

GUARDIAN OF THE QUEEN

GUARDIAN OF THE QUEEN  
BY MJ BOSHERS

BOOK 3  
THE FAEWITCH SERIES

## *MJ Boshers*

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, and places are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, events, or locales is coincidental.

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*To Kenlee. Never be scared to follow  
your dreams.*

# 1

## Memories

I fell in love. I was so stupid...  
I fell in love, it was eternal bliss  
But was betrayed by my love, my Chris  
I gave him my heart, but he chose to refrain  
And now all I feel is unbearable pain  
I fall to my knees soaked to the bone  
Despair fills me up and I am all alone  
As the thunder roars through the sky  
It can't mask my shattering cry  
I feel the earth shake and see it crumble  
My crying still louder than the rumble  
Destruction and chaos is all I see  
This is the burden he left with me  
I will drown forever in my sorrows  
In spite of how many tomorrows  
The days are dead, stale at best  
This love...this need is eternal and it shall never rest.

*What the hell?* The memories and the love I

felt is all coming back at once, but the one that hurts the most is when Chris backs away from me after I chose him and he lets them do the spell anyway. Why couldn't I just leave it alone? I chose him and he chose to betray me...to leave me.

Everything has come back to me, but now I wish it would all go away again. He married her...Deb. After I chose him, he went and married her anyway. He gave up on me. I don't think I can ever forgive him for that, ever. I am so angry at all of them, and I'm wandering around the woods of Wizardland not knowing where else I can go. It's only a question of time before one of them finds me. I remember the one place that nobody wants to ever go again; the Land of Giants.

I'm standing in the cavern where I thought I'd lost Chris forever. I kneel down where his blood still stains the rock he bled on. I touch it again and everything we all went through that day replays in my head. That day will haunt me forever. I look over at the chains hanging up and see my friends being tortured again. I see the knife go into Ian's belly, Danny almost being stabbed by Maddox, the knife going toward my heart, and Chris standing in front of me to take the blow. He falls and I bend down to catch him. As I hold him and look into his green eyes, he dies and I know it's entirely my fault. I did this.

At that memory, I break down. My heart hurts just as bad as it did that day. I decide to curl up in a ball and let it all out. I feel a hand on my back and don't even need to turn around because I know it is Chris.

"How did you find me?" I ask, wiping my eyes.

"You showed me."

"But I wasn't in danger."

"But you were in pain," he says as he curls up next to me and holds me. I let him hold me for a moment because I feel this will be the last time that I will ever let him hold me like this again. I shake off the urge to turn around, kiss him, and let the anger take control. Taking his hand, I squeeze it one last time and then throw it off me. I get up off the ground and wipe off the dirt. He stays on the ground, but looks up at me as I wait for him to speak.

"I'm sorry," he says. I laugh sarcastically, because after all this that is all he can give me. He looks down and decides to get up and come toward me. I back away with my hand up to stop him.

"How could you do that to me? How could you let them take you away from me?"

"I did it for you," he says.

"I told you what I wanted! I chose you and after that you still let them take that love away from me..."

"You would have died!" He slams his fist on a nearby

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rock, impervious to the pain as blood drips from his clenched knuckles.

“Then I’d die!” My words are deafening, making his eyes widen, but soften again and he sighs. “At least it was my choice. I should have had the choice!”

He runs to me, pulls me close to him, and strokes my cheek.

“I regretted it the moment it was too late,” he says tightening his jaw. “We tried everything to get you back.”

“We...?”

“Zoe found a way to get your soul back to you. We didn’t think it worked. That is why I went ahead and married Deb and you told me to go ahead and marry her. I thought I’d lost you.”

His words calm me down, for a moment, and the thought of him and Zoe teaming up to bring me back touches my heart. He leans down to kiss me and I quickly remember he is married, and all my anger for him returns. I back away. He looks at me with narrowed and tearful eyes.

“You have lost me.” After looking into his eyes one last time, I disappear and return to Wizardland.

~

I sit in my quarters and reflect back on what Breccan told me about not letting previous events worry me, and

if I always think of Wizardland first everything would be all right, but I am still unbelievably hurt by what Mom, Brion, and Chris did to me. I don't think I can forgive them. My crown is in a glass case on a table and the light bounces off of it, taunting me to pick it up. When I place it on my head, it slides down over my forehead, engulfing my small teenager-head. Realizing how young I am at this moment, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. *I can't let them get away with what they did to me.* I am the Queen of Wizardland and it's time I act like it. Any other Queen would have them put to death...maybe I'm exaggerating a bit, but I am so angry. I look at myself in the mirror then quickly dress as a queen should before flicking my wand and zapping in Joffrey.

"Joffrey, call the council to meeting, please."

"My lady, Ian has already taken care of things for today..." Joffrey says.

"Ian isn't king yet!" I comment a little too harshly.

"Just call the meeting, please."

"Yes, my lady." He disappears and I sigh with a second of guilt, but I have to be strong and not let little things like that bother me.

As I sit at the head of the table, the members start to take their seats and look at me strangely. "Where is Ian, my lady?" a member asks. I smile.

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“He’ll be along shortly, but he is not king. I am your queen and only I have authority here. Is everyone clear on that?” I try to sound confident as Grandfather does when he speaks, but I’m not sure if I pull it off.

Everyone nods in agreement. “Good, let’s get started. I have called you all here for a trial. Three individuals will be put on trial today. These people have not only disobeyed my authority, but put me in danger. They threatened me, so in that they threatened Wizardland. Do you, the council, agree to a trial?”

They look around at each other and shrug. “Of course, my Queen,” says the head of council.

I flick my wand and everyone I care about stands before us. Ian comes to stand next to me. “What’s going on?” he asks.

“I’m being a queen.” I smirk. “I have brought you all here as witnesses,” I announce to everyone.

“To witness what?” asks Alice.

“To what your king and queen are accused of.” I glare at Mom and Brion.

“Sophie, please...” Mom says as she tries to come forward.

“No!” I scream. “You don’t ever get to speak to me again!” I see the hurt in her eyes, but I stay strong.

“Sophie, calm down,” Brion says. I give him a look of disgust.

“I remember everything.”

He looks down in shame as he clings to my mother. Chris stares at me and I wonder if he knows what I am about to do.

“You three are charged with putting the Queen of Wizardland’s life in danger.” Everyone gasps with shock.

“That’s a lie!” Mom bursts out. “We were trying to protect you!”

“Do you deny taking me to the dungeon, banishing my powers, chaining me up against my will, listening to me scream and beg for you to stop, and do you deny having a witch take my memories from me?” As I finish, the room is silenced and I glance at Zoe. “Zoe, can you come forward, please?” She is hesitant, but does so anyway. “Zoe, did Chris confide in you as to what they did to me?” I can tell she doesn’t want to answer and she looks to Chris. He nods to her to tell me. She looks at me with pity, but decides to take up for Chris.

“He was devastated about what he did and did everything he could to fix the wrong he had done.” She begins to tear up and I have another moment of weakness, but the memory of the dungeon reminds me of why we are here.

“I will ask you three again, do y’all deny it?” I look Chris in the eye and we have a long moment of silence,

until he decides to speak.

“I do not deny it. I did what I thought was the right thing. Obviously, I was wrong.” He looks away from me.

“Obviously.” I smirk. “You three are banished from Wizardland until I choose otherwise.” Everyone gasps at my decision and I see Chris’s eyes widen in shock at my verdict.

“Council, do you accept my decision?” I ask, never taking my eyes off Chris, until Brion gets my attention.

“Sophie, don’t do this...” Brion says.

“That’s funny; I believe I screamed those exact words while y’all were chaining me up in the dungeon.”

“It’s one thing to banish your mother and me, but this is Chris’s home,” Brion pleads.

The head of the council stands to speak. “I’m sorry, Brion, but you really did step over the line this time,” he states.

“She is my granddaughter!” roars Brion.

“And my daughter!” says Mom.

“Yes, but she is our queen!” Joffrey yells, standing in protest. “We didn’t fight for her to be controlled by someone else.” He comes and stands beside me and I smile because it is nice to have someone standing up for me, even if they did want to take my wand away just yesterday. The rest of the council stands as well. Joffrey

nods to the head of council. “The council accepts your verdict, my lady.” Joffrey bows.

I give them all a long look, doubting my decision, but I flick my wand. “Goodbye,” I say, waiting for the tears to fall; surprisingly, they don’t. The gang leaves as well. After all, I did just banish their king and queen. I guess I was expecting a little support from one of them—at least Zoe. She has always understood my feelings.

Ian looks down at me with his arms folded. “Do you feel better now? Did you get it all out of your system?” I narrow my eyes. I thought he’d be happy Chris is out of the way. Joffrey walks away and tells the council to leave as well. I’m sure he thinks we are about to get into a fight. “Are you going to banish everyone who disagrees with you?”

“Only the ones that chain me up and do spells on me against my will.”

“Oh, yeah, I forgot that wasn’t your idea.” He looks down and laughs. “You didn’t do it for me.”

“What?”

“Chris told me that you did it for me,” he says. “God, that selfless bastard makes it hard not to like him sometimes.” He sighs. “I know what they did to you was wrong, but King Brion is a very strong ally. You can’t just banish him. What if we need his help?”

“He’s still my grandfather. He’ll help us either way.”

“I hope you’re right, for all our sakes. You are his granddaughter, so I bet he never thought you’d banish him or your mother, but you did.” I turn around in aggravation and sigh.

“So you think I should undo the banishment?” I grumble.

“I’m saying you’re not thinking clearly. You’re angry and making hasty decisions without talking to someone about them first!” he shouts.

“You think I should be consulting with you first.” I shake my head in amusement. “I am the queen and you are not the king yet!”

“I am well aware of that! To tell you the truth, I’m second guessing that idea every day.” He begins to leave but stops and turns back to me. “If you want to focus on something, stop thinking of vengeance and start focusing on training.” He cracks a smile as Brion walks in the room. “You didn’t even banish them properly.” He shakes his head and disappears.

Embarrassed, I look down in shame. “Don’t worry,” Brion says. “You will learn. It takes more than concentration to banish someone.”

“What do you want?” I ask irritably.

“Just because the banishment didn’t work doesn’t mean the words didn’t hurt. Your mother is distraught.”

“My mother; what about me?”

“Why do you think we did this, for fun? Kate’s vision was clear. If Ian isn’t made king, you will die. I’m sorry we didn’t wait to think of a better plan, but we didn’t want to risk losing you.” He comes closer and puts his hand on my cheek. “You are way too precious to lose, my child.”

“I know, because I will save our lands...blah, blah, blah.”

He smiles. “No, my dear, because you are my granddaughter.” He hugs me and I hug him back.

“I still don’t know if I can forgive y’all yet,” I say pushing him away a little.

He resists and pulls me close again. “Forgiveness takes time, but this is a start.” He kisses my forehead. “Ian is right, though. We need to get you focused on training. If you want to be a great queen, you have to learn inner strength as well as outer strength.”

“Does Chris know the banishment didn’t take?”

“I’m not sure.” He sighs. “He left and went on his honeymoon. I’m not sure when they’ll be back, or if they will be back. I know it hurts, but it is for the best. You can see that, can’t you?” He lifts my chin up and though I want to cry so badly, I don’t.

“Yes.” I sigh and wonder, as Brion still clings to me, how many times my heart can rip open before I can no

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longer feel the pain.

## 2

### The Switch

After Grandfather leaves, I try to find Ian to salvage what is left of our relationship. Walking in his quarters, I expect him to be sleeping, but he isn't in bed. "I'm out here," he states from the balcony. He is sitting in a chair with his legs propped up on the railing and drinking a beer.

"Since when do you drink beer?"

"There are a lot of things you haven't noticed about me lately," he says, looking toward the river with the moonlight reflecting in his blue eyes.

I know he is right, but don't even know what I should begin to apologize for. He has every right not to want to marry me after the many things I've done to him. I can't get out the words *I'm sorry* because they will only sound stupid at this point. "I'm..."

"What, you're sorry?" he asks with sarcasm. "All better. Let's go make out now." He rolls his eyes and takes another sip of his beer.

"Look, I know I can't make up for everything by saying

I'm sorry, but I am. I am sorry for everything.”

“Yeah, well, I've heard that before.”

“I know.” I sigh, aggravated that he is blowing me off.

“You say you've second-guessed us getting married?” I ask hesitantly and to see if some of his sarcasm will go away.

He finally looks up at me. “Yes, I have.”

“I don't blame you.” I snicker to ease the tension. “I would have already run to the hills if I were you.”

He smirks a little but then gets serious again. “Well, you're not me and call me crazy, but I still love you.”

He runs his hands through his hair. “God, I still love you so much.” He grinds his teeth together. “I just don't want to be around you at the moment.” Finishing his beer, he throws it in the trash, glancing at me for a split second, but I can tell he doesn't want to look at me. He fishes out a fresh beer from the cooler of ice and pops the top.

“Okay, I'll leave you alone then.” I turn to go but look back once more at him staring out at the river.

~

Staring up at the ceiling, I lay in bed. But who can sleep right now? I get up, pacing the floor, continuing to be angry at myself. Looking out the window, I realize I can see Ian's balcony.

I sit and watch him drink his beer. He finally stands up

and sees me watching him. He cracks a smile, but it soon fades and he goes inside.

I toss and turn for hours with no luck in falling asleep. Suddenly, I remember a very important detail. “The prophecies!” I yell. As I jump up in the bed, I almost fall off. *Where are they? Who has them? Who had them last? Kate.* I need to go get them, but I stop and think of who will be pissed if I go at it alone. The number of people...too many so I actually listen to the voice inside my head this time and go to get Ian.

~

Looking down at him sleeping I remember how mad he is at me right now. I almost change my mind about waking him up, but realize I must. As I shake him lightly, he jerks me in the bed with him. I squeal with surprise. *Maybe he isn't mad anymore.*

“What do you want?” He narrows his eyes.

“I...” I am not able to get anything else out. He takes the opportunity to kiss me, and I mean he really kisses me, passionately. Ian never kisses me this way. It’s more like...Chris. I stop and look into his eyes.

“Hey, beautiful,” he says.

I jump up quickly. “What is going on? Ian, this isn’t funny.” I back up against the wall.

“Why are you calling me Ian? Sophie, what are you doing here?” He looks around for a moment. “Wait,

what am I doing here? You banished me.”

“Chris, what did you do?” I ask, trying to back up further, but the wall stops me.

“Why are you acting so scared of me? He sees the fear on my face and decides to look in the mirror.

“What’s happening?” he asks, touching his face in shock. He looks at me, still backed up against the wall.

“Why do you assume I did this? I was on my honeymoon. You banished me, remember. That really hurt, by the way.” I roll my eyes at his sense of humor.

“Seriously, I woke up this way. I don’t know how. I have been having flashes of you all day. I just assumed it was the guardian thing. I was mad at you, so Deb and I left right away. We have been gone all day...” He stops and covers his hands over his face. “Oh my God!”

“What is it?” I ask.

“If I am in Ian’s body...do you think he is in...” His eyes widen and he grabs my hand.

“What?”

“We have to go now!”

“Why?” I ask.

He sighs. “Honeymoon, remember.”

“Oh, God.”

“He’s going to be surprised.” He smirks and I smack him on the arm.

“Let’s just go.”

~

When we get to where Deb and Chris are staying I immediately know we are at the beach. It is dark out, but I can hear the crashing of the waves. The beach house is beautiful. I don't see Deb or Ian anywhere, but I notice a door closed in the back of the room so I turn to Chris. He looks worried as well. "Come on." He sighs and grabs my hand.

We walk into the bedroom and Deb and Ian are wrapped up in each other's arms. Although it looks exactly like Chris, I know it is Ian. "At least they are asleep." I say.

"Let's just hope Ian is in there." I get a surge of fear and run to wake him.

"Sophie, wait!" Chris whispers and grabs my arm.

"They are going to be freaked out. What are you going to say?"

"I don't know, but this isn't the time to be fragile."

Chris walks over to Deb's side of the bed. I look at Ian asleep in Chris's body. "This is so weird."

Chris cracks a smile. "You're telling me. Should we wake them one at a time?" he asks as Deb starts to wake up.

"Too late," I say as Deb opens her eyes and jumps up in the bed. She pulls the sheet up to cover herself.

"Sophie...Ian, what are y'all doing here?"

Ian starts to wake, turns over in the bed, and opens his eyes. He sees me staring at him and smiles Chris's gorgeous smile. "Hey, love."

"Ian...I need to tell you something."

"Ian! Sophie, have you completely lost your mind this time? Ian is standing right here." As soon as Deb speaks, Ian's eyes widen with shock and he jumps up to investigate his surroundings. He looks to me as it all sinks in and then glances back to Chris.

"What the hell did you do?" Ian says to Chris.

"Why does everyone assume it was me?"

"Guys, can you tell me what is going on, please?" Deb asks. I can tell she is starting to freak out.

"Okay, everyone calm down. Deb, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to give it to you straight. Ian is in Chris's body and Chris is in Ian's." She looks down for a moment and laughs. I don't think she believes us, but then she stops, looking toward Ian in Chris's body.

"You're Ian?" she asks. "How long have you been Ian?" Ian looks down for a moment and back up to her.

"I'm sorry...I thought I was dreaming." He coughs and looks back to me. My jaw drops.

"You didn't stop, did you?" I stand up and let go of his hand when I put together what they have just done. It quickly sinks in everyone else's mind as well. I glance at Chris and for the first time I can't figure out what he

is thinking. When I glance back to Deb, she looks mortified. I can imagine how she must feel right now. “You couldn’t tell it wasn’t me?” Chris asks, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Chris!” I shout at him for being a jerk because it isn’t Deb’s fault. His clenched jaw tells me he is pissed and he storms out of the room. I really don’t know what to say to either of them.

“Sophie, you know how real dreams can feel from last year when...” Ian tries to explain to me, but I raise my hand for him to be quiet.

“I know, Ian. I had this coming, anyway.” I smile at Deb. “Excuse me.” I disappear to find Chris, and though I was trying not to sound bitter, I don’t think I succeeded. I know it’s not Ian’s fault, but I really want to blame him right now.

I find Chris walking along the beach. “Hey, are you okay?” I ask.

“Are you?” he counters.

“Not really.” I sigh. “But you know this isn’t their fault, right? I mean, those dreams we had last year seemed pretty real, and I know Deb had no clue—”

“I know.” He stops me from talking. I’m not mad at them it’s just...”

“What?”

“Nothing...never mind.” He looks away from me.

“No, what is it?” I grab his arm. “It’s just...why them? Why couldn’t it be us? We could have been together one time with no repercussions and no guilt. It could have been all a happy accident, but the best accident of my life.” He comes closer and holds my hand. I squeeze it, but quickly remember that I am pissed at him so I release it.

“Well, it wasn’t us and I’m sure they still feel guilty about it,” I say.

“Are you ever going to forgive me?”

“I told you in the dungeons I would never forgive any of you.” I look at him in the moonlight, and if I didn’t know better I’d swear it was Ian standing in front of me as he looks toward the ocean.

“Yes, I remember,” he says. “If I could take it all back I would.”

“But you can’t. We all have to live with that memory.” We sit silent for a moment until I smile and roll my eyes at the memory. He turns to me with a wrinkled nose.

“What is it?”

“I actually thought you were going to save me at one point,” I say and he looks back toward the ocean.

“When I chose you over Ian and you ran to me, I thought you were going to rescue me. I thought you would take me away somewhere and we would live happily ever after.”

“I almost did,” he says, looking down at me, rubbing his forehead.

“What stopped you? Why didn’t you just do it?” I start to tear up.

“Your mother reminded me that you would die, and as hard as it was for me, I couldn’t let that happen. That would have been the most selfish thing I could ever do to you.”

“But you were selfish, all of you; you just don’t get it! You didn’t want to lose me and I get that, but it still should have been my choice. I would’ve gladly lived with the fact—no matter how short of a time—that I would die choosing you. If that is what it took for me to be happy? I chose you...that should have been enough. When you backed away, it tore me apart.” I start to cry, even though I promised myself I never would again.

The thought of that moment was too much to take.

Chris grabs me and pulls me close. “Hey, don’t do that. I’m an idiot. Don’t cry over me.” He lifts my chin up to look at him. “I know I don’t deserve your forgiveness, but I will work for it every day.” I wipe my eyes with the back of my hand, trying to suppress all the emotions going on inside me right now.

“Sit with me for a moment,” he says with a pleading look. I take a breath and we sit to watch the sunrise.

“We better get back and figure this thing out,” I say,

catching myself almost falling asleep on his chest. “If we must.” He sighs and helps me get up off the ground.

~

I pop in some breakfast for everyone as Ian and Deb walk in together. They still slept in the same room together, but I guess it wouldn't really matter, considering. Everyone eats breakfast in silence. I try to think of how to solve our little problem. It soon occurs to me that we have another one I completely forgot about. “Oh, my God, I totally forgot!” I yell.

“About what?” Ian asks.

“The reason I went back to your room in the first place. I remembered the prophecies. There are more of them. Jeremy said there were more and Kate was supposed to look into how many. We have to go back to Kate's to get the notebooks.”

“What about our current problem, Sophie?” Ian asks, motioning to Chris.

“It will have to wait. I think it has done about all the harm it can for now anyway.”

### 3

## The Lie

We get to Kate's store and the memories of her haunt me right away. The place is dark and empty. "What if someone already got the notebooks?" asks Deb.

"Let's just hope that hasn't happened," I reply. We tiptoe through the store and start to rummage through what is left of Kate's things. The light comes on, startling us all, and Gabriel glares at us from the doorway.

"I'm only going to tolerate you guys breaking in here so many times," he says, rubbing his eyes.

"Gabriel, we didn't think anyone would be here, sorry," I reply.

"Well, I was here going through Kate's things and it got late," he says and looks around at the empty store and sighs.

"Oh...Gabriel, I hate to ask, but..."

"But you're going to anyway," he says a little sarcastically.

"If it wasn't important I wouldn't..."

"Here." He throws the notebooks on the counter. "I knew you'd be back for them. Now, if that is all."

“Thanks, Gabriel,” I say picking them up. “Wait...this isn’t all of them. There are only five.” I count them again. “Weren’t there ten?” I look at Gabriel for an explanation.

“I don’t know; that is all I found.”

I look at him curiously.

“Oh, you’re not going to trust me now, after everything I did and after Kate died...” He begins to get angry.

“Of course I trust you, Gabriel. I just need the other notebooks. If you find them, please contact me.” I feel horrible for Gabriel. I really don’t know what to say that won’t piss him off right now. “Thank you for these. I really appreciate it. We’ll leave you alone now. Come on, guys.” I give him another apologetic look before we leave.

~

“Okay, do we really believe Gabriel?” Chris asks when we get back to their beach house.

“I don’t know. I don’t see why he would lie. Especially after all he has done for us,” I reply. “We will have to make do with what we have until we can figure out what happened to the rest.”

“Sophie, how are we going to figure these notes out? If it took Kate so long to do it, exactly how do you think we can?” Ian asks.

“What about Zoe?” Deb breaks in. “Isn’t she like some

powerful witch now?"

"Yes, she is, but do we want anyone to know about us though, guys?" Chris asks. "I mean, they will never let this one die."

"Let's just go and act like nothing has happened. We'll take care of the prophecy thing first and go from there. Nobody needs to know anything about our current situation yet, agreed?" I ask.

"Agreed," Chris says as Deb and Ian nod.

"Do we have to leave right now?" Deb looks out the balcony doors at the beautiful view. I feel really bad for her because this is supposed to be her honeymoon, but how is she going to be able to enjoy it with her husband being in someone else's body?

"It's up to you, Deb. This is supposed to be your honeymoon. I'm so sorry this had to happen."

"It's not your fault, but I just want to relax on the beach for a couple of hours before we find out there is another big prophecy to look out for."

"Sure, let's all go. I think we could use a break," I say with a smile. The guys look at me strangely.

"Do you think us all hanging out right now is the best solution, Sophie?" Ian asks.

"Look, we all know this isn't our fault. So we should be able to enjoy our day here without any grudges, and I kind of want to get out there on that beach too." I smile

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at Deb and feel a little bad I just invited myself on her honeymoon. “Deb, do you mind if we tag along on your honeymoon? We can go further down the beach if you’d like.”

“No, you can tag along. It’s not a honeymoon anymore, anyway,” she says.

“I’m sorry, Deb.”

“Like you said, it’s nobody’s fault. Except for whoever did this,” she says.

“Well, what do you say?” I smile at Ian.

“Fine,” he says.

“What the hell, might as well have a little bit of fun.”  
Chris sighs.

~

As I sit here on the beach and take in the beauty, I wonder about the next prophecy. Should I even worry, because the first one hasn’t even happened yet? I am queen, but I haven’t saved all our lands with this power I am supposed to possess. I’m not sure it’s even worth worrying about right now. I watch Deb and Chris splashing each other. She is so beautiful. Her blond hair glows out there on the beach, and when I glance over at Ian he is watching them as well. I decide to go and sit beside him.

“Hey.”

“Hey,” he says and his lips turn upward just a bit.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Nothing.” He glances at Deb again.

“I know; she’s beautiful, isn’t she?” I smile because he isn’t being very subtle about it. He laughs and picks me up over his shoulder and runs toward the water. “Ian, what are you doing? Put me down!” I laugh and hit him on the back. We get to the water and he throws me in. When I come up out of the water, he is smiling at me.

“Are you ready to have fun now?”

“You are so dead,” I say, swimming toward him to try and dunk him under. Somehow, we all four end up dunking each other under water. We start to actually have fun. Ian and Chris are even getting along pretty well. We cook out and build a fire and before you know it time has passed pretty quickly. It begins to get dark and we all notice. Everyone’s mood starts to come down. As we make s’mores on the fire, my mouth waters from the smell of marshmallows and chocolate on graham crackers. Chris starts to tell us some jokes and we laugh, but I can tell what everyone is thinking. They know it’s time for us to leave.

“Hey, I think we need some music,” Ian says with a smirk.

“Oh, no,” I say shaking my head.

“Please, just one.”

“Ian, I can’t...”

## GUARDIAN OF THE QUEEN

“Yes, you can. Stop being in your head so much and just do what you love.”

“He’s right, Sophie,” Deb says. “Just do it. I would love to hear you sing.”

After a moment of them all nagging me, I give in.

“Fine, I’ll do it.” I take a deep breath, stare into the fire, and sing the song I wrote about Chris before the dungeon incident, but to tell the truth I think most of my songs are about him. I just never realized it.

I feel so free when I sing. If I imagine nobody is here with me I can just sing with all my heart and not worry what anyone thinks. I imagine I am on my own as I stare into the fire. I love fire; it is so much a part of me and as I sing my song, I can see the flames getting higher and higher.

~

When I am done, I give Chris an intense gaze.

Everyone is speechless for a moment.

“Wow, Sophie that was amazing. You really are talented,” Deb says to break the silence.

“I keep telling her,” Ian says.

“Thanks.” I blush a bit and glance back at Chris, but he only looks away.

“I guess we need to get back to Faeryland, guys, don’t you think?” he asks. He throws his marshmallow skewer in the fire and walks back toward the beach

house.

“Well, somebody had to say it.” I smile. “At least it wasn’t me ruining the mood this time.”

“Fine, let’s go, but I get a shower first,” Deb says.

“I had a great time today, guys, thanks.” I hug Deb as we walk toward the house. We got along fine today. I think we could become good friends, but there is always one thing that might get in the way...and that is the fact I’m in love with her husband.

~

As soon as we enter Faeryland, I notice Mom walking down the hall. I didn’t anticipate seeing her so soon. She doesn’t see me, so I just let her walk by. I don’t think I’m ready to talk at the moment. “Let’s go find Zoe,” I say.

“Zoe is at Aodan’s house; what’s up?” Alice asks, startling all of us.

“Hey, Alice, what are you doing here?” I ask.

“We all come to train here every night remember. The king says that we should be ready for anything.

Everyone should be along in a few minutes. Why are you here?” She looks at us curiously. “Aren’t you mad at these guys, Sophie?”

I look at them, speechless, and realize I am standing close to Ian, but he is in Chris’s body. I quickly go stand beside Chris. “We made up...I realized they were

trying to protect me.” I laugh nervously. “You know how I can get.”

“That is so great!” She claps. “Your mother must be feeling much better. She has been depressed ever since...”

“Actually, I haven’t seen her yet. I’m sure I’ll see her later on.”

“Sophie, what is going on?” She looks at all of us suspiciously.

“Nothing. Why do you ask?”

Cormac saves us by popping in. “Hey, good to see you back, guys. Is everyone done banishing people?” He smirks at me. If it were anyone else I’d probably be mad at his comment, but Cormac is just goofy, so I’ll let it slide.

“Very funny, but a little too soon, Cormac,” I say.

“Okay, I’ll wait on the jokes.” He surrenders. “Come on, Alice,” he says, pulling her arm. “Let’s get a head start on training.” She smiles as Cormac pulls her away.

“It’s not going to take long for them to figure it out, guys,” I say. I decide to message Zoe to get her here a little quicker. She comes alone, which is good because as soon as she sees us she knows. She is speechless, but keeps pointing to Chris and back to Ian. “Zoe, how can you tell?”

“Hello...I can see true forms now, remember.” She

gives us a confused look. “How in the world did this happen?” She presses her lips in a hard line and looks toward Chris.

“It wasn’t me!” he says. “I’m starting to resent the accusations.”

“Sorry, Chris, but I don’t know who would want to do this,” Zoe says.

“That is why we need you to look through these notes for the next prophecy,” I explain.

“Shouldn’t we figure out this situation first?” she asks, pointing to the guys.

“One problem at a time, and I think we really need to know about the prophecy first. Zoe, don’t tell anyone about the guys either. They will never let up about it.”

“Okay, I’ll try,” she says, attempting not to laugh.

“It’s really not that funny if you know the whole story,” I say.

“Oh, okay,” she says. “Sorry, I’ll get to work on this then.”

“Can I help?” Deb asks.

“Of course, come on.” Zoe welcomes her as if she has been a friend forever. That is just how Zoe is.

I look to both Chris and Ian. “What now?” I ask.

“Maybe you need to go talk to your mother,” Chris says.

I sigh. “I know.”

“Go ahead and maybe we can keep up the charade for a while,” Ian says.

~

Butterflies in my stomach show me no mercy as I knock on the door to Mom’s room. I wonder if I should just leave, but think of how I felt when I almost lost her. She opens the door and I immediately throw myself into her arms. “I’m so sorry,” I say as she hugs me back.

“No, baby, it was a stupid thing to do to you and I will never put you through anything like that again, I promise.” We both cry in each other’s arms for a moment.

“Let’s just forget about it for now,” she says, stroking my hair and kissing my forehead.

“Agreed.” We hold on to each other until Brion walks in.

“So...” He smiles. “All is well, I presume.”

“We decided to forget about it for the moment,” Mom says, smiling. She straightens my hair, which used to be annoying, but now I find it rather delightful.

“Good,” says Brion. “Now, let’s get down to business.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Well, I see you brought Chris and Deb with you. They wouldn’t have left their honeymoon unless it were important.”

“I got to thinking about the prophecies,” I say. “I remembered Kate had them, so thought we should get them back before they ended up in the wrong hands. We figured Zoe could translate their meaning and went back to Kate’s shop. Gabriel gave us what was left, but he didn’t know where the others were.”

Brion sighs. “We might need Erik again. He is the only one who can talk to Gabriel, especially now with Kate gone.”

“We have to be careful because we don’t know who took Mom to the mortal realm to die. Mom, you still don’t remember who it was?”

“No, I couldn’t see them because they came up behind me, but I don’t think it was Erik. The scent was of a woman.”

“Lena and Maeve are still locked up, right?”

“Yes, I checked after the fight,” Brion says. “But that doesn’t mean they didn’t get someone else to do it.”

“Cynthia,” I say. “It had to be Cynthia.” Everyone gives me a weird look. “Lena’s mother,” I explain.

“Of course,” Mom says, getting angry.

“Wait, Mary,” Brion says, stopping her from vanishing.

“I’ll come with you and we’ll take Erik as well, but, Sophie, there is something you’re not telling me.” He looks at me suspiciously.

“What...” He holds his hand up to silence me.

“It’s all right if you don’t want to tell me, but remember that little gift I have. I can sense mortal magic and I’m sensing a great deal of it, so be careful.” He gives me a nervous look.

~

As I begin to stretch before training, Deb comes over. “Hey, do you want to try again?” She whips out her wand and it transforms into a rod.

“Not a good idea, Deb,” I say.

“Why? We both know this wasn’t our fault and you need to train.”

“I thought you were helping Zoe.”

“I was but Ava wanted to help her and besides, you need me more, so get up.” She kicks my foot.

“Excuse me,” I say, a little aggravated. She smiles and everyone gathers around us.

“Deb, what do you think you’re doing?” Chris asks.

“Pushing her...isn’t that what we do?” She laughs.

“I appreciate you wanting to help, but—”

“But nothing! You need to stop feeling sorry for yourself. You’re not the only one bad things happen to, so you need to buck up and get things done!” she yells.

“Deb!” shouts Chris. The gang stands in silence, but I have to laugh because I can’t tell if she means it or not.

“Okay, Deb, I’ll buck up.” Everyone gets their worried looks out, but I assure them I will be fine. “Don’t

worry, guys,” I say, but as soon as we start to fight, Brion and Mom walk in.

“Without magic?” Brion asks as he and Mom walk in the training room.

“We can find out,” I say.

“Not right now,” Brion states. “As much as everyone would love a good show, we have more pressing matters.”

“I think this is a pressing matter,” I argue.

“Sophie, you are the Queen of Wizardland, but I am the king here and I say my people need to train. You and your people may leave if you choose, but if you stay you will respect my decision,” he says with authority, and I know I have insulted him. I look down in embarrassment, like a child who has just been scolded in front of her friends.

“I would like you all to practice the art of blocking someone’s magic and unblocking their block on you. I know we have all been concerned with teaching Sophie, but I feel you all need to know this technique. Usually, only older faeries and wizards are allowed to be trained in this, but under the circumstances I believe it’s time this group learns. There are a few that know already, and with their queen’s approval they can help teach you.” Brion looks to me.

“Of course,” I say.

“Chris and Ian both know this technique well, so they will instruct you. I know Aodan and Cormac have practiced this in the past without my permission...” He looks at them with disapproval. “But it is a good thing they have a head start. When you two get up to speed you can help train the others. Time is of the essence, so you must be serious and focus. We will meet for breakfast tomorrow. After you train, get some sleep.” They both leave us alone to train.

Matt comes in to join us. “Good, here is another that can help,” Chris says as he greets Matt.

“How is it that all the guys know how to do this?” I ask. “It’s always been easier for guys because we are natural leaders,” Aodan says.

“Oh please,” Alice shouts. “Give me an hour and I’ll throw you through a wall.”

“You think so.” Aodan smiles.

“Guys, we have to take this seriously, remember,” Ian speaks up and everyone looks at him strangely.

“Since when are you the serious one?” Cormac laughs.

This secret isn’t going to last long, because we are already slipping up. Silence fills the room for a split second, but enough for Alice to notice the look on my face.

“Guys, what is going on?” she asks.

“Nothing is going on,” I say, laughing nervously.

“What could possibly be going on?”

Chris rolls his eyes at me, knowing I just gave us away.

“Okay, out with it, Sophie!” Alice says, but I don’t answer. I look to Ian, but he doesn’t say anything.

“Sophie, friends don’t keep friends out of the loop. You’re starting to hurt my feelings.”

“She’s right, Sophie,” Chris says as he turns to Ian.

“We should tell them. I can live with the jokes if you can.” Ian is silent. “If they are willing to put their lives on the line, they deserve to know.”

“You’re right,” Ian finally agrees, shaking his head in doubt. “Tell them, Sophie.” They all look at me.

“Why me?” I ask.

“You’re the queen.” Chris smiles and I give him a sarcastic smirk.

“Okay, I’m sorry we’ve been keeping things from y’all, but I wanted to get this prophecy thing taken care of first, and the guys didn’t want to hear all the jokes coming their way.”

“What jokes?” Alice asks. “What is going on?”

“The guys have sort of...switched bodies.” I try to keep it simple and wait for the laughter. They all look at Ian and Chris in disbelief. Chris waves at everyone and smiles.

“So...you are him and he is you?” Alice asks, pointing back and forth from Chris to Ian. She holds her hand

over her mouth in shock, and just when I think they aren't going to make jokes, I hear laughing. I glare at the gang, but it isn't them laughing. I turn to see Erik clapping in the doorway.

"That is just priceless," he says.

"Crap," Chris says with annoyance. Mom and Brion walk in behind him.

"Sorry, didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I'm glad I did," Brion says. "I'm surprised you felt you should keep this from me, Sophie; this is serious."

"I'm sorry, but I felt the prophecy was more important."

"When are you going to realize prophecies are just what could happen and not what will happen?" Brion asks, irritated. "You get mad when we don't trust your decisions, but you can't keep going at this stuff on your own. Everyone seeks council sometimes, even kings and queens. If you would have informed me, we could have taken immediate action, but now it may take some time. A spell like this is very dangerous. It could change everything!" The king is pacing with panic.

"Change what? Why are you freaking out?" I ask.

"I'm freaking out because if they both remain in each other's body for too long it could become permanent."

"What?" Everyone asks in unison.

"How long ago did this happen?" Brion asks.

“Last night. Grandfather, what will this change?”

He hesitates. “You are going to marry Ian, and Ian will be king.”

“Yeah...”

“If you marry Ian in Chris’s body it won’t be Ian, so the prophecy of you saving our worlds at the side of Ian no longer exists...and this is one prophecy we want to come true. This is the perfect example of why you need not bother with prophecies. They only make you crazy, and you will try anything to avoid it or make it happen. It will drain all your energy. It’s better not to know what lies ahead,” he explains. “Trust me, we know. This prophecy has driven us mad.”

“It’s still Ian, so why would it matter if it’s not his body?”

“His blood is what determines who he is. It may be Ian’s soul, but it is Chris’s DNA,” Brion explains.

“Why does it matter if it is Ian, anyway? I might have bought that line about me dying last time, but it is a lie, isn’t it?” I see the guilt on their faces and know I’m right. Chris grinds his teeth with anger and I don’t blame him. “Why lie about it? Why is it so important that I marry Ian? Tell me the truth!” I shout. “You say I don’t tell you things, but y’all are the one’s keeping things from me.” Brion looks around at everyone witnessing this argument. “Just tell us, Grandfather!”

Everyone here deserves to know, because they have laid their lives on the line plenty for me.”

He looks to Mom and sighs. “We have to tell them eventually.” She nods in agreement but takes a few steps back and tears come streaming down her face. I begin to worry about what I am about to hear.

“Sophie, it’s not you or Ian who saves our worlds...” He pauses.

“What?” I shout, angry because of everything they put us through. Chris begins to come forward also.

“Stop!” Brion shouts at Chris. Chris has no choice but to listen to King Brion.

“After everything...why put us through...so much pain?” I begin to tear up and we stare, waiting for him to explain why they put us through hell for nothing.

“Sophie, it’s not you or Ian, but...” He sighs again and I’m getting impatient. I can tell he doesn’t want to tell me, and everyone is waiting for him to answer. “I’m sorry, Sophie, but your child is the one who saves us.” He looks at Ian. “The child you and Ian have together will save us all.”

## 4

### **The Wicked Witch**

Ian and I stare at each other for what has to be the longest moment in history. A child...I know that was always the plan, but to hear it said out loud and to know it will be in the kind of danger I am in every day...It is all just a little too much to take in, and is probably why I faint.

~

When I wake up, Chris brushes the hair out of my face. It takes me a moment to remember it isn't Chris, but Ian. "Hey." He smiles. "Are you okay?"  
"Yeah, just a little embarrassed."  
"Don't be...that was a lot to take in."  
"You didn't faint, did you?"  
"No, but I have this muscled exterior to hold me up now. If I were back in my body I probably would have tumbled right over." He laughs.  
"Your body is pretty muscled up too." I smile.  
"It's just weird being in someone else's skin."  
"I'm sorry I didn't tell Brion right away."  
"Hey, it's not entirely your fault, because we all wanted to wait." He tries to make me feel better.

“Do you still have doubts about me?”

“Of course I do,” he says. “You’re in love with another man, a married man.”

“And you are falling for a married woman.” I smirk back at him. His eyes widen in surprise at my comment.

“Don’t try to deny it, because I’ve seen the way you look at her, and I could tell before the spell.” He smiles at me for a moment.

“Sophie, I love you.”

“And I love you, Ian.”

We sit awkwardly in silence again for a few moments.

“Do you feel like some lunch?” He changes the subject.

“Yes, please.” I smile because I’m glad to be done with this conversation for now.

~

The dining hall is quiet, but everyone is gathered around the table eating. The silence is almost scary. I can hear the forks scrape across the plates as they all eat. Erik starts to laugh and I jump.

“Erik!” Mom shouts.

“I know, I promised,” he says. “But this is too funny.”

“Erik, I warned you.” Chris pulls his wand from his pocket.

“Chris, please,” Brion says. I notice that Erik has a swollen lip. It is starting to heal, but I can tell it was bleeding. Chris puts his wand away.

“So, Ian, tell me, did you really think it was a dream?” Erik laughs and as soon as he gets the words out, Chris is pounding on his face. Brion runs to pull Chris off him. Ian turns to glance at Deb, but she only looks to the floor, blushing. Brion finally calms Chris down and we all get back to our meal.

“Nobody said a word, Ian,” Chris says. “Erik was just being Erik and kept pushing until he figured most of it out. Deb was defending you and let the dream thing slip.”

“It’s okay,” Ian replies as he plays with his food and then looks back up toward Deb. “Are you all right?” he asks. She immediately starts to cry and runs away from the table. Chris starts to get up to go after her, but Ian stops him. “Wait, Chris...Let me go, please,” Ian says and runs after Deb before Chris can even answer. Erik smiles, but doesn’t say a word, and I figure I better change the subject.

“So, does anyone have a clue who could have done this?”

“It has to be mortal magic because I can smell it. It is strong, too,” Brion explains.

“It also has to be someone who knows about the prophecy,” Mom suggests.

“Gabriel is the only one who could know about it,” I say.

“Gabriel wouldn’t have done this. He doesn’t want anything to do with this realm anymore,” Erik insists. “It has to be someone who has access to Kate’s because that is where she kept the notebooks,” I say and notice Erik has a weird expression on his face. “What is it?” I ask and Erik smiles.

“I know something you don’t know?” He laughs.

“Erik, we don’t have time for games.” I slam my hand down on the table, making everyone jump.

“So impatient,” he says.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake.” Zoe sighs. “Kate has a sister and she probably has access to the store.” Erik gives her a look. “That is what you were going to say, right?” She smiles.

“Sneaky little witch, stay out of my head,” Erik snarls.

“Zoe, you can read minds?” Brion asks.

“Not usually, but I have been practicing and that is actually the first time I did it,” she says proudly.

“Well done,” Aodan says.

“Awesome, Zoe,” I say. “Is it as horrible as you thought it would be?”

“It’s not so bad,” she says, laughing. “How did you know Kate had a sister, Erik?”

“Gabriel mentioned it to me the last time we were together.”

“I guess we need to talk to the sister,” Zoe says.

“Brion,” Erik says, “let me handle this.”

“Okay, what universe are you in?” Chris asks.

“She is protected by Gabriel and his men,” Erik says.

“We owe it to Gabriel to tread lightly. We did get his fiancé killed.” He looks toward Chris.

“Kate made her own decisions, Erik. Don’t try and put the blame on anyone here,” Brion says. “But you are not wrong about treading carefully. I will agree to let you go as long as you take Sophie and whoever else wants to tag along.” Brion looks to Chris.

“I’m on it,” Chris says.

“Great,” Erik says as he rolls his eyes at Chris.

“Zoe, I’d like you to go along as well. They might need you,” Mom orders.

“Yes, my Queen.”

I can tell Aodan doesn’t like the idea, and so can Brion.

“Aodan, you may accompany them as well,” Brion says.

“Well hell, why don’t we just take the whole lot of them,” Erik says, sarcastically.

“That sounds like an excellent idea.” Brion smiles.

“But do stay outside until they need your assistance,” he orders everyone, and they agree with a smile.

We all rush through the rest of our meal so we can leave. “I need to go tell Ian about this. I’ll be right back.” I run up to the guest quarters, but they aren’t

here. I figure they may have gone back to Wizardland, so I go to Chris's quarters. I look around, but I don't see any sign that they have been here. I'm about to message him, but I get an idea. Maybe he went back to his quarters instead. If they aren't there I will just message him. I go to Ian's quarters and take a look around.

*Where could they have gone?* I think to myself.

Suddenly, I hear something coming from Conner's old room. "Ian?" I ask, but no answer. I open the door and immediately I am frozen in shock.

The light shines in lighting up the room, Ian turns and shouts. "Sophie!"

"Oh, my God, Sophie!" Deb screams as well. I'm standing in the doorway, speechless as they hurry to get dressed. I should leave, but I can't move. I'm not too angry, but I am shocked that Ian would do this. He's always the one who does the right thing.

"Sophie, are you okay?" He snaps his fingers in my face to get my attention.

Still shocked, I finally get some words out. "I came to tell you..." I close my eyes to remember why I am here.

"I came to tell you we're going to the mortal realm to talk to Kate's sister if you want to go." I think I have a moment of insanity because I start to laugh hysterically.

"Of course you don't want to go. I'm sure you want to stay and finish. I'll let you guys get back to it," I say

and turn around to leave. As I do, I run into the wall. I laugh again, but I run as quickly as I can out of the room and take a deep breath.

Ian comes out and grabs me by the arm. “Sophie, wait.”  
“No, Ian, it’s fine. I should have just messaged you.”

“I’m so sorry,” he says.

“Seriously, don’t apologize. We will figure this whole weird thing we got going on later. Just go be with her right now.”

“Sophie...I...”

“I know, Ian, just go. I’ll be fine.” I smile to reassure him because...really, after everything I put him through, what right do I have to be mad at him?

I’m still in shock as I enter Faeryland and Chris can tell.

“What is it?” he asks.

I don’t answer because how can I tell him I just caught Ian with his wife? He grabs my shoulders to get my attention. “Sophie, what is it?” I look around to see everyone staring at me.

“Nothing...I’m fine. Deb and Ian didn’t want to go, so we can leave when everyone is ready.” Chris stares at me curiously and I know he senses I’m not telling him something. “Seriously, I’m still just freaked out about Ian and me having a child and it’s supposed to save our realm thing, but I’ll be fine. Is everyone ready to go?” He still isn’t sure I’m telling him everything, but he lets

the subject go.

“Hurry back, because we have a lot of training to do,” Brion says.

~

Kate’s store is now completely empty. “It’s so weird seeing nothing on the shelves. I’m going to miss it,” Zoe says sadly.

“Somebody will probably turn it into a bar,” Erik says.

“I could live with that,” Gabriel says as he walks through the doorway. “Seriously, Erik, why do you insist on bringing them here?” he asks with irritation and glances at me.

“Sorry, Gabe, but it’s the only way I can get out of the castle,” Erik says.

“Brion still has you under house arrest?”

“For now,” Erik says.

“How long are you going to play his game?” Gabriel smiles.

“I must tell you that this one here...” Erik points to Zoe.

“Took up Kate’s habit of reading minds, so please don’t give her an excuse to rummage through mine.”

“As long as you don’t mention Kate again.” He glares at Erik.

“We’re here to talk to Arianna,” Erik says.

“What for?”

“Someone did a number on me and Ian and I’d like to

find out who,” Chris says.

Gabriel looks at him, confused.

“This is Chris, by the way,” Erik says and Gabriel’s face lights up as he understands the situation.

“Oh, someone did a body switch.” He laughs.

“Yes, and I think it is the same person who took my notebooks,” I say.

“Arianna just lost her sister, so maybe you should show some respect.” Gabriel grinds his teeth together.

“I’m sorry, but we don’t have time for respect because this spell could become permanent,” I say.

“Arianna has more important things to worry about than taking your notebooks and casting spells,” Gabriel says.

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that,” a woman says as she throws the notebooks down on the counter.

“Arianna, I told you to wait in the back,” Gabriel says.

“Sorry, I had to see what all the fuss was about.” She narrows her eyes at me. She looks so much like Kate.

“You must be Sophie.”

“Yes, I’m very sorry about your sister,” I reply.

“That is so kind of you,” she says sarcastically, “but I will not lift the spell.”

“Arianna!” Gabriel yells. “Sophie, I didn’t know,” he says. I look at Arianna and can see the pain in her eyes. She must have loved her sister very much.

“Why?” I ask. “Who put you up to this? Is this about the prophecies?”

She laughs as she comes a little closer but stops when she notices Chris.

“Dear girl, I could care less about your world and I don’t care about the prophecies either.” She waves her hand in the air and the notebooks go up in flames. I gasp, but Zoe thinks quickly and puts the fire out.

Arianna quickly turns toward Zoe. “Oh yes,” she says. “My sister told me about you, Zoe. She spoke highly of you; so sorry about this.” She thumps the air and Zoe is knocked out. Chris and I run to see if she is okay.

“She is fine,” Arianna says. “I didn’t hurt her.” Aodan and the gang are outside trying to get in. “Can you please tell your friends you are okay so they’ll quit trying to break the door down. They won’t get in.” I quickly message them and the banging stops.

