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SHADOWBORN
ACADEMY
YEAR THREE

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G. Bailey & Scarlett Snow

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Formatting by Champagne Book Design www.champagnebookdesign.com
Editing by Niki Trento-Spencer

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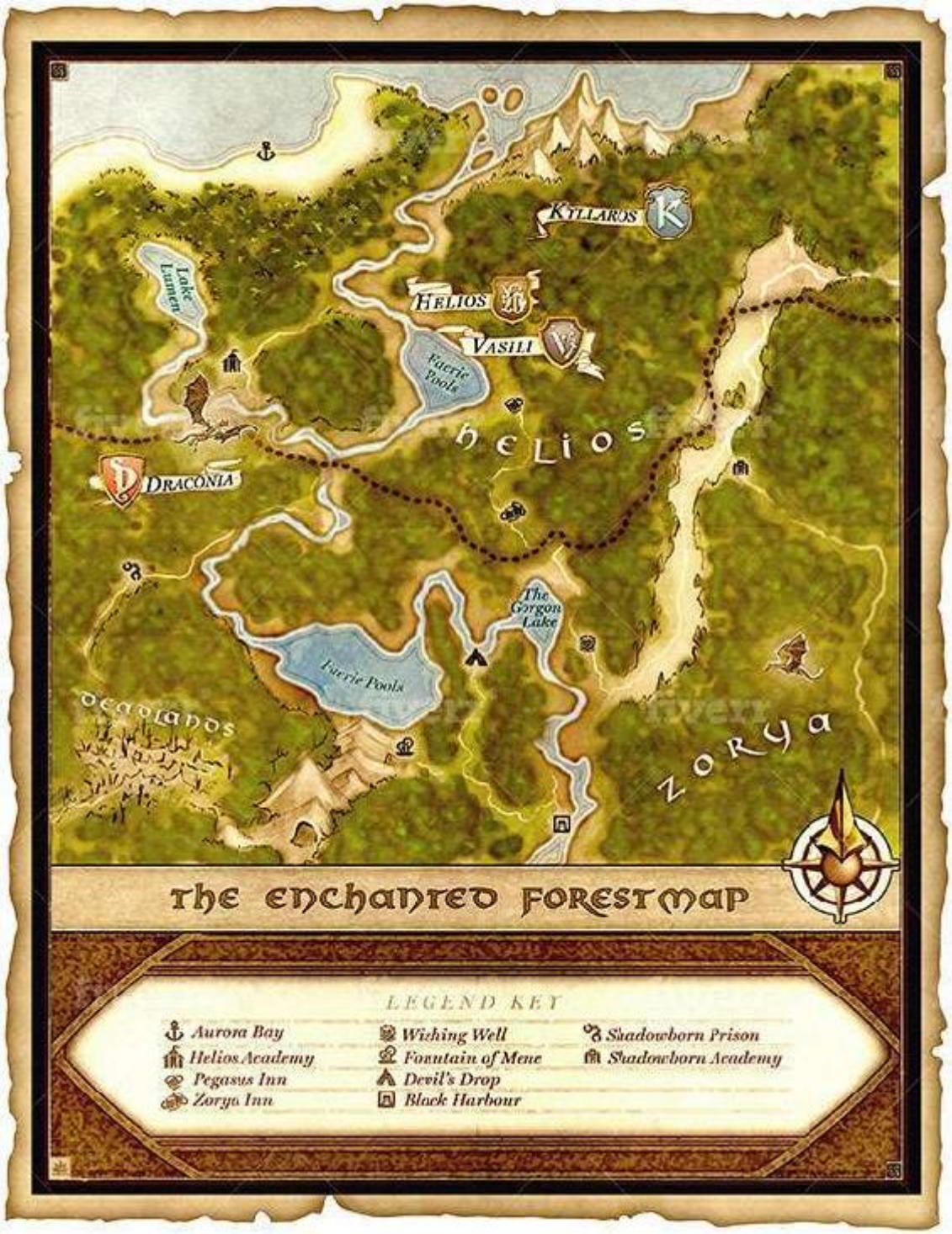
My fate is in the darkness,
And the war there is real…
In the Enchanted Forest, one girl desperately needs to find a way to stop the fae war before it's too late. With her sister raising titans and gods, the light in her dreams turning out to be a lie and her men in grave danger…life at the academy has never been this dangerous.

A mirror once spoke of a girl born in hate who could stop a war…
But does that girl stand a chance against the power of the fae?

Shadowborn Academy is a Dark Reverse Harem Paranormal Fae Romance for 18+. In this world, not even the shadows can be trusted…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Wishing Well
Fountain of Mene
Devil's Drop
Black Harbour
Shadowborn Prison
Shadowborn Academy

PROLOGUE

Once upon a time, I dreamt of pure light even in the darkness of my court. I soon learned that with the *Throne of Luna* comes a heart full of darkness that one can never escape. I tried to in the beginning until I realized where there is darkness, there is power, and so I chose to embrace it. I let it fill my heart with strength while I vowed to never bring a child into such a lightless world. As time went on, the darkness overthrew my sense of reason, and I craved an heir to one day ascend my throne. So I lured the Light Fae King into my chamber, and together, we created the very heir who now rests in my womb.

Or at least…she did.

Pain unlike anything I have ever experienced drags me from my slumber. I'm crying out in agony before I even know what part of me is injured. My hands fall to my stomach to protect my unborn child, but the pain turns into panic when I find nothing. There is no bump. No babe kicking away inside my womb. There is only a line drawn across my stomach and a pool of blood surrounding me.

Hoping this is only but a nightmare, I hold onto my empty womb and carefully push off the bed. Whimpers escape me with each agonising step, and the room blurs as I stumble over to my daughter's crib. I know she's gone before I even reach it, yet a small part of me hopes, prays, begs Selena to not let this be true.

He can't have taken her from me.

As I peer into the crib, I hold a hand to my mouth to suppress my screams. A human child with pitch-black hair sleeps soundly where my daughter should be. Next to him is a white note stained in droplets of blood, and I pick it up with trembling hands, my whispers escaping me:

Narah,

When I came to your chamber, it was not to create a baby but to love you.

It soon became clear we both longed for different things, but I will do what is right for our babe. I have made the trade, and Corvina, the name you chose for her, will be safe with the humans. This is the babe I swapped her for. I only wish that he fills the void our daughter will leave within you.

Long may Corvina rule when she takes the thrones.

Ulric

I scream as dark magic blasts out of me, hitting and devouring everything in the room in my grief. I scream for so long until nothing but ash surrounds me and I fall to my knees.

My child is gone. He took her. He took my unborn child from me!

A small cry catches my attention in the haze and I open my eyes to see the human babe floating in the air, covered in tendrils of dark magic. He embraces the power. Little wings appear from his back. Without even realising, I crawl over and pick him up, holding and shushing him in my arms. His gold eyes look up at me with all the love of a newborn child, and while I should feel love for him in return, I feel nothing.

"I will protect you, Alastair Pitch, but first, there must be war."

CHAPTER ONE

Corvina

The heavy weight of the crown rests in my bloody hands as I stare at the Enchanted Forest stretching endlessly before me. The wind whips around the trees, brushing the ground with new-fallen leaves and the heavy moss-scent of the forest tries its best to comfort me.

But nothing can do that right now.

Pitch's hands rest on my shoulders, waiting for me to break the spell of silence I've made. He doesn't need to ask me what happened. The crown is the only answer anyone needs. The blood coating my hands drives home the truth furthermore. The Light Fae King is dead.

Blinking back my tears, I turn around and look up into the pity-filled eyes of the man I love.

My shadow. My home.

"The king is dead. Queen Narah killed him," I say softly, the words feeling wrong and foreign on my tongue. The way she stabbed him nineteen times will forever be etched in my mind. "Eva has taken over the Light Fae Kingdom with the Titans and Narah. She also holds Izora prisoner, who's really King Ulric's daughter, which totally makes her my sister."

"Shit, Vina," I hear Zander mutter nearby before he rests his hand on my arm. I briefly look at him before another hand falls on my back and I turn to see Gage.

"What do you need us to do next?" he asks quietly. His question lingers in the air between us just before Jonah steps forward and locks his gaze

with mine. The still blueness of his eyes makes me pause. They give me hope that there is a light in this dark fucked up world.

Words seem lost to me for a long time, but they all stand still, waiting for my next move.

"I don't know what we do next. I've never known what I'm doing," I whisper, tears falling from my cheeks to my lips. "I'm an epic fuck up for a princess. How do I even play their game? I'm no royal. I'm nothing compared to the fae and fucking gods!"

Pitch tightens his grip on my shoulders. "Corvina Charles, shut the hell up!" His tone shocks me. Pitch never speaks to me like that. He steps closer, cupping my cheeks as the crown presses into his stomach between us. "The fae, the gods, the Titans, and the whole world have no clue what's coming their way. You are Corvina Charles, a fae created of both worlds and surrounded by shadows, as well as light. You will win this war with us at your side."

"You think so?" I ask him and he nods. I look around at my guys, who all nod once with their eyes full of strength and belief.

With all my men around me, somehow I find the strength to lift my head and take a much needed deep breath.

"We should go to the academy," I say, my voice much stronger than I feel. "I know Eva expects me to be there but she will be busy for a while."

Zander sweeps us up into the shadows and shadowlocates us to the middle of the academy entrance, where we are not alone.

The first woman I set my gaze on, sees me before her eyes slowly drop to the crown. Ivywood's knees buckle underneath her, and an ear-splitting cry that echoes around the academy pulls out of her throat with anguish. No one dares move as we watch her weep for her king, my father.

I look up to see Ambrose at the stairs, leaning on the banister, and there is a big space around him where the students all stare, most looking scared of his existence. The entrance hall slowly fills with students until we are surrounded by hundreds of shadowborns, each of them looking to me, and the weeping fae, for answers.

Gulping down the pain in my throat, I walk to Ivywood and kneel down. She looks up from the floor, locking her eyes with mine. Her face is covered in tears, her eyes distraught with grief, and for the first time, I realise how much she loved my father. I want to feel grief at his loss, but the shock isn't letting me feel anything right now.

I don't know what I will feel come tomorrow. Or next week. Or ever.

"What do you need from me, Queen Corvina of the Light Fae Court?" Ivywood's question bouncing around the room. I offer her a hand and she takes it, letting me pick her up off the floor as I rest the crown by my side, knowing full-well everyone is watching me.

"The academy is going to be attacked by Titans and light fae. Possibly even dark fae," I say, and before I can say anything else, everyone bursts into panicked chatter. Most of them sound terrified and I don't really blame them. Ivywood lets my hand go and steps forward, clapping once and everyone immediately falls silent.

"Every single student here has gone through what no fae could ever imagine. You are not weak, you are not useless, and you will not go down without one hell of a fight," Ivywood shouts, filling even me with strength. "A war is coming, yes, but the academy was made by Selena herself and her love for all things shadowborn. The academy will defend us and keep its students alive. Now, I want everyone to go to your rooms and send letters of warning to your families before it is too late."

The students move like a wave, disappearing into corridors as Ivywood turns back to me. She still looks broken but more determined than ever.

"What is your plan, Your Majesty?"

"I don't have one…" I pause, worrying my bottom lip. "Yet."

Ivywood nods and walks to the door. I find myself following her outside, knowing my guys are right behind me. We stop behind Ivywood on the steps of the academy and Ivywood holds her hands into the air.

"Selena, I call on your protection.
The academy needs a shield.
The shadowborn will rise.
The Academy will protect.
In the name of Selena, I unlock the academy and call to the forest to protect us."

The moment the last word leaves her lips, the ground shakes. I hold onto the banister of the stairs as the floor trembles and vines shoot out of the ground. Hundreds, if not thousands of vines smother the academy, crawling around every inch of stone until they form an enormous egg shape. A wave

of dark magic projects from the vines and wraps around the academy, forming a protective barrier from the outside world.

Shadowborn Academy is in the dark, and if Eva wins the war, it always will be.

CHAPTER TWO

Corvina

Pushing the door to my room open, I expect to see Sage, for some insane reason, curled up on her bed, our stuff littered around the room. The sweet smell of her vanilla perfume barely lingers in the air after all this time.

It's just an empty room full of memories now.

My guys flood inside and Echo jumps into my arms as Ambrose slowly enters. I sit on the edge of my bed, stroking Echo's fur in a bit of a haze as I place the crown on the bedside table.

"I lost both my parents young. Gods tend to kill other gods as much as royals love to murder their own," Ambrose confides as he sits next to me.

"Royals love it enough to give the act a word. Regicide," I sourly reply, looking up at Ambrose. I recall what I read about him in Zander's book. "I'm sorry about your parents and your wife and son. I've lost three now, but who's counting?"

"Vina," Zander gently says my name as I make things super awkward.

Echo jumps off my lap and curls up into the pillows of the bed. Standing again, needing to move, I walk to the window and start to pace up and down. What the hell do I do next? Eva has to pay for what she has done, I'm sure of that. How I'm going to get to her alone is another issue. And after what she did to Sage? Eva has a lot we need to discuss. Well, less discussion, more me kicking her skinny little black-hearted ass into Tartarus where it belongs.

“Where is Sage?” I ask, turning around to see all of them looking at me, and I try not to register how worried they look. “Is she alright?”

“Sage is with her teacher, and I’ve healed her,” Ambrose answers me. “She will be fine. I would give her at least twelve hours to wake up. Is there anything else you need, Vina?”

“That’s our nickname for her, not yours,” Pitch all but growls, stepping right in front of Ambrose.

“Funny. I’ve been in her head almost as long as you,” Ambrose replies dryly, his arms crossed and pressing against Pitch’s chest with how close they are. “I’m pretty sure I’ve earned nickname rights.”

“You fucking haven’t,” Pitch grits out, and Jonah steps in the middle of them, shoving them both apart.

“Look, I know you’re a god, mate, but we need to be alone with Vina. Why don’t you find a room and get some sleep,” Jonah suggests as Pitch stalks over to me. “That’s our plan, anyway.”

The room seems tenser by the second as Ambrose stares Jonah down.

With a big grin, Ambrose holds his hands in the air and steps back. “Your mortal message has been received.” Ambrose heads to the door and tugs it open, looking back at me with a wink. “See you in your dreams, Vina.”

“Fucking asshole god,” Pitch growls as Ambrose slams the door, but I can hear his laughter from the corridor.

I place my hand on Pitch’s shoulder, my lips twitching into a smile for what feels like the first time in forever. Pitch sighs as he looks down at me and wraps his arms around my waist. I rest my head on his shoulder, trying to relax for a moment. His burning leaves aroma always calms me. I let it wrap around my senses like a warm caress.

“Gage, want to go and get some food?” Zander suggests, pushing off the wall.

Gage nods, walking over to him and touching his shoulder. They both shadowlocate, leaving me alone with Jonah and Pitch. Through everything that has happened between us all, I like to think we have gotten closer, and I’m curious to test how far that goes.

“I’m going to shower. Will you both stay close?” I ask, lifting my head off Pitch. “I just don’t want to be alone.”

Jonah nods once, and I have a feeling Pitch would do anything I ask at this stage.

Walking to the bathroom, I leave the door open as I turn on the shower, sensing them both following me in. They close the door softly behind them, and a grin pulls at my lips. I don't look back as I strip off my clothes and let them fall to my feet. I can feel their eyes locked onto my back, and it sends an excited shiver down my spine. I think the three of us could do with a distraction right now, and I know just the show to put on for them.

Stepping into the hot water, I sigh with relief, fully embracing how good it feels. I massage shampoo into my hair before getting the soap and running it over my body. Feeling brave, I slowly turn around as I run the soap between my breasts, locking eyes on Jonah first. His dazed eyes follow my every movement, each soft brush of the soap against my naked skin. The water rushes over me, and droplets flick off my lashes as I blink up at Pitch. His hands ball into fists by his side, his entire body tenses up, but his eyes are full of pure and utter want.

"We're back," Zander shouts, his voice snapping us all out of the trance.

I put the soap back and turn off the shower, getting out and grabbing a towel off the bar. I dry off and wrap myself in one before stepping back into my room.

Poor Jonah and Pitch are trying to subtly hide their erections as they follow me out.

Zander and Gage both exchange a knowing look as I strut over to my closet. I grab a random hoodie of Sage's and some joggers of mine and head back to the bathroom, my stomach grumbling from the smell of burgers and fries the guys have brought.

After drying my hair, I pull my clothes on and head into the bedroom. My guys are happily sitting in a line by the window, each opening paper bags of food and eating.

Jonah holds a bag up for me as I walk over and sit next to him.

"So, Izora is your half-sister?" Zander says around a fry. "I mean, no wonder you two became friends so quickly."

"It's fucked up," I admit, digging into my food, "but out of everything that has happened, knowing Izora is my sister is the only good thing. And getting Sage back."

"She's a light fae now," Jonah mutters. "I wonder how they did that to her? And that nasty scar on her face looked painful as fuck."

My appetite suddenly vanishes, and I set my food aside, telling my guys, "Eva will pay for that, and everything else. I'm not going to let her

win."

Pitch smirks at me. "No, you're not. We're going to win, Vina, and the Titans will be sent back to rot in their prison for the rest of eternity."

I only hope he is right.

CHAPTER THREE

Corvina

"Hey stranger," I softly say, walking into David's room to see my best friend sitting on a couch, almost like nothing has happened between us. For a second, I look past her glittering wings and the glow of her skin. Barely noticing the scar running down her cheek. I can even see past the unnatural brightness to her eyes and how there is so much more darkness lurking within them than before. "Did you miss me?"

Sage doesn't answer as I come to a halt, her eyes fixed on me. She looks so small and scared as she curls into the corner of the white couch, which only makes her wings that much brighter. I need to get her a bracelet like mine if I can. It sure makes clothes a lot easier to put on.

"I'm going to leave you two alone," David comments as he walks past me. He kisses Sage on her forehead, and she closes her eyes in contentment for a second before opening them and watching me as David leaves us alone. Their love gives me hope that they can get through this, and for the first time in months, David doesn't look drunk or fucked up.

He looks happy and relieved.

"I missed you from the moment she took me, Vina," Sage whispers. I nod, stepping closer until my legs brush the side of the couch. Still unsure how to approach this new Sage, I walk around the sofa and slowly sit next to her, careful not to touch her unless she wants me to. Her hand gently rests on top of mine, and I struggle not to pull her into a hug.

"Ronan took me to Eva. I wasn't strong enough to fight either of them. I remember being knocked out, and when I woke up, I was in a prison of

some kind. The days and nights mixed into one until I lost track of time altogether, but I remember every needle, every test. I remember Eva cutting my cheek while Izora screamed and screamed for her to stop. It was awful. I thought I'd never see you or David again."

White-hot fury surges into me. I try to mask it with a pained smile while vowing to make Eva pay. "Izora was with you?" I ask, closing my eyes for a moment as I swallow down my anger.

"Yeah, but I only saw her once. She's a light fae now, too. They did the same to her as they did to me."

I nod, knowing that already. Her fae wings were unmistakable. "Izora is my half-sister," I tell Sage quietly. "Ulric is her father, too, and she saw him die. I couldn't save her, but I will." Sage's eyes widen, and I link our hands like I did when we were kids. "I have one of my sisters back, and I'm ever so thankful for that."

"Eva won't stop. I can't sleep until she's dead. Until Ronan's dead," Sage says, her hand shaking like the rest of her. Tears fall from her lashes, and I finally cave, pulling her into my arms and holding her as tightly as I can while she sobs. "I've—I've never known darkness like this, Buzzie. It makes me not want to wake up."

A lump swells in my throat. "Listen to me, Sage," I say, grabbing her cheeks and making her look at me. Sage might be different, and her magic feels stronger than ever before, but she is still my sister. Our connection is something we founded in the darkest of shadows, and nothing will ever erase that. I will fucking dive right back into them if only to save her.

"I know that darkness, and I won't let you live in it. I will kill Eva and Ronan. You're going to help me, and together, we are going to make them regret even looking at us. We deserve the light, Sage. We don't belong in the shadows anymore."

Sage bursts into tears, and I hold her for a long time, knowing she needs to let all of this out. Being held prisoner once again changed her into something she didn't want to be. It's going to take time for Sage to feel completely healed again. I'll do all I can to make her feel safe in the meantime.

"You're wrong, you know," Sage eventually whispers, resting her head on my shoulder while I play with her pink hair.

"I'm never wrong," I joke, nudging her head playfully with my shoulder.

Sage chuckles, and it warms my heart to hear her laugh again. “We do belong in the shadows, Vina, and the Light Fae bitch Eva has no idea what she has coming her way.”

I grin, resting my head on hers. “There’s my best friend.”

“How is she?” Willow demands, making me almost jump as she steps out of the shadows of the corridor. I’ve just left Sage’s room after a long day together, where she mostly cried and I mostly promised to burn any fae that touched her. Bumping into Willow Greene is the last thing I need right now.

“Sage is coping,” I reply, wondering why she even gives a fuck.

Willow clicks her tongue and shakes her head. “I meant my sister! I want to know how Izora is.”

Raising an eyebrow, I step closer. “You actually give a shit about her now?”

Willow surprises me when she looks down, shuffling her feet. “I fucked up at being a sister, and well, most things when it comes to family. The world is fucking ending around us, and it made me realise I should fight for my family. So tell me how Izora is and what the plan is to get her back?”

“Izora is my sister now, too, funnily enough,” I tell her, and she laughs until she sees I’m dead serious. “You can ask your mum for the deets on that. As for Izora…she looked messed up when I saw her. Eva is using her, and if you really want to help free her, you should rest and train.”

“I will train this whole academy if you need it, Your Majesty,” Willow says and holds her hand out. “Truce?”

I eye her hand with caution for a moment before taking it. “If you fuck me over, Willow, I will cut all your hair off and then kill you, so you die an ugly, bald bitch. That’s your one and only warning.”

I smile sweetly as I let her hand go and walk past her. I’m finally feeling more myself now that I’ve seen Sage. It’s like she’s given me that extra push I needed to face the world again. However, I can’t help but notice how quiet the academy is as I make my way down the maze of corridors and

empty stairwells. I guess it makes sense since everyone is preparing to fight off ancient Titans. Shaking my head, I walk up to Gage's open office door. I enter, quietly shutting the door behind me.

"Is the therapist open for a session?" I ask, my back leaning against the closed door.

Gage grins, resting a hip against his desk. "Always for my favourite student," he teases. I laugh and walk over to him, wrapping my arms around his torso. Gage rests his head on mine. "In all seriousness, do you need to talk?"

"No," I admit, leaning back to look at him. I press my lips to mouth, and he kisses me back with just as much as passion. He lifts me, carrying me over to his couch. Placing me on my back, he covers my body with his. Never once breaking our kiss.

