

Chapter 8: Chapter Eight

I was having the greatest dream, featuring a particular Alpha-male.

Coughs.

It was delicious while it lasted, I didn't even get to see dream-Apollo bare his chest! He was in the middle of unbuttoning his shirt when I'm ripped out of the dream. I wake to guards bursting into our small bed-chamber.

I scream as they grab Mort and me, dragging us out of our beds like fugitives. Exclamation marks re o in my head, and complete confusion overwhelms me. It isn't until we are taken to a dark and spine-chilling room that we are chained to the wall.

"What is happening?!" I yell, eyes welling up with tears. They are hurting me as they lock chains around our ankles, jerking us around like ragdolls. Mort hisses at them, then suddenly the guards' laugh, leaving without a single motive why they did this to us. This is bad. It smells like urine, and the ground is cold and wet. I glance at Mort, breathing hard. "What happened?!" I yell and look around the obvious dungeon. There are bars on the tiny window and there is a bowl sitting in the corner, probably a chamber pot.

Disgusting.

I start to panic.

"I am nding out right now," she says, eyes narrowed in anger. Mort starts to blink, and she is still able to type in her invisible computer with her left hand. She growls, "I knew it."

"Knew what? What happened? Did we do something wrong?!" I ask impatiently.

"Yes," she sighs "Leenie, Laura's agent knew it was us and is threatened. I guess she can sense Apollo's infatuation with you."

It takes me a second for my brain to get up to speed. "Wait, slow down. You think Apollo is infatuated with me? And how is that related to this?"

I'm smart enough to know he thinks I'm cute, but infatuated?

"I do, he has been since the moment he saw you," she says and keeps typing. "You had Peirce singing hallelujah in my earpiece, and by the way, that man has a horrible voice. So, thanks for that. Not that I would ever botch a mission just so Peirce would shut up, but I thought about it."

I raised a brow at her. "Focus."

"But Apollo's attraction for you is a red alert for Leenie. She is a very sore loser; trust me. When she plays, she is out for blood. In our world, it's a very big deal when our team wins. A showcase of talent and rank. If I were to guess this has something to do with that which is not good."

"Oh please, we did not do anything bad," I continue, "for crying out loud, I was attacked by dogs! What could they possibly say to get us in trouble?"

I feel my anger boil.

Mort gives me a dry look. "Clearly, you lack a sufficient imagination."

I didn't want my mind to go there. "What did Peirce say?"

Mort shrugs and tilts her head back against the cold wall. "He is unable to tell that con dant information about another player. But he did say it does not bid well for us." ●

"Isn't competing against each other like this, making things worse? Going against Fairy Godmother's cause? Like, if Apollo really is into me, wouldn't this tamper with that?"

"No," Mort says atly and starts to blink again. "Fairy Godmother Inc. believes that in competition and pushing someone to their limit will produce the best version of themselves—or the worst. They want to see true colors."

I frown.

"They want that one person who rises above the challenge, a worthy individual who has what it takes to rule beside an Alpha-male gure. She must over-come obstacles and ght back." She glances at me. "We learned that in our training."

"Well, geez, if you put it like that."

If Fairy Godmother Inc. likes the competition, then I need to up my game, I was an athlete in high school, so I understand how a little competition can bring out the superhero in you. We both tense as we hear footsteps coming down the stone stairs then the clear sounds of the metal door being unlocked. I grab Mort's hand, and she squeezes it.

The Headmaster of all people saunters in, her long dark gown looking malevolent with all the shadows it casts. She must be here to tell me what world of hurt I'm in for.

"Awe there they are," she says, and I am surprised acid is not dripping from her lips. She looks like a wolf and is followed by gru -looking guards

"What have we done headmaster to deserve this?" I ask meekly, head lowered.

I can hear the swish of her skirts, and she kneels in front of us. "Raise your head, slave."

I do, and I am greeted with pure revulsion in her dark gaze, her lips chapped and pale. "I knew from the moment I saw you that something was o , but I just could not gure it out. I have very respected sources that say they caught you multiple times, pinning for his grace's attention. For that reason alone, is why I rarely keep slaves as comely as yourself here at the castle." She continues as she glances around the room. "Eye contact with the royal family is forbidden on the highest level, and this you should know already! I should have seen the red ag sooner, a beautiful girl without a past?" She laughs, her eyes seeming to bulge out of their sockets. "If you are a spy, then you will be dealt with lethally. I shall inform his Grace of our allegations. His Grace is very sensitive to In ltrators, seeing how his Majesty has fallen ill."