“Now, as I was saying...” She sets the notebooks on fire again and all I can do is watch them burn because I don’t know what I’m up against here. How powerful is this witch, anyway?

“I don’t care about your prophecies, Sophie,” she continues. “Or who you love more. My sister told me about your story, so I decided to use it to my advantage.” I see Chris get a little twitchy.

“And what is it that you want, Arianna?” I ask.

“Nothing that I don’t deserve.”

“Let me guess, is it power or money?” Erik asks.

“I have power and I don’t need your money,” she says, insulted. “What I want isn’t as petty. All I want is revenge for my sister!” she shouts and raises her hands in the air.

“Arianna, no!” Gabriel shouts as he runs toward her, but a guy comes in and tackles him to the ground. She turns to them and smiles. Chris takes advantage and quickly takes his wand and throws her across the room. “Get Zoe!” he shouts.

I go over to Zoe to try and wake her. “Just get her out of here.” I zap her outside with the rest of the gang.

Gabriel stands up. “What the hell, Keevis? Stand down!” Gabriel shouts. Keevis looks toward Arianna on the ground, but she is starting to get up.

“Not this time, Gabe, sorry.” Arianna stands and snarls at me. They both start to come toward us, but they stop with frozen stares. Chris and I turn around to see the whole gang behind us, ready to blow this place up.

Gabriel twists his head in our direction and then back to Arianna’s with his eyebrows furrowed. “I read the prophecies, Sophie, and you’re going to be a busy girl.”

“Lift the spell, Arianna,” I demand.

“Not a chance,” she says, planting her feet.

“Arianna, that’s enough!” Gabriel shouts.

She turns on him. “I can’t believe you’re siding with them after they killed Kate!”

“They didn’t kill Kate. Kate made her own choices and you know this.” Gabriel says with a sigh and runs his hands through his hair. She looks as if she is about to calm down, but closes her eyes.

“No...it is their fault she is dead, and I will not rest until I have killed every last faery.”

“You can’t kill every last faery, Arianna,” Gabriel says with gritted teeth. “Besides, Sophie is half-wizard as well, so if you mess with faeries, you mess with wizards.”

“Elves too,” Matt says.

She glares at every one of us with hatred.

“I suggest you lift the spell,” I say.

“Are you sure that is what you want?” She gives me an arrogant smile.

“Of course that is what I want,” I say.

“I thought this would solve your little problem. You could have them both and still have the prophecy come true. Marry Chris in Ian’s body and you can have a family with him. It would still be Ian’s child, so the prophecy stays true. By trying to get revenge for my sister, I’ve actually given you a loophole. You should be thanking me.”

Chris and I take a quick glance at each other. “That’s

what I thought,” she says. “When you two decide what you want, just let me know, but the spell will be permanent soon.” She waves her hand in the air and we are outside.

“How the heck did she do that?” I ask Chris.

“Where are Zoe and Erik?” I ask, looking around. I run and try to open the door, but it won’t. I bang on it as hard as I can, worried Arianna might hurt Zoe.

“Arianna, open this door! Erik!” Nobody answers me and I begin to panic. We bang on the door for a while until I remember my powers. I retrieve my wand and flick it to bring them to me. Erik is on his knees with a bloody nose.

“I almost had him,” he says as he wipes the blood with his shirt. Zoe doesn’t have a scratch on her.

“Are you okay?” Aodan runs to her.

“I don’t think you have to worry about her.” Erik chuckles, getting off his knees. “I’m starting to like this one.”

Zoe smiles. “Yes, I’m fine.”

“What happened?” Chris asks.

“Sometimes mortal witches can use our powers against us,” Zoe explains.

“Why didn’t it work on you two?” Aodan asks.

“We are stronger,” Erik says. Everyone turns to glare at him.

“We weren’t distracted,” Zoe corrects him.

“Did Arianna say anything?” I ask.

“She doesn’t plan on reversing the spell. She only said that to distract you guys,” Zoe says.

“It worked very well,” Chris remarks.

“Before I knocked her out, I read her mind and think I know of the spell she used. I just have to find it,” Zoe says.

“You knocked her out?” Aodan asks, surprised.

“Oh, you should have seen her in there,” Erik says.

“She was spectacular. I have never seen a more powerful fifteen-year-old...”

“I’m seventeen,” Zoe says, irritated, and we all laugh.

“Let’s get back before we start any more trouble,” I say.

## 5

### **A Twist of Fate**

After the day I've had, all I want to do is go back home to the mortal realm. After everyone goes back to Faeryland, I sneak off to be by myself. I sit by the fireplace thinking about what Arianna said. Is this spell really a bad thing? I don't know anymore, because everything is so messed up. I wish nobody ever found out about the prophecy because this wouldn't even be an issue. King Brion was right about not needing to know the future; it only drives you crazy.

I'm also thinking about Ian and why he would do this. How can we be together now after what I saw? He has walked in on me and Chris numerous times, but we were only kissing. I would have never taken it further. I'm not saying I didn't want to, but I would never do that to him.

What do I say to Chris? Do I tell him anything, or let Deb tell him? Was this a one-time thing? I need to talk to Ian. I message him to meet me at the house. He usually comes right away, but not this time. As I stare at the fire for about thirty minutes, I finally sense his presence. I turn to look up at him but don't get up.

“Hey,” I say.

“Hey.” He comes to sit by the fire as well. “How are you?” He brushes the hair out of my face. He hits a nerve inside me and I lose control of my emotions. He holds on to me and apologizes. “Sophie, I am so sorry. Please forgive me...don’t hate me.” After he finishes his plea, I begin to laugh and he lifts an eyebrow at me. “Are you all right?” He starts to slide away from me. After a minute of laughing, I give him a smile.

“I’m not crying because of you. Well, I am, but not just because of you. I was thinking about everything that has happened to me since I found out what I am. I was thinking of all the bad things and...” I grab his hand. “All the good things.” He smiles and grabs my hand tighter. “Why did you wait so long before you came to see me?”

“We were in the middle of telling Chris.” He sighs and shows me his busted lip.

“So he didn’t take it well?”

“Actually, he laughed, but not as much as you just did.”

“Then why did he hit you?”

“Because of you. He laughed and said he had it coming, but you didn’t deserve that because you would never do that to me.” He looks down, ashamed. “And then he hit me.”

“What now?” I ask.

“I don’t know,” he replies. We sit in silence for a while until Chris and Deb pop in.

“What are y’all doing here?” I ask.

“We thought we should all talk,” Chris says.

“This is awkward enough with Ian, so I really don’t need to talk to you two right now.” I get up to leave.

“Then just listen.” Chris grabs my arm to keep me from leaving.

“Fine.” I glance at Deb and her eyes are glued to Ian. Everyone is silent as we wait for Chris to talk.

“Sophie, did Ian ever tell you that we used to be very close?” Chris starts and Ian rolls his eyes.

“No,” I reply, “I thought you always hated each other.”

“We grew up like brothers and, like brothers often do, we had a bit of a falling out. We were inseparable as kids. We were best friends...” Chris trails off as if remembering. “They called us the three musketeers.”

“Who was the other one?” I ask.

“Joffrey.” Ian jumps in the conversation and I smile picturing the three of them getting into all kinds of trouble.

“He wasn’t allowed to hang out with us, but everyone knew he was our best friend,” Chris continues. “We did everything together.”

“Until you went and screwed it all up!” Ian shouts.

“You see...” Chris sighs. “This is where our stories

don't mesh together well. He says it is my fault and I say it is his."

"You abandoned me!" Ian jumps up in Chris's face and Deb and I look at each other with concern. What did we get ourselves into? "You were my brother," Ian says with all his pent-up rage. "I looked up to you and you forgot about me. How could you just leave without even saying goodbye?"

"No, brother," Chris yells back, "it was you who forgot about me!"

"Okay, guys." I break them apart before they start to tear into each other. "If we are going to do this, y'all have to play nice."

"Then let's not do this," Ian says as he turns to walk away.

"Do you remember the fort?" Chris says. Ian stops and turns back to his brother.

"How did you know about the fort?" Ian asks. Chris laughs and sits down by the fireplace. He looks into the fire and begins to tell his story.

"We were about ten when you and Joffrey discovered it. Joffrey's parents were fighting again, so you two left the castle, and I thought you might come get me before you left. When you didn't, I followed you. Joffrey was so excited. I sat and listened as he opened up to you about his parents. Do you remember the conversation

after that?" Ian is silent. "Let me refresh your memory, brother," Chris says sarcastically. "Joffrey told you that you were his best friend and he wanted to keep the place a secret. You asked him about me and he didn't want you to tell me. He wanted it to be for just the two of you." Ian seems to be interested in the story now.

"Do you remember what he asked you next?"

"Chris..." Ian starts to say.

"He asked you if he was your best friend or if I was and you said..." Chris starts to laugh. "Now let me know if I get it wrong, dear brother. You said that Joffrey was your best friend and I wasn't even your real brother." Chris stops for a moment to let this sink in Ian's head.

"Chris, I was just a boy..."

"You were all I had and you acted as if I were nothing to you! So tell me, who abandoned who?" Chris glances at me, but quickly turns away. Ian is speechless for the moment. "After that, I became a little distant. You and Joffrey became closer every day, so I decided to leave."

"Leave?" I ask. "Where did you go?"

"They have a school for boys in London. Maddox knew someone there, so they let me stay with them for a while."

"Why didn't you ever say anything?" Ian finally speaks up.

“Why would I have thought to say anything? I just had the only family I had toss me aside as if I didn’t matter. I wasn’t interested in explanations. When I came back, I was older, but you were hell bent on getting even with me for leaving and you turned everyone against me. I tried talking to Maddox.” He laughs. “He told me that I didn’t need friends and I should focus on my spells.” “You should have said something,” Ian shouts. “All that time wasted...” He jumps up and walks over to Chris. “That was just a boy who wanted to impress a friend. I didn’t mean it. You meant the world to me. You were my brother...you still are.”

“Well, I guess it doesn’t matter now.” Chris sighs. “If it didn’t matter,” Ian says, grabbing Chris by the shoulders, “you wouldn’t have brought it up...and it matters to me.” He pulls Chris in for a hug. “All this time I thought you were the asshole, and it was me all along. Please forgive me.” As they hug, I see Chris’s face light up with joy. He looks as if he has waited a long time for this moment.

“I forgive you,” Chris says. “But we have another important issue to discuss.” He focuses on me now. “Deb and I have talked it over and we don’t know what to do about this situation, so we are leaving it up to you.”

“What?” I ask. “You can’t literally place your life in

my hands.”

“Well, we do know one thing we want,” Chris says.

“We do want to become permanent citizens of Wizardland and you will be our queen. Our lives will be in your hands anyway.”

“That isn’t fair, guys, because I don’t know what to do either,” I say.

“Maybe we should find out if it’s possible to get this spell reversed and then worry about what to do if we can’t,” Ian says.

“Good thinking, brother,” Chris says. I think they will be calling each other brother a lot now. They have much to catch up on.

“We need Zoe,” I say.

“The whole gang know about it now so we might as well call them all in,” Ian stresses as he looks to Deb for an answer.

“It’s all right,” she says.

“Okay, let’s do it,” Chris says.

~

“I found a spell that will reverse the guys back, but something isn’t right,” Zoe says.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“To perform the spell Arianna would have needed their DNA.”

“DNA?” Ian asks.

“Yeah, it’s a body-switch spell. King Brion was right. It will become permanent, so we need to work fast,” Zoe stresses.

“I’d like to know how she got our DNA,” Ian says.

“Maybe Erik,” Zoe says.

“I was thinking the same thing,” I say. Chris suddenly vanishes.

“Where did he go?” Deb asks.

“He went to get Erik,” I say.

Chris reappears with Erik. “What is going on?” Erik demands as King Brion and Mom appear as well.

“Sorry, King Brion, but we had to discuss something with Erik and it couldn’t wait,” Chris says as he picks up Erik by the throat.

“Quite all right and thanks for messaging me so quickly,” Brion replies. “What has he done this time?”

“I haven’t done anything!” Erik gasps.

“So you haven’t stolen any DNA lately?” I ask.

“What?” Erik looks puzzled for a moment, but quickly figures out what we want. “Oh...the witch needed your DNA for the spell and you think it was me who gave it to her.”

“Yeah,” Aodan says sarcastically. “It had to be someone close to get a sample of their DNA, Erik.”

“And you automatically assume it was me.”

“Umm...yeah,” Aodan says and Erik gives him an

irritated look.

“I have only been close to Chris once and I think he would have noticed if I took his DNA,” Erik continues.

“He’s telling the truth,” Zoe says.

“Although I appreciate and rather enjoy you proving them wrong”—Erik turns to Zoe—“stay out of my head, little witch.”

“If it wasn’t Erik, then who was it?” I ask.

Chris lets Erik go and sighs. We look at each other wondering who could have given the DNA to Arianna. Erik rolls his eyes. “Oh, good Lord.” He pauses for a moment and glances at everyone. “I would love to watch you all wonder if someone here has betrayed you, but I’d like to get back to my book.” He glances at Zoe and sighs.

“You told me to stay out of your head,” she says and he gives her a smile.

“Am I the only one who remembers the witch’s boyfriend is a shape-shifter?” Erik declares.

“Keevis,” Zoe finally answers.

“Yes, and he could have pretended to be any one of you at any time,” Erik says.

“That is a scary thought,” Alice says.

“That is what makes them so dangerous,” Erik states.

“Now that it is settled, I shall return to my book.” He winks at Zoe before he leaves.

“I don’t like him being so comfortable with you,” Aodan says.

“I don’t either,” Zoe replies.

“At least he was helpful this time,” Brion says. “Is there anything else we can do for you, Sophie?”

“No thanks, Grandfather.” I give him and my mother a kiss.

“Oh, and by the way,” Mom says, “you were right about Cynthia. She confessed to sending me to the mortal world to die.”

“What? Where is she now?” I ask, ready to kill her.

“She is in the dungeon,” Brion says. “Where she belongs.”

“No, she belongs in hell!” I say.

“I agree,” Mom says. “Don’t worry, Sophie; in time.” I smile because I know they will all get what they deserve, eventually.

I give them both another kiss before they leave and then stare at worried faces for a moment.

“How much time do we have, Zoe?” Ian asks.

“I don’t know,” she admits. “It could already be permanent. Guys, you need to figure out what you’re going to do. I’m afraid if I wait any longer than tomorrow it will be too late.” We are all frustrated and tired because it is already three in the morning.

“Zoe, do you mean later today or tomorrow?” Aodan

asks.

“Later today,” she says. “I’m sorry, but it needs to be done by noon.”

“By noon!” Ian shouts. “Well this just keeps getting better and better.”

“It’s up to you, beautiful,” Chris says. I look to Ian to see what he wants to do.

“Whatever you decide, love,” he says. I know what to do, but I just hope everyone agrees.

“Go ahead and do the spell, Zoe,” I order.

“Oh, thank God.” Chris sighs with relief. “No offense, brother, but I really need my body back.”

Ian laughs. “Me too, brother.”

“Brother?” Aodan asks with a scrunched up nose.

“Long story,” I say. Zoe quickly pricks their fingers and starts her spell.

“Couldn’t you have just taken a hair?” Chris asks.

“Blood works faster, and be quiet so I can concentrate.”

Zoe sighs. All we can do is sit in silence and hope for the best. After a few minutes, the air feels different.

Zoe’s hair begins to blow and we all smile because it is cool. The lights go out and I bite my lip with worry. The wind gets stronger as Zoe chants even louder. As the lights cut back on everything goes still. Zoe looks up with sweat on her brow and tries to catch her breath.

“It’s done,” she says. I look at Ian and Chris to see if

there is any change.

“Well?” I can see the disappointment on their faces.

“We waited too long.” I gasp.

“I’m sorry, guys,” Zoe says with frustration.

“No,” I shout. “I will not let that witch win.”

“Sophie, there is nothing else I can do,” Zoe says.

“Maybe not you, but all of us...” I say. “Everybody get in a circle and hold hands.” Chris and Ian get in the middle of the circle and Zoe gives me only a half-smile, but performs her spell again. “Everybody focus on Ian and Chris getting back to their own body.”

Zoe chants and the air gets thicker. It is a little hard to breathe, and as I start to sweat, I can feel heat coming off my skin. Suddenly, all the lights bust, but we can still see. The light from our magic is gleaming so bright I have to squint my eyes. Zoe’s eyes are black as she chants and everyone else is sweating and breathing as hard as I am. Zoe finishes the spell and the room darkens again, but she whispers a word and the lights are fixed. Zoe is exhausted and so are we. We all stare at Chris and Ian, waiting for them to answer our silent question; did it work? Chris shakes his head as he pulls his hair back.

“No,” I say. “Why didn’t it work?” Chris and Ian come over to hug me.

“Wait,” Chris says as he gets a little wobbly.

“What’s wrong?” I ask, trying to hold him up, but he is too heavy for me and he falls to the floor.

“Ian,” I yell. Ian comes over and we both kneel down at Chris’s side. “Chris!” I pat him on the cheek, but he is out cold. Ian’s face is pale as well. “Ian, are you okay?” I ask as he takes a deep breath and collapses. “Oh, my God, Ian!” I shout. They both lie motionless and I fear the worst. “Zoe, what happened?”

“I don’t know, but it wasn’t supposed to do that,” she says. The gang surrounds their bodies and nobody knows what to do.

“Look!” Alice shouts. “They’re moving.”

I look down and see Ian open his eyes. “Ian, are you all right?”

“Not if I am supposed to be Ian,” he says.

“Oh,” I gasp. “It worked. You’re back in your own body, Chris!” I hug him and we sit and wait for Ian to wake up. Minutes pass and still he doesn’t. “Ian,” I say as I shake him. I start to panic and shake him a little harder, but he doesn’t respond. “Ian!” I shout louder. “Why isn’t he waking up, Zoe?” Chris smacks him in the face.

“Wake up!” he says. “You can’t die now, jerk. Not after we just made up.” I see tears fill Chris’s eyes and I start to cry. This can’t be happening right now. After everything we have been through, it can’t end this way.

I put my head on Chris's chest and let the tears fall harder than ever. Chris holds me tight and starts to cry as well. I can hear sobs in the background, but then I hear a gasp that makes us all jump. Ian suddenly takes in a breath and sits up. I don't know how long I stay in shock, but after I recover I hit him in the chest. "You scared us."

"Sorry," he says and looks at Chris. Deb comes and pushes us out of the way to hug him.

"Thanks, Zoe," I say.

"Yes." Chris goes to Zoe and picks her up to swing her around. "Thanks."

We all join in and form a huddle.

"What now?" Zoe asks.

"I don't think Arianna is done with us, but maybe we can take a day to relax at least," I say.

"What about the prophecies?" Ian asks.

"You know what..." I sigh. "I don't care. Brion is right; we can't worry about every prophecy we hear about."

"But Brion will insist on the one about our child coming true," Ian says.

"Yes, he will," I say as he looks at me with concern.

"Don't worry about it." I grab his hand. "Whatever we decide, I will handle my grandfather."

"What about your mother?"

"That's going to be a little harder, but we'll figure it

out.”

“What about Arianna and Keevis?” Cormac asks frantically. “They will be planning something else and he can become any one of us! How are we going to prepare for that?”

“Zoe will be able to see his true form, but she can’t be with everyone all the time,” Aodan stresses.

“We’ll figure it out, Aodan,” I say to calm them both down.

“How?” Aodan yells and the gang all turn to me for answers.

“I don’t know, guys. Y’all expect me to have a plan right this second.”

“I think you all need to back off a little bit,” Chris says.

“He’s right,” Zoe says. “We’ve had enough for one day.”

“Actually, we have all had enough for a lifetime, but we get your point,” Cormac says and Alice hits him in the arm.

“Yeah, we’re sorry, Sophie. We’ll bombard you with questions later,” Matt says.

“Thanks,” I say, exhausted.

“Yeah, I guess we are all tired and cranky,” Cormac says.

“Let’s pick this up later when we have had some sleep, but we all need to sleep together down here.”

## GUARDIAN OF THE QUEEN

They agree and I watch them as they fall asleep. I wonder what is going to happen to us next. Chris opens his eyes and smiles at me. “Happy birthday,” he whispers to me. He knows I wouldn’t want anyone to make a fuss right now.

“Thank you,” I whisper back to him, close my eyes, and fall asleep.

## 6

### **The Dream**

I wake with the sounds of snoring all around me. Looking around at my friends piled up together, my heart melts. I love them all so much and swear I will kill anyone who tries to hurt them. I decide to give Jen, Danny, and Chrissy a call because we haven't talked since the wedding. "Jen," I say as she answers her phone.

"Sophie? Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm sorry I just ran out like that."

"It's all right, Alice explained it all to us. I'm just glad you're okay. Are you back home?"

"Yes, y'all want to come meet us for breakfast?"

"Absolutely! We will be there shortly." She quickly hangs up the phone.

"So..." Chris says in the doorway. "Crazy night, right?" He smiles.

"That's putting it mildly." I rub my hands over my face to ease the stress.

"How did you sleep?" he asks. I sigh with heavy eyes.

"That well, huh? Me too."

"I kept dreaming about this dragon. It kept me up all

night.”

“A dragon?” Chris jumps like he has been electrocuted.

“Was the dragon red or green?” He gets serious and I stop to try and remember. “Sophie, this is important. Was the dragon red or green!” he shouts.

“It was both...I think.” I try to get my memory correct.

“Sophie...” he continues.

“Yes, it was both green and red. Why?” I snap at him.

“I don’t know; it could mean several things. We need to talk to Brion.”

“Chris, don’t scare me. What is this about?”

“Dragons can mean several things. I don’t mean to scare you, but with dreams you can’t be too careful. So we will go and see Brion about it before I worry you, okay?”

“All right.” I agree, and if I don’t know what it means right now I can’t worry.

“I need to tell you something though...” He comes closer to me.

“What is it now?” I laugh.

“I messaged Brion last night to give me and Deb an annulment.”

“What? No, don’t do that just because of me...”

“Deb agrees with me. And, of course it’s because of you. Sophie, I have never loved anyone as much as I love you and I never will.” He touches my lip with his

finger, and I can't help but close my eyes and shiver from his touch. "Will you consider that we may have a chance to be together after all?"

"When this is all over, maybe we will know for sure." I grab his hand as everyone comes to join us for breakfast.

"Sophie, happy birthday!" Jen yells.

"Oh, my God, Sophie, I can't believe we forgot," Alice says.

"It's okay. We have had a bit on our minds lately."

"Well, consider this your birthday party," Ian says, popping in decorations and a cake.

"Thanks." I smile.

While we catch Chrissy, Jen, and Danny up on events, Chris and I stare at one another from across the table. I try to look away a few times, not wanting to seem obvious, but know I fail. The prophecy is still in the back of my mind, even though I said I didn't care. If Ian and I don't get married, and we don't have a child, will we need saving later, or does us having a child together make it the reason we need saving? This is all giving me a major headache.

"Sophie, are you okay?" Chris asks. Everyone turns to look at me like I'm fixing to fall apart.

"Yes." I laugh. "Don't worry, guys." I look at their worried faces. "It's only a headache. All this thinking is

burning a hole in my head.”

“I know what you mean.” Cormac holds his head.

“Now you guys know how I feel all the time.” I know he is trying to make us all laugh and it does make us crack a smile, but something is wrong with everyone.

We all hold our heads in pain, except for Danny, Chrissy, and Jen.

“Guys, what’s happening?” Danny asks.

“I don’t know,” I answer in pain. “This has to be Arianna’s doing.”

“What do we do?” Jen asks. “Sophie, I swear, only on your birthday!”

“I know!” I say. “Zoe?”

“Working on it,” she says as her nose bleeds.

“Zoe, why are you bleeding?” Aodan asks. She holds her hand up in protest.

“Stop and let me concentrate,” she says with pain in her voice. I can tell she is in more pain than all of us. She starts to breathe harder and harder. We all are frightened, but we understand Zoe knows what she is doing. She is getting more powerful every day. All of a sudden, she gives a scream and makes us all jump up from the table. The house starts to shake and as dust falls from the ceiling Zoe passes out at the table.

“Zoe!” Aodan yells as we all run to her. Her nose isn’t bleeding anymore, but she is out cold and sweaty.

“Take her upstairs and lay her on the bed,” I suggest.

“No, I’m taking her back to Faeryland,” Aodan interrupts me.

“Okay, that is probably a better idea,” I say.

“Sophie, we probably all need to go back for a little while,” Ian says.

“I know.” I sigh. “I’ll meet you all back in a while.”

“Why? What are you going to do?” Chris asks.

“Nothing; I’m just going to clean up here and then I’ll be on my way back.” Ian gives Chris a look because they know I am up to something. “I won’t be long,” I add.

“All right, do you want some help?” Ian asks.

“No, I’ll be fine. Go and make sure everything is all right in Wizardland. Chris, you and Deb probably need to get back too. I’ll go back to Faeryland first to check in and then I’ll come to Wizardland.”

“If you’re sure.” Chris gives me a hesitant look.

“Yes, I’m sure,” I stress. “Now get going.”

“Sophie, do you want us to clean up for you?” Jen asks.

“We have nothing going on today, except studying for exams tomorrow.”

“What? Tomorrow?”

“Yeah, did you forget?” Chrissy laughs. “Well, I guess it wouldn’t be hard to forget about for you, sorry.”

“Yes,” Jen says. “The first one is tomorrow at eight

o'clock. I can call you and remind you, but pick up your phone." She holds up her cell phone. "You remember these things, right?" She laughs.

"Yes, I remember, Jen." I thought I had more time to study. My days have all been meshing together. There is no way I can pass my exams without a little help. I know it's cheating, but I will graduate.

"You have a whole week of this, so get prepared and try not to get into trouble," Danny says. "You only have one week of exams and then we graduate. You can last that period of time without getting into trouble, right?"

"Do you see who you're talking to?" Chris asks.

Everyone leaves, and since my headache is gone, I'm assuming Zoe has undone the spell. I decide to do something reckless and go to Kate's shop and face Arianna. I'm just so tired of people pushing me around. As soon as I pop in on the roof, someone taps me on the shoulder. "Chris!" I jump. "What are you doing here?" "I could ask the same thing about you," he says and gives me a stern look.

"I just needed to finish this."

"You promised not to do anything reckless and this is beyond reckless," he shouts. "I'm just glad I know you so well and knew what you were planning to do."

"I'm sorry, but I don't plan on fighting her. I only want to talk to her and try to explain..."

“Explain what, exactly?” Chris continues his rant. “Can you explain to me then? Because if I was her I’d be doing the same thing. She is hell bent on revenge! I got her sister killed and I don’t blame her, but she should be after me, not any of you. I should be the one talking to her.”

“No, I’m the queen and it’s my responsibility!” I roar. “You have really got to look up the responsibilities of a queen. I think you can Google it,” he says sarcastically. “You don’t see any other queen going out to get themselves killed, do you? They stay safe so they can rule, and that is their duty. It’s not blazing in like a tornado just because she wants to prove herself.”

I look down because I know he’s right, but it doesn’t seem like me to sit on the side-lines.

“I know you’re right. It’s just not me and you know it’s not. I can’t sit and do nothing...”

“I know, but you have to sit this one out.” He grabs my hand. “Can we please go back to Wizardland? We’ll figure out a way to win this without being reckless.”

“Fine, but don’t tell anyone I almost did something stupid.” I pout.

“I won’t.” He smiles and squeezes my hand and we are in Wizardland.

“How is Zoe doing?” I ask Ian.

“She is fine. She woke up when they got back to

Faeryland. How are you?"

"I'm fine."

"Stop saying that because I know you're not." He grabs me by the shoulders and we are back in his quarters.

"Talk to me and tell me what you're thinking."

"What do you want me to say? I'm scared and I don't know what to think. Are you talking about us, the prophecy, or Arianna? There is so much going on in my head I don't know which problem to think about first."

I sit down on the arm of the couch. "I'm tired of thinking."

"I know, but we need to tackle one of those on the list."

He leans down beside me. "We need to talk about us."

"Now?"

"Now is a better time than any don't you think?"

"I suppose." I sigh. "What do you think we should do about us?"

"I love you, Sophie." He grabs my hand. "You are an incredible person and I would be incredibly lucky to share my life with you."

"But..."

"But...I know you will never love anyone like you love Chris. I know you love me too, but I will always come second and I just don't want to live like that. With that being said, I will still marry you if you think it is the right thing to do. I will be a good husband and a good

king for you, but I want you to be happy and I believe the only way for you to be truly happy is to be with Chris.”

“But the prophecy—”

“Don’t worry about the prophecy,” he interrupts. “Just think about you for a second. What would make you happy?”

I’m silent for little while to think, but I only want one thing at the moment. “I just want everyone else to be happy.” I start to cry on his shoulder and he comforts me.

“Don’t cry. Everyone will be happy.”

“You know Chris and Deb got an annulment?” I wipe my eyes.

“Really? Deb didn’t mention it,” he says, surprised.

“Yeah, Chris told me before breakfast.” I see him crack a little smile but quickly erase it. “It’s all right. I know you care for her and I’m glad.” I look away from him because my vision gets blurry and I think I’m about to cry, but it’s not tears making my vision blurred.

“Sophie, are you all right? You are very pale.”

“I’m not sure...” I stand up to see if I feel better, but I get dizzy.

I begin to faint. As I am falling, Chris runs toward me.

~

I wake up in Faeryland to Chris holding my hand.

“Hey, what happened?” I ask him.

“You fainted and nobody knew what to do, so we had to bring you back to Faeryland.”

“Does anybody know why I fainted?”

“How do you feel?” He strokes my cheek. “Do you need something to drink?”

Zoe comes in the room holding a glass of water. “Here, Sophie, drink this. It should help,” she says.

“Thanks, Zoe. Did Alice say anything? Does she know why I fainted?” I ask because I’m starting to feel a little dizzy again. “Is this a spell? Is Arianna pulling something else?”

“Sophie... your mother will be here in a minute and she will be able to explain to you,” she says with her soft tone.

“Zoe, you’re scaring me. Why can’t you tell me? Chris... what’s going on?” Chris only looks to the ground. Mom comes running in the room.

“Everyone out!” She claps her hands to dismiss them all. “Chris, this means you too... out!” Chris squeezes my hand but leaves immediately.

“Mom, what the heck is going on?” I sit up in the bed.

“Everyone is freaking me out.”

“It’s all right, darling,” she says as she straightens my hair out. “Oh, my baby girl. You are all grown up now. You know I love you and I would do anything for you,

right?"

"Yes, of course."

"And you trust me to help you with any problem that comes your way?" She grabs my hand.

"Yes, what is it? Am I sick?" I swallow a knot in my throat.

"No, you're not sick, sweetheart. You are just going to..." she hesitates.

"Mom, I can take it whatever it is." I try to sound brave for her.

"I know you are strong and you will get through this, but I need you to promise me that you will not try to do this on your own. Promise me you will ask for help when you need it and come to me when you have questions. I will always be here for you no matter what, okay...promise me," she stresses.

"I promise."

"Sophie...you're pregnant."

I laugh for a moment until I see the sympathy in my mother's eyes. "No..." I shake my head. "That can't be right."

"I'm sorry, baby. I know you weren't expecting this to be so soon, but—"

"So soon!" I interrupt. "That is an understatement. I am only eighteen years old...today! I haven't even graduated yet. I'm not ready to be a mom. Tell me

you're joking, please." I start to feel sick and don't know if it's because I'm scared out of my mind or if it's because I'm pregnant.

"I know it's a lot to take in, but be strong. This was planned all along remember. You and Ian were destined to have this baby, and this baby will save our worlds," she says to help me understand her perspective on the situation I suppose.

"Does everyone know?" I ask, trying to fight the tears.

"Yes, everyone was here when Zoe sensed it. And Chris said you had a dream of a dragon last night."

"Yes, so?" I'm confused at what a dragon has to do with all of this.

"Dragon dreams can symbolize different things. They can mean war, death, and new life. Green dragons for instance can mean new life, and a red dragon can mean death or war. Chris said you dreamed of both."

"Yes, I dreamed of one dragon, but it was green on one side and red on the other. It breathed fire, but it was gentle."

"Gentle?" Mom asks.

"Yes, I could tell because it looked into my eyes and said only one word."

"What did it say?"

"It said 'peace' and then it cried."

"It cried?" Mom looks confused.

“Yes, it was strange, but I felt as if the dragon was leading me to something. I woke up before it could take me there.”

My mother thinks for a moment. “We need to talk to Brion about this. This sounds important. I need to leave, baby. Will you be all right for now?”

“Yes.” I smile.

“I’ll return shortly with Brion.” She squeezes my hand. “Mom?”

“Yes, sweetheart?” she replies, getting up to leave.

“How did Ian take it?”

“He was shocked about as much as you, but he has had time to come to realize the baby’s importance.”

“Can you go and get him?”

“Of course,” she says. I am beyond shocked at what she has just told me. I’m not ready for this, but is anybody really ready for a child? I’m only eighteen, so how am I going to be able to handle a baby when I still find myself being a child sometimes? What will happen with me and Ian now? Will we have to get married? People will probably expect it, right?

Ian comes in smiling. “Hey, Mommy,” he says to get a laugh, but I start to cry instead. “I’m sorry, I was trying to be funny. Really bad timing, Ian,” he scolds himself. “It’s okay,” I say, faking a laugh. “I’m just not ready for this. I can’t handle this much, Ian.” I continue to cry.

“I know, and it’s taking me for a loop as well, but you have to admit it is kind of funny.”

I give him a look of disgust. “What is funny about this?”

“I just mean that seeing as how we were about to break up, and all of a sudden we find out you’re pregnant. The greater powers are having a laugh at us right now. The prophecy said we would have a child together, but did it really say I had to be king? They beat us to the punch.”

“But Mom and Brion said they wanted you to be king.”

“Maybe they interpreted it wrong,” Ian suggests.

“Maybe with their old-fashioned thinking, having a baby meant I would be king.”

“Either way, you know everyone will expect us to get married.”

“Well, don’t worry about that right now. You need to rest and try not to think too much. Do you need anything? Do you want to talk to Chris?” I give him an unsure look. “I’ll go and get him,” he says.

Chris comes in with his hands in his pockets. He is silent as he sits down beside me. I look at him, not knowing what to say. *Will he still want me after this?* He looks at me and sighs as if he knows exactly what I am thinking. The next thing I know he is kissing me. My thoughts are washed away and all I can think of is his touch freezing time. I can finally kiss him and not

feel ashamed or guilty about it. It's just me and him together at last.

"Don't ever think I don't want you. I will always want you and I will always need you in my life. Do you understand?" He grabs my face. "I will love you for every bit of an eternity and I will never leave you."

I start to cry and remember how everyone will expect that I marry Ian. Before we can talk anymore, Brion comes rushing in with Mom.

"Chris, can you give us a moment?" Brion asks.

Chris kisses my hand and stands up. "Is this about her dream, King Brion?"

"Yes, but I'd prefer to speak to her alone..."

"I just thought you may want to know I had the same dream," Chris says. Mom and Brion jump with worry.

"Well, I don't know if it was exactly the same dream, but I did dream of a red and green dragon."

"Sit down," Brion says and Chris immediately does so.

"You two are connected in ways you will probably never understand..."

"I think you'd be surprised at how much we can understand, Grandfather. Especially, when it comes to understanding each other." I smile at Chris and he holds my hand.

"Yes, I can see." He glances at Mom. "Dreaming of dragons can sometimes be a big deal, but I will go and

speak to the Elder Spirit and see what he says,” Brion says.

“The what?” I ask.

“The Elder Spirit is a sort of guide of the kings,” Brion continues. “He will be able to help in understanding you two and your dreams.”

“How do we not know about this Elder Spirit? I have been here a year and I am Queen of Wizardland,” I ask, confused.

“There are a lot of faeries and wizards of your age that don’t know,” Brion says.

“Then I think we need to catch up,” I tell Chris.

“I agree,” he says.

“For now, you should rest and not worry about it,” Mom says. “Please make her rest, Chris. She has someone else to worry about, and so do you.” She gives him a stern look. “You are guardian of two now.”

“I understand, my lady.” He bows his head and smiles.

“I’ll return to let you know what the Elder Spirit says,” Brion says, standing up to grab my mother’s hand, and they vanish together.

“Get the gang,” I say.

“I will, but the gang and I will research. You will stay here and sleep for at least a couple of hours.”

“Chris...”

“Just do me this favor. Your mother hates me as it is.

*MJ Boshers*

This way she knows you got a little bit of rest. We will catch you up on what we find when you are refreshed.” He gives me a pout. I have to agree researching isn’t my favorite thing to do.

“Okay, I’ll rest, but just for you.” He smiles and kisses me once more.

“I love we can do that without any guilt now, and I know there’s a lot to discuss about us, but I will savor it...however long it lasts.”

He smiles and fades.

## 7

### The Red Dragon

I didn't realize how tired I was. I quickly fall asleep and dream of the dragon again. It is twice as big as the giants and scaly. It has a sharp, pointy tail that swings around and destroys everything in its path. It sees me, so it stops. I can tell it is trying to lead me somewhere so I follow. It is green on one side all the way to the tail and red on the other. Its wings spread for miles. It turns to me and begins to cry again. "Why are you crying, dragon? Are you in pain?" I ask. It roars and breathes fire.

"Yes."

"What can I do? Where do you want me to go?"

It looks down at me and says, "Y Ddraig Goch Ddyry Cychwyn."

~

I wake up more confused than ever and wonder what that meant. I quickly use a spell to translate, but nothing comes to me. I use another spell, but nothing. My magic isn't working. "Chris!" I yell and he is by my side before I finish.

"What is it?" he asks.

“My magic isn’t working.” I panic.

“Alice!” he shouts and the whole gang is here in a second.

“What is it?” Alice asks.

“Sophie’s magic isn’t working,” Chris explains. “Is it Arianna?”

“I don’t believe so. I think it’s the baby,” she says. “I’m afraid you will have spells when your magic won’t work and other times it will be uncontrollable. I don’t think you should use it at all during the first few months.”

“This is great!” I say with frustration.

“Don’t worry,” Chris says. “I’ll make sure you’re safe.”

“I know, but I won’t be able to help at all,” I say.

They are all silent because they know I can’t stand to just sit and do nothing.

“Sorry, Sophie, but you’ll still be able to research and tell us what to do,” Matt says.

“Thanks, Matt, I feel much better now. I dreamed about the dragon again.”

“Again...this can’t be good,” Zoe says.

“I don’t know what it was trying to tell me. It was leading me somewhere and started to cry. I asked why it was crying and it spewed fire. I asked where it was leading me and it said something I didn’t understand. I was trying to translate it when I found out my powers

weren't working."

"What did it say?" Alice asks.

"It said this," I say. I try to write it in the air because I can't pronounce it, but my magic won't work. "Oh, for heaven's sake, someone give me a pen!" I say, aggravated. I write Y Ddraig Goch Ddyry Cychwyn and Chris throws it in the air so everyone can see. I see a look of surprise on Brion's face as he and Mom come back.

"Oh dear," Brion says.

"What does that mean?" I ask.

"The Red Dragon leads the way," Mom says.

"It means that Ddraig is coming," Brion says.

"Who is Ddraig?" I ask.

"It's pronounced Thraig, and he is King of the Dragons," Brion says.

"Dragons! There are dragons now!" Aodan says.

"I'm beginning to think we aren't special anymore," Cormac says.

"What else do we not know about? You hear myths of dragons such as Paiste and Stoorworm, but you never really expect them to have actually existed," Alice says.

"They were different. They were just as real, but different. Half-human and half-dragons are called Ddraigs, after their king. They look just like a human, but they can transform into a dragon. They live in the

Land of Draco,” Brion states. They originated from the very first dragon shape-shifter. His name was Orion. He isn’t like the Ddraigs. He believed he was pure dragon that could shape-shift into a human. He rarely transformed into a human. It is said that he came upon a woman during the War of Dragons.”

“The War of...” Cormac says. “Sorry, my King, continue.” Cormac bows knowing he is being disrespectful.

Brion laughs. “Quite all right, Cormac. The War of Dragons nearly annihilated all the dragons. It was the longest war ever. It was said that Orion was saved by a warrior... a beautiful warrior.”

“Amazon?” I ask.

“Quite possible,” Brion says. “But when she saved him he transformed into a man and she took him away from battle. They became lovers and had a child named Ddraig.”

“What happened to Orion... or the woman?” I ask.

“Ddraig never met his father, but he said his mother left him as soon as he was able to produce his own, but I believe the Ddraigs are becoming more and more human every day. He will never admit it though.”

“Why are they coming?” Zoe asks.

“Because of me, right, Grandfather?”

“Not this time, Sophie. They are coming for your

child.”

“This is crazy,” Chris says. “Why the hell were we not told of their existence? We could have prepared.”

“It is for your own protection that you do not know certain things until you are ready!” King Brion states.

“Well, that has just worked out splendidly, my king.”

Chris lets his mouth get away with him.

“Chris, I will let that one slide,” Brion says. “Only because you’re right.”

“Sorry.” Chris bows his head.

“I will get you kids all the books you need to catch up on things and bring them to the library, but I need to leave and go talk to a Druid I know.”

“What’s a...never mind I’ll just look it up,” I say. Brion and Mom leave and Ian is pacing back and forth.

“I’ll be damned if they hurt my child,” Ian says.

“I won’t let that happen, brother,” Chris says as he grabs Ian’s arm to calm him down.

“Chris, can you and Ian take Erik and find out what Arianna is up to?” I ask.

“Isn’t that a little dangerous?” Deb asks.

“Probably, but what isn’t these days? Y’all don’t have to and I would do it myself, but under the circumstances...”

“It’s no problem. We can probably sneak around without having to face Arianna anyway,” Chris says.

“I’ll go and get Erik.”

“Thanks,” I say and start to feel bad again. Zoe can tell, so she comes to me and hands me a glass of water. I still can’t comprehend that I am pregnant at eighteen. I really don’t think it has sunk in all the way yet. To tell you the truth I don’t think I want it to sink in yet. I’ll just be in denial for a while. After everything we went through with Arianna, and everything we are probably about to go through, I think it is best.

“If we can find out what Arianna is up to, maybe we can prevent this dragon guy from coming. I’m sure she is the reason for it,” Alice says.

“Ian, just be careful and let us know if y’all need backup,” I suggest. “I hate to ask.” I look at Aodan because he’s going to be pissed I’m even asking. “If Zoe could go she may be able to read Arianna’s mind, if they can get close enough without getting caught.”

“Of course,” Zoe says. Aodan gives me an irritated look.

“I’m sorry, Aodan, but that’s what you get when your girlfriend is powerful.” I smile, but he just shakes his head.

“Aodan, you are more than welcome to tag along. We could use you,” Chris says.

“Why don’t you all go?” I suggest. “Station two people at each door and on the roof for back up. Ian, you, Zoe,

and Chris can go inside for a closer look.”

“Not bad for a pregnant lady,” Erik says as he walks in.

“So I get to go play with the kiddies again. Just don’t go getting attached to me, because I tend to grow on people.”

“Do we really need to take him?” Aodan asks.

“Yes, just in case there are Phooka around. Guys, be careful, please. I need y’all to come back to me.”

“We will. I’ll make sure of it,” Chris says as he kisses my forehead and, in an instant, I’m alone. I don’t like being alone anymore. I listen to the sound of the clock ticking and try to write another song and research, but I need to talk to someone. I flick my wand, forgetting I’m not supposed to use magic, and bring Jen, Danny, and Chrissy here. They look like they have come from war.

“Sorry, guys, are you okay?”

“What the hell?” Danny says. “Why did that seem worse than usual?”

“Sorry, I forgot I wasn’t supposed to use magic at the moment, but that is why I brought y’all here. I need to tell y’all something.”

“What is it?” Jen asks.

“Guys, I’m pregnant.”

“What! Are you sure?” Chrissy yells.

“Pretty sure. I haven’t been to the doctor or anything, but Zoe could sense it, and there are dreams and

dragons and a whole lot of other things going on. I just needed you guys here.”

“Of course; I’m glad you brought us,” Danny says.

I get a pain in my stomach thinking about it and throw up all over the floor.

Jen rubs my back for support and Chrissy holds my hair back. I message Mom to come and she is here in less than a minute.

“Hey,” she says rubbing my back. “You need to stop stressing and drink more water.”

“Okay, do you think I need to see a doctor?”

“Yes, sweetie, and I have someone coming to us. You just relax. She will be here tomorrow.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“You’re welcome, sweetheart, and thank you for calling me. Remember, anytime you have a question, let me know.”

“I will.”

~

Brion has brought us all kinds of books for us to research. “I found a book on the elements,” Danny says.

“I have one on banshees,” Jen gasps.

“Oh my goodness, banshees exist!” I yell.

“And so do werewolves!” Chrissy shouts.

Danny comes running over to investigate. “No way,”

he says. “Do vampires exist too?” He gets excited. “Y’all know about as much as I do. This is too much,” I say as I rummage through the books. “There has to be an easier way. I don’t even know where to start.” A book flies off the table next to Danny and makes me jump. “How did that happen?”

“It wasn’t me,” Danny says. I look at the book, and it’s on the four elements.

“I’d say start with that one,” Jen says. “After all, y’all are part of the elementals.”

“What?” I ask, confused.

“Oh, Sophie, please tell me you at least knew that much.” Jen sighs.

“Of course I did,” I say, but I really don’t have a clue. “Read the book,” she says.

“Okay.” I open the book and start to read. After a moment, I get what Alice meant about being an elemental. I keep reading until my head hurts, and finally I have to close my eyes and breathe deeply to help the headache go away. As I take a few deep breaths, the pages in the book start to turn on their own like the wind is blowing them. I feel the wind pick up and, all of a sudden, the words from the book just fly into my head. It is like I am reading in fast forward. After a minute, I know the whole book by heart. I know what I am and everything about faeries, elves, and

wizards seems easier to understand. “Wow,” I say.

“What just happened?” Danny asks.

“I think I just found an easier way.”

“How? I thought you couldn’t use your magic,” Chrissy says.

“I don’t know. It just happened and I didn’t even try,” I reply. “Give me another book.” Chrissy hands me one on banshees. “Okay, here it goes.” I take a deep breath and feel the wind pick up. I close my eyes and try to relax like I did before. The pages start to move and I can see the words forming in my mind. Everything about banshees is getting implanted in my head. “Oh my, this is awesome. I know how I’m going to study now.” I laugh. “Oh, my God, I totally forgot about exams!”

“That is so not fair,” Danny says. “I bet it doesn’t work with regular books.”

“Let’s see.” I grab a book out of Jen’s bag and try the same method. “You’re right...it didn’t work.”

“Bummer.” Danny smiles. “That really could have helped you graduate.”

“Do you think you have time to study a little for school?” Jen asks.

I think I could, but all of this is making me feel tired.

“Wow, guys...” I sit up a little and hold my head.

“What is it?” Danny asks as he runs to me.

## GUARDIAN OF THE QUEEN

“Nothing really...”

“What is it, Sophie?” Jen asks with a stern tone.

“I’m just getting really tired,” I say. “I think I need a nap.”

“Go ahead; we will be quiet,” Jen says.

“Thanks, guys. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry, you have a good excuse now,” Chrissy says. “We’ll just study for exams.”

“Thanks.” I smile and lie down and drift off to sleep.

## 8

### Chris

We get to Kate's store and Erik holds up a hand for us to wait. I guess he thinks he is in charge. "Phooka," he says.

"Alice, you and Cormac go up to the roof. Aodan, you and Matt go to the back door. Deb and Ian, you two stay here in front while Erik, Zoe, and I go check things over inside," I order and surprisingly nobody has any objections. We vanish and reappear on the stairs. Everyone seems to be in the back of the store. "Zoe, can you try to read her mind from here?"

"Yeah, just give me a minute." She sighs. "I need to concentrate." After a minute, she opens her eyes.

"She's talking to someone."

"A Phooka?" Erik asks.

"No... It's a Ddraig, and they know we're here. Quick, back to Faeryland!"

"Wait... we need to let everyone else know," I shout, turning to see a woman with long, slick, black hair

come toward me. She is beautiful, so I hesitate. She uses it to her advantage too. She quickly transforms into a scaly creature, and destroys the shop as her wings expand. She is green and yellow with red eyes. She roars and spits fire, so I run to make sure everyone is gone. Everyone is, except for me and Erik. “What are you still doing here?”

“What are *you* still doing here? Erik asks.

“Good point,” I say as I run in the other direction. “I’ll see you back in Faeryland.” I run around the corner and almost vanish back to Faeryland, but I notice Erik doesn’t look scared at all. I peek around the corner to see what he is up to.

“Hello, Susanna,” he says. The woman quickly transforms back to her former self.

“Hello, Erik.” She smiles.

Erik sighs. “Why are you here, Susanna?”

“I have business with Arianna,” she says, sliding her hands over Erik’s shoulders to taunt him, but he only watches her.

“And what business is that?” Erik demands.

“We heard about the prophecy, silly. Did you think we wouldn’t come?”

“Why would the prophecy of Sophie’s child concern you?” Erik asks.

“Well, I know you’re not that stupid, so we must have

heard two different prophecies.”

“Don’t listen to him, Susanna,” Arianna says. “He is trying to get you off track.”

“Don’t test me, witch,” Erik says. “What did you tell them?”

“I simply told them the prophecy.” Arianna smiles.

“The prophecy that tells of the child wiping out the Ddraigs,” Susanna says.