The world can burn around us, but every kiss makes me forget it.

The fae, the gods, the world, can all wait.

Gage trails his amazing lips down my jaw as his hand cups my breast. I rub myself against his knee, causing a throaty moan to escape my lips. Tugging my shirt up and over my head, Gage leans back, staring at me with so much desire it makes me blush.

"Can I make you come, Vina?" he softly asks me. Damn, hell, yes. I can only nod, and he scoots back on the sofa. Tugging down my jeans until I can kick them off, taking my panties with them.

Gage doesn't tease or make me wait before he is in between my legs and my back arches as his tongue swirls around my clit. Holy Fucking Selena. Gage chuckles against my clit as I moan, he reaches up, placing his hand over my mouth, reminding me to be quiet. For whatever reason, it just turns me on more. Within minutes, I come with a blinding pleasure that sends shakes through my body. Gage picks me up, placing me on his lap and holding me tightly. "I love you, Corvina Charles. You know that?"

"Whatever happens next, I want you to know that I love you, too," I whisper, meaning every single word.

CHAPTER FOUR

Corvina

Jonah smirks at me as his dagger just misses my ear and slams into the target behind my back.

"That was a little too close," Pitch warns him as he supervises our training.

Turns out Jonah and I being competitive makes all the students super nervous to be in here with us, so for an hour, we get an empty training room to ourselves.

I reach up and tug the dagger out of the wall and close my eyes for a moment, letting the shadow magic take over. It trickles out of my soul, almost like it's frightened of my other magic before smothering the dagger. I shadowlocate the dagger right next to Jonah's shoulder, cutting through his t-shirt a little and he glowers at me.

"Light and dark fae can bend night and day to move around," Ivywood comments as she steps into the room out of nothing but light. "You shouldn't just rely on your shadow magic like a safety blanket. Light magic is the fastest and most untraceable way to translocate. We are taught how to simply call the light and jump into it with a single thought of where you want to go."

"Thanks—" I get cut off when Ambrose runs into the room and everyone turns to look at him.

"I sense a Titan nearby," he hurries to tell us, "and the academy defenses won't last long against it, nor am I any use in fighting them alone. Titans adsorb god magic, so I must insist we get the fuck out of here."

“Language,” Ivywood hisses. “God or not, you will behave and be respectful in my presence. However, I do agree with your statement.” She turns to me and nods. “Corvina, you must leave.”

“And go where? Do what?” I ask, walking up to her.

A loud crack sounds overhead as the floor shakes and slams me onto the tiles. The roof of the building is torn off, our defenses shattered by the Titan, and debris crashes around me. I cover my head and Pitch jumps over, blocking me from most of the wreckage. I roll onto my back, looking up through the dust and moonlight to see a man floating in the air, except he can’t be a man.

He’s the size of a giant and is completely naked other than a strip of black cloth hanging around his waist, hiding what I’m sure is equally as big underneath. On his incredibly muscular chest is a symbol that glows crimson and I’m sure I have seen it before. It takes me a second to realise it was one of the symbols on the painting Eva showed me of the Titans back at our father’s palace. I never in a million years thought I’d one day meet a titan, and now that I see him, I’d much rather introductions were not made. The guy is a monster.

Stretching his long arms out, palms down, the Titan slams his hands onto the ground. I scream as the floor shakes with such violence that it sends me flying into the air, only to be caught by Ivywood as Pitch is thrown away from me. The shaking doesn’t stop as I make my own wings hold me up, Ivywood nods once while the sounds of panicked shadowborns scream down below. I briefly see Pitch catch Jonah while Ambrose floats on a pure white cloud next to me.

Typical god, showing off, but I kinda want a cloud too.

“We are leaving now, Vina. The academy’s magic is nearly gone and nothing will stop him,” Ambrose says, grabbing my hand.

“Use the light. I will make a distraction,” Ivywood tells me. “You can call the crown and any of your friends into the light with only a thought, spiraling you all in the same place.” She bows her head once. “Long may the true queen live and rule.”

With that, Ivywood flies up to the Titan. Both of them stare each other down, and my heart aches for her. I may not have been her closest friend or known her that well, but she loved my father with all her heart, and she did protect the academy like she said she would.

Her voice speaks in my mind and tears well into my eyes.

"In the ever long night, you are the light."

Gods, I hope she's right. I close my eyes and do as Ivywood said. I call the light to my side, imagining all of my friends, and one more thing that's important to me. I feel the drain on my power like a blip. I open my eyes to see Ivywood scream as the Titan rips her body in half, causing the light to vanish, and I hold a hand to my mouth to smother my screams.

"All shadowborns will die on this night." The Titan's deep words echo around me as my light gets stronger and brighter.

"No, they will not," I bellow at him with a smirk, drawing his attention my way.

The Titan's glowing red eyes narrow on me. Closing my own eyes, I let myself fall into the light and I burst with power as I use the shadows to send every shadowborn to the human world. The academy might have fallen, but its queen will save them all.

Fuck the Titans.

Something wet slaps me on the cheek. I open my eyes to see the island where Ambrose was trapped for so many years. I sit up, all my guys, Ambrose, Sage, and David, and even Echo who's sitting on top of a familiar crown, sprawled on the beach around me.

"Your nose is bleeding. What did you do?" Zander asks, crawling across the stones to me as a wave of exhaustion rattles through my body. I wipe at my nose with the back of my hand. Zander rips the bottom of his shirt and dips it in the saltwater before holding it to my nose for me until I take over.

"Thanks," I say, and just then I notice that he's in his pajamas. Well, I know who did the night shift guard and slept today. Must have been one hell of a wake-up call.

Gage and Jonah talk quietly as they make sure we are alone, but they carefully watch me at the same time. Pitch is uncharacteristically silent.

"I saved everyone in the academy and sent them to random places across the human world," I tell them, and everyone goes silent as they stare at me in shock.

"That explains the nosebleed," Zander says. "You used an incredible amount of power to do that. You're fucking amazing, Corvina."

"While I agree that Vina is amazing, such power is impossible," Ambrose points out, staring at me. "No fae should have that kind of power. What exactly are you?"

I don't have an answer for him, and no one else does either.

Zander helps me stand up. We all stand around, wondering what our next move is. I need rest, and we need somewhere to hide.

"My sister has a secret house not too far from here. After what happened, she wanted to disappear," Jonah says, and my hand shakes in Zander's.

"We will go there," Pitch agrees before I can veto the idea. It's the first he's spoken since we arrived here.

Sage picks Echo and the crown up and walks over to me, placing her hand on my arm. "You look pale, are you sure you're okay?"

I almost humorlessly chuckle at her because I feel awful, but instead, I simply nod, clamping my hand tighter in Zander's grip. He kisses the side of my head as we turn and follow the others through the forest. Please, please don't let Jane remember me.

CHAPTER FIVE

Corvina

We reach the cottage by nightfall. Scattered leaves crunch under my boots as I step onto the path winding through the flowerbeds up to a small wooden porch. The moon reflects off the wind chimes rustling by the yellow door, and a strange sense of déjà vu creeps over me. I can't help but feel like I've been here before, but I have no recollection of it.

"What's up, Buzzie?" Sage bumps my shoulder with hers. "You look even paler since we got here."

I peel my gaze off the cottage and smile at her. "I just feel like I've been here before. Have we?"

Sage looks at the cottage and squints her pink eyes. After a moment, she shakes her head. "Nope. I have no memory of this place."

Neither do I, yet I can't shake the feeling that I have.

Zander and Jonah rush past us, elbowing each other in an attempt to get into the cottage first. Jonah wins and closes the door on Zander, who blasts it open with magic before marching after him.

"Come on," Sage whispers, tugging my arm. "I'm freezing my patootie off, and Jonah said there would be food."

Swallowing nervously, I let her take me into the cottage. The inside is small, warm and cosy. The fur rugs and the country-style furnishings remind me of my childhood home. Perhaps that's where the déjà vu is coming from. This cottage is so like the one I lived in for all of eight years. Except, the walls are covered in colourful artwork, and there are pots of paint and canvases on every possible surface. Clearly, Jane is an artist of

some sort, and she's good. I especially like the one of Professor Greyhorn dying a horrible and painful death above the mantelpiece.

"Jane, we're here," Zander calls, collapsing onto the sofa beside the fireplace. Echo flies over onto his lap. "Feed me. I'm tired."

I smile and drop down beside him, leaning my head on his shoulder. He kisses my head as Pitch and Ambrose duck through the front door, both going separate ways, presumably to check out our surroundings.

Meanwhile, Jonah rushes over to the pots bubbling away on a wood-burning stove in the kitchen. The heat from the fire and Zander's body is comforting, wrapping around me like a warm blanket. While Sage and David sit on the sofa beside us, for a blissful moment, I'm able to forget everything that's going on. If I close my eyes and focus really hard, I can almost pretend I'm back in my childhood home where it's Sunday and my mum's baking shortbread cookies for after the roast dinner.

It's the small things that make me think of my adoptive parents.

Adoptive parents…

They were more my parents than the king or queen of this world will ever be.

"I saw what happened and figured you'd come here," a female voice remarks, and I assume it's from our last-minute host. "There's only two beds and the couches so I'm afraid you'll all have to bunk…together…"

She trails off when she meets my gaze. Jane is every bit Jonah's sister, from her long silver hair curled over one shoulder, to her blue eyes. However, as soon as our eyes lock, she drops the blankets and a violent heat rushes into her face.

"Get out," she hisses through clenched teeth, pouncing onto the sofa. "Get the fuck out of my house!"

I let out a surprised scream as Jane hauls me off the sofa by my hair and drags me onto the floor. A white light blasts between us before I can even retaliate, knocking me flat onto my back. The air is kicked from my lungs and Gage, Pitch, Zander, and Sage help me to my feet. Across the room, Jonah pins Jane to his chest while Ambrose stands between us, the remnants of light magic disappearing into the palm of his hands.

"Let me go," Jane snarls, thrashing in Jonah's arms like a wild animal. "Let me go or I swear to Selena, I'll—"

"Just calm the fuck down!" Jonah shouts over his sister, gripping her tighter. "What the hell are you thinking?"

The adrenaline surging through me has my entire body shaking. It's not often I'm stunned into silence, but that's exactly the case here as I try to catch my breath. Turns out Jane does remember me.

"How *dare* you lift a hand to our future queen!" Pitch stands in front of me, a dark menacing aura glowing off him.

"Pitch, it's okay," I whisper, reaching for his hand. "I'm fine."

Dark magic gathers around him and the fear flashing in Jane's eyes is as palpable as the fear gathering inside of me. I've never seen Pitch so angry before. It's both sexy and terrifying at the same time.

"There will be no more bloodshed." Ambrose holds out his hands again, providing the only barrier between Jane and Pitch. "Jane Vincent, you will explain yourself."

"And you will all leave my fucking house," comes her scathing reply. Craning her neck to glare at Jonah, she hisses, "Do you even know who that is?"

Jonah is panting as he looks at me. "Corvina Charles… She's who I've been telling you about."

"*No*!" Jane shakes her head and points at me. "She's the one who killed our parents and brother. She set the fire!"

Jonah pales at the words, his eyes narrowing on my face. "Is this true?"

"I'm sorry," I choke out, tears slipping from my lashes. "I didn't know what would happen when I—"

"Oh, she didn't *know*," Jane scoffs, shrugging Jonah off and stepping towards me. Ambrose blocks her path so she chooses to sneer around him. "You destroyed our god damn lives and you think an apology will make up for it? You deserve everything that's coming your way, you fucking murderer!"

Gods, I should have known this would happen.

Jonah storms out of the cottage, and I don't hesitate when I run after him. Branches snag my clothes as I stumble through the forest, the cold air stinging my cheeks. He's just a shadow darting between the trees, visible only when the moonlight touches him. He stops in the middle of a clearing and turns to me, his whole body bathed in the pale light. The sobs I've been holding back burst out when I see the tears falling from his eyes.

"J-Jonah," I whisper his name brokenly. "I know I don't deserve forgiveness… I had no idea… If I had known what would happen when I became shadowborn, I would never have… "

He marches over to me, his hands clenched by his side, and I hold my breath, closing my eyes. When Jonah claims my mouth with his, it takes my breath away. Kissing me is the last thing I expected him to do. He slams me against the tree and wraps my legs around his waist, his fingers digging into my jaw. There's a distinctive fury in the way he's touching me, but there's also tenderness; every brush of his lips is hard and soft, hateful, and yet loving.

I snag his bottom lip between my teeth and he growls, stepping back. He uses my cloak as a blanket and sets me on the ground. Pulling my shirt off, he leaves a trail of kisses down my neck and over my breasts before gently biting my nipple. I gasp and arch my spine, the cool night air sending a shiver through me as it caresses my skin.

"Fuck, you're beautiful, Vina," he whispers, moving his lips down. He nibbles and kisses every inch of me until he reaches my inner thighs. I part my legs and close my eyes, moaning when his mouth lands on my clit. He swirls and flicks his tongue and spreads my lips with his fingers. When I feel his hot breath on me and hear him inhaling my scent, I open my eyes and blush down at him. He only grins and kisses me before sliding a finger into my wet pussy. I bite my lip, watching as he circles my clit with his tongue and thrusts another finger in.

"Oh, gods!" I dig my fingers into the earth and look up at the moon, the pressure already unbearable. With Jonah's tongue on my clit and his fingers torturing my sweet spot, it's all too much. "Jonah, I'm… I'm—-"

My orgasm explodes and I cum onto Jonah's face, my moans turning into cries of ecstasy. Jonah savors me like I'm the sweetest nectar in the world before he puts his arms by my head and his cock between my legs. The look on his face when he fills me for the first time is the most erotic thing I have ever seen. His eyes dip over and I clench around his cock, still shaking from the aftershocks of my orgasm but eager for more.

I dig my fingernails into his shoulders as Jonah moans in my ear. His groans are so fucking sexy that they have me climbing again, chasing another shattering orgasm. Gods, I hope that I do. From Jonah's thrusts and pants alone, I know that he's close, and I wrap my legs tightly around him, pulling his cock deeper with each thrust. Soon he's spilling into me and I'm cumming onto his cock while seizing his lips into a ravenous embrace.

We stay like that for a long moment, the two of us tethered and our bodies entwined. Jonah looks down at me, his cheeks flushed and pupils

dilated with lust, and gods, he's sexy.

"I've wanted to do that since the first day I met you," he whispers, leaning down to kiss me on the lips, the touch hard and passionate.

"Me too," I say against his lips, wrapping my arms around his neck.

Jonah's mouth pulls into a wicked grin. "Clean up after dinner. I want to be inside of you for as long as possible."

I blush at the command but damn, it's hot. I can only nod as he pulls out of me and reaches for my panties. He slides them up my legs and I lift my hips as he maneuvers them around my waist. The feeling of his cum inside me is so deeply erotic that my breath hitches and I squeeze my thighs together before Jonah helps me onto my feet.

While the two of us adjust our clothes, I cast a glance around the clearing to see where we are. A sharp pang stabs me in the chest. No fucking way. Of all places, this is where Jane lives nearby? It's like the universe is just fucking with me for the fun of it now. My fingers tremble as I do the last of my buttons and smooth a hand down my skirt. I try to school my features not to alarm Jonah, but he must sense my unease as he gently turns me around to face him, and I hurriedly blink my tears away.

"What's wrong?" he whispers, wiping a tear from my cheek with his thumb.

I take a deep breath and nod at the well. "That's where I died and became a shadowborn." A cold breeze drifts through the trees and I rub the chill from my arms. This explains why the cottage felt so familiar to me; I remember passing it the night I followed Pitch into the forest. "Do you remember the final round of last year's Tryouts?"

"The Chamber of Fears," Jonah answers. "I watched my sister die."

"And I was here with this well. I couldn't have faced it without your help. I couldn't have destroyed it."

He looks over my shoulder at the well, his eyebrows knitting together. "Do you remember what I said to you?"

I grin at him, resting my palms on his chest. "You said I'm Corvina Fucking Charles, the most bad ass woman you'd ever met."

Jonah chuckles and wraps his arms around me. "And I wasn't wrong." He tucks my head under his chin and kisses my hair, his heart pounding against my ear. "I forgive you, Corvina."

"I don't deserve to be forgiven," I mumble into his chest.

“You were just a kid,” he says. “You had no control over your powers just like the rest of us didn’t.”

I close my eyes, my tears soaking through his shirt. “I wish I never jumped into that stupid well.”

“We all wish at times we never became a shadowborn.” Jonah pulls me back and frowns at me. “But if you hadn’t, we’d never have met, and as much as you’re a pain in the ass, you’re *my* pain in the ass.”

I chuckle, my cheeks heating up. “Are you saying that you love me, Mr Vincent?”

His reply is to kiss me, and I smile against his lips. This is the only forgiveness I will ever need.

CHAPTER SIX

Corvina

When we go back to the cottage, we find David sitting on the porch. Jonah lets go of my hand and enters the cottage first, his shoulders tensing as he prepares to confront his sister. I don't think I'll ever stop feeling guilty for the pain I've caused them both. While Jonah may have forgiven me, I highly doubt his sister ever will, and I don't blame her.

"She finally calmed down," David says, jutting his chin over his shoulder. "Sage may or may not have knocked some sense into her."

"Is Sage all right?" I ask, my heart stuttering with concern. I love that Sage always has my back but I also hate the thought of pissing Jane off even more. At the end of the day, I'm the one in the wrong, not her. Jane doesn't deserve to get hurt even if my head still aches, and I'm pretty sure she pulled out a few clumps of my hair.

"It's Sage we're talking about." David takes a drink from his flask, the edge of his lips twitching. "Of course she is."

Chuckling under my breath, I enter the cottage to find everyone gathered around the table. Jane is in the kitchen behind them, preparing dinner, and her eyes never leave me while Jonah whispers in her ear. With obvious reluctance, she sets the soup bowls down on the table and follows him up the stairs. I sigh and sit down between Gage and Pitch, trying desperately hard not to focus on Jonah's cum making my panties wet.

"So," Zander starts, tucking his hands behind his head and glancing around the table. "What's the plan?"

“We can’t stay here forever,” Gage sighs, crossing over his arms. “We need allies.”

Zander nods. “Maybe King Chiron can be persuaded.”

“Persuaded?” I repeat, looking between them. “What do you mean?”

“Ever since King Ares ascended the *Throne of Luna*, Chiron has remained passive to our wars,” Pitch explains. “He doesn’t involve himself in fae business anymore. He cares only for his own kingdom.”

“Sounds like they’re a bunch of hermits,” Sage mutters across from me, rolling her eyes. “Pass. We need more shadowborns on our side. Plus, they’re more powerful.”

Zander nods and unclasps his hands. “Then we go to the Black Harbour.”

“Is the training arena still there?” Ambrose inquires, narrowing his eyes in contemplation.

“I believe so,” David answers. “I had a former student who moved there a few weeks ago.”

As soon as David finishes talking, Jonah and his sister climb down the stairs. For a long, strained moment, everyone falls quiet as a tense silence drifts between us. Jonah slumps into one of the chairs at the table while Jane starts pouring homemade soup into ceramic bowls.

“What is the training arena?” I ask, trying to diffuse the tension.

“It’s where shadowborns who are training to become wardens go,” Pitch tells me. “The Black Harbour alone has more shadowborns than the academy.”

“Then we should go there,” I say, almost suggesting we leave now until I see how noticeably exhausted everyone looks. “Once we’ve had some food and rest.”

Jonah nods and watches his sister place a bowl in front of everyone. His eyes narrow on her when she sets one in front of me. To my surprise, she doesn’t deliberately spill it like I did with Eva, and I have to applaud her restraint; I deserve more than hot soup poured over me. I wonder what Jonah said to calm her down.

“Titans prefer to rest during the day, so it’s better you leave in the morning,” Jane says, her voice quiet. She reaches for a jug of water and starts filling our glasses. “Hurry up and eat before the broth gets cold.”

The broth is a thick, chunky vegetable soup that’s delicious and filling, but the room stays super tense and awkward which makes it hard to enjoy.

When we're finally done eating, Jonah helps Jane clean up when there's a knock on the door.

Jane glares at her brother. "If you've brought my ex here just to piss me off, even more, I will end you."

"Don't look at me." He dumps the bowls in the sink and winks over his shoulder at me. "The only people I care about are already here."

My cheeks heat up and a grin slides onto my lips as Pitch stands from the table and walks over to the door. A gust of cool air sweeps into the room and all eyes turn to see who the visitor is. The air catches in my throat when Queen Narah, covered in blood, collapses into Pitch's arms.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Corvina

"The queen looks weak," Ambrose states from behind me as I lean against the door, looking into the bedroom where my mother sleeps peacefully. He's once again right. Narah doesn't look healthy, and I fear she won't for a long time. Ambrose has done his best to heal her, but some dark magic cannot be undone so easily. Especially if not even the Dark Fae Queen can erase it.

Despite everything she has done, and how angry I am at her, I want to be near while she heals. I want to find out what happened and make sure she's okay. Ambrose steps closer to me, so close I can feel the heat from his body like a comforting blanket on a cold night.

"My own mother was cold and indifferent towards me for as long as I can remember," he whispers. "It wasn't her fault. I was a child she never wanted to exist. If I had a mother who loved and cared for me as yours does, I would give her a chance to explain herself."

"But does my mother truly care for me?" I peel my gaze off her and frown at him. "She betrayed me, killed my father, and took over his kingdom. She also made Eva, a complete psychopath, her heir. Those aren't the actions of someone who cares about me or even sees me as their daughter. I'm beginning to think that she never saw me as her daughter."

He pauses and looks at my mother. "If that were the case, Vina, she would not have sought you out."

Once again, Ambrose has a point. *My wise old owl.*

“Ambrose, why did you save me all those years ago?” I ask, genuinely curious to hear his answer.

He doesn’t even hesitate. “I saw a young girl making a foolish decision that I knew she would regret the second she jumped. But more than that, I saw a soul worth saving, and you know what?” He looks back at me. “I was right. Whatever is in your soul, no matter how powerful, is going to save this world from the mistakes of our past.”

“I never said thank you,” I tell him and take his hand in mine, squeezing tightly. “Thank you. I will always be your friend, Ambrose, until my death.”

“Which won’t be anytime soon,” Ambrose says with a meaningful stare. This conversation has been a long time coming for both of us. “Magic keeps a god alive for eternity, and with the magic in your soul, Corvina, how long do you think you will live at my side?”

“Immorality is not promised to anyone,” I whisper. “My mother is powerful and yet look at her. Not even royals can live as long as a god. I don’t think they’re supposed to.”

