm syndrome thing, I would feel a hell of a lot better. I press my lips together and shrug a shoulder before I slide off of the bed. I hiss when my bare feet touch the cold stone floor.

Elias' lips quirk into a grin at my obvious surprise. Shaking my head, I close the distance between us. I'm sure that my hair is a fucking mess from well... fucking. I'm sure whatever small amount of makeup the ladies put on me is equally a hot mess, but the way he watches me, I don't mind it.

Touching my palm to his chest, I bite the inside of my cheek at the feel of his rough silvered scarring. Sliding my hand up, I'm only able to reach the side of his neck, though only barely.

Elias is tall, he towers above me and that mixed with his burly stacked muscles, makes him a force to be reckoned with, in this world of his and in my own. His steel-blue eyes darken, but just a shade as he looks down at me.

"We call it, having sex, fucking, or making love, though I will admit making love kind of gives me the willies too. But it means to make love as we just did, though doing it soft and gentle, coming sweetly with feelings for one another. Having sex is probably the most common, it just means to do what we've done, where both people get off, but it's not necessarily too hard or too soft.

"Fucking is when you don't really care about the person, or maybe it's when you do it really hard, fast and dirty," I explain,

though I feel like an idiot explaining it to him, because I know that he knows exactly what I'm saying.

"Sex. I have never heard this. I must admit, I like the description of fucking." He grins.

Rolling my eyes, I bring them back to meet his. "Of course you would."

His hand wraps around my waist before he hauls me against his chest. He lowers his face, his eyes bright and shining with humor before he speaks so softly that I barely hear him.

"This fucking, hard, fast, and dirty. This is what we will do after we dine this evening. Tomorrow morning, I will make love to you, Sybilla. To end a long day, fucking you hard sounds too delightful to resist."

"Fuck," I breathe.

He hums. "Yes, Sybilla. Your King will *fuck* you."

My entire body shivers and I think a second orgasm rolls through me at his words. I don't know why, but the way he says it, the way the words wash through me, I want that. I want him to do just that. He is so matter of fact that it should be a turnoff, but it's not, not in the slightest.

He's my captor, he's probably going to murder me at some point.

He's delusional and he thinks I'm a witch, but damn, the man is sexy and *good*.

He's so good. And like the glutton that I am—I want more.

I. Want. So. Much. More.

ELIAS

IT'S AS IF I'M POSSESSED BY THIS SIREN. HER VOICE, HER FACE, HER DEEP golden hair. It's her body, that is what has me bewitched. Leaving her alone in my chamber, calling for the three maids that I've assigned to her, is the wrong move.

I have tarnished her reputation, there is no way around it. Tongues will wag, undoubtedly. If she is, like she says from another land which it seems that she is, then she will not mind, nor care if she is the topic of gossip.

However, it isn't very gentlemanly of me to tarnish her this way, but I cannot seem to find the scruples inside of me to give a gods damn. Leaving her in naught but her chemise, I make my way toward my chancery.

The hallways are quiet, a little too quiet and I know that the servants are more than likely spreading the news, and gossip, of Sybilla throughout the house and more than likely the kingdom.

Cornwall is standing next to the chancery door, his head tipped down, his face turned to the side and his angry gaze focused on me as I make my way toward him. Briskly, I walk past him, my shoulder brushing his as I head directly for my leather chair behind my desk.

"Your Majesty, I request an audience," he formally, yet apprehensively, requests for the second time today.

Closing my eyes for a moment, my postcoital calm completely vanishing. "Speak freely Cornwall, for I do not have the patience or inclination to deal with formalities for the rest of this day," I sigh.

He clears his throat, closing the door behind him, slowly slipping one of his hands into the pocket of his tunic as he shifts from side to side in front of my desk. "It is about Aleida, the witch," he whispers as if he's speaking a curse.

"Yes, I have spoken with her. She lies in the dungeon for the time being, speak your concerns, Cornwall."

"Your father, Your Highness, he did not care for the witch."

"But my mother did," I finish, wondering what point he's trying to make with this conversation.

Cornwall nods his head. "Your mother cared deeply for her, Your Highness. Once she was revered in this land, she was treasured. I would like to see her position reinstated."

I'm unable to hide my surprise at Cornwall's request. Leaning back, I look at him, really look at him. My eyes scan him from the floor to his face, taking in every inch of the man.

"What does she mean to you, Cornwall?"

He continues to shift from foot to foot, side to side, obviously very nervous to admit exactly who this woman is and I am intrigued. He closes his eyes, inhaling a deep breath before reopening them and lifting them to meet my own gaze.

"She is a powerful witch, Your Majesty, she is also my mother."

I am, fortunately, a master at hiding my expressions. These words shock me, though I do not show my surprise. Lifting a brow, I cup

my chin and move my hand along my jawline, feeling the whiskers there as I think about what I will say next. Merek enters the room, he doesn't speak, nor do I greet him as I continue to take in Cornwall.

"How loyal were you to my father?"

Cornwall flinches and it's then, for the first time, that I wonder if I can indeed trust this man. "I upheld the position in which I was asked to do so, Your Majesty. Though, I must admit that I did not always *agree* with his policies."

Nodding, I lean back in my chair, my gaze never leaving his. "For the moment, since I've just learned of her existence only this day, she is in a cell. Though, I must admit I have had every intention of keeping her comfortable during her stay.

"As soon as I know more about this new witch that has appeared, and what your mother can discover about her, then she will be allowed to reside in the castle, comfortably in her own chambers."

Cornwall's head jerks, his eyes widening in surprise. "You are a gracious and just king, Your Highness."

I snort, unable to hold the laugh inside. "You may visit her as you wish, Cornwall," I say, lifting my hand and waving him off.

"Thank you, Your Highness," he says with a flourished bow then before I can excuse him, he hurries off, no doubt to visit his mother, Aleida, the witch.

"We need to talk," Merek booms as soon as Cornwell is gone.

Crossing my hands on the top of my scarred wooden desk, I lace my fingers and lift my chin, waiting for his words.

"First, the Queen's chambers, then your own. Are you *mad*?" he demands.

My lips twitch as I look at my old friend, my cousin, my brother. The gossip did not take long to make its rounds and I should be worried about the reputation that I am setting up for Sybilla, but I enjoyed her too much to overly care.

"I feel as though I am, indeed, *mad*."

"Explain this, what has happened in the mere hours I have left you?"

Clearing my throat, I stand, turning my back to him and walk over to the window. I stare at the Elephant birds that roam the grounds, animals that Sybilla has never seen before. Birds that are in great abundance here, and in the neighboring countries.

"She is not of this land, Merek. She has never seen an Elephant Bird, in fact, she panicked when she looked out this window. She passed out, cold. I had to loosen her ribbons just so that she could catch her breath again.

"She uses words and expressions that I have never encountered before. She speaks of lands named Portland, Oregon, and United States. All of these insane words and phrases aside, I am drawn to her, cousin. Drawn to her like no other I have ever met."

Merek stays silent, he does this for so long that I have no choice but to turn around and look at him. Tilting my head to the side, I arch a brow and wait for him to speak.

"Do you think that she could hold magic that is so strong that it is not breakable by Aleida's powers?" he asks.

Pressing my lips together, I lean back against the wall. "It's possible, cousin. It's probable. And yet, I do not sense she is the conniving sort."

"Perhaps she only shows you what she wants you to see. Perhaps she hides her true self from you."

I still at his words. He could be correct. I debate telling him, but decide that he must know. "She used her mouth on me, cousin. Never... a lady?" I shake my head before I continue. "Never has a maid offered that, not unless visiting a *frauenhaus* and even then, you know as I do, that not every woman performs this."

Merek clears his throat, taking a step back, most likely in surprise. "This she offered, cousin?"

"Freely, Merek."

He frowns, his eyes searching mine.

"We need another witch, maybe one more powerful than Aleida, just to ensure that this woman, is indeed, *human*. I have heard tales of a woman of the crystal with extreme powers in Kelna.

"Also, find a geographer. I want to know if anyone has heard of these places she's mentioned. I am very intrigued by her, extremely so."

Merek chuckles, his lips turning up into a smirk. "I *bet* you are."

"She joins us for sup, you'll not mention this conversation."

"Indeed, I will not." He grins.

"Rowan and Henry will guard her until I feel she is not here with ill-intent."

"And you will guard her evenings, I assume?"

It's my turn to smirk. "I will. Though, I must admit with how drawn I am to her, it will be naught but my pleasure to *entertain* her."

Merek and I both chuckle before I dismiss him to find not only a geographer, but also a powerful witch, in the neighboring town, only half a day's ride from Aerilon. He'll be back by the morrow, hopefully with the witch at his back.

Whoever and whatever this Sybilla is, I want it discovered. I will not be my father and make the same mistakes, being a traitor to my people for my own selfish gains. I am a knight, a warrior, and naught has, nor ever will, best me.

CHAPTER SIX



SYBILLA

Jasmine enters a few moments after Elias has left me in nothing but the paper-thin undergarment in the middle of his bed. To her credit, Jasmine doesn't show even an ounce of surprise at the way that I've been found.

Instead, she snaps her fingers to the other women and they begin to put me all back together again. My breath hitches as they tighten the dress and I debate asking them some questions, and decide to just go ahead and ask.

"Whose dress is this?"

Jasmine freezes behind me. Ellyn makes a noise in the back of her throat, at the same time Katrina's hands freeze in my hair. None of them answer me and it causes my heart rate to pick up and my body starts to feel hot.

I'm imagining it's the woman who was kidnapped before me and Elias probably killed her or something, needless to say, my imagination runs completely wild as they freeze without saying a single damn word.

"Girls?" I whisper.

Jasmine, as obviously the woman in charge, is the first to snap herself out of her shock. She jerks her body, her eyes lifting to mine in the small mirror's reflection.

"This was the dress, as are the others that have been placed in the Queen's quarters, of the previous king's paramour."

Blinking, it takes me a moment to register the word that she's just used. "Do you mean his mistress?" I hiss.

Jasmine's eyes shift to the side, then come back to meet mine. "Yes, madam."

"But not Elias'?"

Ellyn is the one who answers me. "Oh no, Miss Sybilla. King Elias is not the same sort as his father. Well... at least we didn't think he was." She realizes her words and immediately lifts her hand to cover her gasp.

Pressing my lips together, I realize that she thinks of me as the same. As some kind of mistress and I bite the inside of my cheek.

"Is Elias married?" I almost demand.

"Nay, madam, he is not. Ellyn has spoken out of turn. I can have her whipped if you would like," Jasmine offers, her face appears as though she would like anything *but* that to happen.

Shaking my head, I release my pressed lips. "No, I would not like that. I wish that the three of you would please speak candidly with me. I don't know anyone here. I also don't know the rules, what's normal and what isn't. I'm completely lost," I admit on a whisper.

Even if this is some kind of cosplay kidnapping thing, no matter how I got here, I am indeed completely lost.

"Will you do that for me, please?" I ask, pleading, almost begging.

Jasmine looks from one woman to the other, they both look at her and then something passes between them. They all three turn to me, their gazes finding mine in the small reflection.

"We can do that, madam," Jasmine murmurs.

"What was his father like and how does Elias differ, why do you think that he could share some attributes?" I ramble.

My hair is finished, I'm in my dress, and all three women step back from me so I take the opportunity to stand and turn to face them.

Katrina is wringing her fingers together in front of her lap. Ellyn is frowning as she stares at the stone flooring and Jasmine's eyes have shifted from me and are looking out of the window.

"Well he, um, that is to say that King Elias' father, he well..." Katrina stumbles.

"He was nothing short of a cad, madam," Jasmine states abruptly. "He kept his paramour while his wife was sick, then moved her into the Queen's chambers the day after her passing. King Elias was a small boy at the time. The paramour took over the Queen's duties and yet he never married her."

"How awful for Elias," I breathe.

The three women dip their chins in matching nods. "There was no love lost between the men. Elias left at the age of ten to train and only came home when demanded by his father. Otherwise he spent his time as he saw fit, as a warrior," Jasmine continues.

"As a revered knight," Ellyn chimes in. "The best in the land."

I know now where he received the scar on his face, in battle, and something about that makes my stomach clench. I don't know if it's all real, but the man that held me in his arms, he was almost sweet.

To imagine that he is some hardened warrior, it does something to me. It makes me feel, and I'm not sure that I want to feel any of these emotions for him.

"We've said too much," Jasmine snaps.

Reaching for her, I take her hand in mine and give it a small squeeze. "No, please," I beg. "I don't know anybody. I'm scared," I admit.

I can feel the pity pouring off of all three women and I should hate it, but I don't. I am so terrified that I'll gladly take their pity. Jasmine lifts her opposite hand and covers mine with it, her finger squeezing me gently.

"Elias is not his father, you have no need to be frightened, milady," she murmurs. "We have other chores to see to. When it is time for dinner one of us, or one of his men will collect you."

"What do I do until then?" I ask.

Jasmine's brows rise and she shrugs a shoulder. "I do not know, milady, as I've never had the luxury of being a king's guest."

Without another word, all three women curtsy and turn away from me, leaving me alone, yet again. Turning away from the door, as soon as they close it behind them, I try to make my way to the window again.

I don't know what I expect to see when I arrive, but I'm still as surprised as I was the first time that my eyes take in the bright-blue leaves of the trees in the distance.

Something is really wrong here, but maybe it's exactly as Elias has been saying, maybe he's not some cosplay guy that's lost his mind, perhaps I am in some different world.

But how?

I stay staring out the window, watching the people walk around in the glittering snow as they do whatever it is they're doing.

There are horses, carriages, those weird birds, along with people dressed like every other movie I've seen of medieval times. Women are in long brown and dark-colored dresses. Men are in tights much like Elias and his men, but instead of thick, deep-colored, long tunics, they have drab colored ones that match the women's dresses.

After taking in my surroundings, I can tell that there is a stark difference between the rich and what I assume are, peasants.

There doesn't seem to be much of a middle class. Maybe I'm just not seeing enough of the area. I decide not to hold any type of judgment, not until I've seen more of this... *land*.

"Milady, it is time for sup," a deep voice calls out.

My spine straightens and I slowly turn around to see the door creaked open and one of the two hot guy soldiers from earlier peeking his head in. His eyes are on me, but they are searching my face. His brows knit together in a frown as he watches me.

"Okay." I nod as I begin to make my way toward him.

Without a word, the men flank me as I'm guided toward a dining room.

ELIAS

MEREK WALKS INTO THE DINING ROOM, HIS EYES FOCUSED ON ME. "THE geographer has been found and he is researching the names of the lands that you mentioned to me. Though, he did not look as if he recognized any of them."

Nodding my head, I lean back in my chair slightly, thinking. I've been doing naught but *thinking* this entire afternoon. After supper, I plan on making another visit to Aleida to see if she has conjured up any information for me. Other than that, there is naught all I can do but wait for news from Kelna.

"You leave for Kelna in the morning?" I ask.

"Sunrise," he says with a dip of his chin.

Nodding, my body jerks when I hear Rowan clear his throat. Shifting my gaze from Merek to the entrance of the dining room, my breath is stolen from me at the sight of Sybilla. She's wearing the same dress as earlier. It is a few sizes too small, her breasts spilling from the top, but she is a vision in the colors of my coat of arms.

Standing, I hear Merek do the same as Rowan and Henry guide her toward the chair at my side. "Good evening, Sybilla," I say softly, lifting her hand to my lips as I bow slightly.

Tasting the skin of her knuckle, I hold back the groan at her scent. I want naught more than to be inside of her again, the moment cannot come soon enough.

"Good evening, Elias," she breathes.

"Officially, this is my cousin, Merek," I introduce.

Lifting my hand and waving toward Merek. He bows slightly and to her credit, Sybilla dips into a small curtsy, bowing her head toward him.

The three of us take our seats, Rowan and Henry do as well toward the end of the table, giving us our privacy if we need it, which I think that the three of us do about now. Clearing my throat, I lift my hand toward my butler, signaling that it is time for the first course, I'm starving.

"Merek is heading out tomorrow in search of a powerful witch," I offer, keeping my eyes on Sybilla to gauge her reaction.

To her credit, she looks naught other than confused by my words. Merek clears his throat, obviously objecting to my telling Sybilla about the expedition. Her brows are furrowed as she looks at me, then Merek, then back to me.

"I don't think that I understand what you're saying," she admits.

Dipping my chin, I reach out and take her fingers in mine, squeezing them before I release them. "If your powers are hindering or blocking Aleida's, then this witch will be able to sense that. She's even stronger than Aleida, the strongest in my land actually," I explain.

There is a moment of silence before Sybilla makes a noise, sounding like a snort. Shifting my gaze from her eyes to her mouth, then back to her eyes, I wait for her to speak. I watch as she temptingly licks her lips, inhaling through her nose then exhaling.

"Bring her, hopefully, she'll be able to tell you that I am not a witch. I don't know how I got here, except to think that you've kidnapped me from my apartment."

Merek makes a noise in the back of his throat, but I cannot look away from Sybilla's golden eyes. She is not lying, she is convinced, she is serious that she believes I have caused her ill-intent. That me, or one of my people, has kidnapped her and holds her hostage.

A fleeting thought passes through my mind. Did she open her body up to me, convinced that I would take it anyway? That I would force myself upon her? I shake my head once as a servant sets a bowl of dark rich stew in front of us.

Picking up my spoon, I grab a piece of bread from between us and dip it in my soup, soaking it to soften the bread before I shove a piece in my mouth. Her eyes flick from the soup to the bread, then back to me.

I decide that I don't care how she felt when she opened for me, because before our coupling was complete, she was nowhere near scared and her cries of ecstasy were definitely *not* cries of fear.

Merek doesn't say much as we continue eating. Though I catch his eyes drifting toward her breasts. I don't blame him one ounce, but I decide immediately, no matter how fetching the gown is on her, that Sybilla needs gowns fit to her body. Obviously, my father's women were much smaller than Sybilla's perfectly curvy physique.

The main course is served and although I don't typically enjoy the bake metis, it's something that is served often in the winter to ward off the chill, Sybilla must like it judging by the moan that escapes her lips. I am forced to shift in my seat at the sound, my cock standing at attention and begging for entrance into her warm body.

Pouring more cider in her goblet, I top mine off as well, needing it to finish this meal with her at my side and me not inside of her. I decide to begin taking our sup together in my chambers so that I can watch her devour her meals, moaning at the flavors, but doing it completely naked.

"I will return as quickly as possible, cousin, and with the witch in tow," Merek says as he abruptly stands.

His eyes aren't on mine, instead his hands are curled into fists at his side and his gaze is focused directly on Sybilla.

"Allow me to walk you out," I offer, clearing my throat as I stand and bow slightly to Sybilla. "I will return shortly," I offer her before I

follow Merek out of the dining room.

Merek and I are at the castle entrance before either of us speaks. He is the first to say something. Whirling around to look at me, I watch as he shakes his head a couple of times, his gaze wild.

"She is..." He pauses, inhaling deeply through his nose. "She is seducing. Though I'm not sure it is intentional, which confuses me, I must admit."

"Yes, I agree," I say with a nod.

"I will return as quickly as possible so that we can get to the bottom of this. I fear that she may be the victim of some kind of foul play. For I see no deception anywhere inside of her."

Lifting my hand, I run my fingers through my hair, my gaze flicking back up to meet his. "I feel the same. Though I must admit, I was afraid it was only because I'd had her. I am glad that physical pleasures haven't clouded my instinct," I say, lifting my lips in a smirk.

He chuckles, reaching out and clapping his hand around the side of my neck. "I have no doubt that they have clouded you, cousin. But I have seen no other person, man, woman or child, best your instincts, no matter what."

He dips his chin in a nod, then turns and leaves me standing at the doors, watching him descend the castle entrance steps and head toward the stables to retrieve his horse. Turning from the doors, I hear the guard close them behind me.

CHAPTER SEVEN



ELIAS

Sybilla sits at the table, a fruit tart held in her fingers and pressed against her lips as I march back into the dining room. Rowan and Henry smartly keep their mouths shut at the sight of me. Sybilla's brows lift and I watch as her lips part before she slips the tart into her mouth.

Walking over to my place at the table, I reach out and grab ahold of my goblet of cider. Lifting it to my lips, I take a healthy drink, my eyes never leaving Sybilla. Setting my goblet down, I lift my hand to signal my butler.

"Have a pitcher, two goblets and a tray of tarts sent to my chambers," I demand, my gaze never leaving hers.

The lashes that fan her cheeks as she stares at her plate instantly fly up at my words and those golden eyes that make me instantly hard, meet mine.

"Shall we, milady?" I ask, holding my palm out to her.

I watch as she gulps, her nostrils flaring slightly before she slips her palm into mine and without hesitation stands to her feet. Jerking my chin behind her toward Rowan and Henry, I silently dismiss their services before turning toward the stairs.

Tucking Sybilla's arm close to my side, I guide us toward my chambers. I could send her into her own and have the maids ready

her for me, but there was something I rather enjoyed about loosening her ribbons myself.

Guiding her into my chambers, I ignore the seating room and keep us moving until we're actually in my bedchamber. Locking the door behind me, I turn around to look at her. She has already made her way toward the window, her profile the only thing that I see in the soft glow of the lantern.

"You'll catch a sickness next to that window. Close the draperies, sweeting," I call out.

She turns to me, her eyes shimmering with what looks like unshed tears. I'm not sure why she looks sad, but I'm not sure that I want to know either. She does as I've asked and drops the draperies. Slowly, she closes the distance between us.

I let out a grunt at the feel of her palms as soon as she presses them against my chest. Even through my tunic, I can feel her body's heat as her head tips back and her golden eyes catch my own.

"Speak," I gently demand, lifting my hand to cup the back of her head.

Sybilla licks her lips, wetting them, then finally does speak. "I'm kind of afraid when I wake up in the morning that I'll be back at home and won't be here."

"You seem sad about that."

She nods, then shakes her head, her brows furrowing together. "I don't know how I feel about that. You don't believe who I am. At the same time, I'm not sure I believe who you are, so I'm not angry about that. But the thought of never seeing my family again, it makes my heart ache."

"You are close to your family."

Her head moves, nodding as she watches me. "I have three sisters and we have our moments but we're close. We talk a lot. Now that we're adults, we're friends. I think I would have a missing piece of my soul if I wasn't ever going to see them again."

I cannot know exactly how she feels as I don't have any siblings, but the thought of not seeing Merek again, it makes my stomach clench. So, I suppose I can understand her woes.

Dipping my chin, I touch my mouth to hers before I speak against her sweet lips. "When the witch comes and sheds some light upon our situation, then I will move mountains to have your sisters join you, sweeting."

Her entire body shivers, my lips twitching into a grin. I love the way that I can pull those sensations from her. I want to make her body shiver, twitch, clench, and then I want to pull unholy sounds from her lips, again.

Reaching behind her, I begin to unhook the back of her dress, taking my time since the last time my fingers were at her hooks and ribbons, I wasn't able to enjoy myself. Using my tongue, I taste her lips, sliding it along her upper, then lower lip.

"I don't know if I should be feeling this way for you, Elias. I'm sure that all of this should feel very wrong," she exhales against my mouth.

I hum, my teeth nipping her bottom lip. "Naught that you have shared with me has felt the least bit wrong, sweeting," I murmur against her mouth.

She laughs softly and I close my eyes, swallowing the sound as I tilt my head to the side and slip my tongue inside of her sweet mouth. She shivers against me again, her body swaying toward me and pressing against me.

Nimbly, my fingers finish unhooking her dress, but I'm unable to pull it off until I untie her ribbons. Right now, I'm quite enjoying plundering her mouth. She whimpers as I lift one of my hands and cup the back of her head again, gripping her hair with my fingers.

"Elias," she breathes.

"Yes, sweeting?" I answer, my lips twitching.

She's breathing heavily, lifting my head, I look into her dilated pupils, her wide eyes, her parted swollen lips and I know what she wants. But I sure do love to hear it tumble from her sweet lips.

"Please," she softly begs.

Shaking my head once, I take a step back. "Turn around," I demand.

Without hesitation, she does as I've asked. Reaching toward the back of her dress, I go about untying her tight ribbons. Once they're loosened a bit, she lets out a heavy sigh.

"Thank you," she moans.

"While the dress, in my coat of arms' colors is quite fetching on you, Sybilla. I would appreciate it if you never wore it again."

She spins around as soon as my finger falls, her hands pressed against her stomach to keep the dress against her body, instead of allowing it to fall to the floor where it should be.

"What do you mean?" she asks, her voice not hiding her wariness.

Clearing my throat, I keep my eyes focused on hers. "I mean your charms were on display, the dress would be revealing if it wasn't three sizes too small, but since it is, it is almost indecent."

Her eyes narrow at me and I raise my brows as I watch her, waiting to see what she's going to say, because judging by the way she's staring at me, it will be something that I may not like.

"I can't believe you just said that to me, like this dress was my choice," she seethes. "What was I supposed to wear?"

Chuckling, I can't help myself. "I'll have a dressmaker come visit you, Sybilla. No need to get upset. Now, let the dress fall, and show yourself to me."

SYBILLA

I WANT TO SHOW HIM MY BACK AND STOMP TO MY ROOM, BUT I HAVE A feeling he'd follow me. Narrowing my eyes, I tilt my head to the side and watch him for a moment. His eyes are full of heat and desire as he waits for me to drop my dress.

I have a feeling that he's waiting for me to drop to my knees too, and the damning part of it all, I want to do that.

Letting my hands release the velvety dress, I suck in a breath as it falls to my feet leaving me in nothing but the see-through undergarment thing. Elias doesn't move, he also doesn't make a move to rid himself of his own clothing.

"Come to me, Sybilla," he coos.

My feet move before I realize what's happening. Without a single word, when I'm in front of him, I slowly sink to my knees. I don't even feel the hard stone of the floor beneath me. I don't feel anything but desire.

Reaching for his pants, I unlace the tights at his hips and slowly pull them down his thighs until they're at his ankles.

Reaching for his boots, I unhook the belts at the sides and smile when he toes out of them. Pulling his tights the rest of the way off, I look up, my breath hitches when I see that he's divested himself of his tunic.

He's naked.

Gloriously naked before me.

Placing my palms on the sides of his thighs, I slowly slide them up to his hips, my eyes never leaving his, his head tipped down and his gaze focused on mine.

"You're beautiful," I breathe.

I mean it too. I'm completely mesmerized by his beauty. Puckered skin from scars and all, they only add to the rugged gorgeousness that is Elias. He shakes his head, lifting his hand to slide it against the side of my face.

"I am a beast, Sybilla. You are an unmatched beauty the likes of which I have never laid eyes on before, not in any of the years of my travels," he breathes.

I shake my head, but I don't argue with him. There is no need for arguments right now. There is only need for pleasure. Leaning forward, I lick the underside of his hard length. He lets out a groan, his eyes darkening to indigo immediately before my own eyes.

Opening my mouth, I take him inside. His fingers flex against the side of my head, my palms grab ahold of the backs of his thighs and without breaking eye contact, I give him the best blow job that I possibly can.

I'm really getting into it, slurping, sucking, my hand even cups his balls and I squeeze gently causing a groan to escape his lips. His nostrils flare, his eyes turning solid black at my ministrations. It's beautiful. I feel him grow inside of me, and think he might pull me away as his fingers grip my hair tighter.

Holding onto the backs of his thighs, I moan as my belly clenches right before he thrusts his hips forward and empties himself down my throat. I swallow every single drop, somehow the whole moment turning me on like nothing I have ever experienced before.

He gently guides himself from my mouth, and I can't stop myself, I lick him completely clean, his black gaze still never leaving mine. His lips curl up into a grin as he releases my hair, he dips his chin in a silent demand.

Reaching for the fabric against my thighs, I bunch it before I pull the thin undergarment over my body, exposing my naked self for him before I toss the gauzy white fabric to the side.

"You are a sight, Sybilla. One that I do not think I could ever tire of seeing in my chambers," he rasps. "Rise, sweeting."

Shifting to my feet, I rise, standing inches away from him, too many inches away. He reaches out, but only his fingertips touch me. He circles my nipple, watching his fingers, he smiles at the way my nipple pebbles around his sweet touch.

"I want all of you, Sybilla."

"Whatever you want," I breathe.

He shakes his head once. "I want too much, sweeting."

"What do you want, Elias?"

He turns from me, and I watch as he turns his back to me as he walks over to the fireplace. I take in his perfectly shaped muscular ass, but I'm unable to hide the hurt at his physical rejection in this vulnerable moment.

"I have to pick a wife, one that will be a political alliance. This can be naught more than what we are sharing, now. I cannot want you for more, Sybilla."

Pressing my lips together, I think about what the girls said about his father and the woman's dress that I was wearing, his paramour. Blinking, I swallow as I realize that's what I am to him, he's telling me, albeit delicately, but he's still telling me that I'll be nothing more than a fuck.

I decide that I don't care. The odds of me staying here, wherever I am, are slim anyway. He gives me pleasure, he's beautiful, and I've never had anything like this before.

I've never slept with anyone that I hardly know. I've never felt this amazing with a man in my life. There is a reason that he makes me feel this way, some kind of connection that we share and I'm not going to question it, not when soon enough it will surely be finished.

"Elias," I call.

He turns, his eyes now blue indigo as he watches me, waiting for me to speak. "None of that matters. I'll probably be gone soon. No doubt, your witches will send me home, or your geographer will." I don't add, or the police will find me and get me the fuck out of here. "So, why don't we enjoy one another until then?"

"I've struggled with it all day. It's not gentlemanly," he murmurs.

Closing the distance between us, I reach for his hand and guide it between my legs. His eyes widen before a small growl escapes his lips. "I find that gentlemen in the bedroom don't make very good lovers."

He smirks. "No, I supposed they do not, indeed." His fingers shift, two of them filling me in one swift move.

I let out a mewl and drop my head back. Elias leans forward and I feel his lips touch the center of my neck.

"Then a gentleman I will not be, not tonight anyway. Tomorrow morning perhaps I will make love to you, Sybilla, prove to you that I can be a kind and gentle lover as well."

I laugh softly, lifting my head to look into his still indigo-colored eyes. My hips shift as I let out a sigh. "Yes, soft and gentle in the morning, but please, own me tonight, Elias. Because if I wake up in the morning without you, I want to remember this for the rest of my life."

Elias' lips twitch and curve up into a smile. "You will remember me, Sybilla. You will remember me until your dying breath."

"I'm terrified that you could be right," I whisper.

"Who am I?" he asks, curling his fingers inside of me.

I let out a shaky breath. "My King."

"Gods, but you are irresistible."

CHAPTER EIGHT



SYBILLA

My breath hitches before I even open my eyes. I feel a heavy band wrapped around my waist, it's an arm and it tugs me against a warm, *naked* body. I let out a small gasp when I feel a warm palm slide up and cup my breast, fingers curling around and squeezing gently.

"You are still here this morn, sweeting," Elias' voice whispers against the side of my neck.

I hum, my eyes trying to adjust to the pitch-black room around me. His hand massages my breast before his fingers pinch then tug on my nipple. I let out a shaky breath as my eyes close with a long sigh.

His tongue snakes out and he tastes my skin. I'm sure that I taste like salty sweat since there isn't a shower in here to bathe, especially after our energetic session together last night. His fingers leave my breast and slowly dance down the center of my chest and belly until they slip between my legs.

Instinctively, and mainly because I like the way his fingers feel between my legs, I lift my top one and hook my leg around his thigh, spreading myself for him. Elias must like it, because I feel his chest rumble behind me as he lets out a growl.

"Gods," he breathes against my neck as he fills me with two fingers.

Yes, he likes it.

His palm grinds against my clit and I can't hold back the shiver as it slides over my skin from his touch. Something feels almost magical every time his fingers are on my skin, every single time. I don't know what it is, but I'm also afraid to question the sensation, afraid that it will be gone the moment that I verbalize my questions.

Shifting my hips, I let out a whimper as he uses his fingers to make that perfect come-hither motion inside of me with each pump. Closing my eyes, I arch my back, pressing my ass against his hard length. I can feel him nestled between the crack of my ass and I can't help but moan.

Elias slips his fingers from me and makes painfully light touches against my clit. Playing me, his fingers only a whisper of a touch with each stroke. My hips roll on their own volition, searching for so much more than he's giving to me.

Turning my head to the side, my lips touch the underside of his scruffy jawline. "Please, Elias. It's not enough," I whimper.

He hums. Of course, he knows that it's not enough, he's trying to torture me. His fingers continue their torturously light touches as he shifts behind me and I feel the head of his cock at my entrance. Grinning against his jaw, I try to rear back, but he pulls back at the same time with a tsking sound.

"I am in charge, sweeting. At least right now," he murmurs.

Biting the corner of my bottom lip, I pinch my eyes closed and wait for him. He repositions himself, then as his fingers continue their ministrations, he slowly buries himself inside of me, both of us letting out a sigh when he's buried to the root.

"Hold your leg higher," he gently demands.

Slipping my arm beneath my already bent knee, I lift it to my chest, opening myself for him even more completely. I should probably be embarrassed, but I'm not. It feels far too amazing to be even the slightest bit embarrassing.

Elias dips his chin, his mouth touching mine. I keep my head back so that I can feel his lips on mine. It's an odd angle, but there is no way I'm going to move away from him. Not when his mouth is on mine, not when he inhales my breaths and fills me, stretching me as he brings me to the edge of my orgasm.

Not when it feels magical.

"Sybilla, you bewitch me," he rasps, his lips moving against mine.

I cry out in pleasure before I pant against his mouth. "You make me feel the same way, Elias."

He grunts, his hips moving faster and harder, as his fingers begin to move in firm circles against my clit. It's too much and yet it's not enough. I suck in a breath, holding it while my body climbs higher, teetering on the edge and only when the orgasm rushes through me do I let out my breath with a whoosh.

"Given freely," he rasps against my mouth.

"Yes," I breathe.

Elias' hips don't stop, he continues to fuck me through my orgasm, prolonging the sensation that flows through me until it's almost too much to bear. Only then does he bury himself deep inside of me before I hear his growl of pleasure and feel him fill my body with his release.

Unable to hold my head, leg, and back at that angle another moment, I turn my head, lying down against the pillow, drop my leg to rest on the top of his thigh and let out a long sigh as I bask in the best orgasm I've had since late last night.

Still buried inside of me, Elias' hand slides up my side, then shifts to slide up my arm as he runs his fingertips over as much of my body as he can reach at his angle. His mouth touches the top of my hair and I feel his body curl closer as he rests his chin on top of my head and nestles the back of my head against his throat.

"The witch from Kelna will be here on the morrow," he oddly announces.

"And?"

There is a moment of silence before he speaks. Before he says a word, he wraps his arms around me and squeezes. "We shall find out if this is all real, or if you have indeed altered my reactions to you."

I should be angry at his words, at his suggestion. I'm not. Closing my eyes, no anger comes, instead I'm filled with an indescribable hurt. I don't know why his words affect me as much as they do. But I feel it down in my bones, the pain of his words is more intense than anything I've ever felt before and I don't understand it.

Without a word, he releases me and slips from me before he slides from the bed. I watch, my eyes welling with tears as he makes his way over to the fire and places a couple of logs there, still completely naked as he walks over to the door and yanks it open, belching down the hall.

Grabbing ahold of the thick blanket that is being used as both a top sheet and a comforter, I pull it up my body to shield my nakedness.

Almost immediately, Jasmine, Katrina, and Ellyn arrive in the doorway. Elias steps aside and my eyes widen in surprise. He's still completely nude as he begins to bark orders at the women. All three of them dip their chins before they turn and scurry off.

Sitting up, the blanket still pressed to my chest, I call out Elias' name. He turns his head, his dark brown hair deliciously messy from sleep, so much so that I almost forget what I wanted to say to him.

"You're naked," I point out.

His lips frown before they tip up in a smirk. "And?"

"And they all just saw you."

His lips shift from a smirk to a full-blown smile. I forget about the hurt that he'd just delivered as I watch him stalk toward me, his massive chest on display. He climbs up the bottom of the bed and I'm forced to lay back down as he covers me with the entire length of his own body.

Elias' lips are hovering above mine, still turned up into a devilish grin. "Do the men in your land stay covered all of the time?" he asks, his lips touching mine with each word that he says.

"Not completely, but they definitely don't show their penis off to the world," I point out.

He laughs softly, his mouth brushing mine. "Does this upset you, that the servants have seen me in my glory?" he asks.

I want to tell him to not be so damn cocky, but there is the little fact that yes, it does bother me. Wrapping my arms around his lower back, I run my nails back and forth there. He closes his eyes with a grunt before he reopens them.

"I just..."

I let the words trail off because how do you tell a man who is obviously delusional, who has kidnapped you and that you've only

known for twenty-four hours that you want to be the only one who sees him naked?

The cocky asshole has me figured out though. His grin doesn't die, not even as he runs his nose alongside my own. "Do not want anyone getting any ideas about me, eh? Want to keep the size of my *wimble* all to yourself?"

I can't help but let out a laugh at his words. "*Wimble?*" I ask between giggles.

He tilts his head to the side. His mouth capturing mine causing my laughter to die in my throat as he fills me with his tongue. I don't hear the people moving around the room, I also don't see the way the women and the boys who carried the tub into the room watch us.

I don't see the gold light that surrounds us, or the way that they all stare in awe at the magic that they witness between their king and me.

ELIAS

LOVE DRUNK? PERHAPS A FOOL AS WELL. LEAVING SYBILLA IN MY personal chambers with a bath, food to break her fast, and the three women as her handmaids I make my way to my chancery to break my own fast, alone in my thoughts.

Turning my back to my door, I stare out of the window and watch the castle grounds. People mill around, doing their duties to help keep their families fed and this castle in working order. I can do naught but think of Sybilla. She has consumed me in such a short period of time that I'm concerned.

Witchcraft.

It is the only explanation. I was not even this taken with the woman who made me a man. "Pardon me, Your Highness," Cornwall's voice booms, interrupting my thoughts.

Turning to look back at him from over my shoulder, I incline my chin so that he will continue without me having to actually order the action. He dips his chin, then does as I silently bid.

"Aleida would like to speak with you, Your Majesty," he murmurs, keeping his voice low and even.

Smirking, I turn completely around to face him. "And what would your mother need to say to me, Cornwall?" I ask.

His nose twitches from my blunt use of my new knowledge of his witch mother. "All I know is that she's informed me that it has to do with the woman, Sybilla, and possibly where she hails from."

I take a step toward him just as a commotion causes me to freeze. Reaching for my sword, unsheathing it immediately just in time to see Merek burst through my door, a beautiful woman at his side.

"Godiva has information," he announces.

My gaze shifts from him to the woman, then back to him again. "This is the powerful witch Godiva?" I ask, arching a brow in disbelief.

His lips twitch for only a moment before they return to a frown. "She is." He nods.

Sheathing my sword, I cross my arms over my chest and tilt my head to the side. "I must have Aleida present. She will need to hear this," she demands.

"Cornwall, fetch her and bring her here."

"Yes, Your Majesty," he says as he turns and his feet carry him quickly out of my chancery.

Merek wraps his hand around her waist and guides her over to a chair. I watch the two, wondering if there is more to this than I am able to see with my own eyes. Then, right in front of me, she waves her hand and before me sits a frail-looking old woman.

"What in heavens..."

"The world will not bother a pretty maiden, Your Highness. They will not think of her as anything but a pretty maiden. But an old woman living out in the woods alone, she is no doubt a witch and a target," she explains.

"You are wise, Godiva," I murmur.

Merek chuckles. "She plays with men's hearts is what she does," he says.

"Only for a bit of sport, Merek," she snaps.

I can't contain my own laughter. That is how Cornwall and Aleida find us a few moments later, laughing at the situation at hand.

"Godiva," Aleida rasps as soon as the door is closed and we are all in the room alone and away from prying ears.

Godiva slowly stands, turning to face the other witch. They close the distance between one another and I watch as they embrace in a

hug that is bonded beyond simple friendship. They were very close once, if not still.

“It is time, Aleida.”

“Yes, I know,” she whispers.

“Women of the crystal, please explain to me what you are referencing,” I demand, my admiration and humor now vanished as they obviously are speaking in code.

“The Prophecy of Sisters,” they say in unison.

CHAPTER NINE



ELIAS

“**W**hat in the name of Hades are you talking about?” I snap.

Merek clears his throat. “Listen to them, cousin. I would not have come straight here, through the night and without sleep, pushing my horse far too hard if this wasn’t important,” he says.

I blink and nod my head. He’s right. He would not have done that and he shouldn’t even be here until tomorrow. Narrowing my eyes, I realize that there is only one way for him to have made it there and back so soon, witchcraft.

He smirks and I roll my eyes at the same time he coughs out a laugh. I don’t call him on his lies, there are more important things brewing here and I want to know what in gods bones they’re talking about.

“The prophecy is from ancient times. The story handed down from generation to generation. It has never come true, not even an inkling, therefore it never crossed my mind,” Aleida explains.

“What is the prophecy?” I growl.

Godiva clears her throat. “It is said that four sisters will be born, not of this world. Four sisters who are born of the same mother and

father, yet do not share the same appearance. They are the only ones of their kind in the entire universe.

"Four sisters who will marry and love the fiercest warriors from all four corners of our world. Once all four relationships are consummated, the events foretold in the prophecy will be set in motion, becoming unstoppable.

"If the four sisters come together once their fate has been sealed, they will absorb all of the powers this world holds. Four sisters will be the most powerful creatures in this world. It is not known if this will be used for good or evil.

"The future is uncertain and unknown if these sisters gather together in our world."

My entire body stiffens at her words. "Four sisters?" I ask.

"She has three sisters, does she not?" Aleida asks.

"Gods bones," Merek curses beneath his breath at the same time Cornwall lets out a, *sard*.

Lifting my hand, I realize that I'm trembling as I run my fingers through my hair. "What does this mean? Does this mean that she has bewitched me? Bewitched my people? Does she cast a spell on Bunafi?" I demand.

Aleida shakes her head, but it is Godiva who speaks. "She is no danger to you or your people. I would guess that if she holds magic, she does not even know of it. In fact, I don't think that her magic has come to fruition yet, it won't be until their fates are sealed and they are all together. When the prophecy is set in motion, that will be when her magic becomes apparent."

Closing my eyes for a moment, I open them again, my gaze finding Aleida. "Does your enchantment of blocking her power still stand firm?" I ask.

"Until I break it, yes, it stands firm, Your Majesty," Aleida confirms with a nod.

"What do we do?" I ask the witches.

They look at one another, then both turn toward me. "There is naught *to do*, Your Highness."

Shaking my head, I lift my hand and run my fingers through my hair. Pinching my eyes closed, I remember another piece of their prophecy. "If she is not born of this world, where does she hail from? Is she not of Earth? Is she a mirage? What is she?" I demand.

It is Godiva who speaks, obviously knowing more of this prophecy than Aleida. "She is of Earth, just not this world. Bring her to me and I may be able to better read her," she softly demands.

"Merek, go and fetch Sybilla."

Merek dips his chin and he leaves us, though I don't take my eyes from Godiva. "So, she has not bewitched me?" I ask, keeping my voice low.

Godiva takes a step toward me, then lifts her hands and cups my cheeks. "You feel strongly for the girl, so soon?"

"Stronger, bigger, unworldly," I hesitate to admit.

Godiva nods her head, dipping her chin, then drops her hands. "Perhaps the prophecy forces the emotions to be greater, more intense, Your Highness? I do not know, we've been told that it was coming for generations, though I've never had even an inkling of it coming to fruition before now," she admits.

"Why now?" I say, more thinking aloud than actually asking them.

They are silent for a moment, my eyes shifting from one old witch to the next. I watch as Aleida opens her mouth, then snaps it closed as soon as the chancery door opens. They turn around to see who is entering the room, but I don't even have to lift my gaze to know who has walked in.

It's only been mere hours since I've last laid eyes on her, but it feels as though I haven't seen her for a lifetime. She causes my heart to swell. Her dark golden hair is piled high on top of her head, pinned with glinting black ornaments.

Her dress is another—far too tight with a far too bare expanse of neck and chest on display—piece from the wardrobe of my father's last paramour. I'm only a tad disappointed that it is not in the colors of my coat of arms. Though, I must admit that the deep plum color makes her skin appear even creamier.

"You needed me, Elias?" she asks, completely oblivious of my station and that of her own.

"The witches needed to speak to you, milady," I murmur.

Her eyes widen and adorably her lips part before she whirls around to face the two old women. Aleida and Godiva both take a step toward her.

I can tell by the way that she holds her body that she is indeed, frightened. My body practically shakes with the need to comfort her,

but I deny not only myself, but her as well in the name of my station as king.

Aleida and Godiva take one another's hands, then they each extend a hand toward Sybilla. "Take our hands, lambkin," Aleida murmurs. "We need to feel you equally in order to read you."

"I don't understand," Sybilla says, her voice trembling as she reaches out to take the women's hands.

I watch as the witches' eyes roll in the backs of their heads and they begin to vibrate in their places. Both of them mumble beneath their breaths, but I decide to watch Sybilla, keeping a pulse on her reaction to this moment. She looks scared. Her eyes are wide and she looks from me to the witches, then back to me again.

Then, as if time stands still, they all three freeze before gold shoots from their hands breaking their huddle apart. Taking a step forward, I catch Sybilla before she falls to the floor, her body slumping against my own. Merek and Cornwall catch the old women.

"By gods bones, what's just happened here?" Merek growls.

I shake my head once. "I haven't a clue, cousin," I admit on a whisper.

SYBILLA

I HEAR VOICES SOMEWHERE IN THE DISTANCE, AND I TRY TO INHALE A deep breath, but it ends up being shallow. Forcing my eyes to open, I look around and am surprised to see that I'm lying on a small couch against the wall of Elias' office.

Sitting up, I immediately lift my hand to my head and let out a groan at the pain pulsing there.

One of the old women, the one that I don't recognize, makes her way toward me and I drop my hand, unable to move, only able to stare at her as she brushes her fingers across my forehead.

My headache disappears and my breath hitches.

Witchcraft.

"What did you find out?" Elias' voice rumbles throughout the space.

The witch that I recognize, Aleida, lets out a heavy sigh. "We slipped inside of her memory banks," she admits.

I make a noise in the back of my throat, refusing to think about what they could have seen. If their powers are true, then they could find out a hell of a lot about me.

Things that I don't want anyone to know, like about that time that I snuck backstage at a Nickelback concert and threw myself at the lead singer. Thankfully, he realized I was a child and sent me on my way.

"She is not of this world, Your Majesty," Godiva announces.

"*What is she?*" he growls, no doubt feeling disgusted that he stuck his dick in me, repeatedly.

Sitting up, I throw my legs over the side of the couch, wondering if I would be able to run, then realizing that even if I tried, I wouldn't get far. Not in this tight as fuck dress, wearing pretty much glorified slippers on my feet.

"She is human, Your Highness. She is just from a different world," she explains as if I am not in this room. In fact, they all act as though I do not exist.

Elias' eyes shift to me, dragging down to my chest before he turns to the witchy women. "What world is she from then? Explain this to me, immediately," he demands. He's holding his body loose, obviously ready for something, though I'm not sure what.

Godiva, the witch that I don't recognize, takes a step toward him and places her hand on his chest. She turns toward me, her eyes sparkling purple before she shifts her gaze back to Elias.

"She is from another world, just as the prophecy has declared. Her world is much different than ours, yet much is the same. It is modern, almost futuristic, beyond anything that can be described, yet her sisters are just as the prophecy depicted. They all look completely different from one another, their main characteristics causing them to not look related at all. They share none of the same hair color, eye color, or even similar heights and weights."

"Witch," Elias booms. "Tell me the dangers that me and my people are in."

Aleida shakes her head, taking a step forward. "There are no dangers that we can see, Your Majesty. If the sisters unite, we do not know what will befall our lands. They may never find one another. In fact, I cannot feel if they are even all here or not. What I can say is that Sybilla is human, she is from another world and though I do not understand much of her world that I have seen through her memo-

ries, I can tell you that she is not dangerous and I cannot feel any magic inside of her."

Merek clears his throat, his eyes flicking to me before going back to Elias. "You should keep her in the dungeon, that way there will be no chance of her reuniting with her sisters and fulfilling the prophecy."

I can't suppress the shiver that skates over my entire body at the thought of being locked down inside of that dark, dank dungeon where I woke up just days ago. If it was up to me, I'd never go back there, again. Running, even in this tight dress and these flimsy shoes is beginning to look appealing again.

"Everybody out," Elias shouts. I stand to my feet, his eyes cut to me and he narrows his gaze. "Except you," he growls. "Take the witches to chambers, get them a bath and make sure they are properly fed. We will convene in the evening," he orders.

The room quickly empties and I stay rooted in my place as he walks over to the door. He fiddles with it and I assume he's locking it so that nobody will bother us. I'm not sure what he wants to do, but I'm reeling from the witches' words.

A different world.

A different *fucking* world.

I begin to tremble as their words settle inside of me, as they sink into my head. Elias stands in front of me, but I notice that it's too far away to actually hold me, and it hurts, deeply. Though I know that it shouldn't, he probably thinks I'm some kind of freak and I feel like one.

A different world.

There is a rumble of thunder, then I see a flash of lightning from the corner of my eye. It happens again, then again. In fact, the faster my heart beats, the more often the thunder rolls and lightning strikes.

"You look ill, Sybilla," he says, his voice husky and so damn sexy that it should be illegal.

Lifting my gaze to meet his, I blink at the scar across his eye. "How did you get that scar?" I demand.

His head rears back, obviously surprised by my question. "I was in battle, about twenty-five years old. A man was coming up my rear, I turned around to defend myself and the coward brought down his dagger, almost taking my eye out," he explains.

"Battle. Like for real. This isn't cosplay, is it?" I ask, my entire body trembling, rain starts to pour outside, it's almost deafening as it pounds against the roof and walls of the building.

The realization slams into me. I was just toying with the idea that he was a real warrior, but I didn't really think that he was, not like this.

"Sybilla, I know not of the word you speak. But, yes, the battle was very real and the coward was planning on putting his knife in my back to end me right then and there."