“That is a lie!” Erik shouts. “The prophecy states that the child will save us all. Susanna, don’t listen to her. She is manipulating you.”

“Says your king!” Arianna yells.

“My brother wouldn’t lie about this.”

“Because he’s not capable.” Susanna laughs. “We know what he did to the Queen of Wizardland, his own granddaughter. If he is capable of that, there is no telling what he may do. He’s getting as bad as Maddox.”

Erik laughs at the comment. “I’ll have to relay that message, but I’d know if my brother was lying.”

“Because you’ve never been manipulated,” Susanna says.

“Leave Maeve out of this,” Erik shouts.

“I’ve seen the prophecy, Susanna,” Arianna says. I can tell Susanna is doubting Arianna.

“Ddraig will be here soon and he’ll know what to do.”

Erik's eyes widen in shock. "Susanna, you know what will happen if Ddraig comes here. Do you really want to bring the Elementals into this?"

"We have no choice. We can't risk it. Ddraig will know what to do."

"Ddraig will only want war," Erik shouts. "You don't want to piss off the Elementals!"

"The Fire King has always been on our side!" Susanna snaps.

"That was before Sophie came along," Erik smiles.

"She is just as much a part of fire as all of you."

All of a sudden, Arianna grabs a sword from behind the counter. "Watch out!" I yell, but it is too late. Susanna's head falls to the ground and Arianna smirks with a bloody sword in her hand. Erik screams in anger and starts to run for Arianna. She holds her hand out and starts to squeeze the life out of him.

"Now Ddraig will have no choice but to go to war since you just killed his right hand."

I flick my wand and she goes flying against the wall.

Grabbing Erik, we flee back to Faeryland. Erik punches everything in his path, including Aodan.

"What the hell?" Aodan holds his jaw.

"I'm pissed off and I don't like you," Erik says as he walks away.

Aodan starts to protest, but I stop him. "Let it go for

now, man.”

He gives me a look but calms down. “What’s going on?”

“We had a visit from the Ddraigs. Courtesy of Arianna,” I say.

“Crap,” Aodan says as he follows us down the hallway.

“Erik, calm down,” I yell.

“Are you kidding? Calm down, really?” Erik says.

“Every Ddraig out there is going to come for me now. She’s going to tell them I killed Susanna. She has been with Ddraig for over one thousand years. He isn’t going to take this lightly. He will kill first and then ask questions later!”

“What is going on?” Brion asks. Erik starts to laugh.

“There he is...the man who thought he was better than Maddox. Well, guess what, brother. Since you pulled that stunt with Sophie, they think you are just as bad as Maddox was. They don’t trust you anymore,” Erik says with discontent. Brion looks down with disgrace. “And now that Arianna killed Susanna—”

“Arianna killed Susanna?” Brion interrupts.

“Yes, and she plans on telling Ddraig that it was me.”

“Oh, good heavens.” Brion sighs. “How did she get the better of Susanna, anyway? Dragons can anticipate an opponent’s every move. It’s what they do.”

“One thousand years and she let a mortal witch get the

better of her,” Erik says. “She would have got the better of me as well if this one hadn’t saved me.” He looks toward me. “Thank you, by the way.” I nod to him and he continues. “What I want to know is...how is it that a mortal witch is all of a sudden stronger than us?” They are both quiet for a moment until Brion sighs.

“The ley of the land,” he says.

“Of course.” Erik rolls his eyes. “You have to hand it to the witch; she is smart.”

“What is the ley of the land?” I ask.

“A dragon’s energy is very powerful. The ley of the land is the way the energy flows on that land. If a dragon crosses its path enough it can interrupt the flow of energy and make it more powerful. Arianna used that extra energy to her advantage.”

“Ddraig will come for vengeance, brother,” Erik says.

“Arianna told him the prophecy said the baby will wipe out their existence.”

Brion sighs and takes a seat. He looks more overwhelmed than I have ever seen him. “Then we better be ready because he will come for Sophie as well,” he says.

“What? Why?” I quickly jump up at hearing her name.

“Sophie is carrying a weapon, Chris,” Erik says. “And it is a weapon that he thinks will be used against him, so he will kill her and the baby without hesitation.” Erik

sits down next to his brother and sighs. “After he kills me, that is. He has been itching for a chance to do so for a long time.” Erik turns to acknowledge Aodan’s presence. “He hates me too.”

“Well, that’s hard to believe, isn’t it?” Aodan says. I crack a smile, but quickly remember that Sophie and the baby are in danger.

“We need to tell Sophie,” I say and get up to take the task.

“No.” Brion stops me. “Let her rest.” I understand Brion doesn’t want to worry her with this, but I know Sophie...and she would want to know.

“Brion.” I sigh. “If you don’t tell her she will be pissed.”

“But she is pregnant and doesn’t need to worry. Just let her finish her nap and then we will tell her.”

“All right.” I give in because Sophie does need her rest.

“Aodan, get everyone in research mode. We have to make some friends and fast,” Brion orders as he starts to leave. “Erik, contact the Phooka; we will need their help. We will need all we can to go up against Ddraig, if it comes to that.”

He turns to leave but stops abruptly. Sophie is standing in the entry way. She looks pale and weak, and holds herself up by grabbing on the archway. “They have all been contacted,” she says weakly.

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“Who have been contacted?” Brion asks, wary of her current state.

“Everyone, from Amazon warriors to banshees and a whole lot of other crazy creatures that I never thought existed. They will be here tomorrow.” She starts to fall.

I quickly run to her and reach her just in time.

“She’s been doing magic,” I say.

“Sophie, have you eaten anything today?” Brion asks.

“I don’t remember,” she says weakly.

“Let’s get you to bed,” I say and she smiles at the inside joke.

“Nina,” Brion orders, “bring Sophie some soup up to her room, please.”

Nina bows and looks concerned but quickly leaves. I carry Sophie to bed. She looks so fragile, I feel like I may break her at any moment. “You can’t keep doing this to yourself,” I whisper. “You have someone else to look out for now, so slow down.” I kiss her on the forehead.

“It wasn’t my fault this time.”

“Really?” I ask, finding that hard to believe.

“Seriously, Chrissy, Danny, Jen and I were all researching. It was very tiring and I was getting frustrated with everything I didn’t know. All of a sudden, the book pages started to turn and the words leaped off the page onto me. I knew everything that was

in the book. It was amazing, but after two books I started to get sleepy. I went to sleep, but when I woke up the guys were asleep too. I felt the wind pick up and all the book's pages started to turn at once. It freaked me out a little so I started to call for help, but it was too late. The words from all of the books came at me all together. I was speechless. All the information at once was painful and I could feel my magic was draining. I was really scared." She holds my arm and I feel a surge of guilt that I wasn't there for her.

"I didn't sense it," I say, wondering why I didn't get any pains if she was in trouble. "Are you okay now?"

"Yes," she says as Nina brings her soup in.

"Queen Sophie, are you all right?" Nina feels Sophie's head and quickly conjures up a wet cloth. "Here, my lady," she says and hands the rag to her.

"I'm fine, Nina." Sophie grabs Nina's hand and smiles.

"Thank you."

"I wish you would stop getting yourself into trouble, miss."

"I'm trying, Nina." She starts to eat her soup very quickly.

"Is it good?" I ask, laughing.

"Very," she says with her mouth full.

"Nina, can you bring us another bowl, please?"

"Yes." Nina smiles and disappears.

“Do you feel better?”

“Yes, but I don’t think I’ll need another bowl of soup,” Sophie says.

“One for you and one for the baby.” I poke at her stomach and she laughs.

“About that... We might need to talk...” She coughs and I can tell she really doesn’t want to talk about us.

“No, no. I don’t want you to worry about that right now. Just focus on your strength and eating.” I do want her to focus on that, but I don’t want to talk about us because I’m scared she will not want me since she is pregnant with Ian’s child. I decided I want to avoid that conversation for as long as I can. After she finishes both bowls of soup, she drifts off to sleep. I stroke her cheek and think about how lucky I am that I was able to have her love for a brief period of time. Ian comes in and I jump.

“Hey, brother.” He smiles. I still can’t believe, after all this time, I finally have my brother back.

“Hey.” I cough in embarrassment because I know he saw me stroking her cheek. He laughs at me. “What?”

“Nothing.” He gives me another smile.

“Shut up,” I say as he laughs at me.

“Look, I know she chose you,” he says and my smile quickly fades. “Zoe, told me. Don’t be mad at her,” he quickly adds. “She did it for a good reason. Why did

you tell me she chose me? After all I did to you.”

I sigh and look at Sophie sleeping and try to remember why. “Because...she deserves true happiness...and so do you.”

“And you don’t?” he asks, a little aggravated. “You’ve sacrificed more than anyone. Why do you think you’re not worthy of happiness?” He waits a moment in silence and I laugh at his comment. “If you’re waiting for my blessing, brother, you have it. If you’re not, then what are you waiting for?” He shakes his head and laughs.

I do feel better knowing he is okay with Sophie

choosing me. “I will never be good enough for her.”

“Of course not.” Ian laughs and I give him an irritated look. “Nobody will ever be good enough for her, but she might as well be with someone she’s crazy about, right?”

“Good point.” I smile. “Thanks.”

“But...”

“Man, you couldn’t let me have this moment,” I say.

“I’m sorry, but...” He gives me a hesitant look. “I still love her. It may not be with the unfailing love you have for her, but I do, so I told her I would still marry her if that is her wish. I will be there for her and be a good husband, father, and king. With that being said, I also know she will never be truly happy with me, so if you

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want her she's right here. She wants you, so take her for your own because if you don't..." He pats me on the shoulder. "I will." He walks away and I look back at my only reason for existence.

## 9

### **Sophie**

I wake to Chris stroking my face. “Hey.” I smile and stretch, feeling a lot better. His eyes are as bright as ever. “What is it?”

“Nothing, just noticing how beautiful you are.”

I blush as he squeezes my chin and I know he wants to tell me something, but he is scared. “Chris, you can tell me anything,” I say to help him along. Maybe he wants to talk about us now. I know I really want to talk to him about everything. We finally have the chance to be together. It’s everything I’ve ever wanted, but maybe not the way I wanted. They say things happen for a reason, so I’ll have to wait and see how this one plays out. I just know I want him by my side to help me. I can’t live without him, and now that we can be together I don’t want to waste the moment.

“Are you feeling better?” He changes the subject as he sits down on the bed and grabs my hand.

“Yes,” I answer, but I’m thinking about how bad I want to kiss him. He leans down to kiss me on the forehead. I do the only thing I know to break through all this ice between us; I pull his head down and kiss him. He

doesn't seem to mind, thankfully, and pulls me in to return the kiss as passionately as ever. I know I will never love anyone as much as I love him. I've always known this. Even when I was with Ian, I just didn't want to admit it, and I know nobody will ever love me as much as he does. He has proved it over and over. We kiss longer than we ever have and it is the happiest I have been; no guilt, no pain, and no feeling as if it's the last time I'll be able to kiss him. This moment of true happiness is what I hope each day of the rest of my life will feel like.

He stops kissing me and I feel a pain in my chest. "Why did you stop?" I ask with concern. Does he not want me anymore now that he can have me? Maybe the thought of not having me is why he wanted me.

He smiles and brushes my cheek. "I have waited for this moment for what seems like forever, Sophie. I'm just savoring it." He leans down to kiss me again but stops, looks up, and sighs. "Hello, Queen Mary." He coughs. I quickly get my just-made-out-look straightened up.

"Mom! Can you not knock?" I say.

"Chris, can you let me have a word with my daughter," Mom says in a stern tone. I can see she isn't very happy with me.

"Certainly," Chris says as he kisses me again in front of

her, and I believe he did it just to torture her. “I love you,” he whispers in my ear.

“I love you too,” I reply. We look into each other’s eyes for a moment until my mother coughs to refocus our attention to her.

“Sorry,” Chris says. “I’ll see you in a bit, beautiful.” As he walks out, Mom gives him a look. “My Queen,” he says as he passes by. Before he shuts the door, he gives me a wink.

I can’t stop smiling. I’m so happy. “What’s up, Mom?”  
“Nothing.” She sighs. “I just came in to check up on you. How are you feeling?”

“Amazingly well.”

“Yes, well...I gathered that.” She looks toward the door.

“What is it? I know you want to say something, so just say it.” I look down at my hands, getting ready for the lecture she is about to give.

“Sophie, really, you are about to have Ian’s baby. Do you think it is the best idea for you to get involved with Chris right now?”

“You will never think it’s the right time for me and Chris to get together. Why does it bother you so bad? He has more love for me than I could ever hope for.”

“You are about to have a baby with a great man. People will expect—”

“Expect me to marry Ian.” I finish her sentence.

“Yes. How will it look to be with someone other than the father of the baby?”

“I don’t care how it looks,” I snap at her.

“Sophie.” She sighs with irritation. “I know you don’t care what people say about you or what they think, but you do need to care about how they will react.”

I give her a look of confusion. “What do you mean?”

“Let’s look at this another way. You love Chris, right?”

“Of course, more than anything.”

“Right, then you two will probably get married eventually.”

“I guess. I haven’t thought that far ahead”.

“Of course not...” She smiles that smile she gives me when she is annoyed. “People will not accept him as king, Sophie. I’m sorry to be so cruel about this, but you have to understand why people still don’t trust him.”

“I’m so sick of everyone not trusting him. After all—”

“Yes, he has saved you plenty, but look at their perspective; he is Maddox’s son! He was on his side and, whether or not you want to believe it, he killed people. He had people killed, Sophie. Our people suffered under his hand, and though we have made peace with him, they will still not welcome him. Wizardland will not welcome him either. Maddox

terrorized them as well.”

“Yes, Maddox; not Chris! That is what this is about, isn’t it? It’s about Maddox and what he did to you. Chris didn’t do that to you, Mom. He wasn’t even alive at the time.”

She looks at me with hurt in her eyes. “That isn’t what this is about. I made peace with that a long time ago.”

“Did you?”

She smiles and pats my leg. “Well, I guess I’ve taken enough of your time.” She gets up to leave.

“Mom, I didn’t mean it. Don’t go.”

“It’s okay, dear. I need to go take care of some things anyway.” She leaves me there, feeling horrible about talking to her that way.

Chris pops in a minute later. “Were you eaves-dropping again?” I ask because he has this disheartened look on his face.

“A little,” he says as he sits down next to me and hugs me.

I grab him tight. “You know I don’t care what she thinks, right?”

“I know.” He kisses me on the forehead.

“Why do you do that when you can easily kiss me here now?” I point to my lips. He smiles and kisses me properly, but in the middle of our kiss Brion comes rushing in.

“We need both of you in the banquet hall...now!” he shouts.

“Why? What’s up?” I reply as I jump off the bed.

“Some of them have arrived early,” Brion says as he vanishes. Chris sighs and vanishes as well. I stand there with my palms on my forehead wondering what kind of creatures I’m about to meet and if they will be friendly.

~

With all eyes on me as I enter the room, I walk to Brion and he proudly throws his arm around me. “This is Queen Sophie, my friends,” he says. They all stand immediately and bow, but have vague expressions. “Hello,” I say. Brion leads me to the table like I am going to fall over. “I’m all right, Grandfather,” I whisper. He smiles and sits me down beside Erik. Chris sits next to me and holds my hand under the table. It calms me down a little.

“So, now that everyone is here, we can get started. Introductions are in order,” he begins. Brion introduces a woman who is as small as I am. She has long, black hair braided to the side. “This is Marylee, the Amazon Queen,” Brion says. I look to her side and a slightly taller woman with short, blond hair is on her guard as she looks at me. “This is Jess, the queen’s bodyguard.” “Hello.” I greet them with a smile and bow my head to acknowledge the queen and they return the gesture.

Brion continues to introduce the man next to them. He is very handsome, but has a big scar on his neck that goes down below his shirt. “This is Joshua; he is a Kelpie,” Brion states. Joshua comes over and kisses my hand and I experience an overwhelming feeling of heat toward him.

“I guess I know what your powers consist of,” I say, smiling. I remember reading about the Kelpie and their powers of persuasion. Chris grabs my hand from Joshua’s grip.

“Then we shall have no more of that,” he says, glaring at the Kelpie. Joshua laughs and heads back to his seat. Brion introduces the giants, Isaac and Gideon, to the group as three other women and two men come walking in.

“Well, I guess we are a little late for the party,” one of the men says. He is very tall and very muscular, but unlike the others in speaking. He speaks like me, but maybe without the southern accent. He is an American. He glances at me and then to Chris. This group looks a little rougher around the edges, but they are all still quite beautiful. They just look as though they try to hide it.

“And who might you be?” Brion asks. “I don’t remember asking an American to join us.”

The man smiles. “My name is Sam. I heard of your

cause so thought my services may be helpful. I hitched a ride with this lovely young lady.” He looks to a petite woman who cracks a smile. Her dark-brown hair brings out her green eyes.

“What services?” Chris asks.

“Well, let’s just say I’m pretty good at war, kid.” Sam gives Chris a smug look. Chris glances at me and sighs.

“Why must everyone call me kid?” he whispers, annoyed. I smile, but hold my tongue.

“I might not have any magical powers, but I have certain qualities that might be useful,” Sam says. “What makes you think we want your help?” Erik says. Sam laughs as he walks up to Erik and growls. I immediately know that he is a werewolf. “Because from what I hear, she needs all the protection she can get.” Everyone looks at me and Chris tightens his arms around me.

“Very well,” Brion says. “We welcome you, friend.”

“What is in it for you?” Erik asks.

“Just want to let out a little frustration, and she is an American—like me.” He takes another glance at me and nods. I don’t understand, if we can get all these people to believe us about the prophecy, why won’t the Ddraigs believe us?

“Shall we continue?” Brion suggests. He introduces a merrow named Brooke who, from what I gather, is

half-fish and half-human. She is supposedly fast in water as well as on land and has poisonous saliva. Next, Brion points out a woman who transforms into a big cat; a murcat. Another woman added to the mixture of creatures is a banshee. She is a shy woman who has the power to see someone's death. Her scream can be heard for miles and it is known to start earthquakes. They call her Mandi.

The last to be introduced is a quiet man, but he is just as handsome as the rest. He is a bit older than the others and they call him Damien. He is a selkie, who can transform into a seal. He has a rather unique gift of controlling the weather. They all show off their abilities for us, except Mandi, the banshee. She stays in the corner away from the group. I feel drawn to her for some reason; perhaps it is that she reminds me of how Zoe used to be. She looks up at me for a moment but quickly returns her stare to the floor.

“Grandfather.” I start to speak and everyone quickly turns my way. The room is silent. I hesitate but continue. “I just wondered why the Ddraigs are so against believing us.”

“Ddraig might have listened to Susanna, but now that he thinks one of us killed her, he will not listen to reason,” Brion says. “He will want revenge. Word has probably reached him by now and it won't be long

before he comes for us.”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake!” Erik yells. Everyone turns toward the door and sighs. I look to see what the fuss is about. A man stands in the doorway drenching wet. He is bigger than anyone here, except for the giants in their original forms. “Who invited Fin?” Erik says irritated. The man in the doorway gives Erik an annoyed look. He glances at me and seems to give me a nod.

“Everyone who doesn’t know...this is Fin.” Brion smiles. “I invited him, so make him feel welcome.” Brion gives Erik a stern look.

“Fin is a fenoderee,” Erik says to me. “You can tell by how ugly he is.”

“Erik!” Mom shouts. “That is not welcoming.”

“Thank you for coming,” I say to Fin. “Thanks to everyone.” Fin ignores Erik’s comment and goes to take his seat.

“All of you have a unique gift, and we thank you for helping us in this time of need,” Brion says. “You and your followers are always welcome in Faeryland, and I am sure Wizardland as well.” He looks to me.

“Of course,” I agree.

“I believe that is all the guests we have for tonight. I have made sleeping arrangements for all of you. Nina and Ava will show you to your rooms and we will meet again here for breakfast at about eight o’clock.” Brion

dismisses everyone, so Chris and I return to my room. Chrissy, Danny, and Jen are still there. I decide to risk popping them back home. They do not need to be here right now because I have the feeling it's going to get very dangerous very fast.

"I got a bad feeling," I tell Chris when we are alone. He kisses my forehead and pulls me close to him. "It will work out," he says.

"Let's hope so." A familiar voice says from the door of my room.

"Gabriel!" I shout in surprise. "What are you doing here?" I notice Chris flinch.

"Don't get jumpy, Guardian. I only came to help." Gabriel smiles.

"You're going to help us?" I ask. He smiles and shakes his head as if he can't believe it himself.

"Yes, my people and I will help. I just wanted to drop by to apologize for everything. I should have sensed something from Arianna. Also, about the way I treated you...and Chris." He looks toward Chris. "I know it wasn't your fault Kate died. I shouldn't have acted as if it was."

Chris nods at him.

"Gabriel, I am very grateful to you." I give him a hug.

"Thank you."

"Have you had the pleasure of meeting the others yet?"

Chris smiles.

“Not yet. I should get the privilege in the morning. It should be very...interesting.” He smiles as he walks toward the door. “Goodnight, my friends.”

“Goodnight, Gabriel,” I say. Chris and I raise our eyebrows at each other. “I can’t believe that.”

“I know; I never thought we would see him again,” Chris says. He goes to shut and lock the door, but Mom stops him. “Hello, Queen Mary,” he says with aggravation, because he knows she is only here so we can’t be alone.

“May I have a word with my daughter, please,” she says.

“Of course, whatever my lady wishes,” Chris says sarcastically and leaves.

“What is it?” I ask with my arms folded across my chest.

“I just wanted to check in on you.”

“I’m not stupid, Mother,” I snap at her. “I know you wanted to make sure nothing was happening with Chris.”

“I just...”

“I know what you think I should do. But I assure you that from now on I will do what I want. I will be with Chris, so you need to get used to that.” I get a little dizzy so hold on to the bed. Mom comes running over

to me.

“You’re getting yourself worked up, Sophie. Just relax...we don’t have to talk about this anymore. I’ll stand behind any decision you make. Just relax and breathe.” She rubs my back to calm me down. “I’ll stop hounding you about Chris, but you have to do me a favor and take care of yourself.” She combs her fingers through my hair. “All right?”

“I promise I will take care of myself. I think I just need some water.” She immediately gets me a drink. “And, Mom, give me a little credit. Nothing will happen with Chris right now. I’m pregnant for goodness’ sake.”

“Of course, dear,” she says as she makes me lay on the bed. “You need to get some rest now.”

“I will, but please tell Chris to come back in before you leave.”

“Fine,” she says. “Just behave yourselves, please.”

I give her an irritated look.

“That was the last comment about it.” She smiles and tells Chris to come back in. “Oh, and about your exams tomorrow...”

“Oh God, my exams!” I shout.

“I’ve taken care of it so don’t worry,” Mom says. “We are going to have to cheat a little.”

“All right, I’m fine with that. Whatever I need to do to get done with it.”

Chris walks back in with a smirk on his face. “You have got to stop listening to our conversations,” I say.

“I didn’t hear everything.” He laughs as he jumps up on the bed with me. “I guess I need to get back to Wizardland,” he says as he starts to kiss me goodbye.

“Can you stay here tonight? I just need someone here with me.”

“Of course. Anything for you, beautiful.” He grabs a pillow and starts to go toward the couch.

“Chris, don’t be silly. We have slept in the same bed before, remember.”

“How could I forget that?” He smirks.

“Just get in here.” I pull the covers up for him.

“Are you sure?” he asks hesitantly.

“I want you to hold me. Can you just hold me, please?”

“Well, who am I to deny my Queen?” he says and takes off his shirt. I think I might have let out a slight gasp, but he doesn’t say anything and hops in the bed quickly to wrap himself around me.

“You’re everything to me,” I say as I fall asleep in his arms.

## 10

### **King of the Dragons**

I wake expecting Chris to be gone, but he is still with me. He is holding on to me as tight as he was when we fell asleep. I start to move. He wakes up and gives me a squeeze. “Morning, beautiful.”

“Morning.” I turn around and give him a kiss just as King Brion storms in the room.

“Chris, we have to go, now!” he yells.

Chris jumps up to get dressed. “What is it?”

“They are here. The Ddraigs are here and they’ll want Sophie.”

“What are we going to do?” Chris asks with urgency.

“We may have no choice but to fight. I’m afraid we will lose, but we have to try.”

“Wait, you can’t...” I say.

“I will not let them hurt you or the baby!” Brion shouts.

I sigh, thinking there has to be another way. I don’t want everyone to go and get slaughtered. I can’t think of anything that will get us out of this one and I can’t help in any way. I can’t fight or use my magic. All I can do is sit in this room and wait for all my family and friends to get killed, but I know that sitting around isn’t

in my nature. How can I do anything without putting the baby at risk? I have to think about the baby.

“Can’t anyone talk to this Ddraig guy?” I ask.

Brion sighs in aggravation. “Sophie, we need to go.

They are almost here and everyone is waiting. Stay here

and do not leave this room. Do you understand?” He

grabs me by the arm and looks me in the eye. He can

tell I don’t want to stay. “Sophie, you must stay here!”

“All right, I’ll stay,” I say to satisfy them both.

“I’ll be back,” Chris says and kisses me once more.

They both leave and I have this bad feeling in the pit of

my stomach. I look out the window and see the army of

soldiers waiting to die for me. It is heart-wrenching. All

it will take is forcing each one back to the Land of

Dragons and killing them, or just manoeuvring them

out of the way to get to me and the baby.

I hear a roar like a storm approaching. Ddraigs in the

distance become visible. They are in their human form

for now. There are thousands marching together like a

machine. This can’t be real; it looks like something

from a movie. Brion stands in the front of the army with

Mom, Chris, and Erik by his side. Behind them, my

friends are ready to fight as well. Ian is holding Deb’s

hand, but as he notices the army ahead he lets go to get

a better grip on his wand.

“Steady!” Brion yells as the army stops about ten feet

ahead of him. "This doesn't have to end with war, Ddraig. Erik did not kill Susanna."

Arianna walks up beside Ddraig and Erik starts for her. Brion pulls him back.

"Don't listen to these murderers, Ddraig," Arianna says, desperate for him not to find out she killed Susanna. "They'd say anything to save their own skin." The King of the dragons growls at Erik as he grabs him by the throat. Erik fights free and falls to the ground. Ddraig changes form along with the others standing next to him. He is big and red all over. He roars as fire comes out of his mouth. He lunges at Erik, but Zoe jumps in the way. He almost tramples her, but he freezes.

"Wait," she says. There is a long silence and I know she is doing magic. Everyone is waiting to see what Dragon King is going to do. "I know your power, Ddraig," she says. "Now know mine," she holds her hand in the air and he comes closer to her. In his dragon form he picks Zoe up. She is still focused on her spell. The other dragons get jumpy, but he waves them away. Looking at Zoe with a crease in his dragon brow, he begins to smile. He puts her down on the ground and she runs back to Aodan. Ddraig turns to Arianna with steam rising out of his nostrils.

"What? You don't believe her?" She begins to back up,

but it is too late. Ddraig lunges at her and bites off the top half of her body and spits it out and returns to his human form.

He wipes the blood from his lips with the back of his hand. "Thank you, young lady," Ddraig says to Zoe.

"That was very impressive. I've never seen mortal magic used in that way before. How did you show me his thoughts?" Ddraig acknowledges Chris. "Never mind, it doesn't matter."

"Does this satisfy you then, Ddraig? Will you leave us in peace?" Brion asks.

"Brion, I am sorry," he says "I will not leave. We can't be sure that this baby isn't a risk."

"Arianna was lying about the prophecy! This baby will save everyone, including you!" Chris yells.

"Ian's child will save everyone!" Ddraig says as he looks up to the window at me. "How do we even know this is his child?"

"Don't talk about her like that!" Chris shouts as he gets in the dragon's face. I gasp for his safety and Ddraig glances up at me and whispers something to the girl next to him. "They can have another child. We will not harm Sophie. Just let us kill the child and this will all be over with. We even have a potion that won't harm Sophie and will kill the child instantly with no effects." I'm horrified at his disregard for killing an innocent

child. Closing my eyes, I hold on to my stomach as if I can protect this life inside me. As I open them, big yellow eyes are looking back at me. The dragon grabs hold of me and pulls me out the window. I scream and kick, but it doesn't do any good. When I finally reach the ground, Chris runs to protect me, but Ddraig grabs me by the throat. "Don't make a stupid mistake, boy," he growls. Brion quickly reins Chris in.

"Don't hurt her, please," Brion begs.

This man looks me in the eyes and I feel his fear of the baby. He quickly transforms into the dragon again.

Everyone is ready to fight. I look up and start to cry feeling his hot breath in my face. His eyes are filled with anger and hate. "Please..." I say to him. His gaze lingers on me for a moment, but he shakes it off.

"Wait!" I yell. He quickly looks back down to me and I struggle to get closer to his face. I want to get a better look into his eyes. A surge of power runs through me and I don't know why, but he quickly changes back into his human form. He is still holding me in his arms, wide-eyed.

"How did you do that?" he asks. I can't answer because I feel weak. I take a deep breath and he looks up at Brion. "She changed me back. How did she do that?"

"Sophie's power is still a mystery to us as well and she is getting more powerful. Let's go inside and talk

about—”

“There will be no talking!” Ddraig shouts. “Give me the potion and let’s be done with this.”

“No,” Ian screams. “You can’t...”

“Ariel, Destiny, take care of anyone who tries to stop me.” Ddraig grabs the potion. I get enough energy to plead with him again.

“Please...” I say. He is ready to make me take the potion, but I put my hand on his cheek. “Please, don’t kill my baby,” I whisper. A bright light comes from my hand and makes his whole body glow. He tenses up a little, but as the light fills him up, he seems calmer. His eyes aren’t filled with hate anymore. He looks up at Brion with a fixed gaze.

“Who is this creature?” he asks, slack-jawed. “We will leave you in peace, Brion.”

Everyone lets out a breath and I notice the dragons leaving one by one. “Don’t search for us,” Ddraig says. “She will be safe.” He cradles me in his arms and turns back to dragon form, and we fly away. He is now red and green.

“No!” I hear Chris yell. As I look down, I see him chasing after us. Lightning comes from his wand and clouds form in the distance. Weak and tired from using magic, I look down at Chris as he chases relentlessly and stare into his fearful eyes once more before

everything fades away.

~

I wake up in a strange and new land. “Where am I?” I ask, scanning my surroundings and see Ddraig looking out over the land.

“You are in the Land of the Dragons,” he says, turning toward me. “You are safe. We are in my castle.” He notices me holding my belly. “The baby is safe as well.”

“Why did you bring me here?”

“You did something to me that nobody has done in a long time. You made me feel.” He leans down and grabs my hand. “I saw the greatness of your child.”

“How?” I ask, confused.

“I think your child has a great ability. She can show people the future.”

I remain silent to process what he is saying. *She?*

“When you touched my face back in Faeryland, I saw your child and her goodness was overwhelming. She will save everyone.”

“She? It’s a she?”

He smiles and bites his lip. “Oh...I guess I shouldn’t have told you that.”

I can’t believe it’s a girl. I just assumed that it would be a boy. “If you know all this, why did you bring me back with you?”

“I needed to talk to you alone,” he says. “Your guardian will be here soon, so we don’t have much time. Your daughter showed me something else. I guess she wanted you to know, but I have to ask you if you want to know or not.”

“What do you mean?”

He takes a breath and presses his lips together. “As you know, prophecies can be a lot to handle, but what she showed me wasn’t a prophecy...it will happen. It could drive you a bit crazy and you can’t avoid it. Do you wish me to tell you?” he asks me with concern.

I think about it for a second. I don’t want to know, but then again, I do. I’ve learned from the prophecies that knowing things you are not meant to know will drive you mad and after everything that’s happened lately, I should take a break from impending doom. “I think you should keep it to yourself, and if I choose later you can tell me then.”

“As you wish.” He snickers. “Thank you for shining your light,” he says, slightly turning his head as if sensing something. “Your guardian is here.” I immediately see Chris with a sword in hand. Ddraig turns to him calmly.

“Chris, don’t,” I yell. Chris’ fists tighten on his sword, but he stops on my request.

“You may take her back now,” Ddraig says. “I told you

she would be safe.”

“Well, forgive me for not trusting you,” Chris says in his usual sarcastic tone. “You were going to kill her a few hours ago.”

“No matter what happens...” Ddraig turns back to me. “Never give up on him. This one is a rare breed.” Chris comes and grabs hold of my hand. “Thank you,” I say to Ddraig and see him slowly fade away.

Chris immediately pulls me to him. “God, I thought I’d lost you...again!”

“I’m okay, but...”

“What?” He looks concerned.

“I’m having a girl.” I smile.

“How do you know?”

“Ddraig said when I touched his face he saw her. He said she would save everyone.”

“A girl?” He laughs.

“Shut up.” I poke him in the stomach, but I thought the same thing. “I need to tell Ian”.

“Oh, right...Ian.”

“Come on, don’t be like that.”

“Sorry, let’s go,” he says.

~

We walk back in the doors of Faeryland Castle and everyone bombards me with questions. It’s getting a

little overwhelming. “Okay!” Ian yells. “Everyone needs to back off a bit.” I notice Chris disappear into the crowd as Ian comes forward.

“Are you all right?” Ian asks.

“Yes, but I need to talk to you about something...” I look at everyone hanging on to every word. “Can we go somewhere?”

“Of course.” He grabs my hand and we are back in Wizardland.

“I meant the next room.” I laugh.

“It’s the first place I thought of,” he says. “What did you want to tell me?”

I wonder for a moment if he’ll be happy about having a girl. Doesn’t every man want a boy? I hesitate for a second but know I have to tell him now. “We are having a girl,” I say softly. He instantly smiles.

“A girl?”

“Yeah.” I hug him and tell him what Ddraig told me. I let this all sink in his head for a moment and see him get lost in a thought. “Are you happy?”

“Of course...I would be happy either way. We are actually going to have a baby.” He twirls me around and around. “I know this is scary, but I will be here for you every step of the way.”

“I know,” I reply.

It is funny that after all we have been through that

something as ordinary as having a kid scares us, but it does. It scares the crap out of me. I don't know if I'll be a good mom or not. I haven't even grown up myself. This isn't how I expected my life to turn out, but even though I'm scared out of my mind, I'm happy. I'm a queen of a land I love with all my heart, I have the guy I know I'm meant to be with forever, and I'm going to have a baby girl who will save everyone, so how could I not be happy? I'm totally worried, but happy.

"Are you ready to face everyone now?" Ian asks.

"Yes, we better get it over with."

~

When we get back, Chris is gone and Mom and Brion take my hand to sit me down. "We are sorry we got crazy, but we were just happy you were safe," Brion says.

"I know, but I'm glad he took me. He told me something I think y'all might like to know." I give Ian a smile and he nods for me to continue. "The baby is going to be a girl."

Mom covers her mouth to try and contain her excitement. "A girl!" she shouts.

"Ddraig saw her, didn't he?" Brion asks.

"How did you know?" I ask him, but I don't know why I always ask. Brion seems to always know stuff like that.

“Just a guess.” He sighs.

“He said she’d be able to see the future,” I say.

“You know what this means for her, don’t you?”

I sigh, but I’m not surprised that my grandfather wants to jump right in to planning her life out. “Not now,” I reply. I know he wants me to think about how hard it will be for her to grow up knowing the future, but I really can’t think about it right now.

“Of course,” he says and kisses me on the forehead.

“Get some rest.”

After everyone congratulates me on the news, I go to my room but can’t sleep without knowing where Chris went. Suddenly, I hear a voice.

“Hey, beautiful.” I smile at his voice.

“Hey.” I turn to see him staring at me. “Where did you go?”

“I just wanted to give you some time alone with everyone,” he says.

“Well, thank you, but now I want time alone with you. Will you take me back to Wizardland?”

“Of course, but I better send Brion a message.” He takes out his wand and flicks us to my quarters, but this isn’t where I want to be. “Can we go back to your quarters?”

“Sure,” he says. I look around and the memories start flooding back. “Why did you want to come back here?”

I sigh. “There are so many memories in here.” I look toward the balcony and grab his hand to pull him outside.

“Are you hungry?”

“Yeah, I’m pregnant.” He smiles and pops me in some bacon and eggs with coffee.

“Don’t worry; the coffee is decaf.”

“Thank you.” I smile, remembering our first breakfast out here.

“Here,” he says, handing me a wrapped present.

“What is this?”

“Late birthday present and an early graduation present.” He smiles.

I open it and it is a drawing of all of us together. “Oh, Chris, I love it. Thank you, but I didn’t think you sketched anymore.”

“Well, I thought I’d make an exception for you.”

“It’s beautiful. You captured everyone perfectly.” I notice he put me and him side by side in the picture.

“Did you ever think we would end up together?”

“What?” I ask, but not surprised because he always asks questions like this out of the blue.

“Did you?” He gets serious.

“No, not at first, but later I kept hoping. What about you? Did you think we would end up together?”

“No, I didn’t,” he says. I almost spit my coffee out

## GUARDIAN OF THE QUEEN

because his answer completely shocks me and he laughs. “I’ve always wanted you. Ever since the first time I saw you in the school cafeteria. I always imagined being the lucky one who gets to hold you each night.” He locks eyes with me. “But I never considered that it could actually happen. I never thought I could have you forever.” He kisses me and I am so blown away. This guy knows how to make my heart melt.

Just when I think we are getting some time to ourselves, Chris receives a message from Brion. “He wants me right away. He says it is urgent.”

“Well, let’s go,” I say.

“No, you stay here and rest, but go back up to your quarters...”

“Are you telling me what to do?” I ask with a smile.

“No...” He laughs. “I would never do that. I’m merely...suggesting.” He kisses me and leaves. I hear a knock at the door.

“Come on in, Joffrey.” I knew Chris was going to call him.

“Hello, my lady.”

“I know...I’m coming,” I say and walk out to go to my quarters.

“I’ll have a guard stand by the door.” Joffrey bows.

“Thanks, Joffrey.” I kiss him on the cheek because he is

*MJ Boshers*

always so sweet to me. He bows and shuts the door  
behind him. I climb in bed and try to rest.

## 11

### Chris

Brion isn't in his office, but Queen Mary is waiting for me. "Hello, Chris."

"Hello," I say hesitantly. "Where is King Brion?"

"He told me to send you down to the banquet hall when you arrive."

"Okay, I'll be on my way then." I start out the door.

"Wait," she calls. "How is my daughter?"

I turn to give her a look of annoyance. "You know she's fine. Why do you not trust me?" I ask her, tired of her cynicism.

"Really?" She laughs. "You are Maddox's son..."

"I am not his son!" I yell but realize my place and apologize. "Sorry, but why can't you believe I have Sophie's best interest in every breath I take? There is nothing I wouldn't do for her."

"That is what scares me. Your love for her and her love for you; it scares me that it might be the downfall for you both."

"Why can't you just be happy and trust that our love will overcome anything?" I beg her to understand my reasoning. "Why can't you just be...happy?"

“I am happy. I am beyond happy, but haven’t you ever felt that something has to go wrong because you are just too happy? Does that make me pathetic?” She wipes tears from her eyes.

“No, it doesn’t.” I smile because I just realized how much we are alike.

“Is something funny?” She gives me an irritated look.

“My Queen, if you only knew how much I thought that exact same thing every second of the day, you would laugh too.”

The queen smiles, but dismisses me with the wave of her hand, so I bow and leave.

~

I enter the banquet hall and all our allies are here. They stop talking to acknowledge my presence. “This can’t be good,” I say.

“No,” Brion states. “It is not. There has been a slight complication in the balance of things.”

“What do you mean, a complication?”

“Well, as you know, everything needs balance. Magic needs balance, the elements need balance, and even we need balance to be healthy...”

“Get on with it,” I say, annoyed at his stalling.

“Very well.” He gives me a stern look for insolence.

“Sophie and the baby are interrupting the balance of things.”

“What? How?”

“They are spreading good luck, happiness, healing, and they are leaking it out into the world,” Brion explains.

“So there is too much good in the world. How does that make sense?”

“I know. Everyone here feels the same, but now the bad is seeking to balance things out.”

“If we need balance, are we going to let them?” I ask. They are all quiet. “Right, we wouldn’t be here if we were going to sit around.”

“It’s not the mortal world we are concerned with,”

Brion continues. “They will have to have their balance or it could destroy them.”

“Well, what then?” I ask, not sure where this is going.

“You remember the banshee?” Brion asks. I look to the lady they call Mandi and she nods. “She has seen something...She has seen demons and they are coming to the source. They are coming for Sophie.”

My first instinct is to run straight for Sophie, but Brion anticipates this so blocks my magic. “What the hell?”

“Chris, we have to plan. We have every asset on hand to deal with this, but we need you to focus. Help us plan our attacks and lead the army. You are her guardian and we need you in battle.”

“Who’s going to protect her while her guardian is in battle?” Sam the American werewolf asks. “We need

her alive. Who can protect her if not her guardian?" Brion hesitates to say, but I already know who. I throw a glass against the wall and everyone backs away. "The baby's father, Ian will keep her safe," Brion says. "Chris, you know he will protect her and you're the best soldier we've got." He puts his hand on my shoulder. "You will know if she is in too much danger. You will sense it, so don't let jealousy stand in the way of protecting her."

I remember what the queen said about our love being our downfall and I calm myself. I know Brion is right as well, but I just got her and now I have to leave her for no telling how long. I guess the queen was right about being happy and waiting for something to go wrong after all. It could be an endless battle with no free time. Demons are like nothing we have dealt with before. "I have to say goodbye, Brion. I have to..." I look away from everyone.

"Very well, my boy." He sympathizes with me. "But please make it quick; they are moving in fast."

~

I find her sleeping and notice again how beautiful she is. I stroke her cheek and feel her smooth skin. She wakes and smiles. "Hey, what did Brion want?" she asks. I can't find the words to burden her with the information so I just kiss her. I don't want to tell her,

but I know she'll hate me if I keep it from her and I can only kiss her for so long.

"Sophie..." I gulp and feel like I'm swallowing glass.

"What is it?" she asks. I can only look away and hope my anger doesn't take over.

"I have to leave for a while, but Ian will be here to protect you."

"What are you talking about? Where are you going?"

She jumps out of bed to follow me across the room. She grabs my shoulder to turn me around to face her.

"You know this would've never worked anyway." I figure if I end it now it may hurt less, but she sees through my plan.

"Don't...don't do that."

"You know I'm right. We should just end it now before..."

"It's a little late for that!" she screams, irritated. "Just tell me what is going on." I am silent and it aggravates her even more. "It's got to be bad or you wouldn't be talking like this. Tell me; I can take it."

"Maybe, but I can't!" I yell. "We're going to war...again, but this time I won't be coming back for a while."

"Why? What is going on?"

"The balance is gone." I don't want to make it sound like it's her fault because it's not, but I can't figure out

how. “There is too much good leaking out into the world and the bad is wanting to catch up.”

“So why is the good getting so far ahead? Who is doing too much good, and how can you have too much good?” she asks, confused.

“Everything needs balance.” I hug her tight.

“It’s me, isn’t it? It’s me and the baby.”

“Yes, but it’s not your fault...” I try to comfort the blow.

“Yes, it is, but thanks.” She gets a look of hope. “But if I can quit sending out good mojo, will it be okay? How do I do that?”

“I don’t know, but something tells me that it won’t be that easy. They are coming to the source...you.”

“Who are coming?”

“Demons.” I see her eyes grow with fear. “Yeah, and Brion wants me to lead them, so I have to go and there is no telling when I’ll be back.”

“There has to be another way...”

“You always think there is another way...not this time, beautiful.” I stroke her cheek. “Ian will be here for you, and I’ll sense if something goes wrong, but I have to go.”

“We can finally be together and now we are being torn apart,” she cries.

“I know.” I pull her close and kiss her. “I will end this.

"I'll kill them all and be back for you, I promise. Do you believe me?"

"Of course." She looks up at me. "The devil himself...remember."

"I love you, Sophie Ann. I will come back for you." I squeeze her one last time and kiss her on the forehead, but I'm not strong enough to stay any longer so I vanish before changing my mind to take her somewhere far away.

~

"What now?" I ask Brion, walking back through the doors of the banquet hall.

"The demons are coming up through the mountain in Wizardland," he says.

"Which mountain?"

"The Mountain of Fire."

"That is close to the castle, Brion!" I shout.

"That is why we need to work fast," Brion says.

"Brion!" Erik yells, storming in the room. "The seer says they are digging through the mountain as we speak."

"What's the plan, King Brion?" Sam asks.

"Demons can't be killed," Brion says. "They can only be slowed down."

"What's the point then?" Rebecca, the murcat asks.

"This will be a long and tiresome battle." Brion sighs.

“But if we can stall them until the balance is restored...”

“How long will that take?” Brooke, the merrow asks.

“I was told the balance will be restored as soon as Sophie has the baby.”

“Brion, that will be months away!” Erik shouts. “We can’t fight continuously for that long. We will need to rest.”

“If we are smart about this we can make it,” Brion says.

“Don’t waste your energy with fighting a losing battle. Everyone needs to go straight in for the kill or...vanquishing it at least. They will transform to human for the battle. It’s the only way they can survive any other realm. If you cut off the head, it will send them straight back to hell. They will crawl their way back out eventually, so we need to vanquish as many as we can. If we rest, Sophie and the baby die.”

“Let’s get started then,” I say. “There are three main tunnels in Fire Mountain, so we will need to split up. Brion, Eli, and Erik will lead the groups.”

“What about you?” Sam asks.

“My group will go in another way,” I say.

“Which way?” Mandi asks.

“You’ll see,” I say.

“Good thinking,” Joffrey says with a smile.

“Brion, take your soldiers and the Phooka through

the left tunnel. Joshua and his followers will go with you. Erik, take the wizards, Brooke and Fin, with you through the right tunnel. Eli, I need you to take your soldiers and the giants down the middle tunnel. Damien and Rebecca, I need you to join them. Most of the demons will come through the middle tunnel.”

“What about us?” Sam asks.

“You and Mandi will come with me, Gabriel, and Joffrey,” I say as I turn my wand into a sword and start toward the door.

“Chris, we will need more,” Joffrey says. “What about our team?” The others look concerned as well.

“We got a team,” I say.

Brion knows who I am talking about and grabs my arm.

“Are you sure you want to bring them in this? They are so young.”

“They may be young, but they are the best,” I say. “We won’t need an army if we stick together.”

Gabriel and Joffrey give me a look of doubt. “Trust me,” I say.

“What about the elemental spirits?” Erik asks.

“They will not help us with this. It is a balance of nature, so we will have to do this without them,” Brion says.

“How are we going to fight in tunnels?” Sam asks.

“These tunnels are not like any other tunnels. They start

out narrow, but widen quickly, so be prepared,” I say.  
“We’re wasting time here. Let’s go.”

While everyone goes to their designated areas to hunt the demons, I tell the gang to meet me at the fort.

## 12

### Back to Sophie

Chris has said goodbye once again and my heart keeps going in repeat. It heals a little and then it breaks all over again. This battle could be the longest we've faced, and the most deadly. They are going up against demons and it is because of me. I wish I could do something to help, but I can't risk getting my baby hurt. My belly is already getting bigger, but I don't want to bother anyone with that right now. I feel fine and Alice said the baby seemed healthy to her, so no need in worrying everyone for nothing. They have enough to deal with. People have been in and out to check on me every second.

"Sophie, can I come in?" Ian asks through the door.

"Yes, come in. I'm fine..." I start to finish my sentence, but I can tell something is wrong. "What is it?"

"The battle has begun. They are fighting in the Mountain of Fire," Ian says. "The demons are trying to get through to you, but don't worry; I promise I'll protect you and the baby."

"I know. Do you think Chris is there yet?"

"He just contacted the gang and told them to meet at the

fort.”

“Everyone is going?” I ask with concern.

“They need all the help they can get. The dragons are keeping watch around the castle. No demon will get in.”

“Did Deb go too?”

“Yes, she did.” He sighs and looks away.

“I’m sorry, Ian.”

“She’s the best,” he says. “I’m not worried.” I know he’s putting on a brave face, but I believe Deb will be just fine. “I’ll be back to see you in a little while. I need to check on a few things.”

“Sure.” I smile. “Ian, thanks...for everything.”

“My pleasure, my lady.” He bows and leaves.

I wonder for a good portion of the day what is happening in the battle. I wonder if any of my friends have been hurt or killed. I decide to sleep for a while so maybe the visions of the people I love getting slaughtered will leave my head.

I wake up to the rumble of thunder over the mountain. Looking in the distance, I see the lightning from the sky. It is peaceful here, surrounding the castle, but I hear the roar of the fighting from the mountain. There are cries and screams over the loud bangs of thunder. I can’t help crying.

I feel a hand on my shoulder and turn to see

Chris. I jump in his arms. “Chris!” “What are you doing here? I thought you had to be in battle.”

“I missed you,” he says as he hugs me tight.

“I missed you too.” I feel something taking my breath away and look down to see blood on my swollen stomach. Chris smiles at me with blackness in his eyes.

“You’re not Chris.”

“You think...” he says sarcastically. “That was for Arianna.”

“Keevis...” The blood from my gut is dripping from the knife he is holding. I fall to the ground and hold on to my stomach.

“Ian!” I yell. Ian is here in an instant and looks around.

“What happened?” he asks Chris.

