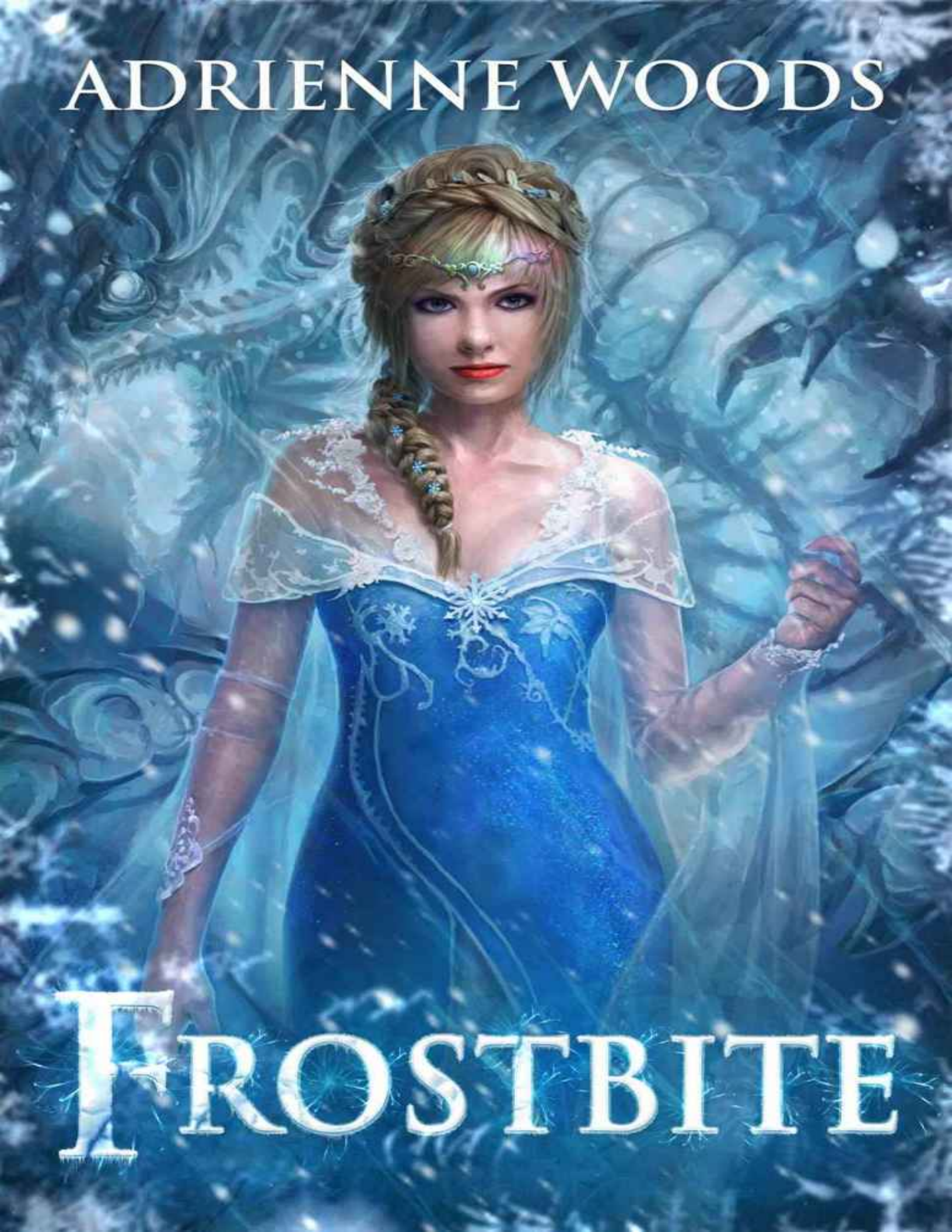


ADRIENNE WOODS

FROSTBITE



Frostbite: The Dragonian Series 3

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Illustration: Joemel Requeza

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DEDICATION

To my sister; Rile Freeman, for all your love and for being one of my best friends. You were the inspiration behind Cara. Love you to bits.

xoxoxo
Adrienne

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First and the most important, as always, thanks is to our Father in Heaven, for blessing me every day, without Your guidance, I wouldn't have done or finished with this if You were not involved in this every day. You are my purpose of life and I will love You till the end of time. Then I would like to thank my extraordinary beta readers, you know who you are, for your valuable input, patience and willingness to delve into this world time and time again.

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Lots of love

Adrienne Woods

OTHER NOVELS IN THIS SERIES

**FIREBOLT
THUNDERLIGHT
FROSTBITE
MOONBREEZE 2015**

NOVELETTES

**VENOM
POISON 2015**

OTHER NOVELS BY ADRIENNE WOODS

DREAM CASTERS: LIGHT 2015

Things aren't always what they seem; the first appearance deceives many; the intelligence of a few perceives what has been carefully hidden.... Unknown

EPITOME



DEATH WAS MY constant companion. I'd escaped its icy clutches three times in my short life.

My first brush with the spirit I now knew as Death was the night I learned who my father truly was. The night I witnessed his transformation into a dragon on Interstate 40. The night we were attacked by dragons. I lost my hero that night, and my world was completely turned upside-down when I was whisked away to Paegeia: a world where dragons and magic exist; a world located inside the Bermuda Triangle, hidden from the human realm behind a magical wall.

Humans have the ability to penetrate the wall, but if they try to exit Paegeia, they are instantly disintegrated.

I used to call it my one-way ticket to Neverland. Now it has become my home.

While the wall may be limiting to humans, dragons are free to come and go as they please, and they've done so for the past nine hundred years, hiding amongst the human race to protect the weak, help the poor and trade with the rest of the world.

The second time I almost died was right after I received my foretelling from the Viden. Foretellings are a type of prophecy

intended to lead the people of Paegeia to their destinies, but the Viden gives them in a messed up way, in the form of a riddle.

Mine could mean anything, but I knew now that it would only bring death. What the words in my foretelling meant, I still needed to figure out. The question was, would it be worth it?

The first time I thought I had figured out my destiny was when I went to retrieve the King of Lion sword. It was formidable, magical and could slay evil in any form. Brian, a Sun-Burst dragon, died saving my life, and the lives of my friends who were dumb enough to follow me into the madness.

The second time I had the opportunity to fulfill the twisted words of the opaque riddle was when I had the opportunity to claim Paul, a Wyvern, to prove once and for all that Wyverns had the capacity to be good like all the other dragons. Once again I was wrong, and my only love, Lucian, paid the ultimate price. He died saving my life, but not before I turned into a dragon myself.

I was a dragon, I had always been a dragon, and I had never known. It was still a mystery why I hadn't been able to shift before, and they were still studying why only my anger and fear had brought on the change.

To be honest, I didn't care about my foretelling anymore. People I loved died, and I couldn't stop feeling like all of this was my fault.

Losing Lucian took a huge toll on me. I didn't want to live, but for some reason now that I wanted to die the spirit of death didn't come to claim his prize. Instead I was left with a hollow feeling deep inside my chest, one that would never be filled. I was left with a broken heart: ice cold, as if no amount of heat could ever warm me again.

Arianna is right, I am like poison.

No, not poison.

The people in my life, the ones I love, didn't die from my touch, their deaths were written in the choices I made. All of them were on death's list; waiting for the day they would take their last breath.

I'd paralyzed their lives, their futures. I was like ice, like frost freezing their hopes and dreams. I was the living embodiment of frostbite.

CHAPTER ONE



I WAS BACK INSIDE that cave, the one where Lucian lost his life. I looked around but I knew he wasn't going to come for me, he was dead. *Then what the hell am I still doing here, staring at a psycho who claims to be my dragon?*

"You really thought that I was your dragon, Elena? Seriously?" He laughed that sadistic laugh that made my insides twist and turn in all directions.

"Get away from me you freak," I spat.

His hand connected hard against my cheek, it burned and my ears rang for a couple of seconds.

"I'm not a freak, I'm a patriot."