I lift my hand to my lips, trying not to laugh, but it bubbles out as I stare at him. "It's not funny, I'm sorry," I whisper.

He shakes his head. "No, 'tis not funny, though when I cut off his head, I laughed a bit, I will admit. However, this is obviously a surprising blow and sometimes we cannot control our reactions."

"I don't understand," I whisper. "We don't have witches, we don't have prophecies, we don't have any of *this* in my world. How did I get here? What is happening?" I ask as I sway.

Elias reaches forward, his fingers wrapping around my biceps to keep me upright. He shakes me slightly, his steel-blue eyes turning indigo right before my own gaze. We don't have eyes that change color like that either, but I don't say that aloud. I love the way his eyes change.

"We will find out more, Sybilla. You must not fret," he murmurs.

"Are you going to lock me in your dungeon?" I ask.

He tilts his head to the side, his eyes searching mine. "The witches assure me that what we have is not brought on by witchcraft. At least not any that you possess, since you apparently possess none in this moment," he explains. "So, in other words, no I will not be locking you in the dungeon as I've grown rather fond of you over the past few days."

Elias' lips tip up into a small grin. My face heats and I know that my cheeks are turning pink at the meaning of his words. "So, I'll be what? Your mistress?" I ask on a whisper.

His indigo eyes turn black, almost immediately and he shakes his head in one quick motion. His jaw clenches and I watch as a muscle jumps in his cheek, obviously in anger at my question.

"You'll be whatever I say that you are, Sybilla, but that does not mean you are a paramour," he growls. "You'll be my wife," he rasps.

"Are you *insane*?" I practically scream.

His black eyes, though I didn't think it was possible for them to get darker, they do, and they glitter. He shakes me once, my head whipping back, my neck cracking with the move.

"I am the King. You will be my Queen and you will never question my sanity again. I am a warrior, a knight, and a gods damned king, Sybilla," he snaps.

"We don't have any of those in my world," I whisper. "And usually people date for years before they marry, not days."

He dips his head, his mouth so close to mine that I could purse my lips and they would touch his. "You are not in your world, Sybilla and you could be carrying my babe. Therefore, for the sake of a possible heir to the throne, I will not allow tongues to wag that he is a possible bastard. You will marry me on the morrow."

He doesn't say another word. He releases me, pushing me back before he turns and stomps out of the room. I land on my ass on the couch cushion and can do nothing but watch him stalk away from me, wondering what in the fuck has just happened here?

CHAPTER TEN



ELIAS

Merek walks up to me, I know that it's him at my back without even turning around. I can feel his ire, his questions, and I know that he is disapproving of what I am going to do with Sybilla.

"She could be carrying my child, cousin."

"Is she the only maiden who could have your babe?" he asks.

Smirking, I turn around to look at him. "The only that I'm aware of."

He shakes his head, his eyes darkening slightly. "You don't have to marry the thing. She is not aware of our world, apparently. You could put her in the carriage house at the back of the woods."

"The house where my father kept his paramour until my mother died? The place that he went to, abandoning my sick mother while she was bedridden?" I ask.

He dips his chin. "This is not the same. You should marry for political reasons; this woman is of no value to the throne, to the crown."

I shake my head once, my irritation at the man that I call family, growing. "She may not hold political value, but there is value in her presence here alone. Whatever powers sent her here, they are not of our world, Merek. To just appear out of thin air, obviously not pre-

pared. This was a sign from the gods, a sign that the prophecy will come to fruition."

"All the reason to keep her away and under guard."

My lips tip into a small smile. Merek is a fine knight, a damn good soldier, and a good leader. But he is no strategist.

"All the more reason to keep her close to me, cousin. For the closer she is, the more I can discover of this prophecy. Do you think me so *anchovy* lusting that I cannot look at the bigger picture? I will marry her on the morrow, for my people, for my crown, and for the future of Bunafi."

Merek gulps, his eyes widening and he curses. "Gods bones, Elias. I hope you know what you're doing."

"I do, and I'm going to have fun doing it as well. She will be so in love with me, soon heavy with my child, that she will not realize that I'm keeping my possible enemy as close as a person can be. As my wife, as my bedmate, as my breeder."

Merek chuckles, his eyes glinting with something unreadable, excitement is part of his feelings, no doubt. He loves the hunt, he thrives on it. I personally would rather fight, finish, and enjoy my prey, but Merek enjoys the chase.

"Good on you, Elias, just do not forget and get swept up in her charms."

I shake my head, my eyes showing him my determination. "No amount of *queynte* could make me be a traitor to my crown, Merek. I am not an ounce of my father and if you do not realize this, then we have larger issues at hand than some sister fulfilling a prophecy and the fact that she will be my queen."

There is a moment of silence, then Merek lifts his gaze to me, his eyes hiding nothing from me. "There is no problem, Elias. I know you are nothing like your sire. You are good, you are a brave soldier and you are loyal not only to your men, but also to your people. In this, I trust you not only as my cousin, but as my king."

He could not know. He did not know that the words he had just spoken mean absolutely everything to me. Clearing my throat, I lift my own hand and wrap my fingers around the side of his neck.

"Thank you, cousin." We release one another and I take a step back. "Gather my soldiers for a special meeting in our place following the nuptials and feast."

"Won't you be attending your bride?" Merek asks, his brows rising toward the sky.

I snort. "She will have her attendance when my meeting is concluded. It will be the time for her to understand that she is not more important than any single one of the matters I must attend to. Sybilla will come last, always."

We part without saying another word. He promises to gather my men, and I find the cook and the rest of the staff, instructing them to prepare for a small wedding feast tomorrow.

Thankfully, none are close enough to me to voice their opinion, though they can't hide the looks of shock on their faces, instead they nod and go about their business. Next, I go in search of Sybilla's handmaids. Jasmine is the first one that I see and seeing as she is the one in charge, I am thankful.

"Sybilla will need a wedding gown by the morn. She needs to be prepared first thing tomorrow morning for our nuptials," I order.

She blinks, her eyes wide and almost frightened-looking, much like everyone else in this damned castle. "Speak before you expire," I order.

She gulps, then looks to her feet before lifting her head and staring at my neck. "Your Majesty, there is no dressmaker in all of Aerilon that will be able to make a dress befitting a queen with such short notice, a month perhaps, but not one evening."

I grunt. "Are there any dressmakers that will have something, anything that will fit her and not show off all of her charms as the dresses she currently traipses around in do?"

Jasmine makes a noise in the back of her throat but doesn't speak. "I can fetch the royal dressmaker and see what he has, but in all honesty, Your Majesty, we may not be able to make something work. Miss Sybilla is..."

"What, what is she?" I growl, my patience waning thin on what people think of Sybilla as. None of them know her, not the way that I do.

Jasmine clears her throat. "She is a bit curvier than other royalty."

I press my lips together, careful not to burst out into laughter, for Jasmine is correct. Sybilla is quite a bit curvier than the women who typically grace the world with their titles, at least in Bunafi and the surrounding countries. I find that it's one of the many reasons I quite

enjoy my time with her. Where most royalty are bony things, dainty, almost frail.

Sybilla is lush, soft, and curvy. She will bear me many children. She will also keep me satisfied in *all* my appetites. She truly is the perfect match, even if it is only to use her for the purposes that she can and will provide me, all while I keep my country safe and secure.

"Do the best that you can. We marry on the morrow, with or without a dress," I snap before I turn around. Instead of going upstairs to enjoy Sybilla's lush curves, I make my way outside and find my stallion, Storm.

I need freedom.

I need to ride with the wind against my face.

I need to breathe.

SYBILLA

STARING OUT OF THE WINDOW, I'M SURE THAT ELIAS WOULD DEMAND that I drop the thick drapery, but he isn't here. In fact, I watch him ride away from the castle on his horse. It's a beautiful sight, his big black horse. I've never seen a horse the size of his before in my life and seeing him riding on its back, my mouth goes dry.

I stay there. Ignoring the chill long after Elias and his strong horse disappear. I wait for him to return, and as the sun sets, I wonder if he will indeed come back. Then as the minutes pass, I know deep in my bones that he won't, at least not tonight.

There is something simplistic about this place. People don't venture out after dark falls. There are no streetlights for the roads, there is only the moonlight. It's the darkest I've ever seen outside, darker than any pitch black that I've ever experienced and I have a hard time believing that Elias could see his hand in front of his face, let alone the road.

"Milady," a soft voice calls.

Turning around, I drop the drapery and see all three of my girls standing before me. Once again, I'm in the Queen's chamber, which means I've been left alone, guarded and locked away for hours, pity-

ing myself. If Elias is not here, with me, I know that he is with someone and I have a feeling a man like him is with another woman.

I shouldn't care. I'm not his wife. I'm not his anything. I'm just his captive, or whatever I am. But I can't deny that my heart clenches with pain at the thought of him fucking some other woman. I hate myself a little for that, hate my heart for feeling anything for him.

Stockholm syndrome is a fucking bitch. I don't care that these witches think I'm in some other world, they're all fucking crazy. Completely too invested in this little game that they're playing. I've been dick drunk on Elias, too drunk to realize that I'm fucking up my life each minute that I play into their hands—into his hands.

"C'mon in." I smile, lifting my hand and motioning to the women.

Jasmine has a large bundle of fabric in her hands and I hurry over to help her rid herself of the load.

"What's this?" I ask as I help her guide the material over to the bed.

We set down the fabric and she looks down, then looks up to me before taking a step back. "I've just been with the royal dressmaker and he's given me all that he has that would be close to your sizing and suitable for your nuptials," she stammers.

I blink. My eyes widen before I blink again. I'm sure that I've heard her wrong. There has to be some kind of language barrier and I don't understand her words. Granted, they have funny accents here, but I can pretty much understand everything anyone says, but this must be some kind of mistake.

"My what?" I whisper.

Ellyn is the one to speak first. "Your marriage to King Elias, milady. It will take place first thing in the morning, so we've been preparing all evening," she explains.

"My *what*?" I hiss.

"Oh, dear," Jasmine breathes.

"Aren't you excited?" Katrina asks. "You're going to be a queen. A true queen. It's like a fairy tale, and King Elias is so very handsome. Every woman I know fantasizes about him, and all the ones that have had him, long to have him in their beds again. I've heard he's extremely skilled. He is, isn't he?" she asks.

My entire body jerks at her words. Every woman that has had him wants him again. *Oh my God*. Her words swirl around in my

head, accompanied by the single word, *marriage*.

"I thought he wasn't serious, that he was fucking with me. You're all crazy. Fucking crazy," I shout.

The three women freeze in their spots, I back away from them until my back slams against a hard stone wall. Ellyn gasps, taking a couple steps toward me. That is, until Jasmine throws her arm out to stop her advance.

Shifting my gaze from Ellyn to Jasmine, my eyes widen and my breaths come out in pants. She shakes her head once, her eyes trying to relay some kind of information to me, but I don't know what she's silently telling me. I'm too fucking stressed out to try to read her.

I hear the wind begin to howl outside, then thunder rolls in the distance again and I offhandedly wonder how fucking often it storms here, *Jesus fucking Christ*.

"These dresses are your options, milady. Now, we must hurry. Tomorrow morn will be here before you know it. His highness was unyielding in his demands. We have no time for hysterics," she snaps.

My back stiffens and I take a step toward her. My entire body is shaking and without so much as a thought, I launch myself at the poor woman. Wrapping my arms around her back, I bury my face in her neck and begin to cry.

Her arms envelop me and she soothingly shushes me as she runs her hands up and down my back.

"There, there, milady. Everything will be right as rain," she purrs. "King Elias will see that you are well cared for. He will put his heir in your belly and you will settle in just fine to our ways here," she coos.

None of her words calm me. Not in the slightest. Pinching my eyes closed, I inhale a deep breath before I straighten my back and wipe my tears away.

I'm going to be his kidnapped bride.

This freak is going to marry me and I'm never going to see my family again. They believe, truly believe that I am in some different world, even those women who claim to be witches.

I'm going to stay here forever, my family will worry and I think that could be the most heartbreaking part of all of this. My sisters won't know where I am. My parents won't ever be able to call and bug the shit out of me with their crazy-assed stories.

My life, my world as I know it is completely over and I'm at the mercy of this man who has apparently fucked the entire goddamn world and never gone back for seconds, though all the bitches have wanted him to.

I *would* end up with some deranged player. It's just my luck. Every guy I've ever dated hasn't kept it in his pants, why would this guy be any different? Maybe this is just normal for all men, maybe I've been expecting too much out of life.

My grandmother used to always tell me.

Billa, she'd say.

Billa, you are a rare flower, just like your sisters. No man will ever appreciate the four of you for the rarities that you bestow. You must see this inside of yourself, dear. You must love yourself above any man. Never, but never love him above yourself. For if you do, he will have far too much power over you, sweet angel. Men are only human, but the love that a woman has for the power that she holds is beyond compare.

I thought she was crazy. Now I realize that she was right. Men are pigs. They're bastards and cowards of the worst kind and apparently even in another *world*, they are the exact same.

"Let's try these gowns on, is there a black one?" I ask.

"Black? But milady, black is for mourning. Blue is tradition," Jasmine informs me.

I snort. Not giving a rip if blue is *tradition*. This whole thing is ridiculous and I'll wear black, just to be a bitch.

"Black is my first choice," I snap.

All three women dip their chins before they turn to the heap of fabric. I know there is something black in the pile, because I can see it peeking out of the bottom.

I'm sure it will anger Elias, but since he's making decisions for me and disappearing, then I'll just do whatever the fuck I want.

I feel a little looney, like take me straight to the nuthouse looney. This can't be real. Cannot be real.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



ELIAS

“**Y**ou’re done with me, then?”

Duraina watches me from beneath her lashes. She’s attempting to be demure. I’m not sure that the word or the actions behind them work for her. She’s acting, because I, as well as every other man that’s slipped in and out of her bed, know that she is anything but demure.

Walking over to the pitcher of ale, I pour myself another goblet full. I’ll need it if I’m going to get through this conversation. What I should have done was send a missive, but for some reason, I thought this the kinder avenue.

“I’ll be wedding my bride on the morrow, Duraina,” I explain as my answer.

She closes the small distance between us, lifting her hand to her charms. Her fingers dip between the crevices of her breasts. My gaze flicks down to the movement, but for the first time, I am not tempted by the action or by her *diddeys*.

Naught about her appeals to me. She wears far too much color on her face, her hair is styled too neatly, she smells too overpowering of faux flowers. Her dress is too tight in an obvious way. *She* is just too obvious. Her lips turn into a pout and I wrinkle my nose, throwing back the goblet of ale, emptying the contents.

"But you are not wed to her tonight, lay with me again, Elias," she purrs.

Her palm touches my chest and slides up, wrapping around the side of my neck. Her touch feels wrong, so very wrong. My body jerks with the realization that just days ago, her touch did not feel that way, in fact, this would have made my cock stand at attention.

Does Duraina only feel wrong now because I've had Sybilla in my bed? Or is it something different? Sybilla is not of this world, and I suddenly wonder if my reactions to her are not genuine. What kind of power does she have over me? What did she bring with her from her world?

I need to see the witches.

Taking a step back from Duraina, I shake my head. "I have a duty to my wife," I lie.

Duraina smirks. "You have no such duty, Elias. In regards to carnal pleasures, you are the one man on this earth who can do as you please and as you see fit. We both know this, do not try to deny yourself a taste of me, My King," she breathes.

Shaking my head, I lift my hand and run my fingers through my hair. "Do not make this embarrassing for yourself, Duraina," I warn.

"I'll do whatever you like, My King. Consider my body yours to use as you see fit, please just don't leave me," she whimpers.

Narrowing my gaze at her, I take another step back. "Is it me, my favor, or my coin that you are grasping for?" I ask, arching a brow toward her.

Duraina's lips turn up into a grin. "I must admit that I enjoy all of those things equally, Elias."

Shaking my head, I wonder how I could have ever held even an ounce of affection for this woman, this brazen selfish cow. Not when the sweetest *queynte* I've ever had waits for me in the chamber connected to my own.

"Hopefully you have a wonderful memory," I announce, turning from her.

"Elias," she calls out.

With my hand on the door, I turn to look back over my shoulder as I wait for her to speak. She takes a step toward me, pushing her breasts out as her lips purse out even more in an exaggerated pout.

"She is not worthy of your loyalty. She has earned *nothing*," she breathes, attempting to sound headier, sexier. It doesn't work.

Lifting my chin, I look my nose down to this *muckspout* of a woman. "But you have, is that what you're telling me?"

"You know that I have," she whispers.

With a jerk of my head, I continue to look down my nose at her. "You, Duraina, have earned nothing. You've spread your legs like a common whore, accepting my coin in favor of my cock's stroke. Along with others in the village."

"But she has done more than that? You wed her after a few days, for what reason? She is a stranger, in fact, I hear she is a witch. So, she's bewitched you then?"

My lips quirk at her words. "Aye, she has bewitched me, but not because she holds any extraordinary powers, she needn't possess them. The future queen is all-powerful without an ounce of magic and you'd do well to remember that."

Without another word, I yank the door open and for the first time in my life, I leave a woman's home, her bed, without an orgasm. Instead, I mount Storm and in the black of night, I make my way back to my castle, back to my bride.

To the world, my foes and my friends, Sybilla is naught but a vessel to carry an heir. To the witches, she is one-fourth of a prophecy that may or may not come to fruition. To me, she is something else entirely and I'm not quite prepared to come to terms with what that is quite yet.

What she will be is my bedmate, she will be my lover behind closed doors, soft and sweet for me. She will be the Queen of Bunafi to the world. She will settle into her place, her role, and together we will have a life.

I will protect my country from the prophecy, staying diligent and keeping Sybilla under guard for the rest of her days. It is the only way to keep my people safe, to protect my lands and the crown.

It is these things that I think of as I push Storm toward my castle, toward home, toward her warm waiting body. I should fight the urge to sink inside of her, no woman should hold the appeal that she does, no woman ever has. Yet, my cock has a mind of its own.

SYBILLA

I OPEN MY MOUTH TO SCREAM THE INSTANT THAT I FEEL THE HEAVY weight on top of me. A hand covers my mouth, a face hovers above mine and only then do I let out a breath. Glittering steel-blue eyes meet mine and a mouth that's turned up into a cocky as shit grin.

The asshole.

"No screaming, sweeting," he murmurs.

Narrowing my gaze at him, I nod my head in agreement. I may not scream, but I do plan on giving him a piece of my mind. Thankfully, he releases his hold on my mouth.

"Why are you here?" I snap.

He jerks his head back, his own gaze narrowing at mine. "What do you mean, why am I here? You're to be my wife and you weren't complaining yesterday." He grins.

Placing my hands against his shoulders, I push against him, growling when he doesn't budge. One of his hands slips beneath my head, his fingers tangling in the back of my hair as he holds me still.

"What's this then?"

"Where were you?" I whisper, hating the fact that I sound just as hurt as I feel.

He shakes his head once, his eyes turning indigo, almost immediately. "It is not your place to ask me such questions, Sybilla. This union is for safety and you will abide by my decision to wed you in a few short hours. We will get to the bottom of this prophecy, but until all is revealed, you're not to leave the castle unless instructed by me."

"I'm your prisoner bride, then?" I whisper.

He dips his chin. "If you wish to speak of yourself that way, then yes. In our bedroom, you may ask questions and converse with me however you wish. As soon as we walk out of the chamber doors, I am your king."

"I'm asking you then, in our bedroom, where were you tonight?"

"It is also my decision whether or not I answer *those* questions which I've given you permission to ask."

"You're an asshole," I snap.

His lips twitch. "I'm not sure what that means, but I have an imagination and I assume that you have not given me a compliment."

"You would assume correctly," I snap again. "God," I growl.

He shakes his head. "Merely your king, sweeting."

Turning my head to the side, I miss the way his eyes sparkle as he laughs at my expense. His smiling lips touch my cheek, then slide down my jaw, to my neck and I'm unable to hide the shiver that covers my entire body at his sweet and gentle touches.

"Please, if you haven't bathed after leaving her bed, don't come to mine with her stench on your body," I whisper.

I'm unable to keep the hurt from my voice. I wish that I was better at hiding my emotions, but apparently, I really suck at that shit, especially since I've fallen for this stranger after about a minute of knowing him. I hate myself, my weaknesses, when it comes to Elias.

"Sybilla," he rasps, his lips never leaving my skin. "I've been with no other woman this eve," he informs me.

I don't call him on the fact that he's only promised to not being with someone tonight. Instead, I let that knowledge soak in for a moment. I allow myself to feel an ounce of happiness.

The fact is that I am being forced to marry this man tomorrow so I should at least try to make it a happy union, even if he's probably only going to use me to pop out some kids.

"Where were you then?" I chance asking as his hands slide my nightgown, expertly, up my legs.

He doesn't even pause in his movements as he slips the gown up my hips, to my waist and then forces my arms to rise as he pulls it free of my body.

"None of your concern, Sybilla."

His words aren't particularly nice, but the way that he says them, in a whisper, I can't deny the way they wash over me causes my legs to part. He grunts, fitting his hips between my thighs and rolls them, his dick sliding along my clit.

One of my hands slides into the back of his hair, holding onto the strands at the nape of his neck. The other stays curled around his shoulder as I shift my gaze to look directly into his. Elias' blue eyes are now as black as the night sky as he looks down at me.

The fireplace glow is the only light in this room, and it somehow makes him look soft, and perhaps a bit sweet as he looks down into my eyes. Sliding my hand from his shoulder, I cup his scruffy jaw and slide my thumb along the bottom of his scar.

Elias' nostrils flare at my move, his jaw clenches beneath my touch, but there is something vulnerable in this moment between us.

Soon it will all be broken, but for a moment, I have him without his kingly shield up.

"I'm scared, Elias," I whisper.

"Why?" he demands.

Licking my lips, I run my thumb along his scar again. "I'm in a world that isn't my own, my family has no idea where I am or how to find me. I'm alone, and I'm terrified at the thought of being used by you and yet..."

"Yet?"

Lifting my head from the pillow, I touch my mouth to his before I finish my thought. "I'm terrified to be used by you, and yet, when you're here with me I find that I crave you."

He growls, and without warning, his hips shift and he fills me in one swift motion. I'm not ready for him. Pulling my head back, I let out a cry of pain as he stretches me. He tugs on my hair, forcing my neck to arch for him, but doesn't shift his hips as I expect. Instead, he stays fully seated inside of me, and completely still.

"Open your eyes, Sybilla," he demands, his voice almost harsh.

Opening my eyes, I attempt to regain my breathing as I stare at his face. His black eyes glitter, his jaw is set hard and there is a tic in his cheek.

"Never be terrified of me, sweeting. I'll never hurt you, my future queen. You'll carry my babes inside of you, you'll give me sons, and you'll make me happy."

"In that order?" I breathe.

He hums, lowering his face, his teeth nipping my bottom lip. "Nay, Sybilla. Not in that order. For I think making your king happy should be top priority, then carrying my babes, then providing sons."

"What if we only have daughters?" I exhale as he pulls out of me before he sinks back inside.

I find it almost shocking that his movements are done with such ease, my body becoming wet almost immediately.

He hums. "Then we will keep trying for sons."

"How many?"

"Sons?"

"Children?"

His lips turn up into a blinding smile at my question. He tugs a bit harder on my hair, forcing my neck to arch even more. His hold

sends sensations throughout my body that should be painful, but instead are nothing but pleasure. He slowly eases in and out of me in a rhythm that is unmistakably achingly close to making love.

"Dozens."

I let out an unladylike snort. He doesn't allow me to respond to his words, instead he slants his head to the side, his lips slam against mine and he fills my mouth with his tongue, fucking me in tandem.

It doesn't take long for both of us to find our release. I push back the thought that as he fills me with his release that he is setting about impregnating me, as he's made so abundantly clear he wants to do as soon as possible.

Wrapping me in his arms, he rests and we don't say another word. I can't get my mind to shut down. All of this seems so extraordinarily fascinating. I still expect to close my eyes and wake up in my apartment in Portland.

Though now, after the witches' little speeches, I'm thinking that may never happen. That is, if what they say is true. I'm still not sure that I'm convinced by their words.

This could still be some kind of cosplay thing, and they're in on it too, but as each hour passes that becomes less and less of a possibility. I may have to come to terms that I've landed in some kind of warped, *Twilight Zone*, thing.

However, if I have to live some magical *Twilight Zone* life, I guess it could be worse than being married to a king who gives really great orgasms.

CHAPTER TWELVE



ELIAS

With my back to the door, I stare out of the window. It seems as though I've been doing much of this in the recent week, looking out of the window and reflecting. Strategy is important to me, though I'm not sure why I feel the need to strategize when it comes to Sybilla.

I could, as Merek suggests, lock her in the dungeon and ensure that the prophecy never comes to fruition without issue. However, my stomach clenches and my chest aches at the thought of not sleeping and waking beside Sybilla each day.

I feel as though I'm under a spell, even though the witches have given their word that I am indeed, not.

"Your Majesty, you called?" Aleida asks, clearing her throat.

Turning my head, I look over my shoulder at the two old witches. They are standing side by side, my chancery door closed behind them.

The great hall and dining rooms are being prepared for the wedding and this is a room where I know we will not be overheard, a room that I know without a doubt is private.

"This marriage, can you see if it will be fruitful?" I ask before I turn completely around to face them.

"Are you asking if we can see your babes?" Godiva asks.

I stare at them, lifting my chin, but otherwise not answering them verbally.

"We do not see the future, Your Majesty. What we can do is sense things, possibly see memories, cast spells, but we are not seers," Aleida informs me.

I shake my head once. "What do you sense?"

Godiva is the one who takes a step forward. "Your new bride is terrified. Not only of this wedding, but of this world, and of her quick feelings for you. And you, Your Highness, you are just as terrified as she about your quick feelings for the lovely woman, are you not?"

"You think that you sense my fear, witch?"

Godiva takes a step toward me, not intimidated by my ire in the least. She reaches out and takes my hand in hers. I watch as she closes her eyes, then her lips twitch in a smile before her gaze meets my own.

"Terrified, Your Majesty. But not of your new wife, of the feelings you already possess toward her. Know that these are not magic, but instead, this is how it feels when the fates align. The prophecy is as much about you as it is her, for the sisters must find their love in the fiercest warriors in the land. You and Sybilla are fated to fall in love, Your Highness. That is not witchcraft, that is a prophecy sent down from the gods millennia ago."

I gulp at her words. Shifting my gaze away from her, I blink before I bring my eyes back to meet theirs. She releases my hand and takes a step back.

"Do not fear the emotions, Your Highness. We know not if the outcome of the prophecy will be good or evil, what we do know is that it will bring about love for you and she is destined, fated, for you," Aleida states.

"In just a few moments, she marries me. Love has naught to do with it. Keeping my enemy close does."

Neither of the witches object to my statement. Instead, they dip their chins in a nod and take a step back. I watch them for a moment, then turn toward Aleida.

"I expect you to keep an eye on her at all times and report to me if you sense anything, anything at all, Aleida," I bark.

She lifts her chin, then gives me a very small curtsy. "Yes, My King," she whispers.

"Do you sense her love for me?" I chance asking.

Though I know not why I'm even posing the question, for it matters not. Her body burns hot for me, she accepts my seed, she will bear my babes and she will live out her days under my watchful eye.

The prophecy will never come to fruition, she will simply be known as Queen Sybilla of Bunafi, nothing more, nothing less.

Aleida drops her gaze. "I sense her fear, her trepidation, but I also sense deep affection that rolls off of her in waves. She is sensitive, Your Majesty, she is also kind of heart. She will be good to you, Your Highness."

I almost laugh at that. She will be good to me, for I will always command it. "You are dismissed, send in Cornwall and Merek," I demand.

The women leave, but not before Godiva lingers for a moment longer. I wait for her to speak, but she doesn't. Instead, she shakes her head once before she slips from my chancery. Merek and Cornwall arrive immediately.

I command Merek to come up with a schedule for him and my men. They will know about Sybilla, and her true identity after the wedding feast. I will have one of them with her at all times from here until the day she expires.

Next, I command Cornwall to write up an agreement between me and the Queen. She must swear her fealty and her loyalty to me, and she must swear that she will never leave this world for her own. I want her to swear this oath to me as her king and more importantly as her husband.

"Your Majesty," he begins to object.

Lifting my hand, I shake my head once. "I do not wish to hear objections. I want it done, and immediately, as I know it is almost time."

"Yes, Your Majesty," he whispers before he takes his leave.

"You're marrying her, truly," Merek mutters.

Lifting my chin, I take a step toward him. "I am. Keep your enemies close, Merek. It is ingrained in us, this is just a different kind of enemy. You'll see that this was a wise decision. In the end, I think it will matter not. The prophecy will never come to fruition, the Queen will never be out of sight. She will never see her sisters again, therefore it will never happen and one day, when we're old and gray, we will all have a good laugh."

"I hope you're right, cousin."

"Me too," I rasp.

Together we leave the chancery and make our way toward the makeshift altar. The priest is already waiting to marry us, he dips his chin toward me, dressed in his finery. I look as if this is just another day, not bothering to wear any of the traditional groom's clothing, especially that fit for a king. I simply can't be bothered.

There is a gasp. Turning toward the end of the altar, red creeps up my neck and assuredly my face at the sight before me.

Though she is lovely, my bride insults me.

The daft woman is dressed all in funeral black.

My lips twitch as soon as she takes a step toward me. I should be angry. Indeed, I am, but I'm also looking forward to punishing her for this embarrassment, and punish her I will.

SYBILLA

HE'S SMILING, IT'S ANYTHING BUT KIND LOOKING. IN FACT, IT LOOKS A little twisted. My heart begins to race at the sight as I walk closer and closer toward Elias. Toward my fate, or maybe, my doom.

He reaches out for me, pulling me closer to him. I fall forward, my body leaning heavily against his as I try to find my footing. He dips his chin, his steel-blue gaze completely focused and entrancing as he stares at me.

"You'll be punished for this, Sybilla," he rasps.

"For what?" I ask, feigning innocence.

"Funeral black," he grunts.

My lips twitch and I shrug a shoulder as I right myself. The dress is black, but it's so luxurious that I couldn't not wear it.

Instead of velvet, it's made of a soft silk fabric. The sleeves are long, all the way down to my wrists. It's not nearly as low cut as the other gowns that I've been wearing, but it does dip into a deep-V showing an expanse of chest and cleavage.

The bodice is tight, laced together with ribbons hidden on the inside at my back, giving me the illusion of an extreme hourglass figure. I can't deny that although they are uncomfortable, it makes me

feel absolutely luscious. The back of the gown has rhinestone type buttons that had to be hooked individually by Katrina.

My shoes are another pair of slippers, I chose a light blue, trying not to shirk tradition too much. Jasmine didn't understand my need for something borrowed, blue, and new, she looked at me like I was completely insane.

The bodice of the dress and the hem are adorned with soft deep gold lace and small rhinestones are sewn into the delicate material. Though it's funeral black, as Elias claimed, it's the most breathtaking dress I've ever worn, and obviously closer to my size than the others.

Ellyn did my hair, pulling it into a pile on top of my head, twisting strands, braiding them, and sticking the black-tipped pins in it.

My makeup is heavy, my lids are deep gold, lined with thick black liner and my cheeks were given a touch of blush.

My lips are the most dramatic though, lined with deep berry, almost black then painted with a thick lipstick type cream.

The priest is talking, but I can't understand a word he's saying. Every now and then his voice booms and it causes me to jump, which in turn causes Elias to chuckle. Then Elias takes my hand and turns me to face him, reaching for my other hand. He grasps both of my hands in his and I'm forced to look up into his blue eyes.

He is staring at me, intently, before he speaks. "Aye." His voice rumbles through the hall. He dips his chin in a way where I know it's my turn to say yes.

"Yes," I exhale, unsure of what I'm agreeing to exactly.

The priest holds out his hand and Elias reaches forward, taking what he has to offer. I gasp when he slips something on my finger, a ring.

Looking down, I almost whimper at the sight. It is a yellow diamond ring. The diamond is huge, bigger than I've ever seen in my life. It's an emerald cut, surrounded by black diamonds, and set in a yellow gold band.

It's like nothing I've ever seen before. Lifting my eyes from the ring, I look up into Elias' now indigo blue gaze. Nothing about his expression has changed, aside from the color of his eyes and I know that he's trying to hide his feelings, I just wish I knew what they were, what the color of his eyes means. I know what it means when they change color during sex, but I have no clue what he's thinking right now.

"Your palm, Sybilla," he murmurs.

Holding my palm out, he drops something in my hand. It's a man's ring and my body jerks at the realization that I'll be slipping this on his finger. He holds his hand out to me, his long, thick finger waiting for its ring.

Pressing my lips together, I slide the ring on his finger and am so mesmerized by it, that my breath hitches. It's yellow gold, with a row of yellow diamonds in the center, black diamonds on either side and complements mine almost too perfectly.

Lifting my gaze to meet his, he smirks down at me like a true smart-ass, then turns to face the priest. I do the same, my body moving woodenly.

"Kneel," Elias gently orders as he begins to bend at the knees.

Glancing down, I notice a small black pillow in front of me and slowly I sink to my knees. "Bow your head," Elias softly commands. I do as commanded. A heavy cloak suddenly drapes my shoulders and two hands reach around to clasp it around my neck. Then I feel something rest against my head. "Your crown, sweeting," Elias rasps. "Lift your head, Queen of Bunafi."

I lift my head, the priest is smiling down at us, his eyes sparkling with unshed tears. I don't understand why he's crying, but since I didn't understand anything that he's said this entire time, maybe he was extremely moved by his own words.

Elias slips his hand in mine and together we rise to our feet. He turns me toward him, gently tugging me closer to his body. My breath hitches when he lifts his hands and cups my cheeks. The indigo blue of his eyes turn black right in front of me.

He grins before he lowers his face, his lips almost touching mine. "You're not just their queen, Sybilla. You're mine now," he growls right before he slants his head and his lips crash against mine in a hard, unyielding, kiss.

"May I be the first to properly introduce the King and Queen of Bunafi."

The entire room erupts in cheers and applause. Shifting my gaze to Elias, I notice that he's looking nowhere but straight ahead, his chin jutting out slightly and his eyes looking down his nose. He looks regal, and me? I look like a hot fucking mess at his royal side.

I suddenly realize that this, all of this, it's real. It's not a dream. I won't be waking up from this. It isn't cosplay. I haven't been kid-

napped. It's really fucking real. And I'm really his wife. Wife. I'm his wife.

"Elias," I whimper.

He tilts his head slightly, his eyes shifting to meet mine. "Wife," he grunts.

"This is real, isn't it?" I breathe.

His lips twitch. "It is. Now, we eat. I'm starved."

Without another word, he guides us toward a table. Set on one side are two large chairs, side-by-side, where I assume we'll be sitting. We walk toward the chairs, and a servant pulls mine out. I can't hide the disappointment that my new husband didn't pull out my chair.

Something niggles inside of me. This is only going to be the second meal we've shared together and we're married... *married*. The word rolls around inside of my head. I'm not sure how it makes me feel, strange. That's the only way that I can describe it, I feel very *strange*.

Platters of food begin to appear, along with wine, copious amounts of wine. Plates of meat, cheese, bread, and fruit are settled in front of me, but all I can seem to do is drink. Then, unfortunately, I get drunk. All the while, Elias is none the wiser, because he acts as though I don't even exist.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



ELIAS

Nobody knows about this room. Nobody but my men. It was used years ago by the king before my father as a place to keep his most valuable worldly possessions, especially when war would break out, as war so often does.

My father never bothered to explore his own castle, more worried about burying his cock in any *anchovy* that would open for him. Me? I spent my youth while my mother was sick, running and hiding away. I discovered this place when I was five years old and spent more time here, than anywhere else on the grounds.

When I returned, I decided to use it to my advantage. Now, it's where my most trusted men and I meet. On this evening of my wedding, while my bride is readying for me, the time has come for me to explain the situation to my men.

Merek, Rowan, Henry, Lief, Asher, and Frederick all watch me, waiting for me to tell them why I've not allowed them to join in the festivities of my nuptials. Clearing my throat, I explain to them everything that the witches have told me, of Sybilla and of the prophecy.

"Gods truth?" Lief hisses.

Nodding, I jerk my chin. "Gods truth."

"What do we do?" Asher asks, lifting his hand to wrap his fingers around the back of his neck.

Closing my eyes for a moment, I inhale a deep breath before I exhale. "I do not know."

"You've married her, Elias," Frederick grunts.

Dipping my chin, I lift my eyes to meet his. "Indeed, I have. Cornwall was pressuring me to take a wife. I made a decision and I cannot go back on it."

"You can have it annulled. You are unaware if she's a witch or not. You do not know anything about her or what kind of land she hails from. Don't be a *jobbernowl*, Elias. She could be a danger to the crown. End the farce with her," Asher says, making a fist and slamming it down on the table that separates us all.

"I have not gone into this marriage lightly, Asher. Sybilla is beautiful, she appears to be sweet, but she has not blinded me with her charms. What I am doing is keeping her close, under my thumb, and not allowing her to be without heavy guard."

Frederick's eyes widen, he's the first to understand my plan. "You're going to keep the prophecy from coming to fruition and have your fun, yeah?"

Snorting, I cross my arms over my chest. "The alternatives for a wife were not as appealing as the one up in my chamber currently. The job needed to be done, and I need to keep a pulse on her at all times.

"If this prophecy is indeed what the witches say it is, there is no known outcome. They cannot predict what will happen if all four sisters are to convene together. I will make certain that we never know what the prophecy's outcome will entail."

"What do you want from us, brother?" Lief asks.

"Aside from the witches and Cornwall, nobody else knows about this. I am entrusting the six of you to not only keep this secret, but to also keep a close eye on our new queen."

Henry clears his throat. "Do you think her dangerous?" he asks.

I shake my head, my muscles bunching at the thought of Sybilla being anything but soft and kind. She is too good, too pure of heart to hold any darkness inside of her. She feels too much to be hiding her true self from me.

"She is not dangerous. I do not know the details of this prophecy. Four of us will be leaving to go to Irragin, to the ancient library

where we can ask the celibates what they know, what they have discovered in their research of the ancient scrolls."

"The rest of us and your bride?" Merek asks with an arch of his brow.

"You may stay here."

"Your bride?" he growls.

"Make sure she does not cause trouble. Cornwall will guide her in her duties. She has her handmaids, which she considers friends for some strange reason. There are also the witches here to keep the enchantments current. She will be fine."

There is a moment of silence while my men reflect on my words. "She is not a witch?" Asher asks.

"Nay, Aleida and Godiva both claim that they cannot sense any magic inside of her. They claim that her magic won't be revealed until she is with her sisters, all together."

Asher nods. I think about everything that's happened over the past few days and my gut clenches at the realization that not only have I bedded this woman, I've also wed her and made her a queen. I hope that I have not done something terrible for my people.

"Who goes?" Merek asks.

"Frederick, Asher, Lief along with myself will be traveling to Irragin. I want Rowan and Henry to continue to guard her highness' person, diligently. Merek, I am entrusting you with taking my place as a figurehead until I return as you are next in line to the throne as it stands currently."

There is a moment of silence, and I can look nowhere but at Merek. His eyes flash with anger and I watch as he leans over slightly. "You expect me to stay and run this country for months?" he hisses. "With that *woman* here?"

"I do."

"Do you command it?" he growls.

Arching a brow, I show him zero emotion. "I do."

He nods his head once, his back straightening. "I will do it because I love you, dear cousin, I also love Bunafi. I will not do it for that thing, whatever she is. I also want it on record that I think you are foolish in this endeavor and I will declare that she should have been locked in the dungeon for the rest of her days."

Jerking my chin, I do not give him the satisfaction of an emotional response to his words. Instead, I nod once. "Those are your

thoughts and feelings, cousin, and I respect them. We leave at first light. Bury your cocks one last time before we go, you know how the celibates don't allow women," I announce as I turn to head out of the room.

"Elias," Merek calls.

Stopping, I turn to him. "I hope you know what you've done by marrying her and what you're doing by leaving her in a strange land all on her own."

My lips twitch into a small smile. "She is not alone, for she will be accompanied by one of the men I trust the most in my life. My very own blood and my brother in battle, Merek."

He dips his chin slightly, his gaze never leaving mine. "I have no patience for women, cousin. You know this."

"You will have it with her, or you have my permission to keep her locked in her chamber if she becomes too cumbersome."

Rowan and Henry chuckle, obviously finding my words funny. Merek doesn't, his eyes are focused on mine and he knows that I am being completely serious. He nods once, and with that, I leave the men to consummate my wedding night.

I won't see her again for at least two months, probably more like four. So I don't plan on sleeping tonight.

SYBILLA

MY STOMACH ROLLS. I'M NERVOUS. I DON'T KNOW WHY, IT'S NOT LIKE I haven't already slept with Elias, but this feels really *really* different.

Ellyn, Katrina, and Jasmine help me out of my wedding garb. They quickly help me bathe, something that I never thought I would appreciate, but since I can't stop shaking, I welcome their help tonight.

Now I'm standing with my hair down my back, in a long white nightgown, a little fancier than the ones that I've been wearing, made of silk and a light pink color instead of the cotton and white.

My personal fireplace roars, and I wish I would have eaten some food instead of drinking far too much wine, especially as my head begins to spin a bit as I pace.

Something doesn't feel right.

In fact, for my wedding night, even though the guy is an ass, something feels really bad. Like an impending doom that I don't understand.

Maybe those witches have it all wrong. Maybe something is going to happen, with or without my sisters. I think that I should leave, run and never look back. The flight instinct in me is strong.

Fighting doesn't seem like the right thing to do. What would I be fighting for anyway? A guy who married me, fucks me, but otherwise doesn't seem that into me? No thanks.

"You'll create a hole in the floor if you continue to walk the same path over and over, milady," a voice rumbles.

Turning my head, my mouth goes dry at the sight before me. Elias is standing at the door that connects our rooms wearing nothing but his tights and they're unlaced at the sides, tempting every muscle inside of my body to launch myself at him.

"Where've you been?" I ask.

He shakes his head once, taking a step back, but doesn't turn around. "You don't ask those questions, Sybilla."

"I don't?"

I watch as he presses his lips together, inhaling through his nose, then letting the breath out through his mouth slowly. "No, sweeting, you don't. Come to bed," he gently demands.

My body sways at the way his voice rumbles, bouncing off of the stone walls around us. Leaving my warm room, I follow behind him into his much cooler bedroom. I notice that his fireplace looks as if he's just started it, the flame not nearly as high or orange as mine, nor as roaring.

"What do I get to ask? I thought I could ask anything when it was just the two of us in this bedroom?"

He stops at the side of the bed, his back straight. I itch to run my nails down his scarred skin. I ache to kiss each of his past wounds, to ask him what they're from, to hear all of his stories.

It has to be so much better than the only story that I have for the only scar that I possess. I fell off of my bike when I was young and my knee caught a rock, causing a cut and eventually a faint silvered scar.

"Nothing," he purrs.

"Nothing?"

Elias shakes his head once. "Nothing, Sybilla. You are a queen, but I am *the* King. You answer to me, you ask nothing of me. You may ask questions, but that does not ensure you will receive answers."

Narrowing my eyes at him, I wonder if this is the life that I was always meant to lead. I've never been this subservient before. Never bowed to any man in my life, never needed to.

Though, I admit, none of the men I've ever dated before have been this alpha male or fucking kings. So, there is that.

But this man—he's insufferable.

He is cocky. He is beautiful. He is demanding. He is kind. He is nothing I ever wanted and everything that I've always craved.

"I will always ask you questions, Elias."

He nods. "I have figured as much and I will answer them, if I am able, but typically I will not. Take off your chemise. Bare yourself for your husband, wife."

Pressing my lips together, a shiver runs over my body at his low command. I don't know why he does this to me, but he does, every time. I want nothing more than to please him when we're together like this, then as soon as he's gone, I feel anger and annoyance with the man.

Reaching for the ribbon at my throat, I tug on it, untying it and placing my arms at my sides as the fabric falls off of my shoulders then pools at my feet.

Elias' steel-blue eyes darken to indigo immediately. He doesn't move, the backs of his knees against the bed, his eyes focused on me and nowhere else.

"Come to me, Sybilla," he roughly demands.

Licking my lips, I step out of the nightgown and close the short distance between us. I expect him to grab me, to wrap his arms around me and kiss me, but he does neither of those things. Instead, he reaches out, placing his palm between my breasts, his eyes never leaving mine.

"You're the queen of Bunafi now. You may not know exactly what that means, but in time, you will learn to understand that you are the most powerful woman in this country. That does not mean that you hold an ounce of power over me, Sybilla," he announces—the ass.

"I didn't realize you knew my thoughts and that suddenly, in this new strange world, that I've apparently decided to wield the powers that I so obviously do not hold over you, Elias," I snap.

He laughs softly, his breath fanning my face. I try to ignore the feeling, but my nipples pebble with my failure. His hand doesn't move, even as his eyes flick down to my breasts before they lift back to meet my own.

"Watch yourself, wife," he warns. "Your duties are simple. Present yourself as a poised queen when you are out of these chambers, at all times. Cornwall will help you with anything else that you need to do, otherwise, your life will be complete luxury."

"What if I don't *want* luxury?"

"You mean to be a peasant?" he asks, arching a brow. "Work from dawn to dusk for barely enough food to feed yourself? No fine clothes, no jewels, no warm comfortable bed?"

"You think I'm insulting you because I'm not sure if I want to sit around on my ass all day?" I ask.

His lips twitch. "It would be an insult. It is part of being a queen, Sybilla."

"What happens when I am in these chambers?" I chance asking, though I'm not sure that I want the answer.

When his lips turn up into a full-on shit-eating grin, I know without a doubt that I don't want to hear what is about to leave his lips. I am arrested by the indigo blue in his eyes, though, and I couldn't leave, even if I wanted to.

"In these chambers, you become my subject. You are anything but queenly. You'll do as I say, the way I say it and you'll do it with a smile."

Narrowing my gaze at him, I shake my head once, reaching for his wrist to pull him off of me. Wrapping my fingers around his wrist, I try to do just that, when he shakes his head once and beats me to it, yanking his arm back and my body with it. Falling forward, I'm unable to brace myself as he falls backward, me on top of him.

"You're not being fair, you're demanding things of me that no woman should ever have to subject herself to, Elias," I breathe.

Elias lifts his head, his lips touching mine before he speaks. "I never said I was fair, Sybilla. I am your king and you will obey me, in all things."

"I'm also your wife, I have a voice, Elias," I say, attempting to sound firm, but failing miserably and sounding breathy.

His mouth brushes mine, his tongue peeking out to taste my lips which causes me to shiver, again, in his arms.

"Yes, your voice is beautiful when you're crying my name."

I open my mouth in surprise, but nothing comes out because Elias' tongue fills it. Then talking is over, as he silences me with his sensual kisses, sending my body into complete overdrive with need.

The wine mixed with desire for him, officially takes over, and I'm ashamed to admit, that I do not act queenly with him, just as he predicted.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



ELIAS

Wrapping my hand around the back of her neck, my other grips her hip as I sink deep inside of her from behind. She lets out a breath, mixed with a moan.

Grunting, I pull almost completely out of her before I slam back inside. She's warm and wet, her body so pliant that I wonder how I survived this world without her in my bed until now, for I did not know pleasure until I had her beneath me.

"Touch yourself," I demand.

She doesn't hesitate, she is not shy like the others. Her hand immediately slips beneath her hips and I feel her fingers graze my balls when I sink myself deep inside of her. Then, she separates her fingers and I feel them on either side of my cock as I pump in and out of her.

"Sybilla," I groan. "Do you feel that, sweeting?" I ask.

She hums, her entire body relaxed as she takes me, takes what I have to give her. She only takes what I allow her to, and only from me.

"Tell me, Sybilla. Tell me if you feel that."

"You stretch me, Elias. You fit me so perfectly, and you stretch me just to your desire."

Lowering my head, I sink my teeth into the back of her shoulder, biting her hard enough to leave a mark, but not so hard as to draw blood. Placing my lips against her ear, I continue to slam against her, feeling her *queynte* flutter around me as she climbs toward her release.

"There is only me for you, Sybilla. You only take your king, yes?"

"Yes," she breathes. "Only you, Elias."

"Only me, what?"

She lifts her hips, arching her back more, her body trembling as her fingers begin to work between her legs, playing with that sweet little nub that will assuredly send her over the edge shortly.

"I only take my king inside of me, only you, Elias."

"Right you do, Sybilla."

Rearing back, I tighten my grip on her neck as I drive into her over and over, the only sounds in the room are our labored breaths and my skin slapping against hers. That is, until her body stills and her cries of ecstasy fill the room.

Slamming into her a few more times, my hips thrust before I freeze, my release filling her as a groan escapes my lips. I stay planted inside of her, my chest resting against her back as I catch my breath.

"My Queen," I exhale against her ear.

"Yes, My King?" She laughs softly.

"You are a formidable match. I do enjoy this aspect of our marriage and I have a feeling that this feeling will not fade overly quickly."

She stills beneath me, her soft pliant body almost as hard as stone. Shifting off of her, I roll onto my back and throw my arm over my eyes, still inhaling and exhaling deeply. "You didn't just say that," she hisses.

Turning to her, I remove my arm and notice that her face is red with anger as she stares down at me. She's sitting up, her hair tumbled around her, covering her breasts from my view. She looks beautiful in her anger, stunning actually.

"Say what?"

She shakes her head once. "That we're compatible in bed, but that it will eventually end."

"Does it not in your world? Do couples always burn with desire as they do in the beginning of their coupling?"

Sybilla presses her lips together, her eyes searching mine and I know that she is truly thinking about my question. I also know that I am right in my assumption when she doesn't answer immediately.

Then something that I cannot read crosses her face, and I have the urge to know what she's thinking. She reaches forward, her fingertips touching my scar along my eye, as she seems compelled to do quite often for some reason.

"I've never been married, Elias. But, obviously I was not a blushing virgin when we met. I can say, that while in the beginning, it seems that new relationships are full of passion and lots of sex. I like to think that as a couple grows together, a different kind of passion consumes them.

