

A close-up, artistic illustration of a woman's face. She has dark, wavy hair and a single visible eye that is a vibrant green color. Her lips are painted a bright pink. The background is dark and textured, suggesting her hair.

*Lilly*

Book One

Tiya Rayne

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# **Lilly**

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Dedicated to my sisters; Tamara Connor and Tiffany Arnold,  
Without you guys they would just be ideas.

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# Chapter One

## 15 years earlier

“Now boys, let’s think this thing through.” I state with my hands up in a surrender gesture. “Are you sure you want to kill me?”

There is no doubt in my mind these idiot shifters want to kill me. I did just prevent them from killing the Queen of the elves. I can see the seething anger glowing in those cat-yellow eyes. In human form shifters are usually lanky, slow, and non-threatening, but when they’re in their wolf forms they are strong, fast, and deadly. Their only downfall is that they’re stupid creatures. They have about as much sense as a head of cabbage. Any other time three shifters would be nothing for me to handle. I am the last of the assassins; A line of elf warriors born to kill. I’m faster, stronger and smarter than most of my opponents; especially the shifters. However, I’ve just fought an army of shifters sent by the Dark King to capture the elf Queen. The Queen is safe and the only thing left of the army is these three imbeciles. I’m wounded, tired, and I spent my last bit of energy tracing these three away from the Queen’s castle. My only option is to delay them as long as possible and hopefully give my wounds time to heal and my energy time to return. Unfortunately, my powers always work slower in other realms.

For the first time I take a look around at my surroundings. Tall trees surrounded me. The ground is covered in brown, red and yellow leaves and the weather is warm with a cool breeze chasing behind the wind. I’m in the human realm and its early fall. I was thinking of a forest when I traced, I was thinking more along the lines of the Black Forest back in the Locke, but I guess this works.

The big black wolf to my right takes a step towards me. He is the leader of the group.

“Careful, Titus!” I say warning him. “We should talk this through. You can’t trace back without me. You’re not in the Locke anymore. Look around.” Titus’s big black wolf form turns his head and scans the forest.

While he is distracted I wave my hand in the air attempting to draw upon my sword. Not even a glimmer of magic. My energy level is affecting my powers.

“You cost us the Queen, Assassin.” He says in that gravelly voice all shifters speak with when in their wolf form. It sounds like a growl mixed with a cough.

“So what now, shifter? Do you kill me, and then hope someone will open up a portal for you?” I laugh without humor. “Face it; you will never get back home without me.” The ability to trace—travel—through realms is something only a few in my world can achieve.

The leader laughs, followed by the other two wolves. “The Dark King is wise. He has a permanent portal open just for his followers. Now stop stalling, Assassin. You have come to the end of your reign. Tonight the great Assassin dies.” Titus bares his teeth, and then dips his head. The dark hairs of his coat stick up from his back.

So this is it. I’ve fought in countless battles against centaur’s, warlock’s, even some immortals, and yet here I am, about to die in a foreign land against three fucking shifters. Not the noblest way to go, but at least the Queen will survive.

I wave my hands in the air once more, still no sword. I take the small dagger from behind my back just as the first wolf attacks. He goes directly for my neck, I step back and he misses it by inches. The second, smaller, wolf attacks next and he grabs hold of my left shoulder. I grab him by the scruff of his neck and yank him off me. I sling the wolf up against a tree and hear the sound of his spine snap. He cries out in a whimper and then goes still. His death helps even the field, but after using so much strength I feel weaker. The remaining small brown wolf howls out his anger and then dives at my legs. He rips into my calf and brings me to my knees. I drive my dagger down into his head and give it a twist; his body goes slack and drops to the ground, disappearing at once. Whenever a being dies outside of their realm, their body goes back to their home. It is the gods way of keeping order to the realms.

I’m bleeding profusely, my arms and legs feel like lead and I am now without a weapon. I am definitely going to die. Titus stalks towards me slowly, his face smiling, as much as a wolf face could. He knows he has the upper hand. Titus lunges at me and at the same time I hear a loud pop followed by a howl. I follow the sound of the pop, and standing in the

woods, holding a shot gun that was almost the size of her, is a little human girl.

“Get back ya mangy mutt.” The little girl shouts in a heavy southern accent. Titus turns towards the little girl and growls. Another pop and another howl. This time, she hit him directly in the eye.

“I said get, or I’ll take both them eyes.” Titus head shot to me and I could read the indecision on his face. He is wondering if he has time to get to me before that gun could do him any real damage. I don’t blame him, this will be his only chance to defeat the Assassin—enemy of all— and it’s now or never. With another pop to his flanks his question is answered, he speeds off through the woods.

With a sigh of relief, I drop myself back onto my ass and lean up against a tree. The great Assassin, last of his kind, enemy of all, has been saved by a little girl. The laugh that escapes my mouth is coated in hysteria and exhaustion.

“Are ya ok, Mister?” the little girl asks as she walks over to me. She is wearing a pair of worn jeans with holes in both knees and a flannel button up shirt a size too big. By law, I am supposed to ignore the girl. We have strict rules whenever we travel to different realms. No contact. I usually have no qualms with this particular rule. I’m not really a get involved type of guy. I’m more of an observer when I visit realms. However, this little girl just saved my life, and she is looking at me with the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen. So to hell with rules, it’s not like I’ve never broken one before.

“Yes! I’m fine little one.” She sinks to her knees beside me followed by the sickliest looking dog I have ever seen.

“Are ya sure you ok, Mister, you’re bleeding pretty badly.”

“I will be fine. Tell me little one, what is your name?”

“I’m Lilly Ann and this here is my dog Bo.” She says pointing to the dog. “He use-ta be my uncle Buddy’s dog, but uncle Buddy says that he ain’t worth the dog food to feed him. So he’s mine now.” She smiles proudly at me, flashing a set of dimples. By human standards she is an adorable little girl. Her black hair is braided down her back in two pigtails, and her big hazel doe-eyes are stunning.

“Your ears are funny.” She states.

“I guess they are.” I smile at how observant she is. My pointed elf ears are usually covered by my hair, but I guess during the scuffle they have



become visible.

“Mama says just because people are different from you, you ought not judge them. My cousin Lizzie calls me a mud baby, seeing as my daddy is black and all, but it don’t bother me none. Everybody knows her daddy ran off with his step sister. Mama says she’s just jealous that my daddy died working on the railroads like an honest man.”

“Well, I happen to agree with your Mother.” I say with a smile and then flinch at the pain that race through my body. My wounds are healing but not as fast as I would like, being in this realm is preventing me from fully healing. I need to get back to the Locke so that I can recuperate. I wave my hand in the air testing my power, only a spark. Damn it! I slump back against the tree. I need a little more time.

“Are ya sure ya gonna be alright, Mister?”

“I’ll be fine little one. I just need a few minutes to rest.” I realize that I have talked more with a little human girl than I have anyone, other than the queen. And, oddly, I’m enjoying her company.

“Well I’ll wait here with ya. I don’t want that big black dog to come back, he seemed mighty worked up over ya.” She says. I am ashamed to admit how much that comforts me. I am in the human world with no powers, no weapon and too weak to defend myself; right now little Lilly was my best hope of survival.

She sits down beside me and crosses her legs in front of her, then pulls a back pack from behind her back and places it at her side along with the shot gun.

“Might I ask why you are out at night with a weapon like that?” No matter how grateful I am she had it, this seemed a bit odd. I’ve been tracing into this realm for many centuries, I know humans are very protective of their young. This human couldn’t be older than five or six mortal years, surely this is unusual.

“This ain’t no real shot gun.” She says picking up the weapon. “It’s a bebe gun. It shoots these little balls.” She says as she digs in her pocket and pulls out a handful of little silver balls.

It won’t kill you, but it stings something bad if you get hit.” She stuffs the balls back in her pocket.

“Uncle Buddy bought this for me on my birthday. He’s been teaching me to hunt, says I’m a natural when it comes to shooting.” With one shot she tool out Titus’s eye, I agree with Uncle Buddy.

“That explains the weapon, but why are you out in the woods alone?” she looks down at her hands in her lap.

“I’m running away.” She says softly. “I did something bad, but I didn’t mean to.” the last part was said with a plea.

“I believe you.” I answer with absolute confidence that this little girl with the most beautiful bright eyes could never do anything wrong. “What is it that you have done?” I am curious to find out why this child felt the need to run from the safety of her home. Again, this shocks me. I usually don’t take the time to get involved in other people’s problems, not unless they are hiring me for a job. Even then, I only want as little information as possible to get the job done. But I was honestly interested in what this little girl was going to say.

“I was playing tag with Bo in the house and I accidentally knocked over Billy Ray’s favorite cup. It’s the one with the big bass on it.”

“I’m sure Billy Ray will forgive you.” The incredulous look she gives me leads me to believe maybe this matter was more serious than I had initially thought.

“Billy Ray is my step-daddy. He don’t like me too well. He’s always calling me mean names like my cousin Lizzie does. He hits me a lot too, not with a switch like mama and Uncle Buddy, but with his fist and sometimes a big belt that’s got this metal fishing buckle on it. He leaves a lot of ugly bruises.” She pulls the edge of her shirt up to show me her stomach, and even with the diluted pale moonlight I can see the purplish mark over her stomach. Anger pierces me and I dig my hands into fist to contain my urge to kill. I feel so protective of this little human that I barely know. Other than her sweet smile and kind heart, I don’t know much else about her, but my need to protect and defend her is almost choking. She rolls her shirt back down and continues on with her story, blind to the raging anger that is soaring through me.

“Mama says not to tell anybody about Billy Ray’s bruises. You won’t tell mama I told ya, will ya?”

“No! Your secret is safe with me.” besides, I didn’t have to tell Billy Ray why I was killing him. I know by taking any action against Billy Ray was breaking another one of those forbidden rules, never get involved with the lives of people from other realms. But, just like the first rule, I do what the fuck I want.

“Good.” She sighs. “Cuz mama says a woman her age is lucky to have a man like Billy Ray to take her in knowing that her younging ain’t his. Aunt Millie says he’s mean towards me cuz I’m a reminder that he can’t have no youngings of his own. She says his soldiers couldn’t take aim if you gave them a sniper and a roof. I’m not sure what that means, but Aunt Millie always finds it funny.” Lilly pulls a small box out of her book bag and sticks a plastic tube in it, then hands it to me. She took another one out and repeats the process before drinking out of it.

“It’s just apple juice.” She says nodding at the little box in my hand. Slowly I raise the plastic tube to my mouth and sip. A sweet taste caress my taste buds and I found myself emptying the little juice box in seconds. Lilly pulls out another one and hands it to me. I take my time and sip this one, no need to deplete all of her rations. Besides, my body is starting to feel replenished.

“So you see, Mister,” She says as she unwraps a sandwich that she found in her bag and hands it to me. “That’s why I can’t go home.” I take a bite out of the suspicious treat. Being an Elf my diet usually consist of fruits, berries and vegetables. However, this unusual taste of peanut and honey on a processed wheat bread is delicious. I devour the sandwich in two bites.

“As soon as Billy Ray finds that cup, he’s gone get me good.”

“So, tell me, where will you go?” I ask out of curiosity. I have already made my decision that I was not letting this little girl wonder off alone. I know this world isn’t nearly as dangerous as the Locke, there were no hungry centaurs or Dark King’s, but it still had its dangers.

Lilly’s eyes light up like the night sky full of glittering stars. She reaches down in that all providing back pack of hers and pulls out a large book then hands it to me. The front cover was a picture of a waterfall in the middle of a diverse forest. It isn’t nearly as beautiful as the great Mystique Falls in the Locke, where the Nymphs lay out on the rocks to sunbathe, but it was beautiful.

“So you want to go to this waterfall?” I ask handing the book back to her. She takes the book from my hands and presses it to her heart as if it is the most cherished thing in the world.

“I wanna go everywhere.” Her voice is filled with a dreamy enthusiasm only children have when they speak of their future, before they realize life is full of limitations.

“I’m gonna travel the world and take pictures of it just like this photographer.” I smile at the simplicity of her dream and how much it brings her joy. No dreams of being a princess or a ballerina for this beautiful little girl, her wishes are much more obtainable. Yet, judging by her clothing and upbringing may still be just as unobtainable as becoming royalty. That thought saddens me. “One day I’m gonna have me a book of pictures just like this one.” She says looking down at the book clutched to her chest. “I’ve already started one, do you wanna see?” I didn’t think her eyes could shine brighter, and even though my body is completely healed, and my power is humming inside me like a hive of angry bees, I would not leave without seeing her work.

“Yes.” I say sitting up straighter. She reaches back in her bag and pulls out a plain blue book.

“Mama bought me a brand new camera for my birthday. She says she had to save all her tip money for three months to buy it for me.” She opens the book and places it in my lap. I quickly scan over the pictures before me.

“They are beautiful, little one.” I say honestly. Her eye for beauty is amazing. The page is full of shots of nature. The first is a tall maple tree, the leaves the color of ginger apples against a sunset. Another picture features Bo standing in a broken-down wagon proudly, as if he were purposefully posing for the camera. The way the shadows play across his midnight fur made him look regal and not like the malnourished pup that he is. Lilly is a talented photographer, even at her young age she captures the beauty in all these photos. I scan down further and one picture caught my attention. It is a picture of a beautiful white butterfly atop of a chubby small finger. The butterfly’s wings were pulled back behind his back as he perched on the tip of the finger. This small beautiful creature, which has every reason to be afraid, is resting so peacefully on the fingers of a little girl. An amazing little girl.

“May I have this picture little one?” I ask only taking my eyes off the picture briefly.

She smiles brightly. “Sure!” she pulls the picture off the page of the book and hands it to me. I stare down at the picture once more amazed at the beauty I find in such a simple picture. That is when I hear it. **“Assassin!”** The Queen’s voice calls into my mind. She is summoning me back to her. My life usually consists of war and death. Shortly after I reached maturity the Locke became a large battlefield, where my people were exterminated.

Not long after, the Dark King stole the throne and every day you survive in the Locke now, is a testament to your strength. A world that was once beautiful and free is now savage and deadly. My life is full of savagery and chaos. Before, I lived for it, even thrived off of it, but at this moment I want nothing more than to sit alone with my little human. I am in no rush to get back to my duties. So, for the first time ever, I ignored my Queen's call.

"Now I owe you something. It is only fair that I should repay you for giving me such a special gift." With a slight wave of my hand, I create a necklace. It is a simple silver chain and a butterfly pendant with iridescent wings.

"Woowow!!!" Lilly says stretching out the word. I smile at her response. I place the necklace around her neck. She moves her braids so I can clasp the ends.

"I've never had my own jewelry before." That wasn't hard to believe. She picks up the butterfly pendant and swirls it between her thumb and pointer finger looking down at it.

"Wear it all the time. It will remind you of Me." she flashes those dimples at me then clutches her arms around my neck for a hug. I place my hand on her back and gave her as much of a hug as I know how. Affection was not something I am used to. Fucking, I could do with my eyes closed but hugging was like a foreign language to me. She pulls away from me and leans back on her knees.

"You know, you remind me of my cousin Roy." I laugh out and it sounds foreign to my ears. It is one of those emotions I never use. This little girl is pushing me to all my limits tonight.

"How is that?" I'm curious to know how I could remind her of her human family. By nature Elves are taller and paler skinned than humans, not to mention the pointed ears, long hair and crystalline eye color.

"Well you're both about the same age." Funny, I'm actually a few centuries old; however I stopped ageing long ago. "About 20 right?" I was shocked at how close she was. I was around 25 or 26 that I last remember changing.

"You are very close." I smile.

"Yeah, I thought so. Billy's 18, but he will be 19 next month. He's really nice to me too, always giving me candy and inviting me to tag along on his days off. He's always introducing me to his lady friends. Mama says it's because Billy's at that age where his manhood and his brain is one in the

same. Something like a bitch in heat, whatever that means. She says that he uses me to impress his lady friends. I don't mind much, Billy needs all the help he can get with that bad skin and all. Are you like a bitch in heat mister?" I throw my head back and laugh, this time it comes out natural.

"I like to think I am not." Even though deep down, I know her mother has me pegged. There have been many women to grace my bed, nymphs, fairies, even a few immortals. None of them stay long after. They all want something from me I cannot give. Love and commitment are not my strong points. Love is not an option in my line of work. Only death and loneliness follow me. So yes, I can please a lady in my bed, multiple times in fact, but that is all I'll ever be able to give her. I good hard fuck is as good as anything sometimes. Most women only want that, and those are the only women I like to deal with.

*"Assassin, the council needs you."* The Queen's voice calls for me once more. I sigh. It was time for me to go. I stand up and tuck my picture into the inside pocket of my vest.

"Are you leaving?" she asks and the sadness in her voice is obvious. Something about the sadness in her eyes does something strange to me, I feel a strange prickle feeling at the back of my throat and my eyesight begins to blur as if I am looking through water. I have to clear my throat before I am able to speak. I've never felt this emotion before and the feeling makes me uncomfortable.

"Yes, little human, it is time for me to go. I would like to thank you and Bo for saving me." I say sincerely, giving her a regal bow. She giggles at my gesture and the sound of her laughter makes the strange prickle feeling recede. Lilly stands to her feet.

"Well, I better get going too." She says dusting her knees off. "Billy Ray will be getting home from the bar soon and he's gone want his cup. I gotta get out of dodge." She slings her book bag over one shoulder and her shot gun over the other. I place my hand on her shoulder. I feel terrible about what I am about to do, but I don't think twice about it. I know that the penalty of altering the lives of humans is a punishable crime, but I know that she needs to stay close to her mother. Besides, no one has to know. I pull my power to my hand and then place it on her cheek.

"Little Lilly you have a kind heart, never change it. Now, I want you to go back home and forget this night ever happened. And please, never try

anything so dangerous again. Ok?" her bright eyes dim as I control her mind.

"OK!" she mumbles automatically.

"Now sleep, little one. This will be all better in the morning." With that suggestion her eyes close and she slumps forward in my arms.

## Chapter Two

Tracing back to the Locke revitalizes my body even more. I stand in the corridor of King Bartus's castle and stretch my limbs. I didn't come back right away, after I put Lilly to bed; I made a stop at the local bar and spoke very freely to Billy Ray. After almost breaking his arm and threatening that if he ever so much as said a word to her that made her cry, I would take his un-useful balls and shove them down his throat, we seemed to come to an agreement. The agreement was clearly understood when he arrived home and realized Lilly had broken his cup, he didn't even look at her. The Elf Queen would say there will be ramifications for my actions, but I don't see how keeping a little girl from being pounded on by her asshole step-father can have a negative impact on the world. The fact that I, the emotionless assassin as I'm so often called, would care enough to interfere in any one's life without payment was already a change for the better. Not that I planned on keeping up this sensitive bullshit. This was just a one-time thing. I still had my rules, no attachments and no involvement. Nothing was changing about me.

I'm feeling cheerful as I walk towards King Bartus's throne room.

"Where is he?" I hear a voice bellow down the hall. Immediately I trace into the room but remain invisible, a gift only my kind is capable of. Artumis, the Western Immortal king is pacing the floor, his bushy red hair sticking out like a valley of wild grass on top of his head.

The Locke is broken up into four territories, the Northern which is where the Dark King rule, is the biggest area of our world; therefore who ever controls this land controls the Locke. The Western territory is mostly coastal land, and its people are masters of the sea. Their king is Artumis. A short grouchy man who's face looks like old leather.

"Please, Artumis, sit." The Elvin Queen states calmly although the creases around her mouth tells me she is far from calm.

