

5 princes and I Chapter 41-45

Chapter 41 Garius and Wyren

After the ball, I hadn't got any chance to eat as much as I wanted to as I took off to bed. My body was tired both from keeping the princess act and from running around with Nate to avoid the fairy princess, but despite all that, the ball was fun.

As I got out of bed, I decided to take a long and relaxing trip to the bathtub. Then I changed into some comfortable clothes and headed downstairs. Along the way, my stomach kept growling in anticipation of something to eat. I was hungry and if I won't eat anything soon, I'll have a huge fit.

That was why, as soon as I caught a whiff of something good and freshly cooked, I didn't waste any time as I made a dash towards the dining area where I found a large picnic basket on top of a table. If I wasn't so hungry I would have wondered and asked why a picnic basket is on the table, but since I was hungry, I dismissed the thought.

With a grin, I started to head towards the basket. As soon as I got there, I reached out a hand to open it, but before I could do so, someone grabbed me by the shoulder and yelled, "Boo!!"

I screamed and jumped a few feet high. Then I whirled to see the b***** who dared to sneak up on me. Nate was laughing so hard that he had to clutch his stomach.

I glared at him. "What the heck, Nate? What's your problem?!"

Despite my outraged appearance, Nate doesn't seem to care. "Damn, Princess." He started to regain his composure. He chuckled. "Don't tell me that you're getting a little jumpy after the ball." Then he winked. "If you like, I'll watch over you from now on so you won't get paranoid."

Frowning, I stuck my hand into the basket and grabbed something to throw at him. Once I felt something, I pulled it out to see that it was garlic.

Ah-ha!!

With a war cry, I broke them into bits and threw them one by one at Nate yelling. "Die you, stupid vampire prince!" I screamed. "And burn!"

Nate watched as the pieces of garlic bounced harmlessly off of his chest before he looked at me and saw my determined look. He laughed heartily and then he cupped his heart and let out a strangled noise. "Ahh! It burns! Oh, the agony!" He fainted hurt, but I was too pleased to see that look of despair on his face to notice that it was all an act.

Instead, I had an evil grin on my face. "That's for yesterday when you made me run you jerk!"

"Oh please stop. You're going to burn my face. Princess, please." He still fainted, hurt, and covered his face and tried to keep his smile out of my view. "What will I tell our future children when they ask about the burn marks?!"

"Vampires can't have kids, you dumba**!" I told him as I showered the remaining garlic at his head. Then I forgot that real vampires are still living beings. It's the undead that is...well, dead.

In that instant, Nate straightened up and gave me a dangerous smile. "You wanna bet?" His voice was dangerously challenging and I had to take a step back when he started to come towards me. His eyes never left mine as he started to approach.

"Come any closer and I will kick your family jewels and then you will never have any kids," I warned him.

He just laughed. "Try it." He said.

"Step into the light, Nate!" Dan said in an angelic voice. Just then, I heard a clang and saw a frying pan landing on Nate's head. When Dan brought up the frying pan, it was a bit bent and Dan then made a tsking sound. "Mana isn't going to be pleased about this." He commented.

Meanwhile, Nate hissed as he clutched his head. His eyes turned red for a moment and I saw his teeth sharpened as he looked at Dan. "What's the big idea, wolf-boy? Do you want me to rip your heart out?" He asked. His voice became deep and dangerous.

Dan glared back at him. "You were scaring the lady. That's why." He said. "And I don't appreciate you for touching our picnic basket."

"That was yours?" He asked.

Dan raised an eyebrow at him. "Got a problem?"

"No. And it wasn't me who touched your basket, it was Rose." Said Nate and pointed at me. I frowned at him.

Don't tell them!

Dan, still holding the broken pan, shifted his gaze at me. I quickly plastered on an innocent-shocked-and-clueless look to fool him. Dan studied my face for a split second before he turned to Nate and raised an eyebrow at him. "Don't point accusing fingers at anyone, Nate," Dan told him. "Only Ren and I can do that."

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“What?!” Nate looked back at me. I smirked and stuck a tongue out at him.

“Hey, brother. I got the blanket. We are all set.” I looked back and saw Ren. When he saw me, he grinned and greeted me with a good morning.

“Alright!” Said Dan, drawing my attention back to him. He rubbed his hands together as he closed the basket and started to carry it. Dan met my eyes before his gaze shifted to his brother and he grinned wickedly. “Say, Rose.” His gaze was back on mine. “Would you like to join us on our picnic in the woods?”

Just then, Nate suddenly reacted. His teeth and eyes are now back to normal. “I don’t think that’s a good idea. Taking Rose out after the rogues attacked her is not safe.”

Dean frowned at him. “She’s certainly not safe with you around.” He said to Nate, making him frown.

“And you think she’s safe with you dogs?!”

And now they were just bickering and shouting insults at each other. As I watched the two of them exchange their words, Ren stood beside me. I looked at him. “Don’t me tell you are going to jump in on their argument?”

Ren shrugged and he yawned. “Nah! I’m out of energy and I’m still tired.” He said. And that’s when I noticed that his brown eyes do look sleepy and his brown hair seemed a bit tangled as if he had just gotten out of bed. His long-sleeved white polo shirt was half tucked in and the b***ons were on the wrong places and his riding boots were halfway zipped.

Even though the twins are wearing the same clothes, it was now easy to determine who is who seeing as Dan looked pretty neat with his hair comb back, his shirt neatly tucked in, and his riding boots zipped up.

When Ren saw me staring at him, he suddenly felt uncomfortable and he blushed when I reached out and fixed his hair. Since he was taller than me, I have to stand on my toes to reach his hair. “Hold still,” I told him as I brushed his hair with my finger.

Once all was in place, I smiled and patted his head like a dog. “Good boy.”

When I drew my hand back, I saw Ren frown at me. “I told you I’m not a dog.” He snarled.

I rolled my eyes and grabbed the blanket from him. “Yeah yeah whatever, teen wolf. Go fix yourself.” With a grunt, Ren started to fix his b***ons and placed them in the right

ones, then he tucked them in and zipped his boots up. Once he was done, he took the blanket from me. "There, happy?"

"Awww....look at you two. Aren't you guys the cutest?" Dan cooed and Ren and I both looked back at his brother and Nate who were now looking at us. Whereas Dan had the biggest and brightest smile that could blind the earth, Nate looked like the opposite where he could swallow the room in darkness. But not as much as PRINCE Ace if he were here.

"The heck are you two looking at?" I asked. Nate just looked away while Dan came to my side and wrapped an arm around my shoulder.

"What do you say, Rose? Picnic?" He asked and raised the basket in front of me and made my stomach growl once again when I caught a whiff of the food inside of it.

I gulped and looked up at Dan. "Are you sure it's okay for me to come?"

Dan nodded. "Of course it is. Right, brother?" Dan looked at his brother for support. I looked at Ren and saw him beaming at me.

"Of course. We packed a lot of food." He said. "And I'm sure you haven't had your breakfast, right? Besides, it's a good chance for us to show you around."

I looked from Ren to Dan before I said. "Okay."

"Yes!" Dan cheered and Ren grinned.

Meanwhile, I saw Nate let out a sigh as he gave the twins a pointed look. "Fine." He said. "But don't you take your sight off of her for a second. If anything happens to her, I swear I will tear your furs off and make them a rag in my room."

"Whatever, Vampy."

"We won't drink her blood."

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The twins said. Nate caught my gaze. "Be careful." He said and gave the twins one last warning glare before he turned around and walked away, leaving me with the twins.

"Let's go!" Dan announced and before I could see him, he vanished as he started to run away towards the door. Ren and I exchanged glances before we both shrugged and followed after Dan.

Once we got out, I saw two bay horses. Dan approached one of them and fastened the basket at the back of one of the horses. Quickly, I looked at Ren.

“Where’s the carriage?” I asked.