"My parents have been married for thirty-five years and they still hold hands. My father still stops what he's doing when my mother enters the room and he watches her adoringly. So, maybe they don't screw like rabbits, but they have a deep passion that has grown between them over the years."

Her words, from what I could understand of them, are beautiful. Aleida was correct in her assessment when she said that Sybilla was kindhearted and felt deeply. Lifting my hand, I wrap my fingers around the side of her neck and squeeze before I run my thumb along her plump bottom lip.

"The more you show me, Sybilla, the more I wonder how you ended up in my bed. Then again, the more I learn about you, the more I realize that perhaps this was exactly where you were meant to be, sweeting."

She leans against my palm, closing her eyes as she sighs heavily. I may be keeping her to ensure the safety of my people, my country, and my crown. To ensure that the prophecy does not come to fruition, but what builds inside of me has naught to do with any of that.

What builds inside of me is simply because of how she makes me feel, as a man. That terrifies me. I've never felt for a woman before, and in only a few days with Sybilla, I feel too much.

This time away from her will be good. I need the distance, and I need to put distance between us. She is nothing but the queen to my king and the vessel for my heirs. I need to remember that.

"Time for sleep," I murmur.

She curls against my side, her naked body pressing against mine, her thigh hitching over mine as she lays her head on my chest with a heavy breath.

"Just to say, I wouldn't mind if you had indoor plumbing in this castle. That would be pretty sweet," she sighs.

"I know not of what you're referring to, sweeting."

With a hum, she curls deeper against my side, as if she is trying to crawl inside of my body. Closing my eyes, I realize that I like her this close.

I need to leave.

Wrapping my arms around her body, I pull her against me as she tells me her fantastical story about what *plumbing* entails.

I need to get away from her.

I'm falling.

Too fast, too deeply.

SYBILLA

I WAKE WITH A MOAN. ELIAS HAS HIS MOUTH BETWEEN MY LEGS, HIS tongue working me—like magic. In fact, I think the man holds some kind of magic. He has stamina like I've never experienced before from any of my lovers, not even when we were teenagers.

Sliding my hand down, I sift my fingers through the strands of his hair and hold on, arching my back and rolling my hips. "Yes," I breathe.

Looking down, I watch as he eats me. His eyes lift to meet mine and I whimper at the glittery black orbs that meet my own gaze. He flicks my clit, over and over, his eyes rendering mine hostage until I come, hard and fast.

Lifting his face from between my legs, he grins down at me, his smile staying planted in place as he shifts above me. My breath hitches as he sinks inside of me.

Lifting my legs, I press my shins against his ribcage as he sinks farther down, his face just inches from my own.

"Good morning, My King," I breathe, lifting my hips to meet his long, languid strokes.

His lips twitch before he touches his mouth to mine. I can taste myself on him, but I don't mind, it's sexy as sin. He swallows my whimpers, my moans, and my cries as his hips move. He feels amazing, like he has every single time.

Wrapping my arms around him, I scratch my nails down his back, my body climbing higher and higher, teetering on the edge. Elias grinds against my clit on a downstroke and my head flies back against the pillow as I let out a gasp.

My entire body freezes beneath him and I come, it washes over me like warm sunlight after a storm.

He doesn't allow me to bask in the glow, instead, he loses control and I watch, speechless, as he roars with his own release. It's beautiful. Everything about Elias is beautiful. He may not think that we will work out, but I know without a doubt that we will fall in love, I can feel it deep in my bones.

This is the man that was singly made for me and I for him. I don't know how I ended up in this magical place, but I do know that Elias is the reason, and I will stay here for him, even if I'm given an opportunity to leave.

Elias' eyes are focused on mine. He watches me for a silent moment, then his eyes shift from black to steel blue almost instantly before he grunts, pulls out of me, and rolls over. Something has changed, I can feel it as an uneasy feeling slides over my skin.

"Elias?" I call out.

He sits on the edge of the bed, his back to me, then looks over his shoulder. "Yes, Sybilla?" he asks, almost woodenly.

"What's wrong?" I whisper.

He shakes his head once before he stands to his feet. My stomach clenches, too nervous to even enjoy his spectacularly muscular ass. He spins around, his eyes on mine and they're telling me something, but judging by the storm clouds in them, I'm not sure that I want to know.

"I leave shortly," he announces. "You need to get to your room while my man gathers my things and the servants bring up something to break my fast. I'll have your women attend you after you've rested some more, I'm sure you are tired from yesterday's festivities."

He's rambling, no he's barking, at me. His voice is deep, booming and unyielding. He's speaking to me as if I'm one of those ser-

vants, and I fucking hate that word, it's awful.

Sitting up, I ignore my naked breasts as I stare at him, unbelieving of his mood shift. "You'll be home from wherever you're going by dinner?" I guess.

He shakes his head once. "Nay. I'll be home in two to four months' time, depending on weather and my findings."

My mouth falls open. I couldn't compose myself if I tried in this moment. "Two to four months' time?" I whisper.

"If you're going to just repeat yourself, can you go to your chamber and do it there?" he snaps.

My growl is deep and long, my eyes narrowed into slits as I stare at him. "You're leaving me? For *months*? I just want to make sure that I have this right. You married me yesterday and now you're leaving me for months. You know that I am a stranger here, I have nobody but you, Elias. Now, you're leaving, without me."

"You have your handmaids, you'll have Merek, Rowan, and Henry as guards. You have Cornwall to help you adjust to what he instructs are your duties. You do not need me, Sybilla. You are a queen, now act like it for *sard's* sake."

Ripping the comforter from the bed, I wrap it around myself as I stand on my shaky legs. I'm weak from the lack of food yesterday, from the overconsumption of wine, and from the numerous love-making sessions. No, strike that, he doesn't love me at all, numerous *fuck sessions* with Elias.

"Why would I think of myself as a queen when you obviously only think of me as your plaything, Elias. You woo me with your words, your promises, your body and then as soon as I take your name you're gone. Poof."

He lifts his hand, running his fingers through his hair. "We have known one another for merely days, Sybilla. You act as though you are privy to my comings and goings. I have business that I need to attend to. Even queens must realize that the world does not indeed, revolve around them," he roars.

Taking a step back, I press my trembling lips together. "We haven't even been married twenty-four hours, Elias. Forgive me for wanting to get to know my husband," I whisper.

"It is a short trip, Sybilla. Quit being theatrical. Go to your chamber, I will see you upon my return."

His words are final, if I didn't know by the way he looked down his nose at me, I certainly figure it out when he turns his back to me and marches over to the door. I watch as he rips it open and bellows for his man and his food.

God forbid the *King* goes without a fucking meal.

Turning my own back to him, I walk over to the door that separates our rooms, stopping for a moment before I turn around to look at him. He's avoiding my gaze, moving around his room to gather his things, packing a small leather bag with his personal items. Pretending that I no longer exist.

"I'm sorry, Elias. Whatever I've done to upset you, even if it was simply wanting your company. I *am* sorry. If I'm not here when you get back, I hope you know that being your queen, being at your side for even the one day, it was the happiest I've ever been."

Elias' body freezes, he lifts his gaze to me and I watch as a muscle tics in his cheek. "You'll not be going anywhere, Sybilla. Cornwall drew the contract and you signed it. You will stay here in this castle under guard. When I return, if one does not already grow inside of you, I'll get to work planting my heir inside of your body. Until then, find yourself, settle into your new home."

I gasp at his words, at his nonchalant talk of possible pregnancy and then even more nonchalantly speaking about *getting* me pregnant, if I'm not already.

If. I'm. Not. Already. Pregnant.

Spinning around, I leave him alone. I stay wrapped in his comforter, listening to the sounds in his bedroom. Then, when the sounds are finished and it's beyond quiet, I wait.

I watch the door, waiting, internally begging, almost praying for him to open the door to tell me goodbye. He doesn't. He leaves, after our fight, the day after our wedding, without a kiss goodbye, he leaves me.

Only then do I cry.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



SYBILLA

I hear Jasmine, Katrina, and Ellyn whispering in the corner of my room. I'm still naked, still wrapped in Elias' comforter and still feeling extremely sorry for myself.

I have no tears left to cry.

I haven't eaten in days, though I had some water yesterday, but only because I asked for it. Apparently, water isn't largely consumed here and I'm not surprised, what I had tasted terrible.

The rain falls outside, I can hear it drip, drip, drip, it's somehow extremely soothing.

I hear Jasmine clear her throat, then she appears in front of me. She's wringing her hands in front of her and her eyes roam over my face. My eyes are open, unblinking as I stare at her, waiting for her to say her piece and leave.

"Enough, Your Highness," she snaps.

My brows rise, but I stay still otherwise. I know that I'm depressed and I'm being stupid. I only knew the man for a few days, but something feels empty inside of me. I still can't believe he just left the way that he did.

"We've all talked and we all agree, Your Majesty, that you need to get up and move. Staying like this does not show your people who

you are. It does not prove to your subjects that King Elias is any different from his father. It only looks as if you are weak."

Her words cause me to narrow my eyes, but I don't respond. She sighs, shaking her head. "At least eat something today. If his child grows inside you, you must nourish the babe."

A shiver rolls over my entire body just as I hear the rain pour a bit harder. It's rained all day and all night since Elias left. It's as if whatever gods they have here feel as sad as I do about this whole marriage, this whole life surrounding me.

The women eventually leave. I feel shitty for ignoring them, but I don't want friends right now. I want to go home. I want to pretend that I never met Elias. I want to forget how his touch, his lips, his dick made me feel. I want to forget it all. But I don't want to forget even a moment of it at the same time.

I hate it.

I hate him.

I hate myself.

Closing my eyes, I let out a sigh and try to force myself to fall asleep. It's been days since I've rested, every time I close my eyes, I see him, I see the way his eyes went from glittering black to steel blue in an instant.

He turned everything off as quickly as he turned it all on and I can't help but wonder if any of it was real at all.

I wake with a start.

My eyes fly open and I sit straight up. I can feel my hair is a ratted, dirty mess, the comforter falls from my chest and my heart starts to race. Then when I realize who is standing in front of me, I let out a scream.

He turns his head to the side, holding his hands up in a show of innocence. Reaching for the comforter, I pull it up to hide my naked breasts.

"I deeply apologize, Your Highness," he murmurs as his gaze shifts back to meet mine.

Shaking my head, my eyes find his, and I shrug one shoulder. "It's fine."

He frowns, noticing my lack of expression returning. "I don't agree with this union, I'm not going to hide that fact, but you *are* the Queen of Bunafi and you are not behaving thusly."

"How am I supposed to behave? Elias married me, fucked me, then turned his back and just sauntered his fine ass out the door like he didn't give one flying fuck about me. I'm sorry, I'm alone in this world, scared to fucking death and now I'm some queen. I don't know how I'm supposed to act," I snap.

Merek's brows lift and his lips part slightly. "I thought it was mostly a jest, but unless you're a linguistic expert, I can't fathom how you would make up so many words in a single sentence."

"I'm not making shit up, Merek. I'm from Portland, Oregon in the United States and it is most definitely nothing like this place."

His lips twitch into a smirk. "Aye, Your Majesty, I'm more apt to believe it now. Regardless of where you are from, you are now here, and here, you are Queen Sybilla. You have subjects. Nobody has seen you for well over a week, they are beginning to suspect things."

"Like what?" I demand with a frown.

Merek shakes his head, as if he finds me funny or maybe unbelievable, I'm not sure which. "It would be best for you, for Elias, for everyone if you were to be visible to the people."

"Do they think I'm sick?" I ask. "Jasmine said something about people suspecting Elias is like his father..."

Merek's face hardens almost instantly at my words. "Elias is nothing like his father," he snaps. "I'm sure you hiding away doesn't help in those talks, along with the fact that Elias has not been king long and he's still earning his people's trust."

Biting my bottom lip, I search his gaze with my own. "You love him," I whisper.

"He is my cousin by blood, my brother by choice," Merek announces, his spine straightening as he looks down his nose at me.

His words are somehow beautiful and they move me. I only have my sisters, no true best friends to call my own, all my boyfriends have run them off over the years and vice-versa. But my sisters, they are always by my side, even when I'm queen of unbearable.

"And me being visible, pretending to be happy, this would help him and you?"

"And you, milady," he murmurs.

"I don't much care about myself right now," I admit with a whispered breath.

He jerks his head to the side, then his eyes find mine. "You should, Your Highness. One should always have regard for one's

self.”

My nose wrinkles and I watch as his lips turn up into a smile. He knows that he’s gotten to me. It isn’t difficult, I’m kind of a doormat that way. I’m easily read, easy to talk into things, especially when I know that I’m being a tad bit extra.

Maybe I’m not easily talked into things, but instead, I see reason quickly? Though, maybe that’s a bit far of a reach.

No matter what it is, I decide to get my shit together, pull myself together and stop wallowing in my own self-pity, I sniff, and my own stench.

“Can you please call in my girls, I guess I’ll get out of bed.”

Merek chuckles, bowing slightly. “We would all be much obliged, Your Highness,” he murmurs.

“But only if you stop calling me Your Majesty and Your Highness and instead call me Sybilla.”

Dipping his head slightly, his gaze finds mine and holds it. “I cannot, Your Highness. You are the Queen,” he says, needlessly pointing it out.

Though, I don’t feel like a queen, not at all. I’m not sure how a queen is supposed to feel, but I feel depressed, alone, and as if something has been ripped from my heart.

“In this castle, to you and anyone else, I’m just Sybilla. If you want me to be a queen out there,” I say, motioning toward the window. “Then that’s fine, but I’m not a real queen and you know that as well as I do. I’m just Sybilla from another world. Plain, ordinary, boring.”

“You’re definitely not plain, ordinary, or boring, Your Majesty,” he rumbles, his eyes focused on mine and nowhere else. His gaze is intense and I don’t know what it means, but something inside of me twists beneath his scrutiny. “I will send your handmaids in immediately, along with some food?”

“Please,” I whisper, unable to take my eyes from him.

I watch, wondering what exactly I’m feeling as Merek moves around my room. With a flourish, he opens the door and disappears, but I can’t look away, something just feels off. I’m not exactly sure and I’m not exactly sure I want to know either.

ELIAS

MY GUT CLENCHES AS WE GUIDE OUR HORSES OVER TO A STREAM TO REST and water them. Reaching into my saddlebag, I pull out a sandwich that the cook prepared. It's nothing fancy, but it will sustain me until we stop for the evening.

Asher and Frederick watch me as Lief goes about guiding the horses to the water and keeping close watch over them.

"You have something to say?"

"You've ridden quite hard, are you okay?" Frederick asks. His concern is real, but the way he watches me, he's curious as well.

Shoving the thick bread in my mouth, I tear off a chunk of the sandwich, chewing so that I do not have to answer him. For, I do not lie to my men, and to admit that I am indeed not all right, will make me seem weak in their eyes.

The truth of the matter is that I do not understand why my stomach clenches harder with each mile that separates me from the castle. The storm swirls around us, seeming to have come from nowhere, the horses are on edge as am I and the other men as well.

"She will be well, Elias. Her guards are your trusted men, Merek your cousin, if it is Her Highness you worry after, she will be safe," Asher announces. "Though, I'm still uncertain why you married her."

Thinking of being without her sends another wave of sickness through my body. I push it down and aside, ignoring it. "Doesn't matter. I have married her and that is the way of it. The celibates will guide us to what's truly going on with her appearance in Bunafi."

There is a moment of silence before Frederick clears his throat. "Speak freely, Freddy," I grunt, knowing that he must have something on his mind.

"The storm is unusual. The way you hold yourself, it is unusual. Are the witches certain that she holds no power, even power that she may be unaware of?" he asks.

Nodding my head, I take another bite of my tasteless food. "They are both certain," I say.

Turning around to look behind us, I notice where Frederick is staring. Dark clouds circle around the area of the castle, though we've ridden too far to actually see the building any longer.

Shifting my gaze back to my men, I shove the feelings of gut-clenching guilt down. I shouldn't have left her, I knew it before I walked out of that chamber, but I did it anyway.

She will be fine, I repeat to myself over and over again. "Shall we head toward Kelna and stop there for the night?" I ask.

"Another chance to drain my cock," Asher barks with a loud boom of laughter.

"Aye." I smirk.

The four of us climb back onto our stallions and ride toward Kelna. We make our way through small villages, and I don't spare a second glance when we ride right past Duraina's home. Thinking of her, it only makes that clenching feeling worsen.

Thoughts of Sybilla consume me. The way that she looked after she found her release, the way she smiled up at me as if she'd fallen in deep love in just a moment. Then I watched that expression disappear in an instant, caused by my own harsh words.

Sybilla must learn that her duties are above everything as are my own. Love has no place in the monarchy. These are hard truths, ones that I have known since birth. She will learn eventually.

The crown, the throne, it is above all else. Even above love. There is no place in our world for passion and love the way there is for a common couple. She will understand and when we share our rare moments together alone, I will make up for what our relationship will lack as much as I possibly can.

The tavern comes into view, it's the nicest place to spend the evening, and has not only the best food but the best bar wenches as well. Dismounting from Storm, I tie him to a post at the entrance of the inn.

There is a boy by the door and I instruct him to feed, water, and board the horses for the night. Making my way over to the inn's keeper, I dip my chin and look down at the portly woman.

"Three rooms please, one of them a suite," I coarsely demand.

She drops her chin, immediately realizing who I am. "Yes, Yer Majesty," she mutters then calls out to someone behind her.

A girl appears, a young woman. Her face pinks as she gives me a poor excuse of a curtsy. "Please, this way, Your Highness," she whispers.

"Have the boy bring baths into the rooms as well," I call out to the woman.

She jerks her head and quickly goes about following my demands. We follow behind the young woman, each of us going into our rooms when she shows us to them with a promise to meet within the hour downstairs for food.

Sinking down onto the lumpy mattress, I close my eyes for a moment as I let out a groan. This bed wouldn't be so bad if I had Sybilla lying naked in it, waiting for me to ravish her.

Lifting my hand over my head, I run my fingers through my hair at the thought of her. I've left her alone and although I shouldn't, I feel a massive amount of guilt that is only intensifying with each mile, each hour, each minute that passes.

Soon the boy appears with my bath, and I go about washing myself before I dress and head down to the dining hall for something to eat and most definitely some ale to drink. And I do plan on drinking copious amounts of ale in hopes of getting the woman off of my mind.

"You're in a piss mood, brother," Lief barks as he downs his third ale.

There's a wench on his lap, curled close to him, pressing her bosom against his chest as he speaks. Frederick has already disappeared around the corner with his own wench, no doubt to enjoy a tup and then go to bed to sleep like a *sarding* baby.

Asher is stumbling upstairs with his own woman, the young innkeeper's daughter, though I shouldn't be surprised, Asher is the youngest of the group and prefers a shyer sweeter woman to bed.

"I'm not," I grumble as I stand to my feet.

I *am* in a piss mood. In fact, I'm in such a piss mood that I'm going to take my miserable self upstairs to my room and attempt to sleep. Leaving Lief to his wench, I stumble upstairs and into my chamber.

Slamming the door closed, I flip the lock and undress before I fall back onto the bed. Staring at the ceiling, I can't help my mind from wandering and when it does, as it has done over the past day, it makes its way to Sybilla.

My cock hardens the moment I think of her naked body open and waiting for me. She smiles at me, her voice a whisper in that odd accent of hers. Wrapping my hand around my cock, I jerk myself to memories of Sybilla's body.

When I come, it's with her name on my lips along with a curse,
because I should not feel anything even remotely like I do for this
woman.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



SYBILLA

Two weeks.

That's how long Elias has been gone. I don't really count the first week though, since apparently, I spent the entirety of seven whole days in bed. I'm over that now, though something still aches inside of me each day that passes without Elias here.

I am finally starting to move around and explore the inside of the castle. Soon, I am hoping to venture outside, I can't deny that I'm getting a little cabin fever.

Stepping into the dining room, I'm surprised to see not only Merek, but Rowan, Henry, Aleida, Godiva, and Cornwall seated at the table. They all stand as I enter the room and I shake my head at their formality as I make my way toward my seat.

Merek immediately stands, pulling my chair out, then guides it beneath me and pushes me in against the table.

Turning my head, I look back at him with a smile. "Thank you, Merek."

He dips his chin, his lips twitching with a wink before he heads toward his seat. I'm acutely aware of everyone's eyes on me, watching the exchange, but I don't pay them any attention.

I like Merek. Sure, he's kind of uptight and growls at me sometimes, but in general, I like him. He got me out of bed, out of my funk. Then there's just the way that he truly loves Elias, I like that he has that inside of him.

Reaching for a bowl of what I now know is some kind of vanilla yogurt, I scoop some out and put it in my bowl. Reaching for the fruit, I grab a few blackberries and raspberries before I sprinkle some oats on top. Then I reach for the honey and drizzle it all over.

I'm aware of the people watching me, probably in disgust, but I don't care. They're all eating their weight in bacon, biscuits, eggs, and ham slices. Which, I love, but I'm trying to keep my weight under control since it seems that women don't really exercise here.

I've decided to start walking, I don't care where, but I'm going to at least get some cardio in by walking around the castle grounds. Then, when I'm all alone in my room, I'm going to try to do some yoga. Though I'm sure I'll fuck it all up, because I can't remember the last time that I actually attempted a downward dog.

I mean, even though they would probably lock me away for being crazy if I did it in front of everyone, what they don't know won't hurt them and I need to stay fit, for myself at least.

"Cornwall," I call out, turning my head slightly to look over at him. He's got a biscuit held up to his lips, it's smothered in butter and jam and looks mouthwatering. His eyes widen and I shake my head once. "I would like to start going over whatever my duties are with you. Elias and Merek both mentioned that you no doubt had things for me to do."

Cornwall, his food still suspended in the air, nods. "Yes, Your Highness, I do."

Smiling, I reach for the small goblet of juice in front of me. "Then after breakfast, we'll meet and discuss these things."

He nods, his eyes widening. "Yes, Your Highness."

Turning to Aleida, I bite the corner of my lip, my eyes searching her as she watches me. "May I also have a private meeting with both you and Godiva?" I ask, my eyes flicking between one and then the other.

I hear Rowan clear his throat in the background. "You may not be alone, Your Highness, King Elias' orders," he growls.

Shifting my gaze to meet his, I give him a small smile. "You can be on the other side of the door. It's a private matter, a female one," I

whisper.

His eyes bug out, and he shifts uncomfortably in his seat, the way that I knew that he would. It seems men are men, no matter where they live, no matter how badass they are. The mere mention of *female matters* makes them squirm. Good to know, I may need to use it on Elias if he ever returns.

The rest of breakfast goes quickly, yet quietly. Cornwall clears his throat when we're all finishing.

"Would you like to discuss your duties in the chancery?" he asks.

Nodding, I agree, then turn to the witches. "I will send one of my girls to collect you when I'm ready and we'll discuss things in my chamber receiving room."

They both smile as they dip their chins, but don't actually say anything. Standing, I turn toward Cornwall and follow behind him, Rowan and Henry bringing up the rear as they have been for the past week.

Rowan and Henry slip into the chancery behind me, closing the door behind themselves. Cornwall walks straight over to the desk and sinks down in the thick large leather chair.

I remember seeing Elias in that same chair, but it didn't swallow him the way that it does Cornwall. My heart clenches at the thought of Elias, though I don't know why, since I can't seem to keep my mind off of him. He's constantly in my thoughts, every minute of every waking hour.

"Your duties as queen aren't too taxing, Your Highness," Cornwall begins, obviously not one for chitchat.

Walking over to a chair, I sink down, sitting on the edge, crossing my ankles beneath me. I smooth down my deep burgundy velvet dress. It's too tight, just like all the others, and Jasmine has informed me that I need to have the royal dressmaker over to measure me.

Apparently, he was supposed to do this weeks ago, but hasn't yet, mainly because I've been dragging my feet. I haven't felt like it, not wanting Elias to spend any money on me, but maybe it's time to do just that.

"Some queens prefer to take over public duties while their kings are away, you needn't do that, as King Elias has already appointed Merek to that particular duty. There are orphanages that you could visit, sick, and elderly. You could do a variety of things. Some queens

have talents for healing, it truly is up to you to do as you wish, Your Majesty."

Pressing my lips together, I shift my gaze to the window. My heart races, unsure of what I can do. Out of those things mentioned, visiting people is the only thing that is slightly appealing, but even then, I am not really part of this world. I don't know their traditions, hell, I don't even know what half of their words mean.

"Cornwall," Merek's voice rumbles.

Both Cornwall and I jerk, my lips part slightly. I hadn't even heard him walk into the room. Looking back at him, I watch as he makes his way from the door over to the desk.

"Why don't you ask Her Majesty what types of things she enjoyed in her previous country?"

Cornwall nods his head, then turns to me and asks, repeating Merek's words verbatim, what I liked doing in my world. I stare at him, blankly. Frowning, I look down at my lap, then lift my gaze back up to him.

Shifting my eyes between Merek and Cornwall, I try to think about how I'm going to tell them how absolutely boring my life was. Clearing my throat, I close my eyes for a moment and think back to just a few weeks ago when I was living in Portland.

Thoughts of Drusilla enter my mind and I smile. "I called my sisters sporadically to check on them. We all live spread out from one another. Drusilla is the closest to my age, and we talked often. Other than that, my boyfriend had just left me the year before and I lived alone in an apartment. I went to work, came home, and that was my life."

Merek blinks, Cornwall shifts in his seat. "I know not of what all that means, but I can assure you that you won't be doing any of those things while you are Queen of Bunafi," Merek snaps.

"Doing what? Working?"

"Talking to your sisters, working, or taking a lover," he growls.

My entire body jerks back as though he's hit me. It feels like he has, his words are like a physical blow. The thought of taking a lover makes me feel ill, but that isn't what makes my entire body ache as though he's just hit me.

Not talking to my sisters, *ever*.

I think about the prophecy. Then it hits me. It slams into me.

"I'm under guard so that I don't come into contact with my sisters. You guys really think that something bad is going to happen if we're together?" I whisper.

Merek doesn't even flinch. His gaze is focused on me and nowhere else. Cornwall shifts in his seat. Rowan and Henry shift behind me, no doubt to guard the door so that I can't run the fuck out of here.

I'm not going anywhere. I'm not even going to try. It's pointless. These dudes are far bigger than me and I don't even know where I would go at this point. I honestly don't think that I would survive out in the glittery snow.

"We know not, therefore we are not willing to take the chance. So, you must think of something to occupy your time, Queen Sybilla," Merek murmurs, his deep voice rumbling throughout the room.

Shaking my head, I close my eyes for a moment. "I don't know. I'm not good at anything," I breathe.

"What did you do for work? Were you *a bar wench*?" Cornwall asks.

I blink at his obvious disgust over the thought of me being a bar wench, whatever the fuck that is. All I can do is picture a woman in German lederhosen with a beer stein in each hand and double Dutch braids.

Narrowing my eyes at him, I hear Merek chuckling beneath his breath as if this is the funniest conversation he's ever heard in his life. "I wasn't that, whatever that is. I worked in an office, I was an escrow assistant," I grind out.

They both stare at me as if I started speaking another language. Rowan and Henry clear their throats behind me, but these assholes just stare. Rolling my eyes, I let out a heavy sigh.

"I worked in an office, I assisted people who were purchasing a home. I helped with the paperwork."

They continue to stare, Merek actually frowns then tilts his head to the side as he tries to figure me out.

I let out a sigh. "Do you people not purchase your houses here?"

Merek smirks. "If you're in the good graces of the King or related to royalty, you'll be given a small castle and land. If you're a servant, you most likely live where you serve, or in a small cottage with your family."

"How do people get small cottages?" I ask.

Cornwall clears his throat. "They build them, or they're passed down from your family who built them, Your Highness," he explains.

Shaking my head, I let out an exhale. "Well, where I'm from, people purchase homes with money they earn from their jobs. There are no kings in my country," I attempt to explain, although I do it extremely poorly judging by the looks of confusion on their faces.

"So, you were a servant in your world then, you assisted others?" Cornwall asks.

Pressing my lips together, I breathe through my nose and realize that I was exactly what he claims, at least by his definition of the word. "I guess so," I mutter.

"Perhaps you can visit children? Do you like children? It would look favorable for the new Queen of Bunafi to get to know her subjects and children are easily won over," Merek suggests.

"Are you saying that I couldn't win over an adult?" I ask, crossing my arms over my chest with a huff.

He grins, leaning back against the edge of the desk with a shake of his head. "I fear that you could easily win over the most cantankerous man on this earth, Your Highness, but shall we start with the wee ones? Some of them have not felt the touch of sweetness from the likes of you ever in their lives."

His words make my heart leap. They're sweet. Too sweet. I'm sure he's manipulating me somehow, but I find that I don't mind it too awfully much. I could use some softness delivered to me, considering I'm still reeling from waking up here each day and not in my apartment.

"Though," he begins and judging by the way his eyes are dancing I know I'm not going to like what he says next. "Perhaps you'll wait until the dressmaker comes 'round and fits you properly. I'm thinking the old and the young will enjoy all of your charms a bit too much."

My eyes widen and my lips part in surprise. "Merek," I hiss as I hear Rowan and Henry guffaw behind me. Cornwall lowers his head, no doubt almost as mortified as I am.

Merek simply stands straight and makes his way over to me, his voice dipping just low enough that nobody else in the room can hear.

“Though I will not object if the damned dressmaker never comes ‘round. I find that I quite enjoy everything that you have to offer, Sybilla.”

Without another word, he saunters off, and I can do nothing but watch his retreating form and wonder how he made those words sound so sexy, as if I were inviting him to look at me. I inhale a shaky breath wondering why I’m not offended by his words, instead, I’m wrongly turned on.

ELIAS

THE CELIBATE’S EYES ROUND WHEN I TELL THEM THE STORY OF SYBILLA, the prophecy that the witches explained to the best of their ability and the fact that they do not sense any magic within her, which goes against the prophecy.

Clearing his throat, the man in charge dips his chin. “Follow me to the library,” he announces.

I stand, following behind him. Asher, Frederick, Lief and the rest of the celibates do not follow. It is clear that they are not invited. I expect to be taken to the main building, but instead, I’m led toward the edge of the property. There is a large wooden door flush with the ground.

“This is what is left of the original building, before the war one hundred years ago destroyed it and we were forced to rebuild. The basement stands, as do all of the ancient scrolls. We decided that they were safer down here, so it was decreed upon a hundred years ago to keep them hidden and safe beneath the earth’s surface,” he explains as he unlocks the heavy lock and chain before he tugs the doors open.

Behind him, I walk down the stone steps, stopping every few feet for him to light the lanterns that line the wall. When we finally make it to the basement floor, my eyes widen in surprise at the scrolls and books that line the walls. They’re all neatly tucked away, categorized I’m sure, but artfully displayed at the same time.

“What we’re looking for will be in the back, sire,” he murmurs as he turns toward the back corner and practically runs. “Now, I haven’t personally done much research on this subject, but in our

teachings, we are often warned that it could happen in our lifetime, that the prophecy could come to fruition. I cannot exclaim how excited and honored by the gods I feel that it is coming to fruition during my reign here."

I grunt, unable to share in his enthusiasm. Where he's excited, I'm worried for my country, for my people, but also selfishly for myself. I have finally found someone that I feel could complete me in all the ways that I need and if this prophecy is fulfilled, it could be the end of that for me.

My stomach twists at the thought of not having her in my bed, of not having her as my own. It physically causes me to feel ill, in a way that I have never experienced before. Nay, I cannot lose her, not my Sybilla.

"What do you know?" I rumble.

The celibate nods then walks over to a table with a scroll in his hand. I watch as he carefully straightens the document out, clearing his throat as he reads the words to me. They are almost verbatim what the witch said, which makes my heart sink.

"Is there not more? The witch said much of the same."

He lifts his gaze to me and grins. "There is, sire. It says here. Four sisters will be the most powerful creatures in this world. It is not known if this will be used for good or evil.

"The future is uncertain and unknown if these sisters gather together in our world.

"The four sisters' hearts determine how their power will unfold on this earth. The love of their warriors also plays a part in the way their powers are wielded. True, pure love meant to last a lifetime always prevails over the Earth's evildoings.

"Their children, created in this love between the sister and her warrior, will become rulers of a new generation beyond compare. The sister and her warrior will have many obstacles to fight, inward and out, to bring these children to adulthood, but when they do, the world will celebrate and prosper under their strength and guidance."

"So, the sisters should find one another? I shouldn't keep the queen from her siblings?" I ask.

The celibate shrugs a shoulder, his eyes lifting to find mine. "Their hearts determine the power, Your Highness. As does the love

that they find. If they do not find their true love, their power could be harmful."

"How do I know for certain if they've found a true love? If I am Sybilla's?" I demand with a growl.

"Trust and faith in the gods, Your Highness. There is no way to know if someone has found pure and true love. You must have faith in the gods and your queen."

"This was useless," I shout, turning my back to him.

The celibate clears his throat. "Do you trust her, Your Majesty?" he asks. "Would part of you die without her? Or is she dispensable?"

Turning to him, I look back from over my shoulder. "I ache being this far from her. Though, I do not know what that means."

"Time, Your Highness. You must have time with her, to know her heart and to allow her to know yours for there can be no true love, deep down pure love, if you do not know one another's true hearts."

I let out a grunt, though I know that he must be correct in his words. My father knew no love, he only desired self-gratification. My mother loved me purely, and I have loved nobody since I lost her.

"Let us rest, feast and talk. The others may have advice as well, but as far as the prophecy goes, that is all that I know, Your Highness."

I take a step, then pause before I swing around to look at him. "What about this other world? Do you know anything about it, at all?"

He smiles, "Rigley is our geographer, he will know if any other world exists, or if anybody knows of another."

We make our way toward the men and I am introduced to Rigley. I ask him immediately about this other world. He frowns and instantly my heart sinks. I do not wish Sybilla to be mentally unstable, but if I cannot have knowledge of this world past what the witches claim, I do not know if I will ever believe her.

"There are other worlds, Yer Highness," he whispers. "Though, as far as I know, they have all perished."

"All?" I ask.

He tilts his head to the side, his lips twitching into a toothless smile. "All but one. It is said to be vastly unappealing. The cruelty of man is beyond what we could fathom and yet they think of themselves as pious people. That is all that I know, you may be better off

to ask your witches. Though, I do not truly believe that it exists, I think it all be lore," he says with a shrug.

I wonder if he's right, then I remember the way Sybilla talked, the things that she said. I recall the fantastical concept of her *plumbing*.

Perhaps the celibate is wrong, perhaps it is not lore, but in fact a truth. I will have to ask Sybilla more probing questions about her land, about the people there, and demand straightforward answers from her on all fronts.

Somehow, I am going to have to trust the witch. I am going to have to do something that I do not believe in, something that I do not believe is possible. Somehow, I am going to have to fall in love with her, true, pure love.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



SYBILLA

Who would have thought that six weeks would fly by, but they have, *in a flash*. Elias was right about one thing that he said before he left, several months just aren't that long here. Merek laughs behind me, breaking me of my thoughts.

He's sitting behind me on the horse, we're sharing a saddle. I'm sure that Elias would be furious, but then again, he ditched me, so maybe not. I haven't ridden much, my first time on this beast was just two weeks ago and apparently, I'm an extremely slow learner.

Merek is holding the reins, trying to show me how to guide the horse. Though, he thought it was hilarious when I asked how to steer the darned thing.

They don't steer many things here, probably because they don't have cars or steering wheels. He murmurs to me to squeeze my thighs and for whatever reason, the suggestion seems so sexual it's unnerving.

"Just tug slightly, Sybilla, guide her," he rasps.

I do as he instructs and Lightning, my mare, goes in the exact direction that I want. I let out a small squeal of excitement, causing Merek to laugh again, this time a bit louder and huskier all at the same time.

I've grown close to Merek, though I have no doubt that he still finds me exasperating. I get it, I'm kind of a pain in the ass, always have been according to my daddy. But these guys need to cut me a little bit of slack, I've never experienced this kind of life before.

Looking forward, I let out a sigh as the blue-leaved trees sparkle in front of us. We're headed back to the castle from town. My eyes soak up all the beauty that this world has to offer, glittering beauty.

The snow is starting to melt, purple grass is starting to grow from the ground and I caused quite a stir when I screamed and freaked out over that little sight the first time that I saw it. All in all, this place is pretty sweet, and super colorful.

The animals kind of freak me out, and there's still no indoor plumbing. I've had my period, which was not the best thing in a world with no tampons, but I'm not knocked up, so there's that.

Everything *glitters*, but I'm starting to get used to it and I'm starting to fall in love with it all. Everything is just so much brighter and prettier here. It's sunshiny and bright every day, warm and just plain beautiful.

My days have been spent going to town visiting children, and starting today, I began to visit people who were homebound. People who were either too old, too sick, or too disabled to leave their homes.

It's been rewarding in a way that I didn't think was possible. I never envisioned myself a do-gooder, or a people person, but I am having the most fun just listening and talking to them, all of them, young and old, big and small.

"If you were not my cousin's wife, Sybilla..." Merek begins. I shake my head, not wanting to hear anymore, but he continues anyway. "I love Elias, since we were boys, always. He is not an easy man, he has never had much kindness bestowed upon him, which I think is why he is not sure how to bestow it upon others. He is a good man, a fair one, and one day you will break past his gates."

"Gates?" I ask, knowing damn well that he means walls.

"They're ironclad, Sybilla, but I think if anyone could melt that iron into liquid rubble, it would be you."

Thankfully, he doesn't say anything else to me. He throws his leg over the horse before he helps me down, reaching up, he wraps his hands around my waist and picks me up off of the horse before he sets me down on my feet.

Merek's hands linger on my waist as his eyes search my own. "The dressmaker has done a wonderful job on your new wardrobe, though I must admit that I miss the way the others fit." He grins, waggling his brows at me.

I gasp, feigning offense. Merek releases me and takes a step back just in time for Rowan's growl to come from the front steps of the castle. Both of us turn to him, but his glare is focused on Merek and nowhere else.

Jasmine appears almost instantly and hurries toward me. "Your Highness," she curtsies. "I believe it's time for your tea," she lies.

Looking between the two men who seem to be having a stare down, I take Jasmine's lead and follow behind her, making my way inside. She doesn't speak right away, instead she guides me toward my chamber.

She steps to the side, and I lift my gaze to see Aleida and Godiva sitting at the small table in the room, Katrina and Ellyn are standing in the corner, their eyes wide. Something is very wrong.

"What is it?" I practically cry out.

"Close the door, Jasmine," Godiva gently demands.

I don't move, my eyes are focused on the witches and nowhere else. A few weeks ago, I met with them alone. It wasn't anything extra special, I just wanted to know all the details of the prophecy that they had knowledge of.

They are hiding something from me though, I knew it a few weeks ago, and judging by the way they are watching me, I'm about to find out what it is.

"We sense things," Aleida announces.

"Sense things?" I ask with a frown.

They nod simultaneously. I take a step back, but Jasmine is behind me, her fingers wrapping around my biceps as she holds me in place. I shake my head, wondering what the fuck is going on here. I'm just about to demand that they tell me what the hell is going on, when Godiva rises to her feet.

She takes a few steps toward me, stopping directly in front of me before she dips her head, her eyes clashing with mine. I gasp at the sight.

They're swirling purple and black, her actual eyes are fucking *swirling* with different colors. My entire body freezes and Jasmine's fingers grip me even tighter as my legs start to shake at the sight.

Godiva reaches out and I pinch my eyes closed as her hand touches my chest. I feel my entire body warm at her touch. Then my back arches, my torso pushing forward toward her. She hums, her voice smooth and calming as my heart begins to slow down from its rapid beating.

"Open your eyes, Your Highness," she rasps.

I force my eyes to open and am greeted to the sight of her now brown eyes and kind smile aimed at me. She tilts her head to the side, watching me with a smile.

"You will be all right. We were worried," she admits.

"Worried?" I ask.

Aleida steps forward, her hands wringing together at her waist. "You and Merek have become very close. If the warrior and his bride do not fall in love, the prophecy will not begin to unfold."

"I thought you didn't *want* it to unfold?" I ask.

Aleida grins and Godiva full-on smiles. "We want what is meant to be, to be. The prophecy must unfold if it is meant to. However, sometimes people put walls up around their hearts when true love isn't what they expected it to be, or when they expected it to happen."

"You broke down my walls?" I ask.

Godiva shakes her head. "Nay, Your Majesty. All I did was look inside your true heart to see if you held affection other than friendship for our dear Merek."

"And?"

She shakes her head. "You know the answer to that, but we had to be sure. If the prophecy is resisted, if it is ignored, or if one partner shuns the other out of anger, it can have dire consequences, we needed to make sure that wasn't about to happen, and it isn't. You have deep growing feelings for our king."

I snort. "Bullshit," I bark. "I hardly know the man."

Aleida takes a step forward, at the same time Jasmine releases my arms. Aleida takes my hand in hers and squeezes gently.

"He is not an easy man to love. His heart is so closed off that I cannot sense his feelings at all, whether it be love or hate, Your Majesty. I do know that as a child he was full of loud feelings. They would practically glow around him. One day they will return, when he finally allows himself to love, to trust, to hope."

"Since I haven't seen him in a month and a half, I'm not holding my breath for any of that to happen," I admit, my voice softer and full of more hurt than I would like to admit.

The witches don't say another word. In fact, they leave me standing in the middle of my room, feeling out of place. When the door closes, I hear the lock being flipped into place, then I'm surrounded by my girls.

"What was that?" Ellyn asks sliding her arm around my shoulders.

"I don't know," I whisper.

Jasmine clears her throat and I lift my gaze to meet hers. "Merek is smitten with you, it is perfectly clear," she says. "He is also loyal to King Elias and would never betray him."

"He's told me that he loves Elias, deeply," I admit. "I don't know what I would do without Merek's help. He has helped to make this place feel almost like home. You girls have aided in making me feel almost happy to stay here."

"Almost?" Katrina asks, obviously a bit upset by my words.

Smiling, I reach toward her and take her hand in mine. "Sisters. I miss my sisters, that's all. If they were here, even with Elias being a giant dickhead, I would be blissfully happy."

Katrina's eyes widen at the same time Ellyn giggles. "Dickhead?" Jasmine asks.

Grinning, I shift my gaze to the side, then bring it back to them. "Asshole, jerk, mean, dickhead."

"I think I like your phrases." Katrina laughs.

"Are you hungry, Sybilla?" Jasmine asks.

Shaking my head, I take a step back from them. "I don't know what I am, but I feel funny," I whisper.

"Funny?"

Placing my hand on my lower belly, I begin to sway and then before I realize what's happened, I'm falling and I'm unable to catch myself before everything goes black.

ELIAS

I GASP, LEANING FORWARD AND EMPTYING THE CONTENTS OF MY stomach. Something is wrong, very wrong.

"Elias?" Lief asks, guiding his stallion toward my side.

Sitting up, my entire body sways. Squeezing my thighs, I force myself to stay on the back of my steed. My gaze lifts to meet Lief's. "I'm fine," I rasp.

He shakes his head once. "You are not," he announces.

"We will make our way back to Aerilon, back to the castle. We must keep riding," I slur.

Frowning, I wonder why I'm slurring. I've not imbibed this morning, and last night I only had one ale before I went to bed, alone—always gods damned alone. Lief shakes his head again, then I watch as he looks behind him from over his shoulder.

"We make camp," he shouts.

"Nay," I attempt to protest.

Lief's eyes shift back to meet mine. "You are in no condition to ride. You probably ate something soured, Elias. One night's rest will do you good."

I want to protest, but my words are cut off with a groan. Practically falling off of my horse, I embarrass myself as I stumble toward a tree trunk and slowly sink down to my backside. Leaning back, my head bounces against the bark of the tree with a thud as I close my eyes.

It doesn't take long for me to fall asleep. I can't shake the feeling that something is very wrong, very off, but I'm too tired to try and figure out an explanation.

"We ride," a voice shouts.

My eyes are so heavy that I can't even force them to open. I know not of what is going on or why, but I suddenly feel my body being lifted and jostled before everything goes black again.

I hear hooves pounding the ground, sticks and leaves crackling beneath the pressure, my body rocks from side to side, my stomach protesting each and every move, but my eyes are too heavy to open. Eventually, everything goes completely black, again.

Inhaling a deep breath, my eyes open and I sit straight up, my heart racing in my chest. "Elias," a sweet voice whispers from the darkness. "Calm, my dear heart."

Frowning, I slowly lay back down onto the soft mattress before I turn to the side and try to make out the dark figure next to me. I feel

a wet cloth placed against my forehead, as she shushes me.

"Where am I?" I demand.

She laughs, her voice familiar and husky. I feel out of sorts. I can't place her voice or the room that I'm currently laying in. I feel my eyes becoming heavy again and my body jerks as I attempt to physically fight my way out of the haze that has begun to take over, again.

"Don't fight it, my dear heart. I've given you a sleeping draught; you need your rest to heal. You'll wake in the morning and I will be at your side when you do."

It hits me, slams into me and my stomach rolls when I realize where I am and who is next to me—Duraina.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



ELIAS

My entire body jerks, my stomach clenches and I let out a groan as I sit straight up. Sweat pours off of me as I attempt to breathe in and out, calming my heart. "Elias?" that voice whispers.

Turning my head to the side, I wince as I see her standing next to me. She's wringing her hands together, her eyes watching me, full of hope. I should strangle my men for bringing me here, they should know better.

"Duraina," I murmur.

She shakes her head, reaching for me. "It is meant to be," she says, rushing forward, throwing herself to the floor at the side of the bed. "I heard a commotion outside and I saw you. Frederick recognized me. I demanded you be brought here so that I could tend to you. I love you, Elias."

My eyes stay focused on her, but I don't show her any emotion, the fact is that I have none for her. Duraina is a nice woman, she's warm and soft where she needs to be. She accepted me inside of her body and didn't cause any trouble, which was why I kept coming back to her, but I hold no true affection for her.

"I've already told you that I was to be married and now I am."

Her lips twitch before she sucks them in. "She is not with child, Elias," she whispers. "Annul the farce or put me in the mistress house at the back of the property. I can make you happy," she promises, then she reached for my hand, guiding it to her belly as she straightens her spine.

"I can give you children, immediately if you want them. I have a potion that I can take to ensure that we conceive straight away, my dear heart."

I yank my hand away with a quick jerk. Throwing my legs over the opposite side of the bed, I let out a grunt as my stomach clenches again.

Something is wrong with me. I have never felt this way before. I've been sick from illness and from spoiled food, but neither has ever made me feel the way that I do right now.

My stomach feels sick, but there is an emptiness that I've felt the past six weeks, except it's suddenly intensified. Duraina's hand touches the center of my back, a hand that used to be a welcome touch does naught but cause my stomach to pain me even further.

Shrugging her off, I stand and cringe as my thighs shake. "Where are my clothes, madam?" I ask, not turning around.

"Elias, please, I beg of you. Don't do this, we are not finished, you and me," she whispers as she moves around her small home.

I ignore her words, refusing to answer her. Refusing to acknowledge her. I've already given her my time, my words and my reasoning for ending the very discrete semblance of what she considers a relationship and what I considered physical relief.

My clothes appear out of the corner of my eye and I quickly snatch them from her grasp before I dress. Once I'm completely covered, I turn to face her.

She's making herself appear small, but I know her, or at least women like her. She will appear meek for me right now because that is what she thinks I desire.

Duraina would never be my paramour, even if I were to have one. I would choose someone who could hold my attention, make me smile, and match me in all ways. Duraina does none of those things. She was a bit of fun, nothing more. A bit of fun that I paid for.

"Thank you for caring for me last night, madam," I announce woodenly. She takes a step forward, but I hold up my hand to halt

her in place. "Do not, Duraina. You have said your piece, I have listened, but there is naught between us. I do not want to know how you have come to know that my Queen does not carry my heir. Nor do I believe in potions like the one you're suggesting to conceive. Some things need to happen naturally."

Her eyes widen and then fill with wetness. "I know because the news is all over town. Everyone wants there to be an heir. You'd left and the news was all over when her cycle appeared. She is strange and she is a stranger to our country. You need someone who is a friend to your people, Elias."

"Cease in speaking to me so informally, madam. My wife's courses are none of your concern, or anyone else's. Also, she is a stranger to this country, because she is a foreign bride, as many are who marry royalty. Not that my personal affairs are any of your business," I snap haughtily.

She flinches and that is when I know that I've made a direct hit. "I will have my man compensate you for tending to my wellbeing," I announce, turning my back to her and taking a step before I pause as she calls out to me.

Looking back over my shoulder, I arch a brow and wait for her to speak her final words. "I fell in love with you, My King," she breathes. "I am sorry that it offends you so."

"There is no offense, Duraina. But when a man has made it clear that he does not feel the same, a woman should never reduce herself."

I don't say anything else and I don't give her the opportunity to say another word either. I'm probably being harsh, but I have a feeling if I were too kind, Duraina would see it as an opportunity and attempt to beg me back to her bed.

There is only one bed that I wish to be lured to, it being so close, yet so far away. My entire body aches with need just at the thought of my wife, of Sybilla.

Glancing around, I notice that Lief has the horses saddled up and ready to ride, Frederick is also at his side, shoving a biscuit in his mouth, but Asher is nowhere to be seen.

"Feeling better, Your Majesty? We thought we were going to lose you," Frederick says, keeping his voice low.

Nodding my head, I hold back my groan at the way my body feels heavy and sluggish, still. "I'm fine, why didn't you take me

straightaway to the castle?" I demand, my gaze shifting to Lief.

Lief shrugs, his gaze traveling over my shoulder. I have no doubt that Duraina is standing behind me, mooning after me. "She saw us on the road, said she knew you and could help in healing since she was a healer," he explains.

I grunt. "Not sure if she is indeed a healer, but she talked of potions. Do not let her near the castle or Sybilla," I order.

Frederick and Lief both nod, their eyes wide. Asher strolls out of a house a few feet away, whistling with a little bounce to his step. Our attention shifts to him and I can't help but chuckle.

"Glad to see you're feeling better, Elias." He grins.

Shaking my head, I smile. "As are you?"

"Tip-top, Your Majesty." He winks.

"Shall we ride the rest of the way home?" I ask.