“That’s not Chris!” I shout before Keevis strikes at Ian. Ian moves quickly, but it’s not enough for Keevis, who is twice as strong. “Ddraig!” I scream, hoping he is still here. I’m losing a lot of blood and Alice is not here to heal me. Ddraig comes bursting through the door. He takes one look at Keevis and the knife and slams him into the wall. The stones break apart and the castle shakes. Ian comes to check on me and the baby. “I don’t feel her anymore,” I cry. “Why can’t I feel her anymore?”

Ian screams, running toward Keevis. Ddraig moves out of the way while Ian gives Keevis a beating. I’ve never

seen him this vicious, but I'm liking it. I want him to rip off his head. "Kill him, Ian!" I say.

With one quick swing of his hand, Ian rips out Keevis's heart and throws it on the ground. With sheer shock on his face, Keevis goes down on his knees. Ddraig quickly breathes fire and burns his body. While we watch his body burn, I remember I was stabbed and scream. "Ian, help!"

He grabs some sheets to stop the bleeding. "I'm so sorry," Ian cries. "I should have been here."

"You would have thought it was Chris and let your guard down as well," I say. "I should have known it wasn't him."

"Neither of you should blame yourselves right now," Ddraig says. "Lie back and let me take a look."

I lie back on the floor and he lifts my shirt and laughs. I do not see the humor in this so I get defensive. "What the hell are you laughing at?"

"Look for yourself." He smiles. I look down and the wound is healed. Ian smiles and gives me a hug. "I told you, Sophie...remember, I saw the future," Ddraig says. "You and the baby will make it through this, but I don't know about everyone else. I only got a glimpse of you two."

I take a breath. I'm glad to know the baby and I make it through this, but it doesn't help my friends any. Ian

helps me up off the floor and back into bed. “I’ll take care of the mess and bring you some food,” he says. “You need to get some strength back in you to heal properly. I’ll message Chris. I’m sure he felt you were in danger.”

I really don’t see how I can eat, but if it will help the baby I have to give it a shot. “All right.” I snuggle up in the covers while Ian and Ddraig get rid of what is left of Keevis.

“Are you sure she wouldn’t be safer in Faeryland?” Ddraig asks Ian.

“No, they would only get to her faster,” Ian says. “They will be able to sense her wherever she goes.”

“Wonderful,” Ddraig replies.

“We just have to wait this out until the baby is born.”

Ian sighs. “Another nine months of this.”

“I don’t think we’ll have to wait that long,” I say, lifting up my shirt. My belly has gotten even bigger than before. “She’s growing exceptionally fast.”

“Wow,” Ian says. “Maybe we can cut the battle time in half then. Ddraig, can you send someone to Chris and the others to let them know? I don’t trust the pixie dust to reach them all.”

“Of course; I’ll send Ariel,” Ddraig replies. “She’ll get the message to them all; it will give them some good news.”

“I hope she is still healthy,” I say, rubbing my belly. Ddraig comes over and rubs it as well. “I told you everything will be fine,” he says. “Stop worrying, because you’ll only tire yourself out.”

I smile at his kindness, because it was only a few days ago he wanted to kill my baby, and now he is risking his life and his people’s lives for her, who is supposed to save the world somehow.

~

It has been a couple of weeks since the battle began and I am getting bigger every day. Jen, Chrissy, and Danny call every now and then, but they are busy getting ready for college visits. I saw them at graduation last week, but only for a moment. Ian let me pop in long enough to grab my diploma and leave. At least I graduated. I am missing Chris badly, and not knowing if my friends are okay is torture. Ian has been taking very good care of me and Nina checks in from time to time. Tonight, Ian and I plan on watching a movie. He says it will take my mind off things. I am missing my mother as well, despite her efforts to keep me and Chris apart. I can’t believe she went into battle with Brion. I can’t make fun of her for sitting around and doing nothing now. I hope that isn’t why she went. I could really use a hug from her right now.

Ian comes in right on schedule. “So...have you decided

what you are going to do about the king thing yet?”

“No, I don’t know. I know the ancestors want you to be king, Ian, but I love Chris and I want to be married to him. I just wish I could make everyone happy.”

“Hey, we don’t know if they want me to be king, remember. Just make yourself happy. Everyone else will get over it...eventually,” he jokes.

“Thanks.” We sit and watch a movie and eat pizza. “I think she’s going to like pizza too.”

“Oh really,” Ian says. “That won’t surprise me. I always thought we’d end up together.” He kisses my forehead.

“Yeah, I did too at one time. We kind of still did end up together. Maybe not in the way we thought, but we will always be a part of each other’s lives now.”

“True,” he replies, putting his arm around me.

“How do you think the gang is getting along in battle?”

“I’m sure they are exhausted and beat up. Alice is probably working over-time. I heard that Charley the elf healer was going too, so that will help.”

“Do you wish you could be there?” I ask, because as crazy as it sounds, I wish I were there fighting next to them.

“A bit, but I wouldn’t have missed this time with you for anything. We are building memories. We couldn’t have done this with the gang here.”

“Yeah...Oh...” I hold my stomach.

“What is it?” He jumps up with concern. “Sophie, what is it?”

My stomach gets a little bit larger and I start to feel a pain. “Ian, what’s happening?” I start to freak out and he tries to calm me down.

“It’s all right...it will be fine,” he says. “Ddraig! Ddraig, I need you!”

Ddraig comes in, ready to fight. “What is it?” he asks.

“I think the baby is coming,” Ian says.

“What? That can’t be right. It’s only been a few weeks.”

“I know, but I don’t think the baby is working on our schedule,” Ian says, panicking. “What do I do? What do I do?” Ian throws his hands up in the air at Ddraig.

“All right...Destiny...she has delivered before,” Ddraig says. “I’ll go and get her. Just stay calm.”

“I’ll try, but it’s a little hard when I got something trying to rip me open from the inside,” I reply.

“I’ll hurry,” he says.

The pain is worse than I thought it would be.

Considering how fast we heal, I thought it would be minimal. I was wrong. I have never felt more physical pain in my life, and I have almost died twice. “Ian...I don’t think I can do this.”

He laughs.

“Why is everyone laughing at me today?”

“Sorry, it’s funny to hear that you can’t do something,” he says. “Sophie, if anyone can do this it is you. Just breathe.”

Destiny comes in and gets to work. “Oh yeah, this baby is ready now,” she says.

Everything happens so fast and the next thing I know I hear a cry. I forget all about the pain as Destiny hands her to me. Ian is by my side crying with me and he kisses my forehead. A few minutes later, almost everyone is back from battle. I guess Brion was right about everything going back to normal after the baby was born. They all come rushing in to see the baby.

“How did she come so fast?” Grandfather asks.

“I have no idea. Where is Chris?” I ask, looking at Alice and Cormac. They look around too.

“He should have been right behind us,” Alice says.

“Zoe and Aodan were fighting two demons with him that didn’t want to go back, but they had it under control. He told us to go and he’d be right behind us,” Cormac says.

Everyone crowds around and gets a look at the baby. She is so beautiful. I can’t stop kissing her. Mom is lit up like Christmas and I can tell she is itching to grab her away from me.

Zoe and Aodan come in looking pretty beat up. “Are

you okay?" Alice asks.

"Yes." Zoe clears her throat. I look around for Chris, but he isn't with them. I can't wait for him to see her.

"Where is Chris?" I ask. Nobody answers and Zoe gives Aodan a weary glance.

"Guys... Where is Chris?" Matt asks with annoyance.

"Is he hurt? He was fine when we left. There were only two demons and he could have taken them out on his own," Deb says.

Zoe glances back at me with tears in her eyes and shakes her head. "He was doing fine fighting one demon," Aodan says. "So Zoe and I teamed up on the other one." He hesitates for a moment. "After we sent it back to hell we turned to help Chris...but it was too late. The demon already had a hold on him and there was nothing we could do. It burned him up and then it left." Aodan looks away from me.

"No!" Ian laughs. "He wouldn't have let that happen. Chris is too good for that." Everyone sits quietly in disbelief for a moment, but then they all argue among each other.

"There has to be more to it," Matt says, not wanting to believe what they are trying to say. "What made him lose focus? He wouldn't have turned his back."

"I don't know, Matt. Like I said, we were a little busy." Aodan gets defensive. "It all happened so fast."

“Sophie, I am so sorry...” Zoe says, crying, but I refuse to believe what they are working up the courage to say.

“Mom,” I say.

“Yes.” She is beside me in an instant.

“Take Christina,” I say and she looks at me with sympathy at the sound of the name.

“Of course,” she says, taking Christina out of the room.

“Where are the ashes?” I ask Zoe. She can’t even look at me now.

“There weren’t any to get, Sophie,” Aodan says.

I flick my wand to bring Chris back to me because none of this makes sense, but nothing happens. I begin to wonder if this all could be true. Is he really gone? “So you’re telling me he’s gone?” I start to tremble.

“You’re really going to sit there and tell me he is dead! Chris is way too smart for this...it doesn’t make sense. He can’t...he just can’t...” I start to cry now with it hitting me hard and I get out of the bed. “Something should have come back. Where are his ashes, his body, his wand...?” I yell.

My grandfather grabs my shoulder to console me.

“Sophie, if he was burnt up by a demon...I’m sorry, but there would be nothing left to return to you,” he explains. With his words slapping me in the face I fall to the ground and Ian is quickly by my side with his arms around me. We cry together and I think I can

actually hear what is left of my heart break into a million pieces.

“This can’t be right. This isn’t real...not after everything. We were finally going to be together.” I hear my cries shake the foundation of the castle and feel my body give up on me. I finally just close my eyes and hold on to Ian, trying to remember to breathe.

~

I sit on the floor of my bedroom, not crying, but silently staring at the last present he gave me; the portrait he sketched of the gang. I’m not sure when everyone left. It’s dark and the moon is shining through the window. I clutch my necklace, which holds Chris’s ring, and I close my eyes. I think of how he felt in my arms and how he smelled; his cologne that drove me mad. I think of the way he grinned at me, which was charming, yet cocky. I see his arrogant strut...I laugh thinking about it, but his passion is what I loved most about him. The passion he had for me was incredible. He could always take my breath away. I was his first thought in the morning when he woke and his last thought before he went to bed. I will never find another like him and I will never try. Love is lost to me now, except for one. Christina is my world now and I will be strong for her.

## 13

### Three years later...

I wake up early and it is dark out. Christina is still asleep. Three years have gone by fast and she has grown so much. Her long red hair flows over her face so I push it back. Ian comes up behind me making me jump. I let out a little squeal and Christina starts to move. “Shush,” I say.

“You’re the one who’s squealing. What are you doing up so early?” he asks.

“I don’t know.”

“Well, might as well make some coffee. See you downstairs, my Queen.”

“Okay, my king.” I smile. Ian has been the best husband, king, and father anyone could ask for. I don’t know what I would have done if he hadn’t married me. As we sip our coffee, I begin to think of Chris. There isn’t a day that goes by when I don’t think of him. “I’m going to Faeryland today.”

“Really?” Ian asks, surprised. “It’s been a while. Do

you want me to go with you?"

"No, I'll be fine. I'll take Christina with me though. She can visit with Mom and Brion while I go and see Zoe. I have to talk to them eventually."

"That's what I've been saying."

"Shut up." I pout.

~

Christina runs toward Brion and he scoops her up in his arms and she giggles. I smile every time she laughs.

"Hello, my angel," Brion says and kisses her cheek.

They both look at me.

"How are you?" Mom asks.

"Good. Is it all right if I leave Christina with y'all for a while?"

"Of course," Mom says.

"I'll be back soon," I say.

"Will we talk when you get back?" she asks.

"Yeah, sure," I say. "Bye, baby, Mommy will be back soon," I explain to Christina, but she never gets upset.

~

I knock on the door, feeling the anxiety build up. I haven't spoken to them in so long. The door opens and Aodan's eyes widen. "Sophie!" he shouts.

"Hi." I smile.

"It's been a long time."

"Yes, it has." I sigh, feeling a little uncomfortable.

“Do you want to come in?”

“No thanks. Is Zoe here?”

“She’s at the shop,” he says.

“Oh, yeah. Ian told me she bought Kate’s shop. I’m glad y’all are doing so well.” I turn to leave and he grabs my arm.

“Sophie,” he says, “we all miss you.”

“I know.” I cough to keep from tearing up. “It’s just been hard...” I stop and sigh. “But I’ll be better soon. Will you tell everyone to meet me at the house tonight at seven for dinner?”

He looks at me strangely. “The house? The River Falls Victorian house that we all used to hang out at, and the one that you said would always be our home and yet we haven’t seen it in three years?”

“Yes, Aodan,” I say, annoyed at his sarcasm.

“Okay...just checking.” He smirks.

“I’m glad to see you haven’t changed.” I smile. “I’ll see y’all tonight.”

~

The bell to the shop rings as I open the door. Zoe comes from the back the way Kate used to, and when she sees me she freezes. “Sophie?” she asks, worried. “Is everything okay?”

“Yes. I just wanted to see you.” She smiles and runs toward me. She stops to look at me for a moment,

speechless, but finally decides to give me a hug. “Oh, Sophie...I missed you so much,” she cries.

“I know...me too, but, Zoe...” I clear my throat and squeeze her hands. “It’s been long enough.”

Her smile fades for a moment but returns as she squeezes my hands. “I agree,” she says.

“Please tell everyone to be at the house tonight at seven for dinner.”

“The River Falls house?”

“Yes.” I smile.

“We’ll see you all there,” she says with a wink.

~

I find Christina playing out in the castle garden with Mom and Brion. She gives me a welcome-back hug.

“Is everything all right?” Mom asks.

“Yes. We are getting together tonight for dinner, if y’all want to come.”

“Oh, that is wonderful,” Mom says. “But we’ll let you kids catch up on things. Is Christina’s birthday party still on for tomorrow?”

“Yes, we’ll be around about noon.”

“Why not let Christina stay the night with us while you catch up with everyone?” Brion asks.

“Yay,” Christina yells and claps her hands.

“I think she would love that.” I laugh. “I’ll see y’all tomorrow.”

~

I clean the house a bit before everyone arrives and am feeling a bit nervous about seeing everyone. It has been three years since we've all hung out. What if they don't feel the same way about me? I have been the worst friend ever. I haven't even been to the mortal world in forever it seems. The door opens and the gang walks in. Ian says they all still hang out on occasion. They walk in without saying a word. They stand around waiting for me to say something. What do I say to these people who I've treated so badly for three years? They tried to help me, to talk to me, and to reach out to me when I was in pain, but I blocked everyone out. I couldn't be with them without thinking of Chris. It was too painful for me so I blocked out everyone, but Christina and Ian. We stare at each other for a moment not knowing what to say. "Guys, I am so sorry," I say. "I have been the worst friend ever and it's taken me three years to realize it, but please forgive me."

"Sophie," Alice says as she comes over to hug me. "We know you went through a lot. We don't blame you for wanting time alone and plus you had a child to take care of. I'm sure that was a lot to handle, but if you would have talked to us we could have helped you through it." "That's what we tried to tell her," Ian says. "Over and over again, but she didn't want help. She wanted to

wallow in her sorrows.”

“Okay,” I say hitting Ian in the arm. “I’m done wallowing. Tonight I wanted to get together to reconnect...if y’all still want to be friends.”

“Of course,” Alice says.

“Well...I don’t know...” Cormac says. “What are we eating?” Alice smacks him in the arm. “Just kidding,” he says. “Of course we still want to be friends.”

“But from now on you have to trust us to help you through things,” Alice says.

“No more blocking us out,” Matt says.

“Okay, no more blocking you out,” I say. “But I also wanted to bring y’all here tonight to celebrate.”

“Celebrate what?” Chrissy asks.

“It is three years ago today that Chris died and I would like to celebrate his existence instead of feeling sad about him not being here with us.”

“That sounds like a plan,” Alice says.

“So I have everything ready in the dining room. Now that we are drinking age...I have plenty of wine!”

“Great!” Zoe says giving Aodan a concerned look.

“Everything okay Zoe?” I ask.

“Oh, yeah,” she says with a shrug of her shoulders.

“Never better.”

We all gather around the table and I raise my glass. I get an anxious feeling in my gut for a moment and I sense a

familiar presence. I look around, but the feeling goes away so I get back to my toast. “Three years ago we lost a friend. He was kind, brave, fearless, and the love of my life. I know we all lost him and I was selfish to think that y’all were not grieving as well. He was a great friend to us all. So let us toast to Chris. He was a light in the darkness for us all and may his light shine on us forever. To Chris... I will always love you.” Zoe gets up wiping her eyes as she walks to the kitchen. I guess I did get a little sappy.

“To Chris,” everyone repeats. As we toast our glasses, I see a bright light and we all are forced backwards. The explosion freezes in the air and we all get up and dust ourselves off.

“What the...” Aodan says. “Is everyone okay?”

“I think so,” I say. “Jen, Danny, Chrissy...”

“Yes, we are fine,” Danny says.

“Zoe, nice catch!” Cormac says. “I’m glad you went to the kitchen.”

“Me too,” I say. I take my hand and place it over the frozen explosion. “Guys this was a powerful explosion. It would have leveled the house and most certainly killed us all.”

“Even you?” Alice asks.

“Well I know fire and arrows won’t, but this would have ripped us to pieces. I don’t think there is any

coming back from that.”

“So I guess there are people out there that still want us dead, then,” Aodan says.

“Guys,” Zoe says. “My spell is wearing off.” The explosion is cracking open like a chicken coming out of its shell so I flick my wand and it’s gone. An explosion goes off in the distance. Their eyes widen. “Don’t worry,” I say. “Nobody was nearby.”

“God, who wants us dead now!” Cormac says just before the window shatters and smoke fills the room.

“Someone broke through the barrier! Everyone back to the other realm!” I say. “Chrissy, Danny, Jen where are you?” I try to find them through the smoke. “I got Chrissy,” Matt yells. I flick my wand and Danny and Jen are next to me. “Grab my hand and I’ll take us back,” I say as gunfire proceeds in breaking the rest of the windows. Jen is hit in the arm by a bullet before I can grab her. Danny falls to the ground after being shot several times. “No!” I yell. Someone approaches me from behind. “Leave them,” he says. “We’ll get them back safely.”

“Gabriel? What’s going on?” I ask as a bullet hits me in the gut.

“There is no time to explain,” he says. “Go back to Wizardland now!” I look at my friends lying on the ground again. “I’m not leaving them.” I flick my wand

as I gasp with pain and send them both to the hospital. “Go now!” Gabriel says. I try to send myself back, but I am in too much pain and it doesn’t work. “Get her back!” Gabriel yells. “I’ll take care of their unexpected guests.” Someone picks me up and I am back in Wizardland. I look up to see Erik. He is holding me in his arms. “Erik?” I say as my body starts to heal. I feel the bullet working its way out and it falls to the ground. “What the hell is going on?” Ian and Deb run in as I get up with Erik’s help.

“Are you okay?” Ian asks.

“Yeah...thank you, Erik,” I say. “But what the hell! First I see Gabriel and then you. Who attacked us and how did y’all know we needed help?” Erik steps back and takes a breath to think. He places his hand to his chin to rub his red five-o’clock-shadow. “Here is what we can do. Given the circumstances I’ll call a meeting with my brother. I can’t discuss anything further about this operation.”

“Operation?”

“I don’t call the shots,” Erik says.

“Well get Gabriel here so he can answer our questions,” I say.

Erik laughs. “Just be in Faeryland after you clean up.” “I’ll have to go by the hospital first to check on Danny and Jen.”

“No, no, no,” he says grabbing my arm. I widen my eyes at him. “Forgive me Queen Sophie, but I strongly suggest you stay inside the magical realm walls. The mortal world is too dangerous for you right now.”

I roll my eyes at him and leave anyway. Chrissy is already pacing when I walk in the hospital and runs to hug me. “I wish they could heal like you,” she says. “Me too.” I return the embrace.

“Who did this?” Matt asks as Erik walks in.

“We don’t know yet, but we are looking into it.” He grabs my arm again. “I must insist you return to the other realm.” I jerk my arm out of his grasp and he sighs with annoyance. “This is why they didn’t want you to know you were in danger. As soon as danger is in sight you have to go straight for it and get in its face.” I ignore his comment.

“How are they?” I ask Chrissy.

“I’m not sure,” she says as Danny’s parents run through the doors and to the front desk. They are greeted by the doctor and soon his mom starts to cry. “No,” I say as Chrissy gasps. “This can’t be happening.” A nurse runs up to the doctor and whispers in his ear. We walk up to get a closer listen. “I’m sorry,” the doctor says. “It looks as if he may still be with us. I have to go, but I’ll be back.” He runs and I follow him back to the surgery room. Danny is sitting up on the table trying to

convince them all that he is fine. I breathe a sigh of relief and hold my chest to make sure my heart hasn't fallen out.

"You shouldn't even be conscious right now," the nurse says as she gives him a shot.

"I don't know what to tell you lady," Danny says. "I'm fi—"

He passes out on the table from the shot the nurse gave him and I notice the bullets they recovered from his chest lying in the stainless steel container. I flick my wand and they are in my hand. They still have his blood on them and I almost cry. One of my best friends almost died and these bullets may be our only clue to finding out why.

"Okay," the doctor says. "Let's stitch him up."

"He's alive," I say as I hug Chrissy.

"Thank God!" she says.

"Now can we leave, please," Erik says. I ignore him once more. "Do you want your friends to die!" he shouts.

"Erik!" I say. "What is your problem?" I look around at everyone staring.

"My problem is that you haven't left the magical realm in three years and you have no idea how much danger you are in right now." He takes a breath to calm himself. "I know you want to protect your friends," he

says in a softer tone. “But by being here you are putting them in danger and every other person in this hospital. They have been just fine for three years without you.” “Go,” Chrissy says. “We will be fine. I’ll call you when we know more.”

“Fine,” I say and hug Chrissy one more time. I really don’t want to leave, but Erik is right. They have been fine for three years and they hang out with me for one night and they get shot. I’m surprised they even want me around.

“You too,” Erik says to Matt. “They haven’t batted an eye at princess,” he nods to Chrissy. “But you they have tried to kill about a hundred times.”

“I must go if I put you at risk,” Matt says to Chrissy.

“Okay,” she says. “Be safe.” I notice as she cups his cheek that she is wearing an engagement ring. I gasp, but decide it is best left alone for now.

~

“These are the bullets,” I say handing one off to Erik. “Good thinking snatching the bullets,” he says. “Not only do we have a lead now, the cops won’t be able to investigate much.”

“I talked to them before we left,” Matt says. “I persuaded them to believe it was just a home invasion. They shouldn’t look into it anymore.”

“Good,” Erik says as he examines the bullet. “Every

artist has a signature. You see this marking here..." I look closer and see a symbol. "What does it mean?" I ask.

"It's a signature and I know it well," he says grinding his teeth.

"Really," I say. "Let's go then." Erik gives me a sideways grin. "What? I can't go there either."

"Nope," he says. "I got this one, don't worry."

"But won't you need back-up?" I ask.

"I got back-up," he says and vanishes. I scream with irritation. "I can't sit here and do nothing."

"Well, go get cleaned up and we'll go ahead and meet with King Brion," Ian says. "We can go check in on Christina too. I hate to say it, but she may not get that party after all."

"I know, but she is only three...maybe she won't care too much. We'll throw her a big one after things settle down." I say.

I glance down at my phone while we are waiting for Grandfather. I still haven't heard from Chrissy. "Matt have you heard anything from Chrissy yet?"

"Nothing yet," he says.

I sit back, close my eyes, and take a breath to relax. I hope Danny and Jen will be okay. Maybe I should have left them alone. If they hadn't come over, they would be safe.

“This isn’t your fault,” Zoe says, sitting down beside me. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to invade your brain.

Sometimes I can’t control it.”

I smile. “It’s okay.”

“You’re not the only one who has put them in danger, Sophie.”

“I know, but it is strange that it happened when I show up,” I say.

“They probably just wanted to wait until we were all together. Get it all done at one time.”

“Yeah...I suppose, but we need to find out who they are fast,” I say. “And I want to know why Gabriel and Erik were there.”

“It’s a good thing they were,” she says.

“Yeah, but they are up to something. I just know it.”

“Sorry I’m late,” Grandfather says. “Shall we get started?”

“Erik isn’t here yet,” Ian says. “He went to check out a lead.”

“Lead?” Brion asks.

“The bullets,” I say handing him one. He inspects it and his eyes widen.

“Oh my...” He says. “I shall return shortly.” He vanishes without explanation.

“Why does everyone keep doing that?” I ask, throwing my hands in the air.

“Let me see the bullet,” Mom asks. I give her a bullet and she looks it over and gets the same look in her eye as Brion, but she lets out a little giggle.

“What is it?” I ask.

“Nothing,” she says as she throws the bullet in the air and catches it again. “I’ll be back.” I grab her arm before she vanishes and we appear in a dark room.

“Sophie, you shouldn’t have come with me.”

“Where are we?” I ask.

“These bullets were made by an old friend of Brion,” she says. “He used to make weapons for Faeryland.”

“What is he doing making bullets in the mortal world?”

“The question is who is he making them for?”

We hear fighting around the corner so we run to check it out. There are men huddled in a circle with Brion and Erik amongst them. “Just tell him what he wants to know Clay,” Brion says. “Nobody can stop him when he is on a mission.” I see Erik, Sam the werewolf, Gabriel, and Brion standing over someone beating the crap out of another. Mom stops all of a sudden with her eyes frozen to the scene.

“What is it?” I ask.

“Maybe we should go back home,” she says, taking my hand.

“Mom, I have seen people get beat up before,” I say pushing her hand away.

“Sophie, please...let’s just go back.” She tries to take my hand again.

“What is wrong with you?”

“Please baby...just take my hand!” she pleads with me more than she ever has.

“No,” I say. “What is going on?”

They all hear us and turn around. “Sophie.” Brion sighs.

“I’m sorry Brion,” Mom cries. “She grabbed my arm...” She shrugs her shoulders speechless.

“Guys, what is going on?” I ask with a laugh. “I’ve seen people tortured before...remember. I think I can handle it.” As I get closer, they move aside and I see the bullet maker bloody and bruised. The man kneeling above him strokes his blond hair out of his face and looks at me with intoxicating green eyes. I hold my chest, gasp for air, and pray to God this is not a dream.

## 14

**Surprise**

“Chris!” I run as fast as I can into his arms. “Oh my God! How?” He barely hugs me back, but I’m too shocked to say anything. “How did you guys bring him back?” I say. “And why didn’t you tell me?” They all look away from me so I turn to Chris for an answer. I notice the scar next to his right eye and it leads all the way down to his chin. His green eyes get a bit glossy as he takes my hand.

“I...” He closes his eyes and bites his lip. “I’m sorry,” he says. I push his hand away realizing what he is telling me. I bite my jaw as I try to remember how to breathe. As I remember how, I finally gasp. “So...” I look to my mother for confirmation of the truth and as she covers her mouth and cries, she tells me all I need to know. “You never died...did you?” Still biting my jaw, I wonder why he would do this. *Why would he put me through all that pain? Did he just want out because of Christina?* My blood hasn’t boiled this much in three years. I can feel the fire inside me starting to take over. I clench my fists and feel the blood stream down my fingertips. I close my eyes and the tears stream out. As I

open them, I see fiery fists swing around to Chris's face. He doesn't flinch. He only closes his eyes and takes the deserving blow. His body flies through the air and then through the wall and I disappear.

Oh...memories.

I go to Christina's room and lay down beside her as she sleeps on her new big girl bed. Nobody follows me or comes to find me so I fall asleep snuggling up next to her. I wake to her trying to open my eyes. "Wake up, mommy," she says. She is probably the only one who can make me smile right now. I tickle her and she giggles. "Want some breakfast?" I ask and start our morning rituals.

The gang is waiting at the bottom of the stairs as Christina and I walk down to the dining room. "Hey," I say with surprise in my voice. I see the look of pity on their faces. I shoot a glance at Aodan and Zoe, taking a breath. I feel my forehead crinkle as my eyes squint with irritation at their presence. "Guys I really don't want to talk about it," I say.

"That's fine," Alice says. "But you aren't going to shut us out again."

"Fine," I appease her, raising my hand. "Y'all are just in time for breakfast."

"Awesome," Cormac says, easing some of the tension in the room as he rubs his hands together. I can't

believe Aodan and Zoe lied to me that day about Chris's death. I don't even want to look at them right now. *How could they watch me go through that and not say anything? Did they all know? How many of my friends deceived me that day?*

"So...did they get any information on our bullet guy?"

I ask trying to keep my mind clear because I know Zoe is trying to read me right now.

"I think so, but they aren't telling us much," Ian says.

"Of course not," I say. "They are still treating us like kids."

"Well...we are," Aodan says. I flare my nostrils at him as I take a calming breath. "I mean...I feel like I am at least."

"Aodan," Zoe says, knowing what I'm thinking about doing. "Please stop talking."

"What?" he asks. "I'm just saying that sometimes we do stupid things and we should be forgiven for those stupid things."

"We really don't need to talk about this right now," I say grinding my teeth. I focus on Christina for a moment. "Eat your eggs sweetie," I say with a smile.

"We really—"

"Aodan shut-up!" Zoe yells.

"We need to apologize, Zoe!" Aodan replies. My breathing gets heavier, but I don't want to upset

Christina. Aodan isn't going to give up until I accept his apology so I pick up my wand.

"Sophie don't!" Zoe says before her and Aodan vanish. Christina's eye light up with fear along with everyone else's. "Don't worry sweetie," I say with a grin. "They just went for a ride." She nods in understanding as I kiss her cheek.

"Sophie," Ian says with exasperation. "What did you do?"

"They just went on a little adventure," I say with a smirk.

"Did you banish their powers?" he asks.

"Maybe..."

"Sophie, they could get hurt," Deb pleads. I shrug my shoulders until my conscience gets the better of me. I glance down at Christina again and she smiles. I know I wouldn't want her to act this way so I give in. "Fine," I say. Aodan and Zoe appear soaking wet with their eyes popping out with fear. Aodan is still screaming until Zoe shoves him. We all laugh.

"You learned to banish powers," Zoe says. "Even mine. Good for you."

"Good for you..." Aodan says. "She almost killed us!" I smirk as I take a sip of my coffee. "Not that we didn't deserve it."

I offer my eyes to Zoe to ask one question. *Why?*

“He said he would kill himself for real if we didn’t go along,” she says.

“Okay then,” I say. “Y’all are forgiven.”

“Really?” Aodan says hesitant to believe me.

“Yes, but I want to know one more thing.”

“What?” Zoe asks.

“Who else knew?”

“Nobody,” she says. “Except for the Guardians.”

“There are more than one?” I ask.

“That is just what they call themselves,” Zoe says.

“What we know so far is all that are involved are the ones that helped in the demon war...at least the ones that were at the meeting.”

“Did Mom or Brion know?” I ask, skimming the lid of my coffee cup with my finger.

“No,” she says and I let the breath that I was holding out. “Chris didn’t want them involved, but Erik did. He was actually the one who had the idea for the group. They don’t tell us anything about it though.”

“Of course not,” I say. “They just want us to stay put and not go to the mortal world.” I copy Chris’s demeanor and British accent.

“So what do we do now then?” Matt asks.

“Go to the mortal world of course,” I say with a smirk.

“Oh good Lord,” Aodan says. “She’s got that crazy look.”

“I’ve kind of missed that crazy look,” Cormac says.

“Deb will you take Christina up to her room to play,” I ask.

“Of course,” she agrees. “Come on sweetie. Let’s go have a tea party.”

“I need to go see Joffrey for a moment,” Ian says. “But I will be right back. Don’t talk about anything good until I get back.”

As soon as they leave the room, Alice comes to sit next to me. “So…” she says.

“So…what?” I ask raising an eyebrow as I sip my coffee.

“So what is up with you two?”

“Ian?”

“Um…yeah.”

“Ian hasn’t told you guys anything?” I ask.

“No,” she says, looking at everyone at the table. “And we haven’t asked. We didn’t want to make him or Deb uncomfortable.”

“But you’re fine with making me uncomfortable,” I say with a laugh.

“Yeah…something like that,” she says.

“Well,” I say shrugging my shoulders. “There really isn’t much to tell.”

“Okay,” she says as she grabs my hand. “I’ll ask some questions and you answer them.”

“Sounds fair,” I say. “Shoot.”

“Are you a couple?” she asks.

“Is Deb’s baby Ian’s?” Zoe asks. “Did he cheat on you? Tell me he didn’t cheat on you with Deb!”

“Do the people know?” Matt decides to chime in.

“Do the King and Queen know?” Cormac asks.

“Does he sleep in the same bed and then sneak off with Deb in the middle of the night?”

“Okay, okay,” I say, stopping them from asking anything else. “I guess there is a lot to tell. They eagerly wait for me to answer. “No,” I say. “Ian does not sleep with me and then go find Deb in the middle of the night.” I laugh. “Deb and Ian sleep in the same room. We are not a couple. We are married, but we have no romantic involvement. So he did not really cheat on me...in my eyes anyway. The people do not know, but Mom and Grandfather do. He married me because I needed a King. I talked with him and Deb about it first and they were both very supportive about the decision. So yes, the baby is Ian’s.”

“Are we all caught up now?” Ian asks as him and Deb walk back in the room.

“Yes,” I say. “I believe we are.” We all laugh as Matt’s phone rings.

“Oh hey,” he answers. “Slow down babe.” He listens and his eyes widen at her words. “We are on our way.”

He hangs up. "Someone has taken Danny."

"What?"

"Go," Deb says. "I'll take care of Christina."

"Thanks Deb," I say and quickly vanish to the hospital.

Jen is frantic. "What happened?"

"He went to the bathroom and never came back," Jen cries.

"How long has it been?" I ask.

"About an hour...I guess," she says.

"Have you told anyone else?" Ian asks.

"No, I didn't want to worry anyone."

"What do we do?" Alice asks.

"Go home," Chris says strutting in the room. My heart burns when I hear his voice. I back away until I touch the wall. I almost fall over. Alice notices and follows me.

"Are you okay?" she whispers.

"I'll be fine," I say. With no warning Ian punches Chris in the face.

"How could you?" Ian says as Chris stumbles a bit. "Do you realize how much pain you put her through?"

"Of course," Chris says wiping the blood from his lip on his shirt. "Of course I do. I can feel her pain remember." He looks at me with pity in his green eyes. Ian turns to me also.

"Can you feel it now?" Ian says. "You're not the only

one who can tell when she is in pain. I can see it in her eyes you bastard.”

All of a sudden, Matt comes over and punches Chris as well. “By the way,” Matt says as Chris spits blood out on the floor. “She isn’t the only one you hurt.” Chris narrows his eyes at Matt.

“Guys enough,” I say. “Danny is missing. We need to find him.”

“Danny is fine,” Chris says. “He is with us.”

We all breathe a sigh of relief. “Why did y’all take him?”

“We sensed he was in danger. I was coming back to get Jen and Chrissy as well.” I glare at him with uncertainty.

“What?” he asks.

“There is something you aren’t telling me,” I say.

“Well we don’t have time so Erik, if you will,” Chris says nodding at Jen and Chrissy. Erik grabs Jen and Chris goes for Chrissy.

“You don’t have to take them Chris,” I say. “They will be fine with us.”

“Well I wasn’t really asking for your permission,” he says. Matt lunges for Chrissy, but Chris is ready for him. “Sorry Matt,” he says throwing a ball of light. When it hits Matt he vanishes.

“Where did he go?” I ask with a gasp.

“He just went back home. Where you guys need to be.”

“What is going on?”

“Just know that they will be safe with us,” Chris insists.

“No, Chris!” I yell. “You’re going to tell me what is going on.”

“Am I now,” he says with his cocky grin I used to love so much, but right now it pisses me off so I flick my wand and send Chrissy and Jen to Faeryland. Chris sighs and looks to Erik.

“Go get them back.”

I look to the rest of the gang. “Go stop him.” Ian stays with me. “So, Chris, are you going to tell me what is going on now?”

“Are you threatening me?” Chris laughs.

“I wouldn’t taunt her if I were you,” Ian says grinding his teeth.

“Please, I’ve taken on creatures a whole lot more powerful than you two,” he says laughing. With a flick of my wand, he begins to choke. I look him in the eyes and try not to cry as I look into the soul of the love of my life I thought was gone forever.

“I’m a lot more powerful than I used to be,” I say. He reaches in his pocket and pulls out another ball of light and throws it at Ian. He tries to throw one at me, but I hold my hand up and it dissolves. I stop the choking spell and he falls to his knees. He flicks his wand, but

nothing happens.

“You’ve learned to banish powers... good,” he says.

“So are you going to tell me what is going on? And don’t tell me you don’t have time. We have wasted plenty already.”

“You don’t want to know, trust me.” Those words ‘trust me’ just hit me the wrong way and I slap him with the back of my hand. My ring puts a gash on his face. “Nice wedding ring,” he says, wiping the blood off and sounding a bit sarcastic. “You haven’t changed a bit,” he says. “Your pride still gets to you.”

“This has nothing to do with my pride,” I say kicking him in the gut. “This has everything to do with my heart you ass!”

“Whatever,” he says. “You married Ian like a day after you thought I was dead.”

“I needed a king!”

“He said he would marry you if I didn’t, but I never thought it would be so soon. Talk about a knife in the gut.”

“Are you listening to yourself right now?” I say. “You lied to me! If you didn’t want to be with me because of Christina you could have just told me. You didn’t have to go and kill yourself off. And make Zoe and Aodan lie for you.”

“Well,” he says clearing his throat. “What’s done is

done. Can I have my powers back now?"

I can't believe how cruel he is being to me after everything he has put me through. Did he even care at all? I lose control of my anger and I run at him. We end up vanishing to my house. I fall on top of him and start hitting him without any thoughts, just anger. He doesn't try to stop me either. I keep hitting him over and over again. I can't even feel my hands any longer. All the pain I felt three years ago has come rushing back.

Someone comes up behind me and tries to pull me off of him. "Sophie, stop," Grandfather says. "You're going to kill him." He is finally able to pull me off and he hands me to Mom. "He won't make it if I don't get him to Wizardland."

"Go," Mom says. "I got her."

She takes me back to Faeryland and Zoe comes rushing over. "What happened?" she asks.

"Let's just say that if we had arrived a few minutes later, Chris really would be dead this time." Mom holds me tight. "I'm going to take her upstairs. Zoe, is she still with us?"

Zoe looks into my eyes and tries to read my thoughts. I can't seem to keep them straight though. They go back and forth to when I first met Chris, to having Christina, and back to when I first met Chris. My mind is all scrambled.

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“Barely,” Zoe says. “If we don’t get through to her soon, we could lose her forever.”

Zoe slowly fades away. I can hear her voice trail off and soon I am back in a time where things were a bit simpler.

## 15

### All in the Mind

#### Chris

I wake up in Wizardland after Sophie kicks the crap out of me, not that I blame her. I know I broke her heart because I felt her pain. But why is she still so mad? She got married the day after I supposedly died. How am I supposed to feel about that?

King Brion enters as I sit up. “Chris, I’m glad you’re okay,” he says.

“Thanks Ki—” He grabs me by the throat and throws me against the wall. I feel the stones break behind me. His grip gets tighter. I grab at his hand to try and get free. All I can do is kick my legs. “Brion...” I squeeze his name out, but barely.

“Do you have any idea how much damage you’ve caused?” he asks as his eyes turn black. “You may have broken her completely this time.” He lets go and I fall to the ground, letting some air back in my lungs.

“I’m sorry,” I say. “I did it so they could be a family. I thought it was the right thing to do.”

Brion sighs. “Well, I’ve learned something since I’ve known her and you should get it by now too.”

“What is that?” I ask.

“That only Sophie can decide what is right for her. We all have to learn to live with her decisions no matter how bad we think they are. It’s her life and her family keeps screwing it up for her.”

“She seems to be happy with Ian,” I say sarcastically.

“Do you want me to choke you again, boy?” he asks and I flinch as he comes toward me. Nobody else can make me flinch like this man. Especially when it comes to his granddaughter. “She isn’t even with Ian like that, you idiot!” I close my eyes and lower my head to let his words sink in.

“What?” I ask as Ian walks in grinding his teeth again and clenching his fists. This isn’t going to end well.

“Are his powers still banished?” he asks Brion.

“Yes and I can’t talk to him. My anger is getting the better of me. I just might kill him for real and we need him. Just set him straight.”

“I will,” Ian says as Brion slams the door behind him. He comes closer and I think he is going to take a swing at me, but he hugs me instead. We hug for a moment and to tell you the truth it felt good. I did miss him. After all we had just made up and I had to leave again. After a minute of hugging, he shoves me away. He swings his fist back and pops me in the jaw for the second time today. “You’re such an idiot!”

“So I’ve been told,” I say rubbing my jaw. “Is there a line outside for people to punch me?”

“Even Wizardland isn’t big enough for a line that long, brother.”

“You got the girl!” I say, aggravated that everybody keeps punching me today. “And you’re King so why are you so upset?”

“Are you that dense?” he asks. “Oh, I forgot who I was talking to. I am mad dear brother because you made us all believe you were dead. We finally reconcile after all these years and you just treated that like nothing. I am also mad because you finally had the opportunity to make yourself happy and you shot it to Hell. I told you I would marry her if you didn’t. Most of all though, I am mad because you may have broken Sophie. You’ve broken her spirit, her heart, and now you’ve broken her mind.”

“What are you talking about?”

“She’s back in Faeryland, but she is in some sort of trance. I don’t know how. Zoe says she is stuck in her mind.” He sighs. “And she’s stuck in there with you so you are the only one who can get her out.”

“How can I?”

“You broke her...you fix her,” Ian says. “We need to leave, but there is one more thing I need to set you straight on. Sophie and I married because she needed a

king. We are not romantically involved.” He laughs. “We don’t even sleep in the same room.”

“But why?” I ask, confused at why she would marry him if she didn’t love him. “Why didn’t she wait to marry for—?”

“Love?” Ian says with a hint of laughter in his voice. “You are dense. She knew she would never find a love like she had with you. She only has one other true love in her life and she’s three years old...named after you I might add.”

“I’m so stupid,” I say, finally getting it. “I’ve screwed everything up.”

“No time to wallow,” Ian says. “We need to go.”

~

Sophie is lying in bed with her eyes closed as if she is sound asleep. Queen Mary glares at me as I walk in. I bow at her and Brion. “What do I need to do?” I ask Zoe.

“Lay down beside her. I’ll put you into a deep sleep and you can enter her mind.”

“What is it like in there?” I ask.

“Basically, she stays as her seventeen year old self in your old quarters.”

“Okay so you’re putting me to sleep surrounded by a room full of people who hate me in a land where I am not immortal. What could possibly go wrong here?” I

sigh as I lie down beside Sophie and Zoe cracks a smile. “And Chris, don’t get caught up in things or you too could get trapped in there. Just remember it isn’t real. It is all in her mind.”

“Swell,” I say. “Let’s do this.”

As soon as Zoe touches my forehead, I enter Sophie’s mind. It looks exactly like my old quarters. Zoe wasn’t joking. I see Sophie out on the balcony with...me. She looks up and the other me vanishes. “Chris?” she says. “Where did you go?”

“I’m here,” I say. She smiles and runs into my arms. God, I missed this. I look in the mirror and my scar is no longer visible. I begin to resemble the nineteen year old I once was. She pulls me out to the balcony and puts my arms around her. She looks out at the view. “Isn’t this nice?” she asks.

“It’s great,” I say as I smell her hair. I’ve missed the smell of her apple shampoo. I start to think how much I wish I could stay in this moment forever. Zoe pops into view. “Focus!” she says. “Right,” I say, shaking off my emotions.

“Sophie, we need to talk,” I say. “Your friends back in the mortal world are in real danger. We have to get back to help.”

“Well let’s go,” she says running to the door. She stops when she sees I’m not running.

“Give me your hand,” I say.

“Why?” she asks.

“So we can go save your friends.”

“What is going on?” she eyes me with suspicion.

“You’re not telling me something.” She’s even too smart for me in a fake reality.

“This isn’t real,” I say. “All of this is in your mind.”

“What are you talking about? You’re not making sense.” I grab her shoulders. “Listen we don’t have time for this. You have created a fake reality in your head and you’re trapped.”

“Chris, you’re scaring me,” she says as the castle begins to shake. “Why are you doing this?”

“Chris,” Zoe yells. “You’re losing her. She’s changing her reality. If she does we could lose her forever. Do something!”

“Like what?” I ask.

“I don’t know. Be the Chris she fell in love with!” I have to think of something...anything. How did I use to be...annoying, obnoxious, arrogant, and sarcastic?

Actually, I haven’t really changed a bit. “I’m just kidding!” I yell to get her attention. Her eyes narrow.

“What?” she asks as things start to become brighter again.

“Got you. You should have seen the look on your face.” I laugh.

“Oh my God, Chris! You are the worst.” I pull her in for a hug and kiss her on the forehead. We return to the balcony and cuddle up next to each other. I try to find a way to get through to her.

“So have you thought about the future?” I ask.

“What about it?” she asks with those beautiful blue eyes.

“What do you plan on doing after school?”

“Wasn’t the whole plan for us to get married?”

“Oh yeah,” I say. She is actually replaying this part in her head? I am so confused.

“So you’re ready for kids, then?”

“Well nobody is ever really ready for kids I suppose,” she says.

“What about names?” I ask. “What would you name your daughter for instance? I like Christina.”

She laughs at first, but then stops and holds her chest.

“Christina?” she says. “Why does that name make my heart hurt?” I want to tell her so badly, but I can’t risk losing her. I need something else. If I had a picture of Christina or something else special to her, but the only thing from the real world she’ll see is me. I see a notebook on the table and it gives me an idea.

“Have you written anything new?” I ask.

“No,” she says, grabbing the notebook.

“I’m not going to read it.” I laugh. I do have a song a

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friend wrote that is amazing if you'd like to hear it."  
"You don't have any friends," she says with a smirk.  
"I have you," I say. "Yes, you do." She smiles.  
"Okay...go ahead." She places her hands under her  
chin and gets ready for a performance. I get up and grab  
the guitar and try to remember the words to the song  
she wrote for me called *Broken*. She is after all broken.  
Maybe this will fix her.

Some things the light some things the light can't mend  
Even if you think it can  
Cause the darkness always finds a way back in  
Into my heart into my soul  
This I've come I've come to know  
Because I'm broken through and through  
Though I care for you  
The light soon will fade  
And you will walk away  
And the darkness wins again  
And I am tortured by the pain  
Of how this will end  
Because I'm broken

You say you say you don't care  
And you're not going anywhere  
But when the shadows start to form

And you see the coming storm  
And the light starts to dim  
You will give in  
And the darkness wins again  
Because I'm broken through and through  
Though I care for you  
The light soon will fade  
And you will walk away  
And the darkness wins again  
And I am tortured by the pain  
Of how this will end  
Because I'm broken

Even if the demons stay away  
You couldn't love this damaged soul anyway  
So leave me to my sorrow  
And leave me to my pain  
Because I know the darkness will remain  
Because I'm broken through and through  
And I care for you  
But if the light doesn't fade  
And you don't walk away  
If the darkness doesn't win  
Will I still be broken  
Will I still be broken

When I'm done, she starts to cry. "Sophie?"  
"Oh, Chris," she says. "We are both idiots." She kisses me and time slows down until we wake up with everyone staring at us.

"Sophie!" Mary shouts as she about trips over Zoe trying to get to Sophie for a hug. As she hugs her, she grabs me by the shirt to pull me in too. "Thank you," she says.

"Where is Christina?" she asks.

"Up in her room playing," the queen replies.

"I'm going to go up to see her." She leaves me in a room full of faeries and one wizard who all hate me.

"They don't hate you," Zoe says. "They are just disappointed in you."

"So," Brion says. "Now that we have that problem taken care of let's deal with the other one. Her mortal friends, where are they and why did you take them?"  
"First let me tell you what has been happening," I say. He folds his hands over his chest. "I am the King of Faeryland. I should always be told what is happening. Especially if it concerns any of us."

"Yes, sir," I say. "I know that now, but I was afraid of blowing my cover."

"What is done is done," Brion says. "Let's just fix it."  
"Ever since Sophie had Christina, the fight with the demons has been over, but a war was just beginning."

“A war...with who?” he asks.

“Everyone.”

## 16

### Back to Sophie

As I play with Christina, I feel like the worst mom in the world. *How could I almost leave her for that fake reality?*

“You couldn’t help it,” Zoe says.

“Do you just go around doing that now?” I ask.

“Only when it’s needed,” she says. “Your brain shorted out,” she explains. “You couldn’t control it. It was on overload.”

“Thanks Zoe,” I say.

“They actually wanted me to come and get you. They are about to go and see Danny, Jen, and Chrissy.”

“Oh, great,” I say. I give Christina the biggest hug I can muster up and kiss her goodbye before I leave.

~

Zoe and I go meet everyone and when I see Chris I freeze up. Zoe gives me a nudge. “So where are we headed?” I ask. He holds his hand out for me to grab. I just look at it for a moment and then I look in his eyes. He raises an eyebrow at me and gives me a little sigh. “We can work out me being an idiot later,” he says. “Right now we have to save our friends.” I smile when

he calls them his friends too. He has never done that before. “Shut-up and take my hand.”

“Everyone hold hands,” Zoe says as she waves her hand back and forth. The air begins to shimmer.

“Everyone take a step forward,” she says. We walk forward and step into my house. “Why are we at the mortal world house? Isn’t that like the most dangerous place for us to be right now?”