"Patriot?" I laughed as loud as I could. "You are a murderer!"

Another strike. The Elementals clucked like crazy, they could feel the danger all around them and must have felt helpless. It was beginning to drive me insane.

“Stop it you mongrels, or I’ll skin you alive,” Paul yelled and for some reason they listened. He looked back down at me again. The point of his knife was close to my throat. “It’s funny how everyone around you knows who you are, Elena, except you.”

“What are you talking about?”

He laughed again. “I guess they like to play mind games with you, like to keep you in the dark.” His eyes met mine. “Some friends you have.”

“Stop that, you know nothing about my friends, or what friendship is.”

“Why? Because they all end up betraying you at the end of the day. Take it from me; it’s better to live in the dark. You can do whatever you want, be whatever you want. Your friends don’t give a shit about you, and neither does your dragon.”

“You are not my dragon,” I yelled again.

“Oh, I know that, and for some sick, twisted reason your true dragon wasn’t bothered one bit that I claimed you as my rider.”

“You are lying.”

“Am I?” He looked around. “Then where is your dragon, Elena? Why isn’t it here?” The Elementals’ clucking noises drowned the rest of Paul’s words. I could see his lips moving, but their sounds of pure panic drilled through my brain, making it impossible to hear what he had to say. It grew louder and louder and then a cannon shot rang through their cries.

I jumped up in bed, soaked with sweat. It was like, the gazillionth time I’d had that dream. I could still hear their clucking and it made me feel like I was going crazy, but still, no tears came. My heart felt as if it was bouncing inside my ears. No matter how many times I had the same dream, I could never hear Paul’s last words as the Elemental sounds kept interrupting him. But there was one thing that I knew was a lie, I didn’t own a dragon. I was a dragon, and that was one piece of information I still struggled to deal with.



LENA, YOU NEED to focus. Put all your strength and emotions into one place and see your dragon,” Sir Edward, the professor who taught transformations inside the Coliseum, said. “See who you truly are and the shift will come naturally.”

I shook my head at his words. “I don’t like the way she makes me feel.”

“It is who you are,” he said again.

“It’s not!” I yelled at him.

“Here we go again,” a chirp came from Amy, a Night Villain. Glaring at her I couldn’t help thinking how much I would love to zap her ass right now. The others just gave me slight shakes and eye rolls as they stared at me in disgust. They didn’t understand how I could possibly not want to embrace my dragon. When their stares became too much, I turned around and ran out of the arena.

“Elena!” Sir Edward yelled after me.

He could yell as much as he wanted. I knew starting with dragon classes would be a waste of time. I wasn’t a dragon. I couldn’t be one. For the love of blueberries, I was afraid of heights. Trees flew past me as I ran toward the wooden door that led to the school. I glanced at the Parthenon dome quickly before I ran up the stairs. I loved that dome and would give anything to put my trust in my two axes rather than rely on my purple lightning. Or to accept her, the being coiling inside of me, begging to be released. I couldn’t grant her that wish because she was too unpredictable and I never knew what the hell she was going to do when she came out. It was like when I became the dragon, I turned into Hyde. A monster that would destroy anyone, no matter if it was foe or friend.

I opened the wooden door with a flick of my wrist as if the hulking oak weighed nothing. I made it around the first corner fast and rested against the wall as I tried to catch my breath.

I hadn’t been lying when I’d said I didn’t like the way she made me feel. The anger and frustration of not being able to save him that day was ten times worse whenever I shifted into her. The pain and the

heartache of losing Lucian were unbearable. It *drove* her, she wanted to kill, and if Sammy and George hadn't been near me the second time I'd shifted into her, an innocent soul would've paid the price.

I wanted revenge so badly. But how did you kill a ghost and his Hippogriff girlfriend? Paul died that day, he deserved it, but the only thing I still struggled with was with knowing for sure. The love of his life, Nora Georgiou, a shape-shifting hippogriff who'd pretended to be our Enchantments professor a couple of months back hadn't cried out in agony when he went up in golden dust. I'd also heard the word "drink" and my mind jumped to one conclusion: a potion.

Lucian's iron blade had killed him, it was the only type of metal that could kill a Wyvern, and yet I had a funny feeling that she had found a way to save his life. How, I still needed to figure out since I couldn't go and ask around if there was a way to save someone's life if they were mere inches from death. If something like that existed, I was sure it would be something forbidden, something that Paegeia wouldn't cast even if the king's life depended on it. And if a potion like that didn't exist, I would be the fool. So I'd been trying to search for the answer myself, with little success. If one of the library books did contain such information, I hadn't found it yet. The Internet threw out potions in the search results that didn't make any sense. Most of them were healing potions but none of them were what I was looking for.

The other reason I'd been searching for something like that, if it existed, was in the hopes that I could find a way to bring back Lucian. If I found something, I wouldn't even think twice about it. I couldn't live without him and thinking about him made me want to bawl my eyes out again, as the ache in my heart crept into my bones and blood. But since she'd come forth, I couldn't show that emotion. There were just no more tears. The last time I'd cried was the day Lucian died.

I guess in some way I'd gotten my wish of never wanting to cry again.

I just never imagined it would come in the form of a purple dragon.

Pressing my back against the cold stone wall, I let my knees give out. I hugged my knees after my butt found the cold surface of the floor and rocked.

As I sat, I could hear a pair of footsteps and someone's breathing approaching. A strong fragrance of vanilla and roasted almonds followed, yes something else that had been enhanced was my sense of smell, and I knew it was Sammy. The noise of her footsteps and breath came closer and closer until it sounded as if she was inside of me. Reaching down her arms wrapped around my entire body.

She wore the same robe as me. It was a piece of clothing that dragons would throw over their human forms after they transformed back. It was nothing special, but I clung onto it because I didn't like being naked in front of everyone. It was the one thing I would never get used to. She was one of my best friends, and had been with me on every life-threatening experience I'd encountered since I came to Paegeia.

"Elena, you need to try."

I looked at her. "Sammy, I can't. Look what happened the last time."

"It's normal. You're grieving and you want justice like all of us, including your dragon form." She sat next to me. "We experience emotions on a different level, a more intense one and I don't know if you will ever get used to it, but you are what you are, Elena. You can't deny her."

I sighed as I stared at the floor. "I thought I was done with the questions, but I can't forget them. I can't forgive him. Why didn't he tell me?" I was speaking about my father. *How many things had he hidden from me?*

"I don't know." Her lips arched downwards and she had a huge frown between her eyebrows. "I wish so badly that there was something that I could tell you that could make all of this easier on you, but there isn't. Being a dragon is hard, Elena. For all of us, but it's who we are and we have to embrace it."

"What if I'm like the Chromatic, Sammy? I don't want to be beaten."

She grabbed me around the neck. “You’re not. Master Longwei said that Thunderlights are good, remember?”

“Then why do I feel so evil?”

“You’re not evil. You lost someone you love in a messed up way. It’s bound to make you feel angry and frustrated because his killer is still out there. You want justice. That’s what you’re feeling. Not getting it made you do what you almost did the last time. It’s not who you are, you’re just experiencing the emotion of that loss and want justice on a more intense level.” She said the same thing again as if I didn’t get it the first time. The bell rang and she stared at me with soft eyes, eyes that pleaded with me to open my mind and just accept things the way they were. When students started to pass us, I sighed.

She made sense, but I still didn’t want to feel that pain and anger. It was too much and my Thunderlight would just have to stay trapped inside this human form a little longer.

“Come, let’s go and see what Chef has made for lunch.” She reached for my hand after she got up and pulled me to my feet in one swift movement.

We entered the cafeteria, and my back connected hard with the wall. Amy’s long and pointy nose almost touched mine. Her fist clutched my robe and with her Night Villain strength she lifted me almost off the floor.

Her two buddies held Sammy tight. “Leave her alone, Amy.”

“Sammy, shush. I’m doing this for all of us.” She snapped at Sammy over her shoulder before her head shot back around to face me.