All three men nod. "Let's get you home to your queen," Frederick announces.

Mounting our stallions, we lean forward and race toward the castle. I ignore everything and everyone around me as I make my way toward Sybilla. My heart begins to race as fast as Storm's pounding hooves along the path toward the castle.

When we're close enough to be seen, I pull back on the reins and slow down to a trot. I don't want to appear as excited as I am to see her. Just thinking about my eyes consuming her curvy body, her golden hair and gaze. It causes my breath to hitch.

Once we're through the trees that separate the town from the castle, we approach the bridge and I stop Storm in his tracks.

I feel my body heat at the sight before me. Anger boils my blood beneath my skin's surface. "Elias, why've we stopped?" Asher asks.

"Can you not see?" Frederick growls.

I see movement to my side, presumably it's Asher shifting to look forward, but I cannot look away. My wife, my gods damned queen is sitting astride Lightning, her mare, with none other than my cousin pressed close to her backside. They're riding the same horse, together out in broad daylight, like lovers.

Asher whistles next to me when he finally sees what I'm glaring at. "Maybe it's not how it seems, Elias," Lief suggests.

I snort. "It is always how it seems, Lief."

Making a clicking noise, I guide Storm toward the happy couple. If I have learned naught in battle, it is that the art of surprise wins

wars.

SYBILLA

"GODS BONES," MEREK CURSES BEHIND ME, OR AT LEAST I THINK THAT'S their version of a curse.

He stops Lightning in her tracks and turns us to face the castle bridge. Lifting my eyes, I look up and I gasp at the sight coming my way. Thunderously coming my way.

There is dust being kicked up behind them, but there is no denying that there are four men on horses and the one leading them is none other than Elias, my husband.

"Take me back," I demand.

"Sybilla," Merek croons.

Shaking my head, I tug the reins out of his hands and lean forward. I do everything that Merek has taught me, and I race Lightning toward the castle steps. Merek shouts behind me, but I ignore him.

Elias is here, the asshole.

I don't wait for Merek to climb off of the back of Lightning. Instead, I jump off and start to sprint before my feet even touch the ground. Rowan and Henry are laughing at their posts. I flip them off with each hand as I run past them.

"Sybilla?" Jasmine calls as soon as I am inside.

"He's here. Hide me," I shout.

"Sybilla," she coos, sounding just like fucking Merek.

Godiva steps into the entryway, her eyes swirling again and I shake my head. "No, stay away from me," I snap.

"He is here for you," she calls out softly. "He feels sick just as you do. He needs to be with you, Sybilla. He needs to be with the one that his heart loves."

Shaking my head, I pinch my eyes closed for just a moment before I open them. "He doesn't love me, he walked away from me, he doesn't even *know* me."

Godiva lifts her hand, her palm facing me and I try to pick up my feet, but they're frozen to the floor. The conniving witch. Narrowing my eyes at her does nothing, she ignores my anger and continues to

move her hands around, at the same time her eyes do that freaking purple swirling thing.

"Open yourself to him, Your Highness. Your mind, your body, and your heart. Without your true heart's match, the prophecy will fail, and ruin will fall upon our world."

"Why are you telling me this now?" I shout.

Her lips turn up into a smile. "Your sickness will grow as will his, if you do not take pleasure in one another. Consider this my meddling, and my wedding gift to the both of you."

In an instant, her eyes return to normal, she drops her hand and she turns around before she starts to walk away from me. "Bitch," I whisper to myself.

My feet become unstuck and I take one step forward before an iron band is wrapped around my waist and my back is hauled against something hard. Inhaling, I whimper at the scent that surrounds me.

Elias. My king. He's home.

His mouth touches the side of my neck, his lips staying against my skin as he begins to speak. "You have some explaining to do, Your Highness. Up to your chamber, I will visit you shortly. Lief and Frederick will guard your door and you are not allowed any visitors," he growls right before he pushes me forward.

Lief and Frederick, who I hardly know, catch me by my arms, surprisingly their holds are gentle. Without saying a word, they turn me toward the stone stairs and halfway drag/carry me toward my chamber.

I don't bother looking behind me. I have my dignity, kind of. What I don't have is a husband who gives much of a fuck about me, until he sees me sitting close to one of his men.

I don't know why I ran. Maybe I didn't want to deal with whatever fucked up shit he had to spew. Maybe I'm still hurt by the way he left me.

Stepping into my chamber, I don't turn around to look at the men behind me. Instead, I walk over to the window.

This window is where I do my best thinking. I hear the door close behind me, and I know that I am alone. I won't be for long, though. Elias will no doubt come stomping in here soon and he'll demand things from me.

I'm at his mercy. Jasmine, Katrina, and Ellyn have explained to me what is expected not only of women, but of queens in this world. It's awful. It's like I've literally gone back in time a thousand years.

In some ways this world is better. The colors are freaking cool as shit, the trees, ground and sky sparkles. There's real magic, and I'm a fucking queen here. In some ways it sucks major balls.

There are no tampons or indoor plumbing, no cars, and no airplanes. My family isn't here and neither are my friends. Plus, there's that whole, women are here to spread their legs and birth babies only, thing.

I feel like I'm meant to be more than a vessel to carry Elias' heirs, but in this world that is all that I am. That is all that he sees me as and when he's finished with me, as aptly pointed out not only by him, but also by my girls, he will take care of me financially, but he'll also seek out someone he wants to screw on a regular basis.

That sucks.

It sucks not only because I won't be allowed to have my own affair, but it sucks because when he's not being a major dickhead, I don't want him to ever screw anyone else. It makes my heart ache to think that he'll turn to someone else, even if it's twenty years down the road.

I pace and pace, then I pace a little bit more. The sun sets, the moon rises high and still I am alone and my legs and feet now ache from the constant pacing.

My stomach clenches, then growls, alerting me to the fact that I haven't had dinner. I think about going to the door to see if Frederick and Lief are still there, but I decide against it knowing that they most likely are.

When it grows even later and I yawn, for the fourth time, I decide to take off my pretty new light-blue dress and get ready for bed. I don't know if or when Elias will be gracing me with his presence, but I find that the longer he makes me wait, the less upset I am and the more pissed off I become.

The asshole.

CHAPTER NINETEEN



ELIAS

“Do you wish to explain what my eyes happened upon as soon as I rode up to my home this afternoon?” I ask Merek.

I’m sitting behind my desk and he is standing in front of me, his spine completely straight, his body wooden. He jerks his chin up, his eyes glancing down at me from over his nose. He is expressionless and I wait for him to answer me.

“Sybilla has never ridden before, Elias. I have been teaching her so that she will be able to ride when we need to visit any of your other holdings. That is what you came upon,” he attempts to feebly explain.

Arching a brow, I wait for him to give me more. There must be more. Because what I saw looked like two lovers out for a jaunt.

Then her running as far and as fast as she could to get away from me, that is unexplainable, except for one thing, she is spreading her legs for my cousin by blood, my brother in life. I can wait Merek out though, and I assuredly will.

Less than two minutes pass and his body relaxes with a heavy sigh. He folds, sitting in the chair across from my desk, slumping down as he leans forward and places his elbows on his knees. Lifting his gaze to meet mine, he shakes his head.

"I do not love her, if that's what you're asking me. But, I do admire her, I respect her, and I adore her."

I cannot hold the growl back that escapes my lips. "*Adore?*"

His lips twitch, completely unaffected by my question and tone. "Aye, Elias. I adore the woman. She is strong inside. She has a zest for life, and she is curious about her new world. She is sweet, especially when she visits the children and homebound of your kingdom," he recalls, looking past me and out of the window with a far-away expression on his face.

I don't like it. I don't like how he knows more about her than me. I don't like that he's spent more time with her than I have. I don't like a gods damned bit of any of it. I am angry, not only at him, at Sybilla, but also at myself for leaving her the way that I did.

Pressing my lips together, I wait for him to collect his memories and face me again. Memories. That is all that he will have of Sybilla, he'll no longer be alone with her, not if I have anything to say about it.

"She is not yours to teach, nor to guide," I say, keeping my voice even and as calm as possible, which is a feat in and of itself in this moment.

Merek's smile returns, it's cocksure and I want naught more than to punch it off of his smug face. When he opens his mouth, I clench my fist to do just that.

"She was lonely, cousin. A strange new world, someone had to help her. Her handmaids no not how to ride expertly. Who else was to guide her?"

Standing, I slam my fist against my desk and lean forward. My calm and expressionless demeanor is a thing of the past. I am angry and I am showing my cousin every bit of ire that I hold for him at the moment.

"There it is," he oddly whispers.

"What?" I snap.

He shakes his head once. "There it is. You've been hiding your true self, Elias, your true feelings for this woman. I wasn't sure if the prophecy was indeed true, or perhaps you were not the warrior meant for her."

"And now?" I ask with a snort.

He stands, his body loose and his expression cool and calm. "Now I believe that she will be able to melt the ironclad gate that

guards your heart. She will do it too, there is no reason to rebuke my words. Go to your wife, Elias. You look like shite."

Merek turns from me without another word and I watch him walk away. I think about his words with a frown. Could Sybilla slither her way to my heart? I ache without her, I feel ill without her, I know that much. Would it be such a stretch to think that I could care for her?

"Your Majesty," a voice calls out from my chancery doorway.

Lifting my gaze, I see Godiva and Aleida hovering around the doorway, looking mighty guilty. "Enter," I call out.

They slip inside, closing the door behind them. They make their way toward me as if I'm calling them to the gallows to end their lives.

"Speak," I demand.

"We, well Godiva thought it would be wise, Your Majesty..." Aleida fumbles.

I hold up my hand to stop her bumbling. Shifting my gaze to Godiva since she is obviously the brains of this duo, or perhaps she's not, I haven't quite decided yet. Before they tell me what they've done, I decide to tell them all that I've learned from the celibates.

"So, if you keep her from her sisters, if you do not fall in love with one another, all of this could turn very bad for the entire world?"

"Essentially, yes," I agree.

"Well, I did the right thing then," Godiva snaps.

Growling, I lean over my desk. "What did you do, witch?" I shout.

"How have you been feeling, Your Majesty?" she asks, arching a brow.

"What did you do to me, witch?"

She smirks, obviously pleased with her craft, her spells, whatever in the gods name she's done to me. "Naught to you, Your Highness," she states. "But I have created a spell for your queen. A binding spell for her and her true love."

"I do not believe in love, so you've wasted your time," I spit.

Godiva smiles, it's wide and almost catlike. "Your gut tells you otherwise, Your Highness."

"How do I fix it?"

“Allow yourself to feel for your bride, Your Majesty. You’ll find that Queen Sybilla is worth your efforts and vulnerability.”

The witches don’t wait another moment. Together they turn around and waltz out of my chancery as if they own this castle. *Sarding* witches.

“Jarin,” I bellow.

My butler appears, his eyes wide as he’s unused to my sour moods. In fact, I’ve not been in a sour mood in years, usually I take it out on a woman, needing release to raise my spirits. Though, the only woman that I want is one that I do not wish to see at the moment.

“Whiskey, Jarin. Bring me an entire bottle.”

He dips his chin and a few moments later my chancery is full of my men, including *sarding* Merek, and we drink. A lot. All of us, even Lief and Frederick whom I instructed to lock the doors of Sybilla’s chamber from the outside so that she could not leave.

SYBILLA

I DON’T SLEEP A WINK. SOMEHOW THIS IS A VERY BAD HABIT WHERE Elias is concerned, me not sleeping and me feeling like absolute shit. Narrowing my eyes at the still closed and locked door, I stomp my foot.

The sun has risen, though it seems humid, which hasn’t been normal and I can almost taste the water in the air and smell the rain.

The castle is beginning to wake outside and in, and yet I’m still here stuck in this stupid fucking room. I stomp my foot again with a huff before I walk over to the tall wardrobe that holds all of my dresses and undergarments.

I don’t know how I’m going to tie the ribbons in the back of my dress by myself, but I’ll be damned if I stay in my nightgown and wait for the asshole to grace me with his presence.

Fucker.

I struggle with the dress, tying the ribbons in the back to the best of my ability, which is pretty damn awful if I do say so myself. My breasts do not feel supported at all, in fact, if I had a full-length mirror, I’m sure I would be appalled by how they look in this dress.

Reaching for the silky panties that the dressmaker included with my undergarments, I tug them up beneath my dress before I slip my feet into a pair of suede brown booties. Smoothing my hands down my pale gold dress, I wonder what is to become of me next.

Being thrust into this strange, unbelievable world wasn't enough. I had to be tethered to some asshole king who ditches me. Now he's back and locks me away in my room, ignoring me. Narrowing my eyes at the door, I decide that he can just go right ahead and fuck himself.

My stomach clenches as soon as I think those thoughts. Placing my hand over my belly, I let out a whimper as the pain consumes me. It's more intense than I've ever felt before, it's crippling and my knees give out beneath me, causing me to fall to the stone floor.

Closing my eyes, I take several calming breaths. I inhale through my nose, exhale out of my mouth in an attempt to ease the pain that has suddenly wracked through my body. Balling my hands into fists, I clench my teeth as I continue to breathe and eventually, the pain eases.

Slowly, I stand to my shaky legs just as the door flies open behind me. Spinning around, I come face-to-face with the man himself. Not only the King of Bunafi, but the king of dickheads. My eyes widen at the sight of him.

He's wearing the same thing he wore yesterday when he came galloping toward me. He has dark circles beneath his eyes, his hair in complete disarray, and the scar over his eye looks redder than normal.

I don't comment on his appearance at all. Instead, I stare wordlessly at him and wait for him to speak. He doesn't speak and we stay still, continuing our stare down.

Arching a brow, I cross my arms beneath my breasts. His gaze flicks down to my cleavage and his lips twitch, probably finding my ill-fitting dress comical, as only he would.

"Am I allowed to eat or will I be locked away in here until I starve to death?" I grind out.

His eyes widen and lift to meet mine. His lips are unmoving and stay in a small smile. "What good would you be to me dead, Sybilla?" he asks, his voice hoarse.

Taking a step toward him, I tilt my head to the side and keep my gaze on his. "I'm not sure what good to you I am *alive*, Elias," I say,

keeping my voice even and calm.

Elias' jaw clenches as his eyes slightly narrow. All humor has disappeared from his face and I find that I miss it the moment it's gone. Unfortunately, the smirky, smartass Elias is one that I find supremely more attractive than the pissed off and annoyed one.

"Do not, Sybilla," he barks. "I'll send your maids up to fix your dress then you may meet me in the dining room to break your fast," he announces.

Deciding that I don't want the girls to fix my dress, for some asinine reason, I want my husband to help me, I reach out and wrap my fingers around his wrist to stop him from leaving. He looks down at my hand, then lifts his steel-blue gaze to meet my own.

My breath hitches at the beauty of his eyes, the tenderness that they show for just a moment before they return to their hardness. I wish that he could lose that anger, that guard that he keeps up, but I have a feeling that Merek was right, the gates that guard him are ironclad.

"Will you tighten my ribbons? It seems silly to send the girls up here when you're more than capable," I suggest, keeping my voice soft.

He frowns for a moment, obviously wrestling with something inside of himself, then nods once. "Turn 'round," he murmurs.

Dropping my hand from his wrist, I do as he orders and turn my back to him. My dress wasn't even buttoned, because even as flexible as the few yoga moves that I've done the past six weeks have made me, there is no way that I could do up a million tiny buttons along my back by myself.

Elias' calloused fingers trail down my back slowly, from the base of my neck to the dip right before my crack. Then without warning, his fingers disappear and he reaches for the top of my ribbons and tugs on them so hard that the breath is forced from my lungs in a whoosh.

He doesn't stop there, he continues to pull on them, too hard, making them too tight causing me to gasp with each tug. In just a few seconds, my ribbons are tied and my buttons are done all the way up my back.

Elias wraps his fingers around my shoulders and spins me around, his dark blue gaze focused on mine.

"You will not bewitch me with your body, Sybilla," he growls.

"Elias," I wheeze.

He shakes his head once. "You will not bewitch me," he breathes, dipping his head. His lips are so close to mine, it would take almost no effort to touch my mouth to his, but I don't.

"Elias."

"The witches put a binding spell on you and your true love," he rasps. "Both you and your true love will be physically ill if you do not accept the love and touch from one another. How do you feel?"

I gasp, remembering how I passed out after Godiva's freaky swirling eyes and hand touched my chest a few days ago, then yesterday how she stopped me in my tracks, cemented my feet to the floor while her eyes did that shit again.

"My stomach," I breathe.

He nods. "Aye, mine as well."

"We're one another's true love?" I ask.

He shakes his head once. "Witchcraft isn't real. What you're feeling is not genuine. What I'm feeling is not, either."

His words are said in a sexy whisper, but they hurt. I take a step back from him, not wanting him to be so damn close to me. He doesn't allow that, he reaches forward, wrapping his arm around my waist before he tugs me against his chest.

"What are you doing? Just let me go if you don't give a shit about me," I whisper.

He shakes his head, dipping his chin, his lips touching mine this time. "I'll never let you go. You are my queen," he growls. "I should not care if you warm my bed or another does."

Tears prick my eyes, I can't help it. Just the thought of him screwing some other woman makes my heart squeeze and my stomach clench in pain. His fingers flex around my waist, his breathing turns into a heavy pant.

"I bloody well care, Sybilla. You are the only woman that I want, and I hate it because I know my desire is a falsity planted by some gods damned witch."

He doesn't allow me to respond to his words, instead he slants his head to the side and slams his mouth against mine. I let out a short gasp as his tongue fills my mouth. I tangle my own tongue with his, moaning as the taste of him flows throughout my entire body.

Pressing my chest against his, I curse this long dress and the fact that I can't hop up and wrap my legs around his waist. Reaching between us, I'm unable to stop myself from shoving my hands beneath his tunic and unlacing the ties of his tights.

When my fingers wrap around the hard length of his cock, he rips his mouth from mine, resting his forehead against mine as I begin to stroke him. His entire body trembles as he lets out a hiss.

"I do not have time to do this properly," he grunts before he leans down and picks me up with one arm.

I'm forced to release my firm hold of his dick, but I don't mind because after six weeks I'm going to have him again, even if I'm pissed off at him at the moment. All of that anger and heartache disappears with the promise of physical pleasure.

Silently, he turns us around and marches over to the closed door, pressing my back against the warm wood. Reaching for my skirt, I gather it in my hands, pulling it up my legs as quickly as I can.

Elias shoves his hand between my legs and grunts when he comes into contact with my panties. "By gods bones, what is this?" he growls.

"Panties," I breathe.

He shakes his head, wrenching the fabric to the side. "Never again, sweeting," he breathes against my lips. "This body should always remain open to your king."

God, this man is such an asshole, and yet, when his fingers fill me, I let out a long groan at the sensation. He curls his fingers inside of me, his lips touching mine.

He kisses me, his tongue sweeping through my mouth at the same time his fingers pump in and out of me, his thumb rubbing firm circles against my clit—*expertly*.

I feel myself rising, climbing, and my body heats as I stand at the edge of the cliff, ready to topple over. My breath comes out in short pants, my ribbons are too tight, I feel light-headed, but I'm too close to stop.

"Yes," I hiss.

He hums against my throat, then without warning his hand disappears and his cock slams home, deep, in one swift move.

My nails dig into his shoulders, my eyes lifting to look into his. Elias' gaze is black and it glitters before my eyes.

He's beautiful.

My lips part slightly as he pulls out, then drives back inside of me, his hands gripping the sides of my thighs as his hips press my back into the door.

"Fuck me, My King," I beg.

He grins, tilting his head to the side slightly. He pulls almost completely out, then slams back inside of me to the hilt, grinding his pelvis against my clit. I can't help but cry out at the delightful sensation.

Elias repeats the motion, over and over until I topple over the edge, my cries of pleasure no doubt filling the castle all around us, though in this moment, I don't care.

My king is home, he is where he is meant to be, and right now all is right in this world. Until our bodies separate, then I have no doubt we'll be at one another's throats yet again.

"Yes, sweeting, your king is indeed, *fucking* you," he rasps, just loud enough for only me to hear. His hips pump, his cock moving in and out of me until he stills and I feel his release fill my body. "And your king will fill you with his heir," he grunts before his lips touch mine.

The exhilaration I felt just seconds ago disappears as the truth crumbles down around me, again. His heir. His vessel. His fucking *queen*.

Turning my head, I refuse to allow him to take my mouth again. He doesn't say a word in protest, instead his lips touch just below my earlobe before he shifts from between my legs and helps me down to my feet.

"Are you ready to eat?" he asks.

Smoothing down my dress, I narrow my eyes at him and the bastard only smiles. I would say something smartass, but I'm starving, especially since I didn't have dinner last night.

Turning my back to him, I reach for the door, only to feel his front press against my, forcing my chest against the door.

"Tonight, I'll strip you of this foolish material and I will *fuck* my naked wife," he whispers.

I shouldn't have taught him what fuck meant. The way he says it makes my thighs shake.

"We'll see about that," I snap my lie.

He laughs, his breath washing over my skin. "Yes, my queen, we assuredly will," he murmurs before he takes a step back.

Pulling the door open, I stomp away from him and toward the dining room where I know everyone is without a doubt waiting for us, since meals are a gigantic affair around here. All the while I hear Elias laughing behind me, as if I'm trying to be funny and I'm not irritated as shit.

CHAPTER TWENTY



ELIAS

After an uncomfortable meal, I head toward my chancery to discuss with Merek and Cornwall everything that's happened the past six weeks here in my absence. I don't miss the way that Sybilla watches me, the obvious questions that she has. I know not what to tell her, how to answer them.

All I do know is that our bodies need one another, the witch made sure of that, past that I'm not sure what to expect.

Merek and Cornwall are silent until the doors to the chancery close. Sinking down in my chair, I'm glad to see that Jarin has cleaned up the whiskey and evidence of last night's drunken gathering.

"Cornwall, tell me, how is the Queen adjusting? Are there any correspondences that needs my attention since I've been away?" I demand.

Cornwall clears his throat and I notice how his gaze flicks to Merek before shifting back to meet my own.

"Queen Sybilla, though a stranger here, has come around to the people. She has made it her mission to visit children in the orphanage and has recently moved to include homebound individuals. Every path she crosses she leaves a bit brighter, Your Highness."

Cornwall shifts from foot to foot, and I arch a brow as I wait for him to gather his strength and say whatever is on his mind. The calm from my earlier release is starting to fade and irritation is beginning to rear its ugly head as he forces me to wait for whatever it is, he is about to say.

"Forgive me for being forward, Your Highness," he murmurs.

Lifting my hand, I wave my fingers. "Please, Cornwall, be blunt if you wish."

He dips his chin, his eyes wide as he begins to be completely blunt and frank with me about my wife. "The people struggle, Your Highness. They do not know you well enough to know if you will be gracious, or like your father. They also struggle to accept a stranger, as... *unique* as your bride. They are not daft, they know that she is different in many ways," he continues.

"What is it that they say about Sybilla?" I demand, ignoring the mention of my father and myself, as those are not topics which I wish to discuss further, ever.

Cornwall lets out a sigh, he looks to the side, then shifts his gaze back to meet mine. "There is talk that she is indeed a witch. That you keep her under strict guard because she is powerful and a danger to the people of this country. They are wary that her beauty is false, that she is a wolf in sheep's clothing."

I shake my head. "She is not," I rasp.

Cornwall chuckles. "I know, Your Highness, but your people do not. Your quick marriage and even quicker disappearance combined with the fact that Queen Sybilla stayed abed—"

"Enough," Merek barks.

My head turns to him, but he is focused on Cornwall. "He must know," Cornwall hisses to Merek.

"If you two do not tell me what this is about, I will have both of you whipped," I state.

Merek's head turns slowly, his brows lifted and a smirk playing on his lips. "You'll do no such thing," he says so cocksure of what I am, and am not, capable of.

"You, I won't whip. I'll just best you with my sword," I snarl, still angry at him for daring to be too friendly with my wife.

Obviously, he is not frightened by my ire, Merek only laughs at my words. "Then it is a challenge I will gladly accept. You do not

need to know what Her Highness does not wish to tell you with her own mouth."

"Cease thinking of my wife's mouth," I growl.

Merek shakes his head. "You are in love with the woman, admit it."

"I hardly know her," I snap.

He snorts. "You do not need to know her deepest darkest secrets to know how you feel about the woman. She was thrust upon you, but you could have done a dozen different things with her. The fact that you chose to marry her and so obviously do not wish to have the marriage be in name only tells a lot about how you feel for her, even if you do not want to admit it."

"The witch has cast a spell on her," I grind out.

Merek's smirk finally dies as he watches me. Cornwall's face pales, probably assuming that his mother has cast this spell and that he will ultimately suffer for her wrongdoings. He doesn't know that I am not a man who would punish a son for his parent's indiscretions, even if she were the witch who had cast this spell.

"You need to tell us, Elias," Merek demands, his happiness and jovial mood completely disappeared.

"The prophecy states that Sybilla must fall in love with her heart's true love. Godiva thought that she would bind Sybilla with her true love, that they would both become ill if they were not with one another. I was sick the whole way home, the men had to take me to a healer, they thought I may not make it. Was Sybilla sick at all?"

Merek's gaze shifts to Cornwall and he nods his head once. "The Queen collapsed a few days ago in her chamber. Her maids were with her, they put her to bed for a day and she seemed to feel better. Jasmine assured me it was only women's troubles that caused her collapse, I thought perhaps her ribbons were just pulled too tightly. Yesterday was her first time outside in three days."

"Gods," I hiss. "You did not think to tell me any of this?" I demand, my gaze focusing on Merek.

He shrugs a shoulder. "She was in high spirits when I visited her. Yesterday, she demanded to see the children and to visit some home-bound souls. I did not deny her, she was very adamant."

"You did not deny her," I mumble. *Sard.*

Merek adores her, it's obvious and I hate everything about it. Though, I'm more angry at myself for leaving and allowing them to

bond, even if it is innocent, which I doubt it truly is. No man can innocently adore Sybilla, it just isn't possible.

"There is more," Cornwall meekly rasps.

"Go ahead, I'm already good and mad, finish me off, Cornwall," I grunt.

He clears his throat, then tells me about the first week of my absence, how they all thought that she was going to expire in her bed. How she refused to eat or drink, that she wasn't sleeping and it appeared as though I had broken her.

My entire body locks up tight at the mention of my queen losing herself because of me, because I was a right ass to her. All I can do is picture my mother in her deathbed. The way my father treated her, the way he kept mistresses and flaunted them without care or concern over my mother or her tender feelings. The way he ignored her existence.

"You are not him," Merek mutters.

Lifting my gaze to him, I notice that Cornwall has left us alone. "Am I not, cousin?"

He shakes his head. "You are not. You do not have a mistress that you allow to conspire against you and your country, protecting her so that she will continue to spread her legs for you. All the while agreeing to sell off your people and your lands to the neighboring country just to stay in her favor. You do not bleed your people dry just to stay in her favor. Forsaking your gods, your crown, your throne, and your people just to have a taste of her rotting from the inside out, *anchovy*."

I chuckle at the description of my father's paramour. Merek isn't wrong, the woman smelled rotten. "Am I putting my people in danger by keeping Sybilla? If the prophecy is true, she does have power. If she gives her heart to the wrong man it will cause hells like no one could fathom in our world."

"Godiva already cast a spell that would render that impossible. You were both sick right after that spell, her body needing her true heart's love and her true love needing her in return. How did you feel after you bedded her this morning?" he asks.

I'm unsure of how he knows, though it should not surprise me. Merek is not only astute, but this castle talks, if Duraina's knowledge of Sybilla's courses are an indication.

"Do not answer, but do not close yourself off, Elias. You are not the former King of Bunafi. You are King Elias Cassius Arthur Wainwright of Bunafi. You are fair and just, almost to a fault. Your people will never suffer and the fact that no matter how much land your father willingly gave to other countries, you conquered it all and gave it back to your people, to your kingdom, plus some."

Shaking my head, I lift my gaze to meet my cousin's. "I do not deserve you or your kind words, cousin," I rasp. "I've been unbearable."

Merek shrugs a shoulder. "You are a man who was thrust into a position that you had no desire to have, then you were dealt something magical and unimaginable and you have handled it better than anyone could ever have expected. However..."

"However?" I ask when he doesn't continue immediately.

He clears his throat. "However, your queen could use some comforting. It is true she stayed abed, not eating or drinking for a week's time. I was forced to demand her to rise and take care of herself and make herself known amongst your people. I do believe the witches when they describe her as tenderhearted."

"Thank you, Merek," I murmur. He dips his chin and turns from me, only to stop and look back over his shoulder.

"Your correspondence is in the top drawer. There are several balls that you've been asked to attend. And unfortunately, my mother will be paying a visit shortly."

"Why?" I almost shout.

He snorts. "Unsure, but I believe it has more to do with me than it does you. She has been hounding me about taking a wife for some time."

I shake my head. "Won't you join me in speaking your vows, cousin?" I chuckle.

His eyes dance and he shakes his head once before he answers me. "Only if you find someone like your queen for me. I think the women of her world, if they are all remotely like her, hold much greater appeal than the royalty my mother will demand I wed."

"Find a commoner then, you do realize I am the one who'll approve your match, do you not?"

He tilts his head to the side, lifting his hand he rubs his jaw. "Would you?"

"To make my cousin, my brother happy, I would do very much, Merek."

Merek leaves my chancery without saying anything else. I've given him something to think about and I hope that he will indeed, think on my words.

I do not wish to force him into a loveless marriage just because my wretched aunt demands he marry someone of breeding. I know as well as he does that those women will never make men like us happy.

We need women like my Sybilla, he is right on that note. She is fiery, smart, soft and sweet all in one extremely seductive package. Standing from my desk, I decide that my correspondence can wait.

SYBILLA

I'VE BEEN AVOIDING MY GIRLS ALL MORNING AND NOW, AFTERNOON. Standing at the back entrance of the castle, I watch the creepy-ass Elephant birds peck at the ground ahead of me.

I prefer the view from the front of the castle, but it's extremely busy today and there is a higher chance of running into not only Merek, Rowan, or Henry, but also Elias there. It's quieter back here, only servants come and go, and they ignore me.

A finger touches the back of my neck, slowly sliding down my spine and stops at the last button of my dress. I don't jump, or even turn around to see who it could be, I already know.

Not only could I feel Elias' presence as soon as he stepped out here, I also know that nobody else in this castle would dare to touch me.

"You're not pregnant then?" he starts.

Spinning around, I narrow my eyes and shift my gaze up to meet his. "Why would you even ask me that?"

He shrugs a shoulder. "I had hoped..."

"I'm sure that you did. That way you could lock me away and never have to put up with me again," I snap.

His brows tug together and his lips turn down into a frown. "Sweeting," he begins.

I hold my hand up. "No, stop right there. No more sweetings, no more soft Sybillas. No more anything. This morning was a mistake. I know the witches did something to make us crave each other, carnally, but we're just going to have to fight that, because it's not happening again."

I hear a small rumble of thunder in the distance and the scent of rain becomes stronger. Elias tilts his head to the side, his eyes focused on me and looking nowhere else.

"Do you love Merek?" he oddly asks, ignoring my words completely.

"What?" I cry. "Of course not. I mean maybe it would be easier if I did, he's sure a hell of a lot nicer than *you* are, but no I don't love Merek."

His lips twitch into a small smile. "You cannot love him and do you know why?" he strangely asks. Crossing my arms over my chest, I press my lips together and shake my head. "Because you are bound to your heart's true love, physically. You become ill if you and your true love are not together and your true love feels the same effects."

I take a step back, not quite believing this shit. That witch bitch. I mean it would make sense that Elias is *the one*, especially with the way I just plopped in his castle the way I did, ripped from my home and my family.

"If I don't want to be bound to an asshole like you?" I ask.

His mouth turns up into a big, too beautiful smile. Damn the bastard and his beautifully scarred face and the way that it makes my belly melt.

Elias takes a step toward me, wrapping his arm around my waist before he hauls me against his strong chest. His mouth touches mine, his warm lips just staying there and not kissing, just touching mine. It's sexy and sensual and he knows exactly what he's doing.

"Elias," I whisper breathily.

He hums, and that brings a shiver down my spine as my body arches closer to his, begging for more of his touch, more of what happened earlier, more of him giving me pleasure.

"You are my queen, Sybilla. With or without that spell, I knew that you were meant to be mine the moment that I laid eyes on you. Prophecy be damned, you were made for me, sweeting. I do not know how to be a husband or a lover, not properly."

"Are you saying you've never been in a relationship before?" I ask.

He grins. "I've had many relations, but usually not with the same woman more than a few times. This is new to me, Sybilla. You must have patience. I'll not be the man of your dreams. I have duties that far outweigh any personal desires. You will need to understand that I will not be able to be available to cater to your every whim," he explains gently.

"Yes, I realize this." I nod.

His lips gently touch mine in a soft kiss. "I vow to endeavor to be a better husband from here on out."

"Is this an apology?"

"Kings do not apologize, sweeting."

"Not even to their queens?" I gasp.

He chuckles, his arms flexing around me. "Not even to their queens, but I will try to be better to you and for you."

Without another word, he shifts his head and his lips capture my own. He may not think that kings apologize, but that very moment, as his tongue tangled with mine, my king apologized for being a royal asshole to his queen.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



SYBILLA

My eyelids flutter open to the feeling of soft lips brushing against my lower belly. Lifting my hand, I thread my fingers through his hair, gently tugging his head back. He looks up at me, his lips turning up into a small smile.

Using my other hand, I extend my index finger and slide it down his scarred eye. His entire body stiffens and I slide my finger over to his mouth, tracing his lips with the tip.

"You're beautiful, Elias," I whisper.

Vulnerability.

It's not something that I'm entirely used to, but I want to be for him, for what appears to be a new start for us. Yesterday afternoon, after his silent apology, he spent the day with me. He showed me around the grounds of the castle, places that I hadn't discovered yet.

He took me to their church, pointed out different species of birds that I've never seen or heard of before. He even took me to the stables where a mama had just delivered her pups. I couldn't contain myself, I sank to my knees and just stared at the still closed-eyed puppies.

Then, he brought me back to our room and made love to me in the sweetest ways possible before he had a tray of cheese, fruit, and

crackers delivered for our dinner along with a pitcher of wine. It was the honeymoon that I wanted, it was perfect.

Now, waking up with him still in bed with me, his body between my legs, I can't stop from warming at the sight of him, his hair still mussed up from his sleep. A sleep that he spent with his arms wrapped around me.

"I am a monster, Sybilla."

Biting my bottom lip, I shake my head. "No, you're not. One simple scar doesn't make someone a monster, what it does is make you ten times more attractive. You are strong, you're a warrior and I've never been with someone so rough, so rugged, so brave or strong before. Beauty, you hold a beauty that I've never witnessed in my life."

I watch as he closes his eyes, almost as if he is in pain before he reopens them and his black glittering gaze meets my own. He bares his teeth and presses his palms next to me on the bed before he pushes up and moves farther up my body, all of his brute strength now hovering above me.

Spreading my legs, he lets out a grunt when his hips fall between them and his length presses against my pussy.

Just when I think that he's going to push inside of me, he lowers his head and runs his nose along my own. I let out a breathy sigh, lifting my legs to press my shins against his ribs. He grunts, his hips shifting as he glides his length through my pussy lips, sliding against my clit.

"Elias," I exhale.

I'm tender from our time together yesterday afternoon and throughout the whole evening. I don't think I've ever had so much sex in such a short period of time and yet, it doesn't feel like enough. I don't know how I managed without his touch for six whole weeks.

"I cannot get enough of your body, of the feel of you, Sybilla," he purrs.

He slants his head to the side, his lips crash against mine, at the same time he eases inside of me. I'm not wet enough and my body protests, but only for a moment. Then my back arches as his tongue slips into my mouth and he pushes completely inside of me, easily.

"You are ready for me, always," he mutters against my lips.

My teeth nip his bottom lip playfully. "As are you, My King."

Elias growls, pulling out of me before he thrusts back inside. "When you call me your king, I feel invincible," he admits.

"Aren't you though?" I sigh, reaching my hands to his ass and grabbing ahold of his hard muscles.

He shakes his head, his lips smiling as a chuckle escapes. He rolls his hips, causing my smile to die and a moan to take its place. "Nay, sweeting. I'm only a man."

"More than a man," I groan as my nails dig into the muscles of his ass.

My grip causes him to move faster, thrusting harder, my breasts moving with each drive of his cock inside of me. Sweat beads on his forehead, but I can't look anywhere but those glittering black orbs as he stares intently into my eyes.

"Everything about you is golden, the color of my coat of arms. You were made just for me, Sybilla. Never forget that you are special, my Queen."

"As long as you never forget either," I whimper.

Elias shifts to his knees, but I can't let go of his spectacular ass. My shins stay pressed to his side as he changes his angle. His arms, no longer needed to hold him above me, shift as one of his hands grips my waist.

The other moves to cup my cheek, his thumb sliding along my bottom lip, his eyes following the movement before they flick back up to meet my own.

Lifting my hips, I meet his thrusts, my body climbing higher and higher, so close to another orgasm. I've had so many in the last twenty-four hours I'm not sure my body can handle one more, but then my back arches, my eyes close and it takes over my entire being.

"Spectacular," I hear Elias whisper above me.

He doesn't allow me to bask in my release for long, his strokes become erratic, hard and fast as he takes his own pleasure, climbing and then stilling as his cock twitches inside of me. He lets out a roar with his climax, his body trembling.

Neither of us move, my eyes are just slightly open as I attempt to catch my breath. My hands are still gripping Elias' ass, his are still gripping my waist and cupping my cheek as we both just stare at one another.

"I don't believe in love, Sybilla. I never will and that is the downfall of this prophecy. You are supposed to be with your heart's true love and he is supposed to love you. The witches meddle, but al-

though you are mine, my body has claimed you, my heart perhaps has as well, but love is a choice and I will never love another."

My heart cracks at his words. He's still inside of me, his cock half-mast and he's making damn sure I know that he will never feel love for me. Turning my head to the side, which he doesn't allow, I try to hide from him. His hand on my cheek guides my face back so that I am forced to look up at all of his beauty as he stares down at me.

"That does not mean that I will treat you poorly. It does not mean that I do not hold affection for you. I do, sweeting. If I were to love, you would be a formidable match for me. You are strong, yet soft. You are sweet, yet high-spirited. You are everything that I've never experienced in a woman and didn't realize that I needed."

"But you'll never love me? I'm your wife and you'll never love me?" I ask, trying to keep the hurt from my voice, but judging by the wince on his face I fail miserably.

He lowers his face, his lips brushing mine. "I will never do wrong by you, My Queen. Trust me, believe me when I say that though there can be no love from me, there will always be respect where respect is earned. And you, Sybilla, demand respect, which you will always have from me."

I hate his words. Hate them. No woman wants to hear about her husband never loving her, but in return respecting her while he's buried inside of her, while she's still wet from his cum. Fuck that.

Releasing my hold of his ass, I put my palms against his chest and attempt to push him off of me. He shakes his head once, shifting his hips forward, grinding his pelvis against my clit.

"You will not push me away for telling you my true feelings," he grinds out.

Shaking my head, I try to keep the tears from falling down my cheeks. There is a crack of thunder outside and then I hear the rain begin to fall. I feel that crack in my heart, my mood as stormy and sad as the weather outside.

"You will not push me away," he orders.

"How do I find my heart's true love, Elias? There is no way that it can be someone who refuses to open himself to me. There is no way the prophecy would put me with a man who refuses to love me and call it magical and fated. I don't believe that, not for a second. The witches got it wrong, *you* got it wrong."

Elias' eyes flash from black to steel blue and that is when I know that he's retreated. He pulls out of me, rolling to the side of the bed before he throws his legs over the side.

"Don't turn your back on me, Elias. Not now, not again," I whisper.

He turns to look back at me from over his shoulder. His gaze is hard, his jaw like granite as he clenches it tightly, a muscle jumping. Then he shakes his head once.

"I do not turn my back on you, Sybilla. You have all but told me that you do not want me. That I am not your true match, nor will I be your heart's true love. Who do you think it is, *Merek*?" he spits.

I sit up, ignoring my nakedness as I crawl on my knees, slipping from the bed to kneel between his thighs. Looking up at him from the floor, I am under no illusion that this is a position of submission, one that he will not miss, nor mistake.

Placing my hands against his knees, I slowly slide my palms up his thighs and stop when I reach the tops and can go no farther. His eyes flick from my hands to my face. He doesn't even attempt to hide his annoyance and anger as he stares at me, jaw clenched and eyes narrowed.

"I want more, Elias. No man has ever loved me and I'm sorry if I want that from my husband, but I do. Prophecy or not, I want my husband to be madly in love with me. I've waited my whole life for that and I'm not going to just accept a lifetime of respect without love, not when I can have both."

"You ask too much," he rasps, the anger ebbing from his features.

Shifting closer to him, I tilt my head back a bit farther. "No, Elias, I am not."

He lifts one of his hands, shifting it through the strands of my hair, cradling the back of my head with his palm. His fingers grip my hair, holding me firmly, but he doesn't pull or guide me in any one direction, he just holds me still, his eyes searching my own, darkening right before me.

"I never want to hear of your past lovers, not ever again, do you understand me," he growls.

His fingers grip my hair tighter, his eyes swirling blue and black before they turn their glittery black. I'm so mesmerized by his eyes that it takes me a moment to register his words.

Narrowing my gaze, I try to pull away from him, but his grasp is too firm. His lips turn up into a slow smile at my struggle. Curling my lips, I pinch my eyes closed for a moment before I reopen them.

"They happened. They're not here and I didn't know you then, so please don't act like I owe you anything. I had lovers, you've had lovers and that's just the way of the world, Elias. You knew I wasn't a virgin the first time you took me."

He leans forward, his eyes sparkling and causing my breath to hitch at the anger that pours from them. His nose is almost touching mine, his lips the same and all I can do is hold my breath and wait for what he is about to say to me next. I have no doubt that whatever it is, he's about to piss me off—royally.

"You are bound to me, Sybilla. By the gods demands you are mine. Love, lust, respect, it matters not. All that matters is that you are mine and I am yours. The prophecy will play out as it is intended by these same gods.

"They jest, and they do so often. They have done this by creating a woman perfect for me to love, yet not allowing me to have that feeling," he explains, my heart racing faster and faster with each word that he says to me.

Elias doesn't stop there, he continues and in the distance, I hear thunder rumble around us as my thundering heart slams against my chest. "You will continue to fall in love with me, as you are capable of that, my sweeting. Your life will be full, you'll be adored by your king, by your people, and our castles will be full of the children that we create together. What else is there in life, but those simple pleasures that are all that will matter at the end of our days?"

Licking my lips, I taste the salty tears that have begun to fall from his words. "Love, Elias. There is love and that prevails over everything," I whisper.

He shakes his head, his fingers twisting as he leans down, resting his forehead against my own. "Love will come in time, Sybilla."

"Not if you do not allow it, My King," I breathe.

He grunts, no doubt hearing the pleading in my voice and the way I use the slightest hint of manipulation by calling him *my king*, something that I know he adores. He shifts his face, his cheek pressing against my own, his lips resting beside my ear.

"I have never allowed a woman where you are now, Sybilla. You have liberties that no other has ever been granted. Do not push for

more too quickly, do not push me at all. I am not a man who can be pushed, who can be wooed by your wiles."

Quickly, he lifts his head, but does not release my hair. His lips turn up as he pulls me closer to him. Flicking my eyes down, I realize that he's hard. Licking my lips, I hate that I want him in my mouth, that I crave to have him inside of me, no matter how.

Lifting my gaze to his, just inches from his hard length, I speak. "I will not be part of a loveless marriage, Elias. I will, however, give us time to fall in love. I know that you are capable, my king. You just need to trust me and I'll be patient, I'll show you the beauty of giving yourself to another person."

Something crosses his features, but he quickly shakes it off. I don't wait for him to say anything else, this conversation is finished for now. Leaning forward, I open my mouth and take him inside of me. I can taste myself on him, I can taste us, and it causes my belly to dip with need.

I moan around his length, closing my eyes and enjoying every moment of being alone with him. Soon enough he'll return to whatever it is that kings of this world do, but right now he is only mine and, in this moment, I hold all of his attention, I bathe in it, welcoming every second of the painful pleasure.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



ELIAS

Sybilla glances at me from above her goblet. We're sitting in the dining room, Merek along with the rest of the men join us. We're talking, creating a schedule for the upcoming months. Since it is summer, we'll be leaving this main castle and riding closer to the territory that we will seize and conquer this year.

"Will Queen Sybilla be joining us?" Rowan asks.

Glancing to Sybilla, her eyes wide, I look back to my men. "Only for a portion of the trip," I explain. "She'll be at the Beallenau Castle with the witches, her girls, and a full guard."

"The what?" she asks, interrupting us.

If Sybilla knew her role, her duties or her standing she would know that to interrupt a man, especially her King, is simply not done. However, concessions are made for my Queen, as she does not know the customs here.

Turning to her, I decide instead of chastising her for speaking out of turn, I will explain the situation to her.

"Beallenau is on the furthest border of my country's holdings. The land we are going to conquer previously belonged to Bunafi, but my father gave it to the neighboring country of Llyne. It is not theirs to have, my father handed it over because he was drunk on his paramour and that was her home country."

Sybilla opens her mouth and I dip my chin, allowing her to speak. "So, he gave parts of your country to Llyne, because his mistress manipulated him?"

Nodding, I arch a brow. "Some say he was bewitched. I know that wasn't the case as my father would do anything to keep what he regarded as his prize. She was indeed his prize, though he was blinded by what was between her legs so much so, that he did not care that he was hurting his people, his kingdom or his future heir's."

"Which is why I've heard murmurs of him being a traitor and you being nothing like him," she breathes.

My brows shoot up, as I'm surprised anyone has said I am nothing like the man. Though the sentiment is true, I have always thought that people assumed me to be like him, and would continue to do so until I could prove otherwise.

"We're going to take it back, plus perhaps a bit more," I say with a shrug.

Her lips twitch and I wonder if she understands the gravity of it, I doubt that she does. Right now, her eyes are sparkling with excitement. She is yearning for an adventure, though I doubt she realizes that war is anything but an exciting adventure, it is more like a hell on earth.

Turning to Merek, I clear my throat. "Ready the men, we leave in a fortnight."

Merek dips his chin, his eyes focusing on mine for a moment, then shifting to Sybilla. "You will be safe, Queen. Your warriors will keep you that way, always."

"We will all prevail," I point out. "We will all return to Bunafi for the winter as victors and we will spend the cold months celebrating in warm beds." I chuckle.

The rest of the men lift their goblets, cheering to my toast before they take a swig from their drinks. Turning to my queen, I touch my goblet with hers.

"And I vow to come home to My Queen, to watch her grow heavy with my child, to witness that child enter this earth along with many more to come," I murmur so that only she can hear me.

She lets out a sigh, leaning forward, she touches her lips to the corner of my mouth. "I am bound to you, Elias. I will be there praying and waiting for you."

Lifting my hand, I cup her cheek, my eyes staying focused on hers. "You'll pray for my return?"

"You know that I will."

"After this morning..."

She holds up her hand between us, the pad of her finger pressing against my lips to keep me from speaking. "I promised patience, Elias. That is what you will have from me."

Tilting my head to the side, I wrap my hand around her wrist and tug her finger from my lips before I press my mouth against hers. I ignore the sounds of the men around us with their roaring cheers and laughter.

Without another word, I stand from my seat, my dinner consumed. Tugging Sybilla's chair back, I bend and shove my shoulder against her belly and lift her over my shoulder as I straighten my back.

The men roar with laughter as I walk My Queen out of the dining room, her gasp clearly audible, which I ignore as I make my way toward my chamber.

I hear female giggles and turn my head to the side to see her maids standing against the wall, their eyes wide as they watch us. Tipping my lips, I grin at the three women.

"Ready your mistresses' trunks. We leave for Beallennau in a fortnight."

The leader of the group takes a step forward, curtsying. "All of us, Your Majesty?" she breathes.

"Aye. All of you, as I believe my queen has a fondness for her girls." I smile.

She jerks her head back, then her eyes shift to Sybilla's. "As we have a deep regard for Her Majesty as well," she exhales.

"Off with you, ready the trunks," I say, turning from them and continuing to walk up the stone steps toward my personal chamber.

Once we're inside, I lock the door behind us and slowly slide Sybilla down my chest, my hands find her waist so that she cannot distance herself from me. Her lips are parted and if she held any ire for me, it's gone now.

She reaches for me first, her hands cupping my beard covered cheeks. Those golden eyes, sparkling as they search mine, smile before her lips do.

"You're taking me with you, you're not leaving me here," she whispers.

Dipping my chin, I grin. "I do not think that I can be away from you, not for months, not even for days. You've imprinted yourself inside of me, Sybilla. My queen has carved a place deep within me, a place all her own."

She moans. "God, do you know how sexy that is?"

"Sexy?" I ask, not understanding the word.

Sybilla's lips twitch and she leans forward, her mouth pressing against mine. "Hot, seductive—sexy," she explains.

Lifting my hand, I tangle my fingers in her hair, holding her to me as I make love to her mouth. She moans, I swallow the sweet sound, far too eager to pull more of those noises from her shortly.

SYBILLA

ELIAS UNDRESSES ME, SLOWLY. I WISH THAT HE WOULD RIP THE beautiful gown off of my body, but he takes his sweet fucking time. Every touch is purposeful, he slowly removes my dress, and even slower he unlaces the ribbon corset at the back before he peels it from my body.

Inhaling a deep breath, I exhale slowly with the release of the tight corset. I'm becoming used to the restrictive clothing, though I could do away with it and just get a nice bra instead, but I don't think these people are ready for bras.

All thoughts of bras disappear when Elias' mouth touches my shoulder as his hands reach around me and untie the undergarment at my chest. Without a word, he slides it down my arms until it pools at my feet and leaves me completely naked.

Lifting my hand, I cup the back of his head, arching my back so that my ass rubs against his hips. I moan at the feel of his hard cock beneath his tights. One of his arms wraps around my breasts, holding me against his chest, the other slips between my legs to touch me.