"I am not a spy—"

Speckled blackness clouds my vision as pain erupts on the side of my face. I glance back to the Headmaster in shock. She is still holding up her leather whip like she will do it again, and she did, even harder this time. I scream as my neck jerks so hard to the left, I feel it crack.

I feel warm liquid run from my nose down to my chin.

"Speak again without being asked, I will crush it," she hisses with a smile.

If she didn't already.

She stands, and I think I hear her saying that I cannot leave this place until Prince Apollo returns from his raid, outlaws on the outskirts of Garthorn. I could be in here for weeks. My vision swims and my head pounds in furry. The pain is so great I feel numb. I hear Mort calling my name but no good, I pass out cold.

Light as a feather.

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It has been four days, and I feel weak.

Defeated.

Thirsty—starved.

I have been drinking barely enough of questionable water and stale bread to stay alive. The ground is cold, and I have been laying in murky water for a while now, I think I hear dripping coming from my left though I am too tired to raise my head and look. This Fairy Godmother adventure has turned into something I'd rather not be apart of. But, I am still too proud to use a life-line. I will not give Laura that kind of satisfaction that she got to me. I'm just dying on the ground from hypothermia and starvation, no biggie. I probably have some virus from the murky water I'm laying in, but I will not give up just yet.

I am made from thicker stu than that.

Mort has been doing her best with her shape-shifting abilities, morphing into random bugs to see what is happening outside this dungeon cell. She has been gone for hours now, and I am about to lose my mind. I just keep running scenarios of payback, revenge. Maybe I will out her birthright in front of everyone, pointing and shouting. I don't see that plan going wrong at all.

Vengeance, I repeat to myself.

Mort nally returns, I can see the little butter y t under the metal door and utter in. "Mort!" My voice cracks.

She materializes next to me, her face pale and out of breath. "I was almost eaten by a cat."

"Oh geez," I whisper, feeling dizzy as I try to sit up, water dripping from my tangled hair.

"It's nuts out there, the castle sta is preparing for a grand masquerade in honor of Apollo's safe return and victory," Mort says and smiles at me.

I jerk towards her with a slight burst of energy. "He's back?! He's back!"

"Yes. For a few hours now and I happened to be there when the Headmaster told him about your situation. Which lead me to almost being eating by the cat. I was not paying attention because I was listening to the conversation, and I didn't want to miss anything." Mort looks sick again and shivers. "Do you know how big cats look when you're this big?" She holds up her ngers to show me the size of the butter y she was.

"Mort," I moan. "What did he saaaaaay?!"

She's killing me softly.

"Well, he pushed past the Headmaster pretty aggressively and is headed here, I think. I had to y through short cuts to get here this fast. I was having trouble with the coordination of my wings, kept ying into the wall. I also ew into a window, which actually really hurt. Because you know it would be bad if he beat me here and I was still a butter y," she gave me a pointed look.

I shake my head. "He is coming here now?!"

My heart kicks to life.

I didn't know I mattered that much to him.

We both gasp as the door is forcefully thrown open, and Apollo's gure lls the doorway. My heart stops at the sight of him. I always forget what a striking force he is. I can see his eyes widen even in the darkness. He slowly walks in, his chest rising and falling at a rapid rate. That's when I notice myself and what I must look like. I am lying on the ground with my hair splayed everywhere, soaking wet. I stopped caring yesterday, or was it the day before?

Apollo kneels down next to me and glances up at Mort. "Are you hurt?"

She shakes her head, no.

"I can see the same isn't so for her," he barely says, his jaw exing.

I barely peak up and see two guards come running in along with the Headmaster. Apollo turns, and the look he gives the Headmaster makes her clutch the cloth at her neck. "Un-chain them now," he orders.

I can see the confusion written on the Headmaster's face. "Your Grace, she is supposed to be a spy!"

"From now on, you do nothing unless you consult with my advisers or me." He commands. "I will decide what her intentions are, not you. You have no authority."

I would have swooned if I was not already on the ground lying in muck. He glances back, and I feel his hand softly touch the bruise on my cheek. He is looking at me like I am a delicate little ower that was dropped in the mud.

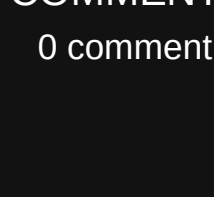
He lifts me o the ground, and I am carried, my memory fading in and out.

I'm safe though.

His body heat warms mine, and I never want him to let me go, I can smell the spicy scent of him. Yum. I almost moan in protest when he hands me o to the medical sta to clean me up and to see to my wounds, yet again.

Though I do see him watching me until I'm out of view.

I think that's a good sign.



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