Ren grinned. “There is no carriage. It’s better if we ride on horses so you can see the view freely and feel the fresh air. Come on.” He started to head towards the other horse and I followed him cautiously.

“But if there are only two horses, then where am I supposed to sit?” I asked.

“Not me, princess.” Answered Dan as he secured the basket with a rope. “I already carry the basket with me. Go with Ren.”

I looked back at Ren to see him stuffing the blanket on one of the bags attached to his horse. Once he saw me, he looked at his brother who was now sitting on his horse and whistling.

He sighed. “Come on, Rose. I’ll help you up.”

I hesitated for a bit but then figured out that it was only Ren and Dan and that I had nothing to worry about. So I approached Ren. I was about to step onto the saddle to climb up when Ren suddenly grabbed a hold of my waist as he effortlessly put me on top of the bay horse before he climbed up behind me. He reached around me and grabbed the reign. His arms locked me in place as he looked at his brother and nodded.

Then our horses started to move in a slow run and I had to grab onto the saddle so I wouldn’t fall. Ren’s arms also became a safety belt for me.

“Where are we going?” I asked without turning back as I am already uncomfortable with our position. I don’t want to make it more uncomfortable by looking back to see how close we are.

I felt Ren chuckle. “You’ll see, princess,” he said. I nodded and didn’t say anything after that. I just settled on feeling the breeze touch my face and just looking at the vast expanse of greens and trees that we pa**.

“Have you ever tried riding a horse before?” Ren suddenly asked behind me.

Still not turning around, I answered. “Aside from my first day in this world and riding Fred’s horse? Nope.”

“Would you like to try?” Beside us, Dan asked.

“I don’t know how.”

“We’ll teach you. Come on.” I saw Dan looking at his brother and nodding. Ren pulled our horse to a stop and so did Dan.

Ren grabbed a hold of my hands and handed me the reign in which I held nervously. Ren saw me shaking and placed his hand on top of them. They were warm. "First of all, find your balance. If you move at a brisk pace, you'll be able to feel a rocking motion as you ride. Keep your elbows light. And when you ride, you should look forward to that is...until you are comfortable and an expert." He said and helped me adjust my grip on the reigns.

I felt Dan's eyes burning on us but I just ignored him.

"Next, relax your elbows." Ren then adjusted my elbows as he kept them apart and far from my body. "Squeeze with your calves to let the horse know to move. Apply more pressure if it doesn't move. To stop, sit deep, pull back, and apply pressure with your knees. When turning, you can pull the reign and tap your foot in the direction that you want it to go. If you don't your horse will only turn its head."

I nodded and followed Ren's instructions. When I found my balance on the saddle, I started to urge the horse forward. When nothing happened, I tried again. I frowned.

"Try putting a little more pressure. Just a little." Instructed Ren.

I nodded and started again by putting as much force as I could into making the horse move. Once I did, Ren and I were caught off guard when the horse suddenly stood on two of its back legs and galloped fast.

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I want to say that I was having the time of my life because of how refreshing that wind felt. But nope. I was panicking and spitting both my hair and the bay's hair off of my face.

"Rose! Ren!" I heard Dan call us.

"Holy crap!! I told you to apply a little pressure! A little!" Ren screamed as he tried to keep himself from falling by holding on to the back of his seat.

I was also doing the same as I balled my fist into the hairs of the horse seeing as the reins were now in front of it. "I'm sorry!" I screamed and let out a frightened whimper. "Just make it stop please!"

"Hang on." He said. I felt Ren reaching out and grabbed a fist full of the horse's hair and pulled as he sat back. "Stop, Garius. Easy there, boy." He ordered and the horse started to stop abruptly so that my nose hit the back of its head. I cursed.

At least the horse stopped running.

Ren got down from the horse as he grabbed the reins back and went to check up on me. "Are you alright?" He asked. His voice laced with concern.

I brushed my hair back as I nodded. "Yeah." My voice sounds strained. "Can we hold the horse lesson for some other time? I don't think I can handle it as of the moment."

Ren chuckled. "Sure. We both could take a break from your horse lesson." He started to laugh and I fixed him a glare when we heard another horse galloping towards us. Dan stopped his bay right beside us.

"Are you two alright?" He asked.

"She's fine," Ren said and he climbed once again back on the horse. "Just a bit shook." Then to me, he asked, "Ready to go, Rose?"

I nodded. "Yes, sir."

We rode for a few more minutes. All the way there, my eyes stayed straight ahead. Even though my first time riding a horse didn't go so well, I still enjoyed riding on one. I smiled as the wind blew on my face and brushed my hair away from my face in which I had to pull back to front in case it would distract Ren's view.

I patted the horse's neck affectionately and smiled. Horses are really beautiful creatures. They may seem big and scary but they are kind creatures for letting them carry you around on their back. If it were me, I would roll over just to get the person off of my back. Honestly.

"What are you smiling about?" My head turned to our side to see Dan giving me a curious glance.

I smiled and shook my head. "Nothing. I just thought about how fun it is to ride a horse this way." I said. "It feels....nice."

Ren chuckled behind me. "Princess, we haven't even let the horse run yet." He said. "I can make Garius run if you like."

"Is that his name? I remember you calling him that earlier."

He nodded. "Dan's horse is named Wyren."

I looked back and forth towards the horses. Garius and Wyren, huh? They look the same. Brown with black hair. I chuckled.

"Don't tell me. Since your horses look the same....they're also twins?" I said then I laughed.

Dan and Ren both exchanged glances and they smiled at each other before looking at me. "Even though they are both bays..." Dan started.

"...they are twins." Finished Ren.

With that, I stopped laughing and just looked straight ahead as the twins laughed at my expression.

Chapter 42 End it With a Goodbye

We soon arrived at a vast expanse of greenery. The twins set the mat a few feet from a cliff. At first, I was horrified and afraid that we might fall. But when Ren and Dan started to drag me toward the edge, that's when I calmed down. Despite the danger of being near that cliff, the view was to die for. Literally.

It was beautiful. I can see a large expanse of trees lining at the bottom. And just ahead of that is a town buzzing with life. I can also see the mountains just ahead of it looking blue from a distance. The breeze here was cool and cold to the skin. But not too cold to make you shiver.

"Wow." I exhaled as I took it all in.

"Neat huh? Dan and I found this place during one of our runs at night." Ren stood beside me. His head looked back and he smiled at me. "The place is set now. Come on and let's eat."

I let Ren pull me back seeing as I have been hypnotized with the view. We both sat and joined Dan on the blanket as he cheerfully brought out what was in the basket.

My eyes nearly bulged out of their socket when I saw what they had packed. Whole meat, some bread, jam, water, mashed potatoes, salad, and different varieties of fruits.

"Are we running away or something? You guys packed a lot!" I said.

"Well, would you rather let us not pack at all?" Questioned Dan. When I shook my head no, he smiled and said, "See? It's better to be prepared. You will never know when you're hungry."

With that, I didn't argue any longer and just sat there and ate as much as I could while laughing and joking with the twins. Then our conversation led to the night at the ball.

"Did you see me last night?" Dan started to brag. "The ladies could not resist my charm." He started to brag.

Ren and I exchanged glances and I both held a look before we turned to Dan and threw a gr*** at him.

“Hey!! You guys are wasting food.” He told us. “I know you guys envy me but you don’t have to be a hater for it. Sheesh!!”

“Yeah. Thank you for taking my cape last night.” Ren said.

“And for leaving us to deal with all those girls,” I added.

Dan jerked up and looked at both of us suspiciously and pointed an accusing finger at both of us. “Hey. Rose, being Ren’s twin is not your job. It’s mine. You have other roles to play.” He said. And before I could ask what he meant. He added. “And we’re even. You’re fangirls also crowded me last night and I have to crawl my way out of them.”

With that, Ren and I laughed at the memory of Dan becoming lost in a wave of girls. I never heard anything of him or saw him after that. “Where did you go after that?” I asked.