"How can I sit? The Assassin treats us as if he is the King of the Locke."



“If the Assassin has not come back, it is because he cannot. Though he is a murderer, he is loyal to the Queen.” Bartus says. Bartus was the Immortal King of the Southern territories, the second largest in the Locke. It is also the one The Dark King covets the most. The true heir to the Northern throne is Bartus, which is all the more reason for the Dark King to despise him. Bartus is accompanied by his son Rykan. He is tall, just like most Southern people and fairly well built. The two look a lot alike with their dark hair and dark eyes. The Southern men are fighters. They have the greatest army in the Locke and their men are skilled fighters, even I can’t deny that.

“Or, maybe he does not wish to.” Fisgal, the Eastern king adds. Fisgal, the darkest skinned of all the kings with his long locks of black hair, was also the most intelligent of the kings. His people are scholars and builders; his land is surrounded by plush jungles and his people live in intricately built homes far up in the trees. The craftsmanship of these astounding homes are unrivaled by any other structures in the Locke. The only thing Fisgal liked more than knowledge was women. He had an insatiable appetite for females.

Immortals resembled humans in build and look however their life spans are almost as long as ours. The only magic immortals possess is longevity and the ability to heal. The kings are gifted with a powerful ring given to them by the elf Queen. However, even with rings their magic is still nowhere close to the elves.

“Assassin will come.” The Queen states confidently.

“Ugh! We should never have included him in the council.” Artumis barks, slamming his fist down on the wooden table. “I do not trust a man that prides himself on death.”

“Careful, Artumis, I would begin to think you don’t like me.” I state becoming visible in the doorway. The entire room turns to look at me. I lean my back up against the door frame and cross my arms over my chest. I see the fear cross their eyes. I am known to be unstable and easily angered. Not a reputation I care to dispute.

“Funny that you don’t trust me, Artumis, was it not you that begged me to save your son from the ogres. If not for me he would be making his way out of an ogre’s ass right now.”

“I do not have a son you son of a bitch. That was my daughter.”

I tap my finger on my chin as I look at him quizzically. “Are you sure that was not your son?” Artimus leaps across the table for me. Fisgal grabs him and holds him back. I never even flinch. I would give anything to knock that fat slob down a peg. He, like most of the immortals, thinks this land belongs to them.

“My daughter is beautiful. She has her Mother’s looks.” Artimus continues to shout across the table as Fisgal pushes him back down in his seat.

“Yes, Artimus, your daughter is beautiful.” The Queen says giving me a pointed look. “Assassin, behave.” I shrug my shoulders already bored with this conversation.

*“Are you well?”* The Queen asks me telepathically.

*“Did you doubt me, your highness?”* I ask jokingly. If she only knew how close I was to death.

*“I never doubt you, Assassin.”*

“Your Majesty,” Bartus says bringing us out of our silent conversation. “Why did you call us here?” The queen steps forward, her long silver dress dragging the floor, the bodice hugging her body like a lover pushing her breast up like a sacrificial offer. The skirt of the long dress flares out at her hips and drops to the floor. She is a beautiful woman, with hair the color of snow that hangs down to her waist in deep waves. Even though she is beautiful and feminine her presence still garners your respect. Although her kingdom is in the middle of the Immortal kings, her reign stretches to all regions of the Locke. The queen controls the magic creatures in this land, a feat not for the timid of heart. Even the Immortal Kings bow down to her and show her the upmost respect. When Queen Avalia speaks, you damn well listen.

“I have had a vision of our future.” This news holds all of our attention. Even I stand up a little straighter.

“As always, my vision came in two parts. In one; I saw the Locke in a time of peace. The fields were green. The crops were abundant. Our people happy and carefree, their children safe and tummies well fed. Famine and war were a distant memory. We lived in harmony, and I saw this peace last many lifetimes.” I was trained to kill since the time I could hold a weapon, killing is all I know. I’m trained to fight with every weapon known to man. My man to man combat skills are unbeatable. I breathe to fight. That is why I am so shocked to find this news pleased me. What will I do when there is

no one else to kill? Instinctively my hand went to the picture in my pocket. Could one run in with a little girl change my entire perspective on life? The better question is, why?

“In the other,” Avalia starts bringing me from my reflections. “I saw our deaths. I saw the time of the Dark King reigning supreme over the Locke for many more years.” The collective gasp fills the air; even I did not want this future.

“So which one will come to past?” Fisgal asks.

“It all depends on the chosen.”

“Who?” Artumis questions.

“In both my dreams, there is a young woman. In her womb lie twin kings. Those kings will rule our world. Her decision will determine if they rule under my first vision or under my second.”

“I do not understand.” Bartus says.

“One decision will save our world or ruin it.”

“And this woman will make that decision?” Artimus ask. Avalia nods. “Then let us kill the woman now. I shall not have a female dictating my life.”

Avalia rolls her eyes. “You cannot. She determines our fate. She is the only way we can end this war against the Dark king and take our lives back.”

“That is if she makes the right decision.” Rykan, who is usually silent during these meetings, add.

“Yes, but it is in those odds I would rather live, than in the odds of our survival right now.”

“So what now?” I ask pushing away from the door. “What do we do? How will we protect this woman and our future Kings?” Avalia’s eyes lock on me and in that brief moment I know she is holding something back. She’s not telling us everything. I reach into her mind to see what it she is hiding and immediately reach a wall. She has never guarded her mind from me before. I push on the wall and suddenly feel a massive mental shove that almost pushes me physically. Avalia has pushed me out of her head, another first. What was she hiding? And, why was she hiding it from me?

“We must find the chosen. My vision tells me, she will come to us with her belly already full of the future kings. We must protect her, and the great gods be with us, we must persuade her.”

“Does your vision tell us who fathered these future rulers?” Bartus asks. Typical immortal, always concerned about their lineage and who will

take the throne.

“It does not, only that they will be mighty warriors, greater even than the great O’Rydin.” Now even I am impressed. We have not had a ruler like O’Rydin in many centuries. His reign was before my time but legend tells of his heroics during the Great War. The Locke has never flourished as much as it did during his time as king.

“How are we to find this chosen if you do not even know what she looks like? Seems like a wild goose chase to me.” Artimus adds, always confrontational. His tone irks me. Did he dare question my queen? I pull a dagger from the sheath inside my vest. I’ve been itching to kill someone since I left Billy Ray, no reason not to take my anger out on Artimus. The Queen held up her hand to stop me.

“I sense her presence; I will know her when I see her. For now we will be patient and diligent. Any woman in the land that is with child shall be seen by me. We will find her. Prepare yourselves, gentlemen; I see an end to the Dark Kings rule.” The queen waves her hand through the air and a chalice appears before us.

“To the chosen.” Avalia quotes raising her glass.

“To the twin Kings.” Artimus adds lifting up his chalice.

“To our future.” supplies Bartus.

“Aye!” we all agree in unison then drink to our toast

## Chapter Three

### Present time

“Night, Lilly.”

“Night, Paulie.” I say slipping my keys out of my purse. “See ya Monday.” I walk out of the diner smelling like smoke and frying grease, which seems to be my natural fragrance now. I head to my beat-up Camry in the parking lot with its one hub cap and faded blue paint. It is after midnight and the parking lot is practically empty except for the few night shift people and one or two customers. It is late fall and the wind is blowing sending a shiver through my body. I pull my cardigan together to block the cold on my arms. I once asked Paulie if we could wear pants under our uniforms, he said it wouldn’t go with the theme of the diner. Placing a jukebox in the corner and adding some Elvis posters didn’t make a theme. I think Paulie just enjoys seeing us in these 1950 pink and white striped diner uniforms. They are too short for my comfort and I tend to wear shorts under my dress. It’s nothing worse than bending over to pick up a straw and showing the whole world your business. My friend Alice enjoys doing just that, says she gets bigger tips that way.

“Did you get that guys number?” Alice asks coming up behind me. I turn my head and look down at my feet.

“Damn it, Lilly! I had this guy lined up for you.”

“I know, but he kept referring to his self in third person. Michael like Lilly. Michael like coffee.” I say imitating his voice.

Alice laughs. “Eeew! The cute ones are always crazy.” We stop at the front of my car and Alice turns to me.

“So, have you thought anymore about what I said?”

“Well, I talked to Mama.” Alice sighs. Alice has been saving up her money, from the time she started working, in order to move to New York to be a model. She now has enough money saved to get an apartment and start her dream. She’s dying for me to move with her.

“Mama thinks that’s too far to go. She says she will be lonely.”

“Your Mama has Billy Ray for that.” I roll my eyes at Alice and cross my arms over my chest. I am not interested in hearing what my Mama and Billy Ray does. That man has never said more than five words to me since I was a child. It’s like one minute he was cussing me out and beating the ever loving crap out of me, and then the next he was avoiding me like the plague. Although I much rather preferred the latter.

“Honey, I know leaving your mama is scary, but you can’t live your life in a safe little bubble. Life is about taking risk and trying new things. For goodness sakes you’re about to be a twenty-one year old virgin, you’re like an endangered species.”

“I know.” I say rolling my eyes.

“Look, I’m not trying to make you do something crazy. I’m just trying to get you out of your comfort zone. There is more to life than working at this diner and taking your mama to bingo on the weekends.”

“I do other things. Just last weekend I went to the new mega mall and bought me some new panties and bra’s from Victoria Secret.

“Wow! Calm down there girl, don’t want to have to call the fun police.” Alice says with fake excitement. “Look, I just think that if you’re ever going to travel the world and take photos you gotta get out of the house. If you don’t you will be doing weddings and birthdays for the rest of your life.” Alice places her hands on both of my shoulders and looks me in the eye.

“Lilly, you’re beautiful, smart, funny as hell, and the most honest and kindest person I know. You of all people deserve to get out of this backwards ass town.” I wasn’t always like this. Uncle Buddy says when I was a little girl I was always getting into things. He says it drove him and Mama crazy worrying over me. Then, one day I woke up and I wasn’t so careless anymore. He says he was glad, but I think he missed the old me a little. I twirl the butterfly pendant on my necklace between my fingers and smile. Alice let her hands fall away from my shoulders and back to her sides.

“I’ll tell you what; you have four months until I move to New York to make up your mind. I won’t bother you again about moving, IF,” She says placing her hands on her hips. “You promise me one thing?”

“And what’s that?”

“From now until January, you have to do at least one thing out of the norm. It can be a crazy night of partying, skinny dipping in the lake or giving away your V-card. The choice is yours, but you have to do something that Lilly Ann Peters,” She says, saying my name with my southern drawl. “Wouldn’t normally do. Do we have a deal?” She holds her hand out for me to shake. I twirl my pendant between my fingers once more and then shake Alice hands.

“You got a deal.”

“Great! Now get going, it’s late and you got further to go than me.” Alice turns and walks towards her car. I inhale deeply and blow it back out. Could I really be as careless as Alice wants after all these years of playing it safe? I guess we will find out.

I live in a small apartment 25 minutes from work. Most of the drive is back roads and woods. Other than deer running out at you, there is nothing to fear. The good thing about living in a small town is that everybody knows you and your people. So no one will mess with you. I’ve driven this road so often that I barely pay attention to it anymore. That’s why I almost miss him.

Out of nowhere a guy just appears in the middle of the road. I swerve my car at the last minute going into the other lane then slam on breaks. My car skids on the asphalt and echoes the sound in the night. I come to a complete stop on the shoulder of the wrong side of the road. My heart is beating out of my chest like a drum solo at a rock concert. My eyes are playing tricks on me, surely that wasn’t a man standing in the middle of the road. I look in my rearview mirror and there he is kneeling in the middle of the road with his hand clutching his stomach. Where did he come from? I quickly get out of my car and rush over to him.

“Excuse me, are you ok?” He looks up into my eyes and smile.

“Am I in the heavenly realm?” he ask, his voice shaky and out of breath.

I laugh. “No sir, you’re just in North Carolina.”

“You look like an angel.” I smile at that. This guy must really be out of it if he thinks I’m an angel. It did make me smooth my hair back into my ponytail.

“I think you need to go to a hospital.” I look down at his blood soaked shirt. His left hand is over his stomach and blood is spilling from around his

hand. I try to stand and he grabs my arm with his right hand.

“Please Angel, don’t leave me.” His touch is hot, a sign of a fever.

“You’re not doing too well. Let me call somebody to help.” He shakes his head and his wavy hair swings back and forth across his face.

“Please, I just need a safe place to rest.” My brain is moving like wheels in mud. This guy is really hurt and he needs help. However, I don’t want to take him to the hospital if he doesn’t want to go. Maybe he had it in with the law, if so; did I really want to put myself in danger by taking him in? My cousin Roy stays in trouble with the law but he was still a good person.

“Please Angel, I will not hurt you. You have my vow.” I twist my butterfly pendant between my fingers. I can hear Alice voice saying “do something daring, Lilly”. Oh for heaven sake! I throw my hands up in the air. I swear, Alice, if this man kills me I’m coming back to haunt you.

“Ok Mister, but don’t let me regret this.” I put his arm around my shoulder and help him to his feet. He tries to keep all of his weight off me, but I was only 5’4” and any weight is heavy to me. Thankfully, I get him in the car, and fasten him in. He is sleep before I can get back on the road.

The man woke up long enough for me to get him up the stairs to my apartment and as soon as I lay him on the couch he is back out. I stare down at him, his back flat against the seat cushions on the couch, his long legs are hanging off the arm of the couch. If I had to guess, I say he is somewhere around 6’2” or 6’3”. In the light I can see that his dark wavy hair is the color of charcoal and it hangs down to his shoulders. I push a lock of hair back off his face and he moans at my touch. He is unbelievably handsome and not much older than me, I think. He has a straight aristocratic nose and high cheek bones. He looks nothing like the men I’m used to seeing. The really strange thing is his clothes. He is wearing a white long sleeve shirt with puffy sleeves, like something you would see in a Shakespeare play. His velvet vest is in a rich teal color and snaps all the way up to his neck. His linen pants are tucked into his black leather knee boots. Altogether, his attire looks medieval. Not something you see in the back woods of North Carolina.

“Mister, I’m gonna have to get you out of your shirt so I can clean that wound, ok?” he mumbles something undecipherable. “I’ll take that as an ok.” I go to my bathroom and gather some gauze, gloves, scissors,



alcohol and bandages. With my arms full I carry the supplies back into the living room.

“I’m going to cut your shirt off. By the way my name is Lilly Ann Peters. I reckon you oughta at least know my name before I go feeling you up.” I know he can’t answer me, but it felt better to talk to him, less creepy anyway.

I push his vest aside and cut his shirt apart. It fell to his sides exposing his chest and stomach. Holy Cow! His body is amazing. His abs are broken off in six perfect sections. I have to bite my lip to keep from running my hands down his smooth hairless chest. His bottoms sit low on his waist showing off his hip bone. I couldn’t help glancing at that dark hair peeking up from his pants. Obviously, Mr. Mystery Man did not wear underwear.

“Get it together, Lilly Ann. It’s just a man..... just an extremely handsome and well-built man.” I mutter to myself.

Thankfully, growing up with hunters, I’m not frightened by blood and gore. I’ve cleaned and mended everything from minor gun-shot wounds from hunting accidents, to stab wounds from bar fights. My family wasn’t quick to go to the hospital. Once, when Uncle Buddy broke his finger racing four wheelers, he let me set it and wrap it. He said he wasn’t paying a doctor for something his niece could do.

I clean mystery man’s wound with the alcohol and the gauze, after getting all the blood off, the wound doesn’t look so bad. I place the bandage over his wound and went about cleaning up the used gauzes. I notice his body is still warm.

“You need to take something for that fever.” I hold his head in my hand and lift it so he can swallow two pills and drink some water. As soon as the water is gone, he falls right back into a peaceful sleep. Now is a good time for me to take care of myself.

After taking a shower I sit down in the chair across from my guest watching the rise and fall of his chest. Soon, the effect of working a double shift catches up with me and I’m out like a light.

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I feel strong arms lifting me and the jerking of my body as if someone is carrying me. My eyes shoot open and I try to push away from the hard chest that holds me. The arms around me tighten.

“Careful Angel, I’m just putting you to bed.” It’s mystery man.

“You’re wounded, you shouldn’t be....”

“I’m fine.” He says cutting off my concern. “I have you to thank for that.” He places me down on my bed and I sit up on my knees. I scan over his stomach to find his wound, I pull the bandage back and I swear the wound is even smaller than I initially thought.

“See, tis only a scratch. Thanks to my angel.” He says smiling, and oh boy is it a nice smile. Now that his eyes are open I can see that they are the same onyx color of his hair. It is breathtaking against his golden skin.

“I’m not an angel. My name’s Lilly.” I say pushing my still wet hair behind my ear. He touches my face with the palm of his hand.

“To me, Lilly Ann Peters, you are a beautiful angel.” I blush.

“Wait, how do you know my name?” he smiles once again.

“Do you always talk to people, that you believe are unconscious?” I smile then realize all I said while he was unconscious; I knew my face was probably bright red. I hide my face behind my hands. He pulls my hands away.

“Do not be ashamed. I am flattered that you find me extremely handsome and well-built.” He says with a sly smile. That doesn’t help my embarrassment. I look away from him, now consciously aware of his close proximity. His scent of wood and musk drifts to my nose. It was a manly scent that sent a shiver through my body and a tightening below my waist that I was not use to.

“I owe you my life, Lilly. Do not feel ashamed around me.”

Speaking of,” I say changing this subject before I become permanently stained this red color. “Why were you out in the middle of the road like that?” He runs his hand through his hair and sits down in front of me, still too close for me to concentrate.

“It’s a long story. One I do not care to repeat to a beautiful maiden such as you.” I blush. He lifts his hand and touches my cheek. “You have the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen.” I didn’t respond. Instead that annoying tightening increases.

I’ve never thought much about my virginity. I don’t wear it like a badge of honor, nor do I deny it. It is something that is. Mama once told me love and sex should go hand and hand, and since I never found love I never had sex. So why does my body now react for this complete stranger? It is something about him that plays with the corners of my mind. Like some old memory trying to replay. For a second I see woods and the back of a man’s head, a man with long dark hair. Then the memory is gone. Was my brain trying to

tell me something about this mystery man? I know I've never seen him before, I would never forget a face like his. However, I am having a hard time shaken this déjà vu from that strange flash of memory. With a mind of its own my body leans towards him. He leans closer to me, so close that our lips are mere inches apart, with one slight move they could touch. I can feel his warm breath brushing against my lips. My tongue darts out and licks my lips in hopes of tasting his scent on my tongue. The movement catches his attention and he pulls away from me suddenly.

"I think I should be going." He stands abruptly to his feet as if my bed has grown teeth and bit him. "I'm having a hard time remaining noble towards you. I do not want to dishonor your husband. "

I laugh. "My husband?"

"Yes, where is he? He should not leave you alone at this hour." He says looking around as if my husband will pop out somewhere.

"I reckon I'm a few years away from meeting him." His eyes fall back on me, they scan down at my t-shirt and bare legs. I didn't plan on him waking up before me when I put on a t-shirt that barely covers my thighs. Thank God I had the right mind to put on a bra and it is one of my newer ones, its red lace shows seductively underneath my white shirt. His eyes linger on my body before finding my eyes again.

"It is hard to believe you are not married. Have your family not arranged anything yet? I imagine your bride price being rather high." He rakes his eyes down my body once again before bringing them back up to my face. "Rightfully so." Is he serious? Imagine my mom setting a price for my hand in marriage; she would get more money selling my beat-up Camry.