“If it was actually your house,” Zoe says.

“Zoe has impressed us yet again,” Brion says. “She has created another realm of her very own.” I hang my mouth open in shock and she rolls her eyes.

“It’s not really another realm...” she says.

“Yes, it is,” Mom says as she pushes Zoe’s shoulder for being modest.

“Okay...maybe a small one.”

“It looks just like our house in the mortal world,” I say, looking around for something to be off.

“I just copied everything and placed it in this...other realm.”

Jen and Chrissy come rushing in and about knock me over for a hug. “I’m so glad y’all are okay.” I notice Jen’s bandage from her wound is gone.

“Jen...how...where is your wound?”

“It healed,” Chris says.

“How is that possible?” I ask. “I mean I’m so glad,

but...”

“I think we all could use a drink,” Chris says, pouring us all a glass of wine.

“So it’s safe here?” I ask.

“Yes, it is the safest place on earth,” Zoe says. “Only us and the Guardians know it’s here and are the only ones who can get in.”

“This is truly amazing, Zoe,” I say.

“Thanks.”

“So...Chris,” I change the subject as I take a sip of my wine. “What the hell is going on?”

“Remember when Maddox had this idea to have a little bit of variety in the world?”

“Yes...”

“Well, he was thinking long term with the whole making babies thing, but he was doing research for short term ideas. The results of his research were never found...until now.”

I take another sip of wine. “And,” I say.

“It works,” he says. “He was able to figure out a way to turn people into whatever he wanted them to be.”

“What? That’s impossible.”

“There is a formula to it but it’s basically mixing the blood together and injecting it into the bloodstream of the subject.”

“This is crazy,” I say.

“The crazy part is that whoever is continuing his madness already has at least three guinea pigs.”

“Guys, I’m so sorry,” I say for getting them into this again.

“This isn’t your fault, Sophie,” Brion says.

“Yeah and besides, nothing has happened to us, yet, anyways,” Chrissy says. “But Danny...”

“What is wrong with Danny?” I ask.

We all go upstairs to see him and he’s sitting on the floor against the wall. “Danny?” I ask walking slowly around the bed.

“What?” He growls.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

“No, Sophie. I’m really not. Can you just go away?”

“Danny, I am so sorry,” I say. “Please don’t be angry with me.”

“I’m not angry with you, stupid!” he says getting up off the floor. His eyes are green and his teeth are sharp. I just don’t want you to see me this way.”

I cover my mouth in shock. “Oh, Danny!”

“It comes and goes,” he says.

“His body is trying to reject the blood,” Chris says.

“They gave him a mixture of werewolf blood and something else. We are waiting for the blood results to figure out what else. It could take a while.”

“Just leave,” Danny says. “All of you!” He slams the

door behind us.

We go back down to the kitchen and sit with our faces in our hands. “This is all too crazy,” I say with a sigh.

“Pizza anyone?” I ask to get a laugh and it works.

“Let’s see if my powers work as well here in Zoe’s world.” I flick my wand and my favorite pizza appears along with sweet tea. “Yep...still works.” As we eat, everyone is a bit quiet. The morale of our group is going downhill so I decide to start some kind of conversation.

“So if y’all could become a mixture of something else, what would it be?” I ask.

“I think I would be part elf,” Aodan says. “That art of persuasion could come in real handy.”

“Faery...definitely,” Ian says. “Being able to just concentrate on what you want without flicking a wand sounds pretty cool.”

“Wizards can do that,” Chris says. “It just takes practice. Maddox mastered it eventually.”

“And he was how old?” Ian says.

“This is true,” Chris laughs and leans up against the arm of my chair. I still melt when he comes near me.

“Part Dragon,” Alice says. “Even though I am already a mix of nymph,” she laughs.

“Dragon!” Cormac laughs.

“Did you see them...they were awesome,” Alice says.

“Merrow,” Zoe says. “I love to swim.”

“I’d like to have that fire thing that Sophie has,” Deb says with a smirk.

“Technically...that was given to her by Djinn the King of Fire so I don’t think that counts,” Chris says. I stick my tongue at him.

“Well, I still want it.” Deb laughs.

“What about you Matt?” Chris asks. “I’m pretty happy with being part elf and faery, but if I’d have to choose...I’d be human.” He looks at Chrissy and they kiss.

“Aww,” I say. Seeing them kiss makes me smile, but inside I wish it was Chris and I. As I look up at Chris, I get the feeling he is having the same thought. He gives me a little smirk. *God, he drives me crazy.*

“So, Chris, what about you?” Ian says interrupting our gaze.

“Um...” Chris clears his throat and looks away from me. “Faery...I guess,” he says.

“Well...I’m a firm believer in being happy with what you are,” Brion joins in the conversation. “But I’d have to choose dragons too.” He sits down beside Alice on the couch. “They are pretty amazing.” Mom comes and sits on the arm of the couch next to him.

“I would be the elemental spirit Queen of Earth,” Mom says. Cormac spits his drink out.

“That’s a thing,” he says. “I want to be King of Fire then.”

We all laugh as Erik and Gabriel walk in. “What about part Demon?” Erik says holding up a piece of paper and looking upstairs toward where Danny staying.

“Are you sure?” Zoe asks. “How would they even get their hands on Demon blood?”

“Just about anywhere...now days,” Erik says.

“It is either demon blood or—”

“Gabriel there’s no way,” Erik shouts.

“Angel...” Zoe reads their mind.

“Unless you go up to heaven and snatch an angel there is no possible way,” Erik says.

“There are Nephilim out there, Erik,” Gabriel says. “He could be...”

“We don’t know that they even exist,” Erik says. “It is best to assume he is part demon. I don’t even know if it’s possible to change a person into an angel that way. A human couldn’t handle it.”

“What do you mean?” Jen asks.

“A human’s body can barely handle our blood,” Erik says. “What do you think an angel would do?”

“Oh my God,” Jen says.

“There is really only one way to find out,” Gabriel says pulling out his knife. Jen gasps. “Don’t worry,” he assures her. “We just have to make him bleed.”

“Well, let’s go find out,” Erik says. We all start to follow them upstairs and Erik looks behind him.

“Seriously...do we all need to go?”

“Yes,” we say in unison.

“So why does he need to bleed?” Jen asks.

“If he is part demon he will bleed black blood,” Gabriel says.

“What if he is part angel?” Chrissy asks as we squeeze tighter together as we reach the top of the stairs.

“He won’t bleed at all,” Erik says slowly opening the bedroom door. “We are only going on what we’ve heard over the last century.” We all pile in the bedroom squished in like sardines in a tin can and Danny comes out of the bathroom. “Umm...hey guys,” he says.

“What’s up?”

“We just need to check something,” Gabriel says showing Danny his knife. Danny widens his eyes and steps away from Gabriel.

“They just need to see the color of your blood, babe,” Jen tries to ease his mind.

“Okay...why?” he says. “What is going on?”

“Just give me your hand, son,” Gabriel says. “This could be nothing to worry about.”

Danny slowly gives him his hand. “Y’all are freaking me out a bit,” he says. Gabriel slices Danny’s hand.

“Ouch,” he says as red blood comes rushing out.

“I don’t understand,” Erik says.

“Well, maybe the results were wrong,” Zoe says.

“Have you had any more changes?” Erik asks Danny.

“No...nothing, but about an hour ago I started having some pains.”

“Pains?” Gabriel asks, rushing in and checking Danny’s head for fever and looking at his pupils.

“Yeah,” Danny says opening his mouth for Gabriel. “I started sweating and having stomach pains so I went to take a shower. I feel much better now...or I did,” he says looking at his hand.

“Sorry, but we had to be sure,” Gabriel says. “You’re not healing.” He takes Danny’s hand to check it over.

“No and that was the only part of this whole thing that I liked,” Danny says.

“Do you think his body fought it off?” Gabriel turns to Erik with his eyebrows creased.

Erik laughs. “That would take an amazing amount of strength.”

“Well, what other explanation do you have?” Chris says. “He is an incredibly strong human.” Danny turns to Chris and scrunches his nose up at him with a growl. Chris narrows his eyes at Danny.

“What?” Chris says. “Do we have a problem?” Danny glares at him for a moment and with no warning his fist connects with Chris’s jaw. Chris stumbles. “Ah...I just

paid you a compliment.” Chris takes a breath. “All right, does anyone else want to have a go at me?” He raises his hands in the air to surrender. “Free punches all around. Let’s get it over with.” He walks in a circle glaring at everyone. Aodan starts to move forward, but I stop him. “I don’t care what any of you think. I did what I did for Sophie and Christina. I thought they would be better off in the long run. I thought you all would be and to be honest it seems all of you are proving me right. If you all hate me so much, why are you all so angry that I left...or is it that you are all angry that I am back?” He leaves the room slamming the door against the wall as he leaves.

“Okay...anyway,” Erik says continuing the conversation. “Back to the problem at hand.”

I decide to go check on Chris while the others talk. He is on the back porch that is identical to the one in the mortal world. “Are you okay?” I ask.

“Yeah,” he says as he cracks a smile.

I sit down next to him on the porch swing. “You never finished your story earlier,” I say. “Who are we up against and why?”

“Whoever it is, they probably have a variety of creatures we can’t even imagine. We don’t know who to trust at this point.”

“We can trust each other,” Brion says, walking out to

join us. Everyone else comes up behind him. “We will face whatever it is and we will win because we have each other.” A whirlwind of pink dust surrounds Brion. “Oh my...” he says.

“God...what now?” I ask.

“The prisoners have escaped.”

“All of them?” Erik asks.

“Yes.”

“You really need a better system, Brother,” Erik says sarcastically.

“Nobody can release the prisoners except a Faery royal...and we are all here!” Brion says as he vanishes. We all follow him to Faeryland and everyone is in a frenzy. Fires are burning that can’t be put out, buildings are collapsed, and pixie faeries that have been imprisoned forever are out causing mayhem. “It’s pure chaos!” I say. Brion’s eyes get the bluest that I have ever seen them. He roars like a lion. The ground begins to shake as he begins to make a circle motion with his hands. A symbol appears written in fire. It’s the triskelion symbol, the symbol of the three realms. A black swirl appears in the middle of the symbol as Grandfather raises his arms. The wind starts to blow and howl.

“They should have left when they had the chance,” Erik says with a devilish grin. “Watch this,” he bends down

and whispers to me. "I love when he does this."  
The pixie faeries start to move toward the symbol. They try to get away, but the force is too strong. The triskelion sucks them in along with a bunch of other unsavory looking characters. It is amazing watching my grandfather at work. The wind starts to dissipate and his eyes go back to normal. Everyone cheers for the king. "Where did they go?" I ask. Erik points down to the ground. "Hell!" I shout.  
"No," Erik says. "The dungeons."  
"Couldn't he just zap them back," I ask.  
"If they were still here...sure, but what fun is in that," Erik says with a smile. "Sometimes you need to show the people the power you possess so they will have more respect for it."  
"Did you get them all?" Mom asks.  
"Almost," he says.  
"Let me guess," Erik says with a sigh as he struts over to them. "Three are missing."  
"Maeve, Lena, and Cynthia?" I ask.  
"Yes," Grandfather says as he raises his hands again. Everything that was destroyed comes back into place. He stumbles a bit and Mom straightens him up.  
"That was too much magic," she says. "He wore himself out."  
"Here," I say, giving him my hand. Everyone takes my

lead and grabs a hand. My grandfather's eyes widen and glow even brighter than before.

"Wow, thanks," he says. "Much better. Let's get back to the castle."

~

Mom paces in the dining hall. "Mom, what is with you?" I ask.

"That was my job out there," she says.

"What?"

"To fix everything. It is the Queen's job to put the prisoner's back and it's the queen's job to fix what was destroyed."

"But you don't have that kind of power," I say not thinking about my words. "Sorry, Mom...I didn't mean it like that."

"No...I know, but you're not wrong. I don't, even as queen. You saw Brion. He barely had enough power."

"Well, how is your job then?"

"This wouldn't be an issue if I had the staff of Merida," she says.

"The staff of..." I say.

"Merida was the first Queen of Faeryland," Zoe says.

"The first?" I ask.

"Everything has a beginning, Sophie," Grandfather says as he walks in. "And I'm fine...it's no matter." He kisses Mom's cheek.

“No, it does matter,” she says. “What kind of Queen am I?” she sighs.

“The staff is embedded with the magic of the elemental spirits,” Brion explains. “They made it specifically for the Queen of Faeryland. They gave it to Merida when she became queen. It is the most powerful weapon in Faeryland. When Merida died, it was stolen. Of course, nobody else can use the staff. Only the queen can wield the power.”

“How did she die?” I ask.

“My grandmother Evelyn told me the story many times,” he begins. “A sorcerer came one day and tried to take the staff. Merida was about to kill him, but Evelyn came in and the sorcerer grabbed her. He told Merida if she didn’t give him the staff her daughter would die. So she surrendered the staff. The sorcerer killed her shortly after in front of my grandmother. That is when King Niall put up the barriers with the help of the elemental spirits.”

“Nobody can use it,” Mom says. “I don’t even know why they kept it.”

“Probably so the queen can’t have the power,” Brion says.

“It would just take so much off of you if I had it,” she says with a pout and kisses him on the cheek.

I feel for Mom. She wants to help so badly. I wish I

could help in some way...wait. I flick my wand and something comes to me. "Is this it?" I ask, holding some sort of gold scepter in my hand. It has a gigantic green emerald on top.

"Oh my God!" Mom shouts. "How? Where? Oh, never mind, thank you." She hugs me with her smile wider than it has ever been.

"Sophie Ann Mason," Grandfather says. "You surprise yet again."

"Go ahead, Mom," I say. "Try it out." She giggles and tightens her grip on the staff. Closing her eyes, she braces herself. We all wait with anticipation at what this staff can do, but nothing happens. She shakes it off and tries it again, but nothing.

"Maybe there is an on switch," Erik says. Brion narrows his eyes at him. "What?" Erik says innocently. Mom closes her eyes and sighs, biting her jaw. "Excuse me, everyone," she says before she vanishes.

"What is happening?" I ask.

"The staff isn't recognizing your Mom as Queen," Brion says.

"Either that or Merida isn't," Erik says, biting into an apple. He always acts like he doesn't have a care in the world. "And if it doesn't recognize Mary then you know who it will recognize..."

"Maeve," Brion says. "She can never know we have the

staff. Does everyone understand?" We all nod in agreement.

"Maybe I should have left it alone," I say.

"It will be fine," Brion reassures me. "As long as nobody finds out. I better go and check on her."

"Well, that sucks," I say.

"Yeah... a real bummer," Erik says, finishing his apple.

"Can we get these guys back into protective custody now?"

"Erik, why do you always have to be a jerk?" I ask and Chris laughs.

"Look," Erik says, obviously holding in his temper. "I didn't work my butt off keeping these brats safe just so they can die tomorrow."

"I understand, Erik, but I don't think Sophie—"

"He's right," I say.

"What?" Everyone says with shock.

"Erik is right," I repeat.

"Sophie, are you okay?" Ian says.

"Yes, but I think he's right this time. At least until they find out who is doing this."

"Well...okay," Erik sounds shocked that I agreed with him, but isn't taking any chances in me changing my mind. "That's settled."

"Can I tell my daughter goodbye first?" I say with a stern tone. He holds his hands up in surrender. I say a

quick goodbye to Christina. I figure I'll leave her with Mom to cheer her up.

Zoe did a great job on the house. If I didn't know better, I would think I was at the house in the mortal world. "I hope Mom is okay," I say as me and the girls sit in the kitchen drinking coffee. "She was pretty upset."

"Your mom is pretty tough," Jen says. "I'm sure she will be okay."

"Who does this Merida chick think she is anyway? Mom is a great queen and a lot better than Maeve."

"Sophie..." Zoe says, looking like the roof may fall in at any moment. "She is one of the ancestors...please don't make her angry."

"I just wish we knew who was doing this," I say. "Who was close with Maddox? It has to be someone he knew, right? This was his whole idea."

"Not necessarily," Aodan says as he sits down with us. "It could have just struck someone's interest." The rest of the gang come and join us at the table.

"Okay, then why let the prisoners out?" I ask.

"Maybe for a distraction," Alice says.

"No," I say shaking my head. "This has Maeve written all over it. It has to be someone she knows."

"They'd have to be royal though...I don't get it," Zoe says, putting her hands over her face.

“They must have found a way around it,” I say.

“I’m getting a head-ache,” Alice says.

“Yeah...maybe this will help,” I say, zapping up some cookies. I try to change the subject for a while because I can tell everyone is getting frustrated. “So how is Ava doing?”

“Oh she is doing great now,” Alice says. “But she had a rough start after Nina sent her away. This is her last year in college, I believe.”

“That’s awesome,” I say, sipping my coffee and thinking how at least one of my friends is safe and happy.

## 17

### Death

I dream of a gold scepter with a green jewel on top that could catch the lightning from the sky. Mom points it to Maeve, but nothing happens. Maeve laughs as Maddox takes Christina from her grasp. “No!” she yells.

Striking Mom with a ball of fire, Maeve smiles as Mom falls to the ground along with the scepter. Brion runs in the room and she strikes him in the chest. As he falls to the ground, she grabs the scepter. I jump out of bed.

“Christina!”

Chris is there as I jump up. “Sophie,” he says.

“Maeve...”

“I know,” I say. “Mom and Brion...are they...”

“Yes, they are alive,” he replies. “But if she takes that barrier down we are all dead.”

“She won’t...it would put her at risk too. If Maddox is back, he is already headed to Wizardland. Ian!”

“Maeve has Merida’s staff, Sophie,” Chris says with haste. “Unless we get it back...”

“Then let’s get it back,” I reply as Ian and Deb pop in.

“Chris, do you think you can get the Guardians to help?”

“On it,” he says as he vanishes.

“What is it?” Ian asks, grabbing my shoulder to assure I’m okay.

“Maddox is back,” I say as the rest of the gang pile in the room.

“What?” Everyone shouts.

“Maevé has the staff, Mom, and Brion...and Maddox has Christina.” I say. Ian grinds his teeth and clinches his fist. “Ian,” I warn. “Play this smart. You won’t be any help to Christina dead.”

“How is he back?” Cormac asks. “Didn’t we burn his body?”

“I guess they stashed some part of him somewhere,” I say.

“I’m going to rip his heart out,” Ian says. Deb grabs his arm to calm him down.

“Yes, you will,” I say. “But we need a plan first...unless...” I flick my wand hoping this will work, but doubting it at the same time. Christina is instantly in my arms. “Oh my God,” I say. “I can’t believe that just worked.” I squeeze her tight along with Ian. “Okay, now for Mom and Brion.” Chris pops back in. He sees Christina and smiles. “Didn’t work on Mary or Brion?” “Nope,” I say.

“Well, we can handle that part,” he says.

“Did you try to get Merida’s staff back?”

“Yes, nothing,” I say with slumped shoulders.

“Okay...how do we get them back?”

“Yeah, isn’t Merida’s staff like the most powerful weapon in Faeryland history?” Zoe asks.

“Supposedly,” Alice says.

“We need to hurry,” Chris says with impatience. “She is taking over Faeryland as we speak and you know Maddox is doing the same thing in Wizardland.”

I struggle with my thoughts for a moment while pulling my hair and screaming with frustration. I compose myself after a moment. “Okay, guys, message as many faeries and wizards as you can and tell them to get somewhere safe for a while. I don’t want them to get caught up in this.”

“Sophie, we won’t get through this without a fight,” Chris says.

“I know, but I want to keep as many as I can safe.”

“What if they just went to the Land of Elves?” Matt says.

“It would be way too many people, Matt,” I say. “And I don’t want to get the elves involved in another war if we don’t have too.”

“I have a brilliant, beyond brilliant idea,” Zoe says.

“What if we get her to leave Faeryland all together?”

“Well...that would be awesome, but she isn’t going to leave and she still has Merida’s staff,” I say. “We need to get close to her.”

“She won’t expect Nina,” Alice says.

“I don’t know...I don’t want to put Nina in danger,” I say.

“Sophie!” Aodan says. “I just received word from Faeryland. We are too late. She’s already assumed the throne. She’s taken prisoners and...” He hesitates.

“And what?”

“They’ve taken over Wizardland as well. They told the council that we ran away like cowards.”

“What?”

“They’ve already been through the ancestors.”

“And they are letting them get away with it?” I ask.

“I don’t know...I don’t get it either,” he says. “But Sophie, there is something else...they plan on killing the King and Queen tonight.” He places his hand on my shoulder as I gasp.

“Well, we know that is a trap waiting,” Deb says.

“Yep,” Chris says. “And they will have an army of multiples waiting for us.”

“What do you want to do?” Ian asks.

“Zoe what did you have in mind?” I ask, pulling my hair back with irritation and impatience. This whole thing is so beyond messed up. For three years, nothing

has happened and now it seems everything is going to hell.

“If someone can get a hold of her and take her to a false reality...” Zoe says.

“Like the one here?” I ask.

“Yes, I can make it appear exactly as Faeryland. She won’t even know she has left. If you can get Merida’s staff from her...I can seal her in forever.”

“That sounds great, but what about Maddox?” Ian asks.

“And we also have to worry about Cynthia, Lena, and the army of multiples,” Alice states.

“Okay, Zoe,” I say, trying not to sound to overwhelmed. “Go ahead and make the other reality and I’ll go find Nina. If Nina can get to her...I can do the rest. When I get back we can deal with Maddox the same way.”

“Sophie...” Ian says gripping my arm with worry.

“I’ll be fine,” I reassure him. “I’ll stay out of sight. Besides, I’m not going to die anytime soon.” I bend down and give Christina a kiss goodbye. “Y’all stay here, please. My future has been seen, but y’all are still in danger.”

“Sophie, you could still be hurt, so be careful,” Alice says.

“I will,” I say as I turn to Chris and give him a smile.

“I won’t be far behind,” he says as he strokes my cheek.

“Good,” I say. “Just be careful.”

~

I sneak in through the dungeon first to check on Mom and Brion, but I don't see them. I have never seen the dungeon so full of people. “Where are the king and Queen?” I ask a woman who I recognize because she owns one of the shops in town. With frightened eyes, she points upstairs. I sigh with frustration. I actually thought it would be as easy as popping them back to the other reality. I start to head upstairs. “Wait,” the woman asks. “Are you getting us out?”

“That's the plan,” I say. “I'll be back for y'all.”

“Okay, be careful Queen Sophie,” she says with a weak, sympathetic smile.

“Thank you,” I reply and pop into Nina's quarters and she's on the couch crying. I run to her and put my arm around her. “Nina, are you okay?”

She jumps with surprise. “Lady Sophie, what are you doing?” She jumps off the couch and starts pacing.

“She will kill you. You must go now.”

“Nina, I need your help,” I say with haste. She looks at me with swollen eyes.

“I'm sorry, my lady,” she says, “but it is just too late.” Her eyes widen as she looks through me.

“What is it?” I ask.

“Hello, again,” A cold voice says from behind me.

“Lena,” I say, grinding my teeth. I flick my wand and send Nina to the other reality so she will be safe. She isn’t going to be able to help me now anyway. I send the prisoners as well. Hopefully, I still have access to the cells. I turn around, but before I can strike her with my wand she hits me over the head and I black out.

~

I wake up tied to a pole in town square with what is left of Faeryland as witnesses. Looking to my left, I see Mom tied up and I look to my right to find Brion as well. They both look frail. “Mom,” I cry. “What did she do to you?” She smiles weakly.

“Oh baby,” she cries. “I love you so much.”

“She’s poisoned us, my dear,” Brion says as he coughs. “It won’t kill us here, but it makes us very weak. All she has to do is send us to the mortal world and we will die instantly.”

“Just use your magic, Grandfather. You are still a king.”

“I’m afraid I am too weak,” he says. “The ropes were made from Merida’s staff... I would be no match for her anyway if I could get free.” He closes his eyes and sighs with defeat.

“She poisoned you too,” Mom says. “I’m not surprised it didn’t work. Honey, you are strong enough to get

free. Get out of here. Take Christina somewhere safe.”

Brion smiles because he knows I am not going to listen.

“Well, well,” Maeve says, appearing in front of me.

“The family is all here...except for one. We will find her soon enough. Maddox and I have plans for her.”

“I’m going to kill you!” I scream as I fight against the ropes.

“First let’s see if your folks here share your immunity to death,” she says waving her hand in the air.

“No,” I shout, giving them one last look before they vanish.

“Ah...” I scream and flames instantly set me free from the ropes. My wand immediately comes back to me.

Maeve laughs and points Merida’s staff in my direction. As the green light streaks toward me, I hold up my wand and fire meets the green glow of the staff. I press harder trying to dim her light. She presses harder as well. We both struggle to hold our power as my friends show up. A war begins.

The Guardians begin to kill Maeve’s army of multiples and she gets a familiar look on her face...the look of defeat. Glaring at the crowd, she growls and then turns to me, pursing her lips. Her eyes go dark and she disappears. The fighting stops and swords lower to the ground. The multiples surrender and actually look relieved about it. “That can’t be it,” Cormac says. “That

was way too easy.” His neck snaps and I gasp. He falls to the ground along with the rest of my friends.

I look up at the top of the hill and see Maeve glowering down at everyone. “He’s right,” she says and vanishes to appear in front of the crowd with Lena and Cynthia by her side. They walk toward me with confidence. I’m speechless as I glance back to my friends on the ground. She notices my sadness as I look at them. Smirking at me, she raises her staff. “No!” I cry, but think quickly and zap them back to Alice’s house to heal.

“Now you are all alone, my dear,” she says. “Nobody is coming to rescue you anymore. Everyone you love is dead.”

“Not everyone,” I say flicking my wand and vanishing back to Zoe’s world. Deb runs in and gasps. “Sophie, what happened?” I run into her arms and cry. I feel a hand on my shoulder. As I turn around, Chris pulls me into his chest.

“I couldn’t get to them in time,” Zoe says. “I could only reach Chris. I read her mind, but I only had time to grab Chris’s hand and leave.”

“You did the right thing, Zoe,” Chris says. “If you hadn’t left we would be dead too.”

“It’s okay, guys,” I say. “I got to them before she could send them to the mortal realm. “I sent them to Alice’s

house to heal.”

“Oh, thank God!” Zoe says with her hand to her chest.

Jen, Danny, and Chrissy come down the stairs. “Oh my God!” Jen says. “Are y’all okay? Where is everyone else?”

Chrissy looks around the room. “Where is Matt?” she asks.

“We had to split up,” Chris says. “Half went with Sophie and the others went to Wizardland.

“What?” I say. “They should have waited!”

“They should have been back by now,” Deb says. She stops pacing and frowns at Chris with worry. Then looks to me. The worry lines on her forehead growing by the second. I flick my wand, sharing her concern, and Ian and Matt appear... beaten, bloody, and broken. “How many Guardians were lost?” I ask. Chris pulls me back in for comfort.

“All of them,” Ian says.

“Erik and Gabriel too?” I ask, my mind muddled with the thought that all of them could be gone. “No,” I say, escaping Chris’s clutch, refusing to believe that any of this is happening. “This isn’t how this ends, people!”

“Sophie, we can’t write our own ending...” Chris says as he tries to pull me close again.

“No, Chris,” I say, pushing him away. “I will not give up and I will fight to the death if I have to.”

“Okay...” He sighs. “I’m with you then,” he says.

“Sophie,” Zoe says, still wiping tears from her eyes.

“There is nothing more we can do. Look around us. We have lost everything.”

“I am looking around,” I say as a smile starts to creep into the corner of my mouth. Zoe’s eyes widen at the thought in my head.

“Sophie, are you okay?” Ian asks.

“No,” Zoe says after reading my thought. “Are you crazy? That goes against everything we believe!”

“If they can do it...why can’t we?” I ask.

“Sophie, I don’t have that kind of power,” Zoe says as everyone looks at us, confused.

“What are we talking about?” Chris asks.

“Sophie wants to raise the dead,” Zoe says.

“Why not?” I ask as they all give me the usual look they have when they think I’ve lost my mind. “Guys we can do this. I can’t accept that they are all gone...I just can’t and I know y’all don’t want to either. I say if the other side isn’t following the rules, maybe we shouldn’t either.”

“Are we really talking about raising the dead?” Matt says.

“I guess so,” Ian smiles.

“Great,” I say. “So Ian and Matt, I need you to find me druids, seers, elemental spirits...I want everyone here,

even the ancestors.”

“That is a tall order,” Ian says. “You can’t just call them on the phone.”

“I don’t care how, but we have to get them here,” I say. He nods and they vanish.

“Zoe, I need you to contact every mortal witch you can find and get them here as well.” She nods in agreement.

“And go by the cemetery...we might as well do this big. Danny I need you to go with.”

“Sophie, even if we do get everyone back...” Chris says. “I’m afraid it still won’t be enough. There are too many of them and they can heal fast.”

“How is that possible?” I ask.

“I’m not sure,” he says. “Werewolf...probably. They have amazing healing capabilities...even in the mortal world. If they injected a bit in everyone...”

“Like Jen and Chrissy?” I ask.

“Yes, maybe enough to heal, but not to change,” he replies.

“What about Danny then?” I ask.

“Whatever Danny is now...it’s dormant. He could be normal forever.”

“Okay, well let’s get the team back together.” I take hold of his hand and he kisses it. “Think about the Guardians and I’ll do the rest.” I flick my wand and the room is filled with death. Everyone is piled high in the

living room. “Deb, can you do me a favor?” I ask with widened eyes at what I am seeing. “Can you keep Christina upstairs for a while?”

“Of course,” she says.

“We will go up with them,” Chrissy says with a crumpled nose, pulling Jen up the stairs.

“Maybe we should have a better presentation for the ancestors,” I say, biting my lip and trying not to look at Mom and Brion lying motionless on the floor.

“And a better aroma,” Chris says.

“Well, let’s go get our friends back first,” I say.

“We better before Maeve gets to them,” he says.

We pop into Alice’s house and her parents run to me in a panic. “Sophie, what is happening?” Selena asks.

“Maeve...she killed Grandfather and Mom and then snapped everyone’s neck, but I thought quickly enough to get them out of there. How are they?”

“Still healing...” Mr. McGregor says as his eyes fall to his daughter.

“Well maybe we can help,” I say, nodding at my friends.

“Let’s do this,” Matt says. “I love being able to do it, but I hate we have to keep doing it.”

“I know exactly what you mean,” Chris says.

Selena runs to look out the window. “Well whatever you are doing, do it fast,” she says. “Maeve is here.”

“What?” Zoe runs to look. “Crap. I’ll take care of—”

“No,” Selena says. “They need you to help. I’ll keep her busy.”

“Selena, there are way too many of them!” I say.

“I’ll help,” Mr. McGregor says. “Just heal our daughter and get them all to safety.”

They both give me a pleading glance before they vanish. “Okay,” I say. “We have to hurry.” We run to surround our friends and hold hands. Our light shines through the house. I can hear Maeve’s voice, but I refocus my concentration on my friends. After a few minutes they all gasp for air. I quickly run to the window and see a remarkable sight. There are multiples everywhere. Every time one rushes toward the house Selena motions to a tree. The roots come up out of the ground. They grab the multiples and toss them miles away into the river. Their screams are loud. Everyone joins me at the window. Maeve is watching with wonder as Selena fights them off, but I can’t understand why she is waiting to strike. “Okay...Selena,” Maeve says. “You’ve made your point.” Looking toward us, she sneers. “It looks like Sophie has her friends back now.” Selena turns her head and as she is distracted, Maeve points the scepter at her.

“No!” Mr. McGregor yells as Selena’s roots begin to burn. The forest is on fire and so is Selena. Maeve

cackles as she falls to the ground in pain.

“Mom!” Alice shouts, trying to run to her.

“Alice, no,” I say. “She will just kill us all.”

“I will kill everyone you love, Sophie,” Maeve yells.

“Just leave before you have nobody left.” She vanishes

along with what is left of the multiples. We run outside

to Mr. McGregor, leaning over Selena’s burned body.

We slowly approach, but before we can say anything a

presence forces us to the ground. We can’t see

anything, but a form of a woman. It is too bright for us

to see any kind of features. She leans down to touch

Selena. “My dear precious friend,” she says.

“Awaken.” She kisses her on the forehead and her

burned body starts to come back to life. We sit in

silence and watch this astonishing act taking place. The

trees that were burned up are also coming back to life,

greener and brighter than they were before. Selena

opens her eyes and Mr. McGregor gasps.

“Thank you, Jessica,” he bows. The form strokes his

face and places Selena in his arms. We are suddenly

back in Zoe’s world.

## 18

### **The Ancestors**

“What time did they say they would be here?” I ask Chris as I scrub the counters clean until the paint comes off.

“You know there really is no sense in cleaning when there are a bunch of dead bodies in the living room, right?” he says.

“I know, but it’s a nervous habit,” I say.

“Yes...I know,” he says, smiling.

“They will be here...right about now,” Ian says as he walks in. I can feel the air get a bit thinner from all the people. “Sophie, this is the seer Annabelle and the druid Adam.”

“Nice to meet you,” I say.

“Christina come back here,” Deb yells, chasing Christina down the stairs. Everyone stops as they pass through the room.

“Christina, sweetheart, go back upstairs,” I say, reaching for her arm. She ignores my order, dodging me as she goes up to Annabelle.

“Hi there, Christina,” says Annabelle, bending down with a smile. Christina holds up her hand as to give her

a high five and Annabelle returns the gesture. A small, timid light shines from both their palms. “Wow,” Annabelle says surprised by Christina’s ability. “Thank you, Christina,” Annabelle says. Christina returns to Deb’s arms.

“I’m sorry, Sophie,” Deb says. “She just ran down here without warning.”

“It’s okay, but can you take her back upstairs before the meeting starts,” I say. “I don’t want her to be around all of this death.”

“I’ll see you again soon,” Annabelle says, waving goodbye to Christina. I give Annabelle a questioning look and she smiles. “She showed me some things to come. Though her visions aren’t too clear yet, they are quite impressive.”

“Okay...we definitely need to talk again after this,” I say.

“A lot of death,” Aodan says. “You know the ancestors will not agree to what you are asking.”

“They have to,” I say. Adam and Annabelle smile, close their eyes, and take in a breath.

“The Spirits are here,” Adam says.

“Where?” I look around the room.

“They won’t show themselves, but they are here,” Annabelle says. She nods and smiles at their presence. All of a sudden, the ancestors appear. There are four of

them that appear in a mist of fog in the middle of the room. They are sitting down on what look like thrones. The four of them are dressed for a ball with gold accessories and crowns with emerald and ruby gems. They are beautiful. I am a bit intimidated and I jump as one of them speaks.

“What is the meaning of this meeting?” the older man says.

“For those of you who have never met the ancestors,” Adam says. “To your left we have King Niall.” My eyes widen at his name. He is the very first King of Faeries. “Then we have Queen Merida, his wife, and their children Ardon and Evelyn.” They all nod with dry stares, except Queen Merida. She glares at me with impatience. I swallow hard and try to work up some courage to face these ancient beings.

“You might as well come forward, child,” Merida says.

“And tell us why we are here.”

I hesitate, but pull myself together and move forward.

“We need your help,” I say.

“It is too late,” Niall says. “King Brion is dead and a leader must step up and be recognized and Maeve has already claimed it.

“She murdered my family,” I say.

“No matter, she is still Queen. Those are the rules of war, Sophie.” I lose my temper and fire comes from my

fingertips. The brat comes out in me again and I begin to lose control. I know I need to be respectful towards these people, but the fire won't contain itself any longer.

"This is your fault," I yell at Merida. "If you would have accepted my mother as queen, this wouldn't be happening." I fold my arms over my chest to wait for her reply.

She sighs and gives King Niall an exhausted look. "It isn't I who chooses the queen, my dear, it is the scepter."

"But why would it choose Maeve?" Aodan asks. "She's like psycho."

"There is nothing more we can do here," Merida says.

"Yes, there is," I say. "Help us fight. If we can bring back those we lost in the last fight..."

"Raise the dead?" King Niall shouts.

"We can't fight them alone," I say.

"I'm sorry, but that goes against everything we believe," King Niall says. "If we start raising people from the dead now... where would it end?"

I understand what he is saying, but it has to be done. "It didn't stop them." I say. "Maeve raised Maddox!"

"Not with our approval," Merida says.

"Exactly," I say. "She doesn't respect your decisions or your traditions. What do you think will happen to you if

she reigns?” I have driven them speechless and they debate among themselves for a moment.

“I’ll support her decision,” King Breccan says as he moves through the crowd toward me.

“Breccan, you can’t be serious,” Ardon says.

“Why not? Maddox will eventually destroy Wizardland again,” Breccan says. “He has no sense of tradition, but she does.” He points to me and gives a smile. “She is the most impressive queen I’ve ever seen.”

Merida presses her lips in a hard line and sighs. She looks to Niall and he shrugs his shoulders in defeat.

“Very well,” she says. “We have a feeling this will happen with or without our approval anyway so—”

“We did want your approval, but that isn’t why we asked you here,” I say. They stare silently at me and Merida wrinkles her nose in confusion.

“Then why are we here?” she asks.

“We want you to fight by our side. Let us raise y’all as well.”

“Sophie, we do not belong in your world any longer,” she says.

“Yes, but if we can raise all of you...” I sigh as she folds her arms in frustration. “Surely all of you are stronger than one staff.”

“There is no way to destroy the staff, my dear,” Merida says. “The only way is to take back the power.”

“Give Mom a chance Merida,” I say.

“It’s up to her, I’m afraid,” Merida says with doubt.

“Mary, from what I’ve noticed, gives up way too easily. She lacks the heart of a queen.”

“You are wrong,” I say.

“We shall find out,” Merida says. “We will help all we can in the fight, but essentially it will be up to Mary to save Faeryland. The seer will show you to our resting place. Good luck, Queen Sophie.” They disappear and I turn to Breccan. Annabelle will show you to ours as well,” he says. “See you soon.” He vanishes and I turn to Annabelle.

“Okay, let’s get started,” I say rubbing my hands together.

“I’m afraid it won’t be that simple,” she says.

“I didn’t think it would be that simple,” I say with a laugh. “We are raising the dead.”

“I mean the ancestors...” she says.

“Well, they showed you where to go, right?”

“Yes and you won’t be able to use your magic once you go through the veil,” she says.

“Veil?” Zoe says. “Sophie...this sounds like all kinds of bad.”

Chris grabs my shoulder. “She’s right,” he says.

“Maybe we can try without the ancestors.”

“Without them you will fail,” Annabelle says.

“Thanks a lot,” Chris says. Annabelle shrugs her shoulders.

“So what am I in for?” I ask.

“Don’t you mean what are we in for?” Chris says. “I’m not letting you go alone.”

“If you go into the veil, Chris,” Annabelle says, “you will lose your powers too. You won’t be any help.”

“You sure know how to make a guy feel special, don’t you?” Chris asks. She gives him a weak smile. “I’m still going.”

“Well then...shall we?” she says, holding out her hands.

“Let me go and say goodbye to Christina.”

~

“Christina?” I walk into the bedroom and hear Deb and Christina laughing in the bathroom. “We’re in the bathroom,” Deb says with a giggle. I can’t help but smile as I walk in. Christina giggles as she blows bubbles in the air. “She loves her bubble baths.”

“Deb, thanks for everything you’ve done,” I say.

“No problem, Sophie,” she replies.

“I mean, everything...after Chris. You took care of Christina when I couldn’t so thank you.”

“It was my pleasure, Sophie.” She smiles and goes back to playing with Christina. “So what is going on down there?”

“We got the ancestors to agree,” I say.

“That’s good news,” she says.

“Yeah,” I say crossing my arms over my chest, sighing.

“But now I have to go through some sort of veil to get a piece of their remains so we can bring them back to life.”

“Oh, that sounds lovely,” she replies.

“Chris is going with me though and we have to leave like now,” I say. “So I just wanted to come up and say goodbye.”

“Okay, but Sophie...” she hesitates and bites her lip.

“Yeah?” I ask.

“Just try to forgive Chris,” she says.

“Don’t I always?” I laugh and lean down to give Christina a kiss. As I kiss her cheek she gives me a vision of Chris falling into a dark pit. Our eyes meet as he vanishes into the darkness. I jump and gasp, but realize I might upset Christina if I get upset.

“What?” Deb asks.

“Nothing,” I say. “Christina, you be good and I’ll be back soon.”

I motion for Deb to follow me out for a moment. “She gave me a vision,” I say, swallowing the knot in my throat.

“What did you see?” she asks.

“Chris’s death.”

“Are you sure?” Deb’s covers her mouth with her hand.  
I nod.

~

Chris notices meets me as I am running down the stairs.

“Are you ready?” he asks.

“You can’t go, Chris,” I say. I try and run past him.

“What?” He asks, grabbing my arm.

“What is going on?” Annabelle asks.

“Sophie,” Chris pulls me closer, his eyes blazing.

“What is it?”

“Christina showed me a vision.” The look in Chris’s eye tells me that he knows it’s about him.

“What was it?” Annabelle asks.

“I saw Chris die,” I say as a fountain of tears begin to form.

“Oh...” he says. How?”

“I saw you fall,” I say wiping my eyes.

“That doesn’t necessarily mean that I die, Sophie,” he laughs the impending doom off as he helps me wipe the last tear away.

“It was dark and it was deep,” I say.

“No matter,” he says as brave as ever. “I’m going with you; besides, if I die you can just bring me back with the others.”

“Chris,” Annabelle says. “If you die in the veil, you won’t be coming back. Magic won’t work in the veil. If

you fall too deep, she will never find your body to bring it back.”

“Great,” Chris says with the sarcasm I have missed so much and I do not want to lose it again. “I’m still going,” he says, noticing my reluctance.

“I’m sorry to say, but if your daughter has seen this there is no escaping it. This will happen.”

“Let’s just not worry about it until the time comes,” he says.

“He’s right,” Annabelle says. “We need to get this done now.”

“Zoe!” I yell.

“Yeah,” she shouts from across the room.

“Go ahead and start the spells,” I say. “I’ll be back soon, and Ian,” I shout.

“Yeah,” he looks my way concerned.

“Don’t go to Wizardland until I return...please.”

“I promise...but please be careful,” he says.

I give him a nod and hold out my hands for Chris and Annabelle. “Okay, let’s do this.”

## 19

### The Quest

We arrive in an overgrown, insect infested jungle. “Oh God!” I say, slapping the mosquitoes away. “Where are we... a swamp?”

“We are in the undiscovered territory of Thailand,” Annabelle says.

“I will never complain about mosquitoes in Georgia ever again,” I say.

“The veil is through the waterfall just behind this brush,” she says clearing the brush with the wave of her hand. I immediately grab Chris’s hand as the waterfall appears. “You have to pass through the waterfall to enter the veil. Your magic will instantly leave you. Are you two ready for this?” We turn to her with raised eyebrows. “Sorry...stupid question,” she says. “Good luck.” We walk up the hill to a huge cavern. We are high above ground now. Chris looks over the falls.

“That is a long way down,” he says as he gulps. “So we just walk through hoping we don’t plummet?” “I guess,” I say. “Chris...” I say grabbing his hand. “I’m not ready to lose you again.” He pulls me close to him and caresses my cheek.

“And I am not ready to leave, but we are going to do this together...until we can’t...no matter what. Just remember, beautiful, that I will always love you.” I begin to cry at his words. “I am so sorry for what I put you through. I can’t believe I wasted three years. We could have...” He grabs me tighter and kisses me. Stopping to catch his breath, he struggles not to cry. “I just wanted you and Christina to be happy...I thought Ian could give you more.”

“Hey,” I say, tilting his head back toward me. “Did you really think I wouldn’t forgive you? You know me better than that.” We hold each other tighter and closer than we ever have. “Let’s not waste another minute,” I say. He doesn’t hesitate to pick me up and carry me inside the cavern. I have waited it seems like an eternity for this moment and I know we have end-of-the-world stuff happening right now, but this may actually be the last chance we have; so I’m taking it.

~

Chris strokes my back with his finger and lightly kisses my shoulder. “Hey,” he says. “We better get going. We’ve wasted a lot of time.”

“That definitely was not a waste of time,” I say with a chuckle.

“Time with you is never a waste,” he says, stroking my hair. “I just wish we had more of it. It’s not fair.”

“No...it’s not,” I say with a sigh.

“I love you,” he whispers in my ear. “Okay, get up,” he says slapping me on the leg. “The fate of our worlds depend on us.”

“That is a scary thought,” I say as he pulls me up. I squeeze his hand tight, not wanting to let go.

“Stop focusing on losing me,” he says, brushing the hair out of my face. My bottom lip quivers. “Start focusing on saving our worlds...for Christina.” I nod and swallow the all too familiar knot forming in my throat. We both take a deep breath and walk to the waterfall. “Here goes nothing,” he says, grabbing my hand. “Ready?” Before I can answer, he pulls me close to him and jumps through the waterfall. We both gasp as we land on dry ground. “Well that wasn’t a good feeling at all,” he says.

“That was like freefalling about a hundred feet down,” I say.

“Is that what it felt like? Good to know,” he says with a sigh. He notices that I did not think his joke was funny. “I’m just kidding.” He straightens himself up from holding his stomach and takes a breath. “Let’s go.” We go further inside the enormous cavern and see about a million stars above us.

“Wow,” I say. “How are we seeing stars right now if we are inside?”

“I don’t think those are stars,” Chris says as he grabs my hand. “Those are bats.” We duck as one swoops down.

“Those aren’t regular bats!” I shriek, letting the others know of our intrusion. The rest of the enormous size bats fly down and we both reach for our wands out of habit. With widened eyes we decide to hold on to each other and duck for cover.

“This way,” Chris says as he drags me through a corridor of the cave. When we are in the clear we catch our breath.

“Good God!” I say.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yeah...you?”

“No,” he says, breathing heavily and making me laugh.

“I’m glad that I can still amuse you. Where to now?”

“My guess,” I say spotting a huge wooden door with a latch on it. “Through there.”

We inspect the door, but there is no way to open it.

“How do we get through?” Chris asks. “It’s locked.”

“Well, you know how to pick a lock,” I say.

“Yeah...with a wand,” he says rolling his eyes at me. I sigh with annoyance.

“We depend on our magic way too much,” I say.

“Maybe we should just knock,” he says with a smirk as he knocks on the door. The latch opens. “What the...”

We both narrow our eyes. “Well sarcasm comes in handy sometimes I guess.”

As we begin to walk through the door a woman blocks the entrance. She is glowing like the form we saw at Alice’s house. “Welcome,” she says. “We have been expecting you.”

“We?” I ask.

“My brothers and I,” she says.

“You’re...” Chris says, backing away a bit.

“Chris, what is it?” I ask as his face goes pale.

“She’s the Queen of Earth...” he gulps. “Jessica.”

“But I thought elemental spirits never showed themselves?”

“When it is necessary,” she says. I keep an eye on Chris as he looks sick to his stomach.

“Chris...are you okay?” I ask.

“Oh...he’s just worried about the rumors,” she says.

“Rumors?”

“Boy...this one doesn’t get out much, does she?”

Jessica asks Chris, but he is still frozen. “The rumors that you will die if you see an elemental in human form.”

“Really...so it isn’t true then,” I ask.

“No,” she says and Chris exhales. “Not always.” She smirks at Chris. “I am here to give you the first challenge of your quest.”

“If the ancestors know how big of a deal this is, why are they making us jump through hoops?”

“Who says that it’s the ancestors doing?” Jessica says.

“These things can’t just be handed to you. They have to be earned.”

“Maeve seems to be getting her way,” I say and Chris shoves me for being disrespectful.

She purses her lips. “You can’t win every battle you face, Sophie,” she says. “There will be loss and heartache. That is what makes life so precious.” She grabs my chin like Mom always did. I get a bit misty, but realize quickly that she is part of the reason I am here. I am going to bring her back...I’m going to bring them all back. “Every challenge will lead you to an ancestor. Take only what you will need.”

“So, what first?” I ask.

“The first challenge will seal your fate. Whether to die or to wait. One shall fall so the other can rise and they shall gain the awaited prize. This challenge will take you to the next door where my brother will tell you more.” She moves away from the door and we walk through, hesitant as we check our surroundings. “Good luck,” she says as she vanishes. The door shuts and locks behind us making us jump. Chris grabs my hand and squeezes. After taking a breath, we proceed to walk

down the dark corridor. My feet kick up dust as I stop suddenly.

“What is it?” Chris asks.

“Do you hear water?” I ask.

“Yeah,” he says. “And it’s getting a bit colder too.”

Torches light up as we turn the corner and we gasp as a gust of wind blows over us. “Let’s keep going.” We come to an opening. Torches light up the entire cavern and we can see how massive this place is. It goes for miles up...and down. “Seriously,” I say as my jaw drops. A long wooden bridge stretches over the vast canyon below. Looking down over the edge, we both gulp.

“Well...that doesn’t look safe, does it?” he says with a sigh.

“Wait,” I say, remembering the limerick Jessica said.

“What?”

“Remember she said, ‘choose to die or choose to wait’,” I say. “There has to be another—”

“No, Sophie,” Chris says. “There isn’t another way.”

He moves in and grazes my lip. “This will happen no matter how long we put it off. We need to do this now.”

“I’m not ready to lose you again,” I plead. His lips touch mine passionately and I shiver thinking about how this could be the last time our lips ever touch again.