Ambrose lifts our joined hands and softly kisses the back of my hand before letting go. He turns and walks away, and I let him leave. I can’t be what he needs in his life, but I will be his friend for a very long time, forever owing him a debt I feel cannot be repaid.

I head to my mother’s side, pulling a wooden chair over and sitting next to her in the silence of the room. This part of the Enchanted Forest is all but silent, the only noise to disturb the peace is the birds chirping away. I can hardly look at Narah like this, vulnerable and on the verge of death. It almost doesn’t seem like she’s real anymore. Her black hair is spread around the pillow, her pale skin is clammy and cold to touch. She is still enchantingly beautiful but the magic used against her has corrupted her soul, and I can feel it. I nearly jump when she opens her eyes, blinking a few times before turning her head to me.

“Corvina, you’re here,” she whispers, her voice hoarse. “So many years I fell asleep wishing you were there when I woke but you never were.”

Gritting my teeth, I push away her emotional blackmail shit. “Don’t expect me to play the doting daughter card when you fucked up the loving mother card. You killed Ulric!”

“He deserved it, and I will never be sorry for his death. He. Stole. My. Child.” She bites out every word, looking exhausted from doing so. I can’t imagine her pain at having her baby stolen, and while I understand it, I

don't need to like it. One wrong doesn't make a right and siding with Eva is just totally unthinkable.

"And Eva?" I question, raising an eyebrow. "My dear sweet sister, who has crashed her train into crazy-ass-town?"

Narah winces and lifts a hand to her stomach. "I wanted the *Throne of Helios* to fall in ruins," she whispers, tears glazing her long lashes. "I wanted every single Light Fae, including Eva, to despise their king because of what he did, and for the Dark Fae to finally rule as they should. Eva promised me all of this even when I saw her heart turn black. I wasn't aware who Ronan was. When I was told, I confronted her, but she would not back down. Eva has some strange desire to see Ronan kill you."

"It's because he was my friend," I all but growl. "Eva wants my heart turned cold before I die. It's no fun just to kill me."

"Yes, that is what I feared. You see, Eva was never going to be my heir. I simply wanted to use her to destroy her father and bring down his kingdom. However, last night I was betrayed by one of my former lovers who told her of my intentions. Eva sent the Titans and her army to attack my kingdom out of sheer spite." Narah's pale lips bear back into a snarl, "She has lost all control and has since gone mad with power! She has even taken over Kyllaros. Prince Elias has fled to the mountains, but I fear his father has been killed. Not even the Deadlands are safe anymore."

"By Selena! You mean, all the kingdoms have fallen?" I question in horror. That means nowhere is safe apart from Draconia. But only those with dragon blood can go into that kingdom. It isn't a place for shadowborns or normal fae.

Narah nods weakly. "I used the last of my magic to lock down my castle with some of our people inside. It's an ancient spell known only to Dark Fae royals to protect the castle. For now, the Titans will struggle to get inside, but the magic of Selena can only hold the castle up for so long," she warns me. "I made a mistake but I will fix it if…if you will help me, Corvina?"

"How could I possibly trust you?" I demand, shaking my head.

Narah looks away at the window and breathes in, wincing again. "I have done much wrong in my life, so much that the damage is beyond repair, but you, Corvina, are my one true act. You may not trust me, but please…please know that I do love you, and I will save the kingdom for you. I swear on Selena, I will never betray you again, Corvina."

I swallow the lump in my throat. I'm still not sure about trusting her, but she's the only ally we have right now.

"Why did you decide to have me?" I ask quietly. "You must have known a child with Ulric would have never been yours alone."

"I acquired a mirror that told me of a prophecy," she whispers and speaks into my mind, probably too weak to say it out loud:

"One born of light and dark.
Royal down to the last drop.
Blue of hair, silver as night.
Your child will be the most powerful in the ever
long night."

I don't say anything as I remember Ivywood saying something similar about me being the light in the ever long night. I hate riddles, especially when they suggest I am somehow going to pull a rabbit out of my butt and save the Forest from frigging Titans. Looking back at Narah, who is my flesh and blood despite her mistakes, I know I don't have a choice but to trust her. I need help. There is zero chance I can do this on my own. If all three kingdoms have fallen, Narah is the only person who is powerful enough to help me stop the Titans.

"I always did love the colour blue," I say lamely, and she just laughs and reaches for my hand.

I let her hold me as we try to put together the cracked mirror of our relationship, just long enough to save the world.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Corvina

"Do you trust her?"

I turn my gaze from Zander to the full moon. "I don't know, Zee-Zee. Should I trust her?"

He chuckles at the nickname and takes my hand in his, the two of us stargazing in the meadow. The cool air against my freshly washed skin and the sounds of the forest are comforting as we watch the night sky. Even as a child, I have always loved the moon and stars. They remind me that no matter where I am, I'm never alone, and now I know that I never was; Selena was always there for me. Would she trust my mother?

When the monsters first came to the forest, she didn't turn them away as Danica did. She embraced them for who they were and welcomed them into her kingdom because she knew they deserved a second chance. If Jonah was able to forgive me for what I did, I should be able to forgive my mother, at least until the kingdoms are saved.

"I want to trust her," I answer honestly. "I'm just scared this is another trap."

"You have every right to be scared, but…" He trails off and I turn to look at him, transfixed by the way the moon bathes his skin in an ethereal glow.

"But what?" I probe him.

"Narah nearly died, right? If this was a trap, I don't think she'd go so far as to kill herself. She cares too much about her precious throne to do that."

"She wanted to destroy King Ulric's throne, not hers," I say in agreement. "I know how much Narah loves being the Dark Fae Queen. She'd never give the Throne of Luna up willingly."

"Which means it must have been taken from her," he counters, turning his gaze skyward again. "Narah is a lot of things—cold, calculating, manipulative—but she's not reckless like Eva. Every decision Narah has ever made was for her kingdom, and for you."

"Me?" I repeat quietly, my chest tightening.

"She started the war for you, didn't she?"

"Yes."

He reaches out and tucks my damp hair behind my ear. "And she came to you for help despite knowing that you might turn her away and leave her to die?"

"Yeah, she did."

"It's because she loves you. I don't think she would have come here if she didn't want to see you one last time. Don't get me wrong, she's a fucked up, unstable mess who needs to have some sessions with Gage, but I do think she cares for you in her own way."

I nod, struggling to find the correct response. I never thought about it all like that. Narah did come here, even though she was on the verge of dying. She was potentially using the last moments of her life to ask for my help and forgiveness. Ambrose and Zander are right: Queen Narah sought me out of all the people she could've gone to. Surely that must account for something?

"You know, I'm really lucky I have you all in my life," I tell Zander.

He looks at me again, arching a brow. "And by all you mean me?"

I swat his hand playfully, grinning at him. "Seriously though. Ever since I met you guys, I've been able to face things I never in my wildest dreams thought I was strong enough to face. I don't know what I'd do without you all. It's like you saved me from the darkness—from myself."

Zander lifts my hand and kisses me. "We're the lucky ones, Vina," he whispers in a low, sexy voice. "Without you, neither of us would have a purpose. You are the one who saved us."

His words make my heart soar, and I roll on top of him, pressing my lips to his. He has no idea the strength he's just given me by saying that. Now I feel ready to face the world again, but more than that, I feel ready to give my mother a second chance.

Everyone deserves forgiveness, right? Even a Dark Fae Queen.

CHAPTER NINE

Corvina

"Has anyone heard of the legend of the Zorya artifacts?" Ambrose randomly asks, breaking the tension stretching between us over breakfast.

Thank the gods!

Breakfast has been just as awkward, if not more so, than dinner. Jane and Jonah sit together, quietly talking between themselves, Zander is on my left side and Pitch on my other. Gage is next to my mother and Pitch, and the awkwardness between them all makes everyone unbearably tense. I'm almost thankful for Ambrose's comment as it helps to break up the tension. Before anyone can answer, Sage and David, who were sitting on the sofa on the other side of the room, stand and join us at the table.

"I once read an ancient script about them but there wasn't much known," Sage says. "The Zorya artifacts are only really brought up in the old fae rhyme sung to children."

"I know it," Pitch says, glancing at Narah. I wonder if she sang him rhymes as a baby, or even played with him as a child. She doesn't look at Pitch like she does at me, but the queen is hard to read at the best of times, and I know that deep down, she does think of him as a son. It's weird to think I'm shacking up with my stepbrother. Adoptive brother?

Yep, we are a weird-ass family.

Just as I think that I look over to see Echo hovering in the air above Jane's head, eating crackers. The crumbs falling from his mouth land in Jane's hair, covered in Echo's drool. So gross but my lips twitch. Narah

chuckles and everyone turns to look at her. Seeing her still so weak and injured is surprisingly hard. It took all her energy to walk down the stairs. She really was on the brink of death last night. Until we have a concrete plan, and she's better, we're stuck in this awkward cottage. Pitch singing softly beside me snaps me out of my thoughts.

"The fae fall to the old gods,
the fae shall not heed.
The old gods breed destruction, so thou the fae may breathe.
In the snowy waters,
lies a sword of tears.
In the high up mountains,
shall the mirror be feared.
In the darkest waters,
keeps the necklace of daughters.
The old gods have fallen, the fae shall be freed."

Gods, that's a scary rhyme to sing to kids. But as Pitch sings it, I get goosebumps and a flicker of familiarity about the rhyme. I link my hand with Pitch's under the table and I look up at Ambrose who leans against Jonah's chair. He appears almost lost in thought as he stares down at the floor. I wonder if he sang the same rhyme to his son before he was taken.

"What exactly are the artifacts?" Zander asks.

Narah straightens up shakily in her chair. "I had the mirror… It showed me Corvina before she was conceived, but it could only grant one vision of the future before it was destroyed. It was said to be made with the blood of a thousand dead fae, and to be a weapon against the gods," Narah says, her voice as unstable as she looks.

By Selena, Eva has ruined her. What did she do? I never thought I'd see the Dark Fae Queen's spirit wounded like this.

Ambrose narrows his eyes on her. "It makes sense now—why Corvina is so powerful. They commanded her existence."

“What?” I say for everyone.

“The artifacts were indeed used against the gods, and the mirror could only be used by one person at one time. It then destroys itself and goes back to its home, waiting for the next person to use it,” Ambrose coldly states. “The mirror, the sword, and the necklace are the only weapons powerful enough to injure the gods since it’s their blood-filled magic that created them.”

“Why would the gods create weapons to make them vulnerable?” Sage asks, taking the words straight from my mouth.

“They were to be used against each other,” Ambrose explains, “but the artifacts soon had other ideas. You see, the Zorya artifacts are alive. They think for themselves, they want for themselves. Dangerous magic,” Ambrose all but growls and Narah nods, her features turning paler. “The mirror wanted Corvina alive so it tempted the queen with the prophecy, knowing it would come true. Now I believe the artifacts are our only hope in the coming war.”

“You want to use the mirror?” I question. “How is a vision of the future going to help us?”

“It won’t,” Ambrose agrees, “but the Sword of Tears is powerful and deadly. It will boost your power and make you unstoppable and strong. Strong enough to kill Titans and send them back to their cage.”

“Why can’t one of us use it? Not Corvina,” Pitch demands, his arms crossed tightly.

Ambrose shrugs. “There is a test for the sword like there is for the mirror and the necklace.”

“This sounds like some sword in the stone bullshit,” Sage grumbles and I grin at her.

Narah says quietly, “The mirror demanded many lives and talked to me when I was close to its hiding place. It said only royals deserve to communicate with it.”

Great. Talking mirrors and swords. Just what we need.

“I’m a royal as well, therefore I should be able to get the sword,” Pitch argues and though Ambrose nods, his eyes stay on mine. We both know that the sword isn’t going to want Pitch when I’m there. Dammit.

“Where is this sword said to be?” Gage asks, the muscles working hard in his face. He’s not pleased about this situation either. I can’t really blame him. It seems to always be me who gets lumped with these quests.

“Near the dragon kingdom, on the edge of their sea,” Ambrose answers, “the water looks flat and waveless even though the ocean around it moves. You can’t miss it. It’s about a day or so’s walk from here if we aren’t interrupted on the way.”

“We should pack and leave,” Jonah interrupts and looks at Jane. “Will you watch the queen while she continues to heal?”

“Yes,” Jane agrees, her eyes flickering to me. “But do not get yourself killed for anyone.”

I avert my gaze. I won’t be letting anyone die for me, especially not those I love.

I turn to Sage and David, asking them, “Will you stay with Jane and Narah? And Echo? I don’t think—” I halt as Echo lands on my shoulder, his big doe eyes staring at me, making me feel guilty for leaving him behind. “Fine. You can come too, Echo.”

I’m sure he grins at me but Sage catches my attention.

“We’ll stay. I’m still weak myself and need to rest,” Sage says, taking David’s hand and smiling at him. She looks back at me. “But be careful, okay? Don’t get lost in the magic. It will tempt you.”

“And I will tempt Corvina back to her home,” Pitch growls, rising from the table. “No magic is going to steal her from me.”

Zander, Gage, and Jonah look at me all at once with worry, but we all know there isn’t really a choice anymore. We get the sword, or we die at Eva’s hand. Personally, I’d prefer to go with the talking sword.

Once we’re packed and ready to go, Sage pulls me into a suffocating embrace. David has to pry her away from me as I struggle to breathe. Dang, Sage’s hugs have gotten stronger since she became a fae.

“Promise me you’ll come back in one piece, Buzzie?”

“I promise. And you’ll promise not to worry?”

“But I never worry.” She glares playfully at me. “Ever.”

“You’re always worrying,” David comments as he tugs her into his arms. “My little worrywart.”

Sage crosses her arms stubbornly. “I don’t worry. I obsessively overanalyse every minuscule detail until I reach a satisfactory conclusion.”

“Because that isn’t worrying at all,” I hear David mutter as I turn to face Narah.

She takes a deep breath and visibly steels herself. “Make haste, Corvina, and stay in the shadows.” Despite her bravado, the fear in her voice is mirrored within her weary eyes.

An unexpected lump swells in my throat as I stare at her. Do I bow or hug her? It’s not like we’re exactly close, but when it comes down to it, I am worried about her. She is my birth mother at the end of the day, and if things go wrong out there, this may be the last time I ever see her.

Before I can make a decision, Narah takes me into her arms. She whispers something in my ear that I struggle to catch. When she pulls back and holds me at arm’s length, her eyes are pure black and the smell of dark magic lingers in the air.

“It’s just a protection spell,” she explains, her eyes turning back to their original colour. “Our blood binds our magic. Use it should you need to. It will not affect me.”

I blink at her in surprise, touched by her concern. “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

“Perhaps when this is all over, you might call me mother, and truly mean it this time.” She smiles at me, tears glazing her lashes. “I would like that very much if it is something you’d dare consider.”

This time, words fail me and I can only nod and smile at her before moving on to the last person.

Jane.

She opened up her home to me in spite of everything. I don’t ever see us being friends, but I owe her my gratitude and will remain in her debt for the rest of my life. I part my lips to say thank you but Jane rolls her eyes and I clamp my jaw shut.

“Just go,” she says, looking away, “and keep my brother alive.”

Well, that was pleasantly awkward.

I nod and lift my cloak hood over my head. With a backwards glance at my best friend and mother, I follow the guys out of the cottage. Echo flies

off Zander's shoulder and into my arms as we walk down the path. I hug and kiss Echo, grateful for his affection.

"All things considered," Zander says, "that went rather well."

"You could've cut the tension with a knife," I counter dryly.

He chuckles. "True. But one thing's for sure, Jane's starting to like you."

I gawk at him. "Really? She could've fooled me."

His arm falls around my waist. "Give her time. I think Echo's glad to be back outside."

Echo's wings vibrate against my arm and one of his legs twitch like a dog as I rub his belly. Zander chuckles and boops him on the nose. Echo sneezes a puff of smoke that I fear will set the ground on fire. But then I remember his collar and how it's helping to keep control of his magic. I still hate the idea of collaring him, which is why, when Zander isn't around, I always take it off.

"Stay back," Ambrose warns ahead of us. "There's something dark nearby."

"Is it a monster?" I ask, and Echo squeaks frantically in my ear, his fur standing on edge. "Echo seems to think it is. Perfect. Just what we need."

"He wants to help us," Pitch says, nodding at Echo. "Take the collar off and see what he does. If anything can fight off another dark creature of Zorya, it's a Shade. Those things are lethal."

"And if Echo fails," Jonah adds with a grin, flexing his biceps, "we've always got these guns to fall back on. Never failed me yet."

"Yeah, right," Pitch grumbles, summoning a black fireball just in case.

I would laugh at Jonah if not for the monster about to kill us.

Putting Echo on the ground, I take off his collar and he immediately flies into the shadows. When we reach him, he's growling at what can only be described as a furry stegosaurus with green jagged spikes running down its spine to the tip of its tail.

The creature roars and stomps its hooved-foot into the soil. Now that I know what Shades are capable of, I'm not surprised when Echo mimics the creature. He turns into a similar version only bigger and fluffier and bright pink.

Oh my gosh, he looks so adorable and yet terrifying at the same time.

Echo charges after the creature. That is when I see how considerably taller Echo is. He swipes his tail and the spikes attached to the end shoot out

like daggers into the creature's skull. It lets out a pained roar, shaking its own tail, but it isn't as effective as Echo's. *Aw, diddums*.

With a loud popping noise, Echo transforms into an enormous pink rabbit whose floppy ears brush the tip of the trees. I press a hand to my mouth to smother my giggle, but it escapes when Echo leans forward and eats the monster in one gulp. He sits back and lets out a deafening burp that sails around us like a gust of wind, lifting my hair. My giggle turns into aching laughter that hurts my stomach.

Transforming back into his original form, Echo flies back over and lands at our feet, looking positively delighted with himself. Zander bends down and scratches him on the head.

"It's official. Pink is definitely Echo's favourite colour," he says.

Tears stream down my face from laughing so hard. I really needed this after everything that's been going on. I feel as though a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. With Echo at my side, I pity any monster, god, or fae that stands in my way now.

CHAPTER TEN

Corvina

"This will do for the night," Zander suggests, patting Ambrose on the back. "Good find, man."

"If there's one thing I'm familiar with, it's empty dark caves."

The two of them grin at each other like long lost friends while Pitch merely glares at them. Jonah and Gage couldn't care less as they start investigating the cave and I follow them in, Zander and Ambrose's laughter bellowing behind me. Echo jumps onto my shoulder, purring and rubbing his head against mine as the cave grows increasingly dark.

I clap my hands together, whispering a spell under my breath. Three magical spheres float into the air above us, spinning ever so softly to cast light around the cavern. The sleet walls narrow towards the top, and at the back is a small pool of water we can use to drink. My aching feet demand that I sit down since we've been walking all day. I find a rock near the water and rest for a while as the guys make plans to get wood for a fire and cook some food. Above the water is a tiny tunnel shuttered in darkness. Most likely I could just manage to fit into it. Before I can blink, Echo flies into it.

"Echo, no—you don't know where it goes!" I chase after him, using my wings to fly over to the tunnel.

"Vina, where are you going?" Pitch shouts as I stare down the tunnel.

"Echo went on an adventure. I'll get him and come back," I tell my guys, each of them staring up at me.

Gage mutters a spell under his breath and then he runs, jumping in the air, and magic pushes him higher than a normal jump would until he lands

next to me on the rock.

"Need a sidekick?" He grins at me.

I chuckle and get down on my hands and knees. Halfway through the tunnel, I notice a soft pink light from the other side, shining brighter than the light I made. Gage and I spend a good ten minutes crawling through the tunnel. Dirt covers and sticks to my hands as I push myself through the other end and nearly gasp at the sight. A tiny room lays on the other side of the tunnel and every inch of it is covered in glowing pink flowers. Petals float around me as I walk into the middle of the room, staring around in awe. This place is truly beautiful. I have to take some flowers for Sage, she would love them. They match her hair and eyes.

A memory of a fae history book Sage once read comes to mind. I'm sure they said caverns around the Enchanted Forest were blessed with eternal flowers and only a fae couple in love could find them. I wonder if this is one of these places as I swoop down to grab some of the flowers.

A hand cups my cheek and I look up to see Gage in front of me before he kisses me. I vaguely spot Echo flying back through the tunnel, returning to the others, but Gage has my full attention now.

Wordlessly both of us tug at each other's clothes, dropping them onto the floor until we are both naked and pressed against each other. Gage picks me up and lies me down on the soft ground, covering my body with his. I roll us over and start kissing down his chest to his stomach and finally to his cock. Running my tongue over the tip, he groans and there is just something so sexy about being in control, having all the power, and I've missed being alone with Gage.

Slowly, I take all of Gage's cock into my mouth, swirling my tongue around him as I go. The deep rumble of his chest turns me on and I flick my tongue over his slit, making him gasp in pleasure.

After only a few seconds, Gage has had enough and effortlessly pulls me up on top of him, still leaving me in control. Positioned perfectly, I easily slide down onto his cock and incredible pleasure overtakes me as he fills me. I roll my hips, once, twice, and again and again as his cock hits just the right place inside of me. By Selena, Gage was made for me. There's no doubt in my mind.

His thumb finds my clit and I drop my head back as the pleasure builds up. I'm inches away from coming and that's when I notice we're flying in the air. My wings flutter hard behind my back and Gage leans up, kissing

my lips as we literally have sex in the air. The danger and the incredible feeling of Gage inside me sends me spiraling into an orgasm and Gage comes with me, kissing me hard at the same time. We both crash to the flower bed as I forget to keep flying and I can't help but laugh as I sit up and Gage laughs with me.

"Maybe we need to practice that one a little more," Gage suggests, picking me up and sitting me on his lap, his cock still hard against me.

I grin and kiss him. Oh, hell yes we can practice this again. And again. And fuck it, again. I couldn't think of a more beautiful place to do it.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Corvina

The usual cold air from the Enchanted Forest has been replaced by the smell of the sea. With every breath, I taste the salt from the water. The trees here look healthier, brushed away from the seafront, and sand mixes in with the fallen leaves that crunch under my feet. Echo flies in circles above Zander, happily floating away on his back. Pitch squeezes my hand tightly and I smile up at him.

"Remember that time we went to Devon?" he asks, and a fond smile tilts my lips up. It's one of my favourite memories.

"Everyone thought you were a mad kid talking to yourself."

I snort in laughter. "I will never forget the Keeper's face when she found me talking to you on the beach. For years, she really did think I was insane."

"When this is all over, I'm taking you to the beach and I'm fucking you on it," Pitch declares like it's a done deal, and every inch of me is completely on board with this plan.

It was three years after the beach that Pitch first kissed me, and the memory stays glued to my memory even to this day. Kissing your soulmate feels like coming home. It's a feeling I'll never get tired of.