"It doesn't work that way here." I knew in some countries those practices are still used, but in America, Thank God, men and women marry for love. Most of the time.

"Then surely you are being courted?"

"Nope! I'm as single as a slice of cheese." He quirks his eyebrow at me and I laugh. "I'm not married or being courted and honestly I'm not in a rush for neither one."

"Why?" he asks widening his stance and crossing his arms over his chest. I sit back on my feet and think about that question for only a minute.

"I'm not ready for it. When you love someone you should give them all of you; all your heart, all your attention and all your time. I'm too busy

trying to figure out my life to give it away.” I sigh. “Love deserves more than part of me. So, until I can give it more, I stay away from it.”

He sits back down on the bed in front of me. “My angel is not only beautiful, but wise.” He places his hand on my knee and the warmth from his touch send butterflies dancing in my stomach. Once again the heat races to my face and I turn from him. His calloused hand cups the side of my face, his thumb making circles over my cheek.

“Does it upset you that I touch you?” He asks turning my head to look into his eyes. I shake my head no, too breathless for words. What is it about this guy that has my nerves firing off through my body like Fourth of July sparklers? It isn’t like I’ve never been touched by a guy before. I’ve gone parking plenty of times when I was in high school. I’ve even gone as far as second base once or twice, so why am I so sensitive now. Maybe it’s because this guy makes all the others look like Ogre’s, my inner voice says. And she’s right; this guy makes me rethink my entire theory on sex and love. His fingers thread into the hair at the back of my head and he pulls me closer to him.

“I’m going to kiss you now. I have millions of reasons why I shouldn’t, but cannot, for the life of me, think of any of them right now.” His words are whispered against my lips. I probably should care why he shouldn’t be kissing me. That seems like something a reasonable person would be thinking. However, all I can think of is what those incredible lips would feel like against mine. I don’t know if I responded or not before his lips came down on mine, urgently. His tongue slips across my lips asking to be granted an audience with mine. I open my mouth obliging his request. His kiss is tender but deep, he explores my mouth like it is a cave and he is a speleologist. When his body pushes mine back on to my bed. His hungry kiss slows to gentle pecks. He props his self over me on his hands careful not to put any weight on my body.

“Lilly.” He moans my name against my neck as he leaves a trail of burning kisses down to my shoulder blade. “Please, tell me to leave.” This is the first. I’ve never had a guy want me to make him leave. If they want nothing else from me, they want sex.

“If you don’t want to be here...” I start to say with a bit of disappointment. The stranger’s head pops up and his onyx eyes stares down at me. “Lilly, I promise you, there is nowhere else I want to be right now. But if I stay, I can only give you one day. I have to go back to my home

soon, and I will not be able to return. I cannot be the love you speak of. If I were truly a gentleman I would get up from this bed right now and walk away, but I can't, so please tell me to leave."

This shouldn't be happening. I know nothing about this guy, not even his name. He could be a serial killer or rapist, even though I feel he isn't, but I want him to stay. Here I am with an amazing man, I can only get one night with him and I'm afraid to take it. Alice is right. I've lived my entire life playing it safe, while the world is waiting on me. If I never take any risk I will never leave my sleepy little town. My book of photography will never get done. I am about to miss out on life. Well not anymore. I refuse to live the rest of my life as safe little Lilly. I'm going to be spontaneous. I'm going to be exciting and daring and hell I was even going to New York in February with Alice. And to start it all off, I am going to do something I've never done before. I look back at those tar colored eyes that are patiently waiting my decision. Without a word I slide my t-shirt up over my head. His eyes scan my body with a hungry possession.

"As you wish." He states with a slight smile, and then begins to kiss me.

## Chapter Four

Six weeks later

“No problem, sir. I’ll get you a cup of cof...” My stomach flutters and my hand flies to my mouth, this time I barely make it to the bathroom. I rush to the toilet and let go of all my stomach content, which really was only a handful of crackers. I lean my head against the back of the bathroom stall door. I’ve been vomiting for a week now. I’m pretty sure I’ve lost five pounds. I thought initially I had some kind of stomach bug, but stomach bugs don’t last a week.

“Hey, Lilly, open up.” Alice calls from the outside of my stall. I moan and stumble to my feet. Alice pushes open the door and hands me a glass of orange juice. “Paulie says go home. Clarissa can take your shift.”

I moan again. I need this job and the tips or else I’ll be back at Mama’s and Billy Ray’s. “I’ll be fine. I just need to get some medicine.”

“Lilly Ann, you’ve been sick for a week now, you need to go to the hospital.” I brush pass Alice and walk to the sink.

“You know I don’t do hospitals.” I say turning on the tap and splashing water on my face. I place my mouth under the running water and swish it around my mouth then spit.

“Why? Cause Uncle Buddy says they’re a rip off. The only reason you should be sick like this is if something is really wrong, or you’re pregnant. But last time I checked virgins don’t get pregnant.” My heart stops. Oh shit, I can’t breathe. Someone is making these loud noises and I can’t think straight. Could I be pregnant? Can a one night stand with the most beautiful man I’ve ever met lead to this? I mean yeah it was more than one time but could this truly be my punishment. Oh Lord not me! That wheezing noise grows louder. I was about to tell whoever it was to shut-up while I think, but that’s when I realized it is me. I’m having a panic attack.

“Ok Lilly, you have to calm down and tell me what’s wrong.” I collapse to the bathroom floor and tuck my knees up to my chest.

“I’m pregnant.” I whisper out. It sounds funny saying it out loud. The virgin who finally has sex after 20 years gets pregnant on the first try. Maybe it was the second or the fifth, it doesn’t matter this wasn’t supposed to happen. I mean, I skipped a period but I figured it was because of the stress from telling Mama about New York. She’s been badgering me about it ever since. This never even crossed my mind. I asked him about protection, but he told me I had nothing to worry about, that he could not get me pregnant. Billy Ray has the same issue so figured I was ok.

“Lilly, sweetie, I know you’ve lived a sheltered life, but let me teach you about how babies are made.” Alice says kneeling in front of me.

“I know how they’re made.” I answer agitated.

“Well either you’re the Virgin Mary or you got some explaining to do.” I drop my fore head to my knees.

“You remember about six weeks ago we had that talk about New York?” I ask my words coming out muffled.

“Yeeeaahh!” She says dragging out the word.

“Well that night I met a guy on the road and I took him home and ....”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Alice shouts. “You picked up a stranger in the middle of the road and had sex with him?”

“You were the one that said try new things.” I say looking up at her.

“I meant skinny dipping or bungee jumping or getting drunk with me, not picking up some stranger for sex. That guy could have been a murderer.”

“I know, Alice.” I couldn’t stop the tears from falling from my eyes. Alice reaches out and pulls me to her side. I lay my head on her shoulder and cry, until Florence comes back and beats on the door for someone to come back to work.

“We’re coming, Florence. Jesus! Get the Depends out your ass.”

“Mama’s gonna kill me.” I say wiping my eyes.

“You are a grown ass woman, Lilly. Your mama got no say in what you do.” Alice obviously doesn’t know my mama.

“You know what’s worse?” I ask.

Alice sighs. “Can it get any worse?”

I ignore that. “I have no way of getting in contact with him.” He reminded me at least three more times that all we would have was that day. He said that once he went back home I wouldn’t see him again. He also asked if I was sure I wanted to give my virginity to someone I wouldn’t see

again. I told him I was tired of hanging on to it anyway, wasn't like I was holding it for a reason. He was so kind and made sure that my first time was very memorable. It hurt like hell but he was as gentle and slow as possible. I was thankful that after the first time the other few times weren't painful at all. We spent the entire day talking and making love. He spent as much time with me as possible before he had no choice but to leave. He was so interested in me and my dreams. I told him about traveling and doing my photography. I showed him some pictures and he even took one with him. He said where he was from they didn't have cameras. I thought that was peculiar but I also thought he might be pulling my leg. Now I'll have a child and it will never even know its father.

"Come on girl." Alice says standing to her feet and pulling me up beside her. "Before we get all worked up let's head back to your place, get some pregnancy test and see if you're even pregnant, ok? Who knows, it could be some bad Chinese food." I smile brightly at her optimism. You know you're in a bad fix when food poisoning is what you're hoping for.

"What about work?"

"I'll tell Paulie we both got some kind of bug." She says waving my question away as if it was no big thing.

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"What does this one say?" Alice asks on the other side of my bathroom door.

"Positive." I answer. Five test, five positives, three cokes and one melt down later, I am sitting on the edge of my bathtub with my head in my hands. I guess it's safe to say I'm pregnant. So this is happening? I'm going to have a kid. It could be worse, I don't know how, but it could be.

"Hey don't get all bent out of shape, you have options. I can take you over to Raleigh and you can get rid of..." I sling my bathroom door open and stand in front of Alice.

"No! I am not getting rid of my baby because I was too stupid to use a condom." I say pushing past her. She follows behind me.

"Think about this Lilly." I turn on my heels so fast I almost give myself whiplash.

"Do you know what everyone told my Mama when she was pregnant with me?" I ask, but Alice knew it was a rhetorical question. "They told her



to get rid of that mutt inside her, and that the only thing I or my Daddy would bring her was shame. Before I came into this world I was hated by my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, and over half of the community. The only person that stood by my Mama side was her big brother Buddy. He told her that if she loved my father she had no reason to be ashamed of me. My Mother had her entire family against her but she kept me. I will not get rid of mine because it came at an inconvenient time. The only person who should be concerned about this baby is me, and if you have a problem with it there's the door." I state flopping down on the couch. I pull my knees up under me and place a pillow over my chest. Alice sits down beside me and pulls my head to her shoulder.

"I'm not going anywhere, and I'm sorry for even suggesting that."

"I know it won't be easy, Al, but I love my baby, even if it's only the size of a peanut right now." I say glancing down at my pillow covered belly.

"And I love your peanut baby too." She says bumping my shoulder. We sat in silence for a moment longer both thinking about the long road ahead of me. I was so cautious in high school to make sure that this was never my outcome. I didn't want to be another unwed teen mom. Even though I'm old enough now to take care of a baby, barely, I still feel as if I'm another statistic. I'm just another country girl that grew up from nothing and will end with nothing. God forbid I have to be like my mom and settle down with some alcoholic asshole that despises my child. That thought makes me shudder. "So tell me," Alice says bringing me out of my depressing thoughts. "How was mystery man sex? I want all the dirty details. You owe me that much." I laugh, thankful for the mood change and fill her in on the most amazing night of my life.

## Chapter Five

“Silence, Artumis.” Avalia says holding up her hand. The room that was once in an up roar went silent immediately.

“I know what trouble the Immortals are facing.”

“Easy for you to say, the Elvin women aren’t being kidnapped.” Artumis shouts. In the blink of an eye I trace to his back and hold my sword at his throat.

“Do you wish to die today, Immortal King?” His three guards pull their swords. I laugh at their feeble attempt. Before they could even get close enough to me I would have this fat bastard’s head in my hands. “If you wish to survive this day you will watch your tongue towards my Queen.”

“It’s okay, Assassin.” Avalia spoke softly. “***He is just upset that he cannot do more to help his people.***” She says speaking to me in my head.

“**He does not deserve the right to speak to you that way.**”

“**Please, Assassin.**” I hold my blade against Artumis’s throat for a second longer then finally let him go, but not without making sure my blade nicked him first. I trace back by the Queen’s side and watch as my blade disappears before my eyes. Artumis touches his hand to his bleeding neck then pulls it away looking down at his bloody fingers. That’s right fat ass, I made you bleed.

“Artumis, I will forgive your outburst only because I know the western women are being hit the hardest. However, need I remind you that I have fought with the immortals in countless wars? My people have died on the same battlefield as yours. When you were still suckling from your mother’s breasts, I fought with your father against the centaurs in order to keep the kingdom you now claim. Therefore, do not ever question my loyalties again, or next time I will not stop the assassin’s blade.”

“**Promise?**” I ask telepathically.

A smile plays at the corner of her lips as she answers. “***If he disrespects me again, I’ll kill him myself.***” I chuckle under my breath. As I said before, the Queen can handle her own.

“Your Majesty.” Bartus states. “I apologize for Artumis’s stupidity.” Bartus shoots his eyes briefly to Artumis. “I think we would all feel better once we know who this chosen is. Have you had any luck tracking her down?”

Not long after the queen spoke of her prophecy, the Dark King discovered it. At first he would take pregnant women and have his witch test their womb for the twin kings. Once he realized the women wasn’t the mother of the prophecy he would release them, leaving them frightened and a little abused but alive. Now, he takes the women pregnant or not and they never come back. He’s getting desperate. There are more and more shifter attacks on the villages each day. We have fought more in the last few years than we have in a lifetime. Everyone is in a dash to get their hands on the chosen mother of the twin kings.

“I have searched the entire Locke for this young woman. I feel her presence but I cannot locate her.”

“You have checked all my concubines?” Fisgal asks.

“Yes, Fisgal. Neither of them are the woman I seek. What about you, Geronis, have you bedded any new women since the last I checked?” Geronis looks a lot like his father, Fisgal. He too was tall and lean with long dreads.

“I will bring them to you.” Geronis says bowing his head. I swear those Eastern men have an intensive appetite for women. Fisgal alone has many children between his concubines, all in which he takes great care of.

The Queen sighs. “I only hope your selection is not as vast as your father’s.” The men in the room laugh.

“What of you, Rykan?”

“Rykan is to be married soon.” Bartus smacks his son on the back proudly. “He would never defile his future bride with that of another woman.” Rykan folds his arms across his chest and nods his head.

“Well, we are back where we started.” Avalia states putting her hands on her waist.

“What of you, Assassin?” Fisgal asks.

“What of me?” I counter leaning back in my seat. I prop my elbow up on the back of the chair with my feet stretched out in front of me.

“We have all paraded our women before the Queen.” Fisgal says pointing around the room. “Yet you have not. Have you not blessed any beds lately?” My body hums with anger. Not only does he have the audacity

to challenge my sex life, but he reminds me that I have none. I have been without the touch of a woman for many years now. It seems I cannot find a woman that holds my attention. Although many have tried, none of them do I desire. Though my jaw flinches I don't give away my emotions.

"The assassin has not been exempt from my search, Fisgal. I can assure you."

"My apologies, Assassin, I did not mean to offend." Fisgal holds his hand up to me with his palms out. I nod my acceptance.

"I think we are all a bit touchy. It will be better once the chosen is found. We can put forth all of our energy into keeping our future safe, and assuring her allegiance." Bartus, the usual peace keeper, adds. The men in the room nod their heads solemnly. We were beaten down and tired. The only hope we have is finding the chosen one; the one that carries our future kings. After so many years it doesn't seem likely.

"Lift up your head men." Avalia shouts standing to her feet. All the men in the room shoot up in attention. "I look out at you and all I see is down trodden and beaten men. Have you lost your fight?" She asks holding her head up. "Our time is coming. The Locke has seen its last tyrant king. Do not grow weary on me now. You are THE Immortal kings. Your ancestors fought the giants and the trolls for this land. You do not have the right to grow tired." Avalia says slamming her fist down on her throne. "The battles will not matter, your wounds will heal, and the dead will be celebrated. But I will fight to the death for our people and to bring the Locke back to its former glory. As long as I have the hope of better times I will throw myself on the Dark King's blade to reclaim my land. But I will not go to battle with weak men. I fight with only the strong, so who will fight with me?" The cheers erupt around the room. Even I feel the motivation of the queen's speech.

"***Well done, your highness.***" I speak telepathically nodding to Avalia.

She glances at me out the corner of her eye, "***They needed uplifting. Plus, I cannot have sodden men leading my army.***" I nod my head in agreement with her.

The Queen sits back down on her throne. "Go now, great kings, motivate your men. And Artumis, I will speak with the fairies and see if I can get more eyes out around your western borders."

"Thank you, my Queen."

“The council is dismissed.” One by one the men trace away. “May I speak with you alone, Assassin?” I stand from my seat and pull my pocket watch from my pocket. I do not regularly bring things back from the human realm; however this was a necessity to keep track of the mortal world.

“Am I keeping you from something?” Avalia’s voice asks with a hint of play in it.

“No.” I say slipping the watch back in my pocket. Avalia walks over to the tray of fruit sitting atop her banquet table. Our council meeting tonight was held in the Glass Castle, The Elf Queen’s home. It is not truly made of glass, but of crystal. The clear surface of the crystal reflects its surroundings giving it the nick-name glass. The castle is truly magnificent. When the sun is shining the crystal reflects rainbows all throughout the castle, and when the night comes the walls are a faded blue like a quiet ocean. Everything in the Elvin kingdom is created with this crystal. The queen’s castle sits in the middle of our land with its sixteen spires pointing up towards the sky. The queen’s throne room sat directly in the middle of the castle and it opens up to a large balcony that stretches out towards her kingdom like a bony finger summoning her people to her. Most of the elves live in apartment style homes that are created out of the crystal mountain that encircles our Kingdom.

“Tell me, Assassin, why haven’t I seen any of your conquest?” Avalia asks as she pops a grape into her mouth. More talk about my sex life. “You have been my protector for many centuries and even though no woman has been lucky enough to tie you down, many have graced your bed, until recently.”

“What is your point, Avalia?” The queen smiles, her silver dress sweeping across the floor as she strolls over to her balcony. I follow behind her checking the time on my pocket watch once again. Avalia turns suddenly and catches me.

“Something has changed with you.” She states.

“I am as loyal to you as always, my Queen.” I say with a bow.

“I don’t mean your loyalty, Assassin.” She says waving her hand dismissively. “I mean something personal. Every fourth day at the same time for the last two years you disappear out of the realm without telling me. I find you staring off in space in times of quiet, as if you’re thinking of something passionately.” I start to say something but the queen cut me off. “Who is she?” I stagger back at her accusation.

“My Queen,” I say placing my hand to my heart. “whatever do you mean?”

“Do not lie to me, Assassin. You are one of the few people I consider a true friend.” she says with her hands on her hips.

“Are you jealous, my Queen?” I ask jokingly.

I have known Avalia since I was just a boy. She came into my village seeking an assassin. She walked amongst the greatest fighters in our ranks looking pass all of the men. She was so beautiful to me even then. Of course she was 500 years older than my 17 years; I was still a boy to the men in my village. With her head held high, she looked pass all the Assassins and said “None of these will do. Is there anymore?” I heard our general say to her, “Only the young trainees, but they are not ready to protect someone of such importance.” Avalia glared at the general and said “Bring them forth.” As soon as her eyes landed on me she said, “Him, he will do.” I have been like a little brother to her ever since and even though she is beautiful I have too much respect for her to lust for her.

Avalia laughs at my joke, “You are still the arrogant young man I picked out many centuries ago.” I smile back at her.

“Yes, I think it was my good looks that caught your attention back then.”

“Do not try to change the subject, Assassin.” She places her arms across her chest. I place mine behind my back and begin to pace.

“Why do you assume it is a woman?”

“There is only one thing that makes a man act the way you do, a woman.” She turns to follow my pacing. “Do I need to check her for our future kings; surely no one will argue your lineage or their right to rule?” I still.

“It is not as you think. She does not carry my child. She does not know I exist.” I laugh at that thought. The Queen’s eyebrows quirk up in surprise. “It is a long story.” I say rolling my eyes. She smiles brightly.

“I hope that you will tell me some time.” I didn’t answer, I just nod my head. If I could help it I would never tell her where I spend my Wednesdays.

“You may go, Assassin.” She says with a smile. “But I would love to meet the woman that has caught the eye of the great Assassin.”