He shrugged. “Somewhere where I can’t be seen.” He said.

“Let me guess...behind the giant curtains.” Ren guessed and Dan feigned a gasp.

“Brother you know me too well!” He said. “And you were supposed to keep an eye on Rose the whole night as her e*****, but you let Nate drag her around the room and run. Shame on you for that, brother. Heck, I am even ashamed to call you my brother!! What kind of prince are you?”

“Certainly not that PRINCE.” Ren jokes. And just the way he said it doesn’t need an explanation as a certain prince crossed our mind making us laugh.

“By the way,” Dan said as he was the first one to recover from our fits of laughter. “Has anyone seen PRINCE Ace this morning?” He asked.

“Or Prince Fred?” Added Ren. “I haven’t seen those two since the ball.”

“Maybe they overslept?” I suggested.

Dan nodded as he considered my suggestion. “Maybe PRINCE Ace is in the library. Reading and studying again.”

“And Prince Fred is in the office and doing the queen’s work again.”

“Dang!! Any one of those two will make a fine King and ruler of us all.” Said Dan.

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“I know.” Agreed Ren.

“What about you two?” I asked. Seeing as I was getting out of the conversation since I still don’t know a lot about the politics in this world. “If you don’t get the throne, what will become of you both?”

Ren shrugged. “We go back to our own Kingdom.” He said as Dan added. “Well, Ren is gonna rule our Kingdom while I stay a prince.”

“What?” I gasped. “But don’t you have an older sibling or something?”

Ren and Dan exchanged glances before looking at me. “Nope.” They both said at the same time.

“Hang on.” I gestured to a time-out. “Aren’t you guys supposed to be the youngest son to be a candidate for a King?”

“Well, supposedly Dan was the only one who should be here,” Ren said. “But the queen decided to take both of us to give us a fair shot.” Added Dan. “And I must say that I am glad that Ren came along with me though.” Dan had a wicked smile on his face as he looked at me.

“And our parents decided that if ever one of us will get the throne in Thalia, then the other will inherit the throne to our own Kingdom.” Said Ren.

“Wow,” I said, absorbing it all in. “What is your Kingdom like?”

Ren and Dan both had a look on their faces as they smiled. They were probably remembering their home. “Our castle isn’t as big as Thalia, that’s for sure.”

“But it was home for us. Unlike Thalia, ours is surrounded by trees.”

“We usually take our run there. And just ahead of them, you can see mountains and rocks.”

Ren looked at his brother. “Hey, remember our secret place? The one just behind the rocks where a cave is located?”

Dan grinned. “Yeah. And ahead of that is a garden and a waterfall.”

“That sounds beautiful,” I said and imagined the place. Ren nodded at me.

“Dan and I used to go there with Liliana.”

At the mention of the name, Dan seemed to stiffen and look away making me curious all of a sudden. “Who’s Liliana?”

"She's the daughter of a close duchess to our family. She can turn into a Lynx. Very rare in the werecat family."

"She's our childhood friend that's all," Dan said in a low voice. All the energy in him seemed to have lost. "Anyway, Rose." Dan started to say and broke the awkward silence. "Do you have any siblings back home?"

I smiled as I remembered her. "I do. Her name is Stella Antoinette Stan. She's eight years old now, but pretty smart for her age."

"What is she like?" Ren asked. Suddenly paying attention.

"Well if you're asking if she looks like me then no. Her hair is lighter and she's paler than mine. She's also quite stubborn and curious. Tell her not to go wander off by herself and you can be sure that she'll do just that."

"Hmm.....sounds to me like you guys are not so different after all."

I glared at them. "Excuse me?" Dan immediately gave me a sheepish smile.

The whole day, the twins and I just sat and played. We did take a short nap, but once we woke up, the twins started to wrestle with each other to prove who's the strongest. They even attempted to take off their shirt to flex their abs and make me the judge to see who has the largest muscle.

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But for some reason, I feel like we were being watched. The feeling always comes and goes. But maybe it was just my imagination since the twins said nothing.

"Guys look. It's time." Ren said. My hands froze in mid-air as I was about to throw the fruit and Dan's hand was covering his face.

I looked towards where Ren was pointing and I gasped. The sun was setting and it was beautiful. The color of the clouds gave a wonderful burst of colors of Ombre. The sun lightened up half the sky with yellow, orange, and red that the pictures you saw of a setting sun does no justice to this at all.

"There she goes. Beautiful, isn't it?" Dan whispered and I can do nothing but nod.

"But beautiful isn't enough to describe it," I mumbled. My eyes still strained at the sight.

"It's funny though that the sun never changes. Even when it sets, it is still the same one. The only sun we ever see. The same one that our ancestors have seen connecting us to the past. I wonder how many faces have seen. How many have seen it rise and fall every day." Ren wondered out loud.

I looked at him. "What about the moon? I mean, isn't it the same one we see every day?"

Ren nodded. "Yes, but unlike the sun, the moon changes its shape and form. Whereas the sun is stable and unchanging." I smiled and looked back at the sun and getting what Ren meant. "No matter how many times we've seen it, it doesn't fail to make me smile and feel the way that I'm feeling."

"Yeah." Dan agreed. "This will be our secret place now."

My heartfelt light with happiness. It gave me some sort of feeling that I can't explain. It gave off calmness and made me glue my eyes onto it until we can no longer see the sun.

Once the sun finally set, the twins started to pack our stuff and I helped them as I neatly folded the blanket. They started to load the things onto their horses while I kept looking back towards the spot where we had sat.

I don't think I'll ever forget this place. Who knew that there were so many beautiful places one could imagine?

"Rose, come on. We're leaving!" Ren called out and snapped me from my thoughts.

"Oh...coming!" Giving it one last look, I headed towards Ren and Garius. Once I got there, Ren helped me up and hopped on himself, but before he could take the reins, I stopped him. Ren paused and gave me a questioning glance. "Can I try riding him again?" I asked.

Ren seemed startled, but then he smiled and nodded his head. "Sure. Just remember what I've told you before."

I grinned. "Thanks!" Then I started to look forward. I took a deep breath and urged the horse to move. Unexpectedly, Garius started to walk forward making me smile. "I did it!"

"Well congratulations, princess," Ren commented. "You've pa**ed your first lesson. Now, why don't you give me the reins so we can make the horse run to get home? It's getting pretty dark now."

I heard a horse sigh beside us and saw Dan. "Now now, brother. Don't be rude to a lady. If she wants to learn how to ride a horse then teach her, you imbecile."

"That's okay," I said and handed Ren the reigns. "Maybe some other time. I'm getting tired after all and I want to go back quickly." It was true, I wanted to sleep. My eyelids are feeling heavy and I keep rubbing my eyes and yawning.

Dan studied me for a moment before he nodded. "Alright then. Let's go." Then we were off. The horse sped up as we made our way through the forest.

Once we got back, two stable boys arrived. Ren helped me down and they both handed Wyren and Garius to the two stable boys.

"Oh, please tell Mana that I'm sorry about the pan," Dan told one of the stable boys who only nodded as they took the horses back at the stable. Ren, Dan, and I then made our way back to the palace. Once we got in, Ren stretched his muscles.

"Man I'm tired!! I think I'm gonna go to bed."

"Me too." Said Dan.

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"I will too after I get something to eat," I said making both the twins look at me.

"You'll get fat eating a lot you know," Ren commented and I just waved him away as we made our way inside. Once we arrived, we saw the King, Queen, PRINCE Ace, and Nate gathered by the stairs. Prince Ace was holding a piece of paper in his hands as he handed it to the King and Queen who seemed to have a sad look in their eyes as they read it.

I exchanged glances with the twins before we made our way to them.

"What's wrong?" Dan asked, making them all look at us. The King looked away while the Queen pursed her lips. Ace didn't speak and Nate was doing the same.

Then I noticed that the only person missing in the group was Fred.