"We're here!" Jonah shouts back to us from the front of the group.

I rush to his side, staring out at the rolling sea stretching before us. Ambrose bumps my shoulder, a big smile on his face. He was right that we'd reach our destination within a day. Right in the centre of the glistening

green sea is the mountain the dragons live on, and as we stare, at least five dragons fly out of the water and around the mountain in a clear formation.

"Is it true that only people with dragon blood can go into the city?" I question, turning to Zander. His eyes lock onto mine as he knows what I need to ask him.

"Ask it," he mutters. "I know you're dying to."

"Zander, I need my uncle to help win this war. Even when I have the sword, I don't have an army, and the only army left is his. I can't go to him and ask, but you can for me. Will you?"

I hate asking this of him.

I hate that it has to be Zander since all he's ever done is hide from his dragon side.

When Zander grits his teeth and turns from me, I add hurriedly, "But I understand if you can't. I won't force you to or guilt you into it. I just know we need help, and he'd be a good ally." I turn to my other guys. "Can you leave us alone for a moment?"

Jonah, Gage, Pitch, and Ambrose awkwardly look between us before nodding and heading into the forest. Echo flies after them. I step closer to Zander, wrapping my arms around his waist. "You're braver than you know, Zee-Zee. I would never ask this from you if I didn't know you could do it."

His silence and the fact he doesn't laugh at my nickname makes me worry. Maybe I pushed too far by asking this of him?

"I've never belonged to the dragons or the magics of this world, Vina," he whispers, his hand cupping my cheek and lifting my head at the same time. I almost gasp when I see his dragon-like eyes glowing as he looks down at me. "But I belong to you and you are my mate. For you, I will go there and demand help."

I lean into his hand. "Tell them you're my mate and will help lead the fae courts. Tell them we offer peace and much more in return for this debt," I softly say. "And tell my uncle that if he hurts you and hides away in his mountain while his family needs him, I will burn the mountain down and destroy his kingdom if it's the last thing I ever do."

"Damn, you can be scary."

We both chuckle for a moment before he brings my lips to his. The kiss is soft—a goodbye, for now, that doesn't need words. It hurts to step back from him knowing I'm sending him into danger, but it has to be done.

Zander runs across the beach, through the shallow water and jumps into the sea, diving headfirst into the water.

I run to the edge of the beach, letting the waves brush my feet as I wait for Zander to come back up. Even though I'm well aware he's part dragon, and like all dragons, can breathe underwater, it's still hard to wait for him. Just when I start to wonder if he's swimming his ass to the city, a massive dragon jumps out of the sea, water glistening on his white scales and his yellow eyes meet mine.

Zander.

His beautiful dragon spins in the air, shaking off the water, and then flies straight for the city without stopping once.

Good luck.

An icy chill creeps over me as I watch him go.

"Hello, Princess Corvina," a voice says. "Princess of Ravens and Wolves. Princess of Freedom. Princess of the Light and Dark. I have heard many whispers about you."

I jump, spinning around in the waves of the sea, looking for whoever just spoke, but finding no one. Oddly, I can't even tell if it was a boy or a girl, and the more I think of the voice, the more it seems like I heard nothing at all. I try to step out of the sea but my feet don't move, and I look down to see I'm sinking into the sand. It's pulling me under.

"Help!" I scream the word out, digging at the sand under my feet as it quickly reaches my knees. I look up to see my guys running out of the forest just as a blast of water slams into them, sending them flying back into the forest. I call my magic but nothing happens. Fear clogs my throat when I realise that I'm stuck. My screams and pleads to Selena are lost to the sea as I sink further and my hands get stuck under the sand. Just as it gets to my neck, dark spots start to cloud my vision and the air clamps in my lungs.

"You're mine now, Princess. I have been waiting for you."

Then I'm lost to the sea and the sand, helpless to save even myself.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Corvina

"And that's the end of class today. Make sure you have all your homework in for tomorrow!" I shout as the teenagers in my class all but rush out of the room the second the bell rings. I chuckle, remembering when I was just like them and not the teacher I am now. I couldn't wait to get out and hang out with my friends. I gather the papers I need to mark tonight and my planner, shoving them in my bag when a knock on the door echoes twice.

"Hey, hun. Still ready for tonight's dinner?" My mum, the headmistress of our school, asks as she comes into my classroom. Still a beauty in her fifties, her pale blue eyes wait patiently for my answer. Mum and I have always been close, but I'm a daddy's girl at heart.

"Is Dad cooking his famous beef stew?" I ask, and she just laughs, walking over to my desk. Surprisingly, my mum hugs me tightly, not like she usually does. I hug her back. "What's this for?"

"All this isn't real. You can't choose this. Look in the water, dear," she whispers in my ear.

I laugh and pull away, frowning at her. "What did you just say?"

She shakes her head, her long blond hair swaying behind her. "I didn't say anything, dear. Don't be late tonight. I love you!" She hugs me once more before rushing out of the room, and I stare at the door as it swings shut.

Look at the water? What about any of this isn't real?

This is *my* life.

I'm Corvina Charles, a normal girl who grew up in a little village and studied damn hard to become a teacher. I mean, I don't have a love life, and no guy seems to compare to the four men in my dreams, but what girl doesn't dream of sexy men?

No, this is real. It's as real as the air in my lungs and the sharp pinch I give my arm. But something about my mum's whisper does shake me up. Even if it was meant as a joke, it's a bizarre thing for her to say.

Shaking my head, I chuck my bag over my shoulder and leave the classroom. I rush to the front door of the school, needing fresh air. Only the fresh air doesn't help the panic or fear creeping over me.

I look over the road at the small park, and in the centre is the wishing well that's always filled with water. This whole area used to be a forest, but when the council decided they needed a park, they uprooted all the trees. That's when they found the wishing well, which they decided to keep. Until this moment, I've never gone near it, but my mum's whisper sinks into my mind, drawing my feet towards the park. Every step seems wrong. My whole body itches to run away even as I pass children laughing and running in circles, and the few teenagers from my class hanging out on the swings. Nothing seems right anymore.

I stop at the well and stare into the water down below. I should walk away and go to the house that I share with my roommate, Sage, and get ready for dinner with my parents.

What am I doing here?

"Choose well, Princess, or you will never leave my sea again."

Why does the creepy water have to talk?

Sea?

What the hell?

Without knowing why I drop my bag to the floor and start climbing the walls. I stand on the edge of the well, looking down into a dark abyss.

"Choose."

The voice doesn't tell me what to choose, or why, but I want to jump.

I want to leave.

And so I jump into the water without another thought.

My body plunges into the salty water at the bottom and I gasp as it surrounds me, pulling me down into its depths. Slowly, light burns into my eyes and I see a sword floating right in the middle of the brightness. I stretch my hand out and grab the helm of the sword. The water swooshes

away, leaving me on a sandy beach with the burning sun bleeding into my eyes. Every real memory of my past and my reality comes crashing back to me as tears burst from my eyes and sobs from my throat.

My human parents are dead. I killed them and I've accepted that it wasn't my fault.

I could have chosen to stay with them, but that world would never have been real.

This world is, and everything that comes with it, the good and the bad.

In this world, my guys are real, and with them is the only place that I want to be.

<I am yours until the war ends. We will be unstoppable.>

I glance at the talking sword, which is so much worse than talking water. It is made of pure gold, but lightweight as I lift it up, my gaze tumbling over the helm which glistens with starlit jewels. Symbols are drawn all over the blade and the leather handle is incredibly soft, fitting perfectly into my hand. As I admire it, the gold changes to pure black, and the stones turn into ravens, the wings holding the blade up. Damn, it's my sword now. It sinks into my hand like sand dissolving into the ocean, and an amber glow travels up my arm. It vanishes under my skin before turning into a gold tattoo that replicates what the sword had looked like. I always wanted a tattoo.

"Until the end," I whisper, running my finger over the raised skin, feeling a strange addiction to the power—to the talking sword now etched into me.

"Vina!"

Jonah's voice carries to me on the ocean breeze. I spin around to see him running over with Pitch and Gage at his side. They all crash into me and hold me in the middle of them. Echo calls out and lands on top of Pitch's shoulder, and I swear he smiles at me.

"It's been three days. Where in the name of Selena did you go?" Pitch demands, his worry drifting into anger.

"Three days?" I question with wide eyes. "It felt like an hour to me. The sword took me. It's a long story. What matters is that I'm okay and I have one of the artifacts."

I show them my arm and they all frown at me in confusion. They can't see the sword. So it's only me who can see it? Ambrose comes rushing out of the forest, sighing and patting his knees when he sees me. To my

surprise, the guys let Ambrose hug me when he gets closer and he lifts my arm with a similar frown.

<I'm yours alone. No one but you will see me until it is time.>

"What happened?" Ambrose asks, stepping back. "Your power is leaking off you in waves. Something big has changed."

"I have a talking sword tattooed on my arm that only I can see," I answer. Ambrose grunts, crossing his arms. All my guys look at my arm very uncomfortably, almost as if the sword is a new guy and they want to figure out a way to get rid of him.

"You seriously have a problem with things talking in your head, you know that?" Pitch grumbles. I laugh despite the weirdness of the situation. We have the sword, Zander will get the dragons and we will win this war. Things are finally looking up.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Corvina

Before dusk settles, we stop by another cave to make camp. This one isn't nearly as impressive as the last and has been used by animals. To prevent the smell of rotting bones hitting us, we built a fire outside the cave this time. I'm more exhausted anyway than I am eager to explore the area. I guess three days trapped in an alternative reality has started to take its toll on me. Pitch senses my exhaustion and takes my hand.

"You should rest," he whispers.

I nod at him, unable to stifle a yawn. "There's just something creepy about this cave. I can't put my finger on it."

"It's probably because we're near the Deadlands border," he says. "They won't come near us. Like the centaurs, Draugars keep to themselves."

"And thank Selena for that," Jonah adds, stoking our wire with a long wooden stick. "Those corpses stink."

"Sshh!" Gage glares at him. "I don't know about you, mate, but I'd rather not attract their attention."

Jonah stands and grins at him. "Are you frightened, Professor?"

"Go fuck yourself."

They both laugh as they walk off in different directions, probably to help Ambrose place more protection spells around us.

"What are Draugars?" I ask Pitch, scooting closer to him on the fallen log. "This sounds like the perfect camping ghost story."

He chuckles quietly before answering. “There are sea-Draugars and land-Draugars. The ones close to the border are the former and control anyone who drowns in the Enchanted Forest, particularly in the Faery Pools. The land-Draugars protect their marshlands and ancient treasure-filled caves. They were rumoured to once fight alongside the Draconians in battle, but I think it’s only a tale.”

“It’s not a tale,” Gage says, returning with firewood in his arms. He sets them down by the crackling fire Ambrose kindly set up for us. “My father used to collect ancient scrolls. In one of them, there was a legitimate account about the Sea Draugars helping to defend the forest when Eris’ sent her monsters. They helped protect Draconia while a lot of other places were destroyed.”

Pitch lifts his brows. “There you go, then. They once weren’t as recluse as they are now.”

“Are they living or undead?” I ask. “I’ve never heard of the term Draugar before and I don’t remember reading about it in the *Book of Zorya*.

It’s Gage who answers me. “Undead. Funnily enough, it’s Draugars who created the Shades.”

At the mention of his species, Echo hops off the log and flies over, rolling to a halt at our feet. I chuckle and lift him up, kissing him on his little wet nose.

“How can something that sounds so terrifying create something this cute?” I hold Echo up to them. “I mean, just look at him!”

“They were created this way as a ruse to befall their enemies,” Pitch explains, reaching out to touch Echo. It’s the first he’s ever tried to pet him. I hold my breath as he awkwardly pats Echo on the head. “Echo is the first Shade I have ever seen or I would’ve deciphered his species the first day you got him.”

“I didn’t know either until Stonehart brought Echo to the staff room.” Gage reaches over and rubs Echo’s stomach. “Luckily, he was able to convince Stonehart to let him stay.”

Ambrose returns with Jonah, but they don’t look as relaxed as Gage had.

“What’s wrong?” Pitch stands and clenches his hands. “What did you see?”

Ambrose stops beside us, the shadows from the fire playing over his face. “I only sensed something dark.”

As soon as he says the words, a gust of ice-cold air sighs around us. It freezes the fire into swerving icicles, and our breaths turn into puffs of smoke. My teeth chatter as I hold Echo to my chest, looking around to see where the coldness is coming from. Every breath I drag in is like snow in my lungs. Even the water bottles beside me freeze into blocks of ice.

"Is it Draugars?" I whisper to the guys, shivering as my breath streams out.

Pitch shakes his head. "Something darker. Gage, Jonah, protect her. Ambrose, come with me."

He steps forward, his entire body radiating with dark magic, but he stops when an even darker shadow appears in front of him. The smokey-black tendrils materialise into a tall, cloaked figure with burning gold eyes. He looks almost identical to Pitch only older with slightly longer black hair and sharper features. His gaze drifts lazily between us, pausing briefly on me, before landing on Ambrose. A smile curves the edge of his lips.

"Aeon. It has been a long time, my old friend."

Every part of Ambrose's body visibly tenses. "I am not known by that name here and I shall never again be fooled into being your friend." He pulls his lips back into a snarl and his skin glows like it did when I first met him. "You betrayed me!"

"Betrayed you?" The Dark God scoffs, contemplating his black fingernails. "I kept you safe from my brother's wrath. You should be thanking me."

"*Balle eis Korakas!*"

Hades' gold eyes snap up to him. "It is I who feasts on the flesh of crows, not the other way around. How disappointing you would choose to side with mortals." He turns his gaze onto Pitch. "You, Alastair Pitch, are my son and heir. It is time to come home with me."

I practically choke on my own spit at the statement. I mean, sure, they look alike, but Hades is the Dark God of the Underworld. Pitch is…the Dark Fae Prince… It isn't a wild stretch now that I think about it.

"Pitch, is this true?" I whisper.

He shakes his head. "My parents died after I was born which is why I was given to Narah."

The Dark God laughs scathingly, his features hardening. "I gave you to the fae queen until I was ready to retrieve you." He holds out a hand and clicks his fingers. "Come. We have wasted much time already."

Pitch stares at the proffered hand with large, unblinking eyes. “No.”

An even darker shadow gathers around Hades, oozing off him in waves. “You choose also to stay with the mortals, my son?”

“Even if what you say is true,” Pitch replies, his tone equally as firm and confident, “you are not the blood I wish to stay with.”

Hades’ hand falls by his side, his knuckles blanching white. He looks between Pitch and Ambrose for a long, awkwardly silent moment.

“Very well,” he says at last. “If this is your decision then I shall go and leave you with a parting gift.” With a wave of his hand, gigantic roots claw out from the earth into a monstrous shadow. “No need to thank me,” he sneers before disappearing into a dark cloud of smoke.

“What the hell has he done?” Jonah asks, pulling me protectively behind him.

The darkness bleeding from the roots snap and crackle like bolts of lightning. They merge together until a beast with matted black fur and three wolf heads snarl at us. Holy fuck, it’s huge. Much bigger than Echo’s giant pink Thumper.

“That is Cerberus,” Ambrose answers, the colour draining from his face. “He’s here to take me back.”

“You mean the three-headed monster who guarded the Howling Hollow?” Gage frowns at him. “Please don’t tell me it’s *that* Cerberus.”

“I’m afraid it is.” Ambrose swallows, his throat jerking nervously. “Nothing will stop him until he traps me with the Bonds of Chaos and returns me to Tartarus.”

The fear in his voice twists my stomach. He barely finishes speaking when the beast digs one of its paws into the soil. Chains covered in fire whip into the air around him.

“Well that ain’t happening,” I say, taking his hand and giving a reassuring smile despite the tremor of fear catching in my throat. “That crazy pupper isn’t taking you anywhere, Ambrose. We’ll make sure of it.”

He looks at me, his brows drawing together. “Why would you all do that for me?”

“Because you’re our friend.” I nod to each of my guys. “And we don’t abandon our friends.”

“Fuck yeah we don’t,” Jonah exclaims.

Gage pats Ambrose on the shoulder and even Pitch, who’s never liked Ambrose, nods in agreement.

“How do we defeat it?” he asks the god, his tone no longer scathing like it normally is when he talks to him. It’s also the first he’s spoken since the bombshell was dropped. I can’t wait until this is over and we can be alone together. “I don’t think positive reinforcement is going to work with this hound,” Pitch adds quietly.

Ambrose runs a hand through his curled hair. “We cannot defeat the demon but we can restrain it. If we use the shadows to bind it, we’ll be able to escape. Who here is a shadowbinder?”

All of us raise our hands and Ambrose grins. The earth shakes around us as the demon prepares to attack. We don’t have long. Seconds, if we’re lucky. I prepare to shield my guys just in case.

“Gather the shadows around him, I will do the rest,” Ambrose instructs, and we split up.

Pitch and Jonah shadowlocate behind the demon while I go with Gage to cover the front. Each of the demons’ heads snarls and snaps at us, but we shield him with magic. With our other hands, we peel the shadows away from the trees and out from under the rocks. They lift off the ground and Ambrose, still standing behind us, holds up his hands.

His spell is stopped when Cerberus swipes its paw at me and I let go of the shadows. I slam against the ground with a startled cry and pain ripples through me. Blood trickles down my leg where there are now four oozing gashes.

“*Corvina*!”

Everyone shouts my name at the same time.

“I’m all right,” I call back at them, using my wings to hold me up now that it’s too painful to stand. “Let’s send this demon hound back down to hell.”

I gather the shadows again, completing our circle so Ambrose can bind the demon. To my relief, the tattoo on my arm heals the wound on my leg. Narah’s protection spell mixes with it and gives me an incredible burst of power.

With the circle now whole again, Ambrose links each of our shadows as if he’s weaving a net. It reminds me of the blanket of stars Selena wove into the night sky. The second the net touches the demon, it lets out a deafening howl that shakes the leaves around us. The shadows sizzle against its flesh and it tries to claw away from it, but Ambrose pins him to the ground.

“This won’t hold him for long!”

He snaps the shadows around the demon like an elastic band, another shrieking howl carries around us. Singed fur permeates the air and a huge void opens up below the demon. It's like Cerberus really is being dragged back down to hell. Good. Serves him right for trying to hurt my friend.

I fly down to my guys and glare up at the demon. *You* are a *very* bad dog!"

Gage pulls me away with a grin. "Alright, you. Let's go before we land ourselves in even more trouble."

"Looks like Cerberus is being summoned back anyway," Pitch remarks, pointing at the black hole dragging Cerberus in.

As the five of us turn to leave, a rush of cold dread fills my spine with ice. My breath turns into smoke again and the ground beneath me freezes. I turn to see the demon wrapping the fire chains around Pitch and dragging him into the void.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Corvina

I stare at the ground where the demon dragged Pitch like something is going to change, like time can simply go back and I can stop what just happened. Panic flares through me as I fall to my knees and dig into the soil underneath me, connecting me to the world even as I fall apart. My vision turns blurry as tears threaten to fall, but I keep on digging, needing to find a trace of something that will help find my shadow.

My mate.

"Vina, stop," Jonah whispers, pulling me back. Even though his touch would usually soothe me, connect me to everything, the burning fear pounding through me makes me hardly notice Jonah.

I shrug him off and dig harder. "There's got to be a trace of some kind. Maybe I can use my magic to counteract the portal. Or maybe I can—"

"I know where Pitch is." Ambrose gently touches my other shoulder, briefly stopping me as I turn to look up at him, searching his calm eyes. "The only place Hades could've taken him is the Underworld."

"That's another realm entirely," Gage says with a frown and I look at him. "Only fae can enter it."

"Then let me go." I stand up and use magic to wipe the dirt off my hands. "How do I get there?"

Ambrose, Gage, and Jonah exchange a worried look. Before they can talk me out of this, I lift Echo into my arms and walk away.

"You're going in the wrong direction," Ambrose calls after me. "The best place to get to the Underworld is through the Fountain of Mene. That's

east. You're going west."

"I was just making sure you were paying attention." I spin around and head the other way. "To the fountain we go!"

Even though a niggling thought settles in my mind, that I can't fight Hades to save Pitch…not in his own dimension, I still know I have to go to him. I would go to hell, to heaven, to the gods or anywhere for my mates. I will fight anything for them. Even Hades.

Jonah stands in front of me, one of his brows lifted. "We should stop by Jane's to check on Narah and the others, don't you think? It's on the way."

I nod, admittedly bummed about having to see Jane again, but it's important we talk to Narah. Maybe she might know a way to fight Hades. I'm pretty sure she is going to be shocked when I tell her who Pitch really is. No wonder he didn't die as a baby when Narah lost control and attacked him with dark magic. Pitch is a half-god. A demigod, and that makes him incredibly powerful…likely more than me. I have to believe he can keep himself alive long enough for me to get to him.

"Okay," I say, nodding and sucking in a deep breath, "we check on the others, and then I'm going to the Underworld to destroy Hades once and for all."

I know something is wrong even before the cottage is within sight. There's a septic tinge to the air that reeks of freshly drawn blood seeping into white roses. It invades my senses and causes the hairs on my body to stand on edge. Ambrose senses it, too, his eyebrows knitting together and his skin glowing ever so softly. He motions for us to stay hidden in the shadows, but the second Jonah sees the cottage peeking through the trees, he runs off.

I put Echo down and go after him, using my wings to guide me above the treetops. I reach the cottage before Jonah does and my heart squeezes when I see that the lights are out and the wind chimes have all smashed onto the floor, nothing more than shattered glass now. The dark magic

lingering in the atmosphere is suffocating, trickling over my body like a static chill.

"Jane?" Jonah leaps over the fence and runs up the porch. "*Jane*!"

He barely sets foot on the first step when a blast of magic sends him spiraling onto his back. I've seen that type of forcefield before when Ivywood shielded the academy. That means it's been cast by a light fae.

As I help Jonah onto his feet, the sword speaks in my mind.

<There are two souls in that cottage, one dark, one light, and only a third, combined of both, may enter.>

"How do you know that?" I ask it, and Jonah frowns at me, rubbing his arm.

Ambrose and Gage appear behind us with Echo, and while Jonah tells them what happened, the creepy sword speaks in my mind.

<I am more powerful than any force in this forest. I know and see all. I will always help you. We are the same. We are made for each other.>

Dammit, I'm getting hit on by a talking sword. All my guys rush to us, and Ambrose stares at my arm like he can hear or sense the power. When his eyes meet mine, I turn away. No need to worry him…or at least that's what I'm telling myself.

"We need to find a way inside," Gage says, tentatively approaching the cottage.

"Wait!" I grab his arm and pull him back. "Eva is in there. She's holding someone hostage and wants me to go in. No one else can get inside."