“That, my Queen, will never happen.” I say as I trace away from the glass castle, not before hearing the queen’s high pitched laugh.

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After that first night I met Lilly, I tried to stay away from her. I did for the first week, but I could not get the bright-eyed little human out of my thoughts. I wondered if she was happy. Was she lonely? Was her step-father keeping his distance? Was she hurt and no one knew? I drove myself crazy that first week thinking of her. I finally convinced myself that if I checked on her one more time and made sure she was ok I would have her out of my system. However, that didn't work. Every time I went to see her it gave me another reason to see her again. She, however, never even knows I'm there. I have watched her grow. Before my eyes she transformed from a curious little girl, to an awkward teenager, to a responsible adult. I was there when she lost her first tooth, I was there when she gave herself her first haircut, and I was even there for her high school and college graduation. I've been a silent force in her life and she wouldn't even know me if I stood in front of her. When Lilly was younger I came to see her a few times a day. But as she grew, I felt as if I was being intrusive upon her privacy so I slowly cut back. I am now down to once a week. So, every Wednesday for the last two years I trace to the human realm to see Lilly.

Today, like every Wednesday, I am at her job in the back booth invisible to everyone around me. I smile as she rubs the butterfly pendant between her thumb and pointer finger.

"Mama, I told you I'm fine." She says into her phone. She's standing in the back of the diner between the jukebox and the booth I'm sitting at. My back is against the window and both legs are propped up on the long vinyl bench. I can see the entire diner from where I sit.

She sighs! "I told you for the hundredth time, I'm not telling you or Uncle Buddy who he is. Now it's my life mama and I'll take care of my responsibilities on my own." What responsibilities? Does this have anything to do with moving to New York with her blonde haired friend? Although I want Lilly to branch out and travel, I do not wish for her to go with the blonde. She is a bad influence for my little human.

"Lilly!" a customer calls for her across the diner.

"I'll be right with you, Mr. Henry." She yells back. "Mama, I gotta go. I'm at work." She rolls her eyes, "I gotta go Mama. I'll see ya Sunday..... Love you too." She slides her finger across her phone then slides it back into her apron. She leans up against the juke box and

exhales. Something is wrong. She always twirls her necklace when she's worried or nervous. I wish I could ask her what the problem is. I've always secretly fixed Lilly's problems. I've dealt with countless bullies and I can't tell you how many times I've helped her in fights. There were so many children with their cruel taunts and name calling. She took them all like a trooper, ignoring those that she could, fighting the ones she couldn't. I've even helped in times when she may not have needed me to, like with dating. Young single-minded boys chased after her wanting nothing more than to claim her body. I chased them all away. I even landed one young man in the hospital, not my proudest moment but it had to be done.

So as I watch her now worry over some unseen problem I want to reach out to her, stroke her hair, and tell her I will fix it.

"Lilly!" Mr. Henry calls her again. She sighs and pushes herself away from the jukebox.

"I'm coming." She walks over to Mr. Henry's table and plasters a fake smile on her face. I know it isn't a genuine smile because her dimples were not visible.

"Let me guess, Mr. Henry, a coffee, Black, two sugars?"

"Are you feeling better, sweetheart?" Is Lilly sick? Is that what is worrying her? I rise from my booth and walk over to her. I look her over and she looks well, maybe a little tired, but she's been working a lot of double shifts lately trying to buy a car. The one she has is in need of service, again. I do not have cars in my realm, so when Lilly first started having problems with the ridiculous contraption I didn't know how to help. However, after the third time that left her stranded on the side of the road, I picked up every mechanical book I could find and taught myself how to care for her car. I would wait until night fell and fix whatever the cause at the time. It is because of my help that it has lasted so long. I wish that I could just buy her a new car and many other things, but I do not have the human realm's financial means. And, I am sure no one will accept my currency.

"I don't like when you're out." Mr. Henry continues. "That other girl never gets my coffee right. I have to suffer with that terrible stuff she gives me."

"I only missed half a day Mr. Henry."

"Well I'm glad you're better now, I need my coffee done right."



“Yes, Mr. Henry.” Lilly turns and walks back towards the back of the diner. Her blonde friend Alice comes up beside her and places a hand on her shoulder.

“How ya doing? Anymore nausea?” Lilly is sick. I’ll have to bring her some opal leaves and slip them into her drink tomorrow. That should cure any illness.

“I lost my breakfast this morning at the photo shoot, but I’ve kept everything else down.”

“How did the shoot go?” Alice asks. I am interested in that too. Lilly is a talented photographer but she is struggling to do the photos that she wants. Like the ones in her book. Unfortunately, she’s been stuck doing weddings, babies, and the occasional group photo.

“The kids wouldn’t sit still and the father blinked every time the flash went off.”

Alice laughs and so did I. Lilly sighs.

“Mama called me again.” Her voice is sad and I couldn’t help feel like I need to fix something for her.

“Let me guess, she wants you to move back in?”

“How did you know?” Alice smiles and picks up her order off the counter and places it on her tray.

“Your mama has been trying to get you to move back in the moment you moved out, of course she wants you to come back now that you’re...”

“Lilly!” Mr. Henry interrupts. Wait. Now that she’s what? I knew humans get various illnesses. Their bodies are susceptible to all kinds of things and many of these illnesses can kill. Is that what’s wrong, is Lilly going to die? For the first time ever I feel sick. I have protected this young girl all her life to lose her to some human disease. I brace my hands on the edge of the counter as rage rocks my body. My vision turns red and my body tenses.

“What the hell?” Paulie states confused as he looks down at the indentation my fingers make in the metal counter. I release the counter and pull away. My mind is racing through options of how I can save her.

“Lilly, table two.” Alice calls back over her shoulder. Lilly walks over to table two and pulls her pad from her apron.

“Hello dear!” an elderly lady says. The woman is old and frail. She’s wearing a bright red scarf covering her hair and her spine is curved leaving her hunched over. I can’t take my eyes off the old lady. Something is

tugging at my memory when I look at her. I cannot place where the familiarity comes from.

“My names Lilly and I’ll be your waitress tonight. What can I start you out with?”

“You are so beautiful, young lady.” The woman reaches out a bony hand and touches Lilly’s arm. My instinct to protect rears up inside of me. This was confusing, no one is in danger. I scan the diner to see if I am missing something.

“Thank you.” Lilly says. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“No, my dear, but you can tell me how you would like to die?” the question startles me, clearly I must have heard wrong.

“What?” Lilly asks jerking her hand away.

“I said,” The woman stands up and her disguise fades away. “How would you and those bastards you carry like to die.” Standing in front of Lilly was Ofilla, the Dark King’s witch. As soon as I recognize Ofilla three Shifters trace into the diner. Immediately I drop my invisibility and materialize my sword. The shifters growl, and Ofilla turns and sees me.

“Assassin.” She hisses. For the first time in 15 years Lilly’s eyes meet mine and the smile that lights up her face stops everything. I would give anything to live in this moment. However it doesn’t last long, because Ofilla shoots a ball of fire from her hands into Lilly’s chest and her body flies across the diner into the counter. I see red. I don’t recall how I start to move, my body is on auto-pilot. I slice through the first shifter in a blur. I can vaguely see people running out the diner all around me. I try to think how this must look to the humans. A crazy man slinging a sword, three large wolves, and a woman that just shot fire from her hands, I do not blame the humans for fleeing. I slit the throat of the second wolf.

“Get back bitch or I’ll blow your head off.” Paulie is holding a shot gun towards Ofilla as she hovers over Lilly’s body. Alice stands by his side wringing her hands together. Ofilla pulls back her lip in a snarl. The light from her hand flies in Paulie’s direction at the same time his shot gun fires. The light hit Paulie in the shoulder sending him flying back into the kitchen. Alice screams Paulie’s name and chases after him. The bullet from the shot gun blows into Ofilla’s stomach knocking her onto her back. She clutches her hand over the wound. I pull my sword out of the last shifter and head for her.

“We found your precious chosen, Assassin.” I pause. Who was our chosen? She looks over to Lilly’s still body and I follow her gaze. I gasp. It can’t be.

“We will kill her before she can take our Dark King’s throne.” I charge at her once again and she traces away just as I get to her. I roar into the air. This can’t be possible, Lilly is not the chosen. I know Lilly is still pure. I’ve heard her and her blonde friend speak of it numerous times. I fought like hell in her teen years to make sure of it. Who would dare taint her body?

I hear her moan and I spin on my heels to go to her. Kneeling down beside her body, I can see the black scorch marks of the fire ball Ofilla shot at her. I move the tattered rags of her uniform and the wound on her chest rip a sob from my mouth. There is a hole in her chest the size of my fist. I bite down on my lip to keep from screaming out. The copper taste of my blood fills my mouth. The sweet little girl with the big heart and bright eyes that I’ve watched grow is dying before my eyes. I lift her head, and she cries out in pain.

“It’s ok, Lilly.” I say soothingly as I place her head into my lap. Some of her raven colored hair has escaped her ponytail and is falling across her face. I push the black locks away from her eyes. I’ve never seen her so close up; seeing as I’m usually looking at her from a distance, she is beautiful. Her full lips are a stunning shade of deep pink against her honey colored skin. Her nose is narrow and resembles her mother’s English heritage. When she opens her eyes and looks at me with her dimpled smile, it steals my breath away. Her big bright eyes are still that stunning shade of emerald and gold.

“Hello, little human.” I say, my voice cracking with emotion. I know Lilly does not remember me; I took those memories away from her, but the way she looks up at me makes me second guess myself. She blinks slowly and I realize the pain is making it hard for her to keep her eyes open.

“Your ears are funny.” She says breathlessly. I choke back my laugh. She is still my perceptive little human.

“I guess they are.” I answer. She smiles one last time before the pain forces her to shut her eyes again, and then she stills in my arms.

## Chapter Six

“Assassin, what is going on?” I storm into the queen’s chambers. One of her loyal male servants stumbles out of her bed with nothing but a pillow to cover his dick.

“Out!” I snarl. The servant fumbles his way out of the room. Avalia rises from her bed, her hands on her naked hips. I am too distracted to take the time to enjoy her pale skin and full round breast.

“What the hell, Assassin, he was actually really good.” She says pointing towards the space her loyal servant had just vacated. I pull a robe off the back of her chaise and toss it at her.

“Call a council meeting, now!”

Avalia fumbles with the sleeves of her robe. “Assassin, it’s late. What is this about?”

“I’ll meet you in the throne room.” I trace away from the glass castle back to the cabin where I’ve left Lilly. I hated to leave her, but I cannot trace her to the queen’s castle without her first accepting her. It is a security all kingdoms have put up. It keeps any of the Dark Kings followers from just popping up into our domains.

I rush to the small bed where Lilly still lies motionless. Her breathing is ragged and her heart beat is slow. Her face is pale and dark shadows are under her eyes. I lay my hand on her clammy forehead, already her fever is breaking. She moans under my touch.

“It hurts.” Lilly’s soft voice calls out. My hands fist at my side. I will kill Ofilla for doing this to her, and the bastard that left her alone with child. Who is he? I know he is from the Locke and is of magical breed because the wound Lilly sustained should have killed her. Not many travel back and forth through the different realms. I travel the most of any from the Locke yet I know it is not my seed that fills her womb. The Immortal Kings have the ability, but never use it. The Dark King has portals set, but he would never travel to a place that makes him weak. His portals are set up mainly for the shifters. The Great Gods forbids a shifter has disgraced Lilly’s body.

I felt the bile rise into my mouth as that thought crossed my mind. Lilly's hand tightens around mine bringing my thoughts back to her.

"She asked about you." I turn my head towards the doorway where Rose's voice comes from.

"What?" I ask. Rose is a petite non-magical with copper colored skin and black hair. She is the village healer and midwife. She lives in Briarsfield, a small village at the edge of the Elvin Territory and the Eastern Territory. It is the closest place I could bring Lilly to our territory without the magical border permitting her entrance. Briarsfield is actually part of the Eastern Territory which means everyone is the same darker complexion as King Fisgal. Rose hurries into the room carrying a fresh set of linen and a white nightgown.

"She woke up and asked for the handsome man with the sparkly eyes." Handsome?

"She is more delusional than I thought." Rose laughs.

"She knows when you are gone. She woke up the minute you left her side; there is something to say about a bond like that." I did not respond to that. The Eastern people had all kinds of silly superstitions. It's best not to entertain them.

"How is her recovery?" I ask changing the subject. Rose lifts the pillow from Lilly's head and replaces it with a fresher one. She then lifts Lilly's body up as if she weighs no more than a small child and lays her in my arms like a sleeping infant. I cradle Lilly to my chest while Rose strips the blood stained sheets and replaces them with fresher linen.

"It's slow." Rose states tossing the stained sheets onto the floor. "But it's coming along. That ole heathen witch should have her heart cut out and fed to the livestock for attacking this poor child."

"Ofilla will be punished." That I can promise. Rose motions for me to lay Lilly back down on the bed. With as little movement as possible I place her down.

"Take off her dress." Rose demands.

"Excuse me?" I ask shocked. Rose rolls her eyes at me.

"I need to get her into some clean clothes. Take off this filthy dress." She says attempting to pull one of Lilly's arms from the dress. Lilly flinches and cries out.

"Get your hands off of her." I say with a little more ferocity than I attended to. Rose rolls her eyes at me and places her hands on her hips.

“The dress must come off, Assassin. So either you do it, or I will.”

With a sigh I say, “I will do it.” Rose nods towards me to get on with it, she then turns and grabs the soiled linen and marches out of the room. I look down at the small face in front of me and swallow the lump that is stuck in my throat. This is more personal than I ever cared to get with my little human.

“It has to happen, Assassin. It is a job and nothing more.” I say scolding myself for being a coward. I take one of the smaller daggers from the inside of my boot and place it at the neck of the pink and white striped dress. With one fluid movement I cut off the intrusive dress splaying it open. The wound on her chest was ragged and red, but the hole was smaller, instead of the size of my fist it is now the size of a plum. I scan her body. My eyes stopping at her stomach; there is no sign of pregnancy yet. Her belly is flat against her rib cage. Her pelvic bones are slightly visible above her black and white lacy panties. Lilly is not bony or overly skinny, her body is well defined with weight in all the right places; her hips flare out at her waist then narrows down to her legs. I smooth my hand over her tight stomach feeling the softness of her honey colored skin. She moans and arches into my hand unknowingly. I quickly withdraw my hand as if her body is fire. What the hell am I thinking?

“Is she out of that dress yet?” Rose asks reappearing into the room. I stand from my seat on the bed quickly.

“Yes!” I say running my hands nervously through my hair. I feel as if I was just caught doing something naughty.

“Good.” Rose begins to pull the dress from under Lilly’s body.

“*Assassin, we are all here. Where are you?*” the Queen calls into my mind.

“*On my way.*” “Rose, I must leave. If she awakes when I am gone tell her I shall return and if anything is to go wrong....”

“I’ll send Gidget to the gate to alert you.” Rose says finishing my statement.

“Thank you, Rose.” I say then trace into the queen’s throne room.

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“Why are we here in the middle of the night? What can the Assassin possibly want?” Bartus complains right before I appear.

“Thank goodness! Assassin, what is this about?” Avalia asks crossing her arms over her chest.

“A human was attacked today.”

“Are you serious?” Bartus shouts.

“A human!” Fisgal complains throwing his hands up in the air. “I was called from the throes of passion for this?”

With a hearty laugh Artumis adds, “Assassin, you are misunderstood; only you care about that ridiculous species.” I was expecting this flippant attitude. Our realm views the others as inferior to our own, and none as more inferior than the humans. The great god gave the human realm to his son Jasu, a peaceful and loving god that thought keeping his people in the dark about the other realms made them less susceptible to corruption and evil. In reality, it made them idiots and weak. In spite of all the proof, they still believe they are the only species.

I ignore their jibes about the humans. “By Ofilla.” That gets their attention. Bartus gasps and Fisgal says a prayer under his breath before spitting on the floor. I knew that would shut them up.

“Are you sure of this?” Avalia ask placing her hand on my shoulder.

“I was there, my queen. Ofilla attacked a human girl. One she suspects to be the chosen.” Ofilla is the most powerful witch in the Locke, if she assumes Lilly is the chosen she is not mistaken.

“Could it be, Queen? Could this be our chosen?” Bartus ask.

Avalia ignores Bartus and turns back to me. “Where is this girl?”

“She is in Briarsfield with a mid-wife name Rose. She was wounded during the attack.” My voice breaks, I’m losing it. I inhale deeply to control myself then go on. “The magic of the unborn twins is healing her, but it is slow. She is only but a human.”

“Have you any idea how this could have happened?” Avalia ask me. I can see the suspicion in her eyes as she looks at me. I know she thinks that I am the one at fault, but she would never accuse me of anything, especially not in front of the others.

“Who could have done such a vile thing?” Artumis questions.

“Only the Assassin travels to the human realm so frequently.” Fisgal states. “Maybe he is responsible?”

“He should be punished for his transgressions, lying with a human.” Bartus says the word human as one would say something disgusting. I do not fault them for their views. Once I too viewed humans as nothing more than annoying, comical, creatures with short lifespans and even shorter attention spans. I traveled to and from their realm and regarded them as you

would a monkey at a zoo, with mild interest and entertainment. However, an encounter in the woods 15 years ago changed my perspective for the humans. Maybe on some deeper level I've always enjoyed their presence because they are as I am. They are considered outcast and unworthy, taboo even. As an assassin, I am considered a harbinger of death. Although I work primarily as the queen's body guard I also take other jobs where I am hired to kill. I enjoy what others shy away from. Most men only kill for noble causes, like war or protecting their own. I kill for the thrill and the right price.

"Assassin is not the father." Avalia defends me out loud. "*Are you?*" she questions in my mind.

"If it were I that lay with a female of any realm, I would not have left her alone for Ofilla or any one to harm." My jaw is clenched tight with rage. Although I do not fault them for their views about other humans, I will kill them for their views about this certain human.

"Before we get all worked up, I need to see this human." Avalia says beside me. I turn to her quickly my agitation with the situation boiling over in me, I shout. "Lilly! Her name is Lilly. Do not call her Human as if she is beneath you." The queen's eyes goes wide with shock then softens with understanding.

"Did you say Lilly?" a voice calls out from the back of the room. I turn to Rykan, who has just traced in. "I'm sorry I'm late I was delegating with Nisus. Did you say something about a human named Lilly?"

Bartus turns to his son. "It's nothing, Rykan. The assassin thinks that a hum..." I growl across the room. "I mean Lilly," He corrects his self. "Could be our chosen. She was attacked by Ofilla today."

"Is Lilly alright?" Rykan looks to me alarmed.

"She is recovering." The Queen answers for me. "Rykan, do you know this girl?" Rykan looks down at his hands then back up to the Queen. He nods his head and my sword was in my hands so fast not even I could have stopped me.

"How dare you!" I shout. It took Fisgal, Artumis, and Bartus to hold me back from Rykan. "You left her you son of a bitch. You left her there alone with her womb full of your seed."

"She's pregnant?" Rykan asks Looking to Avalia for confirmation.

"So it seems." Avalia answers, placing her hands on her hips.



“I did not know she was with child.” Rykan looks at me pleadingly. I pushed even harder to get to him. I want his blood. I want to spill it on the floor as an offering to Lilly.

“Assassin please, this is not helping us protect Lilly.” It is only those words that make me relinquish my struggle. My sword dematerializes and I shove my hands in my hair. I turn and pace the room. The urge to fight and kill makes my limbs tingle. I hate to feel useless, especially when it comes to my little human. I know the only thing that could help Lilly now is healing and I am not a healer. However, I am a damn good killer and I’m sure I could be putting my talents to use somehow for her.