Whimpering as soon as his fingers make contact with my already wet center, I writhe as he growls against my neck before he lifts his head, his jaw touching my temple.

"Wet already, my queen?"

Turning my head, I touch my mouth to the underside of his jaw. "Always for you," I breathe.

It's true. He just has to look at me, and I want him. I don't know if it's because of the binding spell Godiva put on us, or the prophecy, or if I just plain want this man with everything that I am, but I don't really care, because he always makes me feel so damn good.

His fingers begin to stroke between my legs, taking his time and building me up slowly. "I'm going to take you from behind, looking at your backside, it's a sight I don't think I'll ever tire of, sweeting."

I tremble in his arms, my knees almost giving out completely. "Then, you'll ride me. I don't think I will ever tire of your charms either," he grunts.

"But first?" I whisper against his jaw, biting him playfully as my hips jerk against his touch.

"First, I am going to taste you. I want your release on my tongue. I want you to spread yourself for me while I lick the sweetness between your legs."

I don't know how he makes every single dirty thing that he says sound sexy, but he does. "Please," I shamelessly beg.

He laughs softly, then he releases me. "On the edge of the bed, Sybilla."

Elias doesn't have to tell me twice, I pretty much sprint to the side of his bed and without a single hesitation, I place my feet on the wooden rail and spread my legs as wide as I can. Modesty is not something that I possess in this moment.

Reaching my hand between my legs, I use two fingers and spread myself for him. He grunts, and I bite the bottom of my lip as I watch him disrobe for me.

"I've never seen something so beautiful, so breathtaking in my life, sweeting." I snort, not believing his sweet honey-coated words. He shakes his head. "You misinterpret me," he murmurs as he closes the distance between us and sinks down to his knees between my spread thighs.

His eyes dip down to my offered center, then lift back up to meet mine. "Your body is indeed beautiful, Sybilla. But the way that you freely offer it to me, opening completely and without reservation. The way you trust me with your flesh, that is breathtaking."

Tears fill my eyes, his words being far too sweet and yet, I can't help but feel a twinge of sadness. For a man who claims not to be able to love, he's sure full of beautifully tender words that could make the most reluctant woman fall head over heels in love with him in an instant.

"No more talking," I croak.

He grins, his eyes turning indigo in an instant. He leans forward, his mouth just centimeters from my center, his eyes lifting to meet mine. "I quite agree, sweeting, no more talking. Keep yourself open for me, Sybilla. I want to taste all of you."

No more words are spoken. There are only gasps from me, and moans from him that travel throughout my entire body as he fully enjoys tasting me. Lifting my hips, they jerk beneath his ministrations and I am unable to stay still as he ravishes me.

He buries his face against my pussy, his tongue flicking, fucking, his lips sucking me with an abandon that I have never experienced before. My head falls back as I climb closer toward my release, my thighs shaking and threatening to close around his head in an attempt to keep him there forever.

"Yes," I cry as I topple over the edge into the abyss and I come. "Elias."

My chest rises and falls quickly as I attempt to catch my breath. My entire body trembles, but Elias doesn't stop. He laps at me until he's done exactly what he said he would, tastes all of me, every single drop.

When he lifts his face from between my legs, I feel heat in my cheeks at the sight of my wetness shimmering against his short beard. Reaching forward, I try to wipe it away, his lips turn up into a wide grin showing off his white teeth.

"Delectable, Sybilla," he purrs as he stands from his kneeling position. "Up, My Queen, on your knees," he gently orders.

Rising to my knees, I lean forward and touch my mouth to his in a chaste kiss. His tongue peeks out and tastes my lips in a swift lick.

"Turn around, I want to see you from behind. I want to watch myself sink inside of you, watch how you take me, how you stretch for me. How you were made just for me, sweeting."

I shiver at his words. I want that too. I want everything from him. Turning around as he instructs, I bend at the waist, pressing my

cheek and chest against the bed, spreading my trembling thighs, and tilt my hips as I offer myself for him.

My entire body aches for his touch, for him to fill me as only he can. His hands slide up the backs of my thighs before he grabs ahold of the cheeks of my ass and spreads them wide.

"When will you offer this to me, Sybilla? I will not take it unless it's offered, but I will take it one day," he murmurs.

Gulping, I inhale a sharp breath before I release it in a long exhale. "When you love me, with your entire heart, that is when you will have all of me," I whisper.

"You play dirty, My Queen," he says, though he sounds as if he finds me amusing, rather than irritating.

Biting my bottom lip, I don't tell him that to have all of his heart, all of him is akin to him having this part of my body. I want him to love me wholly, because I know that I am falling for him already, and in turn I will give him whatever he desires however he desires it.

Elias not only rules the country of Bunafi, but his guarded love could rule the fate of this world and without a doubt, it rules me.

My breath hitches when I feel the head of his cock at my entrance, then in one achingly slow move, he buries himself inside of my body to the hilt. I feel his hand glide up my spine and his fingers wrap around the back of my neck, holding me against the mattress.

"Yes," I hiss.

He hums, pulling out of me before he slams back inside.

"Indeed, sweeting," he groans. "Bring yourself to your second release, I want to feel your *queynte* strangle my cock."

Letting out a breath, I slip my hand between my legs and I do as My King commands. In return he loses control, fucking me harder than he ever has and I think that maybe, just a little bit, I start to break through his iron gate.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



ELIAS

Wrapping my arm around her waist, I take hold of the reins, pulling the mare to a halt. Touching my lips to the side of Sybilla's neck, I cannot hold back my chuckle.

She is a terrible horsewoman.

Completely *sarding* awful.

I now understand why Merek was behind her, though, if he does it again, I'll take his gods damned head off.

"I'm terrible, right?" she asks, turning her head to look over her shoulder at me.

"Deplorable, sweeting. You won't be ready for your own mount on the trip."

Deciding that we need a ride, a little time alone, I lift my head and click my teeth. Lightning follows my orders, perfectly, as her training was the best in the country. Together, we ride alone toward the gate and bridge that leads us away from the castle.

Leaning forward, I hear Sybilla squeal as Lightning gallops toward the woods. Wrapping my body around Sybilla's, I grin, feeling the wind glide over us. Only when we're close to the river do I slow the mare.

"Elias," Sybilla gasps, turning around to look at me from over her shoulder.

Her face is pink, her hair as wild as her golden gaze. Grinning, my eyes flick down to her lips, before they lift back to her eyes. She looks gorgeous, wild and free, her face no longer pinched in fear or worry.

"I didn't frighten you, I had complete control and you know it," I announce.

Her tongue sneaks out and wets her lips. "Yes, you did. I'm not scared," she whispers.

"I know, sweeting. You're excited. Adventure, are you craving one?" I ask as Lightning trots along the side of the river.

Sybilla's lips turn up into a small smile as she shakes her head once. "Every single moment here is an adventure to me, Elias," she murmurs.

Leaning forward, I touch my mouth to hers. "Just wait, Sybilla. I will show you all the adventures that life has to offer. You will never grow tired of the life you will have here. You will never long to leave, you are bound to me, to this land as I am bound to you as well."

She gasps, but I don't allow her to speak. Thrusting my tongue into her mouth, I swallow her moans as I taste her. Guiding Lightning over to a small glade, I pull back on her reins and squeeze my thighs to halt her movement.

We have reached our destination. Nibbling on Sybilla's bottom lip, I break the kiss and look down at my sweet wife. Wife. The title is still foreign to me, yet, it feels right as well—normal.

Dismounting from the mare, I tie her to a tree, close enough for her to feed on the sweet grass and drink from the stream while Sybilla and I spend some time together, alone. Reaching for my wife, I wrap my hands around her tiny waist and pull her down from the mare as well.

Her hands hold on to my shoulders for stability as I place her booted feet on the soft ground. Sybilla's golden gaze lifts to mine as her soft breasts press against my chest. Soon those soft peaks will be in my mouth, in my grasp, and freed from the constraints of her gown.

"What are we doing here, Elias?" she asks.

Dipping my chin, I touch my mouth to the corner of hers. "We're going to enjoy one another in the privacy of this glade, sweeting."

Her tongue peeks out and she wets her bottom lip, her gaze shifting over my shoulder to the tree canopy covered glade. Her gaze shifts back to mine and her eyes widen.

"You want to have sex in the outdoors?" she hisses.

Though, judging by the way her breath picks up, her eyes dilate, and her nostrils flare, she is not as offended as she attempts to sound.

Wrapping my hand around hers, I turn toward the glade and tug her behind me. She doesn't know that nobody would dare venture out here, my personal hunting cabin is just behind the largest tree on the opposite side of this area, this is my personal space and therefore off-limits to even my men.

"I'm going to devour my wife, an adventure that I think you want as much as I do, Sybilla," I announce as I spin around and tug her against my chest.

"Elias, anyone could walk up here," she warns.

Shaking my head, my lips twitch. "You won't care. It's exciting, sweeting."

"You're a king, I don't think this is appropriate," she breathes.

Lifting my hands, I tug at the front of her dress, exposing her breasts in one swift move. She lets out a gasp and lifts her hands to cover herself. Wrapping my fingers around her wrists, I shift her hands to her sides, holding them there as my head dips down and I take one of her peaked nipples in my mouth.

"Elias," she gasps.

Lifting my eyes to meet hers, I watch as her nostrils continue to flare and her eyes begin to dance. They don't glitter like other women in this world that I've bedded, but they dance and it's mesmerizing.

Gripping her waist, I pull her down to the ground gently. She doesn't physically protest as her knees give way and she sinks to her side. Rolling onto my back, I pull her flush against me, my lips finding hers.

My tongue thrusts into her mouth, the same way my cock will soon be thrusting inside of her warm heat. She breaks the kiss, those dancing eyes looking down at me while her weight presses against my body.

"Elias, you can't seriously mean to do this here..."

Lifting up to a sitting position, I wrap my hands around her legs and pull her closer, wrapping her legs around my waist.

Sliding my hands up her skirts, I smile when my thumb comes into contact with her sweet nub. She's taken to not wearing those awful contraptions that she calls panties beneath her dresses, thank the gods.

Sybilla's breath hitches, her hips shift and I watch as her eyes become hooded. She allows herself to feel, just as I wish her to. She allows herself this adventure. Dropping my head, I place my lips at the center of her chest, licking her sweet skin as her hips jerk.

"Free me, sweeting," I softly demand.

Removing my hand from between her legs, I reach behind her and deftly unbutton her dress before I loosen her ribbons, tugging them open before I reach for the hem of her skirts and lift the entire dress over her head.

Sybilla's hands work my strings open, and her fingers wrap around my cock, squeezing me so expertly that I moan at the sensation.

"By gods bones, Sybilla, you undo me," I groan against her skin.

Without a word, she positions herself at the head of my cock. My eyes fly up to meet her own, and I watch her face as she sinks down along my shaft. She doesn't move once she's fully seated and as much as I want to pound into her sweet body, I also want this moment to last.

Sybilla reaches for the hem of her chemise and pulls it up her body, revealing her soft naked body for me. Lifting my hands, I cup her breasts, sliding my thumbs across her pebbled nipples. Her entire body shivers against my touch, her lips pursing out before she sucks them in.

Lifting one of my hands, I wrap my fingers around the side of her throat, the other I shift between us and press my thumb against her sweet nub, again. Her nostrils flare and she begins to slowly move along my length.

"Don't stop, sweeting," I rasp.

She shakes her head, lifting her hands to grip my shoulders. "Never, Elias. I never want this to end."

Her voice is naught but a breathy moan and I can't help but feel like a god when she is like this, when she accepts all of me this way.

She lifts then slams down along my length and I immediately decide that I'm no god, instead, she's a goddess.

I continue to rub firm circles against her nub, her hips jerking, bucking against me as she searches for her release. I watch her breasts bounce freely above me, the glittering purple grass and blue leaves of the canopy of trees that surround us no match for her beauty, as she takes from me.

Her thighs shake, her *queynte* fluttering around my length. I am so close to emptying myself inside of her, but I will do no such thing until she's reached her own climax.

Squeezing her throat gently, I lean forward and capture her breast in my mouth, my teeth gently tugging on her nipple as my thumb continues to play her clit, harder and faster with each rise and fall over my cock.

"I'm close," she cries, though she does not need to, I can feel her, she is on the edge teetering.

Then, her entire body stills, she cries out and her *queynte* squeezes me, forcing my own climax from my body at the exact same time. Dropping my head back, I let out my own roar as I empty inside of her, filling her and hopefully creating life inside of her.

She's breathing heavily, as am I, her eyes wild, her hair equally so, she looks breathtaking. Lifting my hands, I wrap my arms around her and lie back on the ground as I pull her against my chest. Holding the back of her head against my neck, I close my eyes as we both catch our breaths.

"Let's go for a swim, My Queen," I whisper against the side of her head.

"A swim?" she exhales.

I hum. "Aye, you and me, naked in the river. Mayhap I'll bring you to your climax again, maybe even twice more," I say with a grin.

Her entire body shivers and she lifts her head, those wild eyes dazed and unfocused as she looks down at me. "I've never, not naked," she whispers.

"Then today, My Queen, I give you that adventure."

SYBILLA

LOVE.

It happened so fast that I didn't even realize what was going on until it slammed into me. I've fallen in love with my husband. I know that it has to be more than lust, it must be.

I do want to climb him, fuck him until we both cry out in pleasure, but I also want to see him smile. I want to be the one to make him smile and over the past two weeks, I've made it my sole mission to do just that.

"You're staring out of the window again." Ellyn giggles.

My own lips turn up into a small smile as I bite my bottom lip and shift my gaze back to my girls. "I think I love my husband," I blurt out.

All three of them stare at me for a moment, then they burst out into a fit of giggles. I join them when I realize that we sound like my sisters and me when we were young. I can't remember the last time I laughed like this and I'm grateful for it, I need it.

Shaking my head, I try to calm my laughs down before I get too light-headed from my tied ribbons and pass out from lack of oxygen. The girls are busy packing the last-minute items in my trunks.

Apparently, we leave for Beallenau tomorrow. Though I'm not very excited about the prospect of war, and whatever that looks like where we're going, I am excited for an adventure. Elias is right, I do crave an adventure, one that I know only he can give me in this magical world.

"Sybilla?" Katrina softly calls, her voice is so small that I almost don't hear her.

Lifting my gaze to her, I notice that she's standing next to my bed, a necklace in her hand that she's spinning around, but not really looking at. She's lost in thought and I wonder what could be bothering her so much.

"Katrina? Are you okay? Do you not want to join us?" I ask.

Her body jerks and she lifts her gaze to meet mine, a look of horror crosses her features. "I do want to go, please don't leave me here, Your Majesty," she quickly begs.

"What's the matter then?"

Her gaze shifts from me to the window, then back to me. "I have feelings. I shouldn't. Servants like me, they aren't supposed to have feelings like this for men like him," she mutters. "Forget it," she admonishes.

Standing, I walk over to her, taking the necklace out of her hands and setting it on the bed. Taking both of her hands in mine, I look directly into her eyes.

"I am not anything special in my world, Katrina. I don't have very much money, I don't have any royal blood, and where I come from there are no prophecies or magic. If Elias were the king of a country where I am from, he would not even know I existed."

Katrina doesn't say anything, instead she chews on her bottom lip as she watches me. "What I mean to say is that, I am not worthy of my title, I don't know anything about being a queen and I am common just like you, and yet, Elias saw me. He felt something for me immediately and now we share something deep with one another."

"He's confessed his love for you?" Ellyn asks.

"Quiet," Jasmine hisses.

"We haven't coupled, he hasn't bedded me. I doubt he knows I exist, but I have seen him watch me. He's smiled in my direction. I fancy him, greatly. But I'm not like others... I can't just... and never have more."

"She's not lain with a man before," Ellyn interjects. "She is waiting for her husband."

I can't hide my smile as I look at the sweet Katrina. She's a virgin and she has a crush. I'm not sure who it's on yet, but obviously she thinks that he has a higher standing than she does and that she is not worthy, but I do know that she's been noticed, by her description at least.

"Who is it?" I ask.

Katrina chews on her bottom lip, her gaze shifting to the side then coming back to meet mine. "It's silly," she mutters. "I'm infatuated with him and it's completely silly."

"Katrina," I warn, though I'm not sure what I'm warning, but I want to know and for some strange reason, I want to meddle.

Katrina sighs. "It's Merek," she blurts. "He's so handsome, so tall and so strong. He also smiles, and he was so good to you while His Highness was away. He's kind and handsome and he smiles at me, he doesn't pretend that I don't exist like most do in his station. It's silly, I told you," she rambles.

"I don't think it's silly, do you girls think it's silly?" I ask, looking between the other two women.

Jasmine is a bit older than Katrina and Ellyn, I don't miss the flash of pity that crosses her face for just a moment before she wipes it away.

"I don't think it's silly," she begins. "However, I do believe if you took it any farther, you would be setting yourself up for heartache. Merek is of royal blood and King Elias will no doubt arrange a marriage for him that will give a political advantage."

Katrina's shoulders slump and her chin drops in defeat. She already knows that what Jasmine is saying is true. I shouldn't be the believer that I am, or fill her with false hope, but I know that Katrina is beautiful inside and out and she should have the man of her choosing.

Instead of telling her to go for it, to throw herself at him, I wrap her in my arms and give her a hug. "The man that deserves you will come into your life and he will cherish you and the gift that you've saved for him," I whisper against the side of her ear.

Jasmine clears her throat and they get back to business, packing the rest of my things, the giggling excitement having faded for a moment. Deciding to leave them be, I head outside for a bit of sunshine and a short walk before I am forced to sit on the back of Lightning for who knows how long.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



SYBILLA

I don't pay attention to where I'm walking as I make my way around the grounds in the bright sunshine. The snow is all gone, the sun having melted the last of it just a few days ago. It's warm and the purple grass sparkles beneath my feet.

I'm thinking, completely lost in thought. I feel guilty. I should miss my parents, my family, my home and my life in Portland. It's been months and I know by now my family must realize that I'm gone. I can't imagine what they're feeling, but I don't want to go back.

Elias is here. My life with him, the love that I believe is growing between us, it is beyond anything that I ever imagined possible. This world is big, bright, and beautiful. It also feels like home, strangely enough.

Maybe it's just the fact that I'm falling in love with my husband, but everything here just feels right. My guilt consumes me though, I feel like I need to try to contact my parents, let them know that I'm okay, but I don't know how.

I run into something and stumble backward. Lifting my head, I realize that it was another person, a woman. She's watching me, her head tilted to the side.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to bump into you," I apologize.

She watches me for another moment before she gives me a small curtsy, dipping her chin then rising again. She smiles, but it's not friendly, it looks catty. I know catty, too. You don't have three sisters and not realize when a woman is about to be a bitch.

My eyes sweep her length and I suddenly feel very self-conscious. She's at least two inches taller than me and twenty pounds thinner.

Her hair is a dark chestnut and is shiny and gorgeous, her eyes such a light blue that they are almost clear. She's gorgeous. She looks a lot like my sister Birdie with her dark hair and light eyes.

Her dress is made of a pretty chiffon fabric and is a lot nicer than most of the women I've seen in town. She has some kind of standing and wealth, but I have no clue who she is as she watches me, her lips turned up, her words ready to strike.

"I've yet to see you up close," she murmurs, her voice husky and sexy.

She reaches forward and touches a piece of my hair before her hand drops to her side. "I see that he's chosen you because you are different. Your features oddly match his coat of arms. You intrigue him I'm sure, but do not think that it will last long, for the Wainwright men oft times have very short attention spans."

A warning. A bitch. Pressing my lips together, I tilt my head to the side. "And you're warning me, because?"

"I would hate for a beauty to lose her way, to be hurt. We women must stick together," she smiles, laying it on sticky sweet.

"Or perhaps you want him for yourself?" I ask.

I know my words have played right into her hand when her light-blue eyes darken and glitter with excitement. She coyly bites her bottom lip and leans forward as if to tell me a secret, making sure to show off her cleavage that's almost spilling out of her dangerously low cut bodice.

"It's true, I've had him, Your Highness. I liked what I had and I will have him again, but only when he comes to me. I would never disrespect Your Majesty by going to him."

Yup. Bitch.

"How is he feeling as of late anyway?" she adds softly. "He was at my home a few weeks ago on his way back from Irragin with his men and I had to tend him through the night. I've been overwrought with worry since he left my humble home. It was only the second

time visiting me since you've been present here. You know how men are when they have a new toy," she says, waving her hand around.

My breath is stolen from me. The second time he's been to her. He saw her first before he came back to the castle after being away from me for six weeks. He went to her first. My heart shatters into a million pieces.

There is a rumble off in the distance and then a crack of thunder. The bitch jumps, placing her hand over her spilling out breasts.

"What's your name?" I ask, trying to keep the tears that prick the backs of my eyes at bay.

"Duraina." She smiles. "King Elias and I have been friends for years, Your Highness. Though, I'm sure that he wouldn't want me to tell you any of these things, but I've seen you together and I know you hold great affection for him. He once told me that I was his happiness. That the moments alone with me were what got him through his battles."

She grins, looking off into the distance, but I know she's not thinking fondly of her moments with him, her dramatic pause is for effect, while her words sink in and take root inside of me.

"I'm sorry, I should not be telling you these things, you, of course, are his bright spot, his happiness now. His beautiful wife that will no doubt bear him fine healthy heirs to the crown. You look as though you are sturdy enough to give him a dozen sons."

My eyes widen at her brazen insult, laced in seemingly good intent, though anyone with a brain knows that she just fucking called me fat. Bitch. No, she's more than a bitch, she's a fucking cunt.

I open my mouth to respond, her eyes widen and sparkle even more and I realize instantly that a fight is what she wants. Snapping my lips closed, I give her a tight-lipped smile.

"I really should thank you, Duraina, for your words. They are most kind and I appreciate the way you delivered a warning on falling too deeply in infatuation with My King," I say sweetly, lying through my teeth. "Will you please do us the honor of sitting at our table for dinner? We'll be leaving shortly and I cannot imagine that King Elias would want to part without saying goodbye to you, since you're such an old friend."

Her eyes widen and a look of shock crosses her face before she replaces it with a grin. "I couldn't, Your Highness. I just simply couldn't," she says, taking a step back from me.

Shaking my head, I reach for her hand, taking it in mine. "I'm afraid, I must insist. If you aren't there this evening, I'll send Merek around to fetch you, I will be personally offended if you are not there."

She flinches, then covers it immediately. "Then I endeavor never to offend, Your Highness, and I will be there."

Without another word, I turn my back to her and walk away with my spine straight and my head held high. This dinner is to see just how much they mean to one another. I'll be damned if I let that man play me. I've been played enough by boyfriends, I won't allow a husband to do that to me, prophecy or not.

Walking into the castle, I make my way into my room, thankful that the girls are finished packing my trunks. There is one dress hanging in my wardrobe.

It is dark gold with black suede decorating the wrists and a six-inch border of that same black suede along the hemline. This is thick and sturdy, obviously a traveling dress. It's gorgeous and I'm excited to wear it.

Turning from the dress, I walk over to the window and look down. Elias is still in the middle of the courtyard, his men gathered around as they take turns battling one another.

They're practicing and a few hours ago, I thought it was the sexiest sight in the world, my heart practically burst from excitement at the sight of him, at the possible love that was growing inside of me.

Now, my heart aches, but not from love, from pain. Another roll of thunder followed by a crack of lightning flashes in the sky and as my tears begin to spill down my cheeks, the rain also begins to fall from the sky.

The men pick up their things and make their way inside. I stay staring outside, crying, and feeling extremely sorry for myself. I need to get it all out now, dinner will be soon and I'll be damned if I give that bitch even an inkling that she's gotten to me.

ELIAS

SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT. NOT ONLY IS THE WEATHER COMPLETELY OFF, the storm seemingly arriving out of nowhere and then pouring rain

down on us, but Sybilla has been overly happy as we wait for dinner to be served. As if she is acting falsely.

Drinks have been poured and usually she will only drink a glass while we wait for our food, she is on her third and she keeps watching the doorway, as if she is waiting for someone.

"What did you get up to today, my wife?" I ask, trying to get to the bottom of this.

Her entire body stiffens and she spins to me. "Just watched the girls finish my trunks, and then I took a stroll around the grounds, soaking up the sunshine," she says with a shrug.

Narrowing my eyes, I search hers, she is hiding something. Lifting my hand, I wrap it around the back of her neck, dipping my chin to touch my mouth to the shell of her ear.

"I will find out what you're hiding, my queen. You've gotten into trouble, you'll not hide things from me," I whisper before shifting my head and touching my mouth to her temple.

"By gods bones," I hear Merek curse.

Sybilla gasps at the same time I lift my head to see none other than Duraina standing in my receiving room. My fingers squeeze the back of Sybilla's neck and I look down into her eyes. They're wide and she bites the corner of her lip.

"What have you done?" I ask, keeping my voice menacingly low.

Her eyes narrow at me, as if she's angry, *with me*. As though she has not invited a past, *unwanted*, lover into my home. A home that Duraina has never once stepped foot inside, let alone dined at my table.

"I suppose I forgot to mention that I ran into your very good longtime *friend*, Duraina, on my walk. I've invited her to our farewell dinner."

My eyes widen, my fingers squeeze her again. "You jest, Sybilla," I hiss.

"She's here, isn't she?"

Her voice is a harsh snap and she takes a step away, forcing me to release my grip on the back of her neck. Her eyes are wild, dancing with a fire that I haven't seen from within her before. She's gorgeous in her anger. I choose to focus on her uninhibited beauty rather than my own anger toward her at this issue she's created.

I know that Duraina told her something, she's said something to hurt Sybilla, I can see it beneath the surface, festering. Sybilla won't

easily tell me what it is or she would have done that earlier. If it's a game she wishes to play, then it is a game that she will get and she will not appreciate the outcome, I'm sure of it.

"Dinner is served, Your Highness," Jarin announces.

Grinning, I ignore my wife and begin to walk toward the dining room, knowing that she will follow me. I spend the entire evening, my attention focused on everyone at the table, except for my wife.

Duraina loves the attention, she takes every chance that she can to touch my hand, my arm, and gain my undivided attention. I can feel Sybilla's angry gaze on me, her eyes could kill a man with a single look, I'm sure of it.

"I'm going to retire, I have a headache," Sybilla suddenly announces before dessert is served.

Sybilla has no headache, she is angry that Duraina's presence didn't affect me the way that she intended, whatever her intentions were, that part I am unsure of.

Turning to look up at her, I give my wife a smile. "Take your rest, Sybilla. We leave early. I'll not visit your chamber this evening so that you may rest."

Her eyes flash and I know that I've made a direct hit when she gasps. I ignore my men's grumbles around us.

"Fine," she grinds out.

Lifting my lips in a smirk, I turn toward Duraina and begin to talk again. "Elias," Sybilla calls.

With a heavy sigh, I turn back to face my wife, my now steaming angry wife. She lifts her hand and I arch a brow. It happens before I can stop her, the wench slaps me across the face.

"Have fun with your whore," she grinds out before she spins around and runs away from me.

"Elias, do not run after her, you need to be calm," Merek warns.

Standing from my seat, I look over at my cousin. "Take Duraina home," I snap before I turn and *calmly*, walk after my *sarding* wife.

There is a loud rumble of thunder and a crack of lightning as I climb the stairs after her. The rain begins to pound outside and I freeze. The weather had completely cleared before dinner. The clouds had blown away and there was not one in sight.

Sybilla has magical control over the weather.

The thought slams into me.

The witches had assured me that she held no powers. I'll be talking to them, but not before I deal with Sybilla herself. I don't even attempt to enter her door from the hallway, knowing she's most likely locked herself inside.

Instead, I walk into my own space, and make my way through my personal entrance into her chamber.

She's sitting on the edge of the bed, her face in her hands as she cries. I should leave her to her tears, but I am not going to allow her to get away with this. She did something that she should not have.

"Duraina should have never been invited to dine with us, Sybilla."

Sybilla lifts her head, her eyes wild with her anguish and anger. "You should not have gone to her before coming home, after being away from me for six weeks. You shouldn't have acted as though I was doing something wrong with Merek when you went to that *bitch* before you came home to me. There are so many things that you shouldn't have done, Elias and yet you did them and obviously with zero remorse."

I blink, then my lips twitch. Jealousy is such an ugly thing, usually. However, when Sybilla wears it, she does it beautifully.

"Do you think I went to her bed before coming to you, sweeting?" I ask. Her eyes narrow and I can't help but chuckle. "Is that what she made you believe?" She crosses her arms over her chest and turns her head from mine.

"Look at me," I demand, my voice harsher than needed. It does the trick, because her head whips around and her eyes instantly find mine. "I have not been with another since you appeared in my dungeon, Sybilla. That is no lie. My men thought that I was dying. They saw Duraina and knew that she would care for me. They were afraid that I would not make the rest of the trip home."

"Bullshit," she snaps. "She said she's known you for years, that you always go to her."

"I have known her for years and I did go to her often. I also *paid* her for my visits. My coin is why she wears nice clothes and lives in a fairly nice home without a husband of her own. My coin and other men's coin."

Sybilla's eyes widen and her lips part.

"She takes coin for men's favor. Is this not a common practice where you're from?"

"It's illegal and icky," she says.

Snorting, I sink down in front of her, my hands sliding up the outsides of her thighs. "It is not looked upon as favorable here either. However, Duraina does not have many men for which she provides this service. She is very expensive and she is angry about losing me. She was playing with you, Sybilla."

"And I bought it, hook, line, and sinker."

Leaning forward, I touch my mouth to hers. "Yes, you did, whatever the rest of that sentence means."

"I hit you," she breathes.

Grinning, I slide my tongue along her bottom lip to taste her. "You'll make it up to me, sweeting."

"I'm sorry, Elias. I... what she said, it hurt," she whispers.

"As I'm sure it would hurt if a former lover appeared in front of me as well, Sybilla. We will speak no more of Duraina or any others. What we share is between us, and I will be honest with you if that no longer works for me."

Her body jerks, although not liking my words, she nods and touches her mouth to mine. "It won't ever come to that, Elias," she whispers. "I won't let it."

Humming, I wish not to get into the discussion with her again. She may not wish for it to come to that, but I know that eventually, it will. Instead, I wish to allow her to apologize to me with her body and in turn, I will give her whatever she desires from mine.

Tomorrow we start on a long journey and in just a few weeks, war will begin and I do not wish to go into war with my wife angry at me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



SYBILLA

The girls are riding in the carriage that holds all of our trunks, but apparently the *Queen* will do no such thing, or at least that's what Elias informed me this morning when I tried to get inside of the carriage with them.

For now, my horse trots alongside us, rider-less, because Elias doesn't trust me on her back by myself. He's behind me, one hand wrapped around my waist, beneath my breasts, the other holds both reins in his grasp, though loosely.

"This is your kingdom, Sybilla, everything as far as your eye can see," he whispers against the side of my ear. His breath is warm and sends a chill up my spine.

Closing my eyes, I lean back against him, forgetting that we are in the presence of a dozen other people. His thumb strokes the side of my breast, his hard length presses against my lower back, and I can't help but let out a sigh.

"One day when we are not heading toward war, we will take our time in our travels, I'll show you all that my world has to offer, sweeting," he rasps.

Turning my head, I touch my lips to the underside of his jaw. "I've never traveled much," I admit. "I would love to see anything and everything here."

"Your sisters," he begins. "Did you live near one another?"

I shake my head, then I tell him about my sisters. It feels like it's been a lifetime rather than a few months since I've seen them. I tell him that Drusilla lives across the country from me on the other coast in Florida and we are the closest with one another. Birdie lives in the desert of Arizona, then there's Liv who lives in New York which is northeast.

"So, the four of you live in the four corners of your country?" he asks, almost in disbelief.

"Well, yeah. We're all from Portland, where I live. I'm just not as adventurous as they are. I stayed home, too scared to crash and burn," I admit.

He snorts. "You are not so scared now, sweeting. Look how adventurous you have been since landing here," he points out.

Have I been adventurous though? I don't think that I have, not really. This is my first time truly leaving the castle or the village around it, and I'm doing it with him and his guard.

It's not adventurous, but I want to be. I want to see more, experience more, do more than just hide away, too afraid to fall down, too afraid to fail.

"It is okay to be adventurous and still yearn for a guide, Sybilla. Let me be that guide for you," Elias murmurs, obviously reading my mood.

I haven't forgotten about Duraina, about the time stamp that he's put on our growing romance, about our mutual attraction. God, how can a man so infuriating, turn me on the way that he does? I don't understand it, I've never felt this way before.

My belly clenches just thinking about later tonight, wherever we stop, and making love to him again. That's what it is for me too.

I always thought the expression was gross, outdated, and it honestly just sounded weird to say and think. It doesn't anymore. It's exactly what I feel when he touches me, when he slides inside of me—making love. I didn't know the feeling of love was possible the way that it is with him.

Elias has awoken something inside of me that I didn't know existed. I've fallen in love with him, I know that it's love, but I can't tell him. He's made it very clear that he can't love me, even though Godiva and Aleida say otherwise.

Biting my bottom lip, I watch the blue leaves as we pass by all of the trees, the horses knowing the well-worn path as if they've made this trek a million times before.

"We make camp soon, but first let us break for lunch," Elias calls out, his voice booming above me.

He pulls his horse off to the side of the roadway and toward a stream. My cheeks heat just thinking about the last time he and I stopped by a stream. Elias chuckles behind me, his lips shifting to my ear.

"Not today, sweeting, but soon again I will have you in the daylight, then swim nude with you. I am unsure that I will ever get the image of you out of my mind from that day," he breathes.

"Elias," I choke.

My obvious discomfort only makes Elias laugh behind me as he dismounts. Without a word, he helps me down and steadies me on my feet. "Stay with the women, I'm going to check in with my men," he murmurs, his steel-blue eyes focused on me.

Nodding, I take a step back and start to turn from him. He doesn't let me go right away. He reaches for me, cupping my cheek as his thumb runs along my bottom lip, his eyes never leaving my own.

"My Queen," he rasps. "Why do you make me feel this way?"

"This way?"

His lips tip up into a smirk. "As if my entire world centers around you. As if I would not be able to continue on in this life without you at my side. I have never felt such a way before, it is unnerving, sweeting."

I don't tell him that it's love and it's unnerving as shit. Instead, I give him a small smile of my own. "I feel the same way, Elias," I breathe. "I feel the exact same way."

"Odd sensation," he points out.

Swallowing, I nod. "Yes, odd."

He drops his hand before he gives me a wink and jerks his chin behind me toward the women. I watch as he turns from me and walks over to his men. I continue to watch as he makes his way over to Godiva and Aleida, then I keep my eyes on them as they huddle together and talk.

There is something going on, something that he's hiding from me and as much as I want to demand he tell me, I decide against it.

Turning my back to him, I make my way over to my girls. They all look in good spirits, until my gaze flicks to Katrina. She is staring beyond us, and I know who she is staring at.

"What happened?" I ask.

Her entire body jerks. "He acts as though I no longer exist," she snaps.

"This is bad?" I ask.

She licks her lips, then shifts her gaze from him to me. "Last night, before he went to take Duraina home, he kissed me. It was lovely, no, it was the best thing I have ever felt in my entire life. Then, he deepened it and cupped my breast," she whispers, her cheeks turning flaming red.

I lean in, at the same time Ellyn and Jasmine do the same, all completely engrossed in Katrina's story.

"What happened?" I softly demand, not wishing to draw anyone's attention toward us.

Katrina's eyes water as she shakes her head. "I told him that I was pure, that I haven't done anything with any man before. He stumbled backward as if my body had lit him on fire. He turned from me and practically ran. Then he took Duraina home and he didn't come back to the castle until this morning."

"Maybe he was just late..." I attempt to offer, but Katrina shakes her head wildly.

Her bottom lip trembles and she attempts to hold her shit together. "I watched all night, waiting so that I could steal a moment and talk to him. I just wanted to tell him that I very much enjoyed his kiss. I wanted to tell him that I knew he could not be more than a bedmate with me, but that I was willing."

"Do not," I snap.

Her eyes widen. "But that is the only way that I can be with him," she argues.

Shaking my head, I reach for her hands. "Save that gift for a man who will appreciate it. A man who can and will love you. A man who will cherish you. Do not give it to a man who is looking for a little fun on the side. I am serious about this, Katrina."

Ellyn is chewing on her bottom lip and she wraps her own hands around mine, which are still holding on to Katrina's.

"I gave my gift to a man who only wanted a bedmate for the night, Katrina. He did not care, he gave me sweet words and once he

had me, he was gone before I could even roll over to my side. I never saw him again," she admits on a whisper. "Then, I met a man who actually liked me, for me, and it was beautiful with him. So much better."

"I lost mine in the bed of a pickup on prom night, it was cliché and awful," I groan.

They all stare at me, completely confused by my words. "Oh." I smile. "After a dance with my date. It was terrible, he too was gone before I could even roll over."

We're all sharing, but I notice that Jasmine doesn't say anything. Her gaze is assessing and she smiles sadly, but still doesn't speak.

"I want so badly for it to be him. Merek is so lovely, brave and strong," she whispers. "But today he will not even look me in the eye."

"He's a jackass then," I point out. "You deserve better."

Katrina shakes her head. "He is nobility, and a warrior, there is no better."

My lips twitch. "There is. A man who is strong and sweet, who cherishes you even if he is poor and common is better," Jasmine states with a nod.

I watch as she turns and walks away from our huddle. She has a story. She's not ready to share it maybe, but there is a story there and I'm so nosey and dying to know what it is. Today isn't the time to ask her though, one day, when she's ready, she'll tell me.

Shifting my attention back to Katrina, I notice that she's watching Jasmine as well. "She hides things, but I think she must because I have a feeling what she hides is painful," she whispers softly.

"I think you could be right," I agree.

"So, you'll be ignoring Merek, then?" Ellyn asks.

Katrina's gaze shifts from Ellyn to me, then lifts beyond me and I know that she is looking at Merek. Something crosses her features and I realize that it's determination. "I'll be ignoring him," she snaps.

"Good girl," I whisper.

Though, I realize that she is possibly much stronger than I am, because I don't think I could ignore Elias, not even if I tried. I've fallen in love with him and I have a feeling that he already knows it and he knows that I will never deny him anything—not a damn thing.

ELIAS

GUIDING GODIVA AND ALEIDA AWAY FROM THE REST OF THE CROWD, I place my fists on my hips and look down at them. To their credit, they look innocent enough, but I know these two old witches have to sense Sybilla's powers.

"She holds magic and you have not told me, why?" I demand.

Aleida blinks, her gaze shifting behind me, then back to meet my own. "I did not sense it within her, Your Highness," she breathes.

"Until?"

"Yesterday. The weather, it wasn't charged by nature, by the gods of nature. It was magical. I wasn't sure if it was her or not. Why do you think that it is?" she asks.

Clearing my throat, I debate not telling either of them about how I discovered that my wife holds magic. I know not of what this means for the prophecy, but I know that it has something to do with it.

"We had a disagreement. She became emotional, she cried, and I heard the thunder, the rain and saw the lightning. It wasn't the first time, earlier in the day I'd found out that she became emotionally upset and I predict that's when the first rainstorm came from nowhere."

"Gods," Godiva breathes. "If her emotions wield the weather, she is strong, stronger than I imagined possible. I cannot sense her powers in the slightest, Your Highness."

"How?" I demand. "You two told me you could sense them. Have you lifted the enchantment on suppressing them?" I demand.

Aleida shakes her head. "The enchantment is still intact, Your Majesty. She is stronger than that, it is something I have never witnessed before."

"By gods bones, what are we dealing with?" I demand.

Godiva reaches for me, her frail hand wraps around mine and she squeezes. "Your bride and her magic can be a boon. You must not think of it as a curse, you must think of the good that it can bring."

I almost snort, wondering how to make it work in my favor. If my farmers' crops suffer, then all I have to do is make Sybilla cry for water. It is too great a burden. I do not wish to make her sad, to see

her cry. It hurt my heart, twisted it and caused it to ache seeing the hurt on her face, I never want her to be sad another day in her life.

"You waver, Your Majesty. Do not. This will be a boon. We have no choice, but to watch the prophecy unfold the way that it is meant to. We cannot stop our lives, or the lives of the people around us and hold our breaths to see what will happen with your queen or her sisters. We must just watch and wait, be ready when needed."

Looking over my shoulder at Sybilla as she holds the hand of her handmaid, I shake my head. "If she is with child, how does this magic affect the babe?" I ask.

Aleida smirks. "My son holds no magic in his body. He was born a fat healthy babe, and as any proud mother, I do think that he is smart and handsome as well," she boasts.

Smirking, I dip my chin. "But she is not of this world, and she holds magic, this cannot be normal... she cannot be..."

"Quiet," Godiva snaps. "Your queen did not have a choice in coming here. This was thrust upon her. She has handled everything with the grace and courage of a true queen. She is your match, Your Highness. She is bound to her true love and he is bound to her, meaning you are bound to her."

Her gaze bores into mine, her eyes beginning to swirl with purple and black in a way that is so unnatural, it is unnerving. I try to take a step back, but she lifts her hand and presses it against my chest.

A warm sensation fills me from the inside out as she mumbles some words that I do not understand. Then, as suddenly as she began, she drops her hand and everything is back the way that it was.

"What have you done?" I grind out.

Godiva smirks. "You shall open your heart to your queen, and I know eventually you would do so on your own. We don't have time to wait, Your Highness. I just made things a bit easier for you."

"How?" I demand.

Godiva and Aleida both watch me for a moment, silently. Then Aleida speaks. "You are guarded. Your past hurts have been diminished inside of you. The pain from your father, from his treatment, it is no longer there, is it not?"

Lifting my hand to my chest, I rub the center, my gaze focused on my boots. I allow myself to think about my father, about his treatment not only of me, but also my mother.

I think about how he betrayed Bunafi, for a traitor.

How he gave away my beloved country, my birthright, so that he could access her *anchovy* as he pleased, as if a king could not find that anywhere he liked.

The pain that usually accompanies those thoughts, the shame and embarrassment at being blood-related to that man, it doesn't fill me as it usually does.

Shifting my gaze from my feet, I meet Godiva's gaze. She smiles, reaching for my hand and gives me a squeeze with her bony fingers. "It was a burden too great that you carried, Your Highness."

"A burden that I should not be rid of. For how can ensure that I not repeat the past if I do not feel the consequences of that past on my shoulders weighing me down?"

Godiva shakes her head. "You will never forget, Your Highness, I did not take your memories away from you. Plus, you are not him, therefore you will not repeat your father's mistakes. You do not need to feel as if you betrayed Bunafi when you have done more for this country than any other man I have ever known."

Godiva releases my hand and without another word she and Aleida turn their backs to me and walk away, heading toward the creek, no doubt to refresh themselves so that we may return to the rest of our journey for the day.

Perhaps they are right. Maybe I don't need to feel the pain of my father's betrayal weighing me down. I admit that I feel lighter than I have in decades. Though, I wonder if it's a lightness that entails considerable cost.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



SYBILLA

Travel log.
Day four.
My ass is killing me.

Not just a little bit either. It hurts in a way I didn't think possible. It doesn't matter if I'm standing, sitting, lying down, or sleeping.

It. Still. Hurts.

Elias and I made love the first night on this trip, since then I've been too exhausted and sore to even entertain the idea of his hands and dick anywhere near me. He must sense my absolute horrendous pain, because he hasn't even attempted to touch me in three days.

"We will be there on the morrow's eve, as long as we continue to ride throughout today and wake up at first light tomorrow," he explains, his mouth so close to the shell of my ear that it startles me.

I wasn't paying attention to anything, rather looking ahead at this huge mountain in the distance. The mountain is so dark gray that it is almost black with what looks like pink tips.

"I've never seen anything like that before," I say, lifting my hand and pointing toward the mountain.

There's a moment of silence before Elias speaks. "You do not have mountains in your world?" he asks, sounding confused.

Smiling, I look back to him, my eyes finding his as he dips his chin to look into my face. "We have them," I say softly. "They are usually green or brown, in some areas they're gray because they are rocky. But they look nothing like this, these are hauntingly beautiful."

Elias hums, his eyes searching mine and he lifts his lips with a twitch. "You're hauntingly gorgeous, sweetie," he whispers, lifting his arm and cupping my breast. "I ache for you, my queen," his voice rumbles.

Suddenly, my ass doesn't hurt anymore, instead I ache for him too, painfully. My stomach clenches as I let out a whimper of pain. Sucking my lips between my teeth, the sensation of need overwhelms me to the point where my entire body hurts.

"Something is wrong," I breathe.

Elias nods, his lips pressed into a flat straight line. I'm vaguely aware of him pulling back on the reins and shouting something out, but I can't hear his words as blood roars in my ears. He dismounts before he roughly pulls me off of Storm.

Without a word, he throws me over his shoulder, like a sack of potatoes, and marches away from our group. The forest grows thicker with each step that he takes and I hear the roar of the river that cancels out the roar of the blood pounding in my ears before I'm finally sliding down his body and placed on my feet.

I'm not grounded for long, Elias picks me up by the backs of my thighs and presses me against the trunk of a tree, my legs instantly wrap around his waist. Reaching for my own skirts, as if I'm not in my right mind, I lift them up my legs as far as they'll reach.

When I feel the head of his cock press against my center, my eyes find his black glittering ones and I give him a small smile. "Please, it hurts," I whisper.

He leans forward with his lips touching mine before he drives himself inside of me to the root. "This pain, it is not just from the witch's spell," he murmurs against my lips.

I let out a sigh of relief as he stretches me. Slipping my tongue out, I taste his lips which emanates a growl from deep in his throat. His hands wrap around my waist, holding me at the same time his hips press my back against the tree.

"It's something bigger, isn't it?" I breathe, needing him to move.

He hums, pulling out and slamming back inside. I can feel the bark of the tree scrape my back and I know that it's messing up my hair, but I don't care. I need this more than he could imagine. I'm not going to be able to ride another mile until we're both satisfied.

Elias' pelvis grinds against mine, his mouth still touching mine, his eyes glittering more than I've ever seen before.

"It is the gods, Sybilla. The gods blessed this union, knowing that we are part of the prophecy. They bind us together with a need that is stronger than our own. A need that fills us from the inside out, a need that will result in something so much bigger than just us."

Lifting my hand, I wrap my fingers around the base of his neck, squeezing and wanting to clarify that this need that is bigger, it's love, but I don't want to scare him off. He pulls out and plunges back inside of me, expertly.

I gasp, loving the way his warmth fills me, over and over. Loving him. Leaning back slightly, I want to watch his glittering eyes as he takes me. His jaw is clenched, his teeth grinding together as he concentrates on taking me, his nostrils flaring with each stroke of his cock.

"Take me, Elias. Own me," I beg.

His lips touch mine in just a simple brush before he speaks. "I already do, sweeting. Before I ever laid eyes on you, I owned you."

Without another word, his tongue slips into my mouth, twisting, tangling and stroking me at the same time his control slips and he pounds into me. My back is going to be torn up, my dress as well, but it doesn't matter.

All that matters is my king is inside of me, relieving the ache and pain that had been building inside of my body—inside of his as well. Standing on the edge, I can almost see myself ready to fall over into the abyss of pleasure.

My legs begin to tremble, my pussy clenching down around him, trying to keep his cock buried inside of me, I rip my mouth from his and I cry out as I come.

His roar follows shortly, as he's burying his cock deep inside of me and his face is against my neck, his release fills my body. I let out a sigh as I feel his cum inside of me, relieving the pain from within.

Wrapping my arms around his shoulders, I clench my thighs around his waist to keep him pressed against me and inside of me.

He lets out a groan, his breath fanning my neck before his lips touch my skin.

"Sybilla," he rasps.

"My King," I breathe.

He hums. "Yes. Your king, your only," he mutters.

I don't tell him that he is indeed my only, in so many different ways. The only man I've ever felt this way about. The only man that I have allowed myself to fall in love with. The only man who looks at me as though I am precious. The only man that I would give up my entire world for, even my sisters.

Only him.

Only my king.

ELIAS

I DON'T MISS THE LOOKS THAT THE MEN GIVE ME AS I GUIDE SYBILLA back to our group. The horses are being watered and fed, far away from where we've just consumed one another. Pressing my hand to the small of her back, I gently shove her toward her women.

She looks back at me, giving me a small smile and those eyes of hers watch me for a brief moment before she turns toward her women and makes her way near them.

I watch her go, my lips twitching at how mussed up her hair is, how her dress is a bit worse for wear, and I think it's the best sight I've laid eyes on in a long while.

"You know, it's a shame that we cannot just have our way with her pretty little handmaids, especially when you go off and your voices echo around us. My cock aches, brother," Rowan practically whines.

"They are servants, not slaves, so no you will not just have your way with them," I snap at the same time I hear Merek growl. "Why don't you settle down and get a woman of your own, then, Rowan?"

Rowan shakes his head with a smirk. "I do not plan on ever doing that," he snaps. "I like my water supply to flow, not be dammed and we all know wives have a tendency to cut the flow off, and frequently. Always complaining of headaches, no thank you, Your Highness," he snorts.

Merek chuckles and I follow his lead. "It did not sound like your *King* is suffering from a blocked flow," Merek points out.

Rowan leans forward. "It is new, you're possessed by some prophecy of the gods, and you're a king. This is vastly different than a warrior knight."

"This is true, Elias. Vastly different," Merek points out, though he sounds distracted.

Flicking my gaze to him, I notice that he's staring at something behind me. Turning my head, I look over my shoulder and follow his gaze. He's watching the white-haired handmaid, I believe her name is Katrina.

I jerk my chin to Rowan and Asher who are standing with us and thankfully they walk away leaving me alone with my cousin.

"You want her, cousin?" I guess.

Merek's head jerks and his eyes glance around before they connect with mine. "Matters not, Elias," he brushes off.

"Why is that?"

I watch as my cousin rocks back on his heels, putting his hands behind his back. "She is untouched. *Pure*. At her age, with her beauty, I assume it is for good reason. I cannot take that from her, no matter how badly I want it."

Looking over my shoulder, I spy the pretty maid. She is a sight with her white hair and piercing green eyes. She's young, but not too much so, probably around twenty-four years. She flicks her gaze over to Merek, and I watch as pain etches her features, she feels longing for him as well.