"It's a trap." Ambrose's skin glows even brighter as his magic radiates off him in waves. He shines brightly, like the glare of the sun against the ocean. "Whatever she wants cannot be good."

I'm touched by his concern, but I need to do this. What if it's Sage she's holding prisoner again? Or David? Or even Jane? I need to find out what happened to the others if there are only two people in there, and I need to get to that god damn fountain.

Gage lifts my chin and forces me to look at him. A crease forms between his brows, almost like he can read my thoughts, but he doesn't try to talk me out of this. He just kisses me, the touch gentle and yet filled with such unspoken promise that it takes my breath away.

"Trust me," I whisper against his lips.

"I always have."

I kiss him again before letting go and stepping back. Jonah looks away, his hands clenching, and glares at the cottage. Ambrose, on the other hand, gives a hesitant nod in approval. It's not like I needed it to save my friends, but it's nice to know that the god has my back.

"If you're not out in ten minutes, I will burn the cottage to the ground," he says.

"Like fuck, you will!" Jonah yanks Ambrose back and scowls at him. His features soften when he looks at me. "But in all seriousness, if shit hits the fan in there, I'll skin Eva alive and wear her like a suit."

I chuckle despite the gross imagery. "Just have faith in me, Jonah. If nothing else, I'll be able to take down the force-field and let you in. We've totally got this."

"Ever the optimist, shadow raven."

"One of us has got to be." I wink at him, stepping back. "See you all on the other side, baby."

The three of them watch me turn and make my way to the porch. My smile fades when I climb the first step. I hold my breath, preparing to be shot back onto my ass. Nothing happens. The magic sweeps over me like a sheet of cling film. I wrap my hand around the door handle, and pausing only briefly, twist and enter.

The entire cottage is cloaked in darkness. I wave my hand, igniting the fireplace, and there, bathed in the shadows of its flames, is Eva. She's holding a blade to Jane's throat. To my horror, relief floods through me when I see it's not Sage or any of the others. But Jane is still Jonah's sister, and an innocent person, too. I need to get her out of here.

One thing I know about force fields is that they're easier to destroy from the inside. I clasp my hands behind my back and let my magic seep into the darkness. Everything about me has always been dark, so my power merges seamlessly with the shadows. If I can distract Eva for a couple of minutes, I'll be able to destroy her forcefield and let my guys in.

"Eva," I snarl at her, surprised by how quickly her poison has spread. The black veins now cover part of her face, which she has tried but failed miserably to hide with her matted hair. "You're always so dramatic with your arrivals."

She curls her blackened lips into a repugnant snarl. "What's revenge without a little flair?" Resting the tip of the blade on Jane's jugular, she adds, "But I do think that we ought to stop meeting like this."

Jane's fearful eyes widen. "Get this crazy bitch off me and I swear I won't ever be a bitch to you again!"

"Hush now," Eva warns. "You're ruining my moment."

"What do you want, Eva?" I sweep my gaze over her body. The ivory dress hanging off her thin body is torn and covered in mud. She looks like she hasn't washed or slept in days. "What's happened to you?"

"War has happened." She waves her other hand dismissively. "These things are never easy. Or sanitary."

"Well, you look bloody awful."

Her eyes narrow into slits. She's completely oblivious to what I'm doing. "Don't let my appearance fool you! We are winning this war. Already the titans, and my army, have taken over the Dark Fae Kingdom; something my father never had the guts or power to do. Soon, Draconia will fall, and the entire Forest will be at my disposal."

I clap my hands sardonically, more as a distraction than anything as her forcefield is lifted from right under her nose. "Congratulations on turning into a tyrannical bitch. Now, what do you want from me?" She glances at the tattoo on my arm. "Oh, this little thing? Yeah. You don't want it. Trust me. It talks to me all the damn time, especially when I'm trying to sleep."

<I'm merely passing on my centuries-old wisdom,> the sword counters, and a grin tugs my lips. Strangely my hands shake at the idea of anyone taking my sword…it's mine. It always will be.

"You will come with me willingly," Eva says, adding pressure to the blade, "or I will slit this shadowborn's throat and kill your lovers."

My response is to yawn and stretch my arms, letting more magic shoot off me and into the forcefield. I can already feel how close I am to breaking through it. Just a few more minutes.

"And then what? What exactly do you want to gain from all this, Eva?"

If there's one thing I've learned about Eva, in the short time that I've known her, it's that she loves the sound of her voice

"Come with me and I'll show you," she answers, lifting her chin. "Or watch every person you care about fall and bleed out before you. Personally, I'd rather prefer if you chose the latter. Pitch, Zander, Gage, Jonah, Ambrose…Sage. They're all just *dying* for you to resist me."

"What have you done with Sage?!"

"She's bluffing," Jane hisses. "Narah escaped with Sage and David before she arrived."

“I warned you to shut the fuck up!” Eva yanks Jane by the hair and snaps her head back. “You shadowborns never know when to hold your tongue.” Her eyes darken and gleam in the firelight as she digs her fingers into Jane’s cheeks, prying her jaw open. “Perhaps I should cut yours out as a lesson.”

Jane screams around the blade, her eyes filling with tears, but she’s no longer looking at me.

She’s looking *over* me.

I turn just in time to see Ronan smashing a rock against the side of my skull. The room sways around me and I fall to my knees, watching as a portal bleeds opens behind Eva. She pushes Jane away and seizes me by the throat in one impossibly swift movement.

“You really thought you could distract me, Corvina?” She leans into my face, a sickening snarl sliding over her lips. “It was I who was distracting you all along.” Dragging me by the hair into the penetrating light, she turns to Ronan, a look of adoration on her face. “Stay here, my love, and take care of the others. My sister and I have some catching up to do.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Pitch

Darkness envelops me, punctuated by soft whispers and moans heady with desire. Warm hands roam my being, and a groan leaves the back of my throat when they reach for my cock.

The quiet laughter that greets me does not belong to Corvina.

I shoot my eyes open, horror filling me when I see all of the naked women draped over my body. Their hands slide over my exposed chest.

"Let me go," I warn, trying to shove them away. But my hands are tied to dark wooden bedposts and I can scarcely move. "I said release me!"

"Do as he says," a voice commands. "It seems my son is in no mood to be worshipped."

My eyes land on the darkest corner of the chamber. Hades stands by a latticed window, his body bathed in darkness except for his eyes. He steps out of the shadows and dismisses the harem and my restraints with a simple wave of his hand. The females scramble out and all the while I glare at Hades.

I should have known he'd be the one to summon me.

The rage from another female touching me is all-consuming. Never have I wanted or been with anyone other than Corvina, but now this fucker has taken that from me. They might have only been fawning over my body, but it's enough to send white-hot fury surging through my veins. Hades takes one look at me and chuckles, gliding over to a bar sculpted from ebony stone.

“Do you at least drink, my son?” He pours two despite my lack of an answer, the liquid dark and strange.

“No.” I straighten and push off the bed, tugging at my unbuttoned shirt and pants. Doing the buttons again, I snarl at him, “Why have you brought me here?”

“You are my son.” Hades saunters over, his black robe billowing around him into tendrils of smoke. He sets the glass on the side of the bed, but I ignore it. “I thought you and I could speak in private.”

“We have nothing to talk about,” I sneer. “You have taken me from my mate when she needed me most. You of all people know what that feels like.”

Hades turns his back on me, the shadows draping around him. “To be without the one you love is a pain unlike any other.”

The sorrow in his voice takes me by surprise. Before Eris planted the Apple of Discord, Hades’ love for Persephone was said to be the strongest in all the realms. My anger abates ever so slightly as I look around the room. Every item of ornate furnishing is black like the soul of its master, but above the bed is a tapestry of Persephone before she became Selena. Her sheer pink gown flows down her body like a waterfall and her hair reaches her ankles as she lifts a black rose to the sun. A crown of wreathed flowers adorns her head. She looks like Selena with only slight differences. Unearthly beautiful.

“Was Selena my mother?”

Hades whips around and a dark glint flashes in his eyes. “Persephone,” he corrects, “was not your mother.”

“Then who was?”

He shrugs dismissively. “A mortal.”

“Is she alive?”

“No. It is rare for mortals to survive giving birth to a demigod.”

“Did you love her?”

“I have loved many. Your mother was not one of them. A mere concubine.”

His comment riles me, making the blood pound in my veins.

“If she was only a ‘mere concubine’, how did you end up with me?”

“By convenience.” The Dark God settles back in his chair, resting his arms languorously. “Your mother’s sister left you at my temple, wanting nothing to do with the babe that killed her sister. When the Light Fae King

summoned me to do his bidding, I saw a chance to give you a life free from darkness."

"Free from darkness?" I scoff at the irony. "You gave me to the Dark Fae Queen. That is hardly a life free from darkness."

"Believe me when I say her world pales in comparison to mine." Standing from his chair, he circles the desk and places a hand on my shoulder. "You are the Dark Prince that my wife, Persephone, wanted to inherit her throne. It's time you take what is rightfully yours. Once the war is over, reclaim the *Throne of Luna* and rule the forest with me. Father and son."

I frown at him, drawing my eyebrows together. "With you?" His real motive finally clicks in my head. "Ah. You want the *Throne of Helios*. Of course. But why?"

His arm falls off my shoulder. "The reason matters not. All that matters is that you and I rule the Enchanted Forest together. That is the only way you can become a god."

I look away from him, contemplating his words. The most shocking thing of all is that a part of me wants to say yes. With my god powers, I could protect the forest with Corvina as my queen. We'd be unstoppable and never again would I feel helpless in ensuring her safety. But to get this I would need to hand Helios over to Hades. I would never forgive myself for the destruction I am sure he'll cause there, even more than has already been done. I doubt his intentions are pure considering it was Danica who banished him all those centuries ago.

"I cannot accept," I say, looking him dead in the eye. "The thrones belong to Corvina Charles, and my only wish is to protect her. I do not desire to take either throne from her. She has fought in blood and magic for her people, for the thrones, and she came from nothing. She was nothing but a lowly shadowborn for many years, and yet she fights for the world which abandoned her. Corvina has earnt the thrones. They are *hers* and my place is at her side."

"That is your final answer?" His tone is calm, which surprises me.

"Yes. My heart belongs only to her."

"And your loyalty?" He takes a sip of his drink, his eyes pressed on me. "Does a father not deserve the loyalty of his son?"

"You were never a father to me," I point out. "Narah was scarcely a mother, but she was still there when I needed her." A pause stretches

between us and Hades clenches his jaw. I believe I've touched a nerve. "If you want to be part of my life now, you will let me return to my mate and win this war on my own terms. You will also stay out of it. This is not your fight."

Hades remains silent for a long, tense moment. I keep my eyes pressed on him, refusing to back down or be swayed or manipulated. I might not be a god, but if Hades refuses to let me go, I will destroy this abyss he calls home.

"I will agree," he answers at last, "but know this, Pitch, you are my firstborn son. Once you depart the living realm, you will rule here, as I have done, for the rest of eternity. Your fate was written in blood before you were even born, but perhaps your queen and her mates can rule with you. The underworld respects love and bonds made in life…"

I nod with a small smile, extending him my hand. "Until then, Father."

Hades shakes my proffered hand, and a ribbon of dark magic wraps around us. "Until then, my son."

The magic materialises into a portal that sends me back to the Forest. In a mere blink of an eye, I'm standing outside Jane's cottage. A white light blasts my eyes and throws me off my feet. I release my wings and steady myself before I land on the ground. Ambrose lands beside me, his skin glowing with fury.

"Eva has taken her!"

I snap my gaze around the area, watching as Gage sends Ronan falling onto his back. Their magic collides, along with Jonah and Jane's, who are both standing beside my mother. She's using tremendous amounts of power to ward off something lurking in the shadows.

Another blast bounces off the cottage, but I use my wings to hold me steady and fly to her side.

"Mother!"

"I am not strong enough to banish the Titan," she bellows, her magic weakening before my eyes. "I can bide you time to escape."

The trees fall down behind the cottage as the Titan stomps its way towards us.

"We are not going without you," I tell her.

Although it is weak, she smiles at me. "This is not where I'm to see my end. Go now. Use your magic to open a portal to my kingdom. I will meet you there."

A loud cry shrieks behind us and I turn just in time to see Jonah plunging a dagger into Ronan's leg. I fly over, using magic to drag the weeds out from Jane's garden. Ronan wails as Jonah twists the blade around in his flesh. I land with a thump, wrapping the weeds around Ronan's throat.

I want to watch him die.

I want my face to be one of the last he ever sees.

"This is for what you did to Corvina. Turns out you sided with the wrong queen," I snarl, tightening the weeds until he no longer breathes and his head explodes. I would savor his death if not for the Titan charging into view. Narah is on the brink of collapsing as she struggles to hold the god back. With Ambrose, Gage, and Jonah at my side, we stand beside her, combining our magics to hopefully penetrate the Titan's flesh. The stone slowly gives way, allowing Ambrose to shoot a lightning bolt right into its chest. With a pained bellow, the Titan shatters into pieces like a cracked shell and explodes into a whirlwind of ashes. The wisps flutter around us as Narah pulls me into a tight embrace.

"My son!"

Unexpected warmth spreads through me, filling me with relief. I can count on one hand the number of embraces my mother and I have shared, and this one means more than all of them combined.

"Where is Sage and her mate?" I ask, looking around for them. "Are they safe?"

Narah lets me go, her dark eyes filled with tears. "Yes, they are at my palace. I have since taken my army back and we are preparing to free Corvina and put an end to Eva's madness. I have already sent a raven to inform Zander." She glances to where the Titan burned into a pile of ashes. "The Titan will resurrect itself soon. We must go."

I step back and watch her open a portal. With a backward glance at the Titan's remains, I pause. The ashes gather and swirl around, forming the Titan we just defeated.

They can't be stopped.

I must find Corvina before the titans destroy the world.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Corvina

Eva shoves me onto the cold dirt as we appear somewhere cold. I roll to a stop, picking myself up quickly to face my sister before she stabs me in the back again.

Literally.

Dark wisps flutter around me as I stare at what is left of the Princess of Helios. Her once pale skin is smothered with black veins and I can almost taste the wrong and destructive magic flowing from her. Pure evil is not just in her soul anymore it seems. Her once beautiful hair is no longer soft. It looks like a wave of jagged levels and the static from her magic makes it almost move. Resting on her head is the princess crown she has always worn and I wonder how much she is itching to wear our father's crown now that she thinks she has won.

"How rude I am to my sister!" Eva exclaims, spreading her hands out in a derisive bow. Not playing her games, I search the space we are in. Nothing but ash and dust line the ruins of the room, but the wind whips around us so fast it makes me wonder how high up we are. "I have not introduced you to my new friends."

I scream as wind slams into me, shoving me hard onto the floor. Ash puffs up in a cloud above me and turns everything dark. My heart beats so loudly in my chest I just barely hear the large footsteps of the Titans as they surround us. Their shoulders rest above the ruined walls of the room and their empty faces stare down at me.

“You need new friends, you crazy bitch,” I bellow, but my insane sister just laughs in response.

She skips around me in a circle, humming a song I don’t know but sounds like a lullaby you would sing to a child. By Selena, she has lost her goddamn mind. My body starts to float into the air and I close my eyes, using my own magic to fight the hold on me. But nothing happens. I feel empty inside where my magic should be. Not even the sword feels as though it’s part of my being anymore. It’s like Eva has paralysed me with that creepy lullaby.

Just as I start to move my hand and get control of my magic again, I open my eyes, and shock makes me forget everything as I stare at the remains of the light kingdom. It’s nothing more than fire, ash, and rubble now. The once sweet smell of the kingdom is replaced with an awful burning scent that chokes me with every breath. Now I know it’s the smell of Vasili burning to the ground. Eva flies in front of me, still humming away as she gets super close and looks into my eyes.

“Why destroy the kingdom you wanted to rule?”

My whisper floats between us as she grabs my chin, her nails making me wince as they cut me. “The light and dark kingdom honoured the gods,” Eva says, digging her nails harder. “This is but a shrine to them and their old ways. The new kingdom I will build will honour only me.”

“No one will ever honour or love you, Eva. You’ve become unloveable,” I spit at her, tears falling from my cheek and onto her hand. “I could have loved you once. You’re my sister but you’ve destroyed everything that could have been. You are nothing more than a monster now.”

For a second, her cold and impassive demeanour cracks. I see it so clearly in her eyes like a wave crashing into the ocean, but it vanishes just as quickly, leaving only the sea behind; a sea of darkness in which Eva will never be able to rise ashore from.

My sister has to die.

Eva laughs again, her cackle making the hair on the back of my neck stand on edge. Before she can do anything, a booming noise blasts in the distance. I turn to see a wave of dark fae floating in the air, and on the ground is an army of fae and shadowborn mixed in together. Sensing my mates and mother in the crowd, tears of relief and fear fill me.

They have come for me.

“Titans, do go and kill the remains of the old world,” Eva orders, sweeping a hand dismissively to the wreckage below.

“No!” I scream and my voice is cut off as Eva punches me hard across the face. The blows never stop, and the pain is indescribable as I cower into myself, wishing I could break free of the magic holding me down. As Eva screams and continues to laugh, hitting me again and again, I stare at the sky and my father’s words come back to me, almost like he is speaking in my mind.

“Look up, Corvina. The stars are welcoming you home.”

The goddess herself is never going to let me down, and the stars will never turn dark for me. My father might not be here anymore, but my mates and my mother are, and they are fighting for me.

I need to fight for them.

I’m Corvina Charles, Princess of the Light and Dark Fae, and I am also shadowborn.

No darkness can hold me down. No light can either.

I scream from the top of my lungs as power slams out of me in waves, knocking Eva across the room. I fall to the floor with her, breaking the magical hold she had on me. It’s time the world says goodbye to Eva once and for all.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Zander

With the raven's message repeating in my mind, I soar through the clouds towards the dragon kingdom. I need to get the Draconians on our side now more than ever. There's no other option if I want to save Corvina and help her win this war.

Her fate now rests in hands.

If I succeed here, there's also no chance that my parents can deny my victory. I am doing the work of the crown, after all. But more than that, I am protecting my mate. Corvina means more to me than their approval.

I *can't* fuck this up.

I hold my breath as I fly into Draconia, keeping a wary eye on the dragon warriors watching me from the ground. To my relief, I'm able to enter without combusting into flames. A strange sense of belonging sinks into me as I glide over the caverns. This is the first time I've ever been here, and instead of fear and trepidation, I feel like I'm home.

I swallow the lump of emotion rising within me and swoop down into a dark cave. Streams of sunlight pour around me, catching the sapphire crystals embedded in the stone walls. Emerging from the other side, I immediately see that everything in this kingdom is built around plunging waterfalls, winding caverns, and breathtaking lakes.

The palace is the first thing that grips my attention. A statue of a ginormous dragon with its claws wrapped around an egg protectively towers over the palace. Pouring out from underneath is a waterfall that

plunges into a lake, wrapping the base of the building in mist. It's almost like the palace is sitting on a cloud.

I breeze through, sweeping my advanced vision over the kingdom below. The lake is split up into countless fractions that each contain miniature cities. Bridges connect them and link to an enormous garden with iridescent trees and flowers. Only the palace remains segregated. As I fly closer, I see that it's sitting on the edge of the largest waterfall I have ever seen. It looks like it's perched on the edge of the world.

Entranced by Draconia's beauty, I don't see the chained shackle shooting towards me. It wraps around my ankle and disrupts my flight. I let out a roar as I crane my neck to see what the hell is going on. By the time I do that, another chain latches onto me. They don't penetrate my scales but they have a strong hold on me and drag me down to the earth. I just manage to stop myself from smacking into the concrete, and, using every bit of strength that I possess, I yank the shackles off with my teeth.

Three blue dragons surround me, each of them wearing a silver breastplate with Draconia's sigil.

<Identity yourself, trespasser!> one of the warrior's hisses in my mind.

<Sabhain. Is that how you always greet your kin?>

Another dragon appears, and I assume by his gold breastplate and sheer size that he's the highest-ranking.

<You are not from here, Sabhain, and that makes you an enemy,> the warrior snarls. His piercing green eyes give me a slow, assessing once over, and his lips peel backward to reveal his jagged, blood-stained teeth. *<What business does a halfbreed have in the Dragon King's realm?>*

I straighten so that I'm at my most imposing size. *<I am here on behalf of Princess Corvina, the one true heir to the Thrones of Luna and Helios. The Titans have stormed both kingdoms at the hands of Eva and we need King Cyrus' help to defeat them.>*

The dragons are silent for a long moment, probably discussing whether or not I'm telling the truth.

<If you doubt who I am, the king saw me at the Night of the Moon ball that was held in the Dark Fae Kingdom. We need his help, otherwise, the war will spread to more lands, including yours. By the time this is all over there will be nothing left, only endless graves and mountains of destruction. But with the king's help, we can stop that from happening. We can win this war.>

After a long, strained moment, the leader shakes his head.

<We want no part in this war.>

I glare at them, white-hot fury pounding through my veins. *<You're just going to turn a blind eye? Thousands of innocent people will be slaughtered!>*

One of the other dragons speaks up. *<They are not our kingdom's concern.>*

<You bunch of motherfuck—>

"What's going on here?"

A tall, cloaked figure emerges with a gold medallion around his neck.

<Who are you?> I snarl, my scales bristling with fury.

All I can see is red as I struggle not to punch sense into these spineless warriors.

The Draconian hears me even in his male form. "I am the king's royal advisor, Sir Julius Griscor." His long blond hair flows around him as he comes to a sharp halt. There's a strange, familiar air about the advisor, but I would remember seeing a blonde Draconian. It's extremely rare among dragons.

"The king knows you are here." He turns to the dragons. "Prince Drusus, Prince Draco, and Prince Drakon, thank you for your concern, but this visitor is no threat to us." Turning to me, he adds, "Come, Zander. We have much to discuss."

As I transform back into my human form and follow the advisor, I say, "I never told you my name. How do you know me?"

The Draconian pauses only briefly. "It is my job to know everyone in this forest," he says, resuming his walk. "Hurry now. The king is not a patient dragon but he is keen to hear your plea."

Flying back over the forest, I glance at the army of dragons now flying behind me and King Cyrus into battle. I wasn't sure the king would believe me at first, but with the help of his queen and advisors, I was able to

convince him to come with me by the time the moon claimed the night sky. Tapping into the king's mind, I send him a message.

<Thank you, Your Majesty.>

The king's dragon, a fierce monster of a creature with huge claws, dark green scales, and shimmering blood-red eyes glances at me for a moment.