"Where's Fred?" I asked and they all seemed to flinch at the mention of his name. Finally, the queen started to approach me and she put a hand on my cheek. I suddenly felt nervous when I saw the look in her eyes. A look that told me that I wasn't going to like what she'll say next.

"My dear, Prince Fred left."

I think my ears are deceiving me. Did he leave? He couldn't.

I moved back to look at the Queen. "This is a joke, right?" I looked back at the King, Ace, and Nate. Hoping that one of them would at least say it was a joke. Then something in me snapped and I moved away when the queen tried to reach me again.

I argued. "He's still in the castle, right?"

"Rose-" Nate started to say but I cut him off.

"You can't just say that he left, Nate," I told him gently. "Not without proof."

Just then, Ace decided to come down and approached me. He stood in front of me and handed me the piece of paper that they were staring at a while ago. "Here, I saw this in the library a few minutes ago." I looked up at Ace. His eyes held no expression. His face was unreadable.

I reached out and my hands shook as they took the paper from him. Tearing my eyes off of his, I opened the paper. There was neat cursive penmanship on the piece of paper. I started to read.

To Prince Ace,

I know that you will find this letter in the library in the afternoon. I'm sorry for the trouble by making you hand this note to everyone.

I'm leaving and would like to renounce my spot for being a candidate as the future King of Thalia. Tell the King and Queen that I am sorry that I couldn't complete my stay. I am grateful to them for having me and making my stay so welcoming. Tell them that if they ever have a son or daughter, they would be so lucky to have them. I am nothing but a mere stranger and yet they made me feel like I'm their child. For that, I am forever grateful.

To the remaining competitors, I give you my best wishes. Nate, please be nice to the ladies and lay off flirting with the ladies especially Rose. It's good enough that the maids have already fallen for your tricks. Also, stop messing around with the twins. The same goes for them.

Ren and Dan, I know what you've been doing. Playing pranks on everyone in the castle will one day kill them. Remember that one of you might become the King someday so respect them. Don't go around putting snakes and bugs in their rooms, especially the kitchen. It's unsanitary.

For PRINCE Ace, I hope you'll go around and talk to the others from time to time. Don't go p***** off Rose too so you wouldn't fight. I'll admit that it's hilarious sometimes but I am also afraid that you both might hurt each other one day. You two are worse than the twins and Nate.

As for Rose, I'm sorry. I know I should have told you about my plans. I was going to tell you at the ball but I just can't find the right words to say. I can't tell you goodbye in hopes that I would get to see you again someday. It is not my wish to part but there are just things that I have to take care of. I enjoy our time together and you can't imagine

how proud I was to see you yesterday at the ball. You danced beautifully. It came out naturally to you. I'm proud that you were my last dance for the night. I will never forget it. Take care and always know that I am always here when you need help.

I, Prince Frederick Star from the Kingdom of Hazel, shall no longer be a part of the candidacy for King. I shall leave with nothing but myself, my belongings, and the memory of my stay. I shall speak of nothing regarding the matters of this Kingdom as I swore my secrecy upon signing the contract. As soon as I step foot out of the castle, I shall not turn back and or re-acknowledge myself as a candidate.

This I vow on my name.

Prince Frederick Star

Chapter 43 Comfort

My hands trembled as I read the letter. This can't be happening. I must be dreaming or this is some kind of a sick joke, but no it isn't. The letter that I held in my hands is proof.

Fred is gone. He left.

I bit my lips as they started to tremble. Not because I wanted to cry but because of my mixed feelings.

I didn't notice that everyone's attention was on me. I don't want them to see me like this so I smiled. "I guess that's that then," I said. It was stupid to feel anything. After all, what does it matter if I will be leaving soon anyway?

"Rose-" Nate started to reach out but I moved away. Dan placed a hand on Nate's shoulder and he shook his head.

"His choice. Nothing we can do." I shrugged. I started to turn around and mumble an excuse as I left and headed towards the gardens to get a breather. I went to the back door of the castle to get to the gardens. As soon as I was out, I took in a lung full of breath.

The air here always seems to provide me warmth and comfort and I don't know why. Either it's because of the fresh air that nature provides or there's just some magic at work here, either way, I don't mind it at all.

I went to the pavilion at the center of the garden and sat there looking at the view. The sun was setting and the flowers began to give off a vibrant glow as the droplets of waters reflected the last rays of the sun. Seeing it reminds me of Fred. How we used to come here whenever he had a break with our training.

I sighed.

I looked back at the letter in my hands as I read it again. I just don't get it. Why would he leave? What was the reason? He forgot to write it down in his letter. Was there a dire situation in which he needed to leave?

"Reading that over and over again won't change a thing." I jumped in surprise when someone spoke. I looked up to see Ace leaning against one of the pillars of the pavilion. He gaze at the setting sun as he spoke. "Prince Frederick is gone."

Looking at him, I narrowed my gaze. "Did you follow me here?"

Without looking, he shrugged. "Came to see if you would try and escape again." When I didn't answer, he turned his head to me and our gazes locked. "What are you thinking?" He asked.

"What?"

He pointed at the letter. "What do you think about the letter?"

I looked down and saw the letter crumpled in my hands. I laid it on my lap and started to straighten it back again. "I don't know," I answered honestly. "I think this is stupid. He didn't leave a note as to why he left." I said and looked up at him again.

"What do you think?" He looked back at the spot where the sun had been. It was starting to get dark.

"How should I know? I'm not Prince Frederick."

"You don't say?" I said in a sarcastic tone and rolled my eyes at him. I should have known that talking to Ace like this won't make him nicer. Nice talking to you, Ace.

"But I have to say that I agree with you."

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Again, I looked at him. "What? Complete your sentence and stop making pauses already."

He gave a dirty look but didn't comment on it. "What I'm trying to say is that it's weird that he didn't leave us a reason for his departure. Something must have gone wrong in their kingdom that needs his full attention."

"What? Don't they have others to do those works for him?"

Then Ace gave me that look that makes you feel like your a useless, stupid, and incompetent human being who ever lived.

“He’s a prince, you numbskull. He must attend to the needs of their kingdom.”

“Well excuse me for not knowing much about it. As I’ve said for about a millionth time, I’m NOT FROM THIS WORLD YOU ELFISH FREAK!!”

He just gave me a deadpanned look. “Well this world is full of supernaturals like me, doesn’t that make you the freak here?”

I clenched my hands to my sides. “Wow, is this your way of comforting someone whenever they receive devastating news?”

“Who says anything about wanting to comfort you?”

If I was a cartoon character, I would probably be red and smoking in rage as I watch this man in front of me. “Ugh! Forget it!” I threw my hands up and started to walk away. After having a conversation with that jerk makes me miss Fred even more.

“Where are you going?” He said as I pa**ed him.

Looking back at him, I glared and said, “I’m gonna go and come after Fred. I’m gonna talk to him and demand why he left. If I find his reason suitable, I’ll let him be. If not, I’ll drag him back here and send you off instead.”

I suddenly felt a hand grabbing my arm and stopping me. Ace was looking at me with a serious expression. “You are not going after him.” He said.

I glared at him and tried to pull my hand back but his grip was too strong. “Say’s who?”

“Every sane person in the world is telling you that it’s a bad idea to follow him. Whatever it is, it’s his problem, his priority. He can handle it.”

I stopped pulling my hand from him to look him in the eyes. “Aren’t you a little worried about Fred? He’s our friend. Whatever problem he has, we should be there to help.”

He scoffed and dared to roll his eyes at me. “You and your mundane feelings. You don’t understand anything.”

I have to admit that his words hurt me a little. And that gave me enough strength to pull away from him. With a disappointed look, I said, “You’re right, Ace. I don’t understand.” I took a step back. “I don’t understand how you can act like this when you know that one of your friends is in trouble or is suffering right now,” I said and shook my head at him. “At least I have felt that care enough to find out why he left, unlike some insensitive prince I know.” Before turning my back at him, I added. “Don’t worry about me. I won’t run away.”