“Just move on, Watkins,” she spat, and I could feel her acid saliva spray gently onto my face. It burned slightly and I ground on my teeth to stop myself from showing my pain. Still it didn’t burn as much as I thought it would.

“Get your paws off of me,” I replied through clenched teeth.

“You’re pathetic. Arianna was right. Lucian wasted his life saving yours.”

The two girls that held Sammy snickered.

“Amy, shut up!” Sammy yelled.

No, she was right and I totally agreed with Amy's last statement. Though my Thunderlight didn't. She got mad and when I opened my mouth again, she cussed like crazy. The voice wasn't mine anymore and Amy let go of my robe and started to back off. When she became smaller I knew exactly what was happening and there was absolutely nothing I could do to stop it.

The tables close to us crushed into splinters underneath my dragon weight. Pillows that came in contact with my talons tore into pieces and sponge popped out everywhere around me.

Huge scaly paws tore free from my skin and I didn't care about the robe on my body that shredded into a million pieces, lying in a pathetic heap on the floor. I only concentrated on calming myself down as anger burned through my veins and revenge warmed my belly. If I killed Amy today Master Longwei would surely throw my ass out of here.

The walls started to shake and the students who were inside the cafeteria made their way outside in total hysteria.

"Elena, deep breaths, calm yourself." Chef was in front of me with his hands up in defense. He had to arch his neck and he made his voice thick as he yelled the words.

"Do as he says, Elena. Calm down," Sammy was yelling from below on my other side. "Should I turn?" she asked Chef softly, but whispers were no longer soft to my sensitive ears. They sounded as if they had been spoken directly to me.

"No, it might only rile her up more."

The opposite wall and roof came closer and I wished that I could stop growing. What was going on? I was big, but never big like this.

The pain from the lightning burned my stomach and I had to release it.

"She's going to blow," Chef yelled as Sir Edward stormed into the cafeteria. Suddenly, a purple lightning bolt hit the wall. Bricks spattered and more light from outside streamed in. For some reason the word "escape" played around inside my head.

Students popped their heads inside the newly formed hole, nosy little brats. They flinched away fast as a second bolt exited my mouth. This was exactly what had happened the last time.

It began with me not wanting to breathe lightning on them but the minute I started I couldn't stop, or let me rephrase, I didn't want to stop.

I would see Paul in all of them and in less than a minute I was going to forget that my name was Elena and I would become *her*, destroying everyone in my path, even my friends. That last thought was barely through my mind when everything around me went black.

CARA



FOUND MYSELF IN a very confined space. Little insignificant rodents on two legs scattered around me. An urge to scorch their asses developed deep inside my gut and I could feel my thunder coiling inside my belly.

Two of them spoke to me, calling me Elena.

Who the hell is Elena?

I blew one with my lightning and growled as a pain so strong moved through my body. I looked down and watched in horror as my talons changed length and the scales on my paws turned a deeper purple, almost red.

My snout burned like fire as a stabbing and tearing pain shot along my jaw line.

I could hear the small rodents yelling out orders to put out the flames and I heard the sound of magic killing my thunder. I looked up as the pain vanished and saw the last bit of my purple thunder being destroyed. The only thing was, it wasn't purple fire they were trying to put out, but a pink one.

The small rodents on their two legs gasped and I saw that the one with pale long hair had gotten away from my earlier blast.

I breathed another and a second pain tore through my belly. This time purple thunder didn't come out but a fire so strong it felt as if it was going to disintegrate my core. I caught a part of my reflection in broken glass pieces on the floor and an ugly purple mutt with sprouts hanging from its chin was reflected back at me. That mutt didn't belong to me, and the fear of what was happening became stronger than my revenge. The only thing I knew was that if I didn't get away, they would trap me and destroy whatever I'd become.

I took flight and more walls came crashing down. I pushed myself up through the roof and what I thought would leave a mother of a headache only left a small twinge as I blasted through the brick. It felt as if the change had made me stronger and my endurance for pain had grown larger. Still, the fear of what they could do to me was overpowering my being.

I didn't know that fire, I didn't trust it and Momma always told me not to trust the things you didn't know.

Momma? What had happened to her? Where is she in all of this? Why have I been asleep for so long?

The wind beneath my wings was unstable. I felt woozy as if I'd forgotten how to fly. Everything tumbled down and I couldn't remember anything she'd taught me. Not that any of it mattered.

I heard a shrill screeching sound behind me and I turned my gaze to see who dared to follow me.

It was another dragon, brass in color, and it flew fast in my direction. It let out another shrill scream, and anger heated up the new flame that was burning my throat. I opened my mouth and breathed the pink fire again. The dragon missed it by an inch and froze in mid-air.

Keep your distance was the thought that went through my mind. I didn't want to hurt whoever that was but I was behind enemy lines and none of this looked familiar. I was far from home.

I tried to remember what Momma told me about flying and dove forward, but I ended up in a tumble and couldn't regain my balance. These weren't my wings, this wasn't my body, this was nothing like me.

A deep sadness at the reality of not being able to remember anything crept into the core of my heart and I didn't see the treetops. One hit me straight in the face and another connected with my entire body. I came crashing down as more trees fell, and roots and vines tangled in my talons and around my body. When I came to a stop I tried to move, but it was no use. I wanted to breathe fire again but I stopped as my instinct told me that I would burn this entire forest down with me trapped inside. I inhaled deeply and tried hard to control myself. With every breath I felt as though I could think more clearly. My heart rate decreased and the burning sensation that had coiled inside my body began to cool. An ache for someone was the only emotion that stayed with me, and then everything started to fade

CHAPTER TWO

ELENA



MY EYES WERE closed and I could hear a deep, raspy breathing filling the silence around me.

My body ached and the intensity of the sounds assaulting my sensitive ears told me that I was still in my dragon form.

What the hell had happened and where I was, I didn't know.

My memory was all a blur after Amy pushed me against the wall and I began speaking to her in that horrible voice, releasing that first bolt of purple lightning. I tried to recollect my thoughts and it slowly came back to me in flashes: I'd changed.

The picture that formed inside my mind wasn't the Thunderlight that had been reflected back to me from the glass that lay on the floor; it was the face of another dragon, dark and dangerous.

I turned to see the colored scales on my paw and found a deep purple-red reflecting back. The Rubicon.

No, this can't be. I tried to move but was trapped. I couldn't turn or break free from whatever held me to the ground and that stirred more panic within me.

I froze as I heard a voice. The beast inside of me wanted to take over again, and whatever it wanted to do, it wasn't good. I'd known that from the beginning and nobody had wanted to believe me.

I could hear three hearts beating, and even more voices spoke softly to one another.

"What the fuck?"

"Watch your language, Blake," a man said sternly.

"Just be careful. Sir Edward says that she is a Rubicon," a woman said, frantically.

"Oh, come on. Only one Rubicon can live at a time, Constance."

"I'm just repeating what Sir Edward said."

I growled as they came nearer.

"She's here," the one who'd sworn yelled close to my side and I growled all the more.

"Is she okay?" the woman asked. I knew I shouldn't be afraid of them, but I was. It was such a strange feeling. This happened every time I became her. I wouldn't remember anything and I didn't know if they were friends or enemies. I knew that in another five minutes, give or take, everything would come back. But I didn't have five minutes, they were here now.

My heart was pounding a thousand beats a minute and I couldn't calm it down. My belly warmed up and I could feel the lightning burning inside my throat once again. I tried my best to contain it as my dragon eyes took in the tall trees surrounding me.

One blast of lightning would set this entire forest aflame and I would surely die, choking in the suffocating smoke of my own rage and fear.

"She's still in her dragon form." The voice was right behind me again.

"Elena." He spoke gently.

I couldn't turn around. My body was in a lot of pain and the lightning coiled inside my stomach like a viper begging for a reason to strike.

Stop this, I yelled inside my mind but it just kept boiling.

Trying to control it made it worse and the pain was so intense that it felt as if I was going to explode.