<I should have listened sooner. Eva must be stopped.>

I make sure to meet the king's eyes as I reply. *<Corvina will be queen and you will be repaid for this debt.>*

<When this war is over, we will discuss your father. I know of him and your half brother.> The king informs me for an answer, shocking me into silence which I suspect is what he wanted.

I have a fucking brother?

Pushing away the shock, or any thoughts of the father I have never met, I focus on the present and look at the stars now gleaming above. It is said that the fallen gods and goddesses have gone to rest up there to watch over us. I send a silent prayer to them to help Corvina. *Take my life if you must but not hers. Vina is everything this messed up world needs to save them from drowning in darkness. Fae and shadowborn, and magics alike must see that she is the future for them all. Selena, do not let her die in this war.*

The first thing I sense is fire, so much of it, just before I see the Titans surrounding the ruins of the Light Fae Kingdom. They weave destruction in waves, killing everything in their way. Countless fae and shadowborn fall as we fly towards them and I search for anyone familiar. Sensing Vina in the palace which is surrounded by a dark bubble of magic, I know getting to her is going to be near impossible.

But I'm going to try.

<For the Enchanted Forest, for the royals, and for Selena! Fly, dragons, fly!>

The king's roared demand pounds in my head as I join my fellow dragons and charge at the city.

Corvina Charles…I'm coming for you.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Corvina

"Do you know what? I think we should do this the old way," Eva says, dragging two swords out from thin air. She throws one at me and the metal clangs at my feet. "Father did always want my fencing skills put to good use. This is as good an opportunity as any."

As I bend down to pick up the sword, just managing to hold back a hiss from all the pain, the magical sword speaks in my mind.

<Let me help you.>

<No!> I drag the sword off the floor and hold it with both hands, my arms trembling. *<I want this fight to be fair.>* I glare at my sister, watching as she twirls her sword around smugly. *<I want to be the one who kills her.>*

<If she doesn't kill you first,> the little bastard mumbles, but his remark gives me the strength I need to prove it wrong.

I straighten, holding myself as tall as I can while my magic heals the bruises left by Eva. I notice the injuries I gave her have also healed. With my strength restored, I tighten my grip on the sword and wait for her to make the first move.

"You know something, our father never truly loved me, Corvina, and do you know why?" she asks, pacing in front of the *Throne of Luna*. It's the only thing in our father's throne room that hasn't been destroyed.

"No," I sigh, knowing she would give another monologue before we start fighting. She really does love the sound of her own voice too much. "But I have a feeling you're about to tell me, Eva."

She roots to the spot, and a scathing snarl stretches over her thinly pressed lips. “Father never loved me because I was never you!”

Her outburst takes me by surprise. I thought the king loved her and that was why he wanted me to bond with her. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have bothered asking me to cut her some slack. He wouldn’t have tried stopping us from fighting all the time.

“From the day I was born,” Eva continues, pacing in front of the throne again, “the king saw me as nothing more than a disappointment. Nothing I ever did impressed him. I was never enough. I didn’t understand why until the Titans showed me a vision of a girl with blue hair, a girl who was born before me out of darkness and light. It was then I realised my father rejected me because I could never be who he truly wanted—his firstborn child.” Her eyes narrow into icy shards. “My mother knew the king would never accept us, and that is why she took her own life! All—because—of *you*!”

She lunges, her sword pointed at my throat.

I block her, pushing her back when our weapons meet. She just manages to nick my shoulder.

“I can’t be blamed for who the king did and didn’t love, Eva!”

Apprehension fills me when I see that my magic doesn’t heal the wound. Either my body is too exhausted to heal itself, or these swords are specifically designed to kill magics. My money is on the latter.

This is it. It’s either kill or be killed.

And I will *not* leave my loved ones without putting up one hell of a fight!

Our swords collide, then, again and again, each blow harder and more desperate than the last. I cut through the flesh on her thigh, tearing through her filthy dress, and she catches the side of my stomach, just under my ribs. Sweat trickles down my spine as I pivot on my heel, meeting each and every one of her strikes. My rapid breathing matches her own. She’s growing exhausted, too, unable to hold her sword without trembling.

“The first day…I saw you,” she pants, wiping the blood oozing from her shoulder with the back of her hand, “I couldn’t believe someone as pathetic as you would *dare* sit on the throne. You know nothing of our world, and yet, Father wanted you to rule it! He might as well have set fire to the forest and watched it burn to ashes.”

“I know more…more than you think…” My own reply comes out just as breathless, just as exhausted.

“Really?” Eva rubs the blood off her hand on her dress. “Like how to unleash the Titans?”

I shake my head, barely able to hold my sword at this point. The pain tearing me asunder is becoming unbearable. If one of us doesn’t kill each other soon, we’re going to die from exhaustion.

“Then enlighten me,” Eva snarls, “what does the almighty Corvina Charles know that I do not.”

We circle each other, waiting for the other to strike first. In the corner of my eye, a trio of small dark figures fly onto the throne behind Eva. A grin threatens my lips. I need to keep her distracted.

“I know you loved our father and it was his death that did this to you,” I say, pretending not to notice the shadows. “I know that you didn’t want Narah to kill him. You just wanted him to accept you for who, and what, you were, and give you the throne.”

“*Lies!* Father despised me from the day I was born and I wanted him to suffer just like Mama and I did.”

“But you still loved him, didn’t you?”

I work my way closer to her, preparing my sword for the final blow.

“And I know that deep down, Eva, you’re afraid of all this. You didn’t want things to happen this way. You just wanted someone to love you, but you knew as much as I did that you’re unlovable because of the things you’ve done. No one will ever accept or love a monster like you, and that’s what you’re afraid of—being alone.”

“Noooooo!” Eva pounces on top of me, knocking me onto the floor. “It was you who made me this way! You took everything from me. My mother—father—Ronan—the throne!”

Each exclamation is punctured by the sounds of her fist slamming into my face.

I reach out blindly, my eyes too swollen to see through and grab whatever I can. I hear her choke and I know that I’ve got her throat, so I dig my nails in as deeply as possible in an attempt to thrust her off me. When the sound of glass shattering and Eva’s screams bellow around me, I’m able to see again. The tattoo on my arm glows like a beacon as Eva, running backward, swats my raven friends away from her. Wren, Crowe, and Rook peck at her face and wounds, and I know this is the only opportunity I’ll have if I want this to end.

As my friends fly away, I scramble to my feet, summoning the sword within me. It materialises into my hand, instantly healing all my wounds and giving me strength again as I run over to Eva.

A quick, tactful stab to the heart is all it takes.

Eva clutches at her chest, her mouth gasping around silent words, and falls back. I catch her before she hits the floor and I stay there with her. An unexpected pity takes hold of me as I watch her die. A small part of me wishes that it didn't have to come to this. I may not have liked Eva from the get-go, but I never wanted her to become…this.

"I just—" The words catch in Eva's throat as she chokes on blood; the liquid oozing from her mouth is black instead of red. "I just wanted to be remembered."

I don't tell her that her kingdom will remember her, for all the wrong reasons, because I know that Eva wasn't always like this. She wasn't poisoned or corrupted right from the beginning. It was the lure of the darkness that did this to her. It twisted her pain and rejection into something so sinister that she became unrecognisable, perhaps even to herself.

As the Princess of Helios dies in my arms, I sing to her the first song Pitch ever sang to me—the one about the girl and the Wishing Well—and I tell her to make a wish.

This time, it will come true for her.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Corvina

Leaving my sister's dead body on the ash and rumble covered floor, I slide my sword from her heart and stand up tall. The sword whispers into my ear as I drag my bruised and sore feet to the balcony that overlooks the city. The war zone. Screams and cries of pain that I will never forget linger in my ears as the smell of blood and magic attacks my senses. Dragons litter the skies, some of them slamming into the Titans and biting them in any place that they can. But they don't stand a chance. It's evident when two dragons are punched out of the sky by a Titan.

My hand shakes around the sword as it starts to glow black, radiating power up my arm.

<We will stop this war together, Corvina. This is your fate. I've waited for you from the second the mirror whispered your name to the queen.>

Together.

The word seems strange as I stare out over the city and close my eyes, letting the sword's power mix with my own. It makes me stronger and so much more powerful than I ever thought imaginable. My feet leave the balcony as black, white, and grey magic swirl around me in crackling waves, never touching my skin but destroying everything around me.

This is my fate.

The sword increases whatever magic is in your soul—the magic you are made with. My existence was made by the mirror and I am all the power there is in the world.

I am a light fae.

I am a dark fae.

But my heart and soul will always be shadowborn.

"LEAVE!" I scream to my people, to anyone that fights on my side. "Fall back! Fall back now!"

I use my power to echo my voice into all their ears. The Titans notice me at the same time the final word leaves my lips, and they storm my way, desperate to stop me before it's too late.

<They are nothing compared to our power. We will destroy them all,> the sword tells me and I laugh. Yes, we will. Then we can never be stopped. No one will ever cause pain or suffering to my people again.

Portals open everywhere on the battleground, and those on my side step through them. I hear my mother's voice on the wind, commanding everyone to leave. I take my eyes off the Titans for a moment to see Sage in David's arms, fighting him to get to me, but he forces her through a portal. My rides through the chaos towards me on a black-winged chariot, and right behind her are my mates.

My mates…

<They are nothing. We will stop the Titans, and then the world, together. You and I, Corvina Charles. We are fate. We are gods. We are unstoppable.>

The sword's power is addictive, far more than any magic I have ever experienced, and it lifts me higher into the air. I forget everyone in the world but the sword and the Titans who are my enemies. I can't fight this kind of magic, not anymore. It's too much, too connected to me, too powerful and seductive. As its sweet, sinister whispers fill my mind, I realise that this sword, this mark branded into my flesh, was the true enemy all along. It will destroy the world and reshape it how it likes.

I'm just a host.

For a fleeting moment, I see a vision of the future in the swords eyes; the pain and misery it wants the fae and shadowborn to feel for locking it away.

<Use all your power and destroy them! Make the world remember us, Corvina. Fear us. Do it. Do it now!>

I scream as the sword forces me to send out shockwaves of power, and there is nothing I can do to stop it. Light, dark, and shadow magic leaves my body in waves as I stretch my one hand up in the air with the sword in it. The sword glows so brightly as I let it take over me fully, and for a

moment I forget who I am. All I can see is black, and all I feel in my heart is darkness.

Other than the sword and the power…*what is there?*

"Vina!" A woman's voice desperately shouts, and I open my eyes to see a light fae floating in front of me, the power bending around her like she isn't even there. Her long white hair flows around her shoulders and waist, and she wears a strange white jumpsuit. Broken handcuffs hang from her right wrist and her eyes lock onto me like we know each other. My magic attacks her, wanting her to get away from me, but she only flinches as she holds my gaze. Why is she so familiar?

<*She is no one. She is nothing,*> the sword snarls, and I want to believe it.

Only the girl moves closer, crying out as my power flickers over her skin off her shoulder, cutting her deeply. She just smiles at me and places her hand on my cheek as if she isn't being hurt by my magic.

"Sister, you know me. You know who you are. Don't let the magic take you away. We have lost our father, our kingdoms are ruined, but we have each other. Come back to me."

"Izora?" I croak out as a flood of memories surge back to me. Izora is my half-sister, my friend and I have missed her. *What the hell am I doing? I'm hurting her. I'm hurting those I love.*

Izora desperately reaches for me but my power doesn't let her get any closer, spinning out of control.

"Yes. Yes, it's me," she says. "I've opened the portal for the Titans and they are gone. It's just you and me, sis. Give me the sword."

"It's mine!" I scream at her, tears falling and sizzling on her hands, but she doesn't even flinch. A voice, sounding nothing like my own, speaks from my lips. "The princess is mine. You cannot stop me. She is mine to control!"

"No, Corvina Charles is *my* sister. *My* blood and she belongs to her mates and family. Remember them, Vina? Pitch, Jonah, Zander, and Gage," Izora growls at me and reaches for my sword. She screams in pain as the sword shoots dark webs at her, covering her hand and making her bleed.

"The sword has killed them with your power," Izora screams. "Don't let it kill me. Stop it, Vina. Only you can!"

They're dead? No! No, no, no, no, no!

I search my soul for the connection I've always felt to Pitch. I search for my other mates, for anyone, but it's empty.

I'm alone.

For the first time in my life, I'm completely alone.

And it's the sword's fault. It did this…and the sword will fucking pay for it.

<NO!>

The sword screams in my mind as I slowly pry one finger at a time off from the sword, every movement hurting deep within my heart. Hurting my soul, cracking it into a million pieces. I grit my teeth and think of my mates. The sword hurt them. It took them and it won't win against me.

Izora's hand covers mine and she smiles at me for a long moment, both of us glowing as we float high in the air, a mixture of light and dark magic, covered in shadows. Time stands still as tears fall down my cheeks and I embrace my power. The magic I was born with. As my last finger rests on the sword, nearly letting Izora take it from me, I whisper one last message to the sword as a goodbye, it screams at me.

"You might be powerful beyond comparison but you are not us. We are the children of gods and shadowborns, and you will rot back in the sea you came from and never, ever rise again!"

The second I let go of the sword, the magic booms so loud that I can't see anything but light and flickers of darkness as I fall down in tremendous pain. My body crashes onto the hard ground below and the darkness I know so well takes me under, soothing me before I have to face reality.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Corvina

"It's time to wake up, sleepyhead."

"Dad?" I open my eyes to a room full of darkness. "Where are you? I can't see anything."

A silver flame drifts towards me, growing brighter and larger until it forms the shape of my father. "Hello, Button."

"*Dad*!" I jump into his arms, inhaling his familiar peppermint scent with the tinge of tobacco. His beard scratches my cheek as I hold him close. He's exactly as I remember him, tall and young, with his blonde hair swept back and his blue eyes weary but kind. His arms wrap around me and he runs a hand through my hair, just like he used to do when I was little. "I can't believe it's you," I say. "Where are we?"

He holds me back, a pained smile on his face. "We are in a place you've got to leave."

"Leave?" My throat tightens. "But I don't want to leave you. Is Mum here, too?"

I barely finished speaking when a warm breeze drifts over me.

"Darling," my mum says, and I turn to see her beautiful smile.

The tears in my eyes fall down my cheeks. "I've missed you both so much!"

My dad hugs me to his cold chest and I feel my mum's similarly cold arms wrap around me. The three of us embrace for a moment that I never want to end.

I commit the weight of their arms around me to my memory, desperate this time to not forget. For so long, I have wanted to hug my human parents. I wanted to hear their voices and breathe in their scents, and now that I'm finally able to, I don't want to let go.

"But you need to," my dad whispers.

"We love you so very much, Corvina." My mum smoothes a hand over my face, brushing my hair away from my eyes. "But you don't belong here. You belong with the fae. You always did."

More flames flutter down around us—five in total. They each flicker around me, but their glow is dim and quickly fading. It makes my heart clench in my chest and the air constrict in my lungs, though I can't tell why. It's not like the flames are people.

"Am I dead?" I croak out, looking back at my parents. "I let go of the sword."

"You are not dead, but yes, you dropped the sword," Dad says with a proud smile. "Your mother and I knew you were destined for greatness from the moment we first held you."

I let my tears roll down my cheeks. "I'm so sorry for what I did. I didn't mean for any of this to happen."

"Oh, my darling, no!" Mum turns me around and forces me to look at her. "Everything happens for a reason. Just like these flames, we can't burn forever. There will come a time when the flame is blown out, but that doesn't mean it is gone for good. It simply gets ignited elsewhere."

"But I—" I choke on the words, a sob tearing from my throat. "I'm the one who blew yours out."

"And by doing so, you let us burn a new flame," Dad says, his hands falling onto my arms.

Another flame appears, this one brighter than the others, beaming like a star in the night sky.

"What are these?" I ask, reaching out to touch it, but it flickers away.

"These are your way home. You must return to the living world," he answers softly.

I look between my parents, watching the glow in their faces fade like the flames dying around us. Panic grips me as I realise they're returning to the spirit world.

"Please don't go—I need you!"

I reach out to grab them, but my hand falls through, causing my panic to soar.

"Never forget how much we love you," my mum whispers, fading into a silver flame that merges with the others.

My dad vanishes with her, but his voice still carries to me ever so faintly.

"It's time to wake up, Corvina."

And with a blast of light, I fall back into a warmer embrace, the darkness vanishing.

"Wake up, Corvina!" Narah screams, rocking me in her arms. "Wake up, we don't have time!"

I blink at her, my body shivering in her tight grasp, my head resting against her chest covered in blood that sticks to my hair. Ash and dust brush my lashes and I look up at the sky, knowing even though it is clear and full of stars, my world is about to crash and burn.

Flickering my eyes from my frantic mother, I notice the mess we are sitting in, the rumble of the palace around us. We're still on the battlefield but there are no more Titans, and whatever followers Eva had fighting with them are no longer here. There is a silence—a quiet after the storm. When Narah sees my eyes open, she presses my face to her chest.

"Oh, thank Selena! I thought I lost you too."

"What…happened?" I croak out, wincing at the pain seizing my body.

"When you let go of the sword, your magic shattered it into pieces." She pauses, her arms tensing around me. "Corvina, it… it killed them before making itself whole once more. I sent it away with the last of my magic, thankfully it was weak from losing its connection to you."

Hysteria threatens me with her broken reply. What does she mean my magic killed them? We wanted to win the war, right? So why is that a bad thing?

Gently pushing her away, I prepare to stand on my feet, but I stop when I see what lies before me. Pitch rests on the ground, his dirt-covered face almost peaceful, but I don't sense our bond anymore. It's like someone has cut the string that tethers us with a knife. Beside my shadow, Zander, Gage, Jonah, and even my friends Ambrose and Izora rest peacefully. Again, they just look like they're sleeping, but I know that they are not.

They're dead!

The hysteria I tried holding back explodes from me. Plaintive screams claw from my throat as I crawl over to their bodies. I touch and shake them, trying to wake them up, to heal them, but nothing happens. How could the destruction of the sword do this? It doesn't make sense. But now they are gone.

"No…" The word barely leaves my lips. "Pitch, get up. Get up now!"

He doesn't move.

I move on to Jonah and Zander, my tears splashing onto their faces.

"It's time to wake up," I sob out, repeating the words my dad used, hoping by some miracle that the flames will appear again and bring them back to me.

My guys.

My friends.

How can they really be gone?

As my screams turn into wails, and I bury my face in my hands, I realise that the six flames belonged to each one of them. Now they have been blown out and will no longer burn at my side.

Narah pulls me back into her arms and I cry into her, my sobs turning into shuddering gasps until I can no longer stand from exhaustion and heartache. Nestled in my mother's arms, I cry until I have no more tears to shed.

"Ambrose sacrificed himself trying to save the others," she says, but it only makes me glance at their bodies again. My lips quiver and I turn my face away, unable to look at them. I feel numb inside as Narah embraces me, running her hands through my hair like my mum used to do. "Now it is my turn to make a sacrifice."

Numbly, I look up at her, my entire body drained. I'm surprised by the tears I find in her gaze. One of them slides down her cheek as she smiles at me.

"All of my life, I searched the darkness for a light, yet I could never find it." She holds me tighter, her arms wrapped around me like a warm blanket. "It's because you were my light, Corvina. But now I have the chance to be your light." Pressing a lingering kiss to my forehead, she whispers, "Let me guide you through this darkness."

I thought I had no more tears to shed, but realising what my mother is saying, my eyes fill with them again.

The Dark Fae Queen is going to sacrifice herself to bring the others back.

"I love you," I tell her, hugging her one last time. "You will always be my mother… Thank you."

Narah closes her eyes and lets out a sigh of relief as if she's waited her whole life to hear those words. She spreads her arms and I move back, watching as the ashes lift off the ground around us and whirl around her. They turn into black rose petals that flutter over the bodies of my fallen loved ones, making them glow, and I feel each of their bonds returning to me. First Pitch, then Zander, then Gage and Jonah. Each of them, including Izora and Ambrose, stir awake and my heart is once more made whole again. As the flowers return to Narah and cover her entirely, I just catch the smile on her face before the wind carries her spirit off into the night sky.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Corvina

Tears stain my dirt-covered cheeks as I think about Narah and what she sacrificed for me. I will never forget what she did in her final moments. My mother loved me in her own, slightly messed up way, but it's because of her love that my mates and friends are alive again. For that, I will always be thankful.

I light the black candle and Izora lights the white one at its side in front of the academy. Thousands of other candles surround the building and one by one they light up for all our fallen, for everyone we have lost.

I returned to the academy where all the fae and shadowborn from the war came and told them the war was won, but the Dark Fae Queen had died. Many cried, many bowed to me, and everyone shared the same sense of loss and joy that we were safe. One of Izora's mates suggested we find a way to say goodbye, to mark this day, and these candles will forever stay alight; lit up outside the academy grounds like the stars in the night sky.

The Enchanted Forest will never forget.

This is our way of saying goodbye.

I step back into Zander's arms as I cry, and he gently rubs my back as my mates all step around me, touching me somewhere for comfort. For a long time, we stand like this as I say my farewells, knowing my mates will keep me safe.

"Vina, look," Pitch whispers.

I pull away from Zander, watching in awe as dozens of wisps float around the candles. They bounce from candle to candle as we all watch and

I almost smile as three wisps come to me, flying around my body as my guys step back. I look over to see three other wisps doing the same to Izora and we smile at each other.

"I think they want to take you somewhere," Sage says, stepping in the middle of us. "You should always follow a wisp. The gods send them after all."

I float my hand above one of them and nod, knowing Sage is right. It was a wisp that brought me to the academy. I wonder where they want to take me now.

"I will be back soon," I tell my guys, knowing this is a part of my story I have to do alone. Two wisps stay at my side and one moves to float in front of me as I follow it through my people and to the forest. I look back to see Izora following her own wisps somewhere else in another direction. So we aren't going to the same place it seems.

I follow the wisps for a good half an hour before reaching a clearing in the forest. On a glowing black rock lies the crown Narah had for me in her mausoleum, and surrounding it are dozens of other wisps, each floating together like they are dancing to a song only they can hear.

"I guess you want me to take the crown and become queen?" I ask the wisps, but it's not them that answers me.

"My child, yes, you deserve the crown."

A woman who glows white from every inch of her body appears behind the rock and slowly her features come more into view. She is stunning in an otherworldly way. Looking at her hurts and soothes me at the same time.

"I am the soul of Selena, but you know this, child. Come and kneel before me."

In pure awe, I all but stumble to the goddess and kneel before her. Her hand rests on my head and I feel her magic wash over me. I look down to see my ruined clothes have been replaced with a black dress. It's beyond beautiful, covered in ravens, and it has a high neckline with long lace sleeves. My hair half up and not the messy, blood-covered state it was a few seconds ago.

"Thank you," I say nervously, and she laughs. It's the most melodic sound in the world.