"Do you want her because she holds great beauty or do you want her because you have feelings inside of your heart for her?" I ask.

Merek's brows draw together. "You of all people know that it matters not, Elias. My bride will not be common just as yours was not. Though, Sybilla holds no royal titles, she was chosen by the gods and that trumps anything else."

Nodding, I agree with his words. A bride bound to you by the gods means more than any man-created title imaginable. However, I cannot let my cousin's wishes and desires go completely unfulfilled.

"If you are so determined to marry for politics, who says she cannot be your paramour?"

Merek's eyes flash with anger. "My father was no better than yours, Elias. In fact, I think mine was worse as he paraded his

women *in front* of my mother, forced her to suffer them at his dining table night and day. I would never, not to a woman that I'd given my vows to."

"Even if you held deep affection for the woman as you obviously are forming with this maid?"

Merek shakes his head. "I would not."

"You would rather suffer? You would rather watch her marry another, carry his babes, suffer as she cares for him in a way where she would and could care for you instead?"

Merek lets out a sigh, he takes a step back and I watch as he runs his hand through his hair. "I would rather the man that could be hers, be wholly hers. If she were my paramour, I could never give her all of me and at the same time, I could not give my wife all of me either."

Lifting my hand, I clap my cousin on the shoulder. I want to smile, tell him how proud I am of him. He is a good man, the exact opposite of our fathers.

He will be a good husband, a better father, and since I am the one who will decide his fate when it comes to that marriage, he will be surprised to know that if it is the white-haired maid he wants as his own, I will agree to the union.

He's not ready for that information yet. I want to watch this unfold, see if he falls in love with more than just her rare beauty and instead, falls for the heart that beats beneath the surface.

Turning around, I find the eyes of my own bride. Holding her gaze, I realize that I've done just that. I've fallen for the heart beneath her beautiful surface. She is sweet and kind, her body welcoming to me, but more importantly, her smile and heart even more so.

Yes, she's melted the iron around my heart. She has caused me to feel. The witches may have lifted the burden of my father's mistakes, but Sybilla has made me feel again and that is something that no witch could make happen with a spell. Only the woman bound to me by the gods could do that.

Only Sybilla.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN



ELIAS

Tugging Sybilla closer to my chest, I lean in and whisper against the shell of her ear. “Welcome to, Beallennau, sweeting. This will be home for a while.”

Lifting my gaze to the castle in front of us, I can’t help but smile. I wonder what she thinks. It is newer than the castle in Aerilon, though not quite as large.

It is one of my favorite holdings, and conquering it was a great joy when I was finally able to claim it as my own again, bringing it back into my family name. Sybilla gasps at the sight in front of her, and I can’t help but feel my pride bubble to the surface as my chest puffs out a bit.

“It’s stunning, Elias. I’ve never seen anything like it before,” she breathes.

There are mountains behind it, protecting its flanks from intruders. The only way anyone could breach the back of the castle would be through magic, or unmatched knowledge of the land and how to navigate the mountainous range.

Even then, some of the most knowledgeable experts have perished trying to do just that. This is another reason why Sybilla will be held here while I fight a short distance away in Llyne. She will be

protected in the castle of Beallenau. As well-protected as she can be without me standing right at her side, that is.

"You will be safe here," I inform her.

Sliding my hand from her ribs down to her belly, I press firmly against her there. Closing my eyes, I wish, not for the first time, for my child to be growing within her. I'm not sure why it is of such importance to me, but right now, it feels imperative that she is with child.

I'm not sure why this need has filled me, why it is no longer a want, but a downright need to have her heavy with my child, but it is.

Maybe it had to do with the gods, the prophecy, the witches' spells, or a combination of all of them, but I need Sybilla completely bound to me in all ways possible.

Guiding our caravan toward the castle doors, we have to travel single file on the stone pathway that leads to the entrance. I'm glad to see that the bridge has been drawn and the gates closed.

Glancing down, I notice that the moat is half full, a good amount to ensure that nobody will be able to climb the sharp and jagged rocks that the castle is built upon.

I'm sure that my caretaker received my missive to prepare for war. Also, I know that my soldiers should have already arrived by now, which means this typically quiet holding is probably bustling with unusual activity.

The gate guard sees me and calls out. "Oy, King Elias." Lifting my hand, I give him a small wave. "Is that your new wee queen?" he shouts.

"Queen Sybilla." I chuckle, causing her to jump in front of me at the volume of my voice.

"Welcome home, Yer Majesties," he calls as the gate begins to open and the bridge lowers.

Lifting my hand again, I wave to the gatekeeper as I guide Storm toward the now lowered bridge. Once we're inside of the fortified structure, I see that I am correct. The castle is abuzz with busy people.

Once we're in the center, I dismount from Storm and help Sybilla down. A few of the castle servants appear and I turn toward the boy who stands, ready to take Storm's reins from me.

"Have some men fill the Queen's bath with warm water," I bark.

The boys dip their heads before they turn and take Storm with them to the stables. The handmaids appear from the carriage and I turn to them as well.

"Your mistress needs a warm bath and a decent meal. See that she is tended to."

They dip their chins and curtsy. Turning from them, I take a step away in order to talk to my army when a hand wraps around my wrist and tugs me.

I stop, irritated, I do not have time for this. War is upon us and we leave in only a few days, I need to be briefed by my men.

"I will see you later?" Sybilla asks, her voice full of a million unasked questions, no doubt she will ask them later, as is her way.

Dipping my chin, I jerk my head. "You will. I must go now."

She smiles, almost sadly, but does not release my hand. "I will be waiting for you, Elias," she whispers.

Taking a step closer, I wrap my hand around her waist and tug her against my front. Lowering my face, I touch my lips to hers before I whisper. "You'll wait naked for me, My Queen. Before I leave for this battle, I will have all of you," I growl.

"Do you love me?" she breathes.

I hum. I could tell her that I do and it would not be a lie. However, she wants a confessed true love and I'm not sure I can verbalize those words, now or ever. It makes me far too vulnerable.

"Your heart knows that answer without me saying the words," I inform her.

She smiles against my mouth, her tongue sneakily sliding out to touch my top lip. "I believe my heart does. I want to hear you say it, Elias. I want to hear your words."

"You may never..."

Sybilla doesn't move away from me as I expect after hearing my words. Instead her arms wrap around my shoulders and she holds me against her. "I don't believe that, not in the slightest. I will hear those words. I will hear your confession of love and only then will you have all of me, inside out."

"By gods bones," I curse. "How can I go to my men with my cock standing so stiff and alert?" I growl.

She lets out a small giggle and takes a step back, though she does not release her hold on me immediately. One of her hands leaves my shoulder, her finger extending and I close my scarred eye as she

trails her finger over my scar, something that I would never allow another soul to do, ever.

"Go, My Beautiful King. Lead your men, check on them, then come to my bed," she whispers.

"My Queen, the siren," I say, grinning like the lovesick fool that I am.

Taking a step back, I wrap my hand around the side of her neck and squeeze her gently. "Rest, soak, relax and fill your belly, Sybilla. I will be back shortly," I call out before I turn my back to her and head toward my men.

I can hear clanking of steel in the distance and with my closest warriors, my brothers, flanking my sides we head out to see how our troops fare before the battle that lies ahead of us.

SYBILLA

I STAND NUDE, MY GIRLS AROUND ME AND I'M NO LONGER SHY OR embarrassed by my nudity, at least not with them. The water is hot, with scents of vanilla and something floral that I catch a hint of as I sink down into the large tub.

This castle has a bathroom, a real one, or at least more of a bathroom than I've seen before. There is tile-like flooring, a drain, a tub, a basin with water and a pitcher along with a small mirror on the wall, and a small closet that I know, unfortunately, is an outhouse porta potty situation.

A tray is brought to my side with fruit, bread, cheese, and meat displayed neatly along with a goblet of fruity wine.

I moan as soon as the wine touches my tongue. It's even better than what I drank in Aerilon. It's almost like a spiked fruit sparkling seltzer, simply amazing.

"You know that I have to ask," I begin, turning my gaze to Katrina who is busying herself with soaps that I know she's going to use to wash my incredibly dirty and tangled hair.

She doesn't look up to me, she doesn't even stop what she's doing when she begins to speak. "Merek has left me alone," she whispers.

"Alone except for his heated gazes, the longing ones that if I were not careful, may ignite my own undergarments. I do not know how Katrina resists." Ellyn giggles.

Katrina lifts her gaze, narrowing her eyes at her friend. "Do not look at him so," she snaps.

Ellyn's lips turn up into a large smile. "Give in to his advances. You'll both feel better, and you'll both loosen up, your faces are both screwed up and you're wound so tight, it's a wonder you can walk."

"Ellyn," Jasmine admonishes.

"What?"

Jasmine shakes her head and reaches for Katrina's hand. "You do not give in to that man unless you want to. Only when you decide it's what you want, not to make him happy, not for anyone or anything, but yourself."

"I want him, but I know that I will want to keep him. Merek is the kind of man that I have fantasized about my entire life and I can never keep him," she whispers.

My heart aches for her. It ached because just a few months ago I was her. I dreamt of finding a man, a good man, a strong one. Someone who was kind, but firm.

Someone who would see me and without a shadow of a doubt know that I was meant for him. A man who could make my body sing as loudly as my heart.

It hits me, like nothing I've ever experienced before. It's like I imagine a shot of lightning would feel. My eyes close and then they open wide and I gasp for breath. Jasmine, Katrina, and Ellyn are right next to me. Taking my hands and holding on to me.

"Do you need a healer?" Jasmine shouts.

Shaking my head, I gasp for air again and inhale a deep breath. "Something isn't right," I whisper.

"What do you feel?" Ellyn asks, her voice calm.

I shake my head, my entire body trembling. "It's Elias. I don't know, something is going to happen, I just don't know what but I feel pain in my stomach and it's not like anything I've ever felt before."

"Get the witches," Jasmine barks toward Katrina and Ellyn.

My stomach rolls again before a sharp pain explodes inside of me a second time. I cry out and I hear Jasmine shout somewhere in the

distance. I feel my back arch, I pinch my eyes closed and color bursts from behind my lids.

"By the gods," I hear a voice.

"Grip her arms, keep her from floating off," another voice shouts. "Lock the door."

"It hurts," I whimper.

A hand presses to the center of my chest. A warming sensation fills me and it immediately calms my body. I let out a breath as the pain ebbs. My muscles relax and I turn my head, opening my eyes to see Godiva's swirling gaze focused on me as her lips move rapidly.

"What happened?" Jasmine's voice rasps.

"There was a change. I don't know what, I could not see it. I could only sense it. The change, I'm not sure is good. I could sense another in her bloodline had made its way to this world, though I do not know who or where she has landed."

Wrapping my hand around her wrist, she's still pressing her palm against the center of my chest. "One of my sisters is here?"

Godiva nods her head, her eyes focused on me and no longer swirling with her magic spells. "I know not where, Your Highness. I cannot sense her whereabouts, only that she has crossed over somewhere in our world."

I close my eyes in a very slow blink. "What is the change that you sense, is Elias okay?"

She gives me a sad smile. "I do not know. I only know that there is a change."

"It has to do with him. I'm scared," I whisper. "This war, it must have to do with the outcome."

Aleida, who has been quiet, takes a step forward, her gaze flicks to mine and she sternly holds it. "Your King is the strongest warrior in this part of the world. He is the son of a traitor, many people thought that he would be like his father, but he's already proven that he is not like the man who sired him. He will not leave you, Your Highness. He will always prevail."

Her words are beautiful, the way she truly believes them is as well. But I know that it is not always the way life works out and the impending doom that I feel, the pain as though something was being ripped from inside of me, it was more intense than when Godiva cast the binding spell.

"Let's get your hair washed, get you all cleaned up," Katrina's shaky voice suggests.

Holding the witches' gazes, I arch a brow, but they give me nothing. If they sense the same doom that I do, then they are not going to tell me. Slowly, they back away and leave me alone with my girls.

Ellyn forces me to eat and drink while Katrina washes my hair. None of us say anything else the rest of the afternoon. Once I'm bathed, Katrina takes her time to dry and arrange my hair, while Ellyn and Jasmine unpack my trunks in the wardrobe.

Quietly, they leave me alone to wait for my king. With only a robe tied around my body, I walk over to the window and glance down. It's so much different than Aerilon, but this seems like more of a country home and I find that I like the peace.

There are people bustling around, but they are busy preparing for war, on a normal day, without impending doom and destruction, I think that this would be a nice place to relax and unwind.

Though, I'm wondering if I'll ever be back. I feel as though something very bad is on the horizon. If Elias is taken from me, if he is ripped from me, I have no doubt that the pain I experienced earlier will not hold a candle to what I will feel.

Closing my eyes, I let out a sigh. Warm hands slide around my waist and I feel lips touch the side of my ear. My entire body relaxes as I melt against the warm body at my back.

"You're not naked, my queen," his voice murmurs.

My lips turn up into a small smile as my hands wrap around the tops of his at my waist. "I am beneath the robe. I didn't know when you would join me," I admit.

His fingers toy with the sash that is tied around my waist. "I am here now," he breathes as he unties the sash and opens the robe.

My entire body trembles in anticipation, the pain and fear that I felt only moments ago completely vanishes as my king's hands come into contact with my naked flesh. His mouth touches the side of my neck, his tongue tastes me and he shifts his hips so that I can feel his hard length against my ass.

"Come to bed, Sybilla. Send me off with a night that I will never forget."

Turning around in his arms, I lift my own to wrap around the back of his neck. "You're leaving tomorrow."

“My men were prepared. More so than I thought. We leave at first light.”

My entire body trembles, but this time for a different reason. I open my mouth to say something, to beg him to stay. My words die because he slants his head to the side, and touches his lips to mine, filling my mouth with his tongue.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT



ELIAS

Wrapping my fist around her hair, I tug her head back. Sybilla lets out a long exhausted moan as I sink inside of her body, again. Her body and mine are slick with sweat, my balls ache, her *queynte* no doubt does as well. We've been at this for hours, only breaking between to regain our strength.

I'm unsure of when I'll have her again, how long I'll be in Llyne fighting, so I take my fill from my wife, hopefully planting my heir inside of her as I do. One of my hands is wrapped around her hip, holding her up while the other holds up her head by gripping her hair.

Pumping into her body, I lean over and touch my mouth to her forehead. "You are a sight to see, Sybilla," I rasp.

"I can't come again," she whimpers.

I grunt, slamming inside of her a bit harder, causing her body to shift forward. "You can. You will, because I demand it," I snap.

She tries to shake her head, her eyes wide and her lips parted. "It's too much. Too many times," she whispers sounding weak.

Pulling out of her, I turn her over, cradling her in my arms before I crawl on my knees toward the headboard. Her head lolls to the side as I place her back against the wooden headboard of the bed.

Sliding my hands down the insides of her thighs, I spread her wide. "Feet flat on the bed, sweeting," I gently demand.

She does as I ask, her lids heavy as she watches me, her breathing coming out in short pants. Crawling between her spread thighs, I guide my cock inside of her, wrapping my hand around the back of her neck before I jerk her closer to me.

Dipping my chin, I take her bottom lip between my teeth and gently tug on her flesh. "Elias," she whimpers as I begin to move inside of her.

"Come again, My Queen. I need you," I whisper against her mouth.

"I can't."

Grinning, I slide my tongue along the seam of her lips. "One hand on the headboard, the other between your legs," I murmur.

She shakes her head, but doesn't protest. She lifts one of her hands, turning it to grip the rail of the headboard. The other hand she slips between her sweat-soaked breasts and hisses as soon as she makes contact with her swollen nub.

"Now, make yourself sing for me, Sybilla," I groan.

Keeping my mouth on hers, I pound into my queen. I take from her, more than I should. Burying my face against her neck, I taste her sweetness while I continue to take, my guilt ebbing as I search for my release.

I feel her flutter around me and she gasps before she lets out a wail that if I didn't know she was reaching her peak, I would think that she was being hurt. I don't stop, my own climax hard on the heels of hers.

"Who has just made you come, Sybilla?" I grind out.

"My King," she says through trembling lips.

One. Two. Three. Four strokes and I bury myself deep inside of her with a roar of my own against her neck. I stay with my chest pressed against hers, one hand at the back of her head, the other holding one of her thighs open as I attempt to catch my breath.

"Elias," she breathes.

"My Queen," I mutter, lifting my head from her neck as I look into her golden gaze.

She lifts one of her hands and as she so often does, she extends her finger and traces my scar down my eye. I don't mind because

she's never looked at that scar with pity. She's admired it with curiosity, but never pity. Now she looks upon it with longing.

"Sybilla?"

She presses her lips together before she releases them. "Must you join them?" she asks.

Frowning, I stay buried inside of her, but search her eyes for an answer as to why she's asking this of me. She sighs, her finger tracing my scar a second time.

"I have a bad feeling about all of this, that's all."

Nodding, I touch my lips to hers in a brief kiss. "Godiva and Aleida visited me before I came up to you," I admit.

"They told you everything?" she asks.

I hum, running my nose alongside her own. "They told me that you experienced a pain, that they sensed one of your sisters had breached our world, that she was possibly somewhere, but they had no idea where. They also said that you had a bad feeling within you about me and this war."

"And you're still going?"

Smiling, I touch my mouth to hers again before I trail my lips down her neck, sucking on her tender flesh every so often.

"I would not be the man that I am if I did not go, Sybilla. I am not weak, I am not a coward, and I do not fear death except to leave you alone and possibly with child," I explain.

One of her hands slides through the strands of my hair and she tugs my head back, forcing me to look into her golden glittering gaze. I should be angry with her for the move, but I cannot, as it is beautiful to see her passion and protection rising. She will be a good mother to our babe.

"It is never weak to protect yourself, Elias."

Smirking, I tug her head back slightly by the grip that I still have in her hair. "Nay, it is not weak to protect yourself or your family. It is, however, weak to hide like a cowering animal in the face of danger. The man who rules Llyne is evil. He treats his subjects deplorably. He taxes them and does not care that they cannot feed their families. He does not deserve to rule a household, let alone a country. My father made a selfish deal when he gave that man our land and I will right his wrong."

Sybilla runs her teeth along her bottom lip. "Why do you have to be so damn good, Elias? Why can't you save yourself from whatever

is about to happen? I know that it is something. Something terrible," she whispers.

Releasing my hold on her hair, I slip from her body and gather her in my arms as I lie us down in the bed, tucking her close to my side.

"All will be well, sweeting. The gods would not give you to me, would not guide us through different worlds to find one another and then rip us apart. The prophecy will be fulfilled and whether good or evil comes from that, we will be standing side-by-side throughout it all."

There is a period of silence while I run my fingers down her back and hip, then up again, over and over, trying to memorize every square inch of her soft flesh before I must leave, so very shortly.

"I hope you're right, Elias," she whispers.

"Do not become over-emotional and ruin the good weather we seem to be having." I grin, looking down at her.

She lifts up slightly, her eyes narrowing. "I can't help that," she snaps.

"I jest, sweeting. A light drizzle of sadness when I leave you would not be amiss, for I know that I will be feeling sad as well. I do not wish to leave your side or your warm, soft body."

Sybilla leans forward and touches her mouth to mine. "I should be offended that it's only my body you don't want to leave, but I have to admit, I don't want your hard body to leave me either." She laughs softly.

Sliding my tongue around her mouth, tasting her, I let out a grunt as I release the kiss. "The gods created you for me, Sybilla. I am never leaving you."

She sighs and closes her eyes as she nestles against me. "I love you, Elias," she exhales.

I know not if she realizes she's said the words aloud. My heart hammers against my chest and I close my eyes and let those three little words soak in. My arms flex around her, holding her close to me. I love her more than words can express. More than I could ever admit.

SYBILLA

"IT IS VERY BEAUTIFUL HERE," ELLYN WHISPERS.

Jasmine, Ellyn, Katrina, and I are standing at the top of the castle steps. The men are finishing packing their belongings, arming themselves with their personal weapons of choice.

They are all going, all but a few soldiers that I do not know, who will guard the outer walls of the castle. I won't have Rowan and Henry to watch over me anymore, nor Merek to stay at my side and attempt to teach me how to ride Lightning.

My stomach clenches with fear of the unknown. "It is lovely," I whisper, never taking my eyes off Elias.

He's dressed in a black tunic that is trimmed in gold. His tights are also black and his boots are a dark brown suede. He reaches for a chainmail long-sleeved shirt and with the help of Rowan and Lief, they guide it on over his head.

The other men don their own chainmail shirts, then I watch as they all wrap a chainmail skirt around their waists.

My mouth goes dry at the sight of him in part of his battle regalia. I know from history books that he probably has some other armor, but honestly, I don't want to see it, ever. I want to pretend that he's going on some other mission, not into war.

As if he can feel my gaze focused on him, Elias lifts his head, his eyes collide with mine. He finishes doing something to Storm, then turns to me and marches up the stairs. Without a word, he wraps me in his arms and pulls me against his rough chainmail shirt.

"I will return to you, My Queen," he rasps.

Pressing my lips together, I will myself not to cry. My tears can fall, and no doubt will, after he's gone. I don't want him to think I'm weak, not right now. Elias lowers his head and rests his forehead against my own.

I feel his breath wash over my face and my eyelids automatically flutter closed. "I will return," he says, this time his voice is rougher, harsher and I know that his emotions are just as heightened as my own.

Then his hand shifts between us and he presses his palm against my stomach. "I will return for my bride and my babe," he breathes.

"Elias," I exhale.

His forehead lifts from mine, his eyes are glittering black as he searches my face, his hand still pressed against my belly. "A vow,

My Queen. I will not die in this war. I have too much waiting here for me. You and this unborn child."

"I'm not..." I say, but then my eyes widen.

He smirks, dipping his chin before his lips brush against mine. "I know a woman's body, the way it is supposed to work. I was waiting for you to realize that you were indeed with child. You were taking too long," he mutters against my mouth.

Lifting my arms, I wrap them around his shoulders and push up on the balls of my feet. Slanting my head to the side, I press my lips against his.

"You have to come back to me now, Elias. There is no choice. I am not staying in this world with no epidurals and hospitals to deliver a baby without you by my side," I snap.

He lets out a small chuckle, shifting his hands to my hips and grips me tightly. "I will be there, My Queen."

Elias kisses me, thoroughly, his tongue sweeps through my mouth fucking me right there in the broad daylight. My nipples pebble as I push them against his chest, whimpering with need.

Slowly, he breaks the kiss, nibbling on my bottom lip before he slowly releases me. I feel the loss of him from my heart outward. He lifts his hand, his index finger extends and touches my temple, then he slides his finger down the side of my face, my jaw, and traces my lips.

"Stay safe. Do not venture far. Never go anywhere alone. I will return. The prophecy will be fulfilled, whatever it is, Sybilla. I will not die in this battle," he rasps.

Slipping my tongue out, I taste the skin of his finger and watch as his eyes glitter even more. Smiling, I nod my head slightly. "Come back to me, My King."

Dropping his hand from my face, he gives me a stern nod then turns and walks away. I stay, my feet planted as he mounts Storm. Sitting with his spine straight, his eyes find mine, his reins in hand, he grins.

He's the sexiest man I've ever seen, sitting astride his horse, covered in medieval chainmail, his hair messy from my hands, his scar along his eye. It's all too much and I want to beg him to stay, to take me back to bed and to devour me.

He lifts his chin with a jerk before he and his six men leave us standing, watching, waiting with our hearts cracking as they disap-

pear. Turning to look at my girls, my eye catches Katrina's profile.

She has a single tear falling down her cheek. Her gaze is focused on one rider and one rider only. Stepping closer to her, I link my arm with hers.

"They will be okay," I whisper.

"He kissed me last night," she admits with a wheeze.

"And?" I chance asking.

"Just a goodbye kiss, but it felt like a farewell forever kiss. I didn't care for it," she murmurs.

Tugging her a bit closer to my side, I slip my arm from hers and wrap it around her small waist instead.

"Maybe this will give him some time to think. If he wants you, he will stop at nothing to have you, Katrina. He will move mountains for you."

"I'm afraid that even if he wanted me, he would not even try for fear that he could not keep me."

"Even that will not stop a man in love."

I know that I am right. Elias does not know if he will keep me, if I am going to stay in this world or not. Yet, he wasted no time taking me to bed, marrying me—I place my hand against my belly—and knocking me up. My lips twitch into a small smile. I know that I should be terrified, and I am, but I'm also *excited*.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE



ELIAS

Camp is set up just across the border into Llyne. My troops arrived yesterday and now I'm here with my closest men. We make our way toward the largest tent, knowing without a doubt that it is mine.

Rowan, Henry, Lief, Asher, Frederick, and Merek all have smaller tents surrounding mine so that they are close when I am in need of counsel.

"Merek," I call out as I dismount from Storm before tossing my reins to a boy who is waiting patiently to assist me.

Dipping my chin to the squire, I push the tent flaps back and walk into my new home away from home. My lips tip up into a smile as I look around the space.

I've never fought as a king before, I'm used to being a warrior, sleeping on the hard ground, sometimes in the gods forsaken mud wet and cold.

Mayhap it is good to be king after all.

"You demanded my attendance," Merek grunts from behind me.

Spinning around, I lift my lips to my cousin. "You figure out your dilemma with the young maiden?"

He shakes his head once. "None to be had, Elias. I said my good-byes and when we return, I'll ask that you arrange a marriage for

me. It's time."

My entire body stills at his words. Time. Is it time? Arching a brow, my eyes rake over my cousin.

His eyes are sunken, the skin beneath them bruised purple as though he hasn't been sleeping. He's also lost a bit of weight on his large frame, not noticeably so to anyone else, but he has stood by my side since childhood and I know him as well as I know myself.

"You are in love with her. Just admit it and be done with this," I offer.

He shakes his head once. "I will marry the way I have always been meant to. I will marry for a political alliance for the country of Bunafi. I may not be a prince, but I do have a royal title and I will do what I can to serve my country in all ways."

"While making yourself miserable?" I ask.

His lips curl as he lets out a snort. "Misery is the way of royal life, is it not?"

"I used to think so."

"You are lucky to not only be fated, but you've also fallen in love with your bride. We know that is not normally the way of things. I hope that I can fall in love with my bride as well."

He doesn't say anything else, instead he turns on his booted heels and marches out of my tent. With a frown, I stare at the flaps that he exited through for a long moment. He may not be part of the prophecy as I am, but I have the power to give my cousin the happiness that he deserves.

Merek is a true warrior. He has given his life to me, to the crown and to Bunafi. If a warrior does not deserve the bride of his choosing, then who does? I make a decision, one that I will not tell him of. I need to know for certain whether he truly wants the maid or if it is a case of wanting what he cannot have.

"Your Majesty?" Frederick calls out before he slips inside of the tent.

"Frederick."

He clears his throat. "The scout is back, I thought you may wish to speak to him."

"Call in the others and bring the scout in as well."

Frederick dips his chin before he turns and goes in search of the other men. We've only been here mere minutes and it's already time

to get to work. I don't mind, the busier I am, the sooner we raid Llyne and take it back, the sooner I can go home to my queen.

GODIVA

SITTING STRAIGHT UP, I PLACE MY HAND OVER MY BEATING HEART. Closing my eyes, I whisper the protection spell that shifts me into a beautiful young maiden. Opening my eyes, I glance around the room, listening for any noise within the castle that is not natural.

My door opens, my gaze flies to it and I watch as Aleida slips through. Her eyes take me in and she pauses for a moment.

"So, you sensed it as well, then?" she asks.

Nodding my head, I agree. "I cannot stop it from unfolding," I state.

"It is up to the gods and fate now. We've done what we can."

"Do you detect evil magic?" I ask.

She presses her lips together, shifting her gaze to her feet, then brings her eyes back to meet my own. They're swirling in gold and black. She is searching, sensing and trying to find the answers that we seek.

Aleida and I have magic that is matched, yet we excel at different aspects of our powers which is why we are better together rather than apart. Aleida's eyes shift back to their natural color and she shakes her head once, but doesn't speak right away.

"There is darkness at work here," she whispers. "I just do not know how deep it goes, how strong it is, or when it will come to the surface."

"You can sense more than I can," I point out. "I feel as though I am blocked."

Aleida shuffles closer to my bed and gingerly sinks down on the edge. "Can you sense the babe?" she asks.

Pressing my lips together, I shift my eyes to the side, then bring them back to meet hers. "I cannot sense anything, Aleida. A fortnight ago, I felt my powers strong inside of me. Today, I feel naught. Obviously," I say, waving my hand over my body. "I still hold them inside of me, but I cannot sense them. It is the oddest sensation."

"You're being blocked." She nods. "But whoever it is, they are not strong enough to block every aspect that you wield."

"Do you know any witch with that kind of power?" I ask.

Aleida's face pales, even in the moonlight's glow, I see the color clearly drain from her face. "A god," she whispers.

"I've feared this as well. Not all of the gods surely want to see the prophecy fulfilled. For if it comes to fruition without true love, then chaos will ensue and they will assuredly rise once again."

"The Erinyes," Aleida hisses.

We stay silent for a moment, waiting to see if the goddesses hear our words. Naught happens, there is no shift with the earth, with this castle, with each other, so hopefully they do not hear us talking of them.

"We must warn the King," I announce.

"On the battlefield? He has much to worry over, Godiva."

It is true, King Elias has much on his plate, though the man handles the pressure better than any mortal I have witnessed in my long life.

It makes me wonder if the prophecy has not made him stronger in both mind and body. Perhaps he was chosen for this at birth, touched by the gods and guided by them for just this purpose, to fight against the evil and to ensure that their prophecy comes to fruition.

"We must stay alert, sister," I whisper to my sister witch.

Aleida nods once, taking my hand in hers. "I feel as though we should go into hiding," she whispers.

I hum. "It may not be a bad idea. We are exposed here, vulnerable to the goddesses, if it is indeed them who are meddling."

"King Elias will be angry," she mutters.

Licking my lips, I stare at my friend, casting a beauty spell upon her. She changes in front of me, her body morphing into that of her former youth and glory.

"King Elias may be angry, but we will not leave Sybilla unprotected. However, we are too vulnerable here."

Aleida nods as she stands to her feet. Without another word, the two of us spirit away into the night. One day, Elias will not be angry. Once he realizes that we would never leave Sybilla in danger, but staying here will do just that, he will surely be grateful for our disappearance—eventually.

SYBILLA

WRAPPING THE SHAWL AROUND MY SHOULDERS, I STARE TOWARD THE direction where Elias and his men rode away over two weeks ago. There has been a heaviness in the air since that night. Something shifted, but I can't put my finger on it.

I have no clue what could be happening, but my girls are on edge too. Jasmine keeps watching me, forcing me to eat and drink every five minutes as if I'm going to starve myself or this new apparent life growing inside of me.

"Are you sensing something?" I finally ask her.

She lifts her gaze to meet mine and I see something in her eyes. A question, a worry, it's something and I can't quite put my finger on it. She inhales a deep breath, her gaze flicking to Ellyn and Katrina in the corner lounging.

"I am worried about you and the babe, and about Katrina. I can feel something, a doom that is heavy in the air. I've sought out the witches but they aren't here," she admits.

My spine straightens and my eyes widen. "What? Where are they?" I demand.

She shakes her head. "I know not, Your Majesty. All I know is that nobody has seen them, not a servant, nor a soldier."

My stomach twists and I place my palm against my belly, my eyes never leaving hers. "This cannot be good," I snap.

"No, it cannot."

"How far away is Elias and the rest of the men?"

Jasmine presses her lips together and shakes her head once. "Too far. They are across the border, it would be lunacy to attempt to cross in order to get to them. There is no doubt that the war is underway now. The borders will be heavily guarded, but we do not know by whom."

"Fuck," I hiss.

Her lips twitch into a small smile. She doesn't know the word, but she gets my meaning and she nods once. "Yes, that is the long and short of it, Sybilla."

"What do we do?"

"What can we do?"

Chewing on my bottom lip, my gaze flicks from her to the other girls, then back to her again. "Send a missive?"

"And if it is intercepted and the enemy knows that we are possibly unsafe?"

"Fuck."

Standing to my feet, I begin to pace. I can't help myself. I can't stop myself. Ellyn and Katrina notice it immediately, but I am too caught up in my own thoughts to attempt to explain things to them.

"The prophecy, it doesn't say what happens if we're torn apart, if one of us dies, does it?" I ask.

Jasmine shakes her head, rolling her lips together. "I do not know what it states, Your Highness, Sybilla."

"Your sisters are not here, yet. It cannot be fulfilled until they are in this world. It will come to fruition, Sybilla, you must have faith in our gods, in their carefully laid plans," Katrina says, her lips trembling into a smile.

She hasn't been the same since the men left, either. I know that some of it is her deep-seated feelings for Merek and the way she struggles with them. I also think it is because of the heaviness that is surrounding us. I know that I cannot be the only one to feel it.

"I felt one of my sisters arrive weeks ago. I don't know where she is and Elias has promised to help find her, but not until the war is won."

Katrina's eyes widen, then she shifts her gaze over to Ellyn's. "What about the others?"

"I don't know," I breathe. "I'm pregnant and I'm not sure what that means, but I know it has to play in with this whole thing. It happened pretty damn fast."

Katrina nods her head, Jasmine and Ellyn close around us and before I know what's happening, they wrap their arms around me. "We will keep each other safe, Your Highness. We will be okay," Jasmine rasps.

My entire body shakes. I don't know why I'm a quivering, trembling, crying mess, but maybe this is my pregnancy. God, wouldn't that be awful?

The wind begins to howl outside, and fat drops of rain fall. Pinching my eyes closed tightly, I wonder what the fuck is going on.

My head spins, just as the wind does outside. Everything is a mess right now, even the fucking weather.

“Let’s get you to bed, you need a rest,” Jasmine whispers.

The three girls help me upstairs and into my private chamber. They help me out of my gown and leave me alone and in my nightgown. Climbing into bed, I pull the thick comforter over my body and try to get warm.

I have been cold since Elias left, he was my warmth, my steady and I realize that although I hardly know him, I have become used to him.

I miss him and it is more than when he left after the wedding and I was scared and in a new place. This time I miss him because I love him, because I miss him—the man.

Closing my eyes, I envision him standing next to me, his scarred eye, his messy hair, his cute tights, his sexy as shit chest on display. Letting out a sigh, I fall asleep.

CHAPTER THIRTY



SYBILLA

My eyes open, my heart races. What I don't do is move. I can feel someone watching me. Shifting my gaze from side-to-side, I bite the inside of my cheek as I try to figure out what in the fuck is going on.

I hear something and that's when my instincts take over. Sitting straight up, I turn to see a man standing at my closed door. He has something in his hand, the moonlight catches it and it almost glitters.

A small knife.

"Who are you? What do you want, here?" I demand.

I try to keep my voice from shaking, but I'm not sure that it happens. He takes another step toward me, his knife in hand with each menacing step he takes. His eyes are black, wild, and not full of glitter like Elias'.

I shimmy the comforter off, knowing that if I get wrapped up in that heavy thing, I'm as good as dead.

"It's time for you to meet your gods, Your Majesty," he growls, his voice full of hate and acid.

Shifting my gaze behind him, I wonder how he even got in here. The castle has been under heavy guard, as are the outskirts. It

shouldn't be penetrable. Gulping, I shift my legs so that they're hanging over the side of the bed.

"Who sent you?" I demand.

He grins, his free hand going to his crotch. Gross. "I've been sent to rid the world of your life, of the prophecy, for if it goes unfulfilled, the goddesses will be free to take over this world and it will be a spectacular sight," he says.

I've never heard that part of the prophecy before and I wonder if Elias knows it. My thoughts drift to Aleida and Godiva, where the *hell* are those witches?

"He will have your head for this," I warn.

I don't even know if Elias takes people's heads, but it sounded good. The man flinches and it's then that I know Elias does indeed take heads. A couple months ago, I may have tried to talk him out of that if I'd have known, now I'm using it to my advantage.

Standing to my feet, I curse the fact that I'm barefoot, braless and in a very thin nightgown. The man's gaze flicks to my breasts and I know that he can see my nipples through my gown.

Bending my knees in a small crouch, I try to fake him out and move my upper body left while my feet take me right. I know it's a terrible idea as soon as I begin, but I'm not about to just lie down and let this guy rape and murder me, no way in fuck.

He catches me around the waist, but I don't allow him to subdue me easily. I wiggle, I shift, I fight and I can't help but feel victorious as soon as I hear the metal of his knife bounce against the stone floor.

"By gods bones, woman," he grunts.

He wraps his arms around me, holding them to my sides, but he leaves his balls vulnerable. Without a thought, I bare my teeth as soon as he tries to lower his head. Lifting my knee, with all of my strength I get him right in the junk.

His eyes widen and he stumbles backward. I take that opportunity to run toward the door. Flinging it open, I don't look one way or another, I keep my head down and I run. I hear men shouting and I hope and I pray that my girls are okay.

My feet carry me as swiftly as they can down the stairs and toward the castle's front door. I trip over something as soon as I try to step outside. I don't look down, because I know without a doubt that something was a body.

"Get her," a rough voice shouts from behind me.

"You let her go?" another voice shouts from my side.

I keep running, though not very far or very fast. They are gaining on me quickly, their loud boots drawing nearer and nearer. I can practically feel them breathing down my neck when a whoosh of air stops me in my tracks.

A beautiful white horse appears out of nowhere. "On. I take you to our King," he says.

The. Horse. *Says.*

I look over my shoulder and notice that the men have not stopped in their advance. "On, now," he says, again.

Without thinking, I run up to the horse's side. It's huge, at least twice as big as Lightning. He lets out a neigh and kneels down to allow me access to his back. "Just climb on and hold on to my mane," he instructs.

I'm in a complete daze and feel as though everything is moving in slow motion. I climb onto him bareback, and then I reach forward and grip his beautiful white mane and hold on, my chest pressed against the back of his neck.

The beautiful huge horse lets out another loud neigh, lifting his front legs he begins to run and then something unbelievable happens. Something so outside the realm of my imagination that I can do nothing but scream as soon as it happens.

This horse extends his fucking *wings* and catapults into the air. It flies. I'm in the goddamn air on the back of a horse. Gripping him tighter, I hold on for dear life as he gracefully glides forward. His wings flap as my entire body begins to tremble.

I'm scared, I'm in shock and in awe, but beyond that, completely speechless. Pressing my cheek against his soft mane, I start to cry. This gorgeous creature just saved my life.

"Hold on, Your Highness, I deliver you to the king shortly," he says.

I don't know if he's actually saying the words or speaking in my mind, but it's so unfathomable, so magical that all I can do is swallow thickly. With my eyes open, I watch as the sun rises high in the sky just before the horse glides down and lands gently.

"By the gods," a voice hisses.

The horse's front legs bend and he lowers his head to the ground. Lifting my head, releasing my death grip on his mane, I come face-

to-face with my King, with Elias. He's surrounded by his soldiers, and by his closest men.

He doesn't say a single word. I watch as his jaw clenches and his entire body jerks before he stomps toward me. Then he cups my cheeks in his hands. "By the gods, what's happened?" he demands.

"I woke up. I felt someone watching me. A stranger was in my room with a knife," I whisper.

He closes his eyes for a beat before he swoops me into his arms and without a single word, he marches me toward a tent. Wrapping my arms around his shoulders, I bury my face against his neck and I inhale his scent.

It's been two weeks and somehow, he smells better in this dirty camp, in the middle of war than he ever has. Once we're in his quarters, he lowers me on to what I assume is his bed. It's covered in thick woolen, scratchy comforters, but I don't care.

Elias sinks to his knees in front of me. "Tell me everything," he softly demands.

I tell him in detail everything that's just happened, including tripping over a few bodies. "So, my protection could all be gone?" he asks.

I shake my head, then lift a shoulder. "I didn't see who they were, I was just running," I admit. "The girls are still there," I whisper.

He presses his lips together, his hands cupping my face. His thumbs swipe the falling tears from my cheeks as his now indigo eyes search my own.

"You did the right thing, Sybilla," he whispers. "You and my heir are the most important treasures in this kingdom."

Lifting my hands, I wrap my fingers around his wrists. "The girls are important, don't say that," I softly say.

He smirks. "To me? They matter naught. You are what is important to me, My Queen."

Without another word, he leans forward and touches his mouth to mine. His tongue slips inside and he tastes me, his tongue begins to stroke mine in slow soothing movements. My body almost erupts with a warming need that seems to come from nowhere.

Ripping my mouth from his, I shimmy the gown down my shoulders, letting it fall to my hips.

"Sybilla," he groans. "You've just been through something traumatic," he whispers, licking his lips as he stares at my taut pebbled nipples.

"Elias," I call softly. His gaze flicks up to meet mine and I know that he is conflicted, but I'm not. "I need you, my king. I need you right now. I need to feel you inside of me."

The dam of his control breaks, *instantly*. He slowly stands, jerking his chin toward the pillow and I push the rest of the gown off of me before I climb over to those pillows, my back resting against the short headboard. He removes his clothes, I watch as he bares himself to me, every square inch.

"Spread your legs. Show me what I own, what's mine," he roughly demands.

Any other modern woman would probably fight his words, but not me, I know that what he's about to give me is going to be a gorgeous and generous gift and I am so ready and willing to take that gift, right now.

ELIAS

I WATCH AS A FLUSH BREAKS OUT OVER HER ENTIRE BODY BENEATH MY admiration, my appreciation of the way she opens for me is beyond compare. Crawling on to the woolen bedding, I fit myself between her spread thighs.

Lifting my hand, I press my palm against her chest to feel her heartbeat. She is real. She is breathing. She is alive. Wrapping my fingers behind her knees, I tug her down so that her head lands softly against the pillow.

Dipping my chin, I look down into those golden flaked eyes that I have fallen in love with. The idea of love is absurd, but it fills me every time I even think about this woman.

"Elias," she breathes as she lifts her hand and cups my bearded cheek.

"I almost lost you," I admit.

The words come out shakier than I intend. Emotion overwhelms me as I think about what could have befallen her just moments ago.

Shifting forward, I lift one hand and wrap my fingers around the short headboard as I align my cock with her entrance.

"I'm right here," she breathes, lifting her hips to attempt to take me inside of her.

"You are, aren't you?" I ask as I sink inside of her warm and waiting body.

She's ready for me, more than I thought possible with little preparation. She must be feeling as I am, needing to prove to the gods that she lives. My free hand, I wrap around the outside of her thigh as I bury myself completely inside of her warm center.

Sybilla's hands slide from my cheeks to cup the sides of my neck. Her thumbs trace my jawline as I pull out, then sink back inside. My gaze stays focused on hers, watching as her eyes dance with each stroke of my cock.

"You will never leave my side again, sweeting," I murmur through my clenched jaw. "Never again."

My eyes stay connected to hers, I'm unable to look away, too enamored by my wife, too afraid that if I do, she will disappear from beneath me.

My hips continue to move, I grind down against her sweet nub on each downstroke, watching as her lips part in awe and she exhales each and every time.

My movements speed up, as I try to control my breathing, try to control my body, but I am on the edge, just seconds from losing the thin grasp that I hold. Sybilla's fingers dig into my neck as she grips me, her eyes sliding closed as her *queynte* flutters around my cock.

"Yes," she breathes. "I'm coming."

"Who am I, who do you come for?" I demand, my voice booming louder than I intend.

Her eyes open slightly and she looks up at me through her lashes. Her entire body trembles, I feel her thigh shake beneath my grip. My fingers flex, holding her tighter, no doubt bruising her delicate flesh.

"I'm coming for you, My King, my love," she sighs.

"Gods," I curse right before I bury myself inside of her and roar with my own release.

My entire body trembles, my cock emptying as if it is the first time I've lain with a woman. The force so strong, my hips jerk with

each twitch of my seed's release. My arm shakes as I hold on to the back of the bed, dropping my face, I touch my mouth to hers.

"I love you, My Queen," I breathe.

She gasps at the same time, something happens. Our bodies lift from the bed, we float, my cock still buried inside of her, I look down to see that we are at least two feet from the bed, suspended in the air.

"What is happening?" she cries, her hands wrapping around my shoulders at the same time her legs circle my waist and grip me tightly.

"Magic, Sybilla."

"But what? Where?"

My lips turn up. "Love, sweeting," I breathe. I slant my head and touch my lips to hers. "Love," I repeat before I slide my tongue inside of her warm and waiting mouth.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE



SYBILLA

Once we float back down to the bed, I try my hardest not to freak the fuck out, but I pretty much fail. I'm shaky and scared, we floated, like in the air, like something otherworldly. Then it hits me and I realize that I *am* in another world.

Elias wraps his arms around my naked body and pulls me against his chest, his lips touching the side of my head while he whispers sweet words to calm me down. It works, eventually, though I'm not sure how much my frazzled mind can take at this point.

"Get dressed, the men will want to talk about what happened at the castle," he murmurs against my temple.

Pressing my lips together, I turn my head and touch his jaw with my mouth. "I'm scared that the girls aren't safe," I whisper.

He grunts, his arms flexing around me. "We will soon find out."

"What about the war?"

He shakes his head. "I'll leave Merek here to lead the continuing battle. It will not be much longer, we are forcing their hand. Their numbers dwindle, their men are retreating by the dozens, every day. We will be victorious, sweeting."

He releases me and I slip off of the bed to pull on my thin nightgown. Turning to him, I bite my bottom lip. "I have nothing else to

wear, Elias."

His eyes travel down my length and his lips twitch at the sight of my nipples, clearly visible beneath the gown. He holds up his hand and turns his back to me. I watch as he walks over to a trunk and stands, holding a tunic in his hands.

"It's not as flattering as your dresses, but it will cover you." He grins as he closes the distance between us.

Reaching for the tunic, I pull it over my head, slipping my arms in and am I'm glad to see that it is long enough that it grazes the tops of my knees. Elias wraps his hands around my waist and tugs me against his chest.

Tilting my head back, I look up into his eyes and let out a sigh as his gaze instantly turns indigo. He lowers his head and slides his lips across my own in a brush of a sweet kiss before he releases me.

Without a word, he walks over to the tent entrance and pushes the flap back. I hear him call out a few orders and then within seconds, the tent fills with his men. They all watch me, worry clearly etched on their faces.

"I'm okay." I nod.

"The women?" Rowan asks.

My gaze flicks to Merek. His face is set hard, his hands balled into fists by his sides, he looks pale as if he's going to be physically ill at any moment.

"I don't know," I whisper. "I ran, the soldiers were on my heels. I tripped over men, but I'm not sure if they were yours or theirs. Then that horse appeared." I turn my head to look back at Elias. "What the hell was that, anyway? Your horses fly here?"

Elias' lips twitch. "That was an Arion. It was sent by forces unknown. They don't roam freely here, but they are known to appear from time to time. It is a flying horse with the ability to speak, either telepathically or from the mouth."

"He spoke telepathically and he was there at just the right time," I murmur. Elias nods, his gaze flicking over to the others. "The man in my room told me that they were sent to rid the world of me, by goddesses. I don't know who though and I don't know where Aleida and Godiva are, I haven't seen them in days."

Something flashes in Elias' eyes at the same time I hear Merek growl. "You've done well, sweeting," he murmurs, bringing me close to his side.

His mouth touches the side of my head before he whispers to me, instructing me to go and lie down in the bed to rest.

"I can't rest, my girls. I need to go to them," I state.

There is a moment of silence before Elias lets out a sigh. "We need a plan," he grunts. "We are almost finished here. If I leave, I need Merek to stay behind, make sure that we are victorious and that the castle is cleared and taken over completely," he instructs.

Merek growls, but doesn't protest. His head jerks to the side and his eyes find mine before his lip snarls. I'm not sure if he's really seeing me though, or thinking of Katrina. I like to think, hope even, that he is indeed thinking of Katrina and that he needs to rescue her.

Rowan steps forward, his head held high, his gaze down his nose as he looks at Elias with steely determination. "I will do as you command, whatever you need from me, you have at your disposal."

Elias nods, just as we hear a loud neigh and women screaming. Merek is the first to turn and run. I hear him whisper Katrina's name. My feet are rooted to the ground, just as Elias scoops me in his arms and carries me out of the tent.

The Arion is there, front legs bent, head dipped and my three girls on his back. Merek reaches the side of the horse and without a single word, his hands wrap around Katrina's waist before he yanks her off of the back of the horse.

She's crying, her cheeks stained with tears, her nightgown stained with dirt and what looks like possible blood. My eyes widen then drift to the other women. They look the same, their hair is a mess, their clothes soiled, and Jasmine is holding her arm funny.

"Queen Sybilla, you're okay," Jasmine cries, her feet carrying her toward us.

Elias sets me down on my feet and immediately, I wrap my arms around my friend. "I've been so worried," I breathe against the side of her neck.

Her entire body trembles as I pull her against me. "You need a doctor," I mutter, even though I don't want to let her go. She's alive, she's safe. She's here with us.

Turning my head, I look back to Elias. "They need healers. I think Jasmine has a broken arm," I call out.

Frederick calls out that he will bring the healer before I hear his boots crunch against the ground. "Are you okay?" I softly demand, looking back to Jasmine.

She lifts her gaze to meet mine and she nods. "Aye, my arm is broken, but I am okay. My mistress is alive and well, that is all that I need to get me through the pain." She grins.

"You're crazy." I smile.

ELIAS

THE HEALER ARRIVES, TAKING THE WOMEN INSIDE OF MY TENT WHERE WE can guard the outside, and we do. Reluctantly, Merek releases Katrina to go and be checked by the healer for any injuries. He spits on the ground before marching toward me.

"I claim her as my own," he snaps.

Arching a brow, I try to hide my twitching lips and I fail. "Do you now, cousin?" I ask.

He snorts. "*Sard* duty. Katrina is mine," he growls.

"*Sard* duty? My, how things have changed."

"She was almost killed, nearly raped. So, yes, *sard* duty."

Lifting my hand, I clap his shoulder and give it a squeeze. "She is yours to claim, as long as the lady wishes it to be so. You have my permission and if all goes well, perhaps you can have this castle as a wedding gift, once we conquer it, of course."