As I was headed back for the castle, I heard him mutter something like, "It's PRINCE Ace."

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At dinner, I refused to talk or meet anyone's eyes. Especially Ace.

"Hey, Rose. I asked the queen permission to give you horse lessons. She said yes."

I nodded.

"Isn't that great?"

The twins tried to engage me in a conversation earlier, but getting no response from me made them zip their mouths shut. The silence that came afterward became deafening as we ate. I could have sworn that they were sneaking glances at me.

Not able to take the awkwardness floating around in the air, I excused myself and declared that I was done as I looked at the queen for permission to leave. "But you've barely touched your meal." She said.

"That's okay, I'm full anyway." This was partially true since I just went on a picnic with the twins.

The queen looked at my face and studied me before nodding. "Alright. But if you get hungry, just call Ca**idy to cook you something."

"I will."

Nate got up. "I'll accompany you then."

I shook my head at him. "No thank you. I can find my way to my room. Finish your dinner, Nate." I told him but he just grinned at me.

"Nah. I'm full. I'm about to head to bed anyway. And since our rooms are on the same floor, I figured that we can walk together. Have a chat and all." He reached out his hand for me to take. I looked at his hand hesitantly before studying his face.

In his eyes, I could read that, despite all the cheery acts that he was putting up with, he misses his friend as much as I do.

"Alright," I said softly and took his hand. He smiled and pulled me up from my seat.

“Your grace.” Nate bowed as he excused the both of us. The queen nodded once as a response and Nate escorted me out of the dining room.

We walked side by side. As soon as we reached the first flight of stairs, he spoke. “I know you’re upset.”

No duh. You don’t see me jumping in glee, don’t you? That was what I wanted to say but decided not to.

Nate sighed when I didn’t answer. “I know how you feel, Rose. Fred is a good friend of mine. I may not know why he left but it must be something important that he needed to go home.” He continued. “It’s inevitable really. Fred is a prince and he may be the next king in their kingdom. Whatever the problem is, he must attend to it.”

This time, I looked up at him. My brows furrowed in confusion at what I’ve heard. “What do you mean next king? I thought Fred was the youngest prince in their kingdom. Isn’t that the rule for qualification to be the next king in Thalia?”

“Actually,” he said. “Fred is the only Prince in their kingdom. The only reason why he was qualified is that he has an older sister, Princess Jenina Star.”

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“But I don’t understand.” I shook my head. “If Fred has an older sister, then why did you say that Fred is the next heir to their throne?” I asked. Remembering fully well that a princess can be an heir to the throne according to my lesson with Ace. Only if they are to be married to another prince, that is to be heir to another kingdom, shall the princess lose the opportunity to be queen in her kingdom.

“The kingdom of Hazel is the only exception to that rule.” Answered Nate. “They are very strict on whoever shall become the next ruler. They mostly prefer the males to be their next king.”

I reached out and grabbed Nate’s arm for support when my head started to ache with all the new information. We were almost at the second flight of stairs as we continued to talk about the crazy politics in this world.

“That doesn’t sound fair,” I said. “But what if I pick Fred to be the next heir to Thalia. What of Hazel then?”

“If that happens then Princess Jenina will become Queen of Hazel. You see, there are some situations in which they can consider the women to be the heir. One example is that the only prince dies or becomes a king to another kingdom. Another is when there are no other princes in the family.”

“I see.”

Once we reached our floor, we turned right to the east wing where my room is located. We stopped by my door. I turned to face Nate and smiled at him. "Thanks. I can take it from here."

"You sure?"

I nodded. "Yeah. Thanks for the talk. You're way better than Ace when it comes to serious talks." I said bitterly and looked away. Suddenly remember the conversation I had with Ace earlier. It made me clench my fist and I pictured throwing a sword at the b*****'s head.

Brutal but it helps calm me down a bit.

Nate chuckled. "I know. I may have heard you two talking earlier when I tried to go after you myself." He shrugged. "Ace beat me to it so I just waited for another opportunity like this." Then he met my eyes and smiled shyly at me.

There was a light tint on his cheek that I couldn't help but admire. I smiled at him. "That's pretty sweet even for you, Nate," I told him. "But thank you. I appreciate it. It's nice talking to someone who can relate to what we're going through."

This time, Nate's face suddenly turned flirtatious as he curtsied. "Glad to be of a**istance to you then." He looked up and winked. "Tell me, my lady. Shall I kiss a payment?"

"How about I throw you out of the window, run a horse at you, and feed you to the wolves?" I said with a sweet smile on my face.

He suddenly straightened up and put his palms up as if in surrender. "I'll take that as a no. I guess I'll only be taking your grat**ude then?"

"Yes. Now goodnight, Nate." I smiled.

"Fine. Goodnight, Rose." He started to turn in back on me when he suddenly added. "Oh and don't blame me if you can't sleep at night for not getting a kiss from me. Remember, it's all your fault."

I rolled my eyes at him. What a flirt. "Goodnight, Nate," I repeated. This time, emphasizing every word.

Nate let out a 'hmp' sound before finally disappeared and went to the west wing. Shaking my head, I went into my room.

Chapter 44 Nymphs

The first thing I did was change out of my clothes and take a long bath. Scrubbing out the dirt and sweat on my skin along with the scent of horse from my early adventure with the twins. Earlier this day, it seems like I have the best time of my life with Ren and Dan. Happy and completely oblivious at Fred's departure.

How could my day just go down the drain in just a few hours? The world has a funny way of showing you its humor. It s***s.

After cleaning, I put on some new and fresh clothes. With a towel in hand, I walked around in my room as I dried my hair. Once it was damp, I settled on taking a brush and combing it through. Untangling the ends.

When my hair was completely dry, I laid down on my bed and looked up at the ceiling. What Nate said about Fred becoming the next heir to the kingdom suddenly made me think about Fred.

Who knew Fred had a lot of weight on his shoulders? Just thinking about having the responsibility of ruling his kingdom even though he was in Thalia must be hard and killing him. I can just imagine the training he must be taking when he was a kid: How to act like a prince.....and eventually a king.

In his letter, he wrote to the king and queen how he was grateful he was for his stay. His short time here must have been considered precious.

But if he had all that burden, how can he still smile? Laugh? Be so nice and not sick and twisted like Ace?

I suddenly remembered a saying: The person with the brightest smile is the one hurting the most.

Just thinking about it made me ache again. I want to help him. I want to help Fred. I wanna ask him. Give him a choice on what he wants to do.

Tell him that he doesn't have to do what he doesn't want to. He's not a slave. Everyone is free to make their own choices.

I wanna talk to him.

I went out of the balcony in my room so I could get my fresh air. It was a cold night that I had to wear a cloak even though I am only on my balcony. I stared into the forest and thought about Fred. My thoughts were broken when I heard a song. It was soft and mellow. It was coming from the forest.

The melody was soft and alluring. I want to hear more.

"...damn it! Wake up!" I was suddenly shaken awake by none other than Prince Ace.

I gasped and pushed him away. "What are you doing in my room?!" I demanded.

"You must still be dreaming to think of this as your room!" He snapped.

I raised an eyebrow at him. Suddenly I was aware of my surroundings. I wasn't in my room anymore. We were in a forest. My eyes widened. "How did I get here?" I asked.

Suddenly I heard laughter. A transparent figure suddenly emerged from a tree. "Spirit nymph." Ace said and pushed me behind him. "And there are a lot of them." I followed his gaze to see that there are more of them emerging from different directions.

"Rose. Ace!" Nate called out and emerged from the forest, followed by the twins. The twins were still wearing their riding outfits while Nate was simply wearing some trousers, a shirt, and a thin coat. He was probably going to bed.

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"It's PRINCE." Ace snapped at him.

"What the-" Ren paused when he saw the spirit nymphs, who were now starting to surround us. The princes drew into a circle with me in the center.