"I cannot have my new queen accepting the *Throne of Luna* in such clothing," she answers me and I smile bashfully at her. "Now, you can never speak of this moment. Every queen or king that takes the throne will

meet me or my sister soul for a moment. This is a gift given to only true heirs."

"Thank you for his gift," I whisper.

"Do you accept the *Throne of Luna* and promise to always protect its people and the forest?" she asks me, the weight of her question pressing on my soul for the answer.

Sensing my next words mean everything, I straighten my back and bow my head. "I accept the throne and promise to always protect my people and the forest."

Selena rests the crown on my head and offers me her hand. "Now rise, Queen Corvina of the Dark Fae Kingdom. Long may you rule. Long may you live."

In seconds, she fades away, and I miss her light almost instantly, but I know in my soul that was the last time I will ever see the goddess. Holding my head high, I follow the wisps back through the forest to the academy. When I get there, all the light fae and shadowborn are on their knees, bowing at Izora on the other side of the forest. She has King Urlic's crown on her head and is wearing a silver dress covered in wolves. We both smile at each other as the dark fae begins bowing to me, and my mates all grin before kneeling. Even Ambrose nods his head and kneels. Without another thought, I run to my sister and she runs to me, too. We crash in the middle of all our people and hug each other.

Two sisters brought life into the Enchanted Forest all those years ago.

And now, two sisters will protect it, love it, and be the best royals the fae has ever seen.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Corvina

Five years later

I wrap my arms around myself, rubbing the chill from my arms. Staring out into the Enchanted Forest from my balcony, the wind whips my hair around me and lifts the hem of my black dressing gown. The forest hums and sings with harmony and peace, much like it has done since I took the throne and promised my soul to the forest and its people. I glance back into my bedroom behind me where my mates are all laid out in various positions on our enormous bed. My dark soul belongs to the forest, but my heart belongs to them.

It always has and always will.

Flickering my eyes around our bedroom, I think again about how much I adore it. Our bedroom takes up the space of about three rooms and most of that is the bed in the centre. The giant dark wooden headboard stretches to the ceiling. Pitch spent days creating it from a large tree outside the palace. The tree can still be seen as its roots are the sides of the bed and the main bark of the tree has dozens of ravens and wolves running and flying around a crown in the middle.

My crown.

Soon after the war, I announced Pitch, Jonah, Zander, and Gage as my kings of the Dark Fae. They each took over a section of the kingdom to help get Zorya on its feet. Together we have spent five long years putting it back together, and it's better than it has ever been. Magic and blood have been poured into the very castle walls I stand in now, and we will never forget.

I walk to the edge of the balcony and look down at the centre of the royal courtyard where something special to me rests. Closing my eyes, I turn into my raven and fly down to the courtyard, landing on the rose covered ground before shifting back and looking up. The statue of my mother doesn't look down at me but stares up at the sky above, her one hand reaching for the stars. Her crown rests on her long hair that falls down with her ball gown, and even though this is just a statue, it is so much more. I feel her soul here, watching over me, protecting me. Using my wings, I fly up a little, so we are face to face.

"I miss you, Mother," I whisper as I place my hand on her cheek.

I sense the god before he speaks. "I suspect she misses you as well, little queen."

"Ambrose!" I chuckle, spinning around. I fly to him, and he opens his arms, embracing me in a tight hug as I rest my head on his chest. After the war, Ambrose decided he wanted to see the human world and live in it for a while. He still comes back every so often to check on me, mostly because he knows I would hunt his ass down if he didn't. I pull back and Ambrose rests his hands on my shoulders. Even with the biggest smile on his face, the sadness never quite leaves his eyes.

A vision flashes into my mind so quickly it makes me stumble. I smile as the image leaves my mind.

"What did you see?" he asks with a frown, always suspecting the worst.

My visions are a new power that I suspect was given to me as a blessing from Selena when I ascended the throne. I've been having visions in my sleep of anything from danger to joy, and everything in the middle. Usually, the visions come in my dreams, but lately touching people or objects bring them on. The healers believe it's just a natural progression of my powers. Remnants of the sword's magic still lingers in my blood, making me stronger than ever.

"Only that your story is just beginning, and a wild card is coming your way, Ambrose," I say, winking at him.

"You fae and your secrets," he grumbles and stretches his arms above his head. "I'm starving. Do you think the kitchens will have anyone awake at this time?"

"Nope but I can make a mean ham and cheese sandwich," I tell him, hooking my arm with his as we head to the doors to the castle. "If you're lucky, I might throw in some crisps."

“Fingers crossed,” he drawls and I laugh in response, resting my head on his shoulder as two of my guards open the doors for us with a bow. Their purple and black armour shines from the moonlight, highlighting the raven sigil on their breastplates. My guards were all chosen and trained by Pitch and Zander, who now train and look after our army. Many were lost in the war, but like this castle, time moves on and new things can be found in the darkness.

“How is the human world treating you?” I ask Ambrose as we head down the corridor and a flight of stairs to the kitchens. It’s silent in here, nothing but the sounds of the crackling embers in the fireplace in the centre of the floor. Ambrose takes off his brown leather jacket. He hangs it on the back of a seat before sitting on the edge of the counter, watching as I head straight to the fridge.

“I’ve just accepted a job at a reform school in the back end, middle of nowhere Scotland,” he tells me, and that was more random than I expected. “Sheep for miles, I’m telling you.”

“Why the heck would you do that?” I laugh as I grab the ham and cheese, thinking of all the human students who wouldn’t have a clue that the God of Life is their teacher.

As I make the sandwiches, Ambrose talks. “The reform school is for teenagers and young adults who fucked up, but it is built on an old source of power, something of my mother’s. The school itself is laced with magic, and a lot of the students are not what they seem. It’s a mystery I want to investigate.”

“Sounds like fun,” I say, handing him a plate with his sandwich on it. I grab two packets of crisps and give him one before pulling a stool out and eating my food. “How long are you staying? I know the guys would want to see you before you vanish.”

“I don’t start at the school for a week,” he answers. “So if you’ll have me, Queen Corvina, I would like to stay here until then.”

“You’re always welcome here for as long as you want, Ambrose. You’re family to me—the brother I never had,”

“Technically, you’re sleeping with your stepbrother. Do I get the same perks?” he cheekily asks and Pitch appears behind him in the shadow, whacking him across the back of the head.

“No, you fucking well do not,” he playfully grumbles, kissing me on the cheek and standing behind me. He wraps his arms around my waist and

squeezes me gently. “The queen is needed back in bed. See you in the morning, mate.”

Before I can say goodbye to a laughing Ambrose, shadows smother me. When I reappear, Pitch is on top of me in the middle of our bed and kisses me deeply. I arch my body into him as his lips devour my own, his hands running down my body until he finds my nightgown tie and undoes it. It falls to the side, leaving me completely exposed underneath him. The bed is empty other than Jonah and us, and I push my magic into Jonah a little to wake him up.

As Pitch kisses down my jaw, I turn my head to the side where Jonah is lying, slowly coming awake. All that covers him is a black sheet, and as Pitch’s tongue finds my one of nipples, I moan and close my eyes.

Jonah’s lips cover my own in seconds, and Pitch kisses down my body, his lips heading straight for my clit as Jonah’s hands cover my breasts, rolling his thumbs across my nipples. My back arches as Pitch sucks and nibbles on my clit, pushing two fingers into me at the same time.

I reach for Jonah’s hard cock which is pressing into my side. Stroking Jonah, he groans into my mouth as he continues to rub my nipples, and Pitch pushes me closer to the edge of ecstasy.

<*Come for us, Vina,*> Pitch whispers in my mind.

His command has me spiraling into an intense orgasm that shakes through my body. Jonah lets me go.

Feeling what Pitch wants, I crawl onto my knees in front of him. Looking up at my shadow through my lashes, wrapping my hands around his muscular thighs, I flick my tongue over Pitch’s tip.

Jonah grabs my hips and kneels behind me, rubbing his thick cock over my slit. He pushes into me slowly, as if savoring every bit of friction we create.

With undying hunger, I take all of Pitch into my mouth. Pitch sinks his hands into my hair as Jonah pounds into me, his cock hitting the sweet spot every single time in this position.

As my pleasure builds up again, I moan around Pitch’s cock which sends him into a frenzy. He holds my head as I suck him harder, his breathless moan turning me on as much as Jonah’s groans. I crash into an orgasm, sucking hard on Pitch as he comes with me. Two thrusts later Jonah roars as he spills inside me, making my orgasm so much more intense.

Breathlessly, we all fall back onto our bed, and I snuggle up in the middle of them as Jonah uses his magic to clean us and drape a blanket over us.

"Where are Zander and Gage?" I ask around a yawn.

"Right here," Zander replies, coming into the room with Gage behind him. "Seems we missed all the fun."

"Damn," Gage grumbles as they both get into bed, only playfully though.

Every morning they spend fucking me, so it's only a matter of hours before they can make up for the fun they missed. I smile as I close my eyes in complete and utter contentment.

"Happy Birthday," everyone cheers as I step into the breakfast hall.

The masses of decorations surrounding the room, and all my loved ones inside of it, brings a smile to my lips. Blue balloons cover the glass ceiling, a massive black cake with fake tiny ravens flying around it rests on a table in the middle. Piles of presents sit on the floor around it.

I don't know who to look at first as they sing the happy birthday song to me while Echo flies around the room, making adorable little squeaks from excitement. Sage is right in the middle, her hands resting on the huge bump under her yellow dress, her pink hair has been pulled back into two messy buns.

David smiles at me from her side, looking a million times better than the teacher I once knew. Sage's love saved him, dug him out of the darkness, and now with the baby on the way, there will be a family for him to have.

My mates stand around Sage, and Ambrose at the side of them next to my sister. Izora sings loudly in her white jeans and crop top, her waves of silver hair falling around her as she claps her hands. Beside her are Willow and Jane, clapping as she smiles at me.

Jane and I had a long way to go after the war, but we soon found out we are more alike than we knew. And even if Jane annoys the heck out of me most of the time, she is damn smart and good at negotiating with dark creatures and fae alike. I needed a royal advisor to help me and she was perfect for the job. The rest is history. I would even go as far as to call her a good friend now.

The rest of the room is filled with my old teachers that survived the war, the light and dark fae I got to know over the years, and even Zander's dad… which is a whole other story that has a lot to do with Izora's mates who aren't here. When the song ends, they wait for me to say something and I'm speechless for a moment.

"Thank you so much, everyone," I start off, clasping my hands together and looking out at the statue of my mother for some encouragement. Echo snoozing on top of the statue, now bored with the celebrations, makes me smile. "I never once believed I would be lucky enough to find love and have a family again, but here you all are," I say. "You're better than anything I could have dreamed about. There are so many I wish were here with us right now, but I know they are watching us from the stars. I love each and every one of you, so thank you for being in my life. For loving me. For being the light in my darkness…"

I stop and wipe my eyes, shocked that I'm actually crying in front of them. My mates surround me in seconds, holding me tightly until I calm down.

"Out of the way, pregnant lady coming through," Sage commands, and my mates, the kings of the dark fae, move their asses like a wasp just stung them.

They haven't said it, but I think pregnancy scares the living daylights out of them all, and me too a little bit. It doesn't mean I don't think of having children, because I do.

One of the biggest changes I made in my time as queen is the rule that shadowborn children have to be taken from their parents to a foster home. The new rules state that parents can move into the dark fae kingdom with their child if they wish, and if not, the child will be brought up in the new and massively improved foster homes in my city—not the ones hidden in the human world. I regularly visit the ones here and bring the children gifts and food, as well as paying the dark fae who looks after them like their own. No more shadowborn children are going to grow up feeling unwanted.

Sage hugs me and I savour the embrace as everyone in the room starts settling into the glorious feast laid out.

"How are you feeling?" I ask her, instantly touching her belly like I always do.

Sage's hands cover mine over the bump and she shrugs. "Weird today. I can't put my finger on why, though. I believe it's time I move into the castle for the birth if you still want me."

"Yes!" I practically shout at her, grinning wildly. "Besides, you can't give birth at the academy, Headmistress Milhouse."

The new headmistress of the academy only grumbles at me, not liking that her deputy head, Willow, will be taking over for eight months while Sage gives birth and spends alone time with the baby. I know I will be sad when Sage, David, and the baby move back into the academy, but I will be visiting all of the time.

When we reopened the academy, it was a no brainer who should be taking control and looking after the students. Sage is a very powerful Light Fae now and with David at her side as headmaster, and a good mixture of shadowborn and fae teachers, the academy has never been as strong as it is now.

Sage links her arm with mine and we go to help ourselves to food. After eating as much as I can possibly manage, I sit back in my seat and watch how my family, my friends, and everyone I love fills the room with laughter and joy. It's perfect here in every sense of the word. I couldn't think of a more wonderful way to start my mid-twenties.

Zander steps behind my chair, resting his hands on my shoulders. "I want to show you my gift. Will you come with me, my queen?"

"Is that where you and Gage went last night?" I stand up and wrap my arms around him.

Zander winks at me as he shadowlocates us out into the stables at the back of the castle. I frown at him as I look around the three empty stalls and Zander gently grabs my hand, leading me down the aisle to the stall at the end. Inside is a truly stunning and elegant black Shire that towers over us. Its silver eyes and mane have blue tints to them as the sunlight shines through the doors. I place my hand on his head, and he neighs at me, kicking his legs.

"We spent four weeks negotiating with fae traders for him," Zander says, stroking a hand down the horse's neck. "They wanted so many things

that involved going through swamps and such… Anyway, he's yours. What do you think? It's the main gift from your mates. Happy Birthday."

I jump into Zander's arms, raining kisses down on him as he picks me up. He chuckles before kissing me hard and passionately. I wrap my legs around him as he pushes me harder against the wall outside the stall, his hard cock pressing into me through the thin fabric of my leggings. Using magic, I make all our clothes disappear, and in seconds Zander easily slides inside of me, filling me up. I moan against his lips as he thrusts in and out, using the wall to hold us up.

"Fuck, Corvina, to this day you drive me insane!" Zander groans against my lips as I get closer to my release. The mixture of my nipples rubbing against his hard chest, the way his trusts hit the right spot every single time is addictive.

"Zander….I….love….you," I moan each word out as I crash into an orgasm, tightening around Zander's cock.

He moans as he feels me come and his tongue dives into my mouth, sparring with my own. He thrusts one more time and fills me with his cum. Breathless, we stare at each other and he softly strokes the side of my cheek.

"I love you so damn much, Corvina Charles. I will always love you."

I kiss him again, pushing all my emotions and love into the kiss. I don't know how long we stay like that, entwined, holding each other, before I sense someone arriving. I pull away from Zander and reach for my dress, only to see Gage walking into the stables. He doesn't even blink as Zander lets me go and I use my magic to put my clothes back on. When I see his eyes, I know something is wrong.

"Sage is in labour and it's too early. The healers are with her now but she needs you," Gage says and I rush to him, fear and panic pounding in my mind. We always knew Sage's pregnancy might not be normal because she was forcibly made into a Light Fae *and* she's shadowborn. Nobody knows what her baby will be or how the birth will affect Sage.

Selena, please keep her safe.

"Take me," I say as I reach for Gage's hand.

Gods, I can't lose my best friend.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Corvina

I pace around the room, my steps echoing in the corridor as I wait for the healers to come out and give an update. They asked to be alone with Sage to do a healing spell after nearly forty-eight hours of labour and no sign of the baby yet. David is sitting on the floor in a state, my mates are pacing at either end of the corridors, and Izora is trying to comfort everyone with no luck.

The doors finally open and two healers step out, leaving Sage alone in the room. David doesn't wait, rushing in as the healer with blue hair a similar colour to mine, bows at me, and starts to speak.

"We have delivered the baby safely. Both mother and babe are doing well but Sage is weak. We will go and gather healing supplies," she says, just then I hear the small cry of a baby.

I burst into tears and hug the surprised healer before rushing into the room with Izora behind me.

Sitting on a huge bed that dwarfs her tiny size, Sage looks down at the baby wrapped in a white blanket in her arms.

David kneels next to the bed, kissing Sage's other hand, and I slowly walk over to look down at the tiny bundle in her arms.

"Vina, meet your niece," Sage softly says, handing me the bundle. "Nieve Corvina Milhouse."

My tears splash on Nieve's blanket as I look at her little button nose, her black wisps of hair, and bright pink eyes that look up at me.

“She is beautiful. Her name means heaven, right?” Izora asks, leaning over my shoulder to gaze down at Nieve.

“Yes,” Sage says, glancing at David who’s crying silent tears of relief and love. “I named her after David’s mother who sadly died. Her middle name is after the bravest woman I have ever known.”

“I love you,” I tell her as I gently pass Nieve back and slide onto the bed beside her. Nieve’s little hand reaches out of the blanket and I gently place my finger next to her hand. The second she touches me, darkness slams into my mind, and as a vision blasts through me.

“Nieve, wait up!” A boy about eight with deep black hair shouts as he runs through the trees. He has black trousers and a white top on, with a small sword clipped to a belt on his waist. The boy isn’t alone. At his side is a younger boy with blonde hair in similar clothes and it’s clear they are brothers. They have almost the same faces and they are so familiar to me as if I’ve seen them before. The way the little boy looks up at the older one is a look only a brother can give.

The boys step into a beautiful meadow where Nieve dances around in the middle of the air. Her long black hair sways around her, white wings fluttering ever so softly at her back. Flowers and wisps fly around the children like they know each other well as the sun shines down on the clearing. There is magic here. Good, pure magic.

The older boy, who has black wings like Pitch, flies into the air, and the younger boy who has wings just like mine, follows after him. The children all laugh and chuckle as they dance to no music. I oddly feel emotional as I stare at them.

Turning my head, I see two people coming out of the trees close to me. It’s myself, but I’m older, and next to me is Sage. We hold hands as we stare at the children.

“I’m so happy my boys love your daughter so much. They will keep each other safe always,” I say to her, and the future version of myself glances my way with a wink. I turn back to the boys who are my future sons, joy making my heart soar, and I watch them play until the vision drifts away.

I wake up on my bed, moonlight trickling into the room. Gage is softly stroking my hair. I smile up at him when he sees I’m awake.

“What happened in the vision?” he asks me in a whisper as I sit up and crawl into his arms. “We have all been worried.”

Remembering the children playing together, my oldest boy couldn’t have been more than a year younger than Nieve, so I must get pregnant soon. Or possibly I already am. When was my last period? Now I think about it, my visions have never been this strong before or in the daytime at all. I would usually get visions at night.

Smiling about my maybe secret, I burrow my face into Gage’s neck and kiss him softly in the spot I know he loves. His hands tighten on my waist as I kiss up to his neck to his lips, covering them with mine.

He groans and tugs me harder against him. Undoing his trousers, I kiss him harder. Using magic, I get rid of all of our clothes and lean back onto Gage’s cock.

He slowly slides inside me, fitting me perfectly as his thumb rolls on my clit. I play with my own nipples as I ride his cock, loving every second of having him inside me. Gage growls and picks me up, placing me on my back and driving right back inside me with one smooth movement. His lips devour my own as he thrusts hard in and out of me, drawing me closer to the edge of ecstasy. I curl my toes as the pressure becomes too much, and I crash into an orgasm. Gage continues to slam into me, making it more intense as he smothers my moans with his lips. I moan as he drives in one last time, spilling his cum inside of me, his eyes blazoned with lust.

“You’re too good at distracting me, Vina,” Gage groans as he rolls off me and I chuckle. “Too damn good.”

“I will tell all of you tomorrow about the vision. Are Sage and Nieve okay?” I ask as he covers us with a blanket.

Pitch is the one that answers me as he shadowlocates into the room. “I just checked on them and they are doing well,” he says. “Izora had to return to Vasili, so Zander and Jonah are staying guard outside Sage’s room until you come back. We all knew you would want someone you trust watching them until they feel better.”

I sigh with relief. My mates know me so well.

“Now, what happened in your vision?” Pitch demands, but instead of answering, I lean up and kiss him.

I’m the master of distraction after all.

The ruins of my childhood home surround me, filling my heart with sadness and regret. I haven't been here since Keeper Maddox suggested I say goodbye before going to the academy. That was over six years ago now and so much in my life has changed.

I competed in the Fae Tryouts, I fought in a war and won, I became the Dark Fae Queen of Zorya, and I have four incredible men at my side. I also gained friends as well as sisters, and I even met my birth parents before they died. But the most amazing thing of all is the news I have come to tell the man and woman who raised me.

"Hey Mum, hey Dad," I whisper, placing the wreathed flowers on the gravestone I had made for them. It was Gage's idea, and although I'd wept like a child when I came back here for the first time, I'm happy I did it; it's nice to have something beautiful within all the wreckage.

"When I was a kid," I tell them quietly, "I used to have a dream that I was a princess who lived in the sky. Do you remember? Dad, you built me a treehouse in the garden and we painted clouds and rainbows over it. Although my clouds looked like snowmen." A quiet laugh escapes me and pained tears well in my eyes. "I wish you were both here so I could tell you this in person."

Taking a deep breath, I glance at the sky, about to say the words out loud for the first time, but movement in the trees stops me. I turn to see Wren landing on a branch. Rook and Crowe follow her, and the three of them squawk in encouragement.

"I'm going to have a baby," I tell my parents, smiling at the gravestone. I place a hand proudly on my stomach. "I'm only a few weeks but I already have so much love for my little soybean. I'm more nervous than excited, though. I can't sleep or think straight. Did you both feel like that when you adopted me?" No one but the wind answers me and my smile fades. "I've lost two sets of parents before I got the chance to become a parent myself. I'm worried I'll make a mistake, or I'll not be a good enough mum."

"You will be as great a mother as you are a queen," Wren says, and I glance back to see her spreading her wings out in a bow.

“We are proud of you, Your Majesty,” Rook adds, his voice thick with emotion.

“Yes, very proud.” Crowe hops excitedly on the branch. “And your birth and adoptive parents would be just as proud of you, too. We are sure of it.”

I blink the tears away and nod at them. “Thank you. If it wasn’t for you guys, I wouldn’t be sitting here right now. I’m so lucky to call you my friends.”

Rook and Crowe bow along with Wren.

“Always,” they say in unison.

Branches snap behind us, and a gust of wind lifts my hair onto the breeze. My guys emerge from the shadows, each one looking as worried as the next. Pitch’s red eyes land on me and then on the gravestone. Slowly, the redness fades and his eyes turn gold again. He nods once, giving me a pained smile.

I place a hand on the gravestone, hugging my parents the only way I can, and stand on my feet. The tightness in my chest has gone and I feel like a huge weight has been lifted off me. I can breathe again. I’m so glad that I came here.