"You jest."

I shake my head once. "I do not. Does the cousin to the king, his nearest relative, his brother in battle not deserve his own land, his own holdings, and a castle for his bride? I think that you have more than earned those things."

"If I choose to stay at your side, instead?"

Smiling, I flex my fingers against his shoulder again. "No decisions must be made today, Merek. It is just an idea, a thought. Later we can work out details, just know that you have my consent to marry the maid, my full consent."

He nods, then lifts his gaze to the tent. He watches for a while and I know that he is deep in thought. Shaking his shoulder, I jerk my chin and tell him to gather the rest of the men.

It is time to end this war and to do it swiftly. We have much bigger things to worry over, like the mention of goddesses and the fact that our witches have seemingly disappeared.

"We need a plan," I announce. "With the women here, we need to end this before they get wind of their arrival and before they can send mercenaries to our camp," I state.

Rowan's gaze shifts to the tent, then back to us. "One of us should house a woman, separately. They need constant protection not only against the enemy, but the soldiers here have not felt a woman's flesh in months," he reminds, his voice low.

Merek makes a noise in the back of his throat and I know that he's thinking of Katrina. Though my men would never dare to touch my queen, I have no doubt that if they were desperate enough, if they thought that they could, at least one would try.

"You're right. There are only three that need to be worried over. Merek will take Katrina. Rowen, you take Ellyn and—"

"I will take care of the wee Jasmine and tend to her injuries," Asher announces.

Glancing around, I nod. Now that the women and their protection is taken care of, it is time to devise a swift plan to take over Llyne. Arching a brow, I smirk as my eyes flick from one man to the next.

"Are we ready to end this, for good?" I ask.

"Gaining entrance is the hardest part," Merek grunts.

"The castle, then?"

Frederick jerks his chin. "Take it, take ownership of it. Free the people suppressed by it's leadership," he growls.

"Tonight then?"

"A group of only twenty, the rest will wait for a warning," I offer, my lips unable to keep from smiling at the idea of this plan. It is one we have strategized and utilized a dozen times, but it is still the most effective.

"I will wait with the larger force for the warning," Merek offers.

I nod at his offer, it is a good one. Though I always like my cousin at my back, this time he needs to lead a troop of men himself. My eyes flick between my men. They are all worthy, every one of them has proven to be not only a good warrior, but a good leader as well.

"Rowan and Asher, I want you here to guard the women. During this maneuver, I want them together in my tent, guarded by you personally. I also want you to pick a few other guards for the outside of the tent, trustworthy men," I explain.

They lift their chins, proud to serve as the Queen's personal guard. As they very well should be. To guard their Queen and their future heir to the throne is a high honor. Shifting my gaze over to the Arion who still stands by, waiting for something, I lift my chin toward the beast.

"You will be on standby, Arion. Any sign of distress, even a single moment, take the Queen and if possible, her women to safety."

"I will personally carry them to my home, which is guarded at the top of a mountain, impenetrable," the beast explains.

Nodding, I lower my voice. "I appreciate your help in this and I will owe you, mighty steed."

He jerks his head, his gaze finding mine and he dips his head. "I do this for the women, for the prophecy and for the good of this world. I am obliged, Your Highness, you owe me naught for my services."

"The women are taken care of, the troops to come in after the initial breach are taken care of. I want Henry, Lief, and Frederick to come with me, gather the best and fastest sixteen men to come with us. This will be done before the sun sets and rises on another day."

"It is said, it will be done, Your Highness," Asher murmurs.

"Gather the troops. Tell them what they need to know and naught more. Prepare the women. We do not sleep until Llyne is ours."

My men, all six of them lift their fists and roar at the same time the Arion neighs and jerks his head.

"Elias," Sybilla calls out from the tent.

Turning my head, I look over my shoulder with my hand still suspended in the air. Her eyes focus on mine and she bites her bottom lip. "Ellyn has been stabbed," she calls.

Looking to her, I quickly close the distance between us. She steps to the side and allows me entrance into the tent. The women are gathered around the bed.

Jasmine's arm is now splinted and wrapped as she holds it against her body protectively. Katrina sits on the bed next to the other woman, holding her hand. She lifts her head and looks back at me. She shakes her head, lowering her gaze.

"Tell me," I grind out, keeping my voice low.

"Look at me, Elias," Sybilla softly demands.

Turning my gaze to meet hers, I see the sadness swimming in her eyes. There is something very wrong, something that I do not want to hear, something that happens in war, but not to a good woman, not to the woman who would no doubt lay her life down for my Queen.

"Your doctor says that she won't make it," Sybilla whispers. "The dagger was not just shoved into her side, but it was twisted. He has sewn her wound and given her something to help her sleep, but those bastards probably killed my friend," she whimpers.

Tears flow down her cheeks, I wrap my arms around her, pulling her against my chest. I lift one hand and place it on the side of her head, forcing her cheek against my torso. Her entire body shudders as she inhales a deep breath and attempts to calm herself.

"It is up to the gods, sweeting. There is naught else that we can do. The healer has done what he can," I whisper.

"It's not fair," Sybilla whimpers, lifting her head from my chest to look up into my eyes.

Using the back of my hand, I use my knuckles to wipe the tears from her cheeks, more flow and follow the same path, as if I've not wiped a single one away. My queen aches for her friend, and I imagine, I would feel much of the same if one of my men were taken from me.

The wind begins to howl, the thunder rolls, but there is no lightning, there is only rain. So much rain pours down so quickly that I fear that this land could flood, and we'll all be washed away.

Returning my attention back to Sybilla, I refuse to think any more about what could happen and only hold her.

"No, Sybilla. It isn't fair, though I find that the fates never are," I whisper.

"They really aren't," she snaps, her lips trembling.

Dropping my chin, I touch my mouth to her forehead and I inhale her scent as I close my eyes and just thank the gods that they protected her from the same fate as Ellyn.

It is selfish of me to be thankful that she is not the one lying on her sickbed, but it does not stop me from being incredibly thankful that she stands in front of me, breathing, healthy, and carrying my heir.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



SYBILLA

Elias dresses, not just in his sexy tights and tunic, but he slips his chainmail shirt and skirt on. The sun is beginning to set, the excitement from the day causing me to feel exhausted.

Katrina was led away from the tent a while ago by Merek, Ellyn was moved to a smaller bed away from our bed and that was cleaned up. Jasmine was taken away as well. Though, as Elias readies himself, I know that something is getting ready to happen.

I asked him before he left for this war if they fought at night and he explained to me that they didn't. There wasn't enough light. I get that, it's not like they have city lights here in this world. There isn't any electricity and when it's night outside, it's pitch black.

"Are you going to tell me where you're going?" I ask as I lean back against the wooden headboard of the bed and watch him.

He lifts his gaze, his eyes finding mine and his eyes search my own. I don't know what he's looking for, but he must find it because he nods once and closes the distance between us.

"I'm leading a group into the castle to take over from the inside. Their defenses are weak, most of their troops have abandoned them. They are ailing, they are losing and I am going to end this here and now. I need to get you somewhere safe and I will not compromise you a moment longer than I have to," he explains.

I shiver as I look up at him. This all feels very, scary. I'm not sure how else to describe it, but I'm terrified. This isn't like our wars, there are no tanks in their war, there are no strategic plans and technological weapons that can hit a target from miles away. He has to go inside and fight with his hands, with swords and shit. I am not okay with this.

"You're the King, can't you stay here with me?" I urge.

His lips twitch into a small smile. "Fear cannot rule us, Sybilla. I see that you have let emotion fill you. You mustn't. Fear cannot guide, only hinder a person. I have done this countless times, and I will live this night to do it again. You will stay here under guard, with your women," he explains.

Lifting my hand, I cup his cheek, feeling his beard beneath my fingertips. I want to feel the hair over my entire body, rough and soft all at the same time. Elias smiles, as though he can read my thoughts, which if I'm honest, he probably can.

"Come back to me, My King," I whisper.

He moves the fingers touching his lips to my palm, then to the inside of my wrist. "The gods will not take me this eve, my sweeting. I will return to you, I will see my son enter this earth and I will plant a daughter inside of you, shortly after."

"You have a lot of plans," I breathe.

"I have a lot of life left to live, my bride." He grins.

"I'll wait for you," I whisper.

Elias closes the distance between us, touching his mouth to mine. "You will go to Arion if something happens. He will see you and your women to safety, understand me?"

"Yes," I exhale. "I understand, Elias."

He lifts his hand, wrapping his warm fingers around the back of my neck, his fingers twisting in my hair before he grips me. "You will be safe, Sybilla," he grinds out.

I don't know if he's trying to convince me, or himself, but I think it could be a bit of both. Nodding, I lean forward and press my mouth against his, parting my lips.

I let out a moan as his tongue fills my mouth and our gentle beginnings of a kiss turn into a heated moment, only pausing when we hear a few men clearing their throats.

Elias grunts, shifting his hips so that I can feel his hard length against my belly. I press my lips together, trying to suppress my

smile. His fingers flex in my hair and against my neck as I watch his glittering black eyes slowly turn into their usual steel-blue color.

Elias turns to look over his shoulder. "Are the men ready?" he grunts. Merek's smile is wide as he dips his chin. "Good, we leave immediately."

I'm being pulled into a hard embrace as I watch Katrina being pulled into Merek's arms as well. His mouth shifts to her cheek, then her ear, and I watch as he whispers something to her, whatever it is causes her entire body to tremble.

I smirk at the sight, then lift my eyes to look up at Elias. He winks. "Seems my cousin has decided to take a wife after this war is won," he whispers.

"Has he?" I ask.

He grins, leaning forward, his nose slides alongside my own. "He has. He's claimed the girl. Seems as though Katrina has made an impression on our Merek. I'm more than happy to approve of their union."

"How wonderful," I breathe.

Elias brushes his mouth against mine swiftly, then takes a step back, pausing to reach forward, he places his palm against my belly. "Our babe fares well?" he asks.

Covering his palm with mine, I nod my head. "Yes, the baby is good, My King. Now, hurry so you can come back to me," I whisper.

"You will not even know that I am gone," he murmurs.

I watch as his hand falls and he turns around. The men are dressed in complete armor, looking just like the knights that I've seen in history books.

I have no idea how they wear the metal outfits from head to toe and I've never found them attractive before, not until I watch my husband don his own full-metal clothing.

My mouth waters at the sight of him, I wonder if I could get him to bed in just the chainmail shirt and skirt though, now that little fantasy is hot as shit.

I feel warm, my body heating with thoughts of taking Elias back to bed and keeping him there for as long as humanly possible, mainly so he'll never fight another battle again.

"Let us go, let us succeed, let us come back to warm and willing women," Elias growls.

The men in this tent roar before they leave us alone, well alone except for Rowan and Asher. I hear Ellyn moan and that breaks me from staring at the closed tent flaps. Turning to her, I hurry and sink down on the edge of her bed.

"Ellyn, are you awake?" I ask, taking her hand in mine.

Her eyelids slowly flutter open and she gives me a small smile. "You're safe, Queen," she whispers. "It is all I wanted," she breathes. "The gods call to me now. I must go to them."

"No," I choke. "You will not."

Lifting my head, I call out to Rowan. He takes the several strides to get to my side. He looks down at Ellyn and shakes his head softly, sadness clearly etched in his features.

"She is not well, Your Highness. The fever has set in, whatever they nicked with their blade, it hit something inside of her that will not self-repair."

My bottom lip trembles and I grip her hand tightly as tears well in my eyes. "In my world, she could be fixed," I whisper. "In my world, she would be saved."

Thunder rolls through the sky above us, and I know that it is my tears that is causing this, but I can't control myself. The rain begins to pound against the tent at the same time my shoulders start to shake.

"We are not of your world, Your Majesty. Here we can do naught but make her comfortable and give her our thanks for making this world a bit brighter with her easy and sweet demeanor."

His words are beautiful, but it doesn't make me hate them any less. I do hate them, despise them even. I stay at her bedside, the rest of the tent bathed in silence as I watch one of my only friends in this world pass on to her new world, heaven, or whatever they believe in here.

ELIAS

THE SKY IS A SOFT GRAY, THE SUN BEGINNING TO SET, AND THERE IS A cloak of sadness that fills all of us. I know it is my queen mourning her friend. She must be close or just passed. I did not know the

woman well, but the love that Sybilla had for her, I know that she must be a good one.

"Your Queen mourns," Henry murmurs as we continue forward.

"She does," I agree.

He clears his throat. "It seems she has not witnessed much death, maybe people do not die oft in her world?" he asks.

Looking forward, my head consumed with dozens of different thoughts, I remember what she said. Shifting my gaze to Henry. "She said that Ellyn could have been saved in her world. Perhaps their medicine is farther advanced than here."

"I think mayhap you could be correct," he mutters.

I'm sure that Henry is thinking about his own dead wife, a woman that he lost while she battled for the life of their child. In the end, they both perished during childbirth and he became one of my men shortly after, ready to travel and put his past behind him.

Though, does one ever put the woman they loved, the future they lost behind them? I didn't understand it before, I do now. If Sybilla and our unborn babe were to be taken from me, I would not survive the loss. I do not know how Henry continues to breathe.

"Are you ready, brother?" I ask him, trying to clear my mind of everything but war and victory.

He clears his throat, his chin lifting as he looks up toward the top of the castle. "I hear a witch resides here," he whispers. "I am ready. If I meet the end, I know that my woman and babe wait for me, their arms open and ready to accept me once again."

"They do, brother. But you will not perish this eve, I will not allow it. Plus, the witch, I hear is there under duress and against her will. Mayhap she will be a boon rather than an enemy?"

"Mayhap," he whispers.

Lifting my arm, I give the signal to my nineteen men that it is indeed time to breach the castle.

GODIVA

"THEY BATTLE," ALEIDA WHISPERS.

She has no need to whisper, yet she does. I smooth down my long hair and smile. "They do indeed." I grin.

"Your sister is there, is she not?" Aleida asks.

My eyes flash with surprise that she knows this. "She is..."

"It is no wonder that the King just somehow *felt* the need to go to war with Llyne, immediately, rather than waiting for the prophecy to unfold," she snorts.

"Are you implying that I used magic to free my sister?" I ask, feigning offense.

Aleida smirks, her lips turning up. She's much more confident in her younger skin, gorgeous too. We do make a lovely pair and I have the yearning to feel some soldiers work their adrenaline-induced cocks between my legs.

"I am."

I laugh. "My sister, unlike me, does not need magic to make herself young and beautiful. She was the youngest in my family, born of my father and a whore. She is only twenty years young. She is held in Llyne because of her beauty and power combined. She deserves to be free, does she not?"

"Why not set her free yourself?" she asks.

Lifting my hand, I murmur the words that conjure what I wish to see. It is a window into my sister's life. I've watched her many times over the past few years, each time her body and mind deteriorate a bit farther. She still remains beautiful to the outside eye, but inside, she is breaking.

"He keeps her in chains, *copper* chains," I explain simply.

Aleida gasps. "How did he know?" she demands.

It is true, witches' powers are unable to work if the witch is bound by copper. He has also infused copper lining in the walls of her rooms. It is not a well-known fact.

I have no idea how this pompous, overweight, disgusting, rapist of a king has discovered this, other than the goddesses having whispered it into his ear. He is simply not knowledgeable enough to know such things.

"I do not know, but without King Elias and his men, she will surely perish beneath this man's torture. Shall we watch, help where we can?" I ask, shifting my gaze back to Aleida.

"Yes, I would enjoy that, immensely."

"After, we'll join in the victory of King Elias' army, and enjoy the spoils of the men and their bodies," I offer with a grin.

"What of your sister?" she asks, her brows furrowing.

Licking my lips, I turn to the images in front of me. "Soon enough I will help my sister. For now, she must allow herself to be rescued and her fate to come to fruition as we all must."

Aleida nods and together we watch, and aide, King Elias and his men to victory. The fall of the evil King of Llyne is a beautiful disaster and I cannot look away as he takes his final breath.

My lips turning up into a victorious smile when his soul leaves his body and no doubt travels downward to find its final resting place with Hades.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE



SYBILLA

Ellyn is gone. Her beauty is only a shell and the vibrance of her light has completely faded. Pinching my eyes closed, I allow Rowan to wrap his hands around my shoulders and guide me away from her body.

The rain falls, yet again. I wonder if this place is this world's Portland, it always seems to rain. Thunder rumbles all around us, but I ignore it all while I mourn my friend. My beautiful friend.

Two soldiers enter, walking over to her while my tears fall. Without a single word, her body is carried away. Rowan pulls me against his chest, he's my main source of strength at this moment. I wish that Elias were here, he would hold me the same way, but it would be even more of a comfort.

I shake as I think about what is happening, wondering if Elias is safe. This is all too much. I shouldn't be here. I should be at home safe in my apartment in Portland. I don't know how I became some pawn to fulfill a prophecy, but I'm fucking done.

Pressing my lips together, I take a step back and turn away from Rowan. I hear him grunt behind me, probably sensing my mood shift immediately. I can't take this though. I love Elias. I've fallen in love with him, but I can't stay here.

I just watched my friend die and nobody was even really bothered by her passing. I am not from some ancient world, I'm from modern days with penicillin and surgeons. This isn't right, this isn't normal. I need to go.

"Queen Sybilla," Rowan's voice calls out, his tone sharp. My spine straightens and I turn around quickly to look at him. "You are panicking, Your Majesty."

Rolling my lips, I try not to cry, to scream, or just plain run as far as I can from this place. "This isn't right. I need to go home," I snap.

He tilts his head to the side. "You'll be returning to Aerilon shortly. The battle here is almost over, victory is but moments away."

Shaking my head, I wrap my hand around the front of my throat. "No, I need to go back to my time. This is fucking crazy and the fact that I was about to just accept that this is my new life is even fucking crazier. I need to go, go, go," I hiss as I ramble.

Rowan takes a step toward me, but it isn't him who appears directly in front of me, it's Katrina. I can feel Jasmine at my back and I know that if I were to spin around, she would be there.

Granted, it would be easy to get around her with her broken arm, but I don't try, not with the serious look in Katrina's eyes as she looks down on me.

"Gather yourself, Your Majesty," she says calmly, evenly. Her eyes flash with something, but I can't read what it is. "Ellyn would not want you to panic. She would not want you to run, not only from your destiny, but from your heart."

"It's too much," I whisper as my heart begins to slam against my chest.

"Do you not think that the king is having the same thoughts? He has fallen in love with and married a woman from another world instead of marrying for alliance and politics as he had imagined, as he'd been prepared to do for his duty."

Inhaling through my nose, I let the breath out in a long exhale past my lips. My gaze lifts and shifts to Rowan and Asher who are standing side by side, completely decked out in their battle uniforms, which really look like costumes.

"I miss my sisters. I miss my parents. I miss modern conveniences. I miss everything," I whisper.

Katrina nods. "I am sure that you do miss all of those things, Your Highness. You are a queen now. A queen to many people. You

may miss your old life, but it is the past. Through the prophecy's fruition, you will see your sisters again and perhaps your parents as well, but with that babe in your belly, you have started your own family and that should be your focus, not the past."

"Damn, you're harsh," I whisper.

Her gaze softens and she reaches for me, wrapping her hands around my own. "I do not mean to be harsh, Your Majesty, but you cannot dwell on things that you cannot change. If you think us cold-hearted because of Ellyn's passing, know that we have seen much death, but we also know that she is in a beautiful place now, a place that we all aspire to go."

Nodding once, I hold her gaze with mine, just as Jasmine wraps her good arm around my chest from behind, her bad arm she wraps around my waist and holds me just as Katrina continues to hold my hands in hers.

"Ellyn is at peace, Sybilla. We will all meet again and that is why we do not cry at her passing. Crying for her body is pointless, not when her soul has found eternal light and happiness," Jasmine whispers.

Closing my eyes, I let out a long sigh. The way they describe death, it is beautiful and damn if that doesn't make my dramatics seem... well... dramatic.

When I open my eyes again, both Jasmine and Katrina are in front of me, Rowan and Asher are at their backs, but all of their eyes are focused directly on me. They all give me a sad smile, waiting for me to lose my shit, again.

"I just, this is all happening so fast," I whisper.

Rowan's lips twitch into a smirk. "Our King went from being a free warrior prince, to being shackled to a crown that he wasn't sure he even wanted, to a wife that he had known only moments. It is safe to say, my queen, that everything has happened rapidly for the both of you."

The way he explains it, I feel like a dick for being the only one freaking out, especially since Elias' parents are both dead and as far as I know he has no other siblings. I'll see my sisters again, assuredly.

Plus, maybe if I can find a witch that is powerful enough, she will be able to spirit my parents here, because selfishly, I want my whole family in this world if this is where I'm meant to be.

"Okay, no more freak-outs, at least not for today." I grin.

The four people simultaneously frown at the words, *freak out*, but then they match my smile with ones of their own. We all nod, and then we return to waiting for some kind of sign that Elias has stormed the castle and has taken over Llyne.

As if my thoughts have willed the signal, we hear a bell ringing in the distance. Together, the four of us rush out of the tent and along with all the other people that did not join this fight, we listen to the sound of the bell on the hill.

"He has succeeded," Rowan murmurs.

"King Elias now holds the original land his family has had for generations, land his father selfishly handed to others to keep his paramour's legs spread," Asher grinds out.

"All hail King Elias," Rowan shouts, lifting his fist in the air.

Then one by one, man by man, they shout in unison. *All hail King Elias*. Pride bubbles inside of me as the sun rises behind the castle. A glow surrounds the building and that same warm glow fills me full, almost bursting inside of me.

Love.

Happiness.

Peace.

It fills me full, pushing the sadness and fear deep down in my belly. Though I'm sure those feelings will rise again, especially as my pregnancy progresses, but for now, I am at peace about staying here in Bunafi, with My King.

ELIAS

THE WOMAN LOCKED IN CHAINS STARES BACK AT ME. SHE'S BEAUTIFUL IN an ethereal way. She doesn't seem real. Crouching down in front of her, I tilt my head to the side, my eyes raking over her pretty face.

"I am King Elias of Bunafi," I say, introducing myself.

Her gaze lifts to mine, her eyes holding zero fear as she takes me in. Her lips curl up and she leans forward. "I am Ryia," she sighs, her breath washing over my face. I feel my cock stir against my will in her presence. "Release me, Your Majesty, I am at your service."

"Elias," Merek grunts behind me as I lift my hands to release her from her copper bindings.

Looking over my shoulder, I arch a brow at my cousin. "She's a witch," he growls.

Turning back toward the woman, my eyes search her own as I try to find the evidence of Merek's claim.

"Are you a witch?" I ask, my voice a mere whisper as my desire burns for this beauty.

My fingers continue to work her copper bindings as I wait for the answer, freeing her quickly.

She lifts her hand, her fingertips sliding through my short beard as her eyes connect with mine. "I am a witch, but bound in copper, I cannot practice magic in this room. What you feel for me, it is your desire to have me," she breathes. "I was held by this awful man. You, I would go with freely."

I should push her away, my bride waits for me at our camp, but I cannot leave this witch. I am bound to her, connected to her and I must have her. I have never felt like this before, as if my body is not my own. As though I am not under my own control.

Leaning forward, I cup the back of her head before I feel my body being ripped away and dragged out of the room. The sweet voice of the witch rings out in laughter as Merek tosses me out of the room, my back slamming against the stone wall.

Lifting my gaze to meet his, I am not even angry at his actions. "What's happened?" I breathe.

"That witch must be part siren. She will consume you, Elias. She wants you and I do not know why or what she will use you for, but I do not trust her."

"She said that she could not practice magic in there, maybe I really do just desire her?"

Merek crouches down in front of me, his eyes finding mine. "When we take over, sometimes the men rape, especially the princesses and servants inside of the castle. You have never done such things. Your wife, the woman carrying your heir, waits for you.

"Some men partake in the pleasures of other women's flesh when they are wed. Had you married anybody but her, I would possibly not question it. You are not your father and you love your wife, Elias."

"I do," I rasp. "But how?"

"The gods jest," Merek hisses. "They will try everything in their power to make sure that this prophecy is not fulfilled. That is what it must be, as she is powerful when she should not be so. Do not give in to the desires, Elias. It is not worth the consequences, not for a moment of physical pleasure."

"I'm not sure that it would be pleasurable," I grunt.

Merek chuckles. "That *queynte* probably has teeth."

Standing to my feet, I shake my head with a laugh. "I have no doubt that it does. Blindfold her, bind her arms. She will stay in this room until we leave here," I order.

I should turn and walk away as soon as my orders are delivered, but I don't. Instead, I wait until Merek has done what I've asked, ensuring that my cousin is safe from this siren witch and the overwhelming power that she possesses.

"The deed is done," he murmurs as soon as he walks out of the room.

"She will remain locked inside, under guard, but no man will enter, per the King's orders," I state.

He dips his chin, then turns to relay my orders to the men of his choosing. Turning from him, I go in search of Henry and Lief.

I find them in the dining hall, a group of women gathered together. Some are of higher standing, judging by their clothes, some are simply servants. All are beautiful.

"Explain why there are no men here," I demand, flicking my gaze over the women.

I hear one woman clear her throat before she takes a step forward. She is a beauty with dark hair and darker eyes. Her eyes flash with fear for a moment before she quickly hides the emotion and straightens her spine.

"I am Princess Loreena. Please do not hurt us," she begs, but does not lower her chin, her words are a plea, but her stance is strong and proud.

"Why are there no men?" I ask.

She cringes, then lifts her chin and those defiant eyes find mine. "My father surrounded himself with women. No men reside in this castle, save for him," she states.

I can read between her words. Her father freely used the women that I see before me, no doubt raping them over and over again for

his personal pleasures. Dipping my chin, my gaze finds Loreena's and I jerk my chin in a short nod.

"This will happen no longer. As long as you pledge your loyalty to me, you will be free."

Her eyes find mine, her brow arches as she looks over my face, then scans my body. "What will happen to me?" she asks. "I am the King's daughter."

"Typically, you would not survive," I explain and she closes her eyes for a long blink before she reopens them.

"However?"

"However, I think that you have most likely suffered enough at the hands of a king. We can come up with some kind of agreement, as long as your loyalty belongs to me, of course."

"Yes, naturally of course," she grinds out.

She looks almost resigned, assuredly assuming that I will use her in nefarious ways. She does not realize the man that I am, the king that I am. She will understand. She will see that I am not her father, nor am I my own, even if her siren almost tempted me to do exactly what I despise.

Turning to Merek, I grin. "Take the princess to her chamber, put guards at her door. Also, have a guard bring my bride here."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Merek mutters, dipping his chin.

"Your bride travels with you, to battle?" Loreena blurts.

My lips twitch into a grin. "Though my bride and I are none of your concern, she will never leave my side again."

In a whirl of motion, my men go about fulfilling my orders. The princess is taken to her chambers, the other women remain where they stand as my men go about finding my bride and bringing her to me.

Before she arrives, I interview all of the women and deem them, just as I thought, not a threat. Though they won't be preparing food any time soon, I will keep them in my employ to continue running this castle, as they so desire.

Much is to be done here in this castle, in this land before we can travel home to Aerilon. And we will travel home before the babe is born.

There is so much hanging in the balance, so much unknown, including the witch that has been discovered here in this place. She has something to do with the prophecy, I'm just not sure how yet.

I need Aleida and Godiva to show themselves again. They hide for too long. They have answers to my questions that need to be asked.

Narrowing my eyes, I look around the room wondering where exactly those meddling witches ran off to and when they will decide to grace me with their presence again.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR



SYBILLA

Frederick appears not long after we hear the bells ringing. He's astride a horse, looking no worse for wear as he grins down at us.

"Rowan and Asher, the King requests the presence of his bride," he announces.

My lips twitch into a small smile. I wish that I could climb on Lightning and ride toward Elias as fast as I can, but aside from the fact that Lightning isn't here, I would probably fall as soon as she started to gallop.

There is a loud neigh from behind me. Frederick chuckles as I turn my head to see the Arion horse appear. "Let me take you to the king on my way home, fair Queen," he offers.

I let out a shiver at the fact that a horse is talking and I understand him. It's fucking lunacy. Looking back at my girls, they nod in a silent urge to climb on the massive beast.

"Thank you, I would appreciate that," I say, making my way up to the giant horse.

Reaching out, I let my hand graze his soft mane and neck. He turns his head toward me and buries his face in my neck with a snort. I let out a laugh, wrapping my arms into his mane.

"What's your name?" I whisper.

"Leo," he answers back in his own whisper.

I run my hand down his mane one last time and take a step back as he lowers his front to the ground so that I can climb on his back.

Once I'm seated on his back, I look over at the warriors who watch me. They're smiling, knowing that I'll be with Elias in just mere moments instead of at least an hour's ride to his side.

"Take me to My King please, Leo," I say.

He neighs as he stands. My fingers grip his mane as he begins to gallop and then he jumps before he extends his wings and with just a few flaps, we're up in the air and gliding toward the castle on the hill.

Closing my eyes, I let the air whip my hair all around me, feeling free. This ride is nothing like the last time I was on Leo's back.

This ride is fun, not bathed in terror. Leo swoops down, tilts to the side, then without even a single bump, or jiggle, he lands softly on the cobblestone.

Merek is standing at the entrance of the castle, his smile is blinding when he realizes it's me riding in on an Arion. Petting Leo, I lean into him and thank him for the ride.

"If ever you need me, Your Majesty, just call out for me, I will listen for you."

I slide off of him as he speaks his offer, but before I can answer him, he bends his knees and propels himself into the sky, his wings expand and in just a single breath, he is gone. I watch the beauty that is the massive Arion in flight. That is, until I feel Merek's hand wrap around my elbow.

"He waits for you in the throne room, Sybilla," he murmurs.

Turning to look at him, I see the question in his eyes. "Katrina is well, I assume that Frederick, Rowan, and Asher will bring her and Jasmine as soon as they can."

"Ellyn?" he asks.

I shake my head, unable to say the words aloud. Merek understands my meaning, thankfully, and doesn't demand that I tell him anything else.

Silently, we walk together, side by side until I'm in what I assume is the throne room. Lifting my gaze to the back of the room, I see him. Elias is sitting in a large chair, his hands loosely resting on each arm of the chair, his gaze pointed directly at me.

Sucking in my lips, I take a step toward him, noting that there is an aisle, benches set up on either side that I assume is for the king to come and go. My feet move, one in front of the other as I make my way toward him. Merek's hand falls from my elbow and I assume that he's left us alone in this room.

"Come to me, My Queen," Elias demands, his voice deep and sultry.

My feet carry me to him, I don't even have to think about it, there is nowhere I would rather be than at his side. My panic from earlier has all but vanished at the mere sight of him. Elias is my family, my home, my life now. Sure, I miss my parents and my sisters, but Elias is where I belong.

"I am now the King of Llyne," he softly exclaims as soon as I arrive at the base of the stairs that lead up to his throne.

Lifting my chin, I look at him through my lashes, his lips turn up into a smirk and I don't miss the way that his hands move at his hips. I bite my bottom lip as I think about what his hands at his hips is going to mean in just a few moments.

"Come to me," he demands roughly as he finishes unlacing his tights and I watch his fingers curl around his hard length.

Licking my lips, I watch as he strokes himself for me. Slowly, I climb the few steps toward him. Gathering my nightgown in my hands, he spreads his legs and I sink down to my knees between his thighs.

Elias reaches forward with his free hand, sliding his fingers through the side of my hair, gathering strands before he grips them at the back of my head. I expect him to pull me down toward his waiting hard cock, but he doesn't. He continues to stroke, his black glittering gaze focused on me.

Lowering my head, I keep my eyes on his as I open my mouth and touch my lips to the tip, before I open my mouth and take as much of him inside of me as possible. He groans, but his eyes never waver, never leave mine as my head bobs along his length.

"You are my goddess, Sybilla. My Queen," he rasps, his fingers tightening in my hair.

I hum around him, watching as his eyes widen a fraction before his lips twitch into a small smile. He allows me to suck and lick him for a few moments, completely enjoying my power as much as my submission.

His hand gently tugs my head away, his grin widening as he looks down at me. "Come and sit astride me, sweeting. Ride me on this abhorrent king's throne."

Standing, I climb onto his lap, straddling his hips as I look down at him. "Maybe we shouldn't, not here," I breathe.

Elias smirks, lifting one hand, he cups my jaw, the other he wraps around my waist and without a single word of warning, he pulls me down along his length, filling me like only he can. I let out a gasp, my eyes widening in surprise as his thumb gently glides along my bottom lip.

"I will take you in every single room of this castle. We rule here, he will be naught but a fading memory not only in this castle, but to the people of Llyne," he grinds out.

I'm too lost in the feeling of my body being stretched by him, wondering how I've survived these past hours without him buried inside of me, wishing that I could keep him with me every minute of every day. Elias' thumb slides along my bottom lip again.

My eyes find his and I give him a small smile. "Whatever you need, My King," I breathe.

He grins, lifting his hips, and I whimper with a roll of my own. "You love me," he rasps.

I nod, my eyes rolling slightly as my hips begin to move, finding a rhythm that I know will bring me toward my climax sooner rather than later. Elias chuckles, his hand moving down to curl around the side of my neck as his thumb strokes the center.

"I love you as well, Sybilla."

His eyes are glittery and black, they are all-consuming and my breath hitches at the sight of him as I continue to ride, continue to roll my hips and just feel him, all of him inside of me.

"Soon I will take all of you, sweeting. Every part of you will belong to me," he rasps.

A moan escapes my lips at the thought of Elias taking every square inch of my body as his own. The hand at my waist travels beneath my gown, gripping my thigh as his fingers dance up and then wrap around the globe of my ass.

I shiver as his fingers make their way toward the crack of my ass, then begin to rub firm circles there. "Elias," I breathe.

He grins, his fingers continuing to work me as I continue to take his cock, working myself closer and closer toward release.

Wordlessly, a finger slips inside of my back entrance and I let out a sharp cry at the sensation. "Push back, take my finger, and soon you'll feel my cock back there, you'll beg for it, sweeting," he breathes, his jaw clenched tightly.

Sinking my teeth into my bottom lip, I nod and I do exactly what he wants. I fuck his cock and his finger, over and over I take him inside of me, loving the way that it feels.

He is watching me, lids lowered, jaw clenched, eyes glittering through his lashes and I know that he's just as affected as I am by this intense moment. A muscle jumps in his jaw and I take that moment to lean forward.

My lips touch his, my tongue slides across the seam of his, and I tilt my head to the side as I press my mouth against his, my hips bucking and jerking as I fuck him with all that I have, my body no longer under my control.

He growls, his fingers flex against my neck before he lifts his hips, meeting mine until I cry out as my climax rolls through my entire body.

Elias growls, swallowing my cries, his fingers continuing to work my ass as his hips lift and then he stills inside of me, growling against my lips as his cock fills me with his own release.

I rip my mouth from his in an attempt to catch my breath. "I love you," I breathe. "I want all of you," I admit.

He nods, his face serious, so serious as his glittering black eyes turn indigo. "You shall have me, My Queen, always."

There is a moment of silence as we catch our breaths, our eyes connected to one another's as we just watch each other. I almost tell him how scared I was when he went off to break into this place, when he left me at that camp in his tent.

I almost admit that I was seconds away from completely losing my shit and running away from him as far and as fast as I possibly could. I don't tell him any of those things. Instead, I touch my mouth to his.

ELIAS

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER IS ODDLY DUSTY AND UNUSED IN THIS CASTLE. IT should not surprise me that this unmarried king would not put any woman in his queen's chambers, but then again, I thought that some paramour would have had access to it at some point over the years. However, it looks as if it has been untouched for at least two decades.

Leaving Sybilla and her girls in the room, I go in search of some men to take a tub and fill it with bathing water for the women. Thankfully, one of my men is not too far away and dips his chin before running off, all too eager to do his King's bidding.

Merek is found easily enough at the closed door of the witch's quarters. "Have you thought of what this means?" I ask, jerking my chin toward the closed door.

"Lief knows more of magic than I do," he says with a nod.

Lief pushes off of the wall and tilts his head to the side, his eyes roaming over the door. "Aleida and Godiva are close, but they are cloaking themselves," he murmurs. "I can feel them."

"How?" I demand, as this is the first time that I have heard of Lief having any access to magic, or knowing a *sarding* thing about it.

"I do not practice magic, I do not hold it inside of myself, but much like Cornwall, it has been in my family. My grandmother though, not my mother. I can do naught but sense it. And I sense the women."

Lief spins around and I watch as he narrows his eyes. "Show yourselves, witches," he growls.

As if he's summoned the Devil himself, two figures appear. I recognize one as the witch Godiva when she was brought to me veiled in beauty. The other must be Aleida veiled the same way. Before our eyes, I watch as they become themselves again.

"Thank you for not calling us sooner." Godiva grins, giving Lief a wink. "Your soldiers do love to celebrate victory and we were enjoying ourselves immensely," she admits with a shrug of her shoulder.

"Why did you leave my bride vulnerable? I should have your heads for that," I demand.

Aleida shakes her head, taking a step toward me. "We foresaw the goddesses' evil work. We cannot fight them. They will destroy us if they get ahold of us. The only way we could protect the Queen and you, was to go into hiding so that they could not have easy access to us. We sent her the Arion, who is now connected to her and

all she must do is call his name and he will find her and rescue her from danger," she explains.

"You did not tell us this, why?"

"The fates are all but sealed, Your Majesty. What we did, we needed to do, but we would never abandon your mission as we know it is the most important mission this world has ever known. Fulfilling the prophecy takes precedence over everything. But, we cannot help it come to fruition, we cannot protect you if the goddesses destroy us."

"What *sarding* goddesses?" I growl.

"The Erinyes, the goddesses of vengeance and retribution. They are servants of Hades and are trying to sabotage the prophecy, they're very dangerous and this threat is something we've have only just learned of," Godiva explains.

"What do we do?" I demand.

Aleida lifts her hand, wrapping her fingers around my forearm and squeezes. "You continue to be smart, to watch your backs and pay attention to your surroundings, while Godiva and I continue to do what we do best."

"Now, I have one thing to ask of Your Majesty," Godiva dares to say.

Arching a brow, I watch her, waiting to see what she is going to say.

"Release my sister," she announces, jerking her chin toward the door.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE



ELIAS

“Y our what?” I demand, needing to know that I have not heard her words incorrectly.

Godiva smirks. “Ryia is my sister. Born of my father and a whore he visited regularly much later in his life,” she states. “She is powerful, which is why this wretched king kept her locked away, beneath copper, until he needed to use her magic and her body,” she explains.

Shaking my head, I lift my hand and run my fingers through my hair. “She has power even in that room. She tried to use it on me. She is a siren, most likely sent by Erinyes now that I know what we’re working against.”

Godiva’s lips twitch. “Beneath that copper she has no power, King Elias. If you felt something, it wasn’t because of magic.”

My chest aches as I think about what she’s telling me. I don’t believe it. Ryia is a siren, a temptress and I’ll not believe that just a bit of copper will keep her from attempting to seduce me, the gods powers are stronger than anything man-made.

“I know what I felt. It was otherworldly.”

Godiva dips her chin. “May I speak with my sister, Your Highness?” she asks, keeping her voice softer than usual. She is attempt-

ing to make herself seemingly submissive and I wonder if both she and Ryia indeed do have some kind of otherworld powers.

"Go to her, but you'll not be going alone," I grunt.

Following behind her, I walk into the siren's space, yet again and once again I feel a lust fill me that is unnatural. Closing my eyes, I drop my head and wait for this intense moment to end. Godiva moves around, she sinks down in front of her sister and removes the blindfold.

I hear Godiva gasp at the same time I hear Ryia hiss. Lifting my gaze, my eyes widen when I see the sisters face off with one another. The witches are standing several feet away from one another and there is a green mist in the air swirling between them.

"What have you done, sister?" Godiva asks.

Ryia throws back her head and lets out a demonic sounding laugh. Then she drops her chin. "Are you that surprised, Diva? You left me to the wolf. The goddesses have freed me and in return, I am more than happy to do their bidding."

"I am here for you. I came here to save you," Godiva states.

Taking a step back, I try to open the door so that my men can come in and possibly guard these witches, these women who are obviously at odds with one another. Aleida is the first one to enter the room and judging by the gasp that she lets out, this must be bad.

My stomach twists, it aches and I shift my gaze back to the women. Godiva has her arms extended, her palms facing Ryia, but Ryia is facing me with a smile on her face, her fingers pointing directly at me.

"What are you doing?" I demand on a wheeze.

She smirks. "Taking your love away, Elias. It is only but a blossoming seed, this will be easy, and then the prophecy will be naught but destruction and doom for this entire world."

Aleida starts chanting behind me, but I am frozen to my spot. The pain consumes me and I feel as though she is doing more than simply taking my love from my body, it feels as though she is extracting my soul, my marrow from my bones.

Before I realize what's happening. I hear her. It is Sybilla's sweet voice, except it sounds panicked. Wrenching my face away from the witch, I look behind me in horror to see my wife rounding the corner.

Merek tries to stop her, but she maneuvers past him and stops at the threshold of the door. My heart begins to beat faster at the sight of her. She lifts one hand to her belly, the other she extends to me as tears fill her eyes.

It's as if she knows that Ryia is trying to steal the love that I have for her from my body. My stomach stops hurting and I turn my back to the witch, taking a single step toward my bride.

"Nooo," Ryia screams, her voice piercing and bouncing off of the stone walls.

My knees give out, my hands lift to my ears, covering them as I fall to the floor. My back arches, my head flying back with a scream that I know emulates the pain that I'm feeling inside of me in this moment.

I'm not sure what happens. I hear women screaming, crying, men's voices and the sound of steel hissing through the air, but I can't open my eyes, I can't stand from my kneeling position on the floor and then everything goes completely black.

MEREK

I WATCH MY COUSIN FALL TO THE FLOOR, MY BLADE TRAINED ON THE witch they call Ryia's throat. She smirks, her job seemingly done here, but I know that it is not. Elias is not weak. If he loves his sweet wife, then it is not something that can be stripped so easily from him.

"You finish her, or I will," I growl, glancing to Godiva. "Blood or not, she must be put down."

"You act as though I am a lame animal. That is not very kind, my gentle Merek," she purrs.

She is beautiful, but she does not stir desire inside of me. I have bedded many beautiful maids, she is nothing special. Tilting my head to the side, I curl my lip.

"You are a lame animal, witch," I sneer.

Her gaze narrows at me and she lifts her hands in a threat, but not before I hear low chanting behind me, then the witch flies backward. Her back is pressed to the copper-lined wall and I watch as

her skin sizzles. It is as if she's pressed against hot coals right before my eyes.

Glancing to Godiva and Aleida, I watch as they hold their hands out and begin chanting louder and louder. The witch jerks and the smell of burning flesh fills the room right before her head hangs low.

"Stand to the side, Merek," Godiva instructs.

I hurry to the side and watch as the floor opens up and the witch disappears before the hole closes back up again. Turning my head to look at the witches, my mouth drops open. I try to speak, but naught comes out.

"She is with Hades now, whom she apparently had promised herself to. This could be good or it could be really bad, depending on what he intends to use her for," Godiva mutters.

Sybilla hiccups and I look down to see she's on the floor, her body draped over an unmoving Elias. "Our King?" I ask.

Aleida and Godiva share a look and they both shake their head once. "We do not know, we will not know until we assess him," Aleida murmurs.

Jerking my chin toward them, I demand that they care for their Queen and take her up to her chambers. Scooping Elias in my arms, I pick up the heavy bastard and follow behind them, carrying him to the Queen's chambers.

I pray to the gods not only for his life because I love my cousin as though he is part of my own flesh, but for the country, and most of all for his health so that he can witness his babe enter this world.

SYBILLA

MEREK GENTLY LAYS ELIAS DOWN ON THE BED. I DON'T BOTHER PULLING back the comforter, unsure of what we'll find beneath it. This room is so musty and dusty, that I have no doubt if there are sheets, they are just as gross as everything else.

I watch as Merek leans over him, and I assume that he's checking his breathing and listening for his heartbeat. I pace at the foot of the bed, Jasmine and Katrina staying silent by the window as they watch.

"Is he alive?" I ask after a long moment of silence.

Merek turns his head to me, his body still bent over Elias. Slowly, he straightens his spine and turns to face his body toward me. I hold my breath, waiting for an answer, unsure if I am going to like what he has to say.

"He lives, Sybilla," he rasps. "I know not how her dark magic touched him. If she was able to strip his love for you, or if she wiped his memories from him. I just do not know what exactly she's done to him," he rasps.

I hear both Jasmine and Katrina gasp at his words. We may not have much magic in my world, but I understand the concept of dark magic, and just thinking about it sends a shiver throughout my entire body.

"I want everyone to leave," I whisper.

I feel Jasmine and Katrina close in on my back, but my focus is nowhere but on my husband. If he doesn't remember me, if he's lost his love for me, then I don't want any witnesses to it when he wakes up.

There has been enough fear, embarrassment, and unnerving information hurled at me the past few months. This humiliation I would rather have all to myself, instead of an entire room of people watching as bystanders.

"Sybilla," Merek begins.

Shaking my head, I square my shoulders as I lift my chin. I refuse to entertain anything other than them leaving me alone. Merek clears his throat, then slowly his feet close the distance between us.

"I will give you this request without argument. However, if there is even an inkling of change in his condition, promise you will send for me?"

Sinking my teeth into my bottom lip, I dip my chin in a short nod. "Yes, I will," I whisper.

He dips his chin, then without word, walks past me. I hear him and the girls clear out, the door closing behind them. Only then do I let my shoulders drop as I let out a heavy sigh.

My feet finally become unstuck from the stone floor and I run toward my husband's side. Sinking down next to him, I fit my hips against his side and take his large warm hand in mine. I watch him, waiting for any sign of life other than the very slow rise and fall of his chest.

Elias looks so at peace, he looks relaxed as he lies in the bed. Holding his hand in mine, I refuse to let him go, afraid that if I do, I will lose a part of him, the part that I cherish most in this world and in mine—his love.

Love. It's something that you can't see but only feel. It may have taken me some time to admit not only to Elias, but also to myself that I truly do love him. I've never felt this way about another person in my life.

I suppose that it could be witchcraft, especially with the way Godiva bound my true heart's love and I to one another, but I don't think that what I feel is false. It's not a smokescreen or anything else. It is pure. It is bigger than anything I've ever felt before. No other man has ever made me feel the way that Elias does.

Squeezing his hand, I silently will him to open his eyes and look at me. I want him to smirk, to act cocky and sexy. I want him to pull me into his arms and fulfill the need that I constantly carry for him, and only him.

The need that fills me with an aching pain that I keep trying to ignore, but as the minutes tick by, that pain grows more and more.

"Please, Elias. Please wake up," I whisper. "We need you, me and this baby. Don't make me raise our baby alone in a strange land without modern medicine and my family. Don't do that to me."

Tears fill my eyes, they fall instantly, sliding down my cheeks before they land against his hand that I have clutched in mine. I stay there, at his side, holding his hand, and crying for hours.

The sun sets in the sky, darkness consumes the room, but I refuse to move. I also ignore anyone's attempt at gaining access and demand that they leave me alone.

When the sun rises, the room bathed in early gray morning light, I hear something behind me. The door didn't open, I would have heard that, but when I turn around, I see two figures standing in the bedroom, their eyes focused nowhere but Elias.

"He is here because of you. Why are you here?" I grind out.

Godiva takes a step forward, but my eyes narrow and she wisely stops her approach. "I didn't know. My love for my once-sweet sister was all that I could see. I did not realize the depths of her abuse and the darkness that she allowed to control her. She cloaked herself, she fooled me."

I want to be angry with Godiva, but I can't find it inside of me, not when I would die for my sisters, myself. Turning to her, I bite my bottom lip and inhale a deep breath.

"Can you fix him?" I ask, though it comes out like more of a demand than a question.

I am too far past niceties at this point. I want my husband back and I want him back the way that he left me. I don't want him to not remember me, I don't want him to have fallen out of love with me. I want him just the way I had him, every inch of his stubborn, asshole self.

Aleida shakes her head slowly, her sad eyes meeting mine. "If we bring him back, he may not be the same."

"He's not dead," I snap.

Godiva nods her head once. "You are correct. The king lives. He has dark magic inside of him and all that we can do is try and rid his body of that. We won't know the effects it will have on any part of him until he wakes."

"You can reverse her spell?" I ask on a whisper.

Aleida presses her lips together, her eyes looking at me with nothing other than pure pity in her gaze. "It does not work that way, Your Majesty," she murmurs. "I wish that it did, I truly wish that we could rid you of your emotional pain."

"What happens to the prophecy if he does not love me when he wakes up?" I ask.

My eyes travel over to Elias, I watch him, willing him to naturally open his eyes, but he doesn't. Shifting my gaze back over my shoulder, I lift my chin toward the witches. "Wake him. Take the dark magic from him if you can. He needs to be alive and healthy for his people."

"The prophecy? You, Your Highness?" Aleida breathes.

Shaking my head, I bite back more tears, refusing to let them fall. "It will hurt if he doesn't remember me. It would suck ass, but I won't stop loving him and if it's meant to be, he will find his way back to me."

I'm not sure that I believe my own words, knowing that they are most likely a lie. But maybe they aren't, maybe I *can* make him love me. He fell for me once, he can again. If the prophecy was put into motion by the gods, then maybe it's time for those fucks to intervene anyway.

"Continue to hold him," Aleida mutters before a gray haze starts to swirl around us.

"Will it help?" I ask.

"It couldn't hurt."

I keep my gaze focused on him, watching, waiting to see him open those steel-blue eyes and take me in. I pray to my God as they summon all of their magic around us and I hold my breath, waiting and waiting for it to happen.

Elias' back arches off of the bed, his eyes open and he inhales a deep breath right before the gray mist vanishes. His eyes find mine, but I can't read the expression on his face. I continue to hold my breath, waiting, praying, willing him to speak, to remember—to love.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX



SYBILLA

The witches are still behind me, but I cannot do anything but stare at the man in front of me. His eyes roam over my face, watching me, searching my gaze as he continues to stay silent. Then, as if something shakes him, his shoulder jerks and he sits straight up.