"What happened here?" Dan asked.

"I-Uh...I had a bad dream. Yeah. That's right. A really bad dream." I nodded. "I saw his face." I gestured towards Ace.

"This idiot." Ace pointed towards me. "Suddenly went into the woods."

"Excuse me, you failed abortion prince! I did not! I didn't even know how I got here." I said. My temper was growing at this guy's accusations. "All I remember is that I was on my balcony."

The princes paused and turned to look at me; the nymphs forgot. Suddenly, Nate spoke. "You couldn't have been lured, have you?"

"Huh?"

"Couldn't hurt to try," Ren said and grabbed my hand. He leads towards the direction in which I a**ume leads back to the castle. Nymphs suddenly blocked our paths and hissed. One even tried to claw us with its sharp nails. Ren grabbed me as he jumped back to avoid the nymph.

“Well, that answers our question.” Dan pointed out.

“You have got to be kidding me.” Ace bellowed in anger and started going after the nymphs. The nymphs laughed and climbed the trees to avoid the furious PRINCE cursing at them.

“What’s going on? Can someone please give me an explanation?” I said. Ignoring the fact PRINCE Ace was shooting arrows at the nymphs, which was doing nothing since it would only go through them. The nymphs laughed at him making him even more furious.

“The nymphs,” Nate said. “Are creatures who can hear your inner thoughts. When they see you worthy, they will help fulfill your wish.”

“In other words,” PRINCE Ace finally stopped hara**ing the nymphs, who were now laughing at him from the tree, to face us. “You,” he pointed at me. “Must have wished to see Fred.”

I stared at Ace and raised an eyebrow at him, not happy with his accusation. “Excuse me, but I did not wish for this. And how can you be sure that it was me?”

“They lured you here.” Dan pointed out.

“Hey.” I pointed a finger at him. “Who’s side are you on?”

“The point is,” PRINCE Ace snapped. “It’s your fault!”

“I told you I didn’t ‘wish’ for this!” I argued. “I mean I was thinking about Fred, but I didn’t wish or have that big of a reason to see him. I mean think about it, if they do see me worthy and grant my wish, then wouldn’t they have sent me home to my world already?”

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“The princess has a point,” Ren said and Dan jotted the tally on an imaginary paper.

“Then come here. We are leaving!” PRINCE Ace declared and grabbed my wrist. Once we were starting to leave, the nymphs quickly moved to block our way. They hissed at Ace, and he, in return, showed them his middle finger.

“Move it!” He yelled.

“PRINCE Ace. Nymphs are considered spirit guardians. You cannot disrespect them like that.” Nate said.

“Bloods***er gets a point for that,” Dan said and it was Ren’s turn to tally the imaginary scoring.

“Do I look like I care?” He said and continued to wave his bow at the nymphs like they were pests. “And I do not want to hear complaints from princes who did not even bring their weapons with them.”

“Ohh. Low blow, but he gets a-”

“Quit it!” Ace, Nate, and I yelled at the twins.

“Anyway, we cannot go back. We can neither defend nor defeat the nymphs. And we all know that there’s only one race that can handle them. The same race that they respect.”

Ace clicked his tongue and glared at the nymphs. “Well I am not Rose, therefore I can leave.” He declared and started to move without me. The nymphs blocked his path again and were giggling.

“Something tells me that they are doing this to you for fun,” Nate said.

I watched the scene in front of me and giggled along with the nymphs at the pissed-off Ace. I stopped immediately when he turned to glare at me. I looked at the other princes to avoid his glare. “I guess you guys can go then since the nymphs have no business with you.”

Ren, Dan, and Nate looked at each other. A silent agreement formed between the three of them. “If what you’re saying is true that you did not wish for this then maybe it is Fred who wishes to see you. So maybe seeing Fred can solve this and the nymphs will finally leave you alone.” Nate said.

“And if you’re going then we are going as well.” Dan pointed out.

“After all, you can’t go to Fred when you do not know the way.”

Ace stared into the empty and dark part of the forest silently. “Something is not right. It is very rare for the nymphs to grant being other than fellow spirits their wish.” Ace was seemingly interested in the spot in front of him. He narrowed his eyes. “On second thought, I’m coming along. Just to learn more about this unnatural phenomenon.” Suddenly, he closed his eyes. The breeze suddenly felt icy cold around him.

And then there was nothing.

Nate suddenly draped his coat over my shoulders. I looked at him. “What about you?” I asked as I looked at his thin shirt. When I was at the balcony, I remember having a thin coat before, I must have dropped it on my way to this place.

“I’m fine. More importantly, your clothes are too thin so...” Nate looked away, blushing.

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I suddenly realized that I was already in my nightgown and quickly wrapped the coat around me. Can't these nymphs lure me when I am wearing some nice clothing?!

There was a sudden movement at my side and a very loud snort that startled me. I paused as I recognized the horse. "Garius?" I whispered.

The horse's ears flickered in recognition at the name. It let out a soft neigh and looked at me fully. I smiled as I became certain that the horse is Garius, Ren's horse.

"Garius!" Ren beamed when he saw his bay.

"When?" Dan saw his horse stopping beside Garius. It let out a neigh and stomped its foot.

Another horse appeared. This time it has a reddish-brown coat. The horse saw me and started nibbling at my hair. "Hey!" I moved my head back to avoid it.

"Ryde!?" Nate looked surprised as he stared at him sorell. "How!?"

"Midnight called them. Obviously." Ace said. Now that I looked at him, a black stallion was now by his side. Its coat was a beautiful shade of black and it shone under the faint light of the moon.

Nate pulled Ryde aside to stop him from hara**ing me. Wyren came to Dan's side and snuggled his owner. Garius, on the other hand, was snuggling me. Ren looked jealous that his bay favored me more than him.

"Seems like the horse has more common sense than my brother." Dan snickered which earned a glare from Ren.

"I still do not understand how...?" Nate looked confused. "I mean, how did midnight know where you are?"

Instead of answering, Ace simply stared at him like the answer was pretty obvious. Nate could only shake his head as if he already accepted that he would have zero answers from the reincarnation of Hades.

"Who cares? Let's go look for Fred." I said. We all let out a series of cheers until Ace held a hand out to shut us up.

"If we are going to do this, we have to be smart. We'll need supplies and we obviously can't go back and get some. Buying is not an option since we haven't brought any gold with us."

Dan spoke. "Then what do you propose we should do?"

Ace looked anywhere but at us. "Right now? We'll camp out here." He said. "First thing in the morning, we'll go to the nearest place where we can get supplies and money to travel. It'll be a long one for sure. Fred might still be on his way to Hazel." Ace looked at Nate. "Prince Nathaniel, do you think we could stop by Vertez and get some supplies?"

Nate flinched at the name of his kingdom. I might be imagining it but I could have sworn that I saw fear there for just a split second before it was gone. "We can." He said.

"Good." Ace nodded. "For now, we sleep. Well, we need our strength for tomorrow." At his words, I felt a rush of excitement wash over me. Right now, I ignored the ringing tug in my chest. Not only are we about to see Fred, but we'll also be traveling to a different kingdom.

Chapter 45 Royal Family Problem

Someone shook me awake. "Rose, wake up. It's time to go." I didn't move. I was still so sleepy that my eyes would not cooperate. "Rose? Come on. We have to go." I mumbled in my sleep and turned away from the voice. Suddenly, I heard footsteps approaching me.

"Prince Ace, what are you doing?"

All of a sudden, I felt a thick material covering me – including my face. When I tried to breathe, I feel like suffocating that I immediately sat up. The fabric fell from my face. I breathed deeply as I awoke and looked up at the person standing in front of me. I saw Ace with his arms crossed as giving me an aggravated look. His midnight blue eyes pierce through me. "Oh, you're still alive? For a second there I thought you were dead. I was ready to bury you."