“You can do this,” he says. He grabs my hand and we start to walk along the unstable wooden bridge. I pull his hand back, hesitant to walk on the death trap. He smirks at me, knowing I’m going to be stubborn about this. “Okay...ladies first,” he says pushing me out in front of him.

“Fine,” I say. “But let’s get off as soon as possible.” “Agreed,” he says, following close behind me. When we are about half-way across one of the ropes snap. “Hold on, Sophie!” Chris shouts and the other rope breaks as well. I hold on to one of the wooden slats, my heart pounding and my brain wanting to grab my wand. “Sophie, hold on to the rope,” he says. I quickly do as I am told and we hit the wall hard. My fingers slip one by one. I screech as I fall, but Chris catches me and pulls me back up. As soon as I grab the rope, he loses his grip and grabs one of the wooden slats. He takes a breath and looks up to make sure I’m safe.

“I’m good,” I say.

“Okay, start climbing up, beautiful.” As I begin my ascent he climbs up to meet me. “Hold on tight to the rope,” he says, reaching for one himself, but as he does the slat breaks. I grab his shirt before he falls and he reaches for another slat, but it breaks too. He reaches for the rope, groaning in aggravation. “I can’t reach it!” he says.

“Chris, you’re slipping...I can’t hold on,” I scream.

“Sophie,” he says calmly. “Let me go.” I gaze into his green eyes as I feel my fingers slipping again. “You have to let me go.” He notices my grip sliding.

“I can’t,” I cry.

“You have to!” he shouts. “If you fall...our worlds fall. Our people will be lost forever! Christina will be lost forever!”

“No!” I scream grinding my teeth.

“Sophie...look at me,” he says with a softer tone. As I look down at my true love, I know what is about to happen. “I love you,” he says and he notices my grip slipping further. “Sophie, let—”

I let him go and watch his green eyes widen and fall into the darkness. “I’m so sorry, Chris,” I cry. I can’t believe I just let him go. The rope I’m holding onto starts to snap so I grab the other and continue to climb. Using the last of my strength, I reach the top and as I fall to the ground the bridge collapses into the darkness to meet the same fate as Chris. I catch my breath and look up to see a concrete coffin. “An ancestor,” I say. I slowly examine the name, “Merida.” Pushing the heavy lid away, I see her remains. Carefully, I grab her hand and place it in my satchel. “One down, three to go.” *I can’t believe I let him go. Why did I let him go...I*

*should have fallen with him...No, I had to save our worlds...Christina's world.*

I take a breath and push my emotions down for now. I have to finish these challenges or Chris's death will mean nothing. I run to the next door and as I knock a man appears. "Hello, Sophie," he says as the wind blows all around me.

"King of wind?" I ask.

"Yes," he says. "A pleasure to meet you."

"You as well," I bow my head.

"Congratulations on completing your first challenge. You have earned the right to continue to the next."

"Great," I say, lowering my head and thinking of Chris.

"Don't think about your loss," he says. "Think about why you're here." I begin to tear up, but quickly dry my eyes.

"What is next?" I ask.

"It won't be easy," he says. "You are very powerful with your given powers, Sophie, but you need to learn how powerful you can be without them. Good luck," he says.

"What, no rhyme?" I chuckle.

"Would it make this easier?" He smirks.

"No," I say with a sigh.

“How about this,” he says. “Your challenge awaits beyond the door and survival is your only chore.” He moves aside so I can enter.

“That helped a lot...thanks.” Pressing my lips in a hard line, I walk through the door. I remember that is the look my mom used to give me when I was being sarcastic with her. My thoughts wander as I walk down the corridor. I wonder if Zoe has brought them back yet. “Sophie,” the king of wind shouts. “Don’t lose your focus.” I nod in understanding. “Good luck,” he says before vanishing. The door shuts hard and echoes through the corridor. The latch locking send chills down my spine.

Goosebumps pop up on my neck as the torches light up the corridor. A gust of wind blows my hair back and a knot forms in my stomach. Swallowing hard, I walk slowly, waiting for something to jump out at me. My palms begin to sweat and the fact that I have no powers is hitting me hard so I start to panic. As I turn to walk the other way toward the door, the image of Chris falling plays over in my head. I feel puddles forming on my cheeks and hear his voice in my ear. “Keep going,” he says. “Don’t give up.” Focusing back on my destination, I breathe deeply and saunter towards whatever lies ahead.

Walking along the dirt path, I notice the stone walls are dripping water. It seems I have been walking for miles, but as I turn a corner I see the next ancestor waiting for me. The name on the stone gleams in gold light. “Evelyn.” A stream runs in front of the coffin and I look to the left and then to the right. “This looks way too easy,” I say, narrowing my eyes. “Okay... here goes nothing.” I run to jump over the stream, but as I take the leap, something rises out of the water. My eyes widen as I clutch my satchel and land on the other side beside the coffin. The slick, black monster slithers over to me and the torch light reflects in its dark black eyes. They stare at me for a moment, but I quickly look to Evelyn’s coffin to see how far away she is and his tale whips around knocking me off my feet. This thing has incredible speed and he wraps his thick body around me, tightening every second. I gasp for air as he squeezes harder, but I am able to ease one of my arms out of its grasp. I can hardly breathe now and all I can do is wait to hear my bones crack. As Evelyn’s coffin begins to blur, I recognize that I have failed. Just when everything seems like its fading away I get what I think is a brilliant idea at first, but then think how ridiculous I am for not thinking of it sooner. I roll my eyes as I struggle for enough breath to give me the strength I need to grab the torch that has been over my head since

the fight with this monster began. Grabbing the torch, I light the serpents back on fire. It shrieks and squirms wildly and finally falls over the edge of the stream. I listen until its screams vanish. I take a quick and much needed breath and then work my way to Evelyn.

The lid on the coffin is heavy and all my energy is drained from fighting that crazy snake thing. I scream with annoyance as I try to lift the lid, wondering if the spirits are listening or even watching me right now. "A little help would be appreciated," I yell. The wind picks up as I try to push the lid once more and it finally moves, revealing Evelyn's remains. "Thank you," I say, exhausted. I grab her skull, put it in my satchel, and run to the next door."

"Well done," a different man says as he appears in front of the door. As I stare at him, I feel a pull or tug on my body telling me to get closer to him. He's very young to be an elemental. He is about my age and very handsome. "You have turned into a remarkable young lady, Sophie," he says. "You were just a baby the last time we met." His eyes flicker with fire.

"You're the fire king," I say.

"Yes," he says as he catches on fire. "And you are a part of me." He grins at me as I back away. "Do you feel the connection?"

“Ah...” My mind goes blank and my stomach does flips.

“You know I don’t do that spell for many...well I’ve never done that spell actually. You’re mom and dad were the first.” I continue to gaze at him with wonder.

“I wasn’t going to go through with it, but...” he gives me a wink. “I haven’t had any regrets so far.” He comes closer and I flinch. “Don’t worry,” he says with a chuckle. “It’s only the connection between us.” He grabs my shoulder and I shiver. “You are without a doubt fated for another.” My shoulders slump thinking of Chris. I thought he and I were fated...but I guess I was wrong.

“I don’t believe in fate anymore,” I say.

“You should,” he says. “She believes in you, but she can be a real bitch at times.” He flinches as if someone just smacked him in the head. “But at times she can be your best friend. Are you ready for your last challenge?”

“Last?” I ask. “I thought there were four?” Footsteps come from the corridor and they are moving fast.

“There are,” he says with a smirk. “Just remember that just because you have no magic...it doesn’t mean you have no power.” He vanishes and I ready myself for whatever is about to come around the corner. I pull out Evelyn’s skull. As soon as I see a glimpse of something

I knock it over the head and it falls to the ground. I gasp.

“Chris!” I run to check on him. “Oh my God. I’m so sorry. I thought you were something...else.” I turn him over and he is out cold. “Crap.” I slap him a few times to wake him up. His eyes finally open.

“Ouch,” he says as he slowly gets to his feet.

“I’m so sorry,” I say. “Are you okay?”

“You let me go,” he says.

“Yeah...sorry about that too,” I say as I lunge in for a hug.

“No,” he says. “Don’t be. You did the right thing. Besides...” He pulls a bone from his pocket. “Another challenge down.” I smile, but don’t say a word. His eyes are so green and I just get lost in them. He caresses my face, gives me a wink, and kisses me with those insatiable lips. He pulls back from the kiss and laughs as I pull him back in for another. “Come on,” he says, taking my hand. “We still have one more challenge.” As the door opens, Chris looks around. “Isn’t the fire king supposed to meet us?”

“I already met him,” I say.

“Seriously,” Chris says with a pinched nose. “I wanted to meet him.”

I laugh. “So that means you met the Water King. What was he like?”

“Um...he was...pretty awesome.” We walk down another corridor not knowing what is coming at us next. “Do we know what we are looking for?”

“Josh didn’t tell me much,” I say.

“Josh?” he asks. “First name basis, are we?”

“He said we had a connection from the healing fire spell.”

“Is that the only connection I need to worry about?” I roll my eyes at him.

“Come on.” I laugh as we reach a dead end. “What the hell? Where do we go now? Back the other way?” Chris grabs me as the ground begins to shake and a crack begins to form, backing us against the wall. Fire rises up from the crack.

“Did you piss off the Fire King, Sophie?”

“No...I don’t think so,” I say. Chris looks as worried as I feel. “What do we do?”

“I don’t know,” he says, squeezing my hand tighter as the fire gets closer to us. I start to think about what Josh told me earlier. He said just because I have no magic doesn’t mean I don’t have power.

“I’m part of him!” I yell.

“What?”

“Josh...I’m part of him.” I close my eyes to concentrate.

*MJ Boshers*

“Sophie...whoa!” Chris’s eyes widen as flames surround me. He quickly releases my hand.

“Give me your hand,” I say.

“Are you mad?” he says. “You’ll burn me!”

“Maybe not,” I say. “Just try...trust me.” He hesitates as he looks to find another way, but the flames are right at our feet. “Trust me, Chris.” He slowly gives me his hand and we both gasp when it doesn’t burn him. Not only do the flames not burn him, but, he too, is covered in flames.

“What is going on?” he asks, freaking out a bit.

“I’m not sure and I don’t know how long it will last so we better hurry.” I notice he still looks worried. “Chris, breathe,” I say. He focuses on me as he takes a breath.

“Okay...I’m good.” He pulls me in to his chest. “One second,” he says leaning down to kiss me. “I always wanted to kiss you while you were on fire.”

“Don’t make me lose focus,” I say.

“All right, let’s do this,” he says. “On the count of three.”

“One...” I say. “Two...”

“Three...” he finishes for me and we both jump into the fire. We fall for what seems forever until we finally hit water. We both pop up out of the salty water

coughing. “Are you okay?” Chris yells, swimming for me.

“Yeah...” I say. We swim to the shoreline and continue to cough up salt water. “I wasn’t expecting that.” When I catch my breath I look around the cave. “How exactly is there a beach inside a cave? This has got to be the coolest thing I have seen yet.”

“Sophie, look!” Chris points to a coffin that glows with Niall’s name. As we walk up to it, the ground begins to shake.

“Not again,” I say. “Is it going to open up again?”

“No...” Chris says as his jaw tightens. “I think this is something else.” He tilts his head up toward the ceiling and I turn to see a beast with its head rising over us. He growls and snarls like a dog. His long neck gets even longer as it stretches out. Glowing green eyes pierce my soul as a warning not to come near King Niall.

“Okay...” I whisper. “Go and get a piece of the king. I’ll take care of this...dragon...lizard thing.”

“Yeah, not going to happen,” Chris says. I give him a stern look. “Okay...I’ll go get the bone.”

As the dragon steps forward he changes into a man. “Who are you and why are you here?” he asks.

“We need a piece of King Niall to take back to our world,” I say.

“That will not happen,” he says with a laugh as he eyes Chris getting closer to the king’s coffin.

“Why?” I ask.

“I’ve been given strict orders to not let anyone come near King Niall’s remains.”

“Yes, but this is different...it is to save the world. You must understand. What if someone wanted to destroy the Ddraigs?”

“The what?” he asks.

“The Ddraigs,” I say. “Half-human and half-dragon.”

“I am not half-human!” he roars. “I am all dragon, girl. Don’t let this body fool you. I eat, sleep, and breathe dragon.”

“Then why are you here guarding the ancestors?”

“The elemental spirits asked me too and it seemed like a pretty good deal. Nobody ever...usually bothers me here and I get all the food I need.”

“So this is your home,” I say.

“Yes,” he says. “I guess it is.” His neck turns quickly as he notices Chris grab a piece of Niall. He changes back into Dragon form and grabs Chris by the throat.

“Please!” I scream. The dragon turns back toward me and his eyes give me a familiar glare. “I know you.” His eyes narrow at my comment. I notice something shimmering in Chris’s hand. My eyes widen, but it is too late to stop Chris as he stabs the dragon in the chest. “Chris!” I yell as the dragon falls to the ground. His roar shakes the walls of the cave. “What did you do?”

“There was a sword in Niall’s coffin, why? We don’t have time to argue with this dragon. He would have killed us.”

“How are we any different from Maeve...or Maddox if we just go around killing things that get in our way?”

“Because they don’t want to protect it,” he says. “They just want it for themselves.”

I kneel down beside the dragon with my heart aching for him. Chris comes and kneels down beside me. “Sophie, he would have killed us both.”

“He doesn’t need to die,” I say as I ignite.

“What are you doing?” Chris asks, jumping out of the way.

“Trying out a theory,” I say as I touch the dragon’s wound. His skin sizzles as the fire touches his skin. He tilts his head up, but lets me continue. As I cry for this creature, his wound seals up and he changes

back into a man. He leans up and gives me a soft expression.

“How?”

“I have a healing fire inside me. I never realized it until now.” I give Chris a smile. “That is why I could bring Mom back and the people from the war. It’s been inside me all along. It’s not about the magic. It’s a part of me with or without magic.”

“Whatever you are...” the dragon says. “You’re pretty amazing.”

“Thanks, but we still need that bone,” I say. He gives me a sigh.

“Technically,” Chris says. “We did defeat you.”

“That you did,” the dragon chuckles. “Nobody has ever come close.”

“Luck, I guess,” says Chris with a shrug.

“I seriously doubt that,” the dragon says. “How do you plan on getting out of here? The only way out is back up through the fiery pit or down the falls which is about a thousand foot drop.”

“So we succeeded for nothing?” Chris says.

“Did they just assume that we would fail?”

“I can help you,” the dragon says. “It is the least I can do.”

“Thank you...” I say. “What is your name?”

“Orion,” he says. Chris’s eyes widen along with mine as we remember the story Brion told us about Orion.

“Orion, once we get out of here we need to talk,” I say.

“Okay,” he says, switching back into a dragon. “Hop on.”

“Dragons are so cool,” Chris says with a smirk as he helps me on Orion’s back. He flies through the falls and I immediately feel my magic come back.

“Orion, is there a quiet place we can talk?” I ask.

“Of course,” he says. “I’ll take you to a place I know.”

“Do you think the spirits meant for us to get trapped in there?” Chris asks.

“No,” I say with a smile. “I think they knew exactly what they were doing.” I pet Orion’s neck.

“Stop petting him,” Chris says. “It’s weird.” I laugh and see a smirk on Orion’s face as well. He lands on a beach and transforms back into a man.

“So what is it you wish to tell me,” says Orion.

“Well...” I hesitate, turning to Chris for help. With his nose pinched he shrugs his shoulders. “Thanks,” I say rolling my eyes. “Orion...have you ever been attracted to a woman?”

“You mean a human?” he laughs. “Why? Are you attracted to me, Sophie?” He comes closer to me.

“What? No,” Chris says, standing in front of Orion and me. “That isn’t quite what she’s saying, Orion. We heard a story about a dragon named Orion...the only one of his kind.”

“Really?”

“Yeah...and one day he met a woman named—”

“Esmerelda...” Orion finishes my sentence.

“Yes,” I say.

“She was beautiful...but she was not human,” he says. “She was so much more. I’ve never been attracted to another since...well, present company excluded.” He winks at me and I blush.

“Can we get back to the story?” Chris says. “We are on a tight schedule.”

“Right, so Esmerelda had a son...your son. His name is Ddraig.”

“You’re telling me that I have a son out there?”

“Yes...” I say, watching his eyes go dark.

“Take me to him,” he demands.

“Okay...are you angry?” I ask.

“No...just curious,” Orion says. I’m a bit hesitant to take him to a land full of dragons. Especially

if he means them any harm. I have to think about this. I purse my lips at him.

“I know what that look means,” Orion says. “I promise I won’t cause any trouble for your friends. I just want to see if what you say is true. I have no malicious intent.”

“Okay, we will take you, but please let us ease Ddraig into this,” I say.

“Sophie, we don’t have time for this,” Chris says.

“It won’t take long,” I say. “Grab my hand, Orion.” I glance at Chris and he gives me a sigh as he grabs my other hand. As soon as we enter the land of Draco, I feel Orion tense up. All of them are in dragon form, of course. Ddraig spots us and comes running. “He is just coming to say hi,” I say to relax Orion a bit. Ddraig changes form and hugs me.

“Sophie,” he says. “Chris.” He nods toward Chris. “Congratulations on not being dead. I heard about the little league you have. Disappointed I wasn’t invited.”

“Sorry,” Chris says. “I figured the less that knew...”

“Quite all right,” Ddraig says. “So who do we have here?” He asks, looking toward Orion. I bite my lip hesitating to give the news.

“Orion, this is Ddraig...King of Ddraigs,” Chris says. “And Ddraig...this is Orion...your father.” Eyes widen all around and Chris grabs my hand. “Have a chat. We have to go.”

We pop back to Annabelle. “Chris!” I shout. “Why did you do that?”

“They will work it out,” he says. “We have other issues to attend to.”

“You made it!” Annabelle squeals.

“Barely,” I say.

“Well...I knew you would, but Chris,” she says, giving him a hug. “Sorry,” she says, blushing. “It’s just, I thought you saw him fall?”

“I did,” I say. “I just didn’t see the water that he fell into.”

“It still hurt like Hell when I hit though,” he says.

“Her visions will get clearer as she gets older,” Annabelle says. “Okay, on to Breccan.” We hold hands for Annabelle to take us to the next challenge.

## 20

### Reunion

“Here we are,” says Annabelle as we pop outside an old crypt.

“Okay,” I say.

“Where are we?” Chris asks.

“A place that has been long forgotten,” she says. “It was once a thriving city of Wizardland, but now it’s just left alone in the darkness.”

“How do I not know about this?” I ask.

“It’s been erased from history,” she says.

“Maddox erased it a few hundred years ago.”

“So how are we here now if he erased it from existence?” I ask.

“We don’t have long so, get what you need quickly,” she says, ignoring my question.

Chris opens the crypt and we see all the coffins in plain sight. “This seems way too easy,” I say.

Annabelle stumbles into the crypt and nearly falls over. Chris catches her before she falls to the ground. Her nose is bleeding and she raises her arms slowly. “Trust me,” she says as Chris steadies her to her feet. “It’s not easy.” She shoves Chris away from her as

she leans against the wall. “Hurry,” she says. “I can’t get the two of you back to our time if I’m dead.”

Chris looks off in the distance for a moment. “Did she just say...?”

“Hurry!” she shouts as we hear commotion coming from outside. We scramble to get a bone from each coffin.

“Okay, got them,” I say. We run to each other and grab hands right before they storm into the crypt.

We come back to Zoe’s world with Mom and Brion standing in front of me. It takes my breath away to see them. I hold my chest and begin to cry. I almost fall, but they catch me and wrap their arms around me.

“Okay,” Erik says, strutting over to us. “Can we share this touching display of emotion later? We do have some revenge to get to.”

“You mean save our worlds, right?” I say.

“Who says we can’t have both?” He gives me a smirk as Conner walks in and hugs Ian.

“I agree fully,” Conner says.

“Oh my God!” I say running to hug him too.

“It’s good to see you two as well,” Conner says as we squeeze him a little too tight.

“Sophie, did you get them?” Zoe yells, coming in the room.

“Yes,” I answer.

“All of them?”

“Yeah, here,” I say as I hand her my satchel.

“Great,” she says. “And now I have help.” I look up to see Kate and Gabriel standing behind her.

“Kate,” I say. “Gabriel! It’s so good to see you guys.”

“But Sophie...we needed another witch to help with the process so...” Zoe hesitates.

“So, what...who did you get?” I ask. A woman walks into the room. She has long black hair and she is beautiful. She has dark brown eyes. Her features are very familiar.

“Hello Queen Sophie,” she says. “It’s great to finally meet the woman everyone has been going crazy over.”

“Sophie, this is Jeremy’s mother...Amelia,” Zoe says. The room is silenced and my gasp echoes throughout the house. I remember her now from the pictures in Jeremy’s box.

“Hello,” I say. I know she couldn’t help her son from going crazy, especially considering she was dead at the time, but I can’t help feeling uncomfortable right now.

“Shall we get started then?” I say, trying to remove myself from this uncomfortable situation.

“Well,” Zoe says. “There is one more thing.” She bites her lip and I know she is dreading what is about to come out of her mouth. Someone else comes around the corner and my heart hits the floor.

“Hello, Soph,” Jeremy says with his hands awkwardly in his pockets.

“Oh, Hell no!” Chris shouts, running for him with a sword. Amelia flicks her two fingers and the sword dissolves before it reaches Jeremy. With the wave of her hand, Chris goes flying into the wall. She doesn’t even use a wand, proving Chris’s point earlier about wizards not needing one sometimes.

“I think my boy has paid his dues,” she says.

“You think so?” Chris says as he tries to break free from her spell. I stare at the ground as the flashbacks return. Jeremy approaches me and I flinch.

“I’m so sorry,” he says.

“Stay away from her,” Chris shouts. I can see Jeremy’s face is swelling and I assume it is courtesy of Ian and the gang.

“Sophie, you know the power took control of him,” Amelia says. “It wasn’t his fault.” I fight back the tears.

“You know...” he stops as I glare at him. He backs away along with everyone else as I ignite.

“Don’t say that you wouldn’t, Jeremy!” I yell because he said that over and over again when he was alive. “Because if it wasn’t for Chris you know you would have!”

He sighs, but comes closer to me. “Yes,” he says. “That Jeremy would have.” He grabs my hand even though it is on fire and bites his lip from the pain. “And that Jeremy got what he deserved, but this Jeremy, the one standing right here in front of you...he wouldn’t. I’m so sorry.” His eyes glaze over and I feel a tug at my heart as the fire dies out. I believe him, but this is all too much. I take my hand from his grasp.

“I believe you, but this is all just too...” I don’t finish the sentence; I just disappear to see Christina.

“Mommy,” she says as she runs into my arms.

“Hey, baby,” I say. “I’m sorry that Mommy has been so busy.”

“We’ve been learning our ABC’s,” Deb says. Christina starts to sing the song and we clap along. My heart swells a bit.

“Yay!” I say. “That was so awesome.” I swing her around and after I put her down she goes to play with her blocks.

“So how are you holding up?” I ask Deb.

“I’m fine,” she says with a chuckle and rubbing her belly. “How are you? That couldn’t have been easy seeing him again.”

“No, it wasn’t,” I say with a sigh. “But I’ll get over it.”

“Where is Chris?”

“Probably still stuck to the wall.” I laugh.

“Did you think about what I said?” she asks. My eyes narrow trying to remember. “Did you forgive him?”

“Oh...” I smile and remember how I have so forgiven him. “You could say that.”

“Oh my God!” she says with a snicker.

“Sophie,” Alice says, running in the room. “They’re here.”

As I walk down the stairs, all eyes are on me. I am greeted at the bottom by the ancestors. They each grab my hand one by one and bow. I return the gesture. Breccan comes up next. “Dear Sophie,” he says as he grabs my hand. “You have had much to deal with and today we can put it all to an end.” I give him a smile. “Where is Chris?” he asks.

“I’m not sure...” I look around the room and he pushes through the crowd.

“Here I am, sir,” Chris bows.

“Ah...the Guardian,” Breccan says. “I have a couple of surprises for you dear boy. After all you have done to protect Sophie and Wizardland...well, I’ll just show you.” He raises his arms and two people appear. Chris is frozen with his eyes glazing over. His mouth is hanging open, but no words are coming out.

“Hello, my son,” a woman says. Gasps are heard around the room. I find my hand covering my mouth in shock as well. A man smiles at the woman’s side. I’m assuming it is his father. He looks more like his mother though. The hair...the eyes. I’m amazed.

“Mom...Dad...” Chris stutters. They take the moment and embrace.

“Y’all go and catch up while we plan a bit,” says Breccan.

“We couldn’t do this without you, King Breccan,” I say. “Thank you.” He smiles and introduces me to his brothers.

“Let’s finish this then,” he says. “Shall we?” I smile as he turns to address the crowd. “Witches and Wizards, if you will follow me,” he says. The crowd follows him to one side of the room while the Fae are on the other side. I stand in the middle trying to figure out which way I want to go. If only I could be in two places at once. I can’t let either side fight without me. Chris stands next to me and holds my hand. I know he

can tell what I am thinking and he will go where I go. “Sophie,” Breccan yells for me to join them. I look to my mother, the Queen of Faeries, and she smiles at me, but quickly turns her attention back to Brion.

“Chris, I can’t let them fight without me...can I?”

“You can’t fight for both sides, beautiful,” he says.

“He’s right,” Merida says as she walks toward us. “You are the Queen of Wizardland. You fight for them and you shall fight with them. Mary is the Queen of the Faeries...this is her fight.”

“I can’t—”

“You must,” she says, consoling me with her hand on my cheek. “We will help them in every way that we can.”

My real parents come to hug me. “Listen to Merida, sweetheart,” my dad says.

After it sinks in my head that they are really here, I cry.

“I can’t believe you guys are here...” I say. I am beyond amazed and there are so many things I need to ask them, but we have to get this done. I sigh at the fact that I can’t help the faeries.

“Hey,” Chris says. “I want to help them too, but think about this...they have Kate and Zoe, so really

they are getting the better deal.” I crack a smile and he shows that smirk I love so much.

“Well, Maddox doesn’t have Merida’s staff either,” I say.

“Maddox doesn’t need it,” Chris says. “If we get done early,” he says with a sigh. “We can come help. Just an incentive to get this done quickly.”

I sigh with annoyance, but slowly go over to the Wizard side.

~

After our strategy session, everyone starts to prepare their weapons and Danny walks down the stairs with a pale face. He glances around the room, but stops when his eyes fix on me. I’m about to ask him what is wrong, but I am interrupted by Breccan. “Everyone knows where to be and what to do then?” We nod. “Faeries...are you ready?” I give Mom a smile and she nods back.

“It won’t work,” Danny says calmly as he stands in the middle of everyone.

“What are you talking about, Danny?” I ask.

He sighs. “I am not Danny at the moment,” he says. He smiles as his eyes glow with a white light. My eyes widen and turn quickly to Erik who shrugs mystified.

“So who are you then?” I ask.

“I am a messenger,” he says.

“You’re an angel?” Gabe says.

The messenger laughs. “You still don’t get it after so many years.”

“What don’t we get?” Erik walks forward.

“That you angels just sit around and let us do all your dirty work. We are getting slaughtered... humans are getting slaughtered and you do nothing!” I pull Erik back as he clinches his fist.

“Why won’t this work?” I ask before Erik does something stupid. Danny redirects his gaze on me.

“You still want to save them all,” he says.

“Of course I do,” I say.

“How is battle going to save everyone if the opposite side is innocent?” he says. I bite my jaw not knowing how to respond to this.

“Innocent!” says Erik. “They killed us first, remember.”

“They fight out of fear,” he says. “And they will kill you again.”

“So what are the angels going to do about it,” Merida says, coming forward along with the other ancestors. The angel laughs again and Erik raises his hand to strike the messenger, but his fist stops right at Danny’s face.

“Nobody can strike a messenger,” he says as Erik narrows his eyes and pushes harder.

“Erik, stop!” I say. “So what do we do if not fight?” I ask as Erik lowers his hand.

“I can’t tell you what to do. I am only here to advise you away from battle. This can’t be won by killing the innocent.”

“I’m confused,” I say as Breccan comes forward.

“You came once before,” Breccan says.

“I came several times before,” he says. “I am the messenger Jiel. Not one of you has ever listened to me before so I don’t see how this visit will be any different. I must go now.”

“Wait!” I say. “Can’t the angels help in some way?”

“You don’t get it!” he yells. “You will never get it.” With slumped shoulders he turns to walk away.

“Wait, Jiel,” I plead. He stops, but does not turn around. I’ve been thinking a lot lately about why angels have never come to the rescue when we needed them the most. Why are we the ones who always have to do good deeds and save the world by keeping the balance? One theory has come to me and I think it’s about time I put it out there. “We are the angels...aren’t we?” He turns around to reveal Danny’s white teeth.

“It’s about time,” he says. “After all these years...one of you finally got it.” I glance around at the sea of faces. Some are confused, others are surprised, but most are skeptical. Jiel sighs when he notices their doubting expressions. “You are all protectors, warriors, so yes...angels. Do you think you were given these abilities for the fun of it all? You are all angels in some form or the other...even your mortal friends. Everything happens according to Fate’s plan.”

“How are Maeve and Maddox considered angels?” I ask.

“Everyone has a choice to do good or evil...even angels,” he says.

“All this time that has passed...” King Niall says, shaking his head.

“I couldn’t tell you,” Jiel says. “You were supposed to figure it out on your own and now you have so it’s time for me to go.”

“But we need help,” I say.

“You are here for one reason and that is to protect the innocent. So do your job. Just go to the source of evil and stop it.” When I crack a smile he rolls his eyes. “I just told you what to do, didn’t I?” He shakes his head from side to side with a snicker. “Oh well...it’s time to go. Good luck.” He gives me a wink and Danny falls to the floor.

“Danny!” I shout.

“What the hell?” he says as he takes in his surroundings.

“Quite the opposite actually,” Erik says.

“So everything we have done up to this point has been a waste?” Chris says.

“Maybe not,” I says. “We know we can’t fight everyone, but maybe...we need a distraction.”

“I got it,” Zoe says. “Why don’t we just send her to a false reality like this one?”

“How can we do that when she has an army waiting for us?” Matt asks.

“Well...” Zoe says. “We could use that little trick Matt used with the guards that time.”

“It could work,” I say.

“But if it doesn’t we could lose the element of surprise,” Chris says.

“We just need to be quick and make sure she doesn’t see us,” I say.

“This is true, but I think this could work,” Breccan says.

“Sophie,” Merida says. “Sorry for intruding, King Breccan, but I need to speak to Sophie in private.”

“You could never intrude, Queen Merida,” Breccan says with a bow.

I follow Merida into the kitchen. “What’s up,” I ask.

“Sophie, I just wanted you to know, after this is over we must go back to the other side.”

“What? Why? Did you not hear Jiel? We’re freaking angels!”

“Yes,” she replies, taking a breath and exhaling it. “I’m still processing that bit of information.”

“Don’t you want to be a part of it?” I ask, grabbing her hands to convince her.

She smiles. “Even if what Jiel says is true—”

“Wait...you don’t believe him?”

“Well...it is kind of hard to believe. There are still so many questions...but you do...don’t you?”

“With all my heart.”

“And that is why you don’t need us here,” she says. “And if it shows to be true...that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t sustain our traditions. There can still be chaos among angels.”

“But—”

“Your friends and family can stay if they wish, but we must return.”

“Sophie,” Breccan calls from the leaving room. “We are ready!”

“We will see Zoe’s plan through to the end,” she says as Mom walks in.

“Hey...are you ready?”

“I hope so,” she says, taking a deep breath.

“Zoe, are you ready?” I ask.

“Yes,” she replies.

“Matt?” I ask as he kisses Chrissy goodbye.

“Ready.”

“We will be back,” Zoe says, grabbing my hand.

“Be careful...” Chris says. “And be invisible.” I smile as he fades away. We enter Faeryland, but we stay out of sight, peeking around the corner to see an army waiting. We receive the message that Mom, Nicola, and Merida are in place. “Okay, Matt, you’re up,” I say. Matt throws out a reflection of Maeve in front of the multiples. They all turn to bow at her feet.

“Okay, now, Sophie,” Zoe says. I flick my wand and the army disappears.

“Done,” I say. “I hope this works guys.”

“And they can’t leave, right?” Matt asks.

“Not until I say so,” Zoe says.

“Okay...I guess it’s all up to Mom now.” I bite my lip and look back at the castle.

“She’s got this, Sophie,” Zoe says.

“I know,” I say, exhaling my frustration. “Let’s go.” I grab their hands and we are back to an even bigger version of my house.

## 21

### **Mary's Perspective**

Merida and I wait around the corner as Nicola enters the room. I still can't believe Nicola and Merida are here with me.

"Hello, mother," Nicola says to a startled Maeve.

"Nikki," Maeve gasps with her hand clasped over her mouth. "How?"

"No matter," Nicola says. "Why did you do it, Mom?" Maeve shakes off the astonishment of her daughter's return as she sighs. "You really do need to be more specific, daughter," she says.

"Why did you let Maddox kill me...your only daughter?" Nicola says. Maeve's eyes grow glossy as soon as Nicola speaks about her death. "I loved you...I still do."

"What?" Maeve says with a pinched face.

"No matter what you've done...you're my mother and I know there is a reason you did what you did. I just want to know." Maeve tightens her grip on Merida's staff.

Nicola notices and laughs. "I'm not here for revenge mother..." she gives us a nod. "But they are."

Merida and I step out of hiding. With frozen eyes, Maeve gasps at the sight of both of us and while she is preoccupied by fear, Nicola grabs the staff. “Aren’t we clever,” Maeve says raising an eyebrow at me. She lifts her hand to strike, but realizes Merida has taken away her powers. She starts to back away slowly. “My dear...even if you had your powers,” Merida says with a grin. “You could never beat me. I’m an ancestor...the first of all queens.”

Tension shows on Maeve’s face for a moment, but she soon starts to smirk. “Maybe, but have you forgotten...I’m not alone either.” Cynthia and Lena stand in the doorway. Maeve reaches for the staff, but Nicola pulls it away.

“Nicola...go!” I yell. She disappears along with the Staff of Merida and Maeve yells with frustration.

Returning an angry gaze to me, she grinds her teeth.

“Afraid to fight your own battles, Mary?” she says. I give Merida a nod to let her know that I am ready.

“Oh, this will be a fair fight, Maeve,” Merida says as we are all transported outside of the castle. “Whoever wins this fight will be Queen. Maeve, your powers are returned. We will uphold tradition.” Maeve glows as her hand twitches.

“I do love tradition at times,” she says with a gleam in her eye. I steady myself for whatever she has coming.

With smile on her face, she throws a fireball my way, but I stand my ground and counter it. “You can’t possibly believe you stand a chance, Mary. I am over two hundred years old and you are a bit rusty with the whole magic thing. The mortal world has done a number on you and your magic...hasn’t it?”

“This is going to be so good,” Lena says with a snicker. “Sit back and enjoy the show girls,” Maeve says. “Shall we...” She raises a daring eyebrow. I conjure up a sword and she rolls her eyes at me. “If we must,” she sighs as she retrieves her own sword. We run toward each other, my mind racing and my heart pounding. Is it crazy to think that I can beat her? I have to beat her. My hands can barely grip the sword from the sweat beading up in the palm of my hand and when our swords collide mine falls to the ground. Lena, Maeve, and Cynthia begin to laugh. “Merida, is this really necessary?” Maeve says. I pick up my sword as they laugh and wonder if I should just give up. I know Merida is doubting me as well.

“Mary,” she says. “You are a warrior! We watched you in the battle with the demons. I know you are better than this!”

“Are you sure about that, Merida?” Maeve asks with her arms folded across her chest.

“Mary, focus!” Merida says as Maeve decides to kick me in the stomach. I cough as the breath is knocked out of me. I curl up in a ball to keep her from kicking me again and she kicks the dirt in my face as she spits on me.

“This is pathetic, Merida,” she says. “You should just give me the staff and call it a day.”

“I’m debating on that,” Merida says with disappointment. “So Maeve...tell me, what do you plan on doing to Sophie when you find her?” I narrow my eyes at the sound of her name.

“What?” Maeve asks with a furrowed brow.

“I’m curious,” Merida explains. “I heard through my channels that you made a deal with a demon. Why don’t you tell me about that?” This helps me to my feet. What has Maeve got up her sleeve now?

“What have you done?” I ask as she strikes me in the face.

“Just made a little deal with the devil...Sophie won’t be an issue anymore. She will be in Hell where she belongs and all I had to do was give him was a few human souls.”

“What humans?” Merida asks, but we both already know which humans she means.

“Just a few that have been getting on my nerves. I knew Sophie would be planning something so I had her

followed. You did exactly what I wanted and took him exactly where I wanted him to be. He has been in plain sight and should be making payment right about now.”

“Chrissy, Jen, and Danny,” I say. “No!”

“Yes and as soon as payment is made they will all be in Hell for eternity and there is no getting them back this time.” She raises her sword, but as a surge of anger spreads through my body, I raise mine as well and they connect. The sound of the iron echoes throughout the ghost town we created. Maeve stumbles, but laughs.

“Did we strike a nerve?”

“There she is,” Merida says with a smile as I give her my warrior stance. “You see, Maeve...it doesn’t matter how much magic you have.” I land my sword down on hers over and over again. The sound keeps me focused. Maeve stumbles and I elbow her in the jaw. I smirk as blood slings out of her mouth. Dropping her sword, she narrows her eyes. “It’s about how much heart you have,” Merida continues. “How much you’re willing to risk for what you love, and how many times you would die for it.”

I grab Maeve by the shirt and pull her close, looking deep into her dark eyes. “And I would risk everything for my family,” I say. Thunder and lightning make me jump as Maeve begins to laugh. She wipes the blood from her mouth.

“You’re too late,” she says. “My debt is paid.”  
“No!” I scream. “Zoe, now!” Zoe pops in and waves her hand creating a veil to another world... a prison world. I kick Maeve in the chest and she falls backwards, vanishing into the reality, which is now her Hell. Merida points at Lena and Cynthia and the wind starts to blow. They are pulled into the veil as well. Zoe quickly seals the veil, wiping the sweat from her brow.

“Now let’s go help the others,” she says. Brion greets me with a kiss when we get back to Zoe’s world. “I never doubted you, my Queen,” he says, handing me Merida’s staff.

“Where is Nicola?” I ask.

“She went to Wizardland with Sophie and Jaxon.

“They already left?” I shout and turn to Merida.

“Where are her mortal friends?” she asks.

“Why?” Brion narrows his eyes as we hear Deb scream. We pop upstairs to a gruesome sight and Deb holding a bloody knife. Zoe, Alice, Cormac, and Aodan run into the room and gasp as they see Chrissy, Danny, and Jen lying on the floor with their throats slit.

“Deb... what happened?” Alice cries.

Deb begins to laughs. “That isn’t Deb,” Zoe says. “It’s a demon possessing her.” They all back away from her as her eyes glow.

“The debt has been paid,” she says as she holds up three vials glowing with blue light. The vials disappear and Deb begins to fall to the ground. Alice quickly catches her.

“Is the demon gone?” I ask.

“Yes,” Zoe says.

“What were those vials for?” I ask.

“They were soul catchers,” Zoe says as she cries. “He is taking their souls to Hell...and Sophie is next.”

I gasp, remembering what Maeve said. “Oh my God!” I say grabbing Brion’s arm.

“It’s okay,” he says. “We will fix this.”

“How?” I say.

“We have to get to Sophie before the demon does,” Brion says. You guys stay here and look after Deb and Christina. Mary...let’s go get Sophie.” We vanish as I take his hand and I can only hope we are not too late.

## 22

### Back to Sophie

“Are you ready, Sophie?” Chris asks as we wait for word that Nicola has the staff.

“No,” I say. “I’m worried about Mom.”

“Your Mom is an awesome Warrior,” Chris says. “As long as Nicola gets that staff...Maeve won’t have a chance.”

I haven’t had the pleasure of seeing my mother in battle, but I heard the stories about her in the fight with the demons. “What if she loses focus and starts to worry about me?”

“Kind of like what you’re doing right now,” Chris says.

I roll my eyes at his comment. “We aren’t fighting right now,” I say. “Besides...Merida is right about Mom.”

“What are you talking about?” Chris asks.

“She has been known to give up too soon...” I say, a bit regretful that I admitted it.

Chris sighs. “Look,” he says. “Maybe she has given up on some things in the past, but it was because she was afraid to lose you. Just imagine what she is

capable of to save you. From what I've heard about her in the fight with the demons...she is pretty bad ass." I crack a smile at the thought of her being bad ass. "I know she will not fail us." He strokes my cheek. "And I know for certain that she will not fail you."

Nicola pops in with Merida's staff. "All is going to plan," she says.

I sigh with relief. "Don't worry," she says. "Mary will be victorious. She has Merida with her and Zoe's watching her back from here."

"Is everyone ready?" Breccan asks. We nod in unison and look toward Zoe.

"I'll be waiting for your call," she says with a smile. "Be careful...all of you."

We slowly walk through the woods of Wizardland until I can sense the people in town. "Okay, here is good," I say.

"I'll let Zoe know," Chris says, sending a message to Zoe. I close my eyes to concentrate on all the people of Wizardland. As soon as I feel that I have them all in my mind, I flick my wand. "It's done," I say.

Breccan smiles. "Then let's rid ourselves of this monster once and for all," he says.

"Where's our element of surprise?" Chris asks.

"Here I am," Conner says, making his way through the front of the line with Ian by his side.

“Remember...just distract him,” Ian says. “Zoe will do the rest.”

“Got it,” Conner says with a smile.

“Wait,” I say, stopping Conner. “I didn’t get everyone out.”

“What?” Ian shouts.

“I sense the guards...about a dozen of them.”

“Well...I guess we are all going in after all,”

Breccan says.

“Okay,” I sigh. “Ian, Conner, and I will go to Maddox. The rest of you take care of the guards.”

“We are so proud of what you have become,” Nicola says. “Please be careful.” My parents hug me goodbye and then we all vanish to the main hall. It is like a ghost town.

“Stay out of sight until I say the word,” Conner says. Ian and I stay out of view, but follow him to the dining room where Maddox is sitting by the fireplace with his feet propped up and a drink in his hand. I can see the veins popping out on Conner’s neck, but he takes a deep breath to calm himself. “Hello, brother,” he says.

Maddox lowers his drink and sighs, but doesn’t act surprised. We glance at each other, worried. “So the little rascals pulled it off,” Maddox says. “It’s a shame they had to bring you back just to watch you die again.”

“I think the odds are in my favor this time around, brother,” Conner says.

“Really,” Maddox says, standing up, making Conner flinch. Maddox smiles at the affect he has on his brother. Ian flinches as well and I grab his hand to steady him. “So you think just because they brought you and the Ancient One back from the dead that your side will win?”

Our eyes widen. “How the heck did he know that?” I whisper. The corner of Maddox’s lip curls as he notices Conner’s shock.

“I can feel his power,” Maddox says. “Don’t act so surprised.”

“Time to bring the other element of surprise then, I guess,” Ian says. I flick my wand and Jeremy and Amelia are beside Conner. This time Maddox reacts.

“Amelia?” he gasps, looking at her like she isn’t real.

“Hello, Maddox,” she says. “It’s been a long time.” He finally snaps out of his thoughts and laughs.

“That was cold...brother,” he says.

“I don’t believe you have met your son yet?” Conner says.

“Hello Father,” Jeremy says. I can tell Maddox is getting agitated with this whole situation. He throws

his glass in the fire after downing the last sip. They all jump.

“So what,” he shouts. “Did you think that this would have some sort of impact on me? Change me?”

“I just thought you might want to meet your son,” Conner says.

“At least he had some balls,” Maddox says with a chuckle. “I was very proud when Maeve told me about you.” He walks closer to his son. Amelia grabs Jeremy’s arm and Maddox glares at her. “And you couldn’t have mentioned that you were pregnant before you left?”

“You mean before you banished me!” Amelia says.

“I was angry!” Thunder rolls along with Maddox’s voice. “If you had told me—”

“You would have taken him from me and left me all alone in the mortal world to rot,” she says. He laughs and goes to pour himself another drink.

“You always did know me better than anyone else,” he says pouring a second glass of whiskey and taking it to Jeremy. “Do you mind if I have a drink with my son before we get to the killing.”

Jeremy glances at his mother, but takes the glass from Maddox. “Now is a better time than any,” I say to Ian.

“Okay,” he says.

“Be careful,” I say and he vanishes to reappear behind Maddox. I try to contact Zoe, but she isn’t answering...something is wrong.

“Bravo,” Maddox says. “You guys are getting good. I am actually kind of impressed.” Thunder roars and he closes his eyes as lightning strikes Ian. “And it was an exceptional try.”

“Ian!” I shout as we all run toward him. Suddenly a wave of wind forces us all to the ground. We jump up and dust ourselves off as Chris and the rest of our team pop in behind us.

“Well,” Breccan says as he walks up to Maddox confidently. I believe I see Maddox twitch a bit. “I see you got the family back together.”

Maddox’s eyes lower to Breccan’s feet, but quickly rise back to look him in the eyes. “You must be the ‘Ancient One’ everyone is talking about.” He laughs as he raises his hands in surrender.

“Yes and I believe you killed my son,” Breccan replies. He strikes Maddox in the face.

With a smirk, Maddox lifts his head again, wiping the blood away with his hand. “Well, I’ve killed a bunch of people, but I do remember that one like it was yesterday. Is he here too?” He stretches his neck out, looking around the room. “I’d love to chop that

prick's head off again." Raising his hand to strike Maddox again, Breccan roars with anger.

"Breccan!" I shout. He freezes. "He's just trying to stall you. Let's get this done."

"You know..." Maddox says. "There are a few people missing from this family reunion." He gives Conner a stare. "Where is your better half? You brought my dead wife back, but not your own?"

"She chose to stay behind," Conner says. "I'm sure she couldn't stand the thought of seeing you again."

"I doubt that was the case," Maddox says with a chuckle.

Conner narrows his dark eyes. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Maddox, what are you doing?" Amelia says.

"Finally telling him the truth about his precious Miranda."

"Don't listen to him, Conner," Amelia says.

"Let's just say... she and I—"

Conner's fist strikes him before he could finish. "Liar!" As Maddox rubs his jaw from the blow, he laughs.

"Tell him I am lying, Amelia," Maddox says. Amelia shakes her head, speechless, toward Conner, her eyes growing glossy. She finally has to look away.

“Now tell him who actually killed her.” Maddox says as his eyes grow dark and thunder sounds.

“What is he talking about, Amelia?” Conner says, grinding his teeth.

“Maddox is just trying to stall, guys—”

“I want to hear this, Sophie,” Conner says.

“Amelia... what did you do?”

“It was an accident,” Amelia cries.

“What?” Conner shouts, moving closer toward her. “How?”

“She’s telling the truth,” Jaxon, my dad says.

“You knew,” Conner turns his anger toward Jaxon.

“Not until we reached the other side,” Nicola quickly interjects. “Miranda told us everything.” They hang their heads in shame.

“You see, brother,” Maddox says. “I would have never harmed Miranda... I loved her.” Conner can’t seem to focus on anything. He looks to Nicola, Jaxon, and then back to Amelia. I can tell he is about to lose control. His wand twitches. “Chris,” I yell. “Grab him!” Chris, Dad, and Breccan all grab Conner to hold him down.

“Conner,” Nicola says. “Listen to me. Miranda is my best friend and I believe her story so let me set the record straight.” Conner calms himself and looks at her

with tears in his eyes. “Conner...she loves you and Ian with all her heart.” She strokes his cheek to calm him a bit more. “She ignored Maddox’s advances over and over again, but as usual Maddox has to get what he wants. She knew if she refused again he would kill you and Ian so she went along, pretending she cared for him.”

Her words hit Maddox and his face goes blank.

“How long?” Conner asks with an agonizing sigh, snapping Maddox out of his obvious pout.

“Five glorious years,” he says. “And trust me...she wasn’t faking it.” This frustrates Conner more and he tries to break free. “And then one day this one...” he points to Amelia. “Decides to follow us. She went a bit crazy, throwing every spell she could think of on us.”

“I was aiming for you!” Amelia shouts.

“Well...you hit her didn’t you?” Maddox gets in Amelia’s face and she flinches. “And by the time I found her it was too late.”

“What happened to her? Why were you even in the mortal world?” Conner asks with a growl.

“She insisted we go somewhere so that we wouldn’t get caught. She always loved to go up to the cliffs of Moher. She loved it there.” Maddox says, getting lost in his thoughts. More tears fall as Conner

shuts his eyes. “But Amelia threw a blade and hit Miranda in the chest. She fell over the cliffs and into the sea. I tried to use magic to bring her back...I did,” Maddox says with regret. This is the first time, I believe, I have seen Maddox sad. “I searched for hours and when I finally found her she was gone so I brought her body back.”

“I’m so sorry...” Amelia says to Conner. “It truly was an accident.”

“So that is why he banished you,” Conner says, exhausted from trying to escape.

“Yes,” Maddox says. “So, if you think about it, I am the real victim here.” I notice Ian getting up off the ground as Maddox takes another sip of his drink.

“Yeah...I feel so sorry for you,” I say as I flick my wand and bring Zoe here. He looks at me with a blank stare and for the first time I can see him. He really did love Miranda... as twisted as he is; he loved her deeply and losing her is probably what drove him mad. His eyes widen as a hand goes through his chest and back out again. Ian holds the black, bloody heart of this mad man in his hands and savors the moment. Maddox falls to the ground and says only one word...

