

Chapter 121

"When you called me saying you needed my help with 'magic stuff,' this wasn't what I had in mind." Breyona frowned; her eyebrows gnashed together. She had a gentler version of Asher's expression, who stood a few feet to her left, so still he looked carved from stone. Her eyes flitted down to the dark bra and underwear combo I wore; the one Asher had picked out just a few weeks ago. "...I really need to start training again. I never realized how many calories shifting burned."

"I hear you and Giovanni train pretty hard already." I replied smoothly, my lips twitching as I resisted the urge to laugh. 1

She flicked her chestnut hair over her shoulder and scoffed, "Tristan's an asshole." 1

Rowena flitted into the room, a blur of auburn hair and pale skin. Like a hummingbird, she was light on her feet. She rummaged through trunks, glass bottles clinking and papers scratching against one another as she pulled out everything she was looking for.

everything she was looking for.

Cordelia's soft humming trickled in from the living room. Before slipping into the den to remove my clothes, I had watched amazed as she waved a hand and sent all the glass shards littering the floor and furniture tumbling towards one neat spot.

"We're ready for you now." Rowena paused for a moment, her arms full of thick pillar candles and couple small journal-type books. She sounded a bit breathless, but only paused for a moment before flitting out of the den.

Breyona glanced between Asher and me. Perhaps she recognized the look on his face from spending so much time with Giovanni, "I'm going to wait for you guys out there."

"You don't have to do this." Asher's voice held no blame, only understanding and the frustration that whatever this was — it wasn't going to be pleasant for me. "No one will blame you."

They both knew why I called them here. I had told them everything Rowena told me, including the part where they would have to hold me down.

"I know, but I have no choice. I can feel

...have to hold me down.

"I know, but I have no choice. I can feel the power locked inside of me more and more. I have no clue what it is or what to do with it, but I want to learn. I need to learn." I told him, leaning into his touch because I knew that no matter how much he worried for me, he wouldn't stop me from doing this. 1

This was a side of myself I needed to learn about. One just as powerful as the other two, if not more. I owed it to the people I vowed to protect, both vampire and werewolf. Sometimes I wondered how Asher did it, if the weight placed on his shoulders no longer felt heavy because of how long he had carried it.

I could feel the rapid thud of his heart against my hand and leaned into the kiss he placed against my forehead. His rough voice washed over me, "Don't spread yourself too thin, Lola. There's nothing wrong with doing some things for yourself."

Cordelia and Rowena had outdone themselves. In just fifteen minutes they cleared the living room of all debris and brought a small twin mattress down from one of the bedrooms. It sat in the middle of

I brought a small twin mattress down from one of the bedrooms. It sat in the middle of the room, surrounded by two rings of pillared candles. Blackout curtains were drawn across the windows, so that the small flames were our only light source. As I looked closer at the pillared candles, I noticed symbols carved into the white wax.

"Alright, I've done my part. This room is as protected as it can be with such short notice." Came Cordelia's voice from across the room.

Her greying hair was woven into a thick braid that hung over her shoulder, and her eyes were sympathetic as they looked my way. She held a tiny amber bottle in her hands and pressed her thumb against the opening until a little droplet stuck to her finger. Rowena stood at her side, a white candle and a small leatherbound book in her hands.

"I'm reworking a reveal spell from my family's grimoire. I hated it as a child, swore I'd never use it. It's meant to uncover secrets, but with a few tweaks it should uncover the mark from the binding spell." Surprise flashed across Cordelia's face, but she recovered a split

binding spell." Surprise flashed across Cordelia's face, but she recovered a split second later. "The juniper oil is to protect and purify, and the frankincense to cleanse and reveal. I've anointed this candle with the same oils, as it's what will tie you to the spell." Rowena explained as Cordelia stepped forwards. 2

I could smell the oils on her finger as she brought it to my forehead and traced a pattern along my skin.

"I've set protection wards around this room. No one will be able to enter or leave while she's performing the spell."