Once the room is calm the queen asks Rykan, “How did this happen?”

“I was running through the dark forest a few weeks ago, after some shifters attacked Woodsgrove village. I made them chase me into the forest in order to save the villagers. I was suffering from a bite mark in the abdomen, I was tired and weak. I thought if I got them far enough away from the village I would let them take me, I was too weak to fight. Next thing I know I’m being traced into the middle of nowhere where bright lights are coming right at me. I heard a loud screeching sound and then a soft voice asking me was I ok.” He smiles to his self as he says the last part. “I thought I had died and gone to the heavenly realm, but I wasn’t, I was in...”

“North Carolina.” I finish for him.

“Yeah. Lilly took me home and bandaged me. When I woke I thanked her and we were together, but I did not mean to plant a seed. I did not know our rules did not work in the human realm.” I fling myself towards him again, this time the Queen places an invisible wall between he and I and I hit it with a loud thud. I am seething. He took advantage of her kindness. Logically, I understood how he assumed Lilly could not get pregnant. In the Locke, unwanted pregnancies are non-existing, which is another thing that places us above other realms. In order for a woman to conceive she must wait until she is most fertile, then her partner must feed her the petals from the red flower that only grows in the Sun Valley. Not only does this cut down on unwanted pregnancies it also controls our population. Most Royals and upper society only have about one or two children, just enough to obtain a male heir. The only time you will see more than two children in a household is in the lower caste. They benefit more from the extra help.

“Rykan, how could you?” Bartus ask. “You defile your future wife, and you left a woman pregnant.”

“I did not know she was pregnant.”

“You stay in her bed and you never intended to go back to her? The Southern men are not savages we respect our women more than this. I am disappointed in you, son. Poor Sarafina, I will leave it to you to tell her.” Bartus turns back to Queen Avalia. “I am sorry for my son’s actions.”

“Why should we take this woman’s word?” Artumis ask. “You all know the human race do not value the things that we do. Who is to say it is Rykan’s seed that fills her womb.” That was it for me. I trace to Artumis and place my sword directly to his heart.

“Stand down, Assassin!” Avalia calls out to me.

“Slander her name again, and I swear I will shove this blade into your black heart.”

“You know I speak the truth.” I push the blade into his chest breaking through skin. A slow flow of blood spills down the front of his shirt. Artumis clenches his teeth together to trap his scream inside. I hear voices all around me begging me to stop. One of Artumis’s soldiers has his hands cupped around my neck trying to squeeze the life out of me; however I am too far beyond reason for it to affect me. One of the first lessons in becoming an assassin is learning to control your rage. He who fights blindly by rage fights to die. In battle you should keep a level head in order to see all your opponents’ moves. There are so many things that can work against you in war; your opponent, your environment, and even your own body. Keeping your mind clear helps you to see and react wisely to all of these factors. Had I been thinking clearly I would have known that I should have appeared behind Artumis and pulled his back to my front so that his men would have to come through him to get to me. However, I have not been able to think clearly since I left that diner. My rage has been coiling inside me like snakes, slithering down in me waiting to spring out. Now it has and I am going to kill Artumis. The room is in an uproar around me. Everyone is shouting and tugging on me.

“Enough!” Avalia shouts. “Stand down, Assassin.” I feel all of the force of Avalia’s powers run over my body like cold water on a hot fire. I have served the Queen for many centuries, never has she had to use her power on me to get me to obey. The fight immediately leaves my body and my arms

go limp. I stagger away from Artumis feeling weak and tired. I press my hand against the wall and lean my head forward.

"I am sorry, Assassin." Artumis states slightly out of breath. "I was just stating the obvious." My body tenses at that, but I feel the Queen's calming power wash over me again.

"Your worries are not necessary, Artumis." Rykan speaks up. "I was her first, I can attest to that."

"But wha..."

"Enough, Artumis." Avalia says holding up her hand. "This young lady has done nothing to deserve your slander. Rykan has claimed her maidenhood; still it is I that will determine if she is the chosen. For now, it is best for you to go and await my word. I will go and see Lilly for myself."

"Your majesty, I would like to go as well." Rykan says stepping forward.

I push away from the wall and turn to face him. I feel my rage slither down inside me again. "You will not see her." Rykan's face goes ashen then turns red with anger.

"She carries my young. I have a right to see her." I take a step towards him and immediately Avalia's powers wash over me and I am no longer able to move.

"Dammit, Avalia, release me." I shout.

***"Not until you calm down. You are acting like a crazy person."*** Avalia says speaking in my head.

***"You don't understand."*** I plead, but Avalia ignores me.

"Rykan, it is best if you give Lilly time to heal. If it turns out Ofilla is right and she is the chosen she is going to have a lot to deal with, it is best we allow her time to rest now."

"Even if she is not the chosen, we still have a right to see her." Bartus adds.

I make an exasperated noise with my mouth. If Lilly is not the chosen, I am going to erase her memory of this entire night and send her back to North Carolina, far away from Rykan and anybody else from the Locke.

"After I have seen her, I will call a council so that you may meet her as well. Is that alright?" Rykan goes to say something else but his father cut him off.

"That will be alright."

“Now go kings. Rest your heads, for tonight we may have found our chosen.” Slowly the kings begin to trace away from the glass castle. Avalia turns to me. I feel her power release me and I fall to the floor on my knees.

“Explain.” Is all Avalia says. I take a deep breath, run my hands through my hair and start from the day I met Lilly in the woods.

## Chapter Seven

I know this is a dream because it has one of those weird dream feels. I am in the woods out behind my Mama's trailer. It is dusk and the trees have just started to change to the orange and reds of autumn. I'm a little girl, maybe six years old. I am racing through the forest with Bo at my side. This dream feels oddly familiar, like I am reliving a distant memory. I hear a growl and a yelp and I freeze. There is a big black dog, no not a dog it is much bigger than a dog; almost the size of a pony but built like a bear. There is also a man in my dream. I can't see his face but from the back he has long black hair that falls just below his elbows. He is tall and lean but the way his shirt fit over his arms and back leads me to believe he is well-built. He's wearing black leather boots up to his knees and dark colored pants stuffed down in them. His shirt is black and long sleeve, but the sleeves are rolled up to his forearms. Over his shirt he is wearing a brown leather chest plate with matching fingerless gloves that go up pass his wrist. I remember this vision from the day I met Rykan, this is the same guy from that memory.

I say something in my child voice and both the long haired guy and the big dog turn towards me. It is then my dream shifts and I am still in the forest but I am my regular self now, and it is daytime instead of night. The trees are bright green and the sun is brighter than usual. I am in a white nightgown with a lacy collar and no shoes. I hear the sound of children laughing and decide to follow it. The sound leads me to a stunning garden. In my early teens I went through a phase in my photography, where I studied photos of beautiful gardens. One of my favorite photos was done by a French photographer of the gardens at the Palace of Versailles in France. This garden was like a smaller replica with its geometric designs and four separate sections. All of the walk-ways were done in sandy marble paving stones. The stones cut geometric shapes through the four sections of hedges and their different color flowers. The main walkway was lined with neatly trimmed hornbeam hedges and cone shaped Corsican pine trees. It was the

most captivating thing I had ever seen. In the very middle of the garden was a large six-tier water fountain and sitting on a dark stone bench in front of the waterfall was a woman with two children sitting at her feet. The woman has beautiful sparkling eyes just like my rescuer from the diner. Her hair is white like fresh snow and her face is beautiful. She looks young, maybe mid-twenties, but I can tell by her eyes that she is much older than she appears.

“Hello, Lilly! My name is Avalia.” The beautiful lady says as she stands up. Her light blue dress is firm fitting and drops low in the front accentuating her breast. The bodice of the dress is crisscrossed with black lace like a corset.

“How do you know my name?” I ask. She smiles at me and pushes her hair back over her shoulder revealing her pointed ears.

“Hey, you got them funny ears too.” I say taking an involuntary step towards her. The two small boys standing in front of her start to laugh.

“I guess I do.” she says with a warm smile. One of the boys tugs at her dress and she bends down in front of him. He cups his hand to her ear and whispers to her. She smiles up at me then nods to him. The two boys take off towards me. They run full force until they hit me almost knocking me over.

“Mommy!!!” one boy says. He is slightly taller than the other, but they are identical. They both have the same touch of color to their olive skin and the same wavy dark brown hair that hangs to their shoulders. The shortest boy has hazel eyes like my own, but with more green and the tallest one has the most beautiful dark brown eyes. They are stunning against his caramel skin and dark hair, he reminds me so much of Rykan.

“Wait! Did you call me Mommy?” I ask looking down at the four small eyes staring back at me. Hazel eyes laughs at me.

“Yes! You’re our Mother. Can’t you tell?” I look down into the same hazel eyes as mine with the same dimples and gasp. These are my boys. I drop down in front of them. It is hard to believe.

“How?” I ask touching my stomach.

“They wanted to meet you, so with a little magic I helped.”

“Magic?” I ask. Where I come from magic is making bunnies appear out of hats or Uncle Buddy’s pull my finger trick, not being able to see the 6 year old versions of my fetus babies.

Avalia smiles, "I know it is confusing right now, but it will start to make sense. But first, Lilly, you have to wake up." The smile slips from Avalia's face and is replaced by worry.

"I've tried to wake up. It hurts when I'm awake." I say looking down at my hands. If I wake up I know I will die. That's what the pain in my chest feels like. It was too painful to withstand, in my dreams I'm safe and alive.

"Don't worry, Mommy, we have healed you." The taller boy says then places his hand to my chest where the pain is coming from. A warm sensation fills my chest like hot chocolate on a cold day. I gasp at the feel of it. "What was that?" I ask my dark eyed son.

"I'm an Immortal, Mommy." Is all he says, as if that explains everything. I am about to ask what being Immortal meant, but Avalia says. "Ok my kings, it's time to go."

"Awwww!" they say in unison.

"Now, now, Boys. Your Mother has been asleep long enough. She needs to wake up to take care of you." I suddenly feel a wave of guilt crash through me. I've been so concerned about my pain that I haven't thought about feeding my baby (or babies rather). I am starting off to be a terrible mother. I grab my sons and pull them close to me kissing both their heads.

"I promise I will take better care of you. I won't go without feeding you again. I'll make sure I eat plenty of healthy food." I say as tears spill down my cheeks.

"Don't cry, Mommy!" Hazel eyes says as he reaches up to wipe the tear from my cheek.

"We love you!" Brown eyes add as he wraps his arms around my neck. My sons have a disadvantage; they are coming into the world with only one parent. I made a poor decision which will affect them for the rest of their lives. My job as a mother is starting out on the wrong note.

"Go now, boys! It is time." Avalia says. Both boys look over to her, nod, and then begin to glow like a light coming on inside of them.

"Wait!" I shout as they begin to disappear into the ball of light. "What are your names?"

By now they are only two golden orbs floating in front of me. I hear their laughter float through the air. "You haven't given us names." A voice I know to be my dark eyed son says and then both orbs shoot into my stomach and I feel complete. I didn't know I wasn't whole until the boys were back inside me. I clasp my hand to my stomach and as I do it

grumbles. I look up again to Avalia's sparkling blue eyes and ask. "What now?"

She smiles, "Now, you need to wake up."

I shoot up in my bed with a gasp. That was the weirdest dream I have ever had, and I've had a dream where I was disco dancing with a cheetah. This one tops the cheetah dream on the weird scale by a mile. I flop back down on my bed and place my arm over my eyes. What did I do last night? I try to think about the last thing I remember. I went to work. I argued with Mama about being pregnant and moving back in with her. A lady came in and, "Oh Crap!" I say out loud. I sit back up on the bed and take in my surroundings. I'm definitely not in my apartment. I'm in some kind of wooden cabin. The walls and floor are a dark wood color. The ceiling is peaked with exposed beams. Other than the small bed I am lying on, a chair beside my bed, a small side table and a red screen divider; there isn't much furniture in the room. I look down at my white nightgown with the lace collar. Immediately I clasp my hand to my chest remembering the crazy woman and the ball of fire that hit my chest. "What the hell is going on?"

"Well I'll be. The dead has risen." A petite black woman says as she walks into the room. She has a kind smile and an oval face. Her skin is the color of milk chocolate and as smooth as glass. She has one of those faces that you can't tell if she's older than she looks or younger than she acts.

"Where am I?" I ask.

"Well, you're in the Locke." The woman says walking over to me in the room.

"How far is that from Raleigh?" I ask thinking of the largest known city near my town. She places a tray down beside me on the side table. The tray is filled with an assortment of fruit, bread and some kind of soup. My stomach growls as soon as she sets the tray down.

The older woman laughs. "No need to worry about that right now, you better feed those boys; you've been out for two days."

"Two days?" I repeat swinging my legs to the side of the bed. I've missed work. I know mama is having a heart attack. By now she heard I was attacked by some psycho old lady and she and Uncle Buddy are probably throwing a fit. I go to stand and immediately drop back to the bed. My legs feel like cooked spaghetti noodles.



“Whoa now, child. I know you have a lot of questions, but first you need to eat.” I have millions of questions. However, she’s right I need to eat. I pick up the roll, because it’s one of the few things I recognize and stuff it into my mouth.

“My name’s Rose by the way.” The woman says walking over to the other side of the bed.

“I’m Lilly.” I say with my mouth full of food. My mama would have a fit if she saw me talking with my mouth full. After devouring the bread in my mouth I attack the fruit next. The only fruit I recognized were grapes, strawberries and plums. There was also some kind of round, pink thing that taste like a watermelon but looked like a navel orange.

Rose unbraids my hair behind me. “I know who you are.” She says placing her hand on my shoulder.

“Gidget!” Rose shouts towards the door. A small child with curly black hair and puffy cheeks stick her head in the door. “Get a bath ready for our guest. I want her bathed and ready for when the assassin returns.” Gidget nods and exits back out of the room.

“The Assassin?” I question almost dropping my pink fruit.

“Oh don’t worry,” Rose laughs. “He is the one that saved you.” I remember the handsome man with the sparkly eyes. I thought Rykan was the most gorgeous man I’ve ever seen, but this man was heart-stopping. The kind of gorgeous that should come with a warning label like; men hide your wives and daughters guard your panties. He wasn’t that polished handsome that you see in Hollywood, he was rough around the edges. He’s the handsome you just happen upon on some back road to nowhere where there has been no alterations to his good looks, it’s just really good genes. He was tall and lean but well-built like a swimmer. He had stunning silver eyes that sparkled like diamonds and his hair was dark. It isn’t the color of raven’s feathers like Rykan, but a deep brown color like fudge brownies and was sheared in wavy layers to his shoulders. The smile that spread over my face at the thought of him did not go unnoticed.

“I thought you would want to look your best for him.” I blush and look down at the half eaten strange pink fruit in my hand.

“I doubt he’s interested in me.” I say touching my hand to my belly. I’m pregnant, I’m pretty sure I’m unemployed by now, a single mom, and evidently I’ve made an enemy that wants me dead. Yea, my status has just

gone from single and complicated to downright run the other way. Talk about baggage.

“Don’t be foolish. You are the catch of the Locke.” She says raking her fingers through my hair. “Any man would be honored to claim you as his wife.” Wow! Rose is worse than my Mama in elementary school when everyone on the bus called me a mutt and wouldn’t sit beside me; she said that they were really just jealous that I was unique. In reality they were just hateful redneck assholes who were taught to dislike me from birth.

“Now hurry up and eat.” Rose says bringing me out of my head. “He will be back soon.” She walks back around to face me. I’m not sure about getting all dressed up for this assassin guy, but my body is craving a nice hot shower.

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“You look beautiful!” Rose states with her hands clamped together in front of her face. After Gidget rolled the tub into the room (Yes, she rolled a tub into the room). The tub looked like one of those silver troughs you use to feed farm animals. It was filled half way with steaming hot water. Gidget scrubbed my body while Rose washed my hair. I’ve never had servants before, there is no need for them when you live in a two bedroom trailer the size of a camper, but I would imagine that is what it felt like. After my bath, Rose dressed me in a baby blue satin empire waist dress with silver fleur-de-lis designs throughout. She has just finished braiding my wet hair into an intricate braid that starts at the crown of my head and sweeps back behind my ears on both sides. The two braids are pulled together in the middle of my hair and the rest of my hair falls loose down my back. It is very Renaissance.

“Thank You!” I say blushing into the tall mirror Gidget holds up in front of me.

“Go to the gate, Gidget. Tell the guard to notify the assassin that Lilly is awake.” Gidget slips soundlessly from the room taking the mirror with her. Rose walks over to my bed and starts to fold up the covers. I follow behind her, my dress swishing against the floor.

“Thank you for everything.” I say folding the blanket that is at the foot of the bed. “Mama will be happy to know I was so well taking care of. You should probably meet Mama; I know she would want to meet you.” Rose’s

face tightens as if she is suddenly saddened by something, then she quickly replaces it with a weak smile.

"I would love to meet your mother. She sounds lovely." Rose says. I can't help but wonder if Rose is hiding something from me. Rose takes the blanket from my hands and lays it on top of the pile in her hands. She strokes my cheek with her free hand.

"You are such a sweet child. If I don't see you again, I wish you all the best of luck." She says sadly, then withdraws her hand from my cheek and walks out of the room. That was odd. I twirl my butterfly charm around in my hand trying to figure out what would make Rose change from her jolly self to someone that looks almost depressed.

"You look better." A voice as smooth as aged cognac says behind me. I turn around to find my sparkly eyed hero leaning against the door frame with his ripped arms across his chest. Sweet Jesus he was Hot. The kind of hot that makes females do stupid things. I feel the heat climb up my neck toward my face. I turn my head and look out the window just to keep him from seeing me blush.

"Thank you!" I answer lamely. He pushes off the wall and walks over to me with the swagger of a rock star. He stops right in front of me and he smells just like I thought he would, like man and toe-curling sex. I'm not sure Old Spice has that fragrance but they should. He smiles at me and if I thought he was gorgeous before, his smile makes him intoxicating. Suddenly something flashes in my memory.

"Your hair was longer?" I ask. His face falls and he takes a step back but quickly recovers.

"Why do you ask?" his velvet voice sounding husky. Just hearing his voice is like being touched by him in the most intimate place, by the way, said place is tingling.

"I don't know I just felt like maybe your hair was longer once."

His smile broadens on his face. "I wish that you could have more time to recover," He says placing his hands behind his back and walking away from me. "But circumstances beyond my grasp require that we travel right away." He dodged my question.

"I don't know about traveling. I need to call my Mama and let everyone know I'm ok. There is also some crazy woman out there that tried to attack me." His jaw clenches when I mention the woman.

He turns back towards me with his hands still behind his back. “I understand, but we must first go...”

“No!” I say holding my hands out in front of me. “I’ve been patient. I played dress up with Rose and waited for you. No more evasive maneuvers. Now take me back home.”

He walks closer to me raking his hands through his hair. He stares at me for a moment. His sparkling eyes are so intense and I get the feeling he is seeing deeper than my outer appearance. It feels like he is reading me like a book, like maybe he knew me more about me than I even knew my self. “Would you feel better if I answer some of your questions first?”

I hesitate for a moment, maybe there was some truth to my earlier thoughts because as much as I want to go home, I do want answers. I mean you don’t meet pointed ear people and women that can throw fire every day. Mommy always said I was too inquisitive for my own good.