“Miranda.” Zoe opens the veil and Ian throws the heart in. Chris and Matt throw Maddox’s body into the veil as well.

“It’s done,” Zoe says. “He’s gone.” Mom and Brion pop in as soon as the veil closes.

“Mom!” I yell as she rushes toward me for a hug. Conner grinds his teeth as he growls at Amelia.

“Dad...what is going on?” Ian asks. Jeremy sips the last of his drink and slams it down on the counter.

“What is going on?” Zoe asks as well.

“Oh...not much,” Jeremy says. “We just found out that Mommy dearest over here is the one who killed Ian’s mom.”

“Jeremy!” Amelia yells.

Jeremy gives Zoe a wink. “That isn’t Jeremy,” Zoe says. Her eyes widen as he slices Amelia’s neck. “It’s a demon!”

“Sophie, run, he’s after you!” Mom yells. Chris grabs my hand, but the demon catches us. Chris begins to fight it.

“Chris,” I shout. “Don’t kill him. Jeremy is still in there.” Chris rolls his eyes and knocks him out cold.

Breathing a sigh of relief, I pull Chris in for a well-deserved embrace. “Why is a demon after me?”

“Maeve made a deal with one...” Mom hesitates to finish.

“And...” I say, searching for answers in her eyes, but she begins to cry. “What is wrong? What is going on now?”

“Oh they are just upset,” Chris says, kissing me on the forehead.

“Why?”

He sighs. “Because I killed your mortal friends and stole their souls.”

“What?” Matt yells. He looks at me, but quickly disappears.

As I look up, red eyes look down at me.

“Sophie, don’t let him touch you!” Zoe says.

“Too late,” the demon says. “And I do hate to leave because it reeks with death, hatred, and chaos in here, but we have a deadline to meet.” He pulls me tighter. “Hold on tight,” he whispers and we vanish.

## 23

### Chris

I wake up and Sophie is gone. As I jump to my feet, my heart is pounding out of my chest and I realize the demon took me over. “Damn it!” I look around at everyone crying for Chrissy, Danny, Jen, and now Sophie.

“Ian,” Zoe says with her face scrunched up in pain.

“We need to go. Deb will need us.” She wipes her eyes and holds her hand out for Ian. After taking a quick glance at his father kneeled down next to Mary and Brion, he takes Zoe’s hand and they disappear.

Everyone that is left is trying to calm Conner.

“So, what now?” I ask.

“What?” Mary says, exhausted from crying.

“What is next? How do we get them back?”

After assuring that Mary is okay Brion glides over to me with tears in his bloodshot, blue eyes.

“Um...Chris,” he says putting his arm around me. The words barely can slip through his lips. “They are gone.” He wipes his eyes with his sleeve before hugging me. I push him away, giving him a look of annoyance.

Rolling my eyes, I conjure up some weapons. “Well, by the look of things you all are doubting Sophie again,

but I will never doubt her. Hell is made up of fire and most people can't survive it, but she can." Mary's eyes light up with hope. "Did you forget what your daughter can do, my Queen?" Brion gets irritated with me and grabs my arm.

"Don't go getting her hopes up boy," he whispers in my ear.

"I'm sorry, but she is not gone!" I say jerking my arm out of his grasp. "I'm going to find a way to get her back. They didn't take her soul...they took her body...why? Because they want her alive for some reason."

"Or they just know that she can't die," Mary says.

"Either way she is trapped in Hell and I am going to bring her and the others back."

Jeremy finally wakes up, dazed and confused. He gasps when he sees his mother on the ground. "Mom!" he yells.

"She'll heal," I say.

"What did you do?" he says, shoving me.

"Actually...you did it," I say as I shove him back.

"Well, the demon inside you did it and if you think she didn't deserve it after the story we just heard..."

"She said it was an accident," Jeremy says, kneeling down to pick his mother's head up off the ground.

“Jeremy...” Chris sighs. “She is a powerful witch. If it was truly an accident don’t you think she would have used a spell to find her and send her back to heal right away...and why couldn’t Maddox use his powers...because she banished them before he could. She wanted Miranda to die!”

“Chris, that is enough,” Brion says, noticing Conner’s agitation growing.

“I’m only saying what Conner is thinking. If it were me I’d take her to the mortal world to die, but that is on you guys...I have to go to Hell.” I pick up my weapons and start to leave.

“Chris, you’re being ridiculous,” Brion says. “Nobody can survive Hell’s fire. You just said so yourself...and even if they could the only way to get there is to die.”

“Then I shall die!” I say, turning around to leave. Brion pulls me back again trying to stop me.

“Chris—”

“Brion!” I shout. “I’m not giving up on her and I can’t leave her again...I won’t.” He sighs, knowing I’m not going to give in. I give Mary a nod, letting her know that I will bring her daughter back to her and I vanish to find a way to survive Hell.

Knowing that I am in way over my head, I go to find help...I go to find Zoe. They are all still morning

the loss of Chrissy, Jen, and Danny. “Hey,” I say, putting my arm around her.

“Hey,” she says as she wipes her puffy eyes. I don’t say anything because I know she will read my thoughts and I don’t want to get everyone worked up yet. She looks at me as our minds connect. “Are you crazy?” she says.

“Never mind...stupid question.”

“We have to find a way,” I say.

“You two have been staring at each other too long,”

Alice says. “What’s up?” The gang surrounds us. *So much for keeping this quiet until I come up with a plan.*

“Chris...what is it?” Matt asks.

I sigh with hesitation because I really don’t want to get their hopes up, but I am going to need all the help I can get. “Look, I’m not sure how yet,” I say, “but I’m going to bring them back...I’m bringing them all back.”

“How...their throats were...” Zoe begins to cry again.

Matt comes to console her.

“Have you forgotten that they were injected with werewolf blood? If they haven’t healed yet...it is only a matter of time.” I give them all a smirk.

“Oh my God,” Alice shouts as she runs over to check.

“I totally forgot.” She looks up and smiles. “He’s right, they are healing, but slowly.”

“You couldn’t have lead with that?” Matt asks, hitting me on the shoulder. “Ass.”

“Sorry.”

“Wait,” Matt says. “Danny isn’t healing.”

“Try healing him, Alice,” I say. Her eyes dart to me and back to them again with confusion.

“Chris...they are human,” she says.

“Just humor me,” I say. She does what I ask and her light shines on Danny’s chest.

“It’s working!” she says.

“I told you,” I say. “Remember what Jiel said...they are part angel too.”

“So you buy into this whole angel thing?” Aodan says.

“I do now,” I say. “Now we just have to find a way into Hell.”

“There is no way unless you have fire power like Sophie,” Zoe says. I smile at my thoughts. “Of course,” she says.

“Where is Ian? We will need him.”

“He took Deb and Christina back to Wizardland,” Alice says.

“Have they said anything to Christina?” I ask.

“No, I don’t think she would understand anyway,” Aodan says.

“You’d be surprised,” I say. “So who’s up for a trip to Thailand?”

“How do you know he will meet us?” Zoe asks.

“It’s for Sophie,” I say. “Something tells me that he would do just about anything to help her.”

“Well, let’s go get Ian then,” Matt says, taking another look at Chrissy’s body. “I’m going to have to take her somewhere real nice after this one.”

“Trust me, Matt,” Alice says. “If we pull this off you should be set for life. Just keep reminding her you went to Hell for her.”

~

We go to Wizardland to tell Ian the plan and he is sitting on the bed with Deb. “How is she?” Alice asks. “And the baby.”

“They are better now that we are back here,” Ian says.

“So things are back to normal?” I ask.

“A bit,” he says. “But there are a lot of questions and rumors about Sophie. People are starting to leave because they don’t feel safe anymore.”

“Already?”

“Well...you know how fast rumors fly around here. Most left when they knew Maddox was back.”

“How is Conner?” I ask.

“He’s dealing...trying not to kill Amelia,” Ian says.

“And you?” I ask, putting my hand on his shoulder.

“About the same,” he says. “It’s just a lot to take in with everybody dying around us...” I pull him in for a hug

while the gang sits awkwardly silent. After a moment, I cough up my emotions and release him.

“Well, I know you have some kind of plan so what is it,” he says.

“We are all going to Hell...want to come?” I say and he begins to laugh.

“Wait...you’re serious? What am I saying...of course you are.” His eyes squint as he presses one of his temples. “Chris, have you thought this through? Have any of you?”

“There is only one thought in my head, brother,” I say, a bit agitated at him. “And that thought is to get our friends and bring them back no matter the cost. It is what Sophie would want...right?” Everyone agrees with a nod. “As a matter of fact...I believe Sophie would have already been back with everyone.” Ian looks down at Deb as she wakes up.

“I will never forgive you if you don’t go, Ian,” she says.

“And you know you will never forgive yourself.” He sits back down beside her.

“I don’t want to leave you in this condition,” he says, stroking her cheek.

“I’m not going anywhere and the baby isn’t due for a while...go,” she says. “I’ll be fine.”

“Where are we going?” Jeremy asks with part of his body in the doorway and part out.

“Dude, so not cool being here right now,” I say as I watch Ian tense up.

“Guys, come on,” he says. “I owe it to Sophie...and Danny. They are my friends too. I just want to help get them back.”

We all contemplate and shoulders begin to slump. “It’s up to you Ian,” I say. They glare at each other for a moment.

“Let me make this right, Ian,” Jeremy says.

Ian laughs. “Nothing you could do would ever make this right...but I guess going to Hell is a good start.”

“Hell?” Jeremy says.

“Are you still in?” I ask. He scans the room waiting for a chuckle, but nothing.

“Hell yeah! I mean... I just left, but I can go back for a quick visit I suppose.”

“You were in Hell?” Ian asks.

Jeremy laughs and slants his head toward the ground. “I really don’t remember, but do you really think I’d have went anywhere else?”

“But I thought the power took hold of you...you had no choice, right?” Alice asks.

“Well...I should have tried to fight it harder...a choice is a choice. I shouldn’t have given in to it.”

“Okay then,” I say to break the tension. “Let’s go to Thailand.”

~

We get to the cave entrance and the memory of Sophie and I the last time we were here barrel in like a freight train. I bury my emotions once again as they pierce my gut to focus on the job at hand.

“Wow,” Alice says and her voice echoes throughout the cave.

“Okay...we have to go through the falls,” I say.

“What?” Cormac says as he notices the drop.

“It’s a veil,” Zoe says.

“Are we sure?” Aodan says.

“Yes,” I say, smirking as I remember the moment before Sophie and I were standing in this very spot. Zoe looks up and gives me a smile. “Shut up,” I say, knowing she has just read my thoughts. “That was a private thought.” She giggles. “On the count of three,” I say holding my smile.

They all have to catch their breath when we come through the veil. “Oh, I forgot to mention the falls take away our magic. We are all mortal now.”

“That would have been a nice piece of information,” Ian says holding his chest.

“Some of us still have some power,” Jeremy says lighting a nearby torch.

“That is our mortal magic,” Zoe says.

“Well, that’s good for you two, but what are we supposed to do without our powers?” Aodan asks.

“It’s only while we are here,” I say. “Come on, it’s this way.” They follow me to where Sophie and I saw the first door, but nothing is here now. “It was right here,” I say, pulling at my hair. “This is exactly where we met the Queen of Earth.” We all stare at each other biting our jaws and thinking about what to do next. “Zoe can you...”

“I’ll try,” she says with a sigh. She closes her eyes and the ground starts to shake.

“That was fast,” I say.

“I haven’t done anything yet,” she says as her eyes widen.

“Oh...crap,” I say, remembering the last time the ground shook here.

“That can’t be good,” Zoe says.

“What?” Alice says, backing up to take Cormac’s hand.

“Trust me...” Zoe says. “You don’t want to know.”

Waiting for the ground to split open and devour us all with fire, I look up to see four figures surrounding us all. All four elemental spirits are here, staring at us with their arms folded over their chests. “Chris,” Jessica says. “Nice to see you again.”

“You too, my Queen,” I say and bow before her. The gang and I back up, elbow to elbow and form a circle so

we can keep a close eye on our surroundings. “I guess you know why we are here.”

“Yes,” the younger one says.

“You’re the King of Fire?” I ask.

“Yes, and you’re the Guardian,” he replies. “Not doing that good of a job, are you?” Zoe tightens her grip on my hand and widens her eyes to make sure I know not to be a smart ass so I laugh his comment off.

“No,” I say. “I guess I’m not.” I grind my teeth, trying to keep my sarcasm at bay. It doesn’t work. “But I didn’t see you anywhere so—”

“What he means to say is thank you,” Zoe says. “And we would be ever so grateful if you could help us survive in Hell to get our friends back.”

“No,” the Fire King says. “I think he is trying to say something else.” He squints his eyes and comes closer. Zoe flinches. He smiles at her. “You read that thought did you?” She looks at him and gulps. “I could do it...” Zoe gives him a pleading look and her eyes widen at me. “But I won’t,” he says. Zoe sighs with relief. “It was just a thought.”

“Be nice to the Fire King for God’s sake!” Zoe screams inside my head.

“Yes, Chris,” the King of Fire says. “Be nice. And the name is Josh.” He searches Zoe’s eyes and gives her a

wink. “I do a bit of mind reading as well so let me tell you what this one is thinking.”

“Not necessary,” Chris says. “They all know me by now.”

“Do they know that you would put Sophie above anyone else here?” Josh says.

“Um, yeah,” Aodan says.

“Oh...” Josh says, narrowing his eyes at the other three elementals. They all shrug their shoulders. “So you would all go to Hell with him even though he would put Sophie before any of you.”

“You know what, Josh,” I say. “Let me set you straight on something that I don’t think you four fully understand since you’re elementals. First of all, they are doing this for their friends...not me. Secondly, every one of them would put their true love before their friend if it came down to it. It’s not something you go around and brag about, but you know deep down in your gut you would. You just pray to God that you never have to make that choice. That is what love is...that is what true love is. Have you guys...in your whole existence had that? If not, I envy you, but I feel sorry for you at the same time.” Josh smirks and fire spits out of his eyes.

“Josh,” the King of Water says. “That’s enough.” Josh rolls his eyes and sighs. “Chris, I am Jason. We met once before.”

“Hello again, sir,” I say with a bow, really enjoying him scolding Josh.

“And this is the King of Air, Jacob, and the Queen of Earth, Jessica.” We all bow before them. “We will help you survive Hell,” Jason says.

“But...” Jessica says as we all gasp with relief. “A price will have to be paid.”

“Always a price,” I say.

“Remember,” she says.

“I know you can’t go around giving things away for free,” I say.

“Exactly,” she says with a smile. “You were paying attention.”

“So what is it?” I ask.

“Let me tell them,” Josh says. “Please, sis.” She waves a hand and sighs.

“Okay,” Josh claps his hands together as he comes closer to us. “We’ve established that you all would die for each other blah, blah, blah.” He circles around us, making us a bit nervous. I think he likes toying with us too much. “But what if you had to give something up that was more precious than your lives?”

“What could be worth more than our lives?” Cormac asks.

“Your immortality,” Jessica says with a hint of wonder in her eyes. I can hear everyone suck in and hold their breath for a moment. “You would become one hundred percent mortal. No powers, no healing, and no other realms to run to.”

“But here is the fun bit,” Josh says, showing his excitement. “Right now if you die you go to a place where you can see all your family and friends who have gone before you, but if you die when you’re mortal...you go to a different place. They call it Heaven. Don’t get me wrong it is a remarkable place to spend eternity, but without your family and friends...” He pauses to let this information sink in. “So I’ll ask you all again...if that was the price, would you pay it to save your friends?”

“Yes—”

“Not you,” Josh interrupts, “we all know you would. But I feel some doubts among the rest of you.”

“Of course we are doubting,” Zoe says. “Who wants that? That is horrible...why would you even do that? We are here risking our lives for our friends and you pull this. I thought you were on our side.”

“We are, my dear,” Jessica says. “But the price must match the gift given.”

“Do you all accept this price or not?” Jacob says as he rolls his eyes yet again. “Only one will have to pay it.” “Then let me,” Zoe says. “I never had any magic anyway.”

“Hell no,” Aodan says. “I’m not spending eternity without you.”

“No...” Jeremy says. “Let me. After everything...” The spirits laugh.

“You misunderstand,” Josh says. “You don’t get to choose...we do.” It becomes so quiet you can hear the rushing water behind the cave walls. “Does everyone accept?”

“Guys...let me go it alone,” I say.

“Chris—”

“No, Zoe,” I say, holding my hand up to silence her. “Sophie wouldn’t want any of you to give up your immortality and she’d kill me if I let you. Especially you, Ian. I cannot let you go.” Ian sighs at my comment and begins to say something, but I stop him. “You know I’m right. You are the King of Wizardland and you have a baby on the way...”

“Chris, just stop,” Ian says. “I’m going.”

“No—”

“Look, I know Sophie wouldn’t want us to do this, but if it were any of us down there she wouldn’t hesitate and she would stop at nothing to get us back. So

yeah...I'm going, because Sophie would do the same for me. And believe it or not, brother, I'm doing it for you too."

"I'm in too," Zoe says.

"Me too," Aodan says.

"You know I'm in," Matt says. "My girl is down there. I am not returning without her." Alice, Cormac, and Jeremy agree as well and I smile as I look at these amazing people standing beside me.

"We have been through a lot guys," I say. "And though the feeling may not be mutual for some of you, you are my family and...I love you guys." Zoe gives me a smile and a wink, but I think I've mystified the other guys. I cough away my embarrassment. "Well," I say. "There you have it...I guess we are all in."

"Very well," Jessica says. "Just stay where you are."

They waste no time and raise their hands. The wind starts to blow and pick up the dirt around us. It swirls like a tornado as the ground begins to tremble. Soon there is a mixture of earth, wind, fire, and water circling us. We all hold hands and huddle closer together.

"Is it too late to change my mind?" Cormac says as he squints his eyes to see us.

"Just a bit," I say as the funnel starts to close in on us.

"By the way," Josh says with a smirk. "This might hurt a little." As they bring their hands down forcefully, the

funnel consumes us, bringing us to our knees, screaming in pain. I feel like my insides are on fire. I squeeze Zoe's hand to make sure she is okay and she gives me a nod as her jaw clenches. After a few moments, the pain starts to vanish and my skin begins to glow. As the wind dissipates, we all stand breathless. My body begins to tingle.

"You are ready," Jessica says as she makes a portal.

"How will we know how to find them?" Alice asks.

"We can help you get there and bring you back,"

Jessica says. "The rest is on you. I cannot leave the portal open. When you are ready call out to me and I will hear you." When the portal opens all I see is fire.

"Keep going until the fire stops. Their souls will not be in the fire. They will be locked away somewhere—"

"Jessica!" Jacob shouts.

"Right," she says with a smile. "I'm afraid that is all I can tell you." She touches my cheek. "Good luck."

Looking into my eyes, her mind speaks to me. "You are not alone," she says.

"Jessica, that is enough," Josh says. She rolls her eyes at him and moves aside for us to jump through the portal of fire. Though I have been on fire before with Sophie it still amazes me, but I am not nearly as shocked as the rest of the gang. Alice pushes Cormac through and he squeals with one eye open. When he

realizes he is fine, he joins everyone else in wonder. Jessica gives me one last smile before she closes the portal.

“Guys, this is crazy,” Matt says as he waves his hand through the fire. After giving them a moment to adjust, I snap them out of it. “Okay guys,” I say. “We have to move.” We move quickly through the fire and I feel a burning sensation in my stomach. “I think we are close.” As we are walking through the fire about ten souls come leaping at us, trying to pull us further in with them. We all scramble trying to get away, but Zoe thinks fast and is the first to use her new powers; courtesy of the elemental spirits. She uses the power of wind to blow the souls away from us. We straighten ourselves up and try to regain our bearings, as much as we can after being attacked in fire by damned souls.

“Quick thinking, Zoe,” I say. “Thanks.”

“No problem,” she says, a little shook up herself.

“Let’s keep moving,” I say. I sigh the uneasiness away and move my hair, which is now soaked with sweat, out of my eyes. I’ll admit that rattled me a bit. Finally, we reach the edge of the fire. “I’m glad that is over,” I say.

“Tell me about it,” Ian says. “That was horrifying.”

“Yeah, but how many people can say they have walked through Hell’s fire?” Matt says. “And survived.”

“We haven’t survived yet,” I say. “So let’s keep moving.” As we start, we hear a familiar voice from the fire calling out to us.

“Wait,” the voice says. We turn to see Chrissy standing in the fire. She reaches out for Matt. “Don’t leave me,” she says. “Please.” Matt quickly reaches for her.

“Matt, no!” I yell grabbing his arm just in time. “It’s not Chrissy.”

“How do you know for sure?” Matt asks with pain in his eyes.

“Jessica said that she wouldn’t be in the fire. You know her soul is too good for that.” I beg him to follow me and he struggles with his thoughts for a moment. His fists tighten at his side and his jaw clenches, but he slowly backs away from the fire, still hesitant to leave. The soul changes to a more ghastly form and screams in Matt’s face, nearly bringing him to tears. I pull him away. “Come on,” I say. “We have to hurry.”

We continue down the dark and quiet corridor of Hell and I follow the pain in my gut. “Which way, Chris?” Matt asks as we come to stop. “Left or right?”

Closing my eyes to concentrate on Sophie, I whisper to myself. “Come on, Sophie. Show me where you are.” I get a glimpse of her on the floor, but I can’t tell which way we should go. She is still unconscious. “Sophie, wake up!” She jumps up at the sound of my voice and

closes her eyes. I see her more clearly now. “Which way, beautiful?”

She smiles. “Left,” she says. I quickly take a left and everyone follows. As I touch the walls of the corridor, I sense her even more. A voice stops me as I reach a door.

“Stop,” Jessica says.

“What is it?” Ian asks as he runs into me. “Is it Sophie?”

“No...maybe the others,” I say, confused as to why Jessica told me to stop. Pushing the door open, I can see the room is empty. “It is too quiet...I don’t like it.”

“Look,” Matt yells and points to the shelf on the back wall holding the glowing blue vials. “That has to be them, right?”

“That seems too easy,” Ian says. Ignoring the comment, Matt runs and puts the vials in his pocket.

“Right, let’s go then,” he says. I shrug my shoulders and we turn to leave, but someone is blocking our exit. I give Matt a sideways glance and he looks to the floor.

“Are you trying to take something that doesn’t belong to you?” says the mysterious man. He snaps his fingers and the vials are in his hands.

“Those don’t belong to you!” Matt says. He tries to get closer to this strange man, but I hold him back.

“Who are you?” I ask, narrowing my eyes at him.

“Excuse me,” he says. “I don’t usually have uninvited guests. I go by many names, but humans know me as Lucifer, or the devil if you will.” We are a bit taken aback by his comment so he smiles and continues. “So you see, my house...my property.”

“You expect us to believe that you are the devil?” I ask with a chuckle.

“Chris,” Matt asks. “What are you doing?”

“Trust me,” I say. “I have been around my share of kings.” The man squints his eyes at me. “And you are no king...Darius.”

“How?” His eyes widen.

“You possessed me,” I say. “I know you as you know me.” I snap my fingers and the vials are now in my hand. I give him a confident wink, but I wasn’t really sure if it would work. I just figure if the elemental spirits gave us their powers that we can pretty much do whatever we want.

“I would love to know how you talked them into giving you all their powers,” Darius says, leaning up against the wall. “I’m impressed.”

“The devil doesn’t even know what you’re up to, does he?” I ask. “This has been all because of you...why?”

“Seriously?” Zoe says. “Chris, he wants Sophie. It’s obvious, but he doesn’t want her power...he really likes her.” She reads his mind some more.

“Enough of that,” he says as she gets a headache. “I don’t like you reading my thoughts.”

I laugh. “Demons don’t have feelings.”

“This one does...” Jeremy says. “I remember now.” He slowly inches towards Darius. “It was you...the whole time.” Jeremy gets a look of rage in his eyes and, without warning, he runs to Darius and starts choking him. Immediately, Darius catches on fire trying to burn Jeremy, but it doesn’t work. Matt and I drag Jeremy away so we can find out more about what Darius is up to. Jeremy straightens himself. “It wasn’t the power that drove me mad...it was him!”

“What?” I ask, looking toward Darius for answers.

“I remember everything I did to Sophie, but I never could understand why until now,” Jeremy says. “He was possessing me the whole time.” He tries to go after Darius again, but we hold him back.

“Well, not the whole time,” Darius says with a smirk. We are all in shock at this news and it hits me that I killed an innocent man.

“How did we not notice?” I ask.

Darius shrugs his shoulders. “I just piggy-backed,” he says. “I stayed dormant until a good opportunity came my way.” I grind my teeth in anger and release Jeremy and so does Matt. He runs to Darius and shoves his hand through his chest. Darius rolls his eyes because he can’t be killed. I’m not even sure if he feels pain. Jeremy grabs some nearby wire, choking him until it slices through his neck and he turns to ash.

“If they vanquish back to Hell and we are already there...where did he go?” Alice asks.

“Who cares,” I say. “He’s gone. Let’s go and find Sophie.” Jeremy is still gripping the wire, breathing heavily. I put my hand on his back. “Jeremy...” I sigh with guilt. “I am so sorry.” He continues to stare at the floor, confused.

“I knew I wouldn’t...I couldn’t.”

I look back at the gang for some help. They know I am not good with the whole caring thing. They all look away, denying my request. “We’ll figure this out later, but now let’s get to Sophie and get everyone back home.”

“Dude, really...” Matt says for my lack of sympathy for Jeremy.

“Well the lot of you had nothing to give,” I say. “We need to go.”

“How are we going to find her?” Ian asks.

“I don’t know...our connection isn’t as strong without our powers. I think most of that before was Jessica helping out.”

“Well if that is true...she is the Queen of Earth, right?” Alice asks. “She knows where every living thing is.”

“Yeah.”

“She gave us her power silly,” Zoe says. “Just touch the earth and you will see her.” I touch the earth and see her and Darius. “I see them.” Sophie tries to escape, but he pulls her close to him and whispers something in her ear. She begins to cry. “Okay guys, hold hands. I am going to try something.” I raise my hand and dirt surrounds us. When the air clears, I see Darius and Sophie standing in front of us.

“Seriously,” Darius says with a sigh. “Jessica just has it out for me.”

“Chris!” Sophie squeals and I know that all Hell is about to break lose.

## 24

### Back to Sophie

I can't believe Chris is here along with everyone else. They all came to Hell to save us. I'm beyond astounded, but there is no time to be frozen right now. "Just hand Sophie back and we shall be on our way," Chris says.

"Chris," I shout. "Do you have them?"

"Of course, beautiful," he says as he displays three glowing jars. As Darius sighs, I escape his grasp and run into Chris's arms. He growls and tries to come after me, but stops suddenly when a man with huge wings swoops down. The ground shakes as he lands in between Darius and us. He stares at us with red eyes as his wings vanish from view. "Okay...this would be the real Devil," Chris says. "So...run!" We all make a dash for the fire, but he quickly flies over us and blocks our exit.

"Leaving so soon?" the Devil asks. "I don't even know who you are yet."

"Uninvited guests, sir," Darius says.

"We only came to get back what was stolen from us," Chris says as he holds on to me with a protective grip.

“And what is that?” the Devil asks as he notices the jars in Chris’s hand. “Darius, why does he have soul catchers in his hand?”

“They are our friends!” I shout and Chris pulls me closer to him.

“Sophie,” he says.

“Sophie?” the Devil turns to Darius and laughs. “What did you do? I swear...I can’t go anywhere without you getting into trouble.” He snaps his fingers and I am at his side. Chris flinches as the devil leans down to smell my hair. “Ah...such power. Explain, Darius.”

“I made a deal with Maeve,” Darius says.

“Did you go back on your deal?”

“No, my lord, Maeve got what she wanted...if only for a brief moment.” He grins. “No rules were broken, Lucifer...not on my end anyway.”

“Then what’s the problem?” Lucifer asks.

“The problem is...” Chris says, swallowing hard as Lucifer initiates eye contact with him. “These souls were not Maeve’s to bargain with and neither is Sophie.”

“So you want me to cancel the bargain like it never happened?”

“That would actually be—”

“No, Chris!” Zoe shouts. “It’s a trick. He will just rewind time and Maeve would just find another way. She is where she belongs now. There is no telling what could go wrong.” Lucifer growls at Zoe.

“Nobody is supposed to be able to read my thoughts...”

He snaps his fingers and she is in his grasp. He grabs her by the throat and lifts her up in the air, choking her. She kicks her legs to get free. “You are powerful,” he says. “And it isn’t elemental power...it is all you.” He looks at her with narrowed eyes for a moment. Matt is holding Aodan back and Chris is getting fidgety too.

“Okay,” he says, placing Zoe back down on the ground, but he still holds on to her. “I tell you what...you may return home and take the souls of your friends with you. They will be no good to me anyhow.” We all sigh with relief. “But I will hold on to this one.” He pulls Zoe closer to him.

“Hell no!” Aodan says, charging for Lucifer, but Chris is able to stop him. I get goose bumps all over as the Devil grins.

“We aren’t leaving without her,” Chris says with just as devilish of a grin on his face and a familiar twinkle in his eye.

Ian notices as well. “Crap,” he says, taking his fighting stance. Chris swings his fist with, I’m guessing, all his power because when he connects with

Lucifer's jaw we hear thunder. The Devil falls a few feet backwards.

"Run!" Chris yells. Everyone runs, except Chris. I stop and see Lucifer stand slowly and dust himself off.

"Chris, come on!" I shout as my heart starts racing.

"Go on! I'll hold him off," he says, giving me that stare. The one that makes me think he is about to do something stupid to save everyone. "The Devil himself...remember."

"Chris...you can't beat the Devil," I say with impatience.

"But I can hold him off until you guys get through the portal. Go ahead and call Jessica to open it."

"Chris—"

"I'm right behind you, beautiful." He gives me a wink, but quickly turns as the Devil lets out a roar so loud and angry that it makes Darius vanish. "Go!" The devil turns back into the fiery creature with wings and flies toward Chris. Demons start coming out of crevices of the earth. Running toward my friends, I look back to see Chris with his warrior stance. He is actually going to fight the Devil. Right before Lucifer reaches him, Chris raises his hands and water comes up out of the ground. The water washes over the Devil and he shakes it off like a wet dog. He transforms back into a man.

“Very well,” he says as he throws Chris a sword. “A fair fight it is.” Lucifer wields his sword as well and it catches fire.

“I wouldn’t consider this a fair fight,” Chris says.

“Oh, don’t be so modest,” Lucifer says as he begins circling Chris. “I hear you are pretty good.”

“Oh...I am,” Chris says. “I meant it wasn’t fair to you.” He smirks as he swings his sword with confidence.

“God,” I say to myself. “I love that man.” I hurry to get to my friends. “Guys! Demons coming!”

“What do we do?” Zoe asks.

“Jessica!” I yell.

“What about Chris?” Zoe asks, looking back at Chris fighting the Devil. “What is he doing?” She goes to help, but I grab her arm.

“No, he’ll be fine. He will be right behind us.” The demons get closer as the portal opens. “Come on, Chris,” I say, and then hold my breath.

“He’s not going to make it,” Ian says.

“Think of something fast,” Cormac says. “They’re almost here.”

“Hold hands,” I say. We all hold hands. “Give it all you got, guys.” Dirt begins to whirl around us, water rises, and the wind gets even stronger. Just as the demons approach us I throw out my hands. The power washes them back into their holes.

“Come on, guys!” Cormac says jumping through the portal with Alice. I look back for Chris, but I only see Darius. He winks and smiles.

“Sophie!” Jessica yells. “I can’t hold the portal open long.”

“Just one more minute.”

“Sophie,” Ian says grabbing my hand. “He would want you to go...now.”

“I have to know that he made it,” I say.

“You know he did...he always does,” Ian says. “If you don’t come now I will force you through.” I back away.

“Ian, no!” I say as he grabs me. A hand reaches for me before we go through the portal.

“Not necessary brother,” Chris says with a grin.

“It’s about time,” Ian says. “I told you, Sophie...he always finds a way.” He winks and jumps through the portal. I hug Chris tighter than ever and he gasps for air. He kisses me, picks me up, and jumps through the portal.

“Cutting it close, guys,” Josh says. “Welcome back.”

“Chris, how did you get away from Lucifer?” I ask.

“To set the record straight...he was running from me,” he says. “And the massive rush of water may have played a role.”

“Well...only one more thing to do,” Josh says, rubbing his hands together with a grin. “Payment time.” Heads drop to the ground.

“What is going on?” I ask. Nobody answers so I look to Josh for an answer.

“Nothing is free...remember,” he says.

“What did you do?” I ask Chris because it is usually him risking his life for mine.

“This isn’t on him this time, Sophie,” Zoe says. “We all made the decision, but unfortunately you weren’t here so we had to make it for you.”

“Okay so what is the price?” I ask, folding my arms over my chest. “Is someone going to tell me or not?”

Josh sighs and shakes his head with impatience after a moment of silence. “Someone will lose their immortality,” he says. “As soon as you all go back through the veil.” I immediately think of what it would be like and how that could affect my life...Christina’s life. “All you have to do is leave.” Josh pushes us toward the veil.

“Congratulations on your victory,” Jessica says before they all disappear.

“Well,” Ian says. “I guess we should get this over with.”

“Wait,” Chris says as he grabs my hand.  
“Before we go there is something you need to know.”

“God, what now,” I say as his forehead wrinkles and he bites his lip. Everyone else is staring at Jeremy.  
“Okay...what?” I squeeze Chris’s hand to force an answer and he sighs.

“While we were in Hell...we discovered something. The demon that took you—”

“Darius...what about him?”

“Well...when Jeremy attacked you...it wasn’t Jeremy after all.”

I gasp and cover my mouth as I realize that we killed him for nothing. “Jeremy...I am so sorry!”

“Me too Jer—”

“Enough!” Jeremy says.

“Jer,” I say.

“No,” he continues. “I’m not sorry. It had to be done and Chris knows I’m right.”

“It still sucks,” Chris says.

“Yeah...well now we know,” he says. “It’s done.”

“Guys go ahead. I want to talk to Jeremy alone.”

“Okay, beautiful,” Chris says. He kisses me on the forehead and gives Jeremy a weak smile. As they walk through the veil, I come closer to Jeremy trying to find something to say besides ‘I’m sorry’.

“I told you I wouldn’t...I couldn’t,” he says with agony showing in his eyes.

“I should have noticed...someone should have noticed.”

“Darius was clever,” Jeremy says. “He manipulated everything. I wonder if he was part of the reason Mom told me to go back to Wizardland. How long was he inside me?”

“I don’t know,” I say, hugging him because that is all I know to do.

“I know you have flashbacks of that day...you have to.” He clenches his jaw.

“Hey,” I say, making him look at me. “I do have flashes of that day, but from now on I will no longer see you, I’ll see Darius...okay.” He gives me a nod, but I know this is hard on him. “Jeremy I am so sorry—”

“What is done is done,” he says, playing it cool. “Let’s just go...and stop apologizing.” We walk over to the veil and I hold out my hand. He takes it with a sigh.

“Ready?”

“I guess,” he says. Everyone has pity on their faces as we walk back through the veil and I know my powers have come back.

“I’m sorry guys,” Chris says. “But we all have our powers back so it’s between the two of you.”

Jeremy turns and cracks a smile. “Did we really think this would go any other way?”

“Jer—”

“No, this is how it should be. You are Queen.”

“This is so unfair!” I yell. “After everything we have just found out...I know they had to know...and still they did this!” I am so angry and I can feel the heat.

“Hey, I’m fine,” Jeremy says. “I’ll figure this out. I lived as a mortal before remember. I can do it again.” I calm down a bit, but it still sucks. Why would they do this to him?”

“Come on,” he says. “We have to go get our friends back.” He holds out his hand. “Would you be so kind as to help me back, my lady,” he says.

I grab his hand and try to crack a smile. “Of course.”

~

As we enter Zoe’s world it seems so empty. Danny, Chrissy, and Jen still lay on the floor where we left them. The blue light from the jars brighten as we enter the room. “Here goes nothing,” Chris says as he opens the jars. The blue lights streak across the room and hover over our friends’ bodies. One sinks into Chrissy’s chest and the other into Jen’s. The blue light left over goes into Danny. We wait a moment, but nothing happens.

“Why isn’t it working?” I ask.

“It may take a moment longer,” Zoe says.

“Alice,” I say nudging her. “Go check it out.”

“Why me?” she says, a little spooked. I guess we are all a little on edge after coming back from Hell.

“You’re the healer,” I say. She sighs and walks toward them slowly. Leaning down over Danny, she puts her hand on his chest. A light comes from her hand and she smiles. All three of them quickly sit up and gasp for air. Alice jumps across the room.

“Oh my God!” she yells as she falls on the floor. We all collapse with her, laughing, and crawl toward our friends for a much deserved hug.

“Did we miss something?” Chrissy asks.

“A bit,” Matt says as he kisses her.

“We are glad you guys are okay,” Alice says.

“What did we miss?” Danny asks.

“Do y’all remember anything?” I say.

“Deb...she—”

“That wasn’t Deb,” Ian says.

“Did we die?” Chrissy asks.

“Yes, but you are back now,” Matt says.

“Okay...long story short,” Chris says. “A demon named Darius is obsessed with Sophie. He made a deal with Maeve to get Sophie out of the way, but the price was three mortal souls, which is where you three

came in. He took you three and Sophie to Hell and we went there and brought you back.”

“We were in Hell!” Jen shouts.

“Oh and there was a price we had to pay. One of us lost our immortality.”

“Oh God,” Danny says. “Who?” Jeremy steps forward. “Oh...you.”

“Before you say something you’ll regret, Danny, something else happened while we were in Hell.”

“What?” Danny says, glaring at Jeremy.

“We found out it wasn’t Jeremy that attacked Sophie,” Chris says.

“Yeah, I know it was the power.”

“No,” Chris says. “It was the demon...Darius. He possessed Jeremy the whole time.”

“What?” Danny releases his stare to look at Chris.

“Jeremy had no control,” Chris says. “He couldn’t stop it. If you have ever been possessed you’d understand.” At his words, I remember when Maddox possessed him, but he had a brief moment of self-control and was able to save me. Danny is silent for a moment and then walks toward Jeremy.

“I knew that wasn’t you,” Danny says as he gives him a hug.

“Okay, so Maeve, Cynthia, Lena, and Maddox are all locked away,” Cormac says. “Is everything back to normal now?”

“Let’s go back to Wizardland and find out,” I say. “Everyone up for that?”

“Actually, can you just take us back to the mortal realm,” Jen says.

“Sure, where to?”

“Your house...if that’s okay with you.”

“Our house,” I say. “And it’s no problem. Jeremy, where to?”

“I’d like to go back to Wizardland to tell my mom about...you know,” he says.

“Yes, of course,” I say with a sigh, still in disbelief of what he has been through. “Guys we will meet y’all back at the house later.” I pop them to the mortal world and us back to Wizardland. “Where is everyone?” We walk through the empty foyer as Joffrey passes by and notices us.

“My King...Queen!” he yells running towards us. He pulls Ian in for a hug and his expression is beyond shocked to see us. “We thought you all were dead. My Queen,” he pulls me in for a hug as well.

“Joffrey...how long were we gone for?” Ian asks.

“Three days, my lord,” he says.

“It only felt like an hour or two,” I say. “Where is everyone?”

“They are in the Judgement hall, my lady. Amelia is on trial for the murder of Lady Miranda.”

“What?” Jeremy says. “That was an accident!” Jeremy gets his wand out and flicks it, but nothing happens. “Damn it!” he shouts as he pounds his fist on the wall of the castle. “Damn it!” he says again as he shakes his hand in pain. Alice grabs his hand.

“Here,” she says.

“Alice,” I say with shock. “You can heal mortals now?”

“I don’t know to what extent, but I guess so,” she says with a smile as she watches his hand heal.

“Sophie, take me to my mother, please,” Jeremy says.

“Of course.”

“Thanks, Alice,” he says taking my hand.

Joffrey narrows his eyes. “I assume I have missed a lot.”

“I’ll catch you up on the way to see Deb. Is she well?” Ian asks.

“Worried, Sire, but well.”

“Okay, I’ll meet y’all in her quarters. Jeremy and I pop into the courtroom and all eyes are on us. Jeremy runs to his mother.

“Sophie!” Mom rushes to me. “Oh my God!”  
Brion runs in behind her.

“Where is Christina? Is she okay?” I ask.

“She’s just fine,” Mom says. “She is with Nina since Deb has to stay in bed.”

“Good Lord, we were worried sick,” Brion says.

“Queen Sophie,” Conner says coming in behind Brion. “So glad to see you...and Ian?”

“He went to see Deb,” I say. “We all made it back.” I give him a hug. Jeremy coughs to get my attention. “Oh yes,” I say. “Grandfather...what is going on?”

“Well...Amelia is to be punished for Miranda’s murder,” he says.

“But I thought that was an accident,” I say. “Isn’t that what Miranda told Nicola?”

“Yes, but some...” he looks to Conner. “Argue that Amelia could have found her and brought her back to heal, but she left her to die.”

“That’s not true!” Jeremy yells.

“Can we take a short break so Jeremy can talk to his mom?” I say. “And we need to talk too.”

“Of course,” Brion says.

“Great. I’ll meet all of you in Deb’s room. I want to see Christina.”

~

Christina jumps into my arms as soon as I pop in. I am beyond happy to see her. There was a moment in Hell when I thought that I would never see her again. It didn't last long though because I knew Chris would come for me. He always does, but I still missed her. As I squeeze her tight, I realize how big she is getting. It tugs at my heart a bit to think about her getting older.

Everyone is standing around Deb's bed talking about the baby.

"Any day now," she says as she rubs her belly. "I'm just ready."

"As are we," Conner says, walking in with Mom, Brion, and Chris.

"Hey, beautiful," Chris says, kissing my hand. He picks Christina up and twirls her. "And how are you, love?"

"Fine," she giggles.

"You are getting as big as your mother. You'll be as tall as her before long."

"Ha, ha," I say as he puts her down and pulls me in for a kiss.

"So...how's Jeremy?" he raises an eyebrow.

"Seriously," I ask.

"What?" he asks innocently, but I know that jealous look.

“He’s upset and you should know that nobody will ever come between us by now,” I say.

“Well, obviously...not even the Devil,” he says, smiling that cocky smile and staring at me with those intoxicating green eyes.

“I still can’t believe you fought the Devil,” I say.

“I know, but it was kind of a let-down,” he says.

“What do you mean?”

“I thought he’d be better.”

“Well he was fighting the guardian of the queen,” I say just so I can see that smirk again.

“I can’t believe I finally have you,” he says.

“If you don’t run off again...you could be considered a flight risk.” He laughs at my joke.

“I might be the one who runs you off,” he says.

“I know I’m not the easiest wizard to love.”

“Hey,” I say, stroking his face. “You are very easy to love.”

“Am I?” he says.

“I’ve loved you since...since I first saw you at the fountain.” I say. He leans down to kiss me, but Joffrey runs in the room.

“My King...My Queen!” he shouts.

“What is it Joffrey?” Ian asks.

“Amelia and her son...Jeremy...they are gone!”

“What do you mean they are gone?” Conner shouts.

“I mean they are just gone. One minute they were there and the next they vanished.” Joffrey says.

“But I banished her powers,” Conner says.

“Well...she must have gotten them back somehow,” he says.

“Sophie...did you—”

“Of course not,” I shout.

“Sorry...” Conner says. “I had to ask. He is your friend.”

“He is friends of us all, Father,” Ian says. “He didn’t do this...Amelia did.”

“Of course,” Conner says. “We have to find her. I’ll return soon.” He vanishes along with Brion.

“Crap,” I say and Chris pulls me into his chest.

“Don’t worry, love,” he says. “I’ll go and help. See you soon.”

I give him a smile before he disappears and I sigh looking toward my friends. “I guess rest will have to wait.”

## 25

### The Hunt

Chris and I have searched the mortal world for two weeks, but haven't found them. "Where could they have gone?" I ask.

"I don't know," Chris says. "But we will find them." I sigh. "What?" he asks.

"I don't know...it's just," I hesitate to tell him my feelings.

"You don't want to find them...do you?" He says as if reading my mind. I give him a side-ways glance.

"Sophie, Amelia—"

"I know what she did, Chris!" I say with a tone a bit too harsh. "What about Jeremy? After all he has been through..."

"And what about Conner or Ian?" he says. "Do they not deserve justice, Sophie? I know you feel guilty about Jeremy...I do too, but they are not punishing him they are punishing Amelia."

"But she is all he has," I say with tears building up.

"No, she isn't," Chris says pulling me closer. "He has us."

“I know you’re right.” I pull away from him and dry my eyes. “I just wanted them to have some time together first.” I start to raise my wand.

“But you said that you couldn’t bring them back before,” Chris says. He lowers his head, knowing that I lied to him. Shaking his head, he sighs. “Why did you lie to me?”

“I didn’t lie,” I say. “I couldn’t bring Amelia back. I just didn’t try to bring Jeremy back. Nobody asked me to.”

“Sophie...” He clenches his jaw and strokes my cheek. “What am I going to do with you? Let’s go back to the house and you can bring him back there. Maybe we can talk some sense into him.”

“Thank you for understanding.”

“Yeah...yeah. Let’s go, beautiful.”

~

As soon as we are back at the house, I flick my wand and Jeremy appears. His eyes widen and he runs to the door. Chris blocks his exit before he can escape.

“Jeremy, we just want to talk,” I say.

“I am not telling you where she is,” he says as he turns to look at me.

“Jeremy, I know nothing about this is fair, but—”

“Look, I know what she did was wrong...but I just need a little more time with her. Just give me a few more days. Please, Sophie.”

I bite my lip and glance at Chris. He shrugs his shoulders because he already knows my decision. “All right,” I say. “But Jeremy we are here for you. You will not be alone...okay.”

“Thanks, Soph,” he says. “I got to go.”

“Well, I can send you back if you tell me where,” I offer.

“Clever,” he says with a smile. “But you can just pop me to the mall. I’ll find my way back.”

“You know Amelia will find a way so you can’t do that anymore,” Chris says.

“I know,” I say as I pop us to the mall as well. “That’s why we are going to follow him.”

“Well...I didn’t expect this,” he says.

“He was lying to me,” I say. “I could always tell when he was lying...pre-Darius. He isn’t planning on coming back and he still thinks she is innocent.”

“Should we contact someone?” Chris says.

“Not yet, let’s just see where he goes.” Jeremy gets in a cab so we flag the next one and follow him.

“Where is he going?” Chris asks about thirty minutes into the drive. I look out the window and see a sign.

“He’s going to the marina,” I say.

“Really,” Chris says with a hint of agitation.

“Why?” I ask, concerned. “What’s wrong with the marina?” He hesitates to answer me and his fingers go through his hair. He exhales a breath and rolls his eyes. I hold my stare so he knows I am not letting this go.

“I get sea-sick...okay,” he says.

“What?” I laugh. “Seriously.”

“Shut-up,” he says. “Everyone has a weakness and besides you mine happens to be boats.”

“I thought I knew everything about you,” I say. “So the big, bad warrior who fought the Devil gets sea-sick.” He arches an eyebrow at me. “Okay...sorry, but you better get over it quick because we are here.”

Jeremy hops out of the cab and walks toward a yacht.

“Why is he getting on a yacht?” Chris asks.

“Amelia,” I say. “She still has her powers so they can pretty much get whatever they want.” We walk toward the yacht named ‘The Donna Jo.’ “Come on.”

“Fine,” Chris growls.

As soon as we walk onto the boat Chris starts to look pale. “It’s not even moving,” I say.

“It’s the rocking,” he says, taking a breath. “I’ll be fine.” We walk a bit further and hear arguing. Just when we are close enough to hear the conversation Chris leans overboard to vomit.

“Chris!” I say. “Be quiet.” He continues to vomit and I hear the arguing stop so I quickly pop us out of there before we are seen.

“So sorry,” Chris says wiping his mouth off with his sleeve.

“Are you okay?” I ask, rubbing his back.

“Better now. Did you hear what they were arguing about?”

“He was mad that she was talking to someone, but I couldn’t hear who.”

“Again...sorry,” he says.

“That’s okay. At least we know where they are now,” I say.

“Should we report back then?”

“Yes, I guess.”

~

“Any luck?” Ian asks.

“A bit,” Chris says. “Sophie popped Jeremy back to the house, but he wouldn’t tell us anything.” I notice Ian’s vein pop out on his neck, which means he is pissed.

“Chris—”

“So we followed him to the marina, but had to leave suddenly...” Chris’s voice trails off when he notices the look Ian is giving me.

“You lied to me,” Ian says. “You said that you couldn’t bring them back.”

“No, I said I couldn’t bring Amelia back.” He sighs, pulls at his hair, and turns away from me. “Ian...” He turns back with reddened cheeks.

“She murdered my mother, Sophie, and you’re protecting her!”

“I’m not—”

“You are my wife...my Queen...mother of my child! But I guess your loyalty no longer falls to me...your king.” He walks away as Brion and Conner enter.

“Ian wait,” I say. He stops for a moment, but doesn’t turn around. He sighs.

“Which marina, Sophie?” he asks. I don’t answer right away. “What marina?” he shouts, making me jump.

“River Falls Marina,” I say with tears building up.