“What’s happened?” he demands, his eyes sliding past me, behind me, and to the witches.

My heart starts to slam against my chest, my stomach clenches and my entire body feels heavy and sensitive. His hand stays in mine, but he doesn’t grasp my fingers with his own, he doesn’t know who I am.

“My sister, Ryia, was full of dark magic straight from Hades himself,” Godiva whispers.

Elias jerks his chin, though he doesn’t speak right away. “Tell Merek I wish to see him, immediately. I will have a meeting in the chancery of this castle, you two will be there,” he growls.

I assume the witches leave, but I cannot take my eyes off of Elias. The door closes and the breath that I’d been holding comes out in a long whoosh. My bottom lip trembles, just as Elias’ gaze shifts to meet my own.

He takes his hand from mine and I think that he's going to push me away, but instead, he cups my cheek in his palm, his thumb running across my bottom lip, as he's always done. My eyes flutter closed and I wonder if he didn't lose his love or his memory. I wonder if everything is just perfect.

"I feel as though I should know you, a fine creature at my bedside that weeps for me must be important."

My torso jerks at the same time my eyes fly open. Lifting my hand, I wrap my fingers around his wrist and grip him tightly. "I'm your wife," I whisper. "Queen Sybilla."

His steel-blue eyes turn that indigo color that I love, one step closer to the glittering black eyes when he's full of desire for me. They don't take that extra step this time, they stay dark-colored as his gaze roams over my face.

"Wife," he says as if testing the word out.

I watch as he licks his lips, wetting them as he continues to watch me, staring as if in search for something, what, I'm not sure. My entire body feels cold, so cold that I can't stop the tremors from shaking me down to my core.

Though my stomach clenches in pain, Elias reaches for me and draws me into his arms, pulling me against his chest. I rest my cheek against the center of his chest and inhale his manly scent. Gripping his biceps, I close my eyes, never wanting to leave his arms again.

"I do not remember, wife. I am sorry, are we a love match?" he asks softly, sounding so, so, sweet and I hate it.

Pressing my lips together, I hold the loud cry that threatens to escape me. Sitting up slightly, I release my hold on his arms as I find his gaze with my own.

"We are fated, Elias. A prophecy fulfilled, but yes, we fell in love." Reaching for his hand, I place his palm against my belly. "And we have created something beautiful together with that love," I whisper.

His eyes widen, dropping to my stomach, then lifting to meet my eyes. "By the gods," he whispers. He opens his mouth to say something else when Merek bursts through the door.

Immediately Merek's gaze travels the length of his cousin and his lips lift in a smirk to see that he is alive, breathing, and well.

Rolling my lips together, I try not to ramble and blurt out all that's happened between us, the fact that he doesn't even remember

me.

"What do you last remember, cousin?" Merek asks.

The witches must have told him that Elias would likely not remember me, but they haven't said how much time he would have lost. Merek is smarter than I am, more grounded, and looking beyond his selfish needs, unlike myself.

"I remember coming here, storming this castle and taking out the king. I remember a beautiful woman in a copper-lined room. I remember that you are engaged to a maid."

Unable to hold my words in another second, I whisper. "You just don't remember me."

His eyes shift from Merek's to mine and he gives me a single shake of his head. "I apologize, I do not remember you." He lifts his head and looks to Merek. "She's my wife? Carrying the heir?"

"Aye, Elias. Sybilla is your Queen," he rasps.

Standing from the side of the bed, I brush my palms down the dress that was borrowed from the former princess here, a gown my girls procured, no doubt by just taking it for me. It's a bit tight, but not nearly as tight as the ones that I wore when I first arrived here.

"Well, you must want to meet with your men," I announce after clearing my throat.

"Sybilla," Merek murmurs.

Shaking my head, I give Elias a watery smile. "Go be with your men," I whisper.

He throws his legs over the side of the bed and stands. I expect him to breeze past me, but he doesn't. Instead, he takes two steps toward me and cups my cheeks. His head lowers and I expect him to kiss my mouth, but he doesn't.

Elias' lips touch each cheek before his forehead lowers and presses against my own. "You will join me, my bride."

I wish that he would call me sweeting. I didn't know that it was something I would miss the moment that it was gone.

He takes a step back from me and much to my surprise, his hand rests against my lower back and together we follow behind Merek as he leads us toward the office, or chancery, whatever they call it here.

ELIAS

SOMETHING STIRS DEEP INSIDE OF ME. IT IS MERELY A FLICKER, BUT IT happens every single time that my gaze lands on the pretty woman standing at my side. No, she is not just a pretty woman, or a maiden, she is my wife.

Wife.

I cannot believe that I have zero recollection of this marriage, of the consummation least of all. My hand feels natural against her back, a warming sensation fills me from the inside out.

I don't remove it, instead, I slide it farther around her waist and tuck her against my side. She follows without hesitation, a small sigh escaping her plump lips when she does.

"Tell me what's happened." I demand after the chancery is filled with all six of my men, two witches, and two maids.

The men clear their throats, but it is the witches who begin to talk. They tell me the tale of the prophecy, something else that I don't remember. I don't understand how I could have forgotten so much of the past several months.

"Ryia was full of dark magic from the goddesses, Erinyes," Godiva explains. "She wanted to stop the prophecy by taking your love of Sybilla from you."

Glancing down at my wife, I frown before I pull her even closer to my side. "They will not win," I murmur. "Make me remember, witch. Make me love her again."

"It doesn't work like that," Aleida says, her voice sounding as sad as she looks. I want to shake the witches, scream at them and tell them to do as I demand, but I don't.

"What do I do then?"

Sybilla takes a step forward, forcing the arm wrapped around her waist to fall away. She straightens her back, squaring her shoulders, then clears her throat.

"Can you do that binding spell again?" she asks. "Bind me to my true love."

Godiva holds up her hand as she closes her eyes. I watch as she inhales, then her body begins to tremble. "He is still bound to you, Your Highness," she whispers. "I can feel it within him, though the dark magic is out of his body, Ryia's power was great when she sucked his love of you out of him. It will be up to you and mayhap the gods to replenish it."

"How?" I roar.

"Time, Your Majesty. You are fated for one another, but the love you once shared was not purely magical, or brought on solely by the prophecy, the two of you built that love together. You will again if it is meant to be."

We all stay silent for a moment, my Queen does not turn around to look at me again and I find that I do not like it. I want her pretty golden eyes on me, eyes that are the exact shade of gold as my coat of arms.

"You'll continue to stay with us, if you attempt to disappear again, you will be locked in the dungeon," I inform the witches.

Aleida dips her chin in submission, Godiva, as is her way, only arches a brow. "We must make sure that no other dark magic infiltrates us. What can you do to assure me that it will not happen again?"

There is a moment of silence and Godiva sighs. "Unfortunately, we do not gain our magic from the gods and goddesses. We are not more powerful than they are, we do, however, love loopholes, so we will stay on Your Highness and we will work tirelessly to ensure that you, your wife and your wee babe are protected, always."

"What of my men, my people?" I demand.

Godiva shakes her head once. "Our magic is only so powerful. It would deplete us to attempt to protect an entire country, Your Highness. Then we would be useless and you would be unprotected."

Lifting my hand, I run my fingers through my hair, tugging on the ends before I let out a breath. "What can we do?"

Aleida takes a step toward me, she extends her palm and focuses her gaze on my own. I watch as her eyes begin to swirl with black and gold. She mutters something that I can't understand, her eyes continuing to swirl with color until a deep gray mist surrounds me.

"You are protected, Your Highness. No harm will come to you or the ones you love," she whispers.

I don't miss the way she says, *ones you love*, her gaze shifting to Sybilla. "What of my wife and babe?" I ask on a whisper.

Her lips tip up into a small smile. "Take your wife away on holiday. Fall in love with her, watch as she grows your child inside of her womb and when you are good and truly in love with her once again, she will be automatically under your protection."

"Sard," I hiss. "Until then?"

Godiva takes a step forward. "She is your fated, done so by the gods, Your Majesty. No true harm will come to her unless it is destined by the gods hands."

I hate her words. They cause me to fill with a mix of anger and frustration.

"My Queen," I whisper.

She turns to me, her eyes wide and so very sad. Holding out my hand, palm up, I wait for her to come to me. She slips her cool fingers in mine and I tug her against me, causing her to crash against my chest.

Lifting my other hand, I bury my fingers in the back of her hair, shifting her head to the side before I slam my mouth to hers.

Sybilla gasps, which is exactly what I want as I slip my tongue deep inside of her mouth, tasting her, circling her, hoping that this will cause the memories to flood back.

They don't.

Though we're both breathless by the end, I break the kiss and look into her gorgeous gold eyes. Her eyes are practically glittering with gold flakes as she catches her breath, her eyes wide and focused on mine.

Bending down slightly, I slip one arm beneath her knees, the other wraps around her back and I pick her up, holding her against my chest. Turning from everyone in the room, I begin to walk toward the door, stopping to look back at Merek.

"Get this place running, then come back to Aerilon," I announce.

"Elias, you cannot. What about the princess here, what will you have me do with the people?"

Looking over my shoulder at my cousin, I grin. "Do as you wish with the princess, she must have family somewhere she can go and be with. If not, she may come back to Bunafi and stay with us until she finds a husband. As long as she pledges her loyalty to my crown, no harm will come to her. I trust you Merek, you are more than qualified for this," I state.

He dips his chin. "What of my marriage?" He seems nervous, as if I'd forgotten about his devotion to his handmaid.

"Marry her, brother."

Without another word, I leave the room. "Elias," Sybilla cries.

I don't stop walking, my eyes flicking to my wife. Still such a foreign concept. "Where are we going?"

"I'm taking you away. We're going to spend time with one another, we're going to fall in love and wait for this prophecy to continue, but until then, I am going to enjoy my wife and all the pleasures she has to offer me."

Dipping my chin, I touch my lips to hers. "There is something flickering inside of me, Sybilla. It is not just lust, it is deeper and I aim to find out what it is, if it could indeed be love."

"The witches took your pain from your past about your parents away from you. Do you feel hesitant about me, about love?" she asks, her voice so sweet that I feel it deep in my cock.

Shaking my head once, I don't recall them taking that pain from me, but I do feel hopeful that I will feel deeply for my wife. Not just because of this prophecy, but also because I want a happy marriage, and I feel deep inside of me that this woman does that—makes me happy.

"Don't tell me until you know for sure, until you feel it, but I love you, Elias Wainwright."

My lips turn up into a grin. "And I will fall in love with you, Sybilla Wainwright, for I do not think that any man in your presence could not fall madly in love with you, *sweeting*."

EPILOGUE



TWO MONTHS LATER

SYBILLA

Sitting straight up, I let out a whimper as I place my hand on my now rounding belly. Looking to my side, I frown when I realize that I am alone. Elias is not next to me, and since coming back to Aerilon eight weeks ago, he hasn't left my side for more than just a few hours.

In fact, we've spent the majority of the past two months in bed, wrapped in one another's arms, enjoying one another—*immensely*. I thought that he would change since losing his memory of me, but he hasn't, not in the slightest.

He's still the same in and out of bed, and I couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief the first time that he took me, and that's exactly what he did, he took, then he gave, then he repeated himself over and over again.

Slipping out of bed, I hiss as my feet meet the cold stone floor. Grabbing the fur-lined robe that is draped at the foot of the bed, I slip it on and go in search of my husband. It doesn't take me long to find him, he's sitting in his chancery, his eyes focused outside at the forest shadows in the distance.

"Elias?" I call.

He turns, a goblet of alcohol in his hand. His eyes find mine and he frowns. "You should not be out of bed, and you assuredly should not have bared feet," he murmurs.

Shrugging a shoulder, I close the distance between us. "I couldn't sleep. I felt like something was wrong. What's happened?"

He lifts the hand not holding his drink and slides it around my waist. "I am just thinking, still very much angry that I cannot remember the months that we shared before that witch stripped me of my memories, of my feelings."

I cup his cheeks and do something that I haven't done since we've been back. Extending my finger, I touch the top of his scar. As if by automatic reflex, his eyes close and I trail my fingertip down the rough skin.

"Don't be angry, Elias. They will come back and we have made so many awesome ones since then. Not a moment of time was lost for me, but I can say with certainty that the past two months have been my happiest here in this world."

His eyes open slowly and that's when it happens. His back arches, his eyes glitter, turning silver. I watch as he bares his teeth, his nostrils flare, and then as quickly as it came, it disappears and his eyes turn steel blue again.

"Elias?" I chance asking, my body trembling from whatever has just happened.

His lips tip up into a smirk. "I remember," he rasps.

His lips slam against mine in a hard, bruising, unyielding and perfect kiss before he lifts his head to look into my eyes again.

"I remember," he repeats. "Gods bones, I remember. I was terrible to you, sweeting. When we met, when we were first wed, I was awful," he murmurs.

My lips turn up into a smile and I can't help myself, I laugh. "You were, but I fell in love with you and still do love you, Elias."

He slants his head and his soft lips touch mine, this time kissing me and owning me, sensually making love to my mouth and I let him, every single second that goes by my body warms from the inside out.

"I need you," I whimper.

He grins against my lips, "Aye, sweeting." Elias picks me up by the backs of my thighs and plops me down on the edge of his desk. "And you will always have me, I love you, My Queen."

ELIAS

BURYING MYSELF INSIDE OF MY SWEET WIFE, I FREEZE WITH ONE HAND twisting in the back of her hair, the other clenched around her hip. My eyes focus on hers, never wanting to look away from her again, too afraid that my memories will be stolen again.

My memories came back in a flood, a rush that felt as though they ripped through me. I know not if it was her sweet touch of my scar, or simply *her* that made them come back to me, but I fear asking any questions.

I fear that my memories returning has to do with some kind of witchcraft, but I decide to be thankful, grateful that they're back and nothing more.

"Elias," she exhales, her eyes dancing as she lifts her hands and cups my cheeks.

I taste her thumb as it traces my lips, nipping the pad. Gripping her hair harder, I slowly pull out before I sink back inside. Her sweet bottom is perched on the edge of the desk, her dancing eyes are on mine and her *queynte* is warm and slick, inviting, and mine.

"I love you, Sybilla," I say, repeating my words from just moments ago.

Her lips tip up in a small smile as I pull out, then glide back inside, grinding my pelvis against the sweet nub that I know will bring her toward an orgasm. Her hands move to my shoulders and I watch in awe as her head falls back, a moan escaping her lips.

Leaning over her, I touch my mouth to her neck and continue to make love to her. My wife. The woman carrying my babe in her belly. My everything.

Sybilla's nails dig into my shoulders and I welcome the slight bite of pain as she grips me harder with each thrust and roll of my hips. Sweat gathers against my lower back, my breathing comes out in pants, my balls pull up and I'm moments from climaxing.

"Harder," she moans.

Grinning against her neck, I slam into my wife, harder, as per her request. I don't know if it is because she's from another world, or if it's just her, but the woman is a perfect match for me, in every way.

It doesn't take long for her to find her release, her arms and legs wrap around me, squeezing and holding me against her body. My body trembles as I lose the small grasp that I have of my control.

Lifting my head, I watch her face as my hips continue to slam into her, pounding against her sweet body over and over. Her body is limp, her muscles that were once taut, relaxing as I continue to take her.

When she lifts her head, her eyes find mine and a lazy smile appears on her lips. "Yes, take me," she purrs.

"Who am I?" I grind out. I haven't made her call me her king since I lost my memories, they're back and I want to hear it, no, I need to hear her say the words.

"Elias," she breathes.

I shake my head once, my brow arching as I continue to grind my pelvis against her nub, knowing that she is sensitive, all while I clench my jaw as I try to delay my climax, needing to hear her say the words for me.

"My King," she breathes.

Driving my hips forward, I bury my cock deep inside of her and roar as my release empties inside of her. My vision blurs and I grunt when I feel her hands leave my shoulders and wrap around the sides of my neck. She pulls me down closer to her before she presses her lips against mine.

"I love you, My King," she breathes. "I have never been so happy in all of my life, welcome back."

BRIDE OF THE WARRIOR

A Prophecy of Sisters Short Story

PROLOGUE



MEREK

I see her walk across the courtyard, it is impossible not to see her. She always stands diligently behind her mistress, a constant, and a woman who constantly makes my cock stand hard and at attention, begging for release inside of her undoubtedly sweet body.

"The Queen knows naught of how to ride a horse," Cornwall announces.

Jerking my chin, I shift my gaze from the sweet handmaid to Sybilla, the queen from another world. She is pretty, beautiful, and my cousin is an idiot for not appreciating the gift that she is.

Originally, I wanted no part of her, but after getting to know her over the past few weeks, I'm discovering that there is very much to like about this strange woman. "I will teach her," I announce.

Cornwall nods, fading away. My gaze shifts from the queen to her maid again. Licking my lips, I decide that I'll have her and soon. She seems a bit hesitant, but I know that once I have her alone, she will be unable to resist my charms.

Grinning, I turn away from them. My plan is to start seducing the sweet Katrina tonight, after we eat our evening meal.

Once she's consumed just a bit of wine, not too much, just enough to lower her inhibitions a touch, I know that she'll be more than willing to accept at least some of my advances.

Though, I do not plan on taking her this eve, when I am buried between her thighs for the first time, she will have all her wits about her.

KATRINA

MAYBE HE DOESN'T THINK THAT I HAVE EYES. I CAN SENSE HIM watching me, every time that he is anywhere near me. I should be grateful, flattered, and appreciative of his gaze on me. Instead, I am heated, flustered, and extremely uncomfortable.

I know what the glances, the staring, the focused gaze means for a man like him and a girl like me. He is royalty, he is the first cousin to the King of Bunafi. I am common, and even worse than that, I am a servant on top of it.

A man like him could crook his finger at any woman and she is expected to lift her skirts for him. He could force me to do that, force me to take him inside of me and then toss me to the side and nobody would think anything of it. I've heard of it happening to more than one servant.

"He likes you," Ellyn whispers.

Biting my bottom lip, I shake my head once as I lift the goblet of wine to my lips. "He does not know me," I state.

She hums. "He does not have to know your mind to know what he likes. Many marriages take place between people who like one another yet don't even know the other person's favorite color."

I snort. She's right. So many people marry for one reason or another, their lusting bodies being the only thing that they have in common their entire lives. That is not what I want for myself. I want a true romance, like those that are written about in books. That is what I want.

"Looks like he is ready to finally make his play," she whispers.

Lifting my eyes, I see that Ellyn is right. Merek casually strolls toward me as if I am his prey and he is the largest cat in the world. Licking my lips, I bring the goblet to my mouth and finish the contents, hoping that the false courage from the wine will allow me to tell him that I will not have him.

"I do not think that we have been formally introduced," he purrs.

Holding his gaze with mine, I let out a sharp exhale. "I am Katrina, Queen Sybilla's handmaid," I say, attempting to sound strong.

His lips turn up into a small grin, as if he knows that I'm only attempting to be strong in this moment. The room fades away from around us as I stare into his green eyes. They almost match my own, except they darken a touch when he lifts his hand and reaches for my hair.

My breath hitches as he takes a chunk of my hair between his fingers and moves them back and forth. "I have never seen hair this color before, I was unsure that it was even real," he rasps, his voice barely above a whisper.

"It's real," I murmur.

He grins. "And very soft."

I can't take my gaze from his, I am frozen. He leans forward, his breath washing over my face. If I leaned forward even just a small bit, our mouths would touch, but I don't.

Someone calls his name from behind him and he growls, turning to look over his shoulder. I'm unable to move, my eyes trained on his neck, it's strong and tanned and I have the ridiculous urge to lick it, to taste his golden skin.

"I must go, but we will have some time alone again, no?"

Stupidly, like the idiot that I am, I nod. "Yes," I breathe.

His lips turn up into a victorious grin before he releases me, stepping away. I watch as he turns his back to me and then disappears. This is very bad. I cannot want him and if I give myself to him, I know that he will only take what he wishes and leave, as do all men of his status. I do not want that for my life.

CHAPTER ONE



SIX MONTHS LATER

KATRINA

“Marry me,” Merek whispers. Turning my head from him, I wonder if I can truly trust his words. Can this be real? Can he be real? I feel his lips touch the side of my neck and my heart skips a beat inside of my chest. His hands wrap around my waist, they’re so large that they almost touch as his fingers are splayed wide.

“Marry me, my joy,” he breathes against my skin.

Lifting my hand, I stupidly grip his hair at the nape of his neck as my entire body shivers. I should push him away, but I don’t. My thighs clench with a foreign feeling as my lower intimate area warms and clenches with a need that I have never felt before.

Pulling his head from my neck, I look into his eyes and ask him the same question I’ve asked over the past few months, one that he refuses to answer.

“You bedded Duraina the first night you kissed me, the night I told you that I was pure? What’s changed between now and then?” I demand.

Merek’s gaze shifts to the side, then comes back to meet mine. “You speak as if you know truths, Katrina,” he grinds out.

"You did not return until the next morning."

It is impossible to keep the hurt from my voice. It is there. I am unable to mask it. Merek went to another woman's bed, and he did so because he knew that I would not welcome him in mine. I still will not, until I am married.

"You know that I am not pure, Katrina. Do you want a list of the lovers that I have had in my life, I warn you that I started bedding women at thirteen years of age, so it could be a lengthy list," he snaps.

My shoulder jerks and I try to shimmy out of his grasp, his words being far too much for me to handle. He refuses to release me, his fingers gripping my waist a bit firmer as he watches me, waiting for me to respond to his words.

"I do not want a list," I grind out.

His lips twitch before he lowers his face and touches his mouth to mine. It's a soft, gentle, sweet kiss that he doesn't deepen, not even when my own part to allow his entrance. Nibbling on my bottom lip, he breaks the kiss.

"My sweetness," he rasps. "Say yes and there will never be another, just you."

"That is not romantic," I breathe.

He chuckles as though he finds me funny. "No, it was not meant to be romantic, but it is the truth. Honesty is not always pretty, my joy," he says, letting out a sigh. "Marry me, Katrina."

MEREK

I AM TEMPTED TO THROW THIS BLASTED WOMAN OVER MY SHOULDER AND drop her in the church. Elias has given me permission to wed her and yet she hesitates. I know that she wants me. Her kisses, her hard nipples, the way she moans and shifts her feet when I'm near, as if she's trying to relieve the ache that no doubt builds between her thighs, are all signs that she indeed wants more than a few kisses from me.

"Are you frightened, my joy?" I ask.

Her body jerks slightly and she shakes her head once, but I see the reality of it in her gaze. She is terrified. Though I doubt she's

afraid of me, I do think that she's scared to move forward with me.

"Are you scared of my physical touch or of giving all of yourself to me and fearful that I will harm you?" I ask, keeping my voice low.

She is staying with me tonight, it's possible that Elias is gone, that evil witch having drained his love and possibly his soul from his body. I am guarding Katrina and I will have an answer before this eve is complete, before the sun dawns on a new day.

"I'm not scared, Merek. I'm terrified," she breathes.

Grinning, I touch my mouth to hers again, this time slipping my tongue inside of her and tasting all that she has to offer. Her kiss is timid, it's shy and unpracticed and I find that it is much sweeter than any other that I have experienced in my life.

I keep my hands wrapped around her waist, knowing that if I don't, I will without a doubt rip the bodice of her dress completely in half, and devour her right here without a thought to her desire to stay pure until the night of her wedding.

"Never be scared of me, my joy. This union is one that is not of duty like most in my position. Elias does us a great honor by allowing me to choose my bride. However, I will not force you to marry me. If you do not wish to have me, then I will allow him to make a match."

Keeping my eyes on hers, I take in her expression, wishing to see if she wants me to walk away or not. It will be difficult not to take her as my bride, but I have never forced myself upon a woman and I do not intend to start now.

"In truth, I do not know what I want. I should say yes without hesitating. However, I want to be sure that this will be a love match and we don't know one another that well. I won't be happy if you ever take a paramour, it would destroy me."

My eyes widen at her candid words. A woman should never speak of paramours, not ever, and especially not to a man like me. Lifting my hand from her waist, I cup her cheek. My thumb glides along her bottom lip and I watch as her mouth parts.

"Though you have no right to speak to me about this, I will tell you this but once, Katrina, and never speak of it again. A paramour is not something that I have ever intended on keeping, as long as I had a warm, willing, caring wife in my bed," I murmur.

"As long as everything is perfect," she grunts.

Shaking my head, I press my thumb against the seam of her lips. "That is not what I said. My parents have never strayed. They have never needed to. Though, I know that they have quarreled, as I'm sure I will do with my wife.

"Naught is perfect, there will be times where you will not like me and I will not like you. As long as we have respect, devotion, and love, that is what will get us through the difficult journeys that we face."

"Merek," she whispers as tears fall down her cheeks.

I do not wipe them away, instead I wait for her answer, for her words. I need them just as much as I need her. When she doesn't give me an answer, I release my hold on her and take a step back. Her tears continue to fall, but she says naught.

"I will not leave this eve, because protecting you is my duty. I will, however, leave you alone from now on. Your silence is your answer and I will not ask you again, Katrina."

CHAPTER TWO



KATRINA

The pain in his eyes causes my heart to stop beating in my chest. When he turns his back to me, I watch as he takes the chair and places it facing the window. Before he can sit down, I rush toward him, my body moving faster than it ever has.

Without a word, I wrap my arms around his back. Pressing my cheek against the center of his back, I squeeze his strong waist and let out a breath.

"I want to be your wife, Merek. I want it more than anything in this world, but I *am* scared."

His spine is straight, his body is unmoving, until it isn't. He spins around, knocking me off balance before he bends slightly and grabs ahold of the backs of my thighs and picks me up so that we are nose to nose.

My breath hitches right before his lips press against mine. "Marry me, Katrina. Make me happy, my joy," he whispers.

"Yes, Merek. I have never wanted to marry a man more than I do you. I have never longed for a touch more than I have yours. I have never dreamed to be a different person, one of royalty and standing before I met you, because I knew that if I was then there could be a chance for us."

He chuckles as his feet move and he lowers me down on the edge of the bed. I watch in awe as he sinks to his knees in front of me. His hands cup my cheeks, his thumbs swiping the wet tears from my cheeks.

"I will make you happy, Katrina. You will never regret a day at my side, for I will not allow you to. You can, and I demand, that you are always yourself, never dream to be anyone but you, my joy."

If the gods created a perfect man for me, I know without a doubt that they created this one specifically for me. My lips turn up into a shaky smile and I nod. "There is only you for me, Merek. You are beautiful and perfect, I never thought that this could be a possibility, never in a million years."

"My cousin is a fair king, he is also a good brother and he knew that I desired you, but was willing to walk away from you for the good of the crown. He understood that I was willing to forego a chance at happiness to fulfill my duty."

He rises to his knees, leaning forward he touches his mouth to mine. "He knew that I would do all of this, but he wanted his brother to smile, to love, to breathe easy so he gave me permission to marry the woman that I desire. That woman is you, Katrina."

My entire body melts for him. His lips touch mine, his tongue fills my mouth and he consumes me in a single moment. Merek swallows my whimpers, his hands staying on my cheeks, never roaming down to touch the rest of my body, no matter how badly I want him to.

Lifting my hands, I wrap my fingers around his wrists. "Merek, please," I exhale.

He grins, sinking his teeth in his bottom lip before he shakes his head a couple of times. "You have stayed pure for so long, I will not take from you, not until you are my wife. Until then, we shall only kiss."

"What if I want you now?" I ask, feeling daring.

He shakes his head. "Then you better marry me sooner rather than later, my joy."

MEREK

THERE IS A RAUCOUS AT THE DOOR. TURNING AWAY FROM MY VERY tempting new fiancée, I wrench the heavy door open to see the witches standing there, both of their eyes meeting mine and something unreadable in their features.

"He wakes," Aleida announces. Shifting my gaze from one of them to the other, I wait for them to elaborate, but they do not. "He wishes to see you, immediately."

Turning to look at Katrina over my shoulder, I open my mouth to tell her to stay where she is, but she beats me to it. "Go, Merek. I will be right here waiting for you."

Her words send a warming sensation throughout my entire body and I can't help but imagine her doing just that, waiting for me in our chambers, in our home, for the rest of our days. I find that I very much like that idea.

Lifting my chin toward her, I walk out of the room and go in search of my cousin. He's sitting up in the bed when I walk into the room.

"By the gods," I whisper.

Immediately my gaze travels the length of Elia's body and my lips lift in a small smile, glad to see that he is alive, breathing, and well.

"What do you last remember, cousin?" I ask, wondering if he's lost any memory from the way that witch sucked whatever she sucked from inside of his body.

"I remember coming here, storming this castle and taking out the king. I remember a beautiful woman in a copper-lined room. I remember that you are engaged to a maid."

I should straighten him out on the truth. I was *almost* engaged, though it's official now, so I don't bother. He has bigger issues to worry about in the moment.

Sybilla speaks before anyone else can, her voice barely above a whisper. "You just don't remember me."

My heart immediately aches for the pain in her voice. Elias shifts his gaze from me to her, his expression likely matching mine, obviously sad that he does not remember his wife. It seems as though that witch has taken the memory of his bride from him, but thankfully has left everything else.

"I apologize, I do not remember you." Elias lifts his head and looks to me. "She's my wife? Carrying the heir?"

"Aye, Elias. Sybilla is your Queen," I rasp.

I watch as Sybilla stands from her seated position at Elias' bedside. She nervously brushes her palms down her skirts before she inhales a deep breath. "Well, you must want to meet with your men."

"Sybilla," I murmur. To see this side of her, vulnerable and almost weak, it hurts me. Even when Elias left right after their vows, she did not seem so despondent as she does in this moment.

She shakes her head, almost as if the motion will give her strength. "Go be with your men," she whispers.

I stand silently, watching as he throws his legs over the side of the bed and stands. He turns to his bride, cupping her cheeks before he lowers his head. I watch as he kisses each of her cheeks before he rests his forehead against her own.

"You will join me, my bride." His words leave no room for argument and not for the first time, I am proud of my cousin.

Turning from them, I begin to walk toward the chancery where the men will soon be gathered.

CHAPTER THREE



MEREK

I stand with the rest of the men, next to my fiancée, and two witches as they ride off. They did not say a proper farewell, though I am not sure that I blame them at all. Elias is confused, Sybilla is hurt and in this moment, they only have one thing on their minds, healing, connecting, loving.

"What happens now?" Katrina whispers from beside me.

Clearing my throat, I glance down at her. "We wed, I spend the next few weeks getting this castle up and running, then we return to Aerilon," I explain.

Her breath comes out shakily, her eyes rounding as she lifts her gaze up to me. "We wed," she whispers.

"Preferably this eve," I grunt.

"Merek," she whimpers.

Yes. I do not know how much longer I can wait to have her. I have been imagining having her to myself for months. Now that it is possible, now that she has agreed, I do not want to waste another moment.

Taking a step toward her, I reach out and wrap my hand around her waist, tugging her against my chest. Lifting my other hand, I cup her cheek, my thumb sliding along her plump lips.

"Let us not waste a moment of our lives, my joy. Ellyn has been taken from us, Elias' love and memory have been taken from him, I do not want to waste even a second."

Katrina's eyes widen and I watch as her sweet tongue peeks out and she tastes her lips, wetting them before she nods.

"Yes," she agrees.

Grinning, I'm not sure she realized that she didn't have a choice, but it is sweet that she agrees. Releasing her, I grab her hand with mine and tug her toward the small chapel at the side of the castle.

Pushing the door open, I look around for the priest and see him kneeling in front of the altar, praying to the many statues of the gods in front of him. Immediately, he stands, turning to face me, his eyes wide and terrified looking.

"Please, do not hurt me," he whimpers.

Smirking, I shake my head. "King Elias of Bunafi has taken over this castle, and the entire ruling area of Llyne. I am his first in command and his blood relative. No harm will come to the people of Llyne, as long as they pledge their loyalty to King Elias and his throne," I say, my voice rumbling throughout the small stone chapel.

The priest shakes his head, his lips parted, his eyes staying wide. His gaze shifts to Katrina, then back to me. I watch as he lowers to his knee, bowing his head and letting out a shaky exhale.

"I vow that if he is fair and honest, a righteous king, that my loyalty will fully and completely belong to King Elias," he says.

I like this man, he does not want to agree to something that he cannot fulfill, because he knows as well as I or anyone else on this earth that if he vows his loyalty, the gods will not allow him inside of their gracious embrace if he breaks that vow.

Dipping my chin, I tell the man to rise. He does so, still looking quite unnerved. "King Elias will not disappoint you, sir. And as the leader on his behalf, I will do my best not to disappoint you as well."

The priest's eyes focus on mine, searching me for deceit, and when he doesn't find any, he nods. "We would like for you to marry us this day," I state.

He jerks, his eyes shifting from me to Katrina. "Is this what you wish as well, child?" he asks.

KATRINA

THE PRIEST ASKS ME IF I WISH, TO MARRY THIS MAN STANDING NEXT TO me. Could I wish for anything more, anything else, in my entire life? No, I could not for this is a dream come true not only for me, but also for a woman like me, a woman with no royal blood or proper standing in society.

"Yes, this is everything that I could wish for, and more."

The priest clears his throat and it is just moments later that he declares us married. Merek leans down, his lips touching mine in a soft, sweet kiss. He lifts his head, his eyes searching mine as his lips turn up into a small smile.

"I love you, wife," he rasps.

I have loved him since my eyes landed on him months ago. Though, looking into those pretty green eyes, I know that it wasn't love, it was merely lust. Watching him with Sybilla, seeing him take care of her, then guide Elias to her and watching his devotion to the king, that was what made me fall in love with him.

"I love you, husband, so much," I breathe. "Tomorrow I will love you even more."

His lips turn up into a smirk. "Yes, my joy, you will."

Without another word, he bends slightly, shoves his shoulder in my belly and throws me over his shoulder like a sack of grain. I let out a squeal of excitement and trepidation knowing what is coming next.

I hear the laughter, the cheers, and the gasps as we approach the castle. Lifting my head, my eyes find Jasmine's and she's smiling as she holds her broken arm against her belly. My smile matches hers and she waves her uninjured hand toward me.

Merek doesn't slow down as he passes his men. They all cheer and shout, which causes him to chuckle, but his feet continue toward their mission and I know what that mission is, me on my back, him inside of me.

My entire body trembles, fear and excitement filling me and almost pouring out of me. I don't know what to expect, if in the pain will be overly much, or not, but I trust Merek, and I want to always make him happy.

Once we're in our chamber, or the chamber we have been using the past couple of days. He lowers me to the floor, my body staying

closely pressed against his until my feet are firmly planted on the stone floor.

Merek cups my cheeks with his palms, his eyes searching mine. "Once we are somewhere that has jewels, I will buy you the ring your heart desires," he rasps.

My eyes water from his words, his gaze is so intense, so soft that I wonder how I even contemplated walking away from him. I was a fool to think that I could, because he is more than I ever imagined I could have for myself.

CHAPTER FOUR



MEREK

Dipping my chin, I touch my mouth to hers. Katrina lets out a gasp of surprise when my tongue instantly invades her. My fingers clench around her waist, the desire to shred her gown into pieces takes over, but Katrina is an innocent and there is plenty of time for me to rip gowns in the future.

“Merek,” she whimpers as I pull away from our kiss.

Taking a step away from her, needing the space for a moment to catch my breath, I keep my gaze focused on her bright green eyes. Lifting my hand, I tuck her hair behind her ear.

“If you would like a celebration later, when we return to Aerilon, I would support that,” I murmur.

She blinks, her eyes smiling before her lips. “That would be lovely, but nothing overly large. Maybe just Jasmine and Sybilla, plus the men, mayhap your parents? I do not wish them to be angry at not receiving an invitation.”

My heart swells with pride that she’s thought of my family. Nodding, I extend my index finger and slide it down the side of her neck, sweeping it across her collarbone before stopping right at the neckline of her dress.

“That would be good, my mother would enjoy that I am sure,” I murmur.

My finger slips beneath the fabric of her dress, my eyes watching as hers widen and her breathing starts to come out in short pants. Taking a step toward her, I reach behind her and begin to unbutton the back of her dress, my nose sliding along hers.

"Merek," she breathes.

"Yes, my joy?"

"I'm scared," she admits.

My lips turn up before I brush them along hers. "You will not be soon," I say with my mouth against hers. "Turn around so that I may unlace your ribbons and see my beautiful wife without anything between us."

Her entire body shivers and she takes a step back, turning around so that I may unlace her ribbons. My fingers make quick work of releasing her, but I do not push her dress down, she is trembling with fear of the unknown and I will not take her until she is begging me, her fear a distant memory.

Leaning down, I touch my mouth to her shoulder, my tongue tasting her bare skin. My lips move up to the crook of her neck, finding that spot behind her ear that I know will drive her wild. She leans back with a moan, lifting her arm, wrapping her fingers behind my head as she lets out a moan.

KATRINA

MEREK FEELS AMAZING. HIS MOUTH AGAINST MY SKIN IS LIKE NAUGHT that I have ever felt before. Slowly, my fear begins to dissipate as he feasts on the skin of my neck and behind my ear. His fingers slowly drag my dress down my arms, leaving me in only my chemise as it falls to my feet.

His fingers wrap around my waist, they are warm, almost too warm, and I desire them against my skin, with no fabric barrier between us. My breathing is coming out in pants, my eyes unable to open and my nipples are hard peaks, my breasts aching, along with the place between my thighs.

Turning in his arms, I lift my gaze to his while I remove my own chemise, feeling daring, I bare myself for my husband. Merek does

not move as his eyes take in my nudity. "You are a dream come to reality, my joy," he says, his voice deep and husky.

Biting on the corner of my lip, I feel odd being the only one without clothes. Taking a step toward him, I touch the hem of his tunic. He grins, reaching down and pulling it from his body. I gasp at the sight of the expanse of his bared torso.

Reaching out, I place my hand at the center of his tanned chest. There is a small smattering of hair in the center of his torso and I drag my nails lightly through it, my nipples hardening even more as my nails make their way toward the waist of his tights.

"Do not," he grunts, wrapping his hand around my wrist. Startled, I lift my eyes to meet his. "I will not last and you will be supremely disappointed." He grins, lightening the moment.

Merek picks me up and carries me to the bed. This is it, this is the moment that I will truly become his wife, a piece of me that I have cherished my entire life will be gone and Merek will take ownership of it and of me. There is no other man on this earth that I would rather give it to.

He lies me against the pillows, his body pressed against my side. His nose slides alongside my own and then his mouth touches mine. I moan when his tongue tangles with mine. It is intense, my hips shift with the need to feel more of him.

Merek's hand cups one of my breasts, holding me in his palm as if he is testing the weight of my flesh, then his fingers pinch my nipple and he gently tugs. I feel the sensation between my legs and I let out a gasp of surprise.

His mouth leaves mine, his lips traveling down to my other breast. Tipping my head down, I watch as he devours my breast, his warm tongue swirling around my nipple before his teeth tug the same way his fingers did on the other one.

"Merek," I sigh, my hands fisting the bedding at my sides.

He lifts his eyes to mine, his mouth moving over to my other breast and he follows the same pattern before his lips begin to travel down my belly. He stops just above my center, a wicked gleam in his eyes.

"You don't mean to..."

"Absolutely, my joy. Spread for your husband, show me all of you."

My face feels hot and I shake my head. "I can't."

"Does it ache, do you need to feel me there?"

I nod, much to my embarrassment. I do wish to feel him there. All of him, but his mouth? Surely not.

"You will enjoy it. I would like to give you something to enjoy before I am forced to take your innocence, that will hurt you this first time, Katrina."

Pinching my eyes closed, unable to watch him, I slowly spread my thighs for him.

CHAPTER FIVE



MEREK

My beautifully brave wife spreads her thighs for me. I watch as she shows me all of her, every square inch. I am, without a doubt, not disappointed. I want to examine her, to spread her wide, all of her, but she is not ready for that yet.

Fitting my shoulders between her thighs, I rest her knees over my shoulders to keep her open for me. I lower my face to her center. Inhaling her scent, I moan as it smells better than any other I have taken with my mouth, mostly because this part of her is only mine—forever.

Flattening my tongue, I slide it along her entire wet and achy center, tasting all of her. I hear her breath hitch, then she moans when my tongue circles her sweet nub. I make love to my wife's *queynte* with my mouth.

Her inhibitions take a few moments to disappear and when they do, I cannot take my eyes off of her. Her back arches, her chest rising and falling quickly at the same time her hips lift and jerk.

Sliding my hands beneath her sweet backside, I bring her closer to my mouth, needing so much more of her, needing her sweet release. I know when she is on the cusp.

Her mouth parts, her eyes open and she gasps before her hips jerk faster against my tongue. Her body is taking over for her now,

her control vanished and it is beautiful. When her release floods my tongue, I let out my own moan as I continue to taste her until her tremors subside.

When she is loose, sated, her lips turned up in a small smile, I quickly discard my tights and return to her still spread thighs. My cock presses against her center, but I do not invade her, yet.

Cupping the side of her neck, I look into her green eyes. "This will hurt, but the next time I promise, it will be much more pleasurable."

She nods, licking her lips. "I trust you, Merek. I want more from you, I want you to show me everything that makes you explode as I just have."

My lips turn up into a grin as I lower my head and touch them against hers. "Just looking at you this way makes me want to explode, my joy," I rasp before I slide my tongue inside of her mouth, at the same time I penetrate her center, inching inside of her slowly.

She stiffens, her body unused to the invasion. I give her a moment to become used to my size before I push deeper inside of her, my mouth never leaving hers as I devour her with my tongue. Eventually her body begins to relax and then, I push completely inside of her.

KATRINA

I CRY OUT AS HE TAKES ME COMPLETELY. TEARS IMMEDIATELY FILL MY eyes and fall. Merek wipes them away, not leaving my body, but instead watching me and waiting for me to give him a signal to continue.

Hitching up my thighs, I wrap my legs around his lower back, crossing them at the ankles as I keep my gaze on his. His jaw is clenched, his green eyes turning almost black as he watches me. When his lips twitch into a grin, he slowly pulls out of me, then slides back inside.

Wrapping my arms around his shoulders, I dig my nails into his back, holding on to him, watching him and wondering if he can make me explode this way like he did with his mouth.

"You are so beautiful, Katrina," he rasps, his hips continue moving as he pulls out before easing back inside.

His movements are controlled, even and gentle. I can tell by the way his arms shake and how his jaw is clenched that he is holding back for my sake and that makes me fall a little deeper in love with him than I was even an hour ago.

I can say naught, there is nothing that words can say to compare to the beauty that he is showing me. His hips continue moving, he slowly picks up speed, his gaze so focused on mine that it steals my breath.

Something begins to build inside of me, yearning for more, to feel more. Lifting my hips, I meet his strokes which causes a groan to escape his lips. "You own me, my joy," he grunts as sweat gathers against his forehead.

"You have always owned me, Merek. I have saved myself for you, before I even laid my eyes on you," I admit.

His lips turn up and he lowers his head. His lips touch mine, his hips moving a little harder and faster with each stroke. Ripping my mouth from his, my lips part and my eyes widen. It is coming again, that sensation, that need to release something that is building in my belly.

Merek slides his nose alongside mine, his lips moving to my ear. "Let go, my joy. I wish to feel your climax around me," he whispers.

His words are all that I need. My back arches, my toes point, and my nails dig into his flesh as the release consumes me. My muscles are so tight and I can do naught but hold on to him.

Merek's hips continue to thrust until he stills inside of me, then he lets out a long moan. I feel his length twitch inside of me as he fills me with his seed. His mouth touches mine, and I expect him to roll off of me, but he doesn't.

He lifts his head, his eyes finding mine and I watch as they roam over my face. "You are better than I could have ever imagined, Katrina. Never did I think that I could find my match in all things, and yet, here you are."

"Merek," I whisper as tears leak from my eyes.

"Thank you, Katrina. For this gift and for becoming my wife."

We don't say anything else. I cannot speak another word. He slants his head to the side and his mouth devours me. He shows me his appreciation for accepting his proposal, but it is me who should

be thanking him, and I will, by being the best wife a man could ask for.

EPILOGUE



SIX MONTHS LATER

MEREK

I did not plan to stay here in Llyne as long as I have, but I find that I am very much enjoying the quiet of this land. Not one person fought the takeover by King Elias. In fact, they are all prospering since he has taken this castle as his own and added it to his extensive holdings. All is how it should always have been.

A man, a stranger, rides through the gates on horseback. All of the warriors have gone home, all but Rowan and Frederick have left as well, going back to Aerilon to be at Elias' side and at his disposal.

I watch him, he is dressed strangely, though because of my extensive travel, I know of what land he hails. He's dressed in furs, trousers instead of tights, his boots are a thick material meant to ward off the snow and cold. His hair is past his shoulders, his beard long as well. He is a man of the sea.

He has no desire to slow down, to stop, not until he is right upon me. Jerking my chin, I tilt my head to the side, my eyes gazing over his horse who is sweating and tired.

Lifting my hand, I call for the stable boy. "Yes, Your Highness," he says, dipping down.

Technically, I am royal, however, I do not wish to be called highness, ever, but this boy does so in front of a stranger. He's a good boy. Smart.

"Take this warrior's horse, feed and water him, take care of him, he is tired," I state.

The man dismounts from his steed and tosses his reins to the boy. "Many thanks," he grunts, his voice rough and deep.

"Are you in charge here?" he asks. His Bunafidian is good, but heavily accented.

I shrug a shoulder. "I am not the King of Bunafi, but I am the ruler of Llyne, under the king's command of course," I explain.

He dips his chin with a nod. "I have a missive from my king. I dared not go much farther, unsure if I would run into enemies. I know there have been rumblings of war in this area," he explains.

"Come to the chancery, you can explain to me what this missive is. My cousin took back control of this land some months ago," I say as I turn from him and begin to walk toward the castle doors.

Katrina appears almost immediately, a huge smile on her face, until her gaze skirts to the man at my back and her feet freeze to the floor as her entire body jerks.

"My joy, I have a guest. Off now, yes?" Typically, Katrina would be at my side if we were to have a guest, but I do not know this man or his intentions and I want her to take herself somewhere safe.

She dips her chin. "Yes, Merek," she breathes before she whirls around and runs away.

Once we're in the chancery, the man flops down in one of the chairs. He is tall and thick, his body wide and the chair groans under his weight.

"Your wife is very beautiful. Such a hair color I have yet to lay eyes upon."

"She is none of your concern," I grunt, my eyes narrowed at him.

He shrugs a shoulder as if it means naught to him. "It's a fact. But the reason I'm here is not your pretty little wife. King Aaric, the sea king, has a missive for *your* king."

"What could that be?" I ask.

He grins. "Your queen, is she of another land, perhaps?"

My entire body goes on high alert. "Speak," I growl.

"My queen is Liv from New York. I travel, listening for my king. I heard rumors that your queen was of another land. When I told my

king, he wanted to know for sure. He has a seer at his command and she has seen visions of your land in Bunafi and a new queen, a queen who can aid in a prophecy, perhaps?"

Everything he says, every single thing causes the hairs at the back of my neck to rise. "We will leave at first light for Bunafi. King Elias will want to hear of your information," I state.

He jerks his chin. "Do you have ale and a woman or two for the eve?" he asks, his lips turning into a grin.

I know of these men. Sex is freely shared among them, naught is sacred or guarded. Women and men share equally in the pleasures of the flesh. It is not like here. Shaking my head once, I clear my throat.

"We do not have women available to be at your disposal here. However, there are a few widows in town who share themselves for coin, I can have a man lead you to them and give you a horse from my stable for the eve."

He dips his chin. "Much appreciated. I will return at first light," he murmurs.

I call out for Rowan who I know will watch him. When he comes into the chancery, I explain the situation and he agreed to guide the man and keep watch of him. Frederick also comes to me, and I explain it to him as well. I send him ahead of us so that he can warn Elias and Sybilla of what is coming.

KATRINA

THE MAN, THE GUEST, WHO WALKED INTO THE CASTLE WAS FRIGHTENING. I have never seen a man of the sea before. I thought they were men of legend. I'd heard about them. Heard that they were hulking, larger than any man in this land. Apparently, that was not a story, but rather truth.

I pace in front of the window, waiting for Merek to show up. When he opens the door, my eyes roam over him quickly, looking for injury.

"I am fine. He wishes to speak to Elias and Sybilla, I think we may have found one of her sisters," he rasps.

My body jerks and I place my hand against my belly as it flips inside of me. "Truly?" I ask.

He dips his chin in a small nod. "Yes, my joy. You must pack a small bag. We leave at first light for Bunafi," he informs.

"Me, too?" I ask in surprise.

He hums, reaching out for me. He wraps his hands around my waist and jerks me against his chest. "I do not know how long I will be gone. I'm going to leave Frederick in charge here. I do not want you away from me for that long and your queen may need you, she grows close to her time. We need to be there when the babe enters the world," he murmurs.

My lips twitch into a smile. We don't need to be there when Sybilla gives birth to the heir of the throne, my sweet husband *wants* to be there.

"I will pack a bag," I whisper.

He dips his chin, his lips brushing against mine. "Is there something you wish to inform me of, my joy?"

My breath hitches. "How did you know?"

His lips twitch. "I didn't for sure, until now. I want to hear the words, Katrina."

Inhaling a deep breath, I let the exhale out slowly. Closing my eyes, I reopen them to see that Merek's gaze has turned very dark green, almost black.

"I am with child," I state.

His mouth crashes against mine. I do not pack until much later in the evening, my husband keeps me very busy celebrating our new babe.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As an only child, Hayley Faiman had to entertain herself somehow. She started writing stories at the age of six and never really stopped.

Born in California, she met her now husband at the age of sixteen and married him at the age of twenty in 2004. After all of these years together, he's still the love of her life.

Hayley's husband joined the military and they lived in Oregon, where he was stationed with the US Coast Guard. They moved back to California in 2006, where they had two little boys. Recently, the four of them moved out to the Hill Country of Texas, where they adopted a new family member, a chocolate lab named Optimus Prime.

Most of Hayley's days are spent taking care of her two boys, going to the baseball fields for practice, or helping them with homework. Her evenings are spent with her husband and her nights—those are spent creating alpha book boyfriends.

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