“Corvina,” Zander whispers, rushing over to me. “We woke and you were gone.”

“Are you alright?” Jonah demands, sweeping his eyes over me. His gaze lands on my hand pressed on my stomach.

“I just wanted to tell my parents the good news,” I say, looking at them,

Gage steps forward. “What news, Vina?”

A smile spreads over my lips. “I’m pregnant. We’re going to have a baby!”

Their answer is to embrace me, showering me with kisses and whispers of love and adoration.

I have finally got the happy ending I dreamt of as a child, and I couldn’t be happier.

My name is Corvina Charles. I’m a shadowborn, a fae, a queen, a mate, and now I am a mother.

My life is no longer in the shadows and it never will be again.

EPILOGUE

My dark robes billow behind me as I step out from the shadows. The figure slouched in the dragon throne is not the king I thought I would see here, and nor is the blood seeping through the dais.

"Make yourself known," I say into the darkness, sensing another presence lingering close by.

A low, quiet chuckle circulates around me. "You have come at a bad time."

I sweep my gaze over King Cyrus' dead body bleeding out on the throne. Even I, God of the Dead and Underworld, do not like to see fae killed so brutally. Fae lives were once created and honoured by my mate, and they each should have a death worthy of her love. "It seems I have come at the right time."

At my reply, the Dark Fae appears from behind the throne. His robe and medallion are the same ones the Dragon King's advisor donned, except this face does not belong to Julius Griscor.

This is the face of a coward and now a slayer of kings.

"Professor Greyhorn," I spit his name scathingly. "I do not believe I was summoned here by you."

"No," he offers dryly, dragging the king off the throne and dropping him on the dais in two swift moves. "Cyrus called you before I slid my sword through his throat. It's funny what pleas even a king gives when threatened with death. Even funnier are the noises they make when choking on their blood."

I watch him settle down on the throne and run his hands over the gilded armrests. I know that look on his countenance all too well; the feeling of power and victory filling your soul until there is nothing left but the need for more. This fae will soon learn that nothing will ever fill that void.

“While I do enjoy talking about blood and death,” I say, narrowing my gaze on him, “I came here to fulfill a bargain, and I despise those who waste my time.”

Greyhorn dares wave a hand at me dismissively. “And it shall be fulfilled, for I upheld my end of the bargain. The king fought in the war and Corvina won. In return, you promised to hand over the Lost Princess of Draconia. Where is she?”

I scoff at his reply. This fae believes that he is a god, which he is no more of one than I am fae, but his insanity has me questioning his motives. His intentions cannot be as pure as King Cyrus’ were. The snake-like Greyhorn cares only about power and greed.

“What do you plan to do with this child?” I eye him closely, waiting for his facade to crack. “She is weak-minded and her spirit frail, much like her mother. She is not fit to sit on that throne no more than you are.”

A derisive grin slides onto his face. “Do I detect a hint of concern, Dark God?”

In reply I lift my hand, seizing the air in his lungs. “Enough of your wasteful talking! While I am a god of my word, if you so much as touch a hair on this child’s body, I will feed you to my dog and bind your soul so that you will endure your death for the rest of eternity with Cerberus feeding on your rotting flesh.” Tightening my invisible grip on his throat, I pull my lips back into a snarl. “Do. You. Understand?”

“Y-yes,” he chokes out, grasping his throat to remove my invisible hold. “Re…lease…me!”

I let him go but only because I have a deal to honour. If I had my way, I would drag his pathetic corpse down to the abyss and let him rot. As he struggles to catch his breath, I climb onto the dais and bring my face inches from his.

“Now, if you want to remain up with the living, you will tell me exactly what you are doing in Draconia and what your intentions are with the Lost Princess.”

Still gasping for air, he shapeshifts into a face that I recognise.

Julius Griscor.

This means it was Greyhorn who convinced the king to help my son win the war, which means he is the one to reap the rewards. A bitter taste rises into my throat. I don’t like dealing with snakes at the best of times. They are too slimy for my liking.

“The throne,” he manages to say, rubbing his throat. “I wanted the *Throne of Luna* but the halfbreed stole it from me! All I want is to rule my own kingdom. This is the only one left. I have the trust of the people here and the power to protect them. When the child is of age, she will inherit the throne and I will wed her. That is all. Until then, she will be my ward and under my protection.”

“You are no dragon,” I point out with a snarl. “And there are three princes before you. They will rule and protect her.”

He grins. “They died in the war.”

“How convenient!”

“I am a god whether you think me one or not,” he snaps, straightening as much as he can on the throne. “I will be the king here, one day, whether you want me to be or not.”

I step back from the dais, clasping my hands behind my back in contemplation. I am unfortunately bound to honour this deal and have no choice but to hand Draconia over to Greyhorn.

The Dragon Queen is too weak to rule and her other surviving daughter, Kaida, cares not for the throne. It was the sole reason her father summoned me and asked that I retrieve his lost child from the mortal realm. He wished to replace Kaida with the more tameable sister. The desires and cruelty of the fae never cease to amaze me. Truly, they do not, and they far exceed those of the gods, contrary to what the tales would have people believe.

While I don’t really care what happens to magics here, I vowed to Persephone that I would protect her forest should she ever fall. It is why I made this deal with Cyrus in the first place—to honor my wife’s dying wish. One child in exchange for an entire forest. I have sacrificed more for less. And I will be able to ensure her safety from afar, at least until she is of age. It is the least I can do for her father who, while frail, was a noble ruler to his kingdom.

With a wave of my hand, I summon the girl and lay her sleeping body on a chaise by the window. She is young enough to be moulded into a queen, but hopefully, with time, she will be strong enough to give Greyhorn his just desserts once and for all.

For now, all I can do is watch from the shadows, but time is no matter to gods like me. With one final look at the soon to be king of the dragons, I turn away into the shadows and reappear on the edge of the forest near

Shadowborn Academy. My son sits with the new queen of dark fae, his arm wrapped around her shoulder, and I simply watch.

He may not want me in his life, but I will always protect my only son.

Looking up at the night sky, I send a silent prayer to my long lost mate.

Your forest is safe in my care, my love. Rest well. We will meet again soon.

The End

THANK YOU

It's the end! Are you okay? I don't feel like we were ready to say goodbye either! Thank you so much to every reader that picked up this series as well as a big thank you to everyone who helped along the way.

For us, this is our first completed series and we hope you will stick around to read Izora's trilogy and one more trilogy in this world.

Did someone say dragons?

Thank you one more time! Happy Reading!

Oh, and don't forget to preorder SHADOWBORN ROYALS: Dark Paranormal Prison Series Book Two!

Villainous Hearts Exclusive Excerpt

Villainous Hearts

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Everyone loves to sin but only the villains embrace it.

After turning a jerk's manhood into stone, Zara is sent to the Academy for Villains—a place where troublemakers must atone for their sin or risk burning in the Underworld forever. It's also where **Hades** claims she's his reincarnated wife, bad boy **Loki of Asgard** is determined to seduce her, and the **Prince of Darkness** wants to turn her into his new vampire bride.

Zara might be surrounded by villains, some of them devilishly sexy, but they have no idea what she's capable of…and she has no idea what secrets lurk in the shadows waiting to tear her world apart.

Academy for Villains is a Hades/Persephone retelling with a Reverse Harem Paranormal Romance twist featuring various kinds of mythology in a reform school setting. 18+.

Chapter One

Zara

"Why do villains get punished for having fun?" I sit down on the beach next to my sister and glance up at the blinding sunlight. "One tiny hiccup and now we're stuck at the Academy for Villains for three whole months. It's so unfair."

"You turned a guy's dick into stone and snapped it like a glow stick." Murie side-eyes me with an amused grin sliding over her lips. "What did you think would happen?"

I give a casual shrug. "He touched my butt so I broke his dick. No touchy, no hurty." Tossing my long pink hair over my shoulders, I follow her gaze. The sun has nearly touched the horizon. That means the ship will be here soon, and my stomach clenches at the thought. "Anyway, it was my hair that turned him into stone, not me."

She snorts under her breath. "Blame it on your half Gorgon side like you always do."

"Hey, it's a legit reason. I'm cursed!"

Murie drapes her arm over my shoulders, her feet buried in the water lapping at the shore. "And I'm cursed, too. This academy is the only place for people like us."

"Who? People who are fucked up and not all there in the head?"

She laughs and playfully shoves my shoulder. "Bad-ass women who don't need a knight in shining armour to save them."

"I'd probably just break his dick off anyway," I grumble. "Maybe by accident this time. Maybe. Unless he turns out to be another jerk, in which case I will happily turn his dick into stone and snap it like a glowstick." I stand and brush the sand off my plaid skirt. "Unfortunately, I doubt the academy will let us use magic."

Murie pauses, brushing her silver hair behind her pointed ears. "Probably not but it's worth a try."

"Have I taught you nothing?"

Our mother's voice carries on the ocean breeze. We turn to see her emerging from the sea, the waves lapping at her waist. Her purple tentacles vanish and a long, flowing gown of dark seaweed covers her now human body. Her silver hair and lilac complexion are the same as Murie's. My pale skin, pink eyes, and hair are the complete opposite. I'm also part Gorgon and can't breathe underwater. It doesn't take a genius to see that I'm the adopted one.

"Rules are meant to be broken." My mum dips her toes into the white sand, a smile dancing over her lips. "Be proud of who you are and show no fear."

I grin at her. "Fear? I laugh in the face of fear."

As if on cue, the sand beneath my boots trembles. The sun has touched the horizon at long last and the clouds are stained with streaks of crimson and gold. In the far distance, a shadow eclipses the setting sun. I shield my gaze from the blinding rays and watch as a monstrous, dragon-shaped ship with black sails glides towards us. It should take some time for the ship to reach the shore, but it arrives only minutes later.

My heart picks up its pace as I watch the anchor plunge into the sea. A gangway is dropped down, but at first, nobody disembarks. The dragon wings slowly curl inward and then I see it, the cloud of dark energy seeping down the ramp. A hooded man materialises from the smoke, the shadows licking around his tall frame.

"Captain Nemo." He inclines his head curtly and then looks between me and Murie. "Are you the Eyre sisters?"

"Depends. You here to take us to our doom?" I ask, crossing my arms. "Also, Nemo? As in the fish?

Murie nudges me in the ribs with her elbow. "Yes, we are the Eyre sisters."

Rolling my eyes, I give the ship an assessing glance. The deck looks empty from where I'm standing. Surely, we're not the first ones to get picked up? As I push up onto my tiptoes, the captain snaps his fingers, and something sharp pricks me on the side of the neck. It's like a mosquito bite only sharper.

"What's that for?" I rub where he struck, my irritated pulse fluttering under my fingers.

"A precaution."

"For what?"

He doesn't answer me. After doing the same to Murie, he says, "Say your farewells. It is time to set sail."

I salute him. "Aye aye, Cap'n."

Nemo pivots on his heel and makes his way back to the ship. No sense of humour, huh? Figures.

"Remember what I said, darlings." Mum turns us around and cups the side of our faces. "Be proud and show no fear."

This time, I don't make a joke. I can see the worry in her eyes and it's mirrored in my own despite my bravado. My biggest coping mechanism in life has always been making light of serious situations. The twisted sense of humour I've adopted over the years has got me through some of my darkest moments. But I know, and my family knows, that deep down I'm just as worried as they are.

"Did I ever tell you why I called you Zara-Primrose?"

Her question takes me off guard. My mum rarely ever talks about the day she found me. All I know is that my birth parents left me in a basket outside a stone temple and my mum heard my cries from under the sea. She swooped me into her arms and the rest was history.

"You had this around your neck when I found you." My mum reaches into her pocket and withdraws a stone primrose hanging on a long silver chain. "I couldn't touch it without the pendant burning me. You used to wear it every day until you were about four, then you lost it while out swimming with Muriel."

"I remember that," my sister says.

"I don't."

My mum nods thoughtfully. "You cried for months. I searched everywhere for it but assumed it was lost. Then it showed up at the market in Atlantis the same day you turned that hideous young man into stone."

My eyes widen in surprise, and I take the pendant from her. "It's beautiful."

"And it's yours. It's enchanted, too, so you'll be able to use it to contact me. All you need to do is sit the primrose in water and say my name three times."

Tears prick my eyes as I drape the chain over my neck, tucking the pendant under my shirt.

"I just want you both to be safe," Mum whispers, taking both our hands. "By all means, break the rules whenever necessary, but pick those battles.

And also don't forget your old mama. Murie, have you got your pendant, too?"

"Yes." Murie hugs her. "Try not to worry, Mum. Zee and I will have each other's backs, right?"

"Right," I say, joining in on the embrace

The three of us stay like that for a long moment. When the ship sounds its horn, we know it's time and reluctantly let go before heading over to the ship. I try not to look back. It'll just make boarding the ship that much harder.

A nearly invisible veil has been wrapped around the ship. Humans wouldn't be able to see it thanks to the concealment spell. As soon as we step onto the ramp, the spell lifts, and crew members buzz around the deck. Some other students have already been picked up, and one, in particular, catches my eye. Maybe it's because he's grinning like he's just won the cruise of a fucking lifetime.

He's tall and pale with ebony hair that touches his shoulders. His emerald tunic has gold embroidery, and his black cloak whips around him as he rushes up the stairs to grab hold of the wheel. The force field protecting the wheel sends him spiraling onto his back, much to the delight of the captain and his crew. I wince as he lands on the deck with a loud slap and splutters for breath.

"Let that be a lesson to any fool wanting to take over my ship," Captain Nemo announces, pulling out a scroll and quill, gesturing to the boy. "Loki of Asgard. What sin has brought you to the Academy for Villains?"

Loki rises to his feet and brushes the dust off his clothes. "What do you think, old man?"

"I see. So you tried, yet again, to take over Asgard but failed?"

The boy's face purples with anguish. "Yes," he grits out.

Captain Nemo tuts and shakes his head, scribbling something down on the scroll. "Dear, oh dear. Perhaps next time you will be successful and not get caught." He turns to my sister. "Muriel Eyre. What is your sin?"

Murie hesitates and looks at me for support. I open my mouth to speak on her behalf but the captain cuts me off.

"She has a tongue and can answer for herself."

After a strained moment, my sister takes a deep breath. "I let a pirate drown at sea. I could've saved him, but I—I swam away."

“She was also just a kid herself, and the pirate killed our dad then tried to poach her,” I defend, narrowing my eyes on the captain. My hair bristles like a wave of static electricity as the snakes threaten to take over. “She shouldn’t even be here!”

He just scores something off, not bothering to look up from his scroll. “And you, Zara-Primrose. What sin did you commit?”

All eyes turn to me, including Loki.

Right. Now it’s my turn to tell the truth.

Only, I’m not embarrassed to say it. I embrace what I did to that little pervert.

“I turned a man’s junk into stone, then I broke it off and wore it as a necklace. That’s what he gets for pissing off a gorgon.”

To my surprise, a lot of the crew members and students just laugh. Do they think it’s a joke? Honey, I still have that stone dick in my bedroom back home. It’s sitting on my vanity like a prized fucking trophy. These men would be wise not to get on my bad side. I’m not above adding to my collection. My mum always did say I like to hoard things.

Captain Nemo interrogates the remaining students while the crew propels the ship into motion. I stand beside Murie, watching the waves crash against the surface. The dragon wings attached to the side stretch out, then start to move, lifting us up into the clouds. Okay. So the boat can fly. Thank goodness I’m not super afraid of heights or anything, or that would be a real inconvenience right about now.

Murie links her arm with mine. “This is it, Zee. No turning back.”

We couldn’t even if we wanted to, I almost say, but I don’t want to worry her even more. I rest my head on her shoulder and watch the sea growing smaller beneath us. We might not have a choice when it comes to going to the Academy for Villains, but I hope, for the sake of the students and teachers there, they are ready to meet the Eyre sisters.

We’re villains now.

And I’m not going to hold back anymore.

Preorder now!

About G. Bailey

G. Bailey is a *USA Today* and International Bestselling Author of fantasy and paranormal romance.
She lives in England with her cheeky children, her gorgeous (and slightly mad) golden retrievers and her teenage sweetheart turned husband.

She loves cups of tea.

Chocolate and Harry Potter marathons are her jam and she owns way too many notebooks and random pens.

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About Scarlett Snow

Scarlett Snow comes from a big family in a small Scottish town and has always strived to prove that if you are passionate about something, no one can stop you from chasing your dreams. She lives with her wolf dog and kitties and is unashamedly addicted to coffee.

If you'd like to join her newsletter to be kept updated on her books, you can do so here:

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OTHER BOOKS BY SCARLETT
Scarlett also writes under Kyra Snow (M/F Scifi Romance) and Katze Snow (Dark M/M Books):

Kyra
Katze

APPENDIX I—LOCATIONS

(as mentioned in the book)

Zorya Kingdom

THRONE OF LUNA
Capital City: LUNA
Ruler: Queen Narah

DEADLANDS
Inhabits: Cimmerians, Draugers, Deserters, Bandits

THE BLACK HARBOUR

THE WISHING WELL

SKULL CAVE
aka Howling Hollow Cave, Statue of Aeon

THE GORGON LAKE

FAERIE POOLS

DEVIL'S DROP

SHADOWBORN ACADEMY

SHADOWBORN PRISON

DRACONIA
Capital City: Emeria
Ruler: King Cyrus, Narah's brother
Queen Valessia
Prince Drusus (triplet)
Prince Draco (triplet)

Prince Drakon (triplet)
Princess Kaida

ZORYA INN

Helios Kingdom

THRONE OF HELIOS
Capital City: VASILI
Ruler: King Ulric
Princess Evangelina

LAKE LUMEN

HELIOS ACADEMY

AURORA BAY

PEGASUS TAVERN

FAERIE POOLS

KYLLAROS
Ruler: Chiron
Prince Elias

APPENDIX II—CHARACTERS

STUDENTS
Corvina Charles
Sage Millhouse
Zander Sabhain, Shadow Warden
Jonah Vincent
Jane Vincent
Ronan Fairweather, former
Izora Dawn
Willow Greene, Head Girl
Trolen
Kitty

WARDENS
Zander, Shadow Warden
Theodore Sabhain, High Warden
Mrs Sabhain, High Warden

TEACHERS
Lady Ivywood, Current Headmistress, Magical Defence, History of Magics, Light Fae
Maximus Greyhorn, Former Headmaster, Magical Defence, Dark Fae
Professor Aengus Lochlan, Basic Magic Control, Kelpie
Professor Stonehart, Illusions of Magic, Gargoyle (molten)
Professor Mune, Former History of Magics
Professor David Gale, Tryouts Mentor, Fox Shifter
Gage Michaels, Therapist

OTHERS
Mirrian, Corvina's mortal mother, deceased
Joseph, Corvina's mortal father, deceased
Ambrose
Rook, Crowe, Wren—ravens

Sir Leonidas, Headmaster of Helios Academy
Zaxier, Zander's biological father, former High General of Draconia
Master Gia, royal dressmaker

ROYALS
King Ulcric, Light Fae King of Helios
Princess Evangelina (Eva), Light Fae Princess of Helios
Queen Narah, Dark Fae Queen of Zorya
Alastair Pitch, Dark Fae Prince of Zorya
King Cyrus, Draconian
Queen Valessia, Draconian
Prince Drusus, Draconian
Princess Kaida (Kai), Draconian

GODS & GODDESSES
Selena, Goddess of the Moon, Persephone
Danica, Goddess of the Sun, Aphrodite
Hades, God of Darkness
Ares, God of War
Aeon, God of Life
Eris, Goddess of Chaos and Discord

APPENDIX III—WARDEN RANKS

Grand Wardens—royal advisors, supreme judges, head of the High Table, the most powerful of all the wardens

High Wardens—members of the High Table that govern certain fractions of the forest and human world (like mayors)

Shadow Wardens—law enforcers, highly trained and skilled, powerful

Junior Wardens—still powerful, will advance up to a Shadow Warden

Keepers—protectors of Shadowborns and magic users, never really advance

APPENDIX IV—THE BOOK OF ZORYA

(how the Enchanted Forest came to be)

In the beginning…

Aphrodite and Persephone decided to create a magical forest for all manners of creatures. They appeared in their natural form, unearthly beautiful and fae-like, and brought with them their favourite stars—the Morning Star and the Evening Star. They each placed them in the sky, and one became the sun and the other the moon.

Aphrodite became known as Danica, Goddess of the Sun, and she created the Throne of Helios where she would reign over her part of the forest.

Persephone became Selena, Goddess of the Moon, and she created the Throne of Luna, again where she would rule her half of the forest. To their kingdoms, they became known as the Zorya Sisters.

As the Almighty Goddess of the Moon, Selena, walked through the forest at twilight, admiring her many creations, she came across a shard of glass gleaming on the forest floor. She used this to create the Fountain of Mene which allowed her to see whatever her heart most desired, and to guide her down whichever path she sought in darkness. Selena often used it to see her husband Hades and their children.

The Dark God, Hades, used this fountain to send her a cloak of darkness on their anniversary, which Selena wove it into a blanket of stars that became known as the night sky. Now the moon had stars, and Selena told her people to use them as guides and sources of light within the darkness, for neither of them should be feared since they cannot exist without the other; just like how Selena's kingdom cannot exist without Danica's.

Many decades later, a strange presence crept into the forest. Eris, Persphone's half-sister, had grown envious of this Selena and Danica and she planned to spoil their New World.

First, she unleashed monsters into the forest.

Darkness.

The creatures of dark spread like wildfire, breeding chaos everywhere and anywhere they could. Danica tried to chase them back whence they came, but Selena pitied and grew to love them. Some even became her loyal servants. While she became occupied with her new settlers, Eris sent Danica the Golden Apple of Discord, a feigned gift from Ares, which poisoned her.

Hearing of her sister's illness, Selena rushed to her side. Nothing could be done to save Danica. Eris watched from the shadows as Danica's light faded and her sun waned. But then Selena ripped out her own heart and pressed it into Danica's chest. This allowed Danica to live, but Selena faded and died in Danica's arms before she joined the stars in the sky, and because of her sacrifice, she became one with the Evening Star and the Moon.

When Hades learned of what happened, his anger shook the realms. He used the fountain as a portal and managed to kill Eris, but without his wife to bring out the good in him, Hades' grief drove him to insanity. He partnered up with Ambrose, the God of Life, and they waged war on the kingdoms. Hades killed Eris, but now that Danica had her powers and her sisters, she was able to severely injure him so much that he had to retreat back to the underworld and was stripped of his ability to return.

Peace settled among the forest for a time, and Danica gave the Throne of Luna to Ares, who was quick to succumb to the allure of darkness and he became the first Dark Fae—Queen Narah's four-times great-grandfather.