I looked at the fabric now on my lap before looking at him. My eyes narrowed in anger and I got up and held the fabric to his face. "Were you the one who threw this on me?" I asked. Fuming in anger as I demanded.

Ace looked at the fabric than at my face. He gave me a look as if I was stupid or just plain retarded. The typical Ace Feraden look that makes you feel like you are inferior to him. "Who else?" He said. His voice showed indignation towards me that I couldn't help but mirror as my fist clench at my sides.

Somewhere I heard one of the twins say, "Oh boy."

"Are you trying to kill me, you failed abortion prince?!" I fumed.

"Depends on what kind of stupid stunt are you gonna pull next."

"How about I cut your elf ears for you?"

Before things could get worse between Ace and me, Nate decided to intervene as he stood between us. "Okay, enough." He said uneasily. "As much as I'd like the delay, I'm afraid that you might kill each other sooner or later. Why don't we go and get a move on, now." When none of us seemed to move, Nate placed a hand at my back and guided me away from Ace. But before I moved, I gave the said PRINCE one final glare before turning my back on him.

"Wow, in times like these, I badly wish Fred was here," Nate said, trying to lighten up the mood.

"Guess he's still pissed that we're stuck in this situation, which may or may not be my fault." I shrugged and continued to trudge forward. "If he's so mad he doesn't have to act like a baby about it."

Nate chuckled. "Indeed." We stopped in front of Nate's horse as he bent down to pick up his saddle. He didn't even grumble as he effortlessly placed the saddle on his horse.

As Nate buckled the saddle on, I asked. "Are you guys mad at me too?"

"For what?" Nate didn't look as he patted his horse.

"For, you know, getting lured." Nate finally looked up from his horse. He studied my face that I have to fight the urge not to hide from his stare. Finally, his lips curved into a smile as he leaned on to his horse.

"What will you do if I tell you I am?" He said.

"Nothing," I answered. I felt a hand suddenly being placed on top of my head and mess my hair. "Hey!" I let out a protest and slapped Nate's hand away. "What gives? My hair is already a mess." I glared and tried to comb out my hair.

When I looked up, Nate was beaming at me. "I was kidding, Rose. Well not really. You can say that I was a bit frustrated at first about the situation, but I know that it's not your fault." Then he jerked his thumb behind him towards the twins, where Ren was trying to wake Dan up. Then he threw the saddle on his brother's face. Dan woke up with a start and started strangling Ren.

"And I'm guessing the twins don't mind at all. They always wanted a little trip out of the palace after all. Now, lighten up. We don't want Fred to see you with that face when we find him."

At his words, I managed to smile a little. "You think he's the one that those nymphs are trying to help?"

He chuckled. "You make it sound like he was taken." He said. "And of course we'll find him. We have Ace with us. Although he is especially rude, he knows how to lead this group into finding Fred through that power of his." He assured me.

I grinned and started patting Nate's horse as I realized something. "He's pretty." I gestured towards his horse.

"Oh him?" Nate looked at his horse and smiled. "His name is Ryde. And if you are curious, Ace's horse is called Midnight."

"I didn't ask for his horse," I mumbled and petted Ryde. He let out a snort of delight as I rubbed his neck.

I was enjoying petting Ryde when a pest suddenly spoke. "Get on your horses! We are leaving!" Ace ordered as he sat on top of his black horse, Midnight, impatiently.

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I hope you fall and break your neck in the process.

As if reading my mind, Ace fixed me a look as that says 'you were saying something?' I started to gulp and figured that it's my cue to get a move on. I waved at Nate and Ryde as I made my way towards the twins, specifically Ren and Garius.

Ren just finished putting the saddle on Garius when he looked up. Garius saw me coming and immediately trudged towards me, leaving Ren. "Uh.....hey, Ren."

When he saw me, he grinned. "Hey, Rose." I patted Garius, who was now snuggling me with his snout. His tails flicked back and forth and let out a soft noise. Ren laughed and patted Garius's neck. "Seems like Garius likes you."

"Uhhh....yeah." I nodded and moved my head back when Garius licked me. "Say, Ren. Mind if I ride with you guys?"

"Absolutely!!" Ren and I looked at Dan who answered. He was now riding Wyren with a stupid smile on his face. When he noticed us looking, he smiled sheepishly.

"Uh....sorry. Carry on."

Ren and I exchanged glances. He smiled and nodded his head. "Of course you can." He said. "Besides, I still need to teach you how to ride a horse."

Ren helped me up on Garius first before he hopped on himself. As soon as we were all settled, Ace made his way in front of all of us. "We'll stick with the plan." Said, Ace. "First off, we'll head to the Kingdom of Vertex to get supplies. Then, we'll find Fred. Understood?" For some reason, Ace looked at me as he said it. We nodded.

Ace looked satisfied at our reply. "Good." Then he looked at Nate. "Prince Nathaniel, can you lead the way?" Nate nodded. Ace motioned for him to lead and Nate automatically took place ahead of us. Without a word, we followed him. Our horses marched a few steps behind his.

After a few minutes – or hours. I don't know – of riding in boredom Ren let me take the reins as he taught me how to ride. He gave me instructions over and over again as I made mistakes that the horse kept running off. Ace found it annoying that he keeps giving us looks of annoyance whenever Garius runs off. Nate doesn't seem to mind but Dan certainly enjoys my failures as he keeps slapping his thigh and laughing his b*** off. It was pretty annoying.

Eventually, I got the hang of it and was now riding – or keeping Garius – at a steady pace and the same path as them.

After a while, my hip and back started to ache from riding one-sided because I was wearing a stupid dress. Well, you can't blame me for wearing the dress, I was lured. Speaking of Thalia, I wonder if we are still within its borders. If not, where are we?

I gave the reins to Ren as I stretched my back. Hating the feeling of riding already. "Back hurts?" Asked Ren.

"What? Nooo!!" I said sarcastically. "Try riding the horse on one side. Let's see how you'll like that." I huffed and started to slouch when Ren poked my side to make me sit up straight again. I gave him an annoyed look. "Quit it!" I snapped at him.

"Well, you can lean on my arm if it hurts that much." He offered. I looked up at him with a doubtful look. "What?" He looked flabbergasted. "I swear I'm not up to anything. Just trying to help."

"Uh-huh," I said. Unconvinced. If I knew, he'll just drop me so he and Dan can joke about it.

I looked beside us to see Nate with a stone expression. It was the first time since the whole ride that I've seen his face. Somehow, he was worried. "Nate?" I called out to him, but he didn't seem to notice. "Hey, Nate!" I called him again. This time, louder. It seemed to have caught his attention since he started to shake his head as if in a trance before looking at me.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

He smiled at me – tried – for I could tell that it was a bit forced. "I'm fine." He said. But I was unconvinced. He looked anything but fine to me.

"Are you sure?" Nate nodded and gave me that forced smile again. Whatever his problem was, I could tell that it was bothering him, but he doesn't want to talk about it.

I sighed and stretched my back again. I was getting tired and I felt my eyes dropping. “Ren, I’ll take you on your offer. Be sure not to drop me, okay?” I gave him a warning look that says he’s gonna die if he drops me. When I saw him nod, I leaned my back against his arms feeling my back relax a bit. It wasn’t that comfortable but it was better than not learning at all.

“Wow, you’re pretty heavy.” Said Ren. Laughing as I elbowed him.

“You offered numbskull,” I told him as I let out a huff. “Man I can’t wait to go to this Vertez place and sleep on a bed.” I yawned. As soon as I said it, I saw Ren looking at Nate.

“Um, Rose- We aren’t staying a-” Before Ren could finish what he was about to say, Nate cut him off.

“Don’t worry, Rose. It’s just a little further ahead.” Nate said, this time, a kind genuine smile was playing on his lips. “And tonight, we’ll clean up and sleep on warm beds.” He said. The sound of it all sent relief over me, but as I looked at the faces of the other princes, they looked anything but happy.