Cordelia said softly, stepping back to admire her handywork. 2

My heart was hammering in my chest as I laid down on the spring mattress. Asher hovered over my head; his calloused hands pinned my wrists down with ease. Breyona knelt by my feet; her eyes determined as she held them in place. She might not be able to shift, but she still had some serious strength. 1

"I won't lie, this spell isn't a pleasant one and I doubt this altered version will be any better. Revealing anything against its will is painful business." A dull fire

It is painful business." A dull fire glowed in Rowena's mossy eyes as she knelt between Asher and Breyona, to my left. Cordelia took her place to the right, a spectator to what I knew was going to be a miserable experience. "Your wolf will not like me after this, so do try to keep her from killing me. Now, hold her down and let's hope we don't have to flip her over." 1

I would've laughed if it weren't for the serious look on her face. A thin sheen of sweat had already begun to coat my skin. As much as I tried to keep my attention on Asher, I couldn't help but watch as Rowena took the white candle in her hands and lit it with another.

Clutching it between both hands, she closed her eyes and began to speak softly. Seconds passed, and I watched the firelight dance over her hair, revealing the various tones of red. When she opened her eyes, the light within them had grown brighter.

"To reveal what's hidden within, let the wax pull the mark from beneath her skin." She said and placed the candle just a foot above my stomach, tilting it so that

skin. She said and placed the candle just
●ot above my stomach, tilting it so that
the melted wax veered towards my skin.

What kid hadn't stuck their finger in the
melted wax of a lit candle? That split
second where the warmth was almost
painful, until the wax hardened from the
lack of flame, forming a little cap on the
tip of your finger. My mom had yelled at
me a time or two for doing just that.

That was the pain I'd been expecting as I
watched the melted wax pool beneath the
flame. In one fluid motion, she left a trail
of wax from one side of my hip to the
other. Instead of a fleeting burn, it felt
like a red-hot dagger had pierced my skin
and set fire to what organs it slashed
through. ①

"Oh—" I gasped, lifting myself off the
bed with enough force to make Asher
snarl. "—that's painful."

'Tell him to let us go.' Maya's snarl made
my head buzz.

After what could've easily been several
minutes, the searing pain flickered and
faded, like a starved flame without
anything to devour. Rowena repeated
that same line a second time, and in one

at same line a second time, and in one fluid motion, left a trail of wax down my left leg. The same searing pain commenced, and my body thrashed on its own, the adrenaline coursing through it demanded it fight.

“Don’t let go.” I snarled, gritting my teeth, and clenching my eyes to keep myself from kicking out with my foot and sending Breyona flying across the room.

She continued with my right leg, and it took every ounce of remaining energy I had to hold myself back. My mind was working on overdrive, fixating on Breyona’s left hand. She had broken that wrist when she was twelve, before I had ditched her for Tyler’s fake friends. All I’d have to do was get out of her grasp and kick that wrist hard enough—.

Rowena continued chanting that same rhyme beneath her breath, holding the candle until enough wax pooled to splash across my bare skin. As its stinging heat was poured down my left shoulder, dripping down my collar bones and into the lacy fabric of my bra, I let out a scream that was more rage than pain.

With each new pour the pain of an old

With each new pour the pain of an old one would fade. I could feel the hardened bits of wax on my skin, could hear them tumbling onto the mattress as I thrashed and bucked. Once my limbs and shoulders were covered, the pain was nothing more than a dull sting.

“...this one is going to hurt...” I swore I heard Cordelia say softly, her voice full of sympathy that failed to reach my ears.

Rowena poured the wax directly onto my chest, right where my heart was.

Instantly I could feel something in my chest ignite. Where the fire had died out along my stomach and limbs, it flared to life in an explosion that made my back arch off the bed. ①

Like layers of burnt skin being peeled away, I could feel something rising to the surface. I half expected the mark to smolder like embers—but not only was it ice cold against my skin, it wasn't even a mark at all.

Cordelia was the first to speak, “It's a sigil—one I've never seen before.”