“Yeah, I guess.” I finally say. He nods his head, walks around me and sits down on the chair beside the bed. He motions with his hand for me to ask my first question.

“What are you?” not the most urgent question, but I still wanted the answer.

“An Elf.” He answers matter-of-factly as if that was the most common thing in the world. Ok, I’m going to skip pass that. I mean it’s obvious by his pointed ears and sparkling eyes he has to be something otherworldly. Although, he is a far cry from the elves that Christmas portray. I would have gone for vampire seeing as that’s the going rate for hot guys now a days. Well, on to the most important question.

“Where am I?”

“The Locke.” I roll my eyes. Everyone keeps saying that as if I’m supposed to know where it is.

“Where is the Locke? And how close is it to my house?”

“The Locke is everywhere. We live beside your world.” He answers locking his fingers together in his lap. Ok, now I was about to lose it.

“Beside my world?” I repeat. He nods. “Like mars?” I ask thinking of its position in the solar system. If I really am on an alien planet I am going be the talk of the neighborhood. Uncle Buddy’s friend, Harley Edwards, swears that he’s seen a flying saucer. He was even on the evening news about it once. Of course now he’s a homeless drunk that rambles about

aliens and probing. I don't think I'll be appearing on any news channels about this. I got enough problems. The Assassin laughs.

"We are not on another planet. We live on the same Earth as you, just another realm. Imagine the world as an onion. There is an outer layer and underneath are tons of different layers. You are in another layer."

"Uhuh! So I am to believe that I am in some mystical world that lives on top of mine."

"You can believe what you want, Lilly, but you asked a question and I gave you an answer."

"Ok fine!" I say flopping down on the bed in front of him. "Let's say I believe I'm in "Oz" when do I get the ruby slippers to go home?"

"I'm afraid you will have to see the wizard for that." He says with a stunning smile. I see the handsome Elf is quite the comedian.

"So when do I meet this wizard?" The Assassin stands to his feet and puts his hand out for me to take it.

"There is a lot we must discuss before you will receive your ticket home, but I promise you, you will receive all the answers you want. But first, you must first come with me." I want to be angry and demand he give me a phone to call Mama, but for some unknown reason I trust him. It is something about this guy that makes me feel safe. He did just save my life. Maybe that's why my hand is already reaching out towards him, although it felt more intimate than that. His hand closes around mine and he tugs me toward him. My body, flush against his, feels like I'm up against a solid wall, a hot, sexy, intimidating wall.

"Do you trust me, little human?" He asks and his warm breath spreads across my face. We are exceptionally close and I am highly conscious of where his hands are. One hand is at the middle of my back and the other clutching my left hand between us. It is the hand on my back that feels so hot.

"Lilly!" he says my name with a faint smile.

"Huh?" I ask still physically aware of that right hand that seems so close to the top of my butt.

"Do you trust me?"

"Yes." I answer without an ounce of doubt.

"Close your eyes." Automatically they close. My body is obeying him on its own accord. Is he about to kiss me? Do I want him to kiss me? Hell Ya!!! I wait for the pressure of his lips on mine, but instead there is a

whoosh sound and the feeling of being dropped. I tighten my grip around his neck and bury my face in his shoulder smothering a scream.

"It's ok." His voice says softly in my ear. I keep my face buried. My stomach feels as if it has dropped into my feet. My head is spinning and I feel like I have stepped off a merry go round. Trust me, I know all about merry-go-rounds, in third grade some girls trapped me on one and spun me around for five minutes. I was sick for two days after that. Assassin tries to pull me back to see my face, but I know if I move I will vomit all over him. I clench him tighter, even though we are already close enough. I can feel the hardness of his chest pressing against my breasts.

"Lilly, It's ok. It's over." He says rubbing up and down my back. "I won't let anything hurt you." His voice is so serious it sounds like he meant that with every fiber of his being.

"emmm!" someone clears their throat behind us. I open my eyes and as soon as the room stopped spinning I see that I am no longer in the small cabin. This room is huge and made entirely of Ice? That can't be right. I once saw a book of photography by some cave explorer and there was a picture of the Skaterfell cave in Iceland, this place is very reminiscent of that. Surprisingly I'm not cold. I turn to find a room full of smiling faces. I release the assassin and step back; right away I realize that was a huge mistake. The room spins and my feet disappear from under me. Before I can hit the floor Assassin's strong arms grip me.

"Get her a seat." Someone says.

"I'm fine. Honestly. I just need a minute." I say breathing slowly fighting the urge to hurl. Someone hands me a goblet of water and I drink it greedily.

"You should not trace with her. She is not accustomed to it." a familiar voice says. I open my eyes and standing in front of me with the same blue dress is Avalia.

"No way!"

She smiles politely. "Hello again, Lilly."

"How did you...but you are.... you were in my dream. You were with..." I grab my stomach and panic starts to rise up like a tidal wave heading for shore.

"They are still there." She whispers and the anxiety eases down.

"I would like for you to meet everyone." She says stepping back. "Of course you already know Assassin." She says with a smirk pointing to my

handsome rescuer whose arm is still wrapped around my side. I blush, again, as my eyes catch his silver eyes.

“Yes, I’ve met him.” Avalia places her hand on my shoulder and guides me away from Assassin. I look cautiously over my shoulder.

“Don’t worry, Lilly. He will follow.” She says in my ear. I am in a room surrounded by unfamiliar faces. He is the only one I know and feel attached to; of course I want him near me. At least that’s the excuse I’m giving myself for my actions. Assassin places his hands behind his back and follows closely behind us.

“This is king Artumis of the Western Kingdom.” She says stopping in front of a short round guy with thick red hair like straw and a long thick beard. It is almost as if he has stepped right out of the pages of J.R.R. Tolkeins ‘The Lord of the Rings’ novel. I’m definitely not in North Carolina any more. All I’m missing is a checkered blue dress and a dog named Toto.

“Hello, chosen. You are looking healthy.” He says gripping my hand in a sweaty handshake.

“Thanks, but my names Lilly.”

“Yes it is, and we should call her that.” Avalia’s voice is clipped.

“My apologies Cho...I mean Lilly.” Artumis says bowing his head.

I wave away his apology. “It’s no big deal, how could you have known?”

He smiles and his face crinkles up like used discarded paper.

“This is King Fisgal of the Eastern Kingdom and his son, Geronis.” Avalia says pointing towards a tall black man and his young handsome son.

“You are beautiful.” Geronis says taking my hand and planting a kiss on it.

“Thank You!” I say hoping my cheeks aren’t as red as they feel. Geronis holds onto my hand longer than necessary, but I don’t mind. He is tall with broad shoulders and has the most beautiful chocolate skin I have ever seen. His lips are full and his eyes are the color of fresh brewed coffee with thick eyelashes. He smiles and it’s like watching a Colgate commercial. His teeth are perfectly aligned and white as if he never had a piece of candy in all his life.

“Maybe I could give you a tour of the Eastern kingdom. It would be my pleasure to spend some time alone with you.” Before I can answer, Assassin

grabs my hand from Geronis. Geronis looks up at the Assassin's face and tilts his lips up in a smirk.

"She has an escort." is all Assassin says as he places my hand back at my side.

Avalia continues on with her introductions ignoring the hostility between Assassin and Geronis. "Lilly, this is Bartus of the Southern Kingdom." Bartus looks oddly familiar. He has intense dark eyes and black hair with Italian tan skin. He looks to be in his mid-fifties with a dusting of gray through his thick hair but it doesn't make him look old, just distinguished. He is handsome, there is no denying that.

"You look amazingly like someone I know." I blurt out.

"Who might that be?" he asks with a spark of mischief to his eyes. I thought about telling him he looked oddly familiar to my twin's father but that would be inappropriate, considering I don't know him that well.

"You wouldn't know him." I say feeling silly. The entire room laughs at that, all except Assassin who I don't think laughs very often any way.

"You would be surprised who he knows." A voice calls from behind me. The sound of it takes me back six weeks earlier.

*My room comes into view and I'm lying on top of my pink and black comforter with a very handsome Rykan leaning on top of me. His lips find mine and the kiss is slow and intense, not as urgent as his first kiss. This kiss reaches into my soul and pushes away all my inner doubts and insecurities. His lips are soft yet firm against mine, his tongue is demanding control of mine yet gentle in its caress. His mouth is full of contradictions. His hand skims my ribcage and goose bumps follow its trail.*

*"I love the way your body reacts to my touch." He says as he pulls away from our kiss. His dark eyes are smoldering as he looks down at my kiss swollen lips. "I cannot imagine anything as beautiful as you are right now." His words send a warm blush to my cheeks. No one, besides Mama and Uncle Buddy, has ever called me beautiful.*

*Rykan trails a hand over the red lace of my bra. My nipples immediately harden under his touch.*

*"I want to see your beautiful breasts. How do I remove this lovely contraption?" He says tugging at my strap. I laugh.*

*I love the way he acts as if modern things are so new to him. From the way he speaks and acts I've come to the conclusion that Rykan is from some small country overseas. His color suggests somewhere tropical, yet his*



*accent says European. I sit up in bed making Rykan lean back. He is straddled over my hips on his knees. I unsnap the hooks on the back of my bra while still holding the cups to my chest. Rykan isn't the first man to see my breasts; my high school boyfriend (if you could even call him that) spent a lot of time groping my naked chest. He seemed to like my breasts, but he was also a teenager just hoping to score. For the first time, I was putting my body on display for someone that has probably seen a lot of breasts, and some that may have belonged to a lot prettier females.*

*"Are you alright?" Rykan ask once he notices my hesitation. "Have you changed your mind about this? We can stop." I found comfort in that. If I decided I wanted to stop this he seemed as if he would, not that I want to.*

*"No!" I say shaking my head. "I'm just.... I've never..." I sigh. "If you don't like what you see... just tell me, ok." I pull the bra from my chest and let it fall to the floor. The way Rykan is looking at my breasts is as if they have discovered the cure for cancer. He reaches out and slowly traces his calloused thumb against the ridged peak on my left breast. The mixture of soft and rough causes an unexpected hitch in my breath. His coffee colored eyes find mine and the look in his eyes tell me that he was officially at the point of no return. Rykan wanted me. That thought alone made me feel powerful. Here was a beautiful man that could be with any woman he wanted, and right now he wanted me. He was looking at me as if I was truly the most exquisite creature he had ever seen. I lie back down on the bed and Rykan follows, cautiously leaning over me on his hands and knees. He kisses both corners of my mouth then plants one soft kiss on my lips before trailing hot kisses down my neck to my sternum. When his hot wet tongue laps at my nipple I buck off the bed. My body is on fire. My nerves feel like livewire igniting sparks all over my body. Rykan moves his attention to my other breast while rolling the recently abandoned nipple between his fingers. He sucks my nipple in his mouth before nipping it gently then sucking again. It is the most amazing feeling of pleasure and pain. My hands are in his silky hair and my body is rocking against his. My sex is aching for some kind of release. As if he knows my body and its wants he starts to trail kisses down my stomach towards my throbbing clit. He pauses at the waist band of my shorts.*

*"I will apologize now, Lilly. I am about to do you at a huge disadvantage. Once I have you, no other man before me or after me will ever compare." He says with a mischief glint in his eye. I laugh.*

*“Well, there hasn’t been any one before you and I can’t speak for the ones after you.” I say. Rykan freezes so immediately that I think something is wrong.*

*“Have you not been with a man before?” he asks looking up at me. I shyly shake my head no. Rykan sits back on his knees and runs a hand through his silky hair. “Lilly, I cannot accept this gift you are giving me. It is too special; you should save it for someone important.” I appreciated his concern, but I wasn’t holding on to my virginity for any special reason. I just wanted to share it with someone special, someone that would look at me and cherish the beauty that in spite of being told it wasn’t, I had to believe was there. Rykan was that man.*

*“Hey!” I say sitting up and placing my hand on his rock hard abs. “I decide who I want to give my virginity to and I’m offering it to you. Are you refusing it?” I knew that question was a low blow, but I was finally ready to be daring and I wasn’t going to let a little thing like my hymen get in the way. My words worked because a sudden look of determination shown on Rykan’s face.*

*“I will make this special for you, Lilly, and I will never forget this gift you are so kindly giving Me.” he cups my jaw with his large hand and I turn my face to kiss his palm. “Lie back!” he directs and I oblige. Rykan removes his unbuttoned shirt, letting it slide slowly off his shoulders. His body, I noted, is made for modeling. All tight muscle, defined abs, and sculpted chest. He stands up from my bed and slowly unties the string in his pants. The entire time his eyes are locked onto me. When he finally slides his pants down and steps out of them I am blown away by what I see. It isn’t the beauty of his golden body, or the hard muscled legs that look like he runs marathons in his spare time, what blows me away is the massive size of his cock that is standing at full attention. I am no specialist in penis sizes, lord knows I’ve only seen one in real life and only a handful in those dirty movies my cousin Billy keeps up under his bed, but I’m pretty sure the one Rykan has is abnormally large. The head of it is massive, I’m not even sure I would be able to fit my hands around it. And that is supposed to go where? Rykan leans back down over me placing slow kisses over my lips. His hand cups my swollen breast and I moan. He hooks his finger under the waist band of my shorts and panties. I lift my hips as he slides them slowly over my butt and down my legs tossing them to the floor. I close my legs still getting over my nervousness and he places his hands on both my knees*

opening my legs up for his perusal. I would have found this intimidating if not for the possessive look on his face.

*"Beautiful!" is all he says as his eyes hungrily devour the view of my now slick pussy. Rykan glides a finger slowly through my wet folds and a moan rips from my lips at the intimate caress. When he places the same finger in his mouth and closes his eyes in pure delight, a rush of moisture escapes between my legs.*

*"You taste delightful. So sweet and so wet for me." he says peering back down at me. He cups my sex with his hand while working his thumb against my throbbing nub. In my stomach a pressure starts to build, like air slowly filling up a balloon. I can't control my hips from rocking into the warmth of his hand. "You are so wet," he says still torturing my body with his light circular strokes against my clit. "But I need you soaking wet before I can enter you." he then pushes one of his fingers inside me and I cry out from the exhilarating fullness of it. The pleasure balloon in my body is slowly filling up more and more. I push my hips down trying to get more of his finger inside me. I need more, more fingers, more movement on my clit more of anything he can give me. My body is on fire on the inside with the need for more.*

*"Please, Rykan?" I don't even recognize the pleading sultry voice that comes from me. Rykan laughs, "You're not ready for me yet my lovely Lilly." He leans down and takes one of my breasts into his mouth and I almost come undone. The Pressure in the balloon is so intense I feel as if it's about to explode, but it just keeps building inside me. Rykan slides another finger inside me and I cry out.*

*"Oh yes, beautiful. You are almost there. Your tight little cunt is squeezing my fingers. I can't imagine what it will feel like around my cock." My body is in stimulation overdrive; his words are driving me just as crazy as his fingers and his thumb. Then it happened, the balloon burst and I was shot to mars on an orgasmic rocket. Stars danced on the back of my eyelids as my body convulse with my orgasm. Once I start to descend back to earth, Rykan slowly removes his fingers from inside me and slips them back into his mouth. He then leans up over me and places the head of his cock at my sensitive entrance.*

*"It is best I do this fast," he says through gritted teeth as he slides his cock back and forth through my wetness. "It will hurt at first, but I won't continue until it stops."*

*“Wait,” I say stopping him. “What about protection?”*

*“Do not worry, I will protect you from anyone that dares to disturb us.”*  
*I laugh.*

*“No, I mean from disease or pregnancy.” Rykan smiles patiently down at me and places a sweet kiss against my lips.*

*“I have no illnesses, and we will not share the red fruit, I cannot get you pregnant.” I had no idea what fruit has to do with anything but if he can’t get me pregnant then I’m ok.*

*“Are you ready now, my Lilly?” he asks. I nod my head and he immediately sinks his massive cock into me. The sudden burning sensation is painful, but true to his word Rykan does not move once he is inside me. And boy was he inside me. At this point I think it is more him in me than me. He places slow kisses to my temple and my forehead until the pain subsides and begins to ache in a completely different way.*

*“Ok!” I say breathlessly. Rykan pulls out of me slowly then pushes back in; the friction immediately starts to fill that balloon back up. His movements are slow and precise being sure to rub against the right spots. His cock was stretching the walls of my pussy to its limits as he slowly pulled out to his massive head then quickly slid back in to the hilt.*

*“By the gods, Lilly, you are so tight and perfect. I will not last long.” His slow pace, although felt good, was not what I wanted. The urge to have him harder and deeper inside me was like an itch I could not reach to scratch.*

*“More!” I whisper to Rykan as I thrust my hips down to meet his long strokes. I wasn’t even sure what more entailed I just knew I needed it. I can feel his smile against my lips as he kisses me lazily. He pulls back and smiles down at me, “As you wish.” His next thrust sinks into me so deep I feel it in my chest. I cry out at the beautiful feeling. His hips move rapidly as he bucks into me with more force. The sound of wet flesh slapping against each other echoes throughout the room along with my pleased cries. I feel my balloon reaching its limits.*

*“Fuck! Lilly I need you to come, baby; I’m not going to make it.” Rykan cries out as he pushes his cock into me and swivels his hips rubbing against my clit just right. For the second time my balloon burst and I yell Rykan’s name as my rocket shoots me back to the stars. The last thing I hear before my orgasm takes away all my senses is Rykan yelling my name.*

My memory dims and I am brought back to the present. "Prince Rykan!" I say breathlessly, his name slipping off my lips like honey. I feel the tears fill up my eyes. I thought I'd never see him again and here he is standing in the doorway behind me. He is gorgeous, just as striking as the first time I saw him. His eyes smile as he looks at me.

"Lilly, I would like for you to meet my son, Rykan." Bartus announces beside me. My feet automatically start moving towards him. I didn't know how much I'd missed him until he is standing before me. I am half way to him before I see the pale hands slip around his arm. It is a girl. A pretty brunette with a slim nose and pouty lips the color of rose petals. She is tall and skinny like a supermodel. Basically, everything I am not. Her eyes shoot to my stomach and the hate that sweeps across her delicate features is obvious. He is married. Oh sweet Jesus! I am worse than my cousin Lizzie; at least she never got pregnant by the married men she dates. When this gets out Mama will never be able to show her face at bingo again. A lump forms in my chest the size of a boulder.

"You're married." is all that I can say. Rykan looks painfully at me.

"Fuck! Rykan! Why would you bring her here?" I hear the assassin say behind me. I wish I could disappear. I want nothing more than for aliens to actually come and abduct me from this layer of earth and take me away. I will gladly sit on the bar stool beside Harley Edwards if it meant I would not have to be here.

"It was not my intention." Rykan says pleading with me.

"I am his wife, I go with my husband." Oh God, she just verified it. I don't think I'm breathing. I gasp for air feeling like a fish out of water. Assassin turns to me and places a hand on my shoulder.

"Little human, I need you to breathe." I try to nod but I am still struggling to catch my breath.

"Lilly are you alright?" Rykan ask taking a step towards me.

"Do not touch her." Assassin shouts standing between me and Rykan. Avalia steps to my side and places her hand on my arm.

"Sarafine, you are not yet Rykan's wife and when I give an order for you to stay put I mean for it to be followed. Do I make myself clear?" Sarafine lifts her head defiantly but nods her agreement.

"Now go back with the others. When you are needed we will call you." Sarafine pins me with one last disgusted look then turns her back to me.

“Breathe Lilly.” Avalia says turning to me. Her face is kind, not like when she had just addressed Sarafine.