“Let’s go,” Ian says. Brion looks at me, concerned, but he and Conner vanish with Ian.

Chris pulls me close to him. “Look, I know why you lied, but that doesn’t make it right.”

“I know.” I wipe my eyes. “I’ve never seen him this angry.”

“Of course he’s angry,” Chris says with a laugh. “He feels you chose Jeremy over him.”

“That isn’t—”

“Yes it is,” Chris says. “Though you may not see it that way that is exactly what you did. You need to fix it, beautiful.”

“How?”

“I don’t know,” he says kissing my forehead. “Go be with Christina for a bit. I need to go see someone.”

He vanishes and I go to see Christina who is already asleep so I climb in bed to snuggle up with her. Soon I close my eyes and I am asleep.

I wake up to Christina staring at me. “Good morning,” I say, giving her a kiss.

“Morning Mommy,” she says. “Why were you and Daddy fighting?”

“Oh...sweetie, that was nothing,” I say, surprised she knew we had a fight.

“He sounded mad,” she says with her ‘I know you’re lying’ face.

“Well...Mommy made a stupid mistake that hurt Daddy’s feelings, but don’t worry I will fix it.”

“No need,” Ian says from the doorway.

“Daddy!” Christina yells and runs to him for a hug. He picks her up and gives her a kiss on the cheek. I love seeing the two of them together. It makes me smile.

“Can you give Mommy and me a moment, monkey?”

“Sure,” she says, grabbing Nina’s hand to go downstairs and eat breakfast.

“Ian, I am so sorry,” I say, feeling guilty about hurting his feelings. “You know my loyalty will always fall to

you. I just felt guilty about getting Jeremy killed and then getting his powers taken away—”

“Sophie, be quiet for a second,” Ian says. I’m a little hurt at his words, but I listen to what he has to say.

“Wow,” he says. “I really didn’t think that would work so well,” he says. I narrow my eyes at him. “Look, I may have been a bit harsh last night. Even though you should have been honest with me, I should have remembered how close that you two were pre-Darius. So I am sorry too.” He holds out his arms and I quickly run in for a hug.

“Plus,” Chris says, pulling me from Ian’s grasp. “I went to talk to Zoe last night and someone paid us a visit.” I turn to see Jeremy standing in the doorway and I gasp.

## 26

### Chris

As I walk in Zoe's shop, Ian, Brion, and Conner are waiting for Zoe as well. "What brings you all in here?" I ask.

"Did you know?" Ian asks as he starts toward me. Brion stops him and sighs. "Did you forget your loyalty as well?" I let out a chuckle. I know he is just mad right now, but it's very irritating.

"Okay, enough of that, brother," I say to remind him who he is talking to. "No, I didn't know and it hurt me too when she didn't tell me. I'm not saying it was right or that you shouldn't be a little pissed, but let me paint you a picture from her mind." Ian rolls his eyes as I begin. "Imagine a friend that you have known since kindergarten. You hang out every day before school, after school, at the mall, parties, and even an occasional meet up at a coffee house. So, this friend you've known forever becomes someone totally different to the point where you think he's gone mad. And this friend you've trusted your whole life attacks you one day. They hold you down, force themselves on you, and the whole time

you think your world is falling apart. Nothing could be worse, until you have to watch them die. Feeling happy that they are dead, but guilty about it at the same time. Do you know how much guilt that puts on a person? I do...I felt her guilt.” I watch as Ian’s head lowers to the ground. “Then after a while you find out it wasn’t them at all. You watched your friend die for nothing...you killed your friend for nothing. Your friend lost everything because a demon wanted you!” I poke his chest. Then, when you think nothing else bad could happen to this poor bastard he loses his powers and is about to lose his mother as well all because of you. Guilt beyond guilt brother.” I’ve silenced everyone. “Now you have the chance to make up for that just a little by letting him have a few moments left with his mother. Wouldn’t you do it?”

“Okay,” Ian sighs. “I get your point.”

“I sympathize with Jeremy for all he has gone through...I do,” Conner says. “That still doesn’t change the fact that he is hiding Amelia.”

“Yeah...” Jeremy says, walking in with Zoe. “About that.”

Ian jumps. “Hear him out guys!” Zoe says before anyone can lose their temper.

“Go ahead,” Ian says, his jaw tightened.

“After I saw Chris and Sophie yesterday, I went back to my mother and she was talking with someone.” Jeremy says.

“Who?” Conner asks.

“Darius.”

“Why the Hell was she talking with Darius?” I ask.

“I overheard their conversation...” he says.

“What were they discussing?” Brion asks.

“She made a deal with him...to get my powers back,” Jeremy says.

“What?” I shout.

“But only the elementals can do that...right?” Ian looks to Brion.

“Yes,” Brion says.

“I told her that, but she insists that he found a way. She wouldn’t listen to reason. She is obsessed with getting my powers back.”

“What was the deal?” Brion asks.

“Let me guess...” I say. “For Sophie.” He nods in agreement.

“How do they plan on getting to Sophie?” Brion asks.

“I didn’t hear that part,” Jeremy says. “But I’m afraid he may try to use me again...I can’t do that again.”

“We have a potion to keep him out,” Zoe says. “I’ll get started on it.”

“Don’t worry, Jeremy,” I say. “We’ll keep him at bay, but we need to know where Amelia is.”

“I’m not sure,” he says, scratching his head. “But there was a place she mentioned...some abandoned estate near Sophie’s house.”

“The Hightower Estate,” I say. “I stayed there a few times when I was in hiding.”

“Let’s go then,” Conner says.

“Wait,” I say. “The deal has already been made. We need a plan to stop it.”

“Have all the ancestors gone back to the other side?” Ian asks.

“I believe so,” I say. “Mom and Dad went back as well.”

“They weren’t sure you were going to make it back,” Brion puts his hand on my shoulder. “I told them not even Hell would stop their son, but they had to make a quick decision, my boy. I am sorry.” I cough away my emotion for the time being.

“So when is this potion thing going to be ready?” I shout to Zoe.

“A few more minutes,” she says.

“I say we go test the water,” Conner says. “Go see what she is up to.”

“Isn’t that risky?” I ask. “She could run and go into hiding again.”

“She still claims to be innocent,” Jeremy says. “And I believe her.” Conner growls, but Brion calms him with a touch of his hand.

“Then why did she run?” Conner asks.

“She wasn’t going to...until she found out I lost my powers. She got a little pissed off about it.”

“A little?” Ian says. “She made a deal with Darius. I’d say she was more than a little pissed off.”

“She can still be reasoned with—”

“I’m afraid that time has passed Jeremy,” Brion says. “If she doesn’t uphold her end...Darius gets her soul.”

“What?” Jeremy asks.

“And you know we can’t let her uphold that deal,” I say. Jeremy screams in annoyance, burying his face in his hands.

“Why would she do this?” he says.

“A mother will go to any length for her child,” Brion says. “But I’m sorry; she can’t be saved.”

“Didn’t you say that only the elemental spirits can give powers back?” Jeremy says.

“Yes,” I say. “So.”

“Well...he shouldn’t be able to uphold his end either...right?”

“As long as we can get to the elementals to tell them what’s going on.”

“We already know,” Jessica’s voice echoes throughout the room. Soon they all show themselves.

“In trouble again, are we?” Josh says. My eyes habitually narrow. “Mind your thoughts, Chris,” he says.

“Darius has been having too much fun with the human world...and Wizardland it seems.”

“I’ll go and have a talk with Lucifer,” Josh says. “He’ll set Darius straight. Just find Amelia and bring her to trial.” They disappear and we shrug.

“That was easy enough,” Conner says.

“It’s never that easy...” I say, wiping sweat from my brow that seems to appear every time I see Josh.

“Especially when Sophie is involved.”

“But we have to trust they know what they are doing,” Brion says. “So let’s go get Amelia.”

“Maybe we all need to take a bit of that potion,” I say.

~

The Hightower Estate is over grown with weeds, grass, and moss lining what I can only imagine used to be the one of the most magnificent estates in Georgia.

“Let me go in first,” Jeremy says. Nobody argues as he works his way in. We creep further behind him to stay hidden in the shadows.

“Jeremy,” Amelia says. “Where have you been?”

“Mom...this has to stop,” he says.

“But we are so close, baby,” she pleads.

“Darius—”

“Darius is lying, Mom!”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” Darius says, walking in from the other room. Jeremy flinches when he sees him.

“What is going on?” Jeremy asks.

“He only needs you for a little while,” Amelia says. “He promises he will leave as soon as he gets what he wants.”

“You mean Sophie,” Jeremy says.

“Well...yeah,” Darius says. “That was the deal.”

“And then you can have your powers back,” Amelia says.

“How could you make a deal like that without asking me first?” Jeremy says. “After all he has done to me...to us!” He makes his mother flinch from shouting.

“It isn’t fair that they took your powers from you!” she says. “Not after everything you have gone through.”

“It was my choice. I chose to go to Hell and save my friends...knowing well what could happen. I trust the elemental spirits and so should you.” He grabs his mother’s wrist.

“What are you doing?” she asks, looking into his eyes.

“It’s time to go home,” he says. She turns to Darius for help and he turns to smoke, but quickly reappears.

“You have been cleansed,” he growls. I nod for all to follow as I make my way out of the shadows. Darius gives me a smirk. “You’ve all been cleansed. How clever of you, but no matter, she will be mine...eventually.”

“She will never be yours!” I shout as I run to slice his head off, watching him turn to dust.

“What have you done?” Amelia cries. “If I don’t go through with the deal—”

“Everything is taken care of Mom,” Jeremy says. “The deal is broken.”

“How?”

“Don’t worry,” he says. “Let’s get you back for the trial.”

“They will never believe it was an accident.” She cries in Jeremy’s chest and he gives us a pleading stare.

Brion sighs with sympathy. “I think I may know a way.”

## 27

### Back to Sophie

I can't believe they got him here. "Jeremy, how—"

"He came to us," Chris says. "Amelia made a deal with Darius to get Jeremy's powers back." My hand immediately covers my mouth. "It's taken care of," Chris says while locking his arms around me and kissing my cheek. "Let's go," he says. "The trial is starting."

"Hang on," I say. "Jer." The rest leave us in the quiet room.

"What's up, Soph?" he says. I smile, knowing this is the Jeremy that I grew up with and nothing is lingering inside of him.

"I just want to say that I am sorry again," I say.

"Soph," he says with exasperation. "You have to stop apologizing for other people's choices. You didn't choose what Darius did to you."

"No, but he did it and you had to face the consequences and now you're having to face more." He pulls me in for a hug.

“Everything will work out,” he says. “Come on.” He drags me down the hall. “I don’t want to miss this.”

“Miss what?” I ask.

“You’ll see.”

~

When we enter the courtroom Amelia is already on the stand with the council ready to hear her. Annabelle, the seer that took us to Thailand, is at her side.

“What is going on?” I ask Chris as I go and stand beside him.

“The seer can project an image to show what happened that day,” he says.

“Well...that’s neat.”

“Yeah, but extremely painful for Amelia,” he says, folding his arms over his chest. He glances at Jeremy and sighs.

“Are you sure you are ready for this Jeremy?” Brion asks. “This will be excruciating for her.”

“Yeah...but she will heal. At least everyone will know the truth about that day...including me.”

“I thought you believed her,” Chris says.

“I do, but I’ll know for sure...you know,” Jeremy says.

“I get it,” Chris says. “Her willingness to do this should be convincing enough. She wouldn’t go through the pain otherwise.”

Annabelle places her hand on Amelia’s shoulder and nods. Amelia braces herself in the chair. As Annabelle raises her hand, Jeremy grabs mine. As soon as her hand goes to Amelia’s temple she starts to scream. Jeremy’s grip gets tighter. I can see tears forming in his eyes. I let go of his hand to rub his back for comfort. Chris notices and puts his hand in place of mine so I can grab Jeremy’s hand again. He gives me a wink, but I think he feels just as guilty as I do. An image appears above Annabelle. I see Maddox and my heart skips. “Sophie, your hand is getting hot,” Jeremy says. “Please don’t burn me. I don’t heal instantly anymore...remember.”

“Sorry,” I say, calming myself down a bit. Miranda appears next and I look over to Conner and Ian. They both have reddened cheeks and tightened jaws. They are trying to control their temper.

She is so beautiful. Her long, curly, black hair blows in the wind as she and Maddox embrace. When Maddox can’t see her face she sheds a few tears. You can tell she doesn’t want to be there by her expression. She looks out into the distance. All of a sudden, Amelia manifests, waving her wand around in anger. She

throws a sword, but misses Maddox and hits Miranda instead. The force pushes her off the cliff. Ian and Conner embrace as they watch her die. Amelia's eyes widen. She knocks Maddox out and pops down to where Miranda fell, but it was too late. Amelia was telling the truth about going back for her. She had been banished so what could she do? The image fades with Amelia crying over Miranda's body and holding her in her arms. Annabelle releases Amelia and she starts to slip out of the chair, unconscious. Jeremy quickly runs to catch her. I notice Annabelle is a bit wobbly too, but Brion gets to her before she falls. The council discusses for a moment. "This was clearly an accident," Joffrey says. "Although she should have come forward sooner."

"She was banished," Jeremy says. "How could she?"

"Fair point," Joffrey says. "But there are other ways to reach us. She knew Mary was in the same vicinity and she did nothing to try to make contact with her. Jeremy sighs in frustration as he holds his mother. "We will wait on the spirits to make their judgement."

"Yeah...yeah," Josh says. "Clear of all charges." The crowd whispers.

"Wait a minute," Conner says. "She still killed my wife."

“Yes, and she had the chance to come back, didn’t she?” Josh says.

Conner growls and lunges for Josh, but Ian holds him back.

“King of Fire, Dad...just saying.”

“Well...he’s a prick,” Conner says and Josh smirks.

“Josh,” Jessica says. “We have other pressing matters to deal with.”

“Yes...of course,” Josh says. “Amelia will serve time for not coming in sooner, but enough of that for now.” He finds me in the crowd. “There she is,” he says. “Come forward you little trouble maker.”

“This is not her fault, Josh!” Jason says.

“I’m only playing around with her,” Josh replies. I move forward with Chris following. “Not you, pretty boy...just her.” I close my eyes, hoping Chris doesn’t respond. *Why must Josh have to get underneath his skin so badly?*

“Because it is fun,” he whispers in my ear when I approach him. “I like to see that warrior in him come out.”

“Josh talked to Lucifer and Darius will not be bothering you again,” Jessica says with a sigh.

“Well that is good then,” I say, seeing Jeremy’s face light up.

“Yeah...” Josh takes a breath. “It would be, but seeing how obsessed Darius is with you has intrigued him.”

“What do you mean?” I chuckle.

“I know, crazy right?” Josh says. “But none the less...he wants you.”

“What?” Chris says. “This is crazy! What part of ‘not available’ do these damn demons not understand?”

“I am not a demon boy!” Lucifer roars as he appears with fire all around him. As the flames die out the crowd panics and runs toward the exits. Lucifer waves his hand and the doors shut, blocking them all in. As they scream, I get pissed. I flick my wand and send everyone, except my friends, outside; I may need their help. The Devil gives me a smirk. “A Queen indeed.” He looks at Zoe and gives her a wink. “Hey, sweetheart.” She swallows hard and grabs Aodan. I think everyone is speechless at the moment so Josh takes the reins.

“Lucifer...what the hell,” he says.

The Devil lets out a sigh and waves his hand. They all vanish and Lucifer and I are alone. I raise my wand to bring them back, but he holds up his finger. “Would you rather I snap my fingers and kill them all on the spot, my dear?” I’m not sure he could do it, but I

don't want to risk it. "I just want to talk for a moment," he says.

"About what?"

He sighs and struts around me. "Do you know what you are...I mean really?"

"Yes," I answer, unsure.

"No...I mean do you know everything?" He raises an eyebrow.

"Why don't you enlighten me?" I say, trying to stay calm as I wipe the sweat from my palms. I am freaking out a bit. I am talking to Lucifer! I breathe slowly, putting on a brave face. He snickers at my comment.

"Well...the whole angel thing..." Dust falls from the ceiling as the walls shake around us. He laughs. "We don't have much time. Those pesky elementals will work their way in eventually. There are levels of angels. Now you and your friends are at the very bottom of the barrel...the workers if you will."

"Workers?"

"You see," he says, brushing off more dust from his shoulder. "There are worker angels...such as you and I'm using the term 'angel' loosely. I mean...you really shouldn't be in the same category."

"Do you have a point?" I say, annoyed at his banter. I just want him to tell me what he has to tell me

and leave. Flames shoot from the torches on the wall and lightning strikes the window making it shatter.

“Man...they are getting testy,” he says. “Okay, so we have you guys, elementals, the spirits, a few others above that, and then at the very tip-top of the barrel there are the archangels...me.”

“What is your point?” I narrow my eyes.

“No point,” he says. “I was just trying to impress you. Maybe I should try a different tactic. So you are classified in with your friends, but since Josh juiced you up when you were a baby your power is up there with the spirits...just about. Don’t you think you deserve better than this?” He looks at our surroundings and snarls his nose.

“And that would be what...Hell?” I laugh and he shrugs.

“Well...yeah,” he says.

“I’ve been to Hell...remember,” I say. “And I will take this over that any day.”

“Oh...but you only saw the second floor,” he says.

“Second...what is the first?”

“Not sure...”he says. “Something to do with the worst of the worst elementals or something...that is Jessica’s department.”

“Jessica’s?”

“Hell has many levels, but I live in the penthouse suite. Take my hand and I will show you.” He grins. I have to admit I am curious, but there is no way...well...in Hell that I am grabbing the Devil’s hand. “Oh...” he says. “I’ve piqued your interest,” he says, turning his head quickly toward the door and then back to me. “We’ll talk again soon,” he says with a wink and vanishes. The doors fly open and the spirits and my friends rush in.

## 28

### **Love is Eternal**

It's been a week since Lucifer came to see me. Everything seems to be normal, but I'm waiting for something to go wrong at any moment. I've been a bit jumpy ever since.

Amelia is doing her time with the elemental spirits and Jeremy is helping out at Zoe's store. She has even let him stay in the apartment upstairs. He seems to be adjusting pretty well without his wizard magic, but his mortal magic is still there.

Chris seems to think Lucifer has moved on to something else. I hope he is right because Deb should be having her baby at any moment and I don't want anything to mess that up. Everyone is already on edge...waiting. The Kingdom is having a festival today...it should actually have already started, though they don't know about the new arrival yet. I have to announce it to the whole kingdom and tell them that the baby is Ian's and Deb's...I am so nervous. I mean if they don't take the news well they could rebel...anything could happen. Brion said it wasn't a

big deal, but he always makes things sound better to keep me calm. Chris taps my shoulder and I jump.

“Still waiting on Lucifer to pop up?” he asks. I sigh with relief when I see him. “It’s been a week, beautiful,” he says placing a strand of hair behind my ear. “Do you think the elementals might have reasoned with him?”

“Well, I wish I knew. I haven’t heard from them since they left with Amelia.”

“I know it’s frustrating, but today is a happy day,” he says. “We are adding to our family.”

“I know.” My lip curls up hearing him talk about our family. He always knows how to make me feel better.

“He’s here!” Ian bursts into the room. Of course, I jump again. Chris smiles.

“Congratulations, brother!” They embrace and I stand to join in. Ian about squeezes us both to death, smiling from ear to ear.

“Come...you must see him!”

Everyone runs to the other room to see Deb.

“Come on, Love,” Chris says, holding out his hand for me to grab.

~

Deb is holding a beautiful baby boy in her arms. His head is covered with dark brown hair and he has Deb's green eyes.

"Congratulations, Deb...you too, Ian." Deb's smile fades when she notices my bleak expression.

"Still worried about Lucifer?" she asks.

I smile. "I can't hide anything from this crowd anymore, can I?" I say.

"Well...you never really were good at hiding it before," Aodan says.

"Ha, ha," I say. "But I am fine and today is about...have y'all even got a name picked out yet?"

"It's Haidain," Ian says. "Named after Deb's father. Haidain Ian Campbell."

"I love it!" Alice cheers.

"Okay..." the doctor comes in. "Everyone out. Let's give the baby and Mom some rest." He pushes everyone out of the room. "Go enjoy the festival." Everyone says their goodbyes and I take another look at Deb and baby Haidain and wonder...*will I ever have another one. Should I have another one? Would Chris even want one?*

"Of course he will," Zoe whispers in my ear. She smiles as she walks by and I blush, pressing my lips in a hard line. "I can't help it sometimes," she says

innocently. “It just happens.” She snickers as she and Aodan vanish.

“What was that all about?” Chris says.

“Just Zoe reading my mind again,” I say annoyed.

“And what is my lady thinking about,” Chris asks as he pulls me closer.

“Nothing,” I say, blushing again. He raises an eyebrow.

“Come on, let’s go to the festival,” I say to change the subject.

~

I love seeing Wizardland so happy and vibrant. I can smile easily looking around at everyone so at peace, but Lucifer is still in my head. Also, after seeing Deb and Ian have a baby...it’s making me think about Chris and me. What is our future going to be like? I will never be able to call him my husband. I already have one. Most of the Kingdom knows about us by now, but Ian still has to be King. He is the best King. I have to stop obsessing. I have Chris now and that’s all I ever wanted. My thoughts are just getting away from me and Chris pulls me in close to his chest and leans down and kisses me. When I open my eyes we are at a beach somewhere with a blanket spread out on the ground. I laugh.

“You looked like you could use a break,” he says.

“Thanks.”

“So...what’s on your mind?” he asks. “And don’t say Lucifer because I know you. It’s something else.” I nervously twiddle my fingers and look out into the ocean. The wind blows in my face and I close my eyes. I take a deep breath, smelling the ocean air.

“Come on,” he says. “I know you too well.” He pours us both some wine. “I know something is bothering you.”

“It’s silly girl thoughts, don’t worry. I’m fine.”

“Okay...” We sit for a moment and sip our wine. “Well, let me share my thought then.”

“Of course,” I say, happy I’m off the hook.

“Lately I have been thinking about some things...”

“Really? I say with a smile.

“Not that...well yeah, but not just those thoughts...other thoughts.”

“Like what?”

“Us,” he says, caressing my cheek and sliding his thumb across my bottom lip. I almost drop my glass of wine. He still gives me butterflies.

“Our future...our family.”

“Oh...” I say. He’s been thinking the same thing I have. He chuckles as I immediately tense up.

“I’m not saying right now on this blanket, Sophie, calm down.” He laughs. “But I’d like to talk about the possibilities.”

“No...it’s just...that is the exact thing I have been thinking,” I say. “I have just been too chicken to bring it up.”

“Why?” he narrows his eyes. “Listen to me, beautiful. If you haven’t noticed by now, I am madly in love with you. I want you always and forever. I want to grow old with you and have a family with you. I want it all.”

“But I’ll never be able to call you my husband,” I say as tears build up and I fiddle with the wedding ring on my finger. Chris bites his lip and as he sighs, he grabs my necklace from around my neck. He looks at his ring I always wear. “You are wearing my ring as well,” he says. “And I already see you as my wife. All the rest...” He holds up my wedding ring. “It’s all for show...for everyone else, but what you feel in here...” He places his hand on my heart. “...is the only thing that should matter. I know that we are bound together for eternity. Do you feel the same?”

“Of course I do,” I say.

“Then there you go,” he says. “You are my wife and I am your husband until time is no more.”

“Even beyond that,” I say and we lose ourselves in that moment as husband and wife.

~

“Where have you guys been?” Brion says. We blush. “Everyone is waiting for the Queen to address them.”

“Sorry, King Brion,” Chris says. “Time got away with us.”

Grandfather shakes his head and smiles. “Just go,” he says. I run to meet Ian and Deb on the balcony overlooking the festival. Everyone is waiting for the big announcement. I’m nervous at how people will react to knowing about Ian and Deb having a child together, if they don’t already know by now. Grandfather told me to just announce it quickly and they will accept it eventually if I tell them that nothing will change. I’m trusting his words right now as Deb hands baby Haidain over to me. I can already hear chatting in the crowd. As I step forward, the voices stop and all eyes are on me and Haidain. Ian steps forward and puts his arm around my waist to steady me. “We can do this...together,” he says. “Just remember what Brion said.” I take a deep breath in.

“Good evening, Wizards of Wizardland,” I begin. “I hope y’all are enjoying today’s festival, but we have some good news to announce. Today we welcome not only a new citizen of Wizardland, but also a new member of the Royal Family.” Cheers fill the air luckily. “His name is Haidian Ian Campbell...” Cheers fade in the audience. Please welcome the child of Deb Kleary and Ian Campbell...your King.” Whispers spread throughout the crowd and I start to worry. “This doesn’t change anything, but the number count in the Royal Family so do not assume otherwise. Help us welcome him today and show him and Deb Kleary respect as you would the rest of the Royals. They are family.” I pass Haidain to Ian and walk away as the crowd cheers again. “That was mortifying,” I say to Chris.

“You did great,” he says, hugging me with his fingers embedded in my hair.

“That was horrifying,” Ian says.

“You think?” I say rolling my eyes at him.

“You did splendid, my dear,” Grandfather says. “Your mother and the others are out accessing the damage.

“So we just need to wait it out then,” Ian says.

“Well...coffee anyone?” I say.

~

Mom comes in with the rest of the gang. "So..." I say.

"Well nobody is saying much," she says. "Even if they are, they aren't going to tell me."

"Nobody is saying anything to us either," Alice says.

"Well, I heard a lot," Zoe says. "But nothing dangerous...just some stuck-up people who think too highly of themselves."

"So, no threats?" Brion asks.

"No."

"Good news." I sigh, gladly accepting it.

"I guess," Zoe says. "But I still had to teach some manners to a few of them."

"Zoe," I say. "What did you do?"

"Not much," she says. "A prick to the finger...a slap to the back of the head."

"Zoe..." Brion tries to scold, but holds in a laugh.

"I couldn't help it. I hated hearing their thoughts about the whole thing."

"Sorry, Zoe," I say. I know that couldn't have been fun for her.

"It's not your fault," Zoe says. "People are going to judge...it's just how it is...everywhere."

"Well...maybe it will die out," Mom says.

“Has anyone seen my dad?” Ian says. “I haven’t seen him since after Haidain was born.

“I’m here,” Conner says as he pulls a girl, who couldn’t be more than eighteen, through the doors. “I spotted this girl lurking about the castle when Haidain was born. I found it a bit odd so I spelled her to be followed. When the spell showed her going to Faeryland I got some men and we followed. We found her in the royal chambers tossing it about as she was looking for something.”

“Really?” Brion folds his arms over his chest.

“She has a very interesting story to tell,” Conner says, nudging the girl to talk.

“Oh my God!” Zoe clasps her hand over her mouth. “Sophie, you may want to pop Erik here...like, now.”

I flick my wand quickly. Erik rolls his eyes when he sees me. “What did I do now,” he says with a sigh. “And you know what, Brion, I don’t think she should just be able to flick people about like that—”

“Hush Erik,” Conner says. “Tell him.” Conner nudges the red-haired girl again.

“You’re Erik?” she asks with a low, shaky voice.

“Yeah...who are you?” he says with his usual sarcastic tone.

“I’m...your daughter.” I’ve never seen Erik in shock until now.

“Holy crap!” Cormac says. After a moment of silence Erik begins to laugh.

“This is a joke, right,” he says. “Well done. Now can I go?”

“This isn’t a joke,” Zoe says. His face goes blank again.

“Then she’s lying!” he says.

“I’m not!” the girl yells.

“I’d know if I had a daughter,” Erik says, pacing back and forth.

“Erik...look at her eyes,” I say, noticing that they are as blue as the rest of ours. He stops and sighs, but does as I ask.

“I need a chair,” he says, noticing the same thing as me. I quickly pop in a chair just in time for him to sit. “Thanks,” he says. He covers his face with his hands for a moment.

“No...” he says, standing up again. “This isn’t...I know you may find this hard to believe,” he says, hesitating and lowering his voice. “But I haven’t been with anyone in the past thirty years or so except...”

“Maeve...” the girl says. “Maeve is my mother.”

“Holy crap!” Cormac says again while Erik falls into the chair again.

“You were the one who opened the cell door,” I say. “You are the royal blood.”

“All I know is that a guy came to me and brought me to that dark place. He told me if I did one thing for him I could go back home. All I had to do is open the door, so I did.”

“What is your name, my dear,” Mom asks.

“Maggie,” she says.

“Do you know how much trouble you’ve caused?” Conner says.

“Look, I didn’t know what I was or what I was doing. Next thing I know this woman is telling me what I am and that I am her daughter. She wanted me to stay with her, but I told her no. All I wanted was to go home to my parents. They took me home...” She starts to cry. “They killed my parents, right in front of me.” Conner immediately wraps his arms around her. “She brought me back to that Faeryland place and said I belonged to her. She taught me a little magic, but then you all stopped her and I didn’t know what to do. I’ve been hiding out in the dungeons. I just want to go back home.”

“What was this man’s name she was with?” Erik asks.

“Um...” she wipes her eyes. “She called him Darius.”

“Of course,” Chris says. “I sure do wish you could kill demons.”

“He was a demon?” she asks.

“Look, if you want to go home—”

“Wait,” Brion says. “What were you looking for in our room?”

“Something that could tell me who my mother is or my father,” she says.

“Well,” Brion says. “Let’s go have a chat and I can tell you all about Maeve.”

“Do you mind if I talk with my father?” she says.

We turn to Erik and he raises his eyebrows.

“Erik!” I say.

“All right,” he says. “Come on. I’ll tell you all about your wonderful mother.” As they vanish, I turn to Zoe.

“She was telling the truth... I think. Sometimes people can lie with their thoughts. She might have been telling the truth, but she was keeping something...”

“What?” I ask.

“I’m not sure, but I’ll go and find out,” she says.

“Well, let’s get to know her before we start doubting her,” Mom says.

“She can stay with us if she wishes and we will talk in the morning,” Brion says. “I think we should call it a night though.”

“Yeah...” Alice says with a yawn. “I think we are going to call it a night too. See you at breakfast.” Everyone leaves and it is just Chris and I.

“So, no supper then,” I say making him chuckle.

“Go check on Christina,” Chris says. “She has probably already passed out. I’ll get some pizza and meet you there in a bit.”

~

Christina is already asleep when I get there. I feel we haven’t had any time together lately. I stroke her hair. “Thanks Nina,” I say. “You can go home now.”

“Yes, my lady,” she says.

“Did she have fun at the festival?” I ask.

“Oh yes,” Nina says with a hint of laughter. “She had a big day. She passed out early.”

“Nina,” I say. “I don’t know what any of us would do without you. You are the best.”

“Oh my pleasure, my lady,” she says. “I shall see you tomorrow.” She vanishes and I sit on the bed beside Christina thinking how beautiful she is. *I can’t believe I made this.*

“She is breath-taking, isn’t she?” a voice says from the shadows. My heart stops for a moment and then I react. Jumping up, I point my wand as the Devil comes out from the shadows.

“Leave her alone!” I shout. Chris is beside me in an instant, pointing his wand as well. Lucifer rolls his eyes.

“I was hoping we could talk in private,” he says. Christina starts to toss and turn. “Let’s not wake the child.” He snaps his fingers and we are in the dining hall. “I think we need to talk.”

“About what?” Chris asks, still pointing his wand.

“You know those things will not help you so why not just put them away.” Chris turns his wand into a sword and smirks.

“I think I faired pretty well last time,” he says, raising an eyebrow.

“Guys, stop,” I say trying to prevent a brawl in the dining hall. “Lucifer, what do you want?”

He sighs, giving Chris a glare before turning back to me. “Well, it seems Darius may have caused a bit more mischief than I thought.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“It has come to my attention that Erik has had a visitor.”

“Yes, he has learned he has a daughter,” Chris says, narrowing his eyes as the Devil snickers.

“That girl is indeed Maeve’s, but she is not only Erik’s child,” Lucifer says.

“What?” Chris says, glancing at me. “Then whose child is she?”

“Darius,” I say.

“Yes.”

“But I didn’t think demons could have children,” Chris says.

“They can’t, but Darius isn’t like other demons. He’s...rare,” Lucifer says.

“How so?” I say.

“I’m not giving all my secrets away,” he says. “Just wanted to warn you ab—”

“And since when do you care about us?” Chris says.

“Who said I care?” Lucifer says. “This is a simple favor for Sophie...and nobody else.”

“A favor,” Chris says grinding his teeth. “So you expect to be repaid then.”

“Isn’t that how favors work,” Lucifer says. “Don’t underestimate her.” He vanishes and I let out a breath, watching Chris pace and pull at his hair.

“Calm down,” I say, grabbing his hand. “We have to find Erik. Go ahead to Faeryland and I’ll let Ian

know what is going on. I'll meet you there in a moment."

~

I reach Faeryland and everyone is already waiting in the dining hall. "Did you tell them?" I ask Chris.

"Yes, but I was a bit too late," Chris says. Erik is propped up in a chair with his throat slashed. I sigh and look around the room.

"Where are Zoe and Aodan?" I ask.

"They never came," Brion says. "I assumed they were running late." I try to zap them back, but it doesn't work.

"Chris..."

"On it," he says. "We had a connection once before, maybe it will work again." He closes his eyes to concentrate as Erik sits up and gasps for air.

"She took Aodan and Zoe to the mortal world," he says still gasping.

"The shop," Chris says. "Let's go."

"Wait," Erik says. "She wants Zoe to open the prison world. She wants her to release Maeve."

"Crap," Chris says. "I bet she is torturing Aodan to get her to do it too."

"Well, let's go then," I say.

"Sophie, she is powerful," Erik says.

“Then I guess we better all go,” Chris says.

~

The shop is quiet as we enter the basement. I get a chill down my spine. “Chris, if anything happens to them...”

“It won’t,” he whispers. “I won’t let it. I promise.” I nod feeling a bit better because I know he will do anything to keep his promise to me. I just hope we aren’t too late. “Zoe, we are here,” Chris whispers. “Where are you?” He closes his eyes to concentrate more. “They are upstairs.” He bites his lip and sighs. “We need to hurry.”

As we reach the top of the stairs, we hear Zoe scream. Chris busts in the door and Zoe is on her knees crying. Aodan is lying in a pool of his own blood, and Jeremy is hanging on the wall with nails in his hands and feet. “Oh my God,” I gasp, not able to move. Maggie snarls at me as Maeve would and strikes Chris against the wall.

“Zoe, get Aodan and Jeremy and leave!” I yell. She tries to do as I say, but is slammed against the wall too.

“Crap!” I flick my wand and we are all back in Faeryland trying to catch our breath.

“Well...” Erik says. “Now we know what a half-demon, half-faery can do.”

“A whole Hell of a lot,” Zoe says as she checks on Aodan.

“How’s Jeremy?” I ask. Brion checks on him.

“He’ll survive, but he is mortal now...he needs a hospital.”

“Send me with him, Sophie,” Matt says. “I’ll take care of him.”

“Thanks, Matt.”

“Sophie, good thinking bringing us back,” Brion says. “I think she was draining all our powers. You must have distracted her from blocking you.”

“How?”

“Not sure, but we need to research before trying to take her on again.”

“I agree,” I say. Suddenly, Maggie storms through the door looking pissed. Mom thinks quickly and points Merida’s staff at her and she vanishes. We stare at Mom in amazement.

“I guess I should have thought about that earlier,” she says.

“Is she gone for good?” I ask.

“No, it is only temporary,” Mom says. “But it gives us a little time.”

“How long?” I ask.

“Minutes...hours...” Brion says. “We can’t be sure.”

“Lovely,” I say. “How do we stop her?”

“I can help you with that,” Lucifer says, making me jump along with everyone else. “I can stop her. All you have to do is ask.”

“He’s talking about making a deal,” Zoe says.

“I know he is,” I say. “I’m curious Lucifer...what do you want? My soul?”

“Of course not,” he says. “Don’t be so dramatic. All I need is a small favor.”

“What kind of favor?” Brion asks, coming to stand in front of me. Lucifer laughs and snaps his fingers to send him back to stand by Mom.

“You have so many friends that would die for you,” Lucifer says.

“Not just friends...” I say. “Family.”

“You know Darius was never after you,” he says.

“Really,” I say. “Then what was he after?”

“Your power,” he says, circling me like a vulture. “Oh...he was attracted to you, don’t get me wrong. You are beautiful after all, but he thought if he could create something like Maggie with Maeve...just think what he could create with someone like you. He is such an ambitious demon.” I roll my eyes at his comment. “What? He showed initiative. Then it occurred to me that they made something powerful, but

let's face it, he is still just a demon...but me on the other hand..."

"Oh my God!" I yell. "You want to have a baby...with me?"

"Oh Hell no!" Chris says, pointing his sword at Lucifer's throat.

"Lucifer, what are you doing?" Josh says, appearing in front of Chris. He moves Chris's sword to the side as he raises an eyebrow.

"You know that can't happen, Lucifer," Jessica says with her arms folded over her chest. Jason and Jacob appear as well.

Lucifer sighs. "I thought you four might be a problem," he says, pulling out a gold, half-moon shaped blade that lets out a glow. The elemental spirits back away from him.

"Where did you get that?" Jessica says.

"I make deals...that's what I do," Lucifer says. "Even angels in Heaven want something every now and then. Oh..." he says with a smirk. "And I got two of them." Maggie pops in beside him holding the same blade.

"Lucifer," Josh says, holding his hands up to surrender. "Why? All of a sudden—"

"Sorry," Lucifer cuts him off. "Have you met Maggie? She is remarkable." Maggie smiles.

“Excuse me,” I say. “What are those?” I point at the blades.

“Oh...these beauties were forged in Hell’s fire and spelled by the spirits themselves. These blades will kill anyone, anything, and anywhere...even elemental spirits.

“Oh crap!” I say.

“And if it can kill an elemental...I’m thinking these barriers won’t be very efficient either.” Josh grabs my hand and pulls it to Chris’s sword and it catches fire. The flames reflect in Chris’s eyes.

“There,” Josh says. “Now his sword contains Hell’s fire. Don’t forget, Lucifer, that you too can be killed with it.”

“That is why I have Maggie...to make sure that doesn’t happen.” He gives her a nod and without warning she is next to Jacob. She slices through him like butter and he turns to dust.

“Jacob!” Jessica yells. Maggie snarls and before they can vanish, they all turn to dust. As the dust clears, Maggie returns to Lucifer’s side.

“Are they dead?” I ask with my voice trembling.

“Yes,” Lucifer sighs. “I really didn’t want to do that, but they left me no choice. They would have tried everything to stop me from what I need to do.”

“Lucifer...I will never have your child,” I say, holding on to Chris.

“I don’t know about never,” he says with a flicker in his eyes. “I think I can persuade you.” He swings his blade, but Chris is ready. As their blades connect, fire shoots out of them knocking them both to the ground. Lucifer gets up and nods to Maggie once more. She races off as someone comes up behind me, grabbing my waist.

“I’m sorry about this,” Darius says. I can’t move any part of my body to help my friends. “Let me go,” I say. I can’t see what is going on, but I notice the dust as the wind blows it across my face. I pray harder than I have ever prayed before.

Chris stabs Lucifer in the arm and he falls to the ground bleeding. “I guess archangels bleed after all,” he says, raising the sword to Lucifer’s throat. I think we are going to win and I breathe a sigh of relief, but then a blade goes through Chris’s chest and I stop breathing all together. Maggie gives me a smirk and Chris’s eyes widen as they look to me.

“Sorry, beautiful,” he says faintly before he turns to dust. I am able to move now so I fall to my knees.

Darius falls beside me.

“This wouldn’t have happened if he had never met Maggie,” he says. I scream louder than ever as the last stone falls around us. The rain pours and the skies

darken above. I continue to cry as I see none of my friends around. I am all alone as the rain puddles around me.

“This could have been avoided,” Lucifer says as I tremble at his feet with Chris’s sword inches away.

“We left one,” Maggie says, pulling a soaking wet Zoe by her hair. We immediately connect our minds together.

“Sophie, what are we going to do?” she asks.

“Do what they ask?” I say coming up with somewhat of a plan. She gives me a confused look because my thoughts are racing.

“Okay, gorgeous,” Lucifer says, grabbing Zoe from Maggie’s grip. “Time for you to open that prison world.”

“Why do you care?” I ask.

“Balance,” he shrugs his shoulders.

“You just killed the elementals...how are we going to have balance now?” I ask.

“The skies will be dark for a time,” he says. “But they will soon be replaced. The world will be all roses again eventually. Maeve and Maddox will rule all of...this.” He waves his hand to the chaos around us.

“They will kill Zoe and me as soon as they get the chance,” I say.

Lucifer laughs. "I think not. You two will serve me well."

"Go ahead, Zoe," I say. She nods and takes a breath, beginning her spell to open the prison world. Lucifer gives me a wink and returns to watch Zoe.

"Remarkable," he says, mesmerized by her. Chris's sword catches my eye again so I pull it towards me. I might need it later. Darius backs away as I jump, ready for anything. Zoe finishes her spell and Maeve, Lena, and Cynthia appear with a body lying beside them. I remember Ian ripped Maddox's heart from his chest before sending him to the prison world.

"Okay, Sophie," Lucifer says. "Send him back to Wizardland to heal." I sigh, but do as I'm told. Maggie smirks along with Maeve. My anger builds and flames shoot from my body. "There's my girl," he says.

"Enough!" I say walking up to him until we are nose to nose. "I'm ready to deal."

"That time has passed," he says with a laugh.

"Has it?" I ask. Taking a step back from him, I place the sword to my throat. "One slit and neither of us get what we want."

"Clever," he says. "I'm liking you more by the second."

"So..." I say pressing the blade harder against my skin.

"Are we going to deal?"

“Okay...okay,” he says. “What do you want? Your friends back?” He begins to snap his fingers.

“No!” I say. “Her...” I point to Maggie and she narrows her eyes at me.

“You want me to kill the greatest creation since...well, me?” Lucifer says.

“No,” I say, watching them look at each other confused.

“Then what do you want?” Lucifer asks.

“I wish she had never been born at all,” I say.

“Lucifer...” Darius tries to get his attention, but Lucifer puts his hand up to silence him. Lucifer raises an eyebrow to me...curious.

“Why are you so worried about her?” I ask. “Aren’t we about to make something even better?”

“Oh yeah...” he says. “I almost forgot.” Maggie’s eyes widen as Lucifer snaps his fingers. “Done.” She vanishes and I smile with satisfaction.

“What have you done?” Maeve shouts as they all begin to vanish as well.

“Sorry, love, but I’m sure you will find another way,” Lucifer says. She growls at me and my lips curl up a bit as she vanishes completely.

“Okay...” Lucifer says. “First things first...” He stops as we all begin to vanish. He gives me a half-smirk. “Something tells me you just tricked the Devil.” He shakes his head. “Remarkable.”

“Sorry,” I say. “Maybe another time.”

“Oh there will be another time, my love,” he says. “You can count on that. Bye, gorgeous,” he says to Zoe and our surroundings change to the courtroom and Amelia’s trial. I really thought it would rewind us further than this. At least before Jeremy lost his powers. Chris is standing beside me and I jump in his arms and kiss him, thankful he is alive.

“What was that for?” he asks. “Not that I mind.” His forehead wrinkles at me and I figure he has no memory of the past events.

“Sorry,” I say. I just...

“Are you okay?” he asks, giving me that stare of his.

“I’m fine.” I say as I hear someone trying to get my attention. I turn to see Jessica.

“Come here,” she says.

“Chris...I’ll be right back,” I say.

“Okay...” he says, turning to see Jessica and the rest of the elementals. “Do you need me?”

“No...I’ll be fine. This will only take a second. Just be here for Jeremy...he needs someone...okay.”

“Sure,” he says, putting his hand on Jeremy’s back for support.

I run into Jessica's arms and surprisingly she hugs me back. "You brilliant, brilliant woman," she says.

"Brilliant, indeed," Josh says hugging me as well and I feel that pull in my gut again. I back away quickly and he laughs. "Just the connection...remember."

"Oh...yeah," I blush.

"So am I the only one who remembers anything?"

"Yes," Jessica says. "We had to come back and thank you. The exact moment Lucifer thought about having a child is when he met Maggie so without her being born the thought never came into play."

"But why did all of this still happen?"

"Maggie had nothing to do with Darius or his plans. They only needed her to open the door. Maevae still made the deal...Darius just found another way to get it done. You only have about a week to replay."

"But Lucifer said—"

"Lucifer lies," Jason says. "He is the Devil."

"To say thanks we want to give you something," Josh says.

"What?" I ask.

"Anything you want," Jason says. I think for a moment about everything in the past and look at the

trial going on. “We can’t change what Amelia did, Sophie. It would change too many events.” I sigh, looking at Jeremy’s face full of pain and I bite my lip.

“Now that...” Josh says with a smile. “We can do. Go back and join them and we will be there soon.”

I turn to leave. “Oh...and Sophie,” Jessica says. “Darius is still a bit obsessed with you so watch your back.”

“Got it,” I say. “Thanks, guys.”

“We’ll wait to hear the elemental’s give their judgement.”

“Yeah...yeah,” Josh says as him and the rest of the elementals pop in beside Amelia. “Clear of all charges.” Josh gives me a wink.

“Wait a minute,” Conner says. “She still killed my wife.” I remember Josh’s next comment and I sigh. He looks at me and coughs the comment away. I smile and mouth the words “Thank you.”

“She will serve time for not coming to us sooner, Conner,” Josh says. “But this is clearly an unfortunate accident. I am sorry.”

Jeremy sighs. “But before we get to that,” Josh says touching Amelia’s head to wake her up. “I think you want to be awake for this next part.” Amelia grabs hold of Jeremy and clings to him. All four elementals

come and put their hands on Jeremy's head. He flinches. "What is going on?" he asks.

"Be very still," Jessica says. A light flows out of the elementals and into Jeremy and he falls to his knees. Amelia covers her mouth in shock. Jeremy's eyes glow with a blue light. The veins on his neck are popping out and his fists are clenched.

"Oh my God," Chris says. "You talked them into giving him his powers back." I shrug my shoulders and he kisses my forehead.

The light fades and Jessica grabs Jeremy by the hand. "Stand up," she says. "Jeremy, after everything you have been through you still believed in us and because of that we hereby grant you your powers back and welcome you with open arms back to Wizardland." Amelia starts to cry. "The deal with Darius is broken."

"Thank you," Amelia says.

"Amelia," Jessica sighs. "You are clear of all charges, but I am afraid you will have to come with us for a time. Trust everything happens for a reason. You can have a few minutes with Jeremy, but after we need to leave."

"Of course," Amelia bows. "Thank you again...for helping my son. He is why I live."

"We know," she says. They all disappear and leave the courtroom silent.

“Well...” Joffrey says. “Court is adjourned.” I smile realizing that even though the outcome wasn’t what I was hoping for, it was still awesome and I do believe that the elementals know exactly what they are doing.

~

A very long week has been by and it has pretty much gone the same as it did before. It was extremely weird to have everything happen again. Luckily, Lucifer was MIA that whole week. The same thoughts about Chris play in my mind...about our future. I forget all about baby Haidain coming until Ian bursts through the door. “He’s here!” he shouts.

Everything starts to play out like a rerun again and I find myself in another daze.

“Sophie,” Chris asks. “Are you okay?”

“Oh...I’m fine.” He grabs my hand and we are at the same beach with the same blanket and the same bottle of wine.

“So, what’s on your mind,” he asks as he strokes his thumb against my bottom lip. *Damn*. The same butterflies flutter around in my stomach as before and I’m speechless. “Well, let me tell you my thoughts then.” I smile, ready for the talk we had before, but he leans over and kisses me instead. I guess we are skipping the other part. I laugh. “What?” he asks.

“Nothing,” I say and pull him back to my lips.

~

Of course we are late again. “I know,” I say, running past Brion to the balcony. Chris tries to let go of my hand, but I drag him with me.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

“Come with me,” I say. He looks to Brion. “No, look at me.” He bites his lip. “Until time stops...you and me...remember,” I say even though I know he won’t remember the conversation we had.

“Even after that,” he says with a smirk as he walks out onto the balcony with me. I announce Haidain and spot the elementals in the crowd. They wave and smile. Christina comes to join us on the balcony as the crowd cheers and Chris picks her up. He kisses her cheek and she whispers something in his ear. His eyes widen and he swallows hard, looking to me.

“What is it?” I ask, scared she has had another horrible vision.

“Tell your mom what you just told me, Little Bit,” Chris says with a smile. She leans over to me.

“You have a baby in your tummy,” she says.  
“My baby brother.”

I gasp and I believe my eyes get double the size of Chris’s.

“Congratulations,” Josh whispers. Of course, he is only in my head. I blush and say thank you.

“Oh my God!” Zoe yells from inside the castle.

Chris looks at me with those intoxicating green eyes. “Happiness doesn’t describe what I feel at this moment,” he says.

“Then what word would describe it,” I ask.

“Saved,” he says. “You saved me Ms. Mason...sorry...Mrs. Campbell.”

“From what Mr. Marshall?” I ask.

“Myself.”

“Well...we saved each other,” I say. “And I’m glad I finally got to save the Guardian of the Queen for a change.” He laughs.

“I love you, my wife,” he says with that smirk I love so much.

“You remember the conversation we had?” I ask.

“Of course,” he says. “We are connected in ways that nobody will ever understand.” He gives me a wink. “Our love is eternal and it shall never rest.” He leans down and kisses me in front of our Kingdom.

The End...?