The guy laughed near me but it wasn't him anymore, it was Paul. For some reason I always remembered Paul. He came into sight. "Look at you, a dragon, and not just any dragon, another Rubicon. Goran is going to be pleased, Elena."

Another Rubicon? How can this be?

The heat in my body rose a couple of degrees and I released my purple lightning. The only problem was, it wasn't purple, it was a vibrant pink fire.

Paul blocked it with an invisible force and the flames backfired onto my scales. It felt warm, familiar. He came closer and grabbed me by the whiskers that had suddenly sprung out of my chin.

Whiskers I'd never had. Then he laughed again. I released another breath but he froze my fire. The features on his face slowly began to morph into the face I had seen before it had turned into Paul.

Blake? Everything came back in a split-second wave crashing down over me.

"I'm sorry," I yelled and the green of the trees became brighter. I could feel my skin soaking up an invisible cloak.

"Are you calm?" Blake yelled.

I nodded my ugly head, but the whiskers he had a firm grip on hurt my chin. "I'm scared," my deep voice whispered back.

Constance and Master Longwei came into view, and my fear evaporated as I recognized them.

"Why can't I control her?" *Oh no*. I dug my head into my paws as Sammy's figure jumped into my mind. I'd blown fire at her when she'd tried to follow me. I'd almost killed my best friend.

A whimpering sound left my body, reminding me of the calls made between whales; a sound that always brought me to tears.

“Are you sure you are calm?” Blake asked again.

“She’s calm, Blake. We need to get her out of this,” Constance said, and for the next couple of minutes they spoke all sorts of incantations and I began to feel the grip the roots and vines had on me starting to weaken.

When I was finally free, Blake’s spoke again. “Can you move?”

I didn’t answer. They should just leave me here. I couldn’t face Sammy or what I’d done to the cafeteria.

“Look at me,” he demanded.

I didn’t do what he asked.

“Elena, look at me,” he yelled this time.

“No!”

I could hear his steps coming closer.

He grabbed my whiskers again, and turned my head by force to look at him. It didn’t even hurt this time. He stared at me for a short while. Then something I’d never seen in his eyes before emerged. It was as if he’d finally found the answers to all his problems.

His mouth curved slightly upwards. He really was so beautiful. The slight curve of his lips transformed into his million-dollar smile. One I’d only seen that first day my eyes had fallen on him, the same one that resembled my father’s and the one that would make every girl turn to goop on the spot.

Blake helped me like the last time I’d had to transform back into my human form. It still wasn’t easy as the shift was just as painful as the changing into a dragon part. It became a bit easier, though, to clear my mind when he was near.

Constance covered my naked body with a robe the minute my human figure re-surfaced and all the scales and talons were gone. When I lifted my head slowly, I found Blake still sitting on his haunches in front of me.

“Thanks,” I mumbled and clutched the robe tighter around my body.

“You’re welcome,” he chuckled again, ending it with a huff. He looked down at the floor for a short second and the expression of what I’d

seen earlier in his eyes became evident on his face. He stood up and walked toward Master Longwei.

Constance helped me up and the woods that had looked so small before gave me the opposite impression now. Most of the trees around us lay flat, bent at their trunks in sort of a sad bow. We had to climb over them to get out of the woods and I closed my eyes to the destruction around me. This could never happen again.

Constance stayed close to me and carried most of my weight as we walked. I felt drained and tired, as if I could sleep for a whole month. My eyes found hers and she gave me a soft smile and a squeeze. *How had everything gotten so messed up?*

I wasn't just a dragon, I was a Rubicon. Nothing made sense. How can there be one special dragon for the light that can turn into a dragon meant for the dark?

"I thought only one Rubicon lived at a time?" I whispered to Constance.

"That's true, but ever since you came to Paegeia Elena, plenty of things have happened that we just don't have answers for," Constance said quietly.

"Yay me," I sulked.

She giggled softly. "See, you're almost back to normal."

It was silent for a while as we tried to find a way out of the woods. "It's not so bad. You'll get used to her," Constance tried to reassure me.

"I don't think it's the "getting used to her" part I should be worrying about." I sighed and found Constance's worried gaze on me again. "It's hard to explain. Um, when I'm her..." I sighed again. "When she takes over, I don't know what I'm doing."

Constance smiled. "Ever heard the term Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde?"

I nodded. "It's exactly like that."

"It's normal, Elena. You'll remember more every time you turn and the procedure will come faster too. The rest, well there is only one dragon that can really help you with that," she said and nodded toward Blake who walked right next to Master Longwei, speaking in

Latin. He despised every hair on my body. Yet today he'd showed me some kindness, some sympathy.

"Will I become evil too?"

Constance's eyes glistened but she looked away. "I don't know, Elena. Only time will tell."

I bit the inside of my lip and nodded again.

We finally reached the edge of the forest and I had to admit, my dragon form was really fierce and had taken a third of the forest down with her.

Blake took his robe off and I looked away. The change came so naturally to him, and when I heard the tear and pop sound, I knew he'd transformed into a dragon.

Constance looked at me.

I shook my head. "I can't."

"Okay." She smiled, took off her robe and walked away from me to transform. She was such a beautiful dragon. Her silver scales shimmered in the last ray of sunlight, almost blinding me as they reflected at just the right angle. Her long neck made her look majestic and she had a small white beard right below her chin. Her Swallow wings were my favorite feature. She held out her paw and I grabbed it, using her talons to stand. She lifted off and as soon as the ground was a couple of paces below me I closed my eyes. My heart beat like crazy as she pulled me closer to her body.

Her leathery torso felt warm, soft and she smelled clean, like the forest.

I tried to listen for her heartbeat but could barely hear it. Funny how everything about them was so different from us. I took a deep breath.

You are a dragon, Elena.

We landed back on Dragonia Academy turf half an hour later. I gave Constance a hug after she'd shifted back into her human form, and thanked Blake awkwardly as he stood butt naked with his robes hanging over his arm, still speaking to Master Longwei.

He had absolutely no shame when it came to his naked body, none of them did, and I doubted that it was going to be that easy for me.

When I entered the room, Sammy grabbed me around my neck.

My arms started to shake and I didn't know if it was the reality of me almost killing her that had finally kicked in. "I'm so sorry."

"Shhhh, I'm perfectly fine, not even a hair was harmed."

"I could've killed you, Sammy."

"Hey, my brother is a Rubicon, he taught me well." She had a huge grin on her face but for some reason I didn't see the humor in it.

"So, you're a Rubicon?" Becky said right behind me. I turned around.

"I didn't try by any chance to zap your ass too, right?"

She shook her head and laughed. "George and I are way too fast."

"Be careful, this room might be too small for that head of yours," Sammy said.

"Whatever," Becky sang. The vibe that had emerged from their constant fighting ever since I'd turned into a dragon grew thicker with each silent second. It felt as if it was going to drown me.

I shook my head slightly. "Can you guys just please stop?" I begged. "This has been going on for far too long. I'll try to embrace this, if you guys just go back to normal, okay?" I looked at both of them.

Ever since I'd become a dragon I'd struggled with accepting it. Sammy had given me space but Becky, well, she was being Becky.

We fought a lot and she would tell me that I was a coward for not accepting it. To her, being a dragon was hot, and she would have given anything to be one.

Sammy didn't like Becky's way of helping me to deal with this, and where she was usually soft and laid back, she'd changed and become a cat whenever Becky didn't back off. It led to a lot of fighting and a lot of awkward moments.

"Sorry," Sammy said and gave Becky a hug, who in return grabbed me, pulling me into their embrace too.

“I’m sorry too. I know I’m a hard ass, but I hate seeing you guys like this.”

“It’s just difficult,” I said. “Sammy you know exactly who you are, I just found out. I don’t know how to be a dragon. I meant it when I said that I didn’t like the way she makes me feel.... how on earth did I become a Rubicon?”

They both started to laugh.

Becky let go of Sammy but kept her arm wrapped around my neck. “Ever since you came here, mystery was written all over your face. It’s time you just went with the flow girl.”