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“Are you sure about this, Prince Nathaniel?” Ace asked. Riding his horse until he was on the other side of Nate. His expression was hard as he looked at Nate.

“Of course.” Nate grinned and he started to laugh as he faced the road ahead of us. “It’s not like I can run away from them forever. Besides, I’ve gotten used to it. Doesn’t bother me anymore.” Ace studied Nate for a bit before he finally gave him a curt nod.

Listening to their conversations, I became confused. What are they talking about? Runaway from who? It seems to me that there is something here that I do not know of. They were keeping something from me and I want to know what. I looked up to Ren for an explanation but he just smiled as if it was nothing. Because of that, I figured that it must be a prince thing or something.

We were finally on the borders of Vertez – as Nate had announced. Up ahead, I could just make out the figure of their castle surrounded by a village made out of cottages. As we started to pa** by, you could see that the ground was evenly placed by bricks that you could hear the footsteps of the horses. You could easily tell that the city was rich and well-governed seeing as how the people were well dressed...and fed – if you know what I mean.

I quickly straightened up as the people of the Vertez stared at us as we pa**ed. Once they saw Nate riding with us, they started to wave and a group of girls started to scream

as they looked at Nate in awe. I watched as Nate grinned that flirty grin of his and waved back at the girls and wink. The girls went nuts.

Wow, he's not that picky with girls, isn't he?

Averting my gaze from Nate, I started to look around the village and spotted the market area. There were meats and bread on several stalls. Farther from it is a clothing section. I saw a man not far from us drinking on a wooden cup. He must have sensed me looking because he then looked up from his cup. The liquid from what he was drinking was lining and dripping from his lips. I gasped and edge closing to Ren when I realized that it was blood that he was drinking.

Look away. Ren spoke to me in my mind when our eyes met. He didn't have to say it twice as I was more than happy as he averted my gaze from the man. My stomach churned at the site. It was animal blood, Rose. But you must not look at them when they drink. Ren told me.

"If they need animal blood to live, why do they eat regular food in the first place?" I asked, remembering what Nate had told me.

"Well, they do need animal blood to help them live, but the regular food helps keep their body in shape and keeps their cravings at bay." He explained and looked around nervously. "Um...let's not talk about this right now. Vampires have a sensitive hearing you know."

I nodded in agreement. "Good idea. Let's not talk about it at all."

He nodded.

We finally arrived at the palace. It was huge but not as huge as Thalia. There was a bridge connecting the village to the other side where the castle was surrounded by water. It was a castle in the middle of a lake. Nate must have seen me gaping as we crossed the bridge because he started to look at me with a huge smile on his face.

"What do you think?" Nate asked.

"It's beautiful." I heard Nate chuckle as we finally reached the entrance of the castle. A couple of guards opened the gate as soon as they saw Nate. Once we were inside, we descended from our horses and followed Nate as he led us in. The interior of the castle was as big as the exterior. The place room was hum***ous with a bunch of different intricate designs decorating the walls and post. Most of the colors were red, white, and gold. Dangling on the ceiling is an expensive-looking chandelier with red crystals hanging from golden-colored metals.

Nate stood in front of us. "I'll have servants lead you to your rooms so you can rest and bring you something to ea-

"NATHANIEL!!!!" A voice boomed from the second floor. We all looked up to see a man wearing an expensive-looking suit, much like Nate's but a little too flashy and official-looking. He was beaming and waving at him while Nate let out a sigh as he faces palmed.

"Oh, dear." I heard Nate say. I watched as the man climbed leaped from the rails. I screamed and covered my eyes – well not really since I peaked a little – only to see that the man landed safely on the ground and made his way to us. Once he stood beside Nate, I saw that he was an inch or two taller than him. "Show off," muttered Nate while the man just laughed and started to greet Ren, Dan, and Ace. When his gaze landed on mine, his smile widened.

"Well, who is this?" He asked Nate.

Nate let out an exasperated sigh as he introduced us. "Adam, this is Princess Rosalie from Thalia. Rose, this is my older brother Prince Adam." Brother? Well now that I've gotten a closer look at him, I could see the resemblance. Although Adam's hair is blonde, his eyes are green like Nate's. They share the same jawline, angular nose, and dimples when they smile.

"Call me Adam."

"Uhh.....nice to meet you....., Adam. Please call me Rose." Putting my lessons on, I curtsied. Adam chuckled and elbowed his little brother.

"She's so formal, ain't she? Well then." Adam took my hand and brought it to his lips. "The pleasure is all mine, princess. I've heard so much about you." He asked.

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I looked at Nate for support and he only nodded at me. "Er...I suppose." I answered. "And what...what kind of things have you heard about me?" I asked nervously. I hope it was nothing bad or anything.

Adam shrugged. "Nothing much. Just that you were pretty and well mannered." At the last part, the twins started to cough loudly – which I a**ume is their way of covering their laughs. Luckily, Ace shut them up by glaring at them. "That reminds me." Adam snapped his fingers as he fished something out of his pocket.

Nate must have guessed what his brother is about to do because his eyes suddenly narrowed at his brother warningly. "Adam, don't you dare!!" He sneered.

Adam rolled his eyes at Nate. "Oh come one, little brother. It's not like she's yours, to begin with." With that, Adam started to get down on one knee while I just looked at him confusedly. He brought out a small box and said, "Will you marry me?"

At the corner of my eyes, I saw Dan rolling up his sleeves and tried to charge Adam, but Ace and Ren were there to stop him as he punched the air. "Oh no, you won't!!" Screamed Dan.

Meanwhile, I gave Adam a deadpanned look as I said in a dead flat tone, "No."

Adam chuckled. "You haven't seen the ring yet." He said as he opened the box. Inside the box was a praying mantis with the ring tied to its body. It hopped on my shoulder near my face. Eyeing me with those yellow bug eyes. In disgust, I started to scream and run.

"AHHHHHH!!!! GET IT OFF!! GET IT OFF!! GET THE !@#\$\$%^&*(OFF OF ME!! HOLY ^&*(!!!!)" I ran around, slapping my shoulder and dusting my hair as I did.

"ADAM!!" I heard Nate scream at his brother. I heard him run. Suddenly, I was being lifted off of the ground as strong hands wrapped around my waist.

"It's gone already, idiot. Stop it." Ace said in annoyance. I stopped struggling as Ace set me back down, but I was still holding my shoulder as if the bug was still there. I turned to face Ace to see that the mantis was perched on his hand. By the looks of it, he seemed amused. "Sacred of a little bug?" he smirked.

"Oh shut up!!" I snapped at him.

Just then, Nate came running to me. "Are you alright?" asked Nate. I nodded and he let out a sigh of relief before looking at his brother, who decided to join us, furiously. "What the heck, Adam!?" He grabbed his brother's collar while Adam simply laughed.

"Sorry, little brother." Adam shrugged. "You know how mother and father pressure me to look for a bride."

"Yeah, but proposing on the spot and tying a ring to a bug? Are you nuts!?"

"It's a pretty good trick to me. Besides, I'll know if she's the one when she won't scream at the sight of bugs."

"If she refuses?" Nate looked unconvinced.

"Then I will kidnap her and charm her with my looks." He grinned.

"Uh-huh." Said Nate. "I'm guessing you still haven't found a girl. Which would lead to me to ask you....how many girls have you.....proposed to?"

Adam looked up as if he was counting. Then he started to rub his chin.
“Hmmm...including Rose? 23.”

Nate snorted and released his brother from his grip. “Loser.” He told him. Adam grinned at his brother before his expression became grim.

“Are you staying for the night?”

Nate nodded. “Yeah. And tomorrow morning we’ll head off after we get supplies for our trip.” I tensed a bit when I thought Adam would ask us where we’re going, but luckily he didn’t ask. Adam averted his gaze from Nate, his expression losing all humor in it.

“Mom and dad will be back for dinner. Are you sure about this?”

“I’m sure.” Said Nate.