“We need to talk.” Rykan says. He is looking at Assassin’s hand on my shoulder as if it bothers him. Really? The guy that just told his baby mama he is engaged is jealous. Imagine that.

After taking a few deep breaths I answer, “Yeah I think we do.”

“Let us give them a moment alone.” Avalia announces. She turns towards the other men in the room and ushers them away from us. Assassin lingers by my side.

“I can stay here if you like.”

Even though I feel comfort when Assassin is near I didn’t want an audience for this. I’m pretty sure Rykan is about to tell me he is madly in love and isn’t going to leave his wife for his one night stand. Yes, I think I’ll pass on a witness to that.

“I’ll be alright.” I say forcing a smile. Assassin nods then turns to Rykan.

“It will be wise if you refrain from touching her.” With that he turns and walks away. Rykan looks over my body and lingers on my belly. “Are you alright, do you need to sit?”

“I’m fine. I’m only a month and a half.” I say waving him off. We are quiet for a moment. Neither of us wants to be the first to address the elephant in the room.

Finally I cave, “Why didn’t you tell me? Is that why you couldn’t see me again? Jeez, Rykan you’re engaged.” I say rushing my words.

“Lilly please,” He looks as if he is going to touch me then quickly put his hands at his side. “Sarafine is not the reason I couldn’t see you again. Do you know where you are?”

“Yes, I’m in another layer of the onion.” I say looking around at the glass ceiling. Rykan looks confused, and then shakes it off.

“I could not see you because I’m not from your world. If I’d known I would leave you with child I would never have left you.”

“But you’re engaged.”

“I do not love Sarafine.” I roll my eyes. Famous words of an unfaithful man. “I know that does not make it right, but I’m royalty and that means I don’t marry because I love someone I marry because it is required. My father made a commitment to Sarafine’s and I am obligated to marry her.”

“Still doesn’t explain why you lied to me. I have my faults here too, Rykan. I could have said no, and I would have if I’d known about Sarafine.” Rykan runs his hands through his hair. He reaches out to touch me once again and thinks better of it. Part of me wants his touch, I crave it like a smoker to a cigarette; I could live without it but it would be so good to have it. Rykan was the first man to make me feel like a beautiful woman. Being this close to him makes me hazy, vulnerable, and I’ll admit a little wanton. However, that second part of me knows he does not belong to me and should never touch me again.

“Lilly, when I met you I had almost died. Living through that made me realize how I’ve never really lived my life at all. I’ve lived how my kingdom and my father thought I should. My night with you was me doing something that I wanted to do. I never knew I would affect your life the way I did. I am sorry. I know you are angry with me right now and you have a right to be, but trust me, I never meant to hurt you.”

There was no way around this. We were both put in a situation now that there was no positive outcome. I wanted Rykan that night just as much as he wanted me. In fact, I was pleased at the thought of being with him only once with no commitment and no lies about calling me tomorrow. I knew that my actions were just as much at fault for my predicament. I figured my punishment was that I would have to raise my baby on my own. Raising my boys alone wasn’t even going to be the hardest thing about this situation, but knowing they have a father that will one day have a proper family of his own and not want to be involved in his sons life was a lot harder. Not to mention the whole different realm situation. How does that work? Will he visit on weekends or do I have to almost die every time I want my kids to see their father?

“So what now? Do I go home and never see you again? Do we make visitation arrangements or is this the end of it for us?” Rykan’s face goes completely pale.

“What’s wrong?”

“Lilly, they haven’t told you?”

“Told me what?” I ask, my heart picking up speed. So many scenarios run through my head. I guess I’ve watched far too many Sci-fi movies.

He grabs my hand and holds it, “Lilly you can’t go home.”

“I said don’t touch her.” Assassin’s sword is directly at Rykan’s neck. I never even saw him coming.

“Rykan, what do you mean I can’t go home?” The room goes into a ruckus. Assassin pushes Rykan in the chest and his sword just disappears into the thin air. If I wasn’t already hyperventilating that would have been cool, however I can’t think clearly enough to be impressed. What does he mean I can’t go home? Am I being kidnapped? Is there an alien attack on earth and there is no home to go to? Am I dead? The room is spinning and everyone is shouting. People are being shoved and others are screaming in each other’s face.

“She cannot go home.” Artumis shouts at Avalia who is not the least intimidated.

“I know that,” Avalia argues. “I was going to explain it to her later. Not spring it on her like an idiot.” She says pointing at Rykan.

“She has a right to know the truth and I have a right to tell her. I know her intimately.” Rykan says defensively.

Assassin shoves Rykan in the chest, “I will kill you if you ever say that again. You know nothing about her.”

“Oh, and you do? Everyone knows you don’t care about anything but yourself. So why are you so concerned about Lilly?” Rykan ask accusingly.

“I should kill you now.” Assassin’s sword reappears out of nowhere.

Bartus steps in the middle of Assassin and his son. “Rykan is right; she had to find out sooner or later.” I have had enough. I hate people talking about me as if I’m not here.

“HEY!” I shout to the room. Everyone freezes and turns to look at me. “I think I have been very sane giving all that I’ve seen in the last 72 hours, but can someone please tell me what the hell is going on?” No one speaks at first and my irritation grows.

“Assassin, please?” I plead. I don’t know why I ask him, but I feel connected to him. Yes, I am carrying Rykan’s twins and yes he did not too long ago see me in a very intimate way, but it is Assassin that I trust. He walks towards me and places his hand on my shoulder.

“You should sit.” He waves his hand out in front of him and immediately I feel a chair pressing at the back of my legs. Assassin pushes slightly on my shoulder and I drop down into the chair.

“I guess I should start at the beginning.” Avalia says placing her hands on her hips. Assassin sits on the edge of the glass table with one leg bent and the other stretched out in front of him. He is close enough to me that I feel comforted but not too close I feel crowded. Rykan looks suspiciously at



Assassin and when his eyes catch mine he smiles. Everyone seems to relax now that no one is arguing.

Avalia sighs. "Our world was created by the great God. He created many realms for his children. The Locke was created for his daughter, Eva, and we come from her. This is all before your world was ever created. We magicals were the first here."

"Magicals?" I ask confused.

Avalia smiles. "Yes, Elves; like Assassin and myself," She says sticking her hair behind her ears so I can see the pointed tips. "There are also witches, nymphs, fairies, trolls, shifters and many more. Our world was filled with them. We lived freely but divided. It was our division that almost brought our world to an end. We were destroying each other." She looked away but I still caught the remorseful look in her eyes. "After many centuries, Eva, the goddess daughter, saw our destruction and decided to place the non-magical beings in our world. She created them to resemble the humans of your realm and hoped they would entice us to live civil as your humans did. By the time the first non-magicals came we were already nearly extinct. They did not convince us to follow their ways; instead they survived around us allowing us to destroy each other. Eventually our people began to breed with the non-magicals causing a race of Immortals. Artumis, Fisgal, Geronis, Bartus, Rykan and even your sons, are Immortals." She says pointing towards my stomach. "It was during this time that O'Rydan was born, the child of a non-magical and a fey. It was O'Rydan that saved the Locke." The proud look on everyone's faces let me know this O'Rydan guy was pretty important. "He tried to gather the magicals together to work towards peace. He wanted us all to unite and save the dying land that he so loved. Many of us, growing tired of the hatred and the death, agreed upon the union, but some did not want it, mainly the witches, shifters, giants, and the goblins to name a few. We went to war, dividing our world in two. With the great O'Rydan's help we defeated our adversaries and took back our world. We agreed upon an arrangement that the Locke should be governed to keep the peace and the unity. The land was divided into five kingdoms. The Eastern." She says then nods at Fisgal. "The western." And I look towards Artumis. "The Southern, which your sons are heir to, and then there is the Elvin kingdom which I rule. It sits in the middle of the other four kingdoms." Then something dawned on me. I was only introduced to three of the kings.

“Where is the Northern King?” I ask. Rykan flinches and Avalia’s lips thin.

“The Northern kingdom is held for the true king, the one that rules over all the land. For many centuries that kingdom went to the direct descendant of O’Rydan. However, it has fallen into bad hands. We call him the Dark King. He is an immortal with witch blood. 1,000 years ago he stole the northern throne from the rightful king and he has ruled our world for far too long. He is cruel and evil. Under his rule the Locke is starving, dying and brutal. Families are being pushed from their homes. People are being captured and enslaved or killed at the whim of the Northern King. We are at our last hope to save our world.” As Avalia pauses in her story I take the chance to look around. Upon first notice the men in the room were all attractive in their own way but with a closer look I see just how tired they are. Dark circles sit under every one’s eyes; scars line their arms and faces. Even Rykan has a new small cut under his eye. They look as if they’ve been fighting a long war.

“So where do I come in?” Avalia smiles brightly at me.

“You are our last hope.” What? Are these people insane? My emotions must be written on my face, because Avalia quickly says, “Relax, Lilly. I was given a vision about you a long time ago. This vision informed me that you would carry twin boys that would grow up to be our future kings. The Two Kings from the direct bloodline of O’Rydan. They will revive our land.” Everyone’s eyes look to my belly, their faces fill with looks of pride and admiration. I don’t think anyone has ever looked at me that way before. Well, once in middle school I climbed on to a power line for Uncle Buddy to hook up his free cable and mistakenly gave free cable to the entire trailer park for a week. I was every ones favorite person and for a week I had friends. However, this felt distinctly better.

“So you want my sons to be your Northern Kings?” I ask just to make sure I had all this right. “No one’s going to take them from me or sacrifice them, right?” Something crosses Assassin’s face. It looks a bit like anger or hurt. It is a tightening of the lips and a narrowing of the eyes. It comes quickly and is covered up by his usual look of disdain.

“They are the direct descendants of O’Rydan, rightful rulers of our world. Your boys will never be harmed.” Avalia says. It is something weird about the way she says that last part, it makes me think I should look into her sentence, but maybe I am just being paranoid.

“Why do I feel like I’m missing something?” I ask staring back and forth at the overly happy faces in the room. Mama says if you ever want to find the devil in the crowd look for the one that is the happiest; because they have more to hide. Right now everyone was happy. Assassin winks at me. I’m sure he did it because I had just asked a valid question, however it sent a lustful shiver down my spine that makes me feel like I am sitting naked in front of all these people. A smile creeps to my lips that I fight to hide. I look away from Assassin to hide my high school crush behavior and my eyes land on a very pissed off Rykan. He is fuming as he stares daggers at Assassin.

“I won’t lie to you, Lilly. There are people in our world that will do anything to keep you from delivering those kings.”

“Like the lady at Paulie’s diner?” I ask.

“Ofilla.” Assassin supplies her name.

“Yes, Ofilla works for the Dark King and she, among others, will try to kill you.” Avalia states unapologetically. “It is why I ask that you stay here until you deliver the twins or at least until we can make sure you are safe. I cannot promise that you will not be threatened here, but if you stay we will protect you with our lives. We cannot offer that protection in the human realm. However, the decision is completely yours.”

Artumis opens his mouth to say something but before he can Avalia holds up her hand to silence him.

“What do you say, Lilly?” Avalia ask.

Ok Lilly lets break this down; if I go home I run the chance of being hunted and killed by characters from Narnia, not to mention I put Mama and Uncle Buddy in harm’s way. If I stay here, I will still have the threat of being killed, but here I will at least have people who better know how to handle the fire ball woman. Granted, every house on the trailer park does have at least one gun in it, but I don’t know how well guns fare against balls of fire.

“Alright, I’ll stay.” Everyone in the room let out a collective sigh and cheers erupt. “What about my family? What do I tell them?” I ask speaking over the cheers.

“Don’t fret; your family was made to believe you went away for a while.” I was going to ask how could they think that, but I just saw a sword disappear in thin air I’m pretty sure the same magic that did that could make my family believe what they wanted them to believe.

“And you’re sure there is nothing else I should know?” the room falls silent again. The mood shifting from cheers to discomfort. That’s odd.

“Lilly, you ....”

“We want you happy, Lilly. That is all we want.” Avalia says cutting Assassin off.

“Assassin?” I ask. It seems like he wanted to say something different. And, I trust him to tell me if anything is wrong. Avalia seems nice and all, but my gut is telling me to go with Assassin. He looks back at me for a moment and I thought he was going to say something but then he just nods and turn towards Avalia.

“May I see you alone, my Queen.” Assassin says pushing off the table and rising to his full height. Avalia never takes her eyes off me. Yet she seems to be in deep thought. Finally Assassin storms out of the room. I rise from my chair ready to follow him, but Avalia grabs my arm gently.

“He needs a moment.” She says nodding towards the empty door Assassin has just left out of.

“Let us celebrate! We waited 15 years for this day. Tonight we celebrate the safe finding of Lilly and our future Kings!” Once again the cheers erupt and the room begins to fill with servants carrying large trays of food and well-dressed people speaking and pointing towards me. I take another look at the door Assassin walked out of and right away wish he would come back for me.

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After only three hours of the so-called ‘celebration’ I was starting to wish I had chosen to go home. I’ve met Barons and Baronesses, lords and ladies, senates and chancellors, and a few generals. There was also the Southern Queen who considers me as family and the Western Queen and her daughter. I’ve even met a few of Fisgal’s concubines, and to tell you the truth I don’t remember any one’s name. After the first ten people every name starts to sound alike. The only way I can keep track of who I’ve met is by giving them nicknames based on their appearances. There is ‘also pregnant’, he is a baron of the southern kingdom. His stomach pokes out over his pants as if he is nine months pregnant. There is also ‘sour face’ who I believe is Sarafine’s mother. She looks a lot like her daughter with the same slim nose and long model legs. They both seem to be sporting that

same sour look every time they look at me. It's the same one Mama and Aunt Millie gives Ms. Riker and her 20 something year old boyfriend whenever they come to the trailer park cookouts. I don't feel bad about giving people nicknames, I must have told everyone here at least three times to call me Lilly but nobody seems to remember that. To them, I am the chosen or the human and according to the whispers, the bitch that ruined Rykan and Sarafine. That's my favorite. Living in a mystical world isn't much different from living back home, except here its whore being whispered behind my back rather than racial slurs. Don't get me wrong, I do seem to have some loyal friends. Rolynn, Artumis's daughter, is actually pretty nice despite her father referring to me as Rykan's pet human. As if I was a dog or a fish. Avalia has been my life line, I've tried not to stray too far from her but we seem to keep getting pulled apart. Rykan has barely said a word to me. At one time tonight we ended up beside each other and I thought he was going to speak to me, but the entire room stopped what they were doing to turn and stare at us. It was like he and I were a movie and the best part was just about to come on. Rykan immediately walked away and haven't come near me again. Occasionally I will catch him staring at me or glance at me briefly from across the room. My biggest disappointment was Assassin. He never came back. I've glanced at that door a hundred times wishing he would saunter back in with that arrogant walk of his. This night has been exhausting, I was so glad when it was finally time to eat.

I'm sitting at a large rectangular table on the right side of Avalia, with lord sweaty hands to my right, listening to people talk about me but not at me. I stuff another piece of roast beef, or what I think is roast beef, into my mouth.

"So, my King," 'Also pregnant' starts. "Will the bastard kings be raised fully in the Southern Kingdom?" by now I've learned not to take offense to the word bastard being used to describe my sons. After hearing it a hundred times I've realized, though it means the same as it does back home it is used more loosely here.

"They will be brought up in the finest Southern learning as did their father and his." Bartus answers proudly. Of course nobody asked my opinion.

"They should spend their summers in the Western kingdom learning to sail the ocean." Artumis adds proudly stroking his beard.

“Aye, Artumis, and on a few occasions I shall send them to the Eastern kingdom and let Fisgal teach them the ways to woo a woman.” The entire table erupts into laughter. Avalia catches my eye and smiles apologetically to me. Did these people think they have control of my sons just because they were royalty and had power? Well, where I’m from there’s nothing more dangerous than a mother protecting her young and even though mine are the size of peanuts right now I still feel very protective.

My legs begin to shake with fury under the table. Avalia places her hand on my knee to calm me down.

“When will they start their military training? It is wise to start them as early as possible. With your military bloodline I’m sure they will exceed all expectations.” ‘Bushy eyebrows’ says. ‘Bushy eyebrows’ is a general in Bartus’s army with eyebrows the size of squirrel tails.

“I agree. I would like to start them as early as four or five.” Are they insane? I look over to Rykan to see how he feels about this but he is still refusing to make eye contact with me. Well he could sit back and let these crazy people decide his future, but I’ll be damn if they plan my boys.

“Since no one seems to ask my opinion, I’ll just give it.” I announce. “No offense, Bartus, but I think it is Rykan and my decision on how our boys will be raised. As I’ve told you once before, as soon as this trouble is over, my babies and I will head back to North Carolina where they will be raised in the manor I see fit.” The room becomes eerily quiet. You could hear a pen drop. Bartus’ eyes narrows slightly at me, but I’m not backing down. These are my boys; I could care less what they will become to these people. Great kings are not, I’m their mother and I choose what school they go to and how they will spend their summers and the only military training they will have is shooting squirrels in the back yard with Uncle Buddy.

“You are absolutely right, Lilly. You have to excuse my husband; he is just excited about being a grandfather at such a young age.” Again the table erupts in laughter. Lalana, Rykan’s beautiful mother, nods slightly to me with an approving smile. She purposely lightened the mood and averted attention from me. Bartus and the other gentlemen get wrapped up in a conversation about being young. The servers begin to bring in the dessert and I was sure that the night would end positive. Until I hear her voice.

“Tell me, chosen.” Sarafine says deliberately using the name I told her not to use. “What makes you think you are so qualified to raise OUR future kings?”

“Sarafine, that’s enough.” Lalana says coming to my defense.

“Pardon me, your highness, but I am just asking the question everyone else seems to be thinking.” Once again the room is silent; it is the deafening silence that follows a comedian’s bad joke. Sarafine is goading me. She’s been waiting for this opportunity all day. I can see the delight in her blue eyes, when she thinks she has me stumped. I have spent most of my life being taunted and picked on.

When I was five, some older girls chased me home from school throwing mud at me; I locked myself in my room and cried. Uncle Buddy came over and sat at the end of my bed chewing his smokeless tobacco and spitting it in his empty Pepsi bottle. He wiped my tears with his dirty red handkerchief and told me, “Lilly-Pot, I reckon you gone get picked on for most of your life. Not cuz of something you done wrong. Mostly on account of the world just too ugly and stubborn to look pass simple things. The way I see it, you got two choices, you can be a victim or you can be a fighter. Both will cause you to have scars, but only one will leave them where you will be proud to see them.” My Uncle Buddy was always saying brilliant things like that. That day, I made my decision. I chose to fight.

“Well, my qualifications must be pretty stellar seeing that I am the one chosen to carry your future kings.” Everyone else in the room is watching us like an audience watching their favorite soap opera. No one ate; I don’t think I even heard anyone breathe.

“Let’s be honest, chosen, it doesn’t take much to carry a child. All you need to do is lie with the right man, I’m sure any whore could do that.” Wow! Sarafine really know how to hit below the belt. If this was middle school her comment would have been followed by collective ooh’s. Well, if that’s how she wants to play it.

“Well Sarafine, Everyone knows it requires a little more than me just lying there. Then again, maybe that’s why Rykan came to me.” Now, if Mama was here she would say, Lilly Ann that is called boasting and it is the tools of the devil. Thankfully, Mama’s not here.

“Well, Well.” Fisgal says nodding towards me. “Seems Lilly is my kind of girl.” The table laughs and begins to fill back up with conversation.