“Easier said than done.”

“No, somehow you always find a way to just be okay with everything. You’ll see, before you know it you’ll be just as badass as Sammy.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of, being a badass dragon.” A serious tone laced my voice again.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Becky said shaking her head.

“I’m a Rubicon, Becky. I’m going to turn evil too, it’s just a matter of time.”

“Over my dead body,” Sammy yelled.

“Mine too.”

“What if I need the beatings too?”

“You know what, let’s not speculate please. We’ll deal with it if we get there,” Becky said.

All three of us nodded.

It was quiet for a couple of seconds before Sammy chuckled. “Now I finally get why my brother was so into you whenever he was drunk. It was *her* that drew him closer.”



DIDN'T FEEL HUNGRY that night, skipped dinner, and went to bed early. My dragon form really drained my energy.

When I walked into the cafeteria the next morning everyone stared at me. There were even a couple of Dragonians whispering about trying to claim me. I rolled my eyes at that piece of information. As if I was going to be an easier claim than Blake. If they knew her the way I was starting to, they wouldn't be thinking that.

Around ten, Master Longwei's voice came from the speaker system. "Elena Watkins come to the office, please."

Professor Pheizer, who'd helped us with developing our abilities while we're in human form, nodded her head and I packed my books and left.

She wasn't so helpful anymore and even limited her advice, but I still saw the question in her eyes of what I was whenever I found her staring at me. She would look away of course, but my dragon eyes were a lot faster than hers. Sometimes that second that our eyes met felt like minutes before she'd drop her gaze. It was hard to explain, I just felt . . . different.

I found Master Longwei behind his desk and he gestured with his hand to the chair in front. I took a seat. He held both his hands with his fingers rested against one another in front of his mouth. "You need help, Elena."

I huffed. "What's new?"

His lips curved into a smile and he dropped his hands as he moved his chair underneath his desk. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Blake has agreed to help you find your dragon."

I froze. *What!* Blake had actually agreed to help someone else besides himself? Latin jumped into my mind and I shook my head at the words from the last conversation that had taken place between Master Longwei and Blake, right here in his office, after my secret had been revealed. "No, it's fine. I'll make peace with her some other way."

“Elena. The two of you are from the same species. It won’t be anything like your Latin lessons, I promise.”

I laughed. “How do you know, did he say so? For all I know it could be his way of getting closer to me and killing me off. Two Rubicons can’t live together in this world. You know that.”

“He gave me his word that he would not hurt you. He wants to figure this out as much as you do, Elena, and I promise you he doesn’t want to kill you.”

“Just like the way Paul promised you.” It just slipped out but I didn’t regret it. Lucian died because of that choice.

Master Longwei’s eyes froze at my words, and he looked away. “I was fooled. It is a mistake I’ll never make again.”

I took a deep breath. “I probably don’t have a choice, do I?”

“Not this time.”

“Fine, where do I meet him?”

He raised his eyes and looked as if I hadn’t just offended him a couple of seconds ago. “That is up to you two. I’m only the messenger.”

You mean I have to hunt him down and ask him. “Fine, thanks.” I wasn’t thankful really. I didn’t want to spend time with Blake any more than he wanted to spend time with me. I hated how he made me feel. Sometimes I felt like a toy. He was always there, except the last time, when I was in danger, but afterward he would push me away as if he hadn’t just saved my ass. It was a frustrating little game and one I really didn’t have the time or energy for anymore.

“Have fun.” He smiled awkwardly. “Not too much though.”

For some reason I wanted to snicker at his sentence. I’d always wondered if Master Longwei could read minds. As if Blake and I would ever have fun. Nothing had changed and he was still the arrogant bastard he had been a couple of months ago.



AT LUNCH TIME Sarah gave me a note. She gave me a genuine smile when she handed it to me and I stared at Sammy who just shrugged her shoulders. Sarah was part of Tabitha's group, and they despised me just as much as Blake did.

I put the note in my pocket without reading it. I wasn't in the mood to find out what Tabitha or Sarah wanted from me now.

I finally took out the note during Enchantments. The class was different from human magic but just as hard as all the incantations involved connection spells. Dragons couldn't do magic in their dragon form, although they were magical creatures, but there was always a loop hole to this whole magic thing and that was what we had to learn, how to harness it. The hard part was that they were still in Latin and my dragon was English. Nothing made sense at all.

I squinted as I looked at the horrible handwriting. I'd thought Lucian's was bad; an ache just from thinking his name jolted through my body.

I put the note down and wished with all my heart that I could just let go of all this pain and cry, but the tears were still absent from my cheeks.

I opened the note again and struggled with the first word. I finally knew who'd written it when I made out the word "meet" and something like "mountain".

I sighed and chucked the note back into my pocket as the bell rang. *This isn't going to work*, I thought as I threw my backpack over my shoulder and left the classroom.

I found Blake with his arm around Tabitha's neck below the staircase as I walked out. He looked different and cooed disgusting words of what he was going to do with her later on into her ear. It was times like these that I didn't want to be a dragon.

The first thing I noticed was the broad smile on his face. Blake never smiled like that. Although it was breathtakingly beautiful, it was sort of creepy at the same time.

“You have terrible handwriting.” I interrupted their little moment. “Just tell me where you want me to meet.”

He smiled at me. “There is a mountain right behind the...” He stopped and just stared at me for a short while. I, of course, stared back and gave him slightly raised eyes and a “what?” shrug. “What is it Elena, why the long face?”

“How do you suppose I get to that mountain Blake?”

“You can fly.” His tone was sarcastic.

“You really think that Ms. Hyde is going to remember to meet you there? Because I can promise you, she won’t.”

“Then I’ll just have to hunt you down,” he said in a flirty way. My eyes found Tabitha’s and I knew she’d heard it too as her jaw muscles twitched. She glared at Blake.

My heart beat a bit faster. For once Tabitha and I had something in common and it wasn’t fighting for Blake’s heart.

“Forget it, I’ll make peace with her on my own terms.” I didn’t need another Arianna on my case.

“Elena!” he yelled after me but I just kept walking. I could hear Tabitha protesting and it would be just my luck if she hadn’t known about this little arrangement at all.

“Would you slow down?” His voice was right behind me.

“Why do you want to help me all of a sudden, Blake?” My tone was harsh.

“I have my reasons, and once you’re ready, I promise I’ll share them.” He raised his eyes and smiled again.

What was it with him and all this grinning? It didn’t suit him. “Fine, whatever. But I’m not flying to some stupid mountain,” I mumbled.

“Then meet me behind the Parthenon dome,” he said abruptly and walked off in a different direction.

“What time?” I yelled and when he turned around I flapped his note in my hand. “Couldn’t decipher that one either.”

He chuckled. “At two.”

Two? Master Longwei hadn't been kidding when he'd said it wouldn't be like Latin. I really wondered what Blake was going to get out of this.

CHAPTER THREE



IHAD FIVE MINUTES after the last bell of the day rang to get ready for my meeting with Blake. His sudden change in behavior still lingered on my mind, and I still didn't trust the help he was offering.

Ever since I'd come to Paegeia Blake had developed a deep hatred towards me and now he treated me like I was his favorite type of Jell-O. But maybe Master Longwei was right, maybe Blake did have some answers for me because he was exactly like me.

At two, I ran down to the Parthenon dome. I waited in the front and I should've known that it was some sort of prank when he wasn't there by quarter past.

As I stood there waiting I heard a deep growl from the back of the Parthenon dome and I went to investigate. I almost jumped out of my skin as I turned the corner and saw a huge purple-red dragon with sprouts all over his face lying on his belly like a cat.

He grunted.

"I didn't know you were here, okay," I said, but I knew it was useless as he didn't understand a word I was saying.

He shook his head and it made a huge *whooshing* sound as it whipped through the air. He got up and I had to arch my neck back to look at him.