“Well done, Lilly.” Avalia says speaking low into my ear. “I’m afraid you will always have an enemy in Sarafine, but don’t worry, I think tonight she has learned that the little human can take care of herself.” I laugh. As always it feels good to stand up for myself, rather its racist little kids on the

playground, or your mystical baby daddy's fiancée. I glance at the end of the table to Rykan who quickly winks at me and smiles then turns back to Fisgal to continue his conversation. Oddly my body is still reacting to Rykan. Flashes of our steamy night race through my mind. Images of naked bodies and convulsing orgasms make me blush. I turn my head and find Sarafine staring daggers at me. If looks could kill, this would be my last supper.

Today has turned out to be an exhausting emotional experience. I've recovered from a near death experience. I found Rykan after thinking I would never see him again, and then lost him to his horrible fiancée. I was told my sons will be the kings of a mystical world filled with every creature imaginable and I've met more people in one day than I have in my entire life. Oh, and don't forget I can't go home because some half human, half witch is out to kill me. Who would have thought that safe, predictable Lilly would find herself in this predicament?



## Chapter Eight

I could kill them all. I will start with Rykan. It would be so easy to take my sword and rip through his gut. The other Immortal Kings would be next, I can't deny the thought of killing Artumis hasn't crossed my mind on more than one occasion. However, I know Avalia would place her magic on me and would hold me in place stopping me from finishing my task. Sigh. Or I could trace in, grab Lilly, and trace back out before anyone realizes it. I would take her to a place far away where no one could find her.

"Are you contemplating killing us?" The Queen speaks behind me.

I turn my head slightly and glare at her before turning back to my perch on top of the windowsill in the highest tower of the glass castle.

She sighs, "Are you going to stay locked away in this tower all night brooding?" I don't acknowledge her comment. I hear Avalia cross the room towards me.

"She is beautiful, isn't she?" she says trying another tactic to get me talking.

"You lied to her." I state unable to play this small talk game any longer.

"Yes, I did." Avalia says unrepentant.

"How could you?" I demand as I stand to my feet.

"Because I did not want to be the one to tell the girl; who not only just found out that the asshole that got her pregnant and abandoned her and is also engaged to a conniving heathen of a woman, that our entire society relied on a decision she would soon make. I'm sorry if I felt she had enough problems to deal with in one day, please forgive me."

I turn and punch the stone wall behind me. Pieces of stone and dust cascade down from where my fist just went into the stone. I see the logic in what Avalia is saying but I am still angry. How can they ask so much from Lilly? She owes us nothing. She wouldn't even have any dealings with us if it had not been for that fucker, Rykan.

"Tell me you're wrong. Tell me you misinterpreted your vision. Please, Avalia." I plead turning to her. "Please tell me something."

Avalia hesitates, her emotions showing vividly across her face. I know she doesn't know what to make of my show of weakness. I honestly have no idea myself. I know I would give anything for all of this to be some humorless joke on my behalf.

"Assassin," Avalia starts softly placing her hand on my shoulder. "You know as well as I do how accurate my visions are." I turn from her with haste, snatching my shoulder from under her hand. I brace both hands against the arch ways of the window and peer out at nothing.

"Are you sure your relationship with Lilly is as platonic as you say?"

I turn to her quickly barely containing the rage that is on the rise inside me. "I've watched over her from a babe, surely you do not think I've longed for her in such a way that may suggest I'm as uncivil as the Ogres?"

"I am only implying that maybe you have formed an attraction to a beautiful woman that you just so happen to know when she was a ...."

My blade is out and at Avalia's throat before she finishes her sentence.

"Or maybe not." She says with an eye roll. I vanish my sword and turn back to the window. "Look, in spite of what you do or don't feel for Lilly she is still our chosen. And soon after those twins are born SHE will make the sacrifice to save the Locke."

"What sacrifice?" I ask turning back to her abruptly. Avalia pause, her eyes shoot quickly to the ground and then backup to me.

"I meant, decision." once again I get the sense that Avalia is hiding something from me. I push into her mind and catch a glimpse of Lilly standing in front of me with the most broken hearted look on her face and tears in her eyes. Immediately a wall goes up in Avalia's mind and I am forcefully shoved out.

"Do. Not. Do that again." She warns.

"What did I see? Why is she crying?" Avalia turns her back to me. "Does it have something to do with her decision?" Her silence is deafening. "What aren't you telling me?" Avalia shakes her head, refusing to respond. "Answer me, damn you!" I shout.

Avalia turns back to me abruptly. "You have no idea what the power of foresight entails. My secrets are my own to bear. You have never questioned my motives or my secrets before, you have always trusted me. I need you to trust me now. Trust that I cannot tell you this, it will destroy our fate if I do." The sorrow in the Queen's face told me that what she battled was her burden alone. She's right I've always trusted her and have followed her

judgment devotedly. But, can I trust Avalia with Lilly's life? A life I value even more than my own, can I risk her for my devotion?

"What is your plan, Avalia?"

With a sigh of relief Avalia states, "As I said before, Lilly's happiness is my upmost priority. She will be treated as the savior that she is and that requires your help."

"My help?" I ask turning to face her.

"Yes, Assassin. The girl has taken a liking to you. She feels comfort when you are around, probably because of your presence throughout her life. For the time remaining you will be her assassin. You will protect her with your life."

"Just because I agree to hear you out," I say walking away from the Queen. "does not mean I will participate in your little game." Immediately I hit an invisible wall. I turn to see Avalia's eyes are illuminated a bright blue with her power.

"You will do as I say. As much as you want to deny it, it was your interference 15 years ago that started this."

Images begin to play in my head. Lilly at six years old, her gun across her back and Bo at her side running through the forest as her drunken step father shouts her name. The images change and I almost retch at the visions in my head. The physical abuse was just the beginning. That night Billy Ray's abuse turned sexual.

"That night was the start of the downfall of Lilly Ann Peters. After years of her step-fathers physical and sexual abuse ..." Avalia continues and so does the scene she forces in my head. I witness every blow, every thrust, and every muffled cry she goes through over the years.

"Lilly finally has too much and after years of hiding her pain, she takes a shot gun from her Uncle Buddy's cabinet and...."

"Stop!" I scream dropping down to my knees. I hang my head in my hands unable to face the pain and violation on her face as that bastard defiles her over and over until the day she places a gun in her mouth. I saved Lilly from more than death that night. However my actions threw her in the middle of a war, and now she is the prize possession of that war. I took Lilly's life away from the great God when I intervened, now I think he is punishing me for it.

"I will do as you ask." I say, my voice coming out in a submissive whisper.

“In two days’ time I want you to take a small caravan to escort Lilly to the Southern realm. Bartus says he wants to spend time with her. However, as always the Immortal Kings are after the Northern throne and right now Lilly holds the key to it. Bartus assumes he has a leg up on everyone else because Lilly carries Rykan’s twins. I don’t want her out of your sight for a moment. I don’t trust the Kings. There is a leak in our circle, I’m sure of it and I don’t know from which kingdom the deceit flows.”

“Why must I take a caravan, I can just trace her there. It’s faster” I say getting to my feet.

“Lilly isn’t from our realm, she is not made to trace. You will have to do it the long way.”

“From here to the Southern Kingdom by horse is five days. We are in the midst of a war. I can’t ...”

“You will,” Avalia says holding her hand up to stop me. “Because, before her boys are due Lilly has to visit all the kingdoms.”

This is my breaking point. Has Avalia gone mad? We should keep Lilly safely locked away in the glass tower. It is bad enough I have to take her to see Bartus, but to march her through the entire Locke like a walking bulls-eye is pure insanity.

“Have you gone mad? Why in the hell would we parade her around like this?” Avalia sighs and turns her back to me taking my spot at the glassless window.

“You were not yet born during the great war between the magicals.” She says staring at the same empty spot I saw just moments ago. “Many of our kind were killed before any of us would even stand and fight. The centaurs and the giants were slaughtering us by the hundreds. It wasn’t until O’Rydan came and gave us a reason to fight. He gave us someone to stand behind, a face to rally us. The Dark King has terrorized our people. They are afraid of him. As much as they want to take the Locke back they are afraid to go against him. But if they have a face, someone to get behind, someone that would make this fight personal for them, when the time came we would have an army.”

“These people you speak of, they are not fighters they are farmers and nobles who have never picked up a weapon. What do you want them to do?”

“It is those people that have tipped the scale in many wars, not only in our realm but in the human realm as well. If you haven’t noticed our trained

soldiers are dwindling. The Dark king is depleting our armies while expanding his own. We need them. More importantly, we need her.” As always Avalia is right. We are losing this war. If Lilly’s decision is going to change anything, we need an army to back her. As much as I hate to admit it she needs to be seen. I have to stand back from this and look at it as a war tactic. I’m good at war.

“What about the kings, do they know of your plans?” I ask standing a little taller with my arms cross over my chest. Now that I am viewing this differently I feel more confident in my actions.

“They all have their own motives for Lilly, right now they are focused on what they want from her. I need them to keep focused on that. Best thing right now is to let the hands play; I will study the movements from afar. At least until I find out who is leaking the information to the Dark King.” Avalia sits down in the arched glassless window and sighs. “There are only two people in this world I trust right now; you, obviously, and Lilly. She is pure of heart and strong, I can sense the goodness inside her like a beacon of light. They attacked her today, not physically.” She says waving her hand at me when I reacted to her comment. “They all want to control her and those boys, but she stood up for herself. She’s as strong as I thought she would be.”

I walk over to the window and sit down beside Avalia. “This is Lilly you speak of. She was abused, tortured and bullied her entire life. Dealing with a bunch of pompous immortals is nothing to her. I know she can handle it.” I say smiling to myself. My little human can handle anything. I immediately shake that thought from my head. Lilly, is not mine and if I’m going to be her assassin I need to start viewing her as my new job.

“You should go see her. She spent the entire night watching the door for you to return.” I nod at the queen and stand to my feet. “And, Assassin,” Avalia adds before I trace away. “One does not control the heart. No matter whom they are.” I bow to Avalia and trace away. I’m not sure what she meant by her last comment but neither did I care to focus on it. I have a job, keep Lilly alive long enough to save the Locke, then get her the hell out of dodge.

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“Really, it’s quite alright. I can get undressed by myself.” I trace into her room to find that Lilly is pleading with the three servants Avalia has assigned to her.

“It is our honor, chosen.” One of the servants says.

“Again, call me Lilly and I don’t need help.” I forget this is all new to Lilly. Though most people would delight in having someone at their beck and call, Lilly is having a hard time being served. I make myself visible, standing in the door way. As soon as Lilly sees me her face lights up. I want to say that her reaction did not affect me, but that would be a lie.

“Assassin.” My name is a caress against her lips that makes me shudder. I push away from the door and cross the room towards her.

“Ladies, give Lilly some privacy, please.” I say without taking my eyes away from Lilly. The servants bow and all three exit the room and close the door behind them.

“Thank you!” She says blushing down at her hands. “I’m not use to people making such a fuss over me. I mean, Mama tends to hover a little bit but even she lets me dress myself.” She says with a chuckle. Her mother is overbearing on many things In Lilly’s life. The woman was having a hard time allowing Lilly to grow up and be a woman herself. I’ve felt for many years she was afraid to let Lilly go away, not to protect Lilly, but she was too afraid that Lilly would never come back.

“How are you feeling?” I ask her. She sits down on the edge of her bed and twirls her butterfly pendant charm around her fingers.

“Scared.” She says looking up at me briefly. “Being a mother was not in my plans right now, being a single mother was never in my plans and this,” She says circling her hands around the room. “This just feels like too much. I get this feeling when everyone looks at me, they are expecting something big from me, and I’m not sure I can deliver it.” My heart tightens at those words. We were not only expecting something big, I get the feeling from Avalia we were expecting something unfathomable.

“I’ve learned that few people really understand the true value of themselves.” This makes her smile and my heart warm. I scold myself for that. I need to distance myself from her. I need to view her as someone who has hired me for a job. I cannot think clearly if I see her as My Lilly. Avalia was right. My interference 15 years ago got Lilly in this mess. I will do all I can to see her out of it safely.

“You should rest. You have had a rough day.”

“Tell me about it.” Lilly says as she stands up from the bed. She crosses over to her privacy screen and stands behind it. I hear the fabric of her dress ruffle as she pulls it off. I stiffen. Everywhere.

“You know, when I met Rykan I felt so comfortable with him.” she tosses her dress over the top of her privacy screen and walks around the screen in nothing but her shift. When the light hit her linen white shift her black panties and bra peek through like shadows underneath. I turn my head to look at the wall, she has no idea how the light is playing with her clothing, or how her clothing is playing with my increasing erection. Where the fuck did that come from?

“He made me feel safe.” she goes on to say still oblivious to her clothing. I ‘m only half paying attention to her, those black pieces of scrap under her shift have most of my attention. I grab the robe off the chair that the servants had left and hand it to her. She takes it from me and shrugs it on.

“It felt like I was supposed to be with him.” She says flopping down on the bed pulling one leg underneath her. “I guess that was stupid. Why would someone like Rykan want to be with me?” I feel the pain in her words. I hear the years of being told she was ugly or not good enough when she spoke. Lilly is taking this as just another example of how she is inferior. Another reason for me to kill Rykan, I am making a list.

“Funny, I was just thinking the opposite.” She looks up at me with her bright eyes in shock. “I wondered why someone as kind, and as beautiful as you would ever settle for Rykan.” Her cheeks immediately redden. She looks down at her hands in her lap.

“Thanks!”

“For what?” I ask puzzled.

“For being nice, for saving my ass at the diner, for not treating me like the others.” She says drawing her knees up to her chest and wrapping her arms around her legs. “You would think I would be accustomed to being stared at and looked down upon, but I guess no matter what the reason for the prejudice, it still sucks.” Her eyes sparkle with unshed tears. For the first time, I am able to physically wipe her tears away. Something I’ve longed to do since I first saw her. I do not hesitate. I sit down on the bed in front of her and brush the tear off her cheek with my thumb. Her skin feels like silk underneath my touch. I wonder what it would taste like. What the fuck? No, I don’t. I shake my head trying to dislodge the vision of running my tongue over Lilly’s body. Get your shit together, Assassin.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be bothering you with my silly issues.” She says wiping at the freefalling tears, so sweetly oblivious to the perverted

thoughts running through my mind.

I swallow the lump in my throat and try to sound as normal as possible despite the heated blood rushing south through my body. “Never apologize for being who you are around me, Lilly.” She flashes her dimples at me and my hand aches to touch her face again. However, she is no longer crying or in need of my comfort, so why does my hand shake with the urge to feel her skin? I ball my hands into fist to keep them from developing minds of their own and reaching out to her. Thankfully she yawns, which gives me a reason to leave her before I do something foolish. I stand up from the bed.

“Do you have to go?” she asks.

“You are tired.”

“I’m not tired.” She says then yawns again. We both laugh. It’s nice to know she still fights sleep, the same as she did when she was a little girl.

“Goodnight, Lilly.” I bow to her and then head to the door.

“Assassin.” She calls my name in a sleepy whisper and I turn to find her under the covers, eyes already closed. “Will I see you tomorrow?”

“Yes. Now go to sleep, little human.” I stand in her doorway watching her as she drifts off to sleep. I extinguish the lights in her room as I walk out, and then close the door behind me.

I find myself smiling, standing in the hallway alone. After all these years of watching her in the shadows, I have my Lilly here with me. Many times I wanted to appear to her as a random stranger just so I could talk to her, to hear her voice address me, if only for a brief conversation. I wondered what she would think of me. Would she enjoy my company? Would she laugh with me as easily as she did her blonde friend? Would she find me interesting as she hadn’t any of her other few dates? I never imagined it would actually happen, and to have her prefer my company to others is unfathomable.

I push myself away from her door, feeling unusually in good spirits, when I have the feeling of being watched.

“Do you think it is wise to be alone with me, princeling?” I stop and ask the shadows. Rykan steps out of an alcove directly behind me. I turn on my heels to face him.

“What is your affiliation with MY Lilly?”

“You may want to reconsider backup, if you are going to use words like MY and Lilly in the same sentence around me.”

“I want you to stay away from her.” I laugh.



“Do you dare mock a king?”

“No, I mock a king’s son, who dares to request anything from me.”

“I am son of Bartus, descendent of O’Rydin and the next in line to the Southern throne. You WILL follow my order and you will Stay. Away. From Lilly.” The princeling has balls, I will give him that. Either that or he is on a suicide mission. I take a step towards him and to his credit he doesn’t back away.

My voice is calm and even when I speak, “You have no rights to Lilly. Just because you foolishly stumbled upon her and she allowed you, for some reason unbeknownst to me, to take her virginity gives you no rightful claim to her. Do not forget, princeling, you are betroth. Which means you cannot seek claim to another woman.” Our laws state that a man can only claim one female that is not related to him. Rykan’s arrangement with Sarafine is his one and only claim. I watch the anger and frustration flitter across his face as he accepts my words.

He nods his head as if I have made a valued point, then a satisfied smile crosses his face. “Oh but you are wrong, Assassin. I cannot claim Lilly, but I can file a claim to the heirs in her womb. So I’ll say it this way, stay away from my sons.” The fucker had a point there. Since Lilly is a human and is staying in our realm as a guest of Avalia’s, all he needed to do was file a claim to his sons and have Avalia sign off on it. Then he could request I stay away from them. And, although Avalia would not agree she has to follow the laws of our world. However, I think he is forgetting one more thing.

“Listen to me, young prince. Nothing, not you, not the laws, not even my Queen will keep me away from Lilly. And, until she delivers those heirs of yours, I have been assigned her assassin.”

His face contorts in anger. “I will have you removed from that title. I will assign her my own guard. She is my responsibility.” My vision goes red at those words, but I smother my anger back down. I cannot kill him, yet.

“The Queen assigned it to me herself; I like to see how that conversation will go.” Avalia will never allow it. He may be able to request I’m not alone with her or that I cannot speak to her, but he will never have me removed as her assassin.

I love the look on his face as he realizes this. “I see the way you look at her.” He says. “As if you wish it was your seed that fills her womb.” I grab

him by the throat and slam his back into the wall.

“Watch your tongue, Rykan. You have taken my patience to the limit.” He places both his hands on my chest and pushes me away from him. I allow the distance.

“I have struck a nerve, have I not, Assassin?” he is right, but I don’t reply. I am not sure as to why it has struck a nerve with me. I wish to tell myself that it is because he suggests something that is wrong and untrue, but that feels strangely like a lie. Maybe it is because I do not wish to speak of Lilly in this manor at all, as if she is nothing more than a casual romp in the sheets.

“Never speak to me of Lilly in that manor again. She deserves more. Only because I think she will hurt, I have not killed you yet. Try my patience again, and her hurt will not matter.” Thankfully he took my threat for the promise that it was.

“Heed my warning, Assassin. I will be watching you.” with those words Rykan traces away from the glass castle. I stand in the hallway staring at the empty space he had just left, my good mood after leaving Lilly’s bedroom completely gone. The talk with Rykan has reminded me of the dangers Lilly is in. A vicious King wants her dead, a foolish prince wants her body and everyone wants the power she carries in her belly, how the fuck do I save Lilly from all of this? And why does what Rykan want bother me the most?

To Be Continued.....

I hope you enjoyed Lilly’s story.  
Book Two Available Now.



## **Note from the Author**

My name is not really Tiya Rayne, it is a pen name that I chose to represent the two most important girls in my life, my daughters. I do, however, write Young Adult books under my real name, K.C. Connor. I also enjoy reading feedback on my work. Please leave a review or send me an email.

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