He sure was one ugly bugger, but at the same time, he was so damn beautiful as the sun sparked off the different colors of his scales. He stretched his back and I had to suppress my laughter as his huge butt rose into the air.

Well, at least I wanted to laugh again.

He darted upwards and took off, but not before grabbing me in his hulking talons.

I let out a cry as I dangled upside down, and another left my lips as he flipped me over in the air and caught me in his paw. "Are you crazy?"

My heart hammered a million beats a minute as a deep chuckling sound left his belly. *Hell no, you didn't just laugh at me.* I felt like kicking the inside of the huge paw that carried me like an egg in a basket, but I didn't, as I was afraid he would open up and drop me.

I closed my eyes as I clung onto one of his talons. The speed we flew at was crazy and it reminded me of the elevator again. My stomach dropped with the way he ducked and dove.

Silently, I wished he would stop fooling around and just fly straight like a normal dragon, but then again, Blake was far from normal.

He opened his paw and I landed with a hard *thud* on the cold ground. My heart rate refused to slow as the image of him dropping me in mid-air and forcing me to transform played round and round in my head. I would have incinerated his ass.

"Wasn't that fun?" His voice broke through my thoughts and I was too scared to open my eyes because I knew I would find him naked. He chuckled as if he could hear my thoughts. "I've got a robe on, Elena. It's safe to open your eyes," he mocked.

I didn't want to open my eyes yet as my head still spun like crazy and bile was stuck in my throat. *Oh crap, I was going to*

The thought hadn't even properly formed in my head before I got onto all fours, crawled to the nearest tree and vomited.

“Was it that bad?” He sounded sincere as he crouched beside me.

“It’s not that, believe me, this is an Elena thing,” I mumbled.

“I would love to hear about it.”

I gave him a look and saw he held a wet cloth in his hand. I took it and wiped my mouth. *How did he know I was going to throw up?*

“Something tells me you already know.”

He chuckled. “I don’t, I just came prepared.”

“I’m afraid of heights,” I said softly.

“Sorry?”

“Oh, you heard me.” My tone was harsh again. “I’m afraid of heights!”

“How is that even remotely possible?” His eyebrows rose slightly and I could see him struggling to suppress his smile.

“Go ahead, laugh,” I snapped. “I don’t know, it’s the way it is. I’ve always had this fear of heights thing going on.” I ducked my head in between my legs and took deep breaths.

“You serious?”

“Yes, always have been.”

“But you’re a dragon?”

“So sue me.”

He chuckled. “You’re really funny in a messed up way. You always this pissed?”

“No, it somehow seems to come out whenever you are around.”

He laughed again. I took a deep breath; his happy-go-lucky attitude was really starting to piss me off.

“First rule,” he said, and I knew my resting was over. He was so much like Lucian. “Whatever you do, don’t fall in love with me.”

“Excuse me!” I squinted at him.

“You heard me,” he said through a huge smile. *Oh that ego.*

“Don’t flatter yourself. I’m not one of those diddlebags that buff their eyes every time you come near.”

He smiled and the tip of his tongue licked his upper teeth. I had to admit, it was sexy in some messed up way. I shook that thought out of my head. *What the hell was he trying to do, prove me wrong?*

“Second rule,” he turned around to face me again. “You need to deal with being naked, Elena.”

“Fat chance, Mr. Ego.”

“Elena, you are a dragon, all dragons are used to being naked.”

“Well, not this one.”

“Good.” He nodded.

“What’s good?”

“You finally acknowledged yourself as a dragon. I can work with that.”

I raised my eyes and upper lip in a sarcastic way and looked down at the ground.

“Why don’t you like her?”

“Because I don’t remember the shit she does; I can’t control her and I always end up wanting to kill one of my friends.”

“That will change the more you bring her out, Elena.”

“I can’t promise that she won’t hurt you.”

He laughed again. “I can handle a little female Rubicon.”

I huffed sarcastically. “She’s different.”

“She doesn’t have my experience.”

“Fine, just don’t fall in love with her, please.”

He laughed again. “Glad we have one rule in common.” He smacked both hands together hard. “Get her out, Elena.”

My lips vibrated as I blew out air. I’d forgotten my robe and flinched.

“It’s going to be fine, I promise.”

“I don’t even understand one word you are saying Blake. She doesn’t speak Latin.”

“Let me worry about that. I’ll work something out.”

“I forgot my robe.” I finally admitted what I was really scared about.

He chuckled again, went to the backpack I didn't even know he had with him, and pulled out another robe. "I told you, I always come prepared."

I grabbed the robe and walked with huge strides to the biggest tree I could find and pulled off my clothes. I pulled on the robe that was way too long for me and that smelled like Blake. His fragrance lingered on the fabric as if he'd just emptied an entire can of his scent. It smelled amazing. I lifted it up from the ground and walked back to him. We just stood in front of one another for a couple of minutes as I contemplated bringing her out.

"I really need to meet her Elena."

I bit my lower lip. "She makes everything feel ten times worse, Blake," I begged.

"It's normal. You've got to embrace her."

"Fine, turn around."

He gave me a blunt look.

"Turn around."

"Seriously?"

I grabbed both his shoulders and turned him around.

I took off my robe when I was sure he wouldn't look and closed my eyes as I crouched down. I rested my head on my knees and let my emotions take over. Anger usually did the trick but the ache of missing Lucian was more potent. I welcomed it and thought about him like I used to. His smile, the way his look made me feel. For the love of blueberries, I missed him so much.

I could feel the change, the pull and the tear. The jolt of pain shot through me as my limbs grew and my butt stretched out into a tail. When I opened my eyes, Blake was really small and he was still turned away from me. He started to turn his head and for some reason I was calmer than usual.

He just looked up at me.

"Hi, I'm Blake."

I sighed. "It's still me, idiot."

“I thought you said...”

“It takes about a couple of minutes, just wait.”

He smiled. “I don’t know why you don’t like her, Elena.”

“You’ll spin another story once you meet her.”

He smiled and I lowered my head onto my paws and closed my eyes, waiting for her to come out.

CARA



COPENED MY EYES, scared of where I was going to find myself. My body felt fine and when I lifted my head I was someplace completely different. *How the hell did I get here?*

I had to admit, it was a peaceful place and the view would take any dragon’s breath away.

Something cleared its throat below me and I looked down. I found another rodent.

I got up onto all my paws and was ready to breathe a blast of fire when he lifted up his hands in defense.

“Calm down, Elena.”

“Who the hell is Elena? I’m not Elena.”

He squinted his beady little eyes. “Who are you then?”

“Name is Cara.”

“Cara.” His one eyebrow raised and then a smirk ran over his face.

“Fine, I’ll go with that.”

“You are?” I should be incinerating him, not speaking to him. I opened my mouth again.

“Wait,” he said and his arms and hands were up in the air. “I’m like you, okay.”

I laughed. “You are nothing like me, little rodent.”

“She wasn’t joking when she said that you are feisty.”

“Who are you talking about?”

“Elena, she’s in there with you.” He laughed again. “I’m sure you’ll meet her soon.”

Was this little rodent mocking me? “I have nobody inside of me.” The words rolled down like poison.

He laughed again. He was so arrogant, and it was annoying the hell out of me. Without another thought, I took my talon and flicked him off the mountain.

Good riddance.

I closed my eyes again for a few seconds and looked at the view. The sun baked my scales but the weather was changing. There was a cold breeze in the air that made me shiver.

Just as my eyes wanted to close they grew as the view was spoiled by a huge, ugly mother and I got up, turned around and bolted through the trees to find another escape off this mountain. I could hear its flapping above my head as I changed direction. I guessed the trees falling down didn’t really help my escape plan so much.

I found an edge and hurled myself off the cliff.

The wind supported my wings and lifted me higher into the sky. I still didn’t trust them because for some reason they didn’t feel like they belonged to me.

I spotted the other dragon in the distance, it was really big and I made a dart in the direction furthest away from it.

When I looked back to see where it was, I found nothing.

Then, I felt something warm and wet dripping down my face. It had a tingling sensation and when I looked up, the mutt was right above me. I darted down and struggled for the next half hour to shake the dragon from my tail.

My new body was faster and I loved every minute of this speed.

The dragon was still on my tail though and something was telling me that it was much faster than it’d revealed so far.

I stopped in mid-air and it darted past me like a rocket.

It stopped too when it saw me and I knew this was it. If we had to fight to the bitter end, then so be it.

“What do you want from me?” I yelled and the dragon cocked its head to the side, turned around and flew back toward the mountains. I knew I should go in the opposite direction but for some reason I followed. It was difficult to keep up as the beast accelerated. It turned into a fun game of follow-my-lead and I was surprised that I could do everything this mutt could.

The rodent from the mountain jumped into my head. *Could it be him, but Momma said...This Elena, was she my human form?*

I remembered it now and I forgot to flap as bits and pieces of my old life came back. *I had been waiting for my human form, what happened, why was I asleep for such a long time?*

I struggled to get my balance back so Momma and what she'd said had to wait.

I looked down as the ground came nearer and I couldn't stop. Huge talons grabbed me and threw me higher into the air. I landed with a thud and found myself on top of the ugly mutt's back. I didn't want to fight anymore as I could hear his heartbeat jumping through his chest and vibrating right through my body. Something about this dragon reminded me of someone else. Someone I'd forgotten....
Papa.

ELENA



HEARD A THOUGHT, a voice, and felt an emotion of missing someone as much as I missed Lucian. *Papa.*

I thought immediately of my dad and when I opened my eyes I found myself on a dragon's back, but I was still in my dragon form.

Oh crap, what had happened now?

I closed my eyes again as the horizon started to see-saw. My head twirled.

I knew I was on Blake's back and I knew who he was. It was a first as it usually took a couple of minutes before that part came back. He was right, the more I brought her out, the faster I would get used to her.

I was dying for the memories to come back, and I hoped she'd breathed some fire on his ass, made him work a bit to get her attention. That thought made me smile, and I was sure a dragon could grin as I felt the corners of my lips curving upwards.

The word "Papa" jumped into my head again. The feeling was a familiar one. *Did my dad fly with me like this when I was little? Was that what my dragon form remembered?*

Blake landed back on the mountain with a heavy *thump*. I slid, fell off his body and landed with a *thud* on the ground.

He changed back in a couple of seconds and I closed my eyes again waiting for him to put on his robe.

"Why did you fall?"

"Just give me a couple of minutes and I'll remember," I said sarcastically.

He smiled. "You're back."

"What happened?"

"I'll give you a couple of minutes."

"Haha, you are so hilarious."

"You can change back now, Elena. I still don't know why you don't want to embrace her."

I sighed.

"Please don't tell me you actually liked her?"

He chuckled as he took a cigarette out of his backpack.

"You still smoke?"

"Yes," he said in an 'it's got nothing to do with you' tone.

I grabbed the robe that lay on the floor gently with my teeth and went into the woods again. I noticed that one side of the mountain's trees were completely destroyed and lay broken on the ground.

I so didn't want to know what had happened between them.

I took a deep breath, followed by another and started to think about my human form the way Sammy and Constance had taught me. A tingling feeling told me that the change was close and I could feel a very stuffed feeling as my dragon body tried to push itself back into my human form.

When I opened my eyes I looked at my hands and saw fingers covered with human skin. I sighed. Finally I'd managed to do that without any help whatsoever.

I pulled the robe over me and went to Blake. He stared at me for a couple of seconds.

"What now?" I said, hoping that my boobs weren't hanging out.

"Your hair."

I grabbed my ponytail, it was still fine. My hand went automatically to my head, hoping that I wouldn't find it bald. It was still covered with hair.

He got up and pulled out my pony.

"What are you doing?"

"Look, Elena." He pulled a big strand over my face and I saw what he meant. The strands weren't blond anymore but a soft color of the rainbow.

Please don't tell me I'm going to turn into that rainbow dragon next. I sighed.

I grabbed the rest of my hair, it was still blond. "Is it only my fringe?"

He nodded. "Humph."

"That's all you can say?"

"It looks kind of cool."

"Urgh! Whatever." I grabbed my elastic band out of his hand and pulled my hair back into a pony.

I took a deep breath as images appeared in my head. I saw some sort of a conversation between a dragon and a human. It was her and Blake and the amusement on his face when he asked her questions made me furious. It was as if he didn't believe a single word that came out of her mouth and he'd mocked her. I burst out laughing as she flicked him off the mountain.

"She flicked you off the mountain!"

He pulled his mouth into a sarcastic grin.

"You are right, she's sort of awesome...Cara?"

"Yeah." He raised his eyes once and shook his head softly.

"Is that normal?"

"I don't know, you tell me." He looked at me. "But then again, nothing about you is normal."

"Ha, ha." I bit back, and I rolled my eyes and threw myself down opposite him.

He just smiled and heated up his cigarette with his breath.

"How do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Use your abilities while in your human form."

"They haven't taught you that yet?"

"No, they have. I just don't seem to be able to do it."

"You'll learn in time," he assured me.

"I beg to differ."

"Rome wasn't built in a day, Elena. Or so I've heard." He'd said the same thing Cheng had the first day I'd met him. I missed Cheng, he'd been right about Paul and that Lucian would never claim Blake. I didn't know how to face him again, how to apologize and admit he'd been right.

I took a deep breath. "Yeah, well my patience isn't what it used to be."

"It's all up here." He tapped his temple with his finger. "Yours are stuffed with a lot of crazy things right now, things you need to accept

first, before you will be able to use it to conquer your abilities. So the faster you get rid of the 'world owes me something' mentality, the sooner you'll be ready to start learning."

I scowled at him. *What did he know anyway?* The only thing he had to keep away from was his dark side. He'd never fled, never questioned who his father really was and always knew that he was a dragon. I sighed. He had a point though, not that I would give him the satisfaction of admitting it, but I had plenty of crap stuck inside my head to deal with first before I could take on the bigger stuff.

Blake looked at his watch and got up. "I still have a warbel practice to coach so, let's call it a day." He winked at me.

I just stared at him and shook my head softly. "Fine, when do you want to do this again?"

"Tomorrow, same time, same place. Like I said, you have a lot to learn."

"Yeah, that I already know. Maybe if you tell me something I don't know, like why you're helping me, then this could get a bit easier."

He chuckled. "If I tell you that, I might as well kill you, Elena," he said as he changed into the Rubicon.

CHAPTER FOUR



HE TOOK ME back to the academy when our session was over. The flight back wasn't as horrible as the one coming to the mountain and I couldn't stop thinking about Cara. Who was she? And why did I get the feeling that this wasn't even a little bit normal. Constance said it was like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but Blake didn't have another name for the Rubicon inside of him.

"Don't make me wait tomorrow like you did today." Blake walked past me.

I wanted to throw something back but when I saw he was butt naked I shut my mouth and looked away.

Great, now his naked ass is imprinted on my mind.

I had no idea how to get used to the naked part of all this. He was right though, dragon was what I was and I had to get used to this one way or another.

Everyone stared at me as I walked back into the academy.

Stare as much as you want, idiots.

I sighed as a part of me missed the old Elena. She wasn't so depressed and her thoughts were kinder, but then again she hadn't lost her love of her life.

I ran two steps at a time and entered our room with a crash. Becky was sitting on her bed doing her homework and Sammy was watching some sort of reality show on the T.V.

Becky looked up as I entered. She sucked in her breath. "Elena?"

Sammy turned around too. "So how was...."

"What happened to your hair?" they cried in unison.

My hair... that was why everyone had stared. I'd forgotten. "Nothing. It changed when I shifted back today."

Becky made her way in front of me and she pulled the elastic out of my ponytail the way Blake had earlier. My hair fell over my shoulders and down my back. The strands of rainbow hair were clutched in her hand. "It's so beautiful."

Sammy was at her side and they inspected it like I was some sort of an experiment gone wrong. I pulled my hair out of her palm.

"Elena, you really need to snap out of this anger phase," Becky yelled. "It's getting old now."

"Becky," Sammy warned as I entered the bathroom.

"We all lost Lucian, Sammy. She needs to deal with it."

I flung around and charged back to her. "Deal with it?" I yelled. "How can I deal when shit like this," I pulled the strands of rainbow hair, "keeps making an appearance? You were born in this world, Becky. Ever since I got here I've been clinging to the edges just trying to stay above water."

Sammy looked at the carpet.

"Don't tell me you know what it is I'm going through. You still have George, I've got nobody."

"That's not true. You have us."

I gave a sadistic laugh. One I didn't even know I was capable of. "No offence, but you are no way close to what Lucian was."

Hurt filled her eyes. It didn't even bother me that I was the cause of it, and I turned around to go to the bathroom.

I took a shower and thought about what I'd said to her. Still no regret came. She'd asked for it and it was time that someone put her in her place. She should really learn when to back off.

What is happening to you, Elena? the old Elena's voice yelled inside my head. I pushed her back and closed the taps.

After I pulled on new clothes I went back into the room. Becky was gone but Sammy still sat on the couch. She looked at me.

"What?"

"That was really harsh, Elena."

"Sammy, just spare me please."

She jumped up from the couch. "What the hell is happening to you?"

"Let me think. Uhm, I'm a dragon, one predestined to turn evil. I lost the only person that really cared about me, and oh yeah, I really don't want to be here anymore. You want to know more, or can I stop?"

"Don't speak like that. Lucian died saving your life. To give up now would be a waste of his death, Elena."

I closed my eyes and tried to push my anger aside. I didn't want to lash out at Sammy too, but the feelings inside of me were so strong. It was as if I was still in my dragon form. All my feelings felt ten times worse and nothing my friends said made any difference.

I crawled into bed and flung my duvet over my head.



THE NEXT DAY classes were hard. I was called lazy because none of the incantations that left my mouth wanted to work.

Professor Swarch, who was teaching Enchantments for Dragons, got his ass scorched with lightning after accusing me of not trying hard

enough. The class thought it was hilarious; Constance didn't, and neither did Master Longwei.

It wasn't supposed to happen that way. I couldn't control it, and for some reason I could wield lightning when I felt frustrated, or irritated, or really mad. It would be awesome though if it could have happened in Professor Pheizer's class instead of Professor Swarch's.

Sir Edward was glad that I'd transformed in his class, but the minute Cara made her appearance again they had to use magic to contain her and get Blake to calm her down. For some reason he turned out to be the only dragon that knew how to do it, and I didn't know if I should hate that or love it.

Blake was wrong in saying that I would gain control over her the more she got out. And when the day was over and there was nothing left to keep my mind occupied, I ached for Lucian. I tried so hard to remember the sound of his voice, or the way his eyes used to light up whenever he thought something was wicked.

I hardly remembered the smell of his cologne and didn't have anything left of him to remind me of what it was like to have him near.

Queen Margerite came the day after his funeral and took everything he owned. His parents hadn't spoken a word to me since the day he'd died. I knew why. They were blaming me for their son's death, and they should. It was me that had ended up leading him to it.

If I had just end my relationship with him that day at the museum he would still be alive. He wouldn't have come back and searched for me that afternoon, and that hippogriff wouldn't have killed him.



THE NEXT DAY I cut class, all of them, and stayed in bed. Training with Blake was a waste of my time anyway.

The past two days had gotten us nowhere, just a lot of backbiting and him calling me names and decreeing how much I thought the world owed me.

He was wrong. What he didn't understand was that I wanted nothing from this world.

Around three my duvet got pulled off me.

"Get up!" A really pissed off Blake held my blanket in one hand.

"Blake, can you just let it go for today? She had a pretty..."

"No Samantha." He turned his head back to me. "Get ready, Elena."

I jumped out of bed, grabbed my robe and charged past him. "You are a real pain in the ass."

"Yeah, that makes two of us."

I could hear him behind me walking down the stairs, and opening the main door was no effort anymore.

I didn't wait for him to pass through and I could hear his hand smacking against the door.

Why did he want to help me find my inner dragon so badly?

I could feel my anger rising again and it started to tear and pull my skin in all directions. I walked a bit faster and flung the second door open that exited to the Parthenon dome. My clothes started to tear as my limbs grew and I fell off the steps. A popping sound told me that Blake had transformed too.

My weight broke half the stairs and I fell head-first to the ground.

When I looked up Blake was in his dragon form right beside me, trying to help me up with his snout.

A growl escaped my mouth and I breathed fire on him. He yelled something and looked past me. I turned my head and found a gazillion students watching the two of us at the top of the stairs. The pink flame in my stomach coiled again and released another bolt of fire in their direction but Blake got in the way and blocked it with his body.

I turned around and my wings automatically started to flap at my sides. The wind slipped beneath them and my body elevated above the ground. I didn't dare to go higher as I knew my head would start to spin again.

I could hear the flapping sound of a second pair of wings behind me and he said something I didn't understand.

I really didn't want to participate in his stupid session anymore; I didn't want or need his help and I wished everybody would just leave me alone.

CARA



I FOUND MYSELF IN the air and the mutt was right above me when I awoke. I felt agitated and could sense something was very wrong with my human form, or the way they called her, Elena. She felt angry, something I didn't like very much. Frustrated was another feeling I picked up on, and she missed someone named Lucian the same way I missed Dad. It was the same ache.

The mutt went higher and for some reason I didn't want to follow him. Was it him that had caused all of these emotions running through my human form?

I wished I knew what was behind all of this, and at that exact moment flashes of another life paged through my mind. I was right, it wasn't Dad that she missed. She didn't even think about him. It was somebody else: This Lucian, he was another human.

I watched how he'd died, stung by a hippogriff. A vague memory of what Momma had told me long ago about the hippogriffs emerged. They were supposed to be extinct.

Then a flash of that rodent I'd flicked off the mountain made his appearance. So it was him that had made her so angry.

My human's reflection in the mirror came next. She had the most beautiful green eyes and was gorgeous. The one she longed for made her feel like that on a daily basis and the feeling of her missing him again jolted through my chest.

A scene of a Wyvern tying her down to a boulder with shackles came next. It made me angry and I realized it was the day I had woken up. Her anger and helplessness had awoken me.

“Don’t worry baby, Cara is here now,” I said softly and charged at the mutt in front of me.

I blew fire on his ass, something he hadn’t expected. When a second bolt of lightning blew off him, I realized nothing seemed to penetrate the shield he protected himself with.

I could feel some of Elena’s anger disappearing but for some reason mine still stayed.

He flew and blocked all the way back to the mountains and landed.

I descended and landed a couple of minutes after him. I found the rodent from yesterday in the mutt’s place. His arms were enflamed with pink light. He had a dark gaze in his eyes as he stared at me.

“Enough!” he roared.

“I’ll say when it’s enough. You think you can bully her as much as you want and get away with it. I’m in control now.”

“So you’ve finally met Elena. She’s not the innocent victim you think she is, Cara. I’m trying to help her deal with you. So if you want to come out more, you’ll back off.”

His words took me by surprise and I had to admit, I hadn’t expected him to say something like that.

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why are you helping her? From what she’s shown me you don’t seem like the type that would help her at all.”

“We had our differences in the past, but now that I’m a hundred percent sure what she is...”

“You benefit from this, don’t you?”

“Not in the way you think. Is it safe to subdue my fire?”

“Fine.” I gave in thinking if the mutt was telling the truth then I might be getting more time to be free.

His flames grew less and faded into nothing. He pulled on a robe to cover his body and went to sit by a tree.

I lay down in front of him. "Why do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Cover your body with a garment."

A grin spread over his face. "Elena isn't used to naked bodies and I don't know when she will emerge again."

"She's what?"

"Exactly my point," he said and he lit up something that smelled disgusting.

"What is that?" I tried to get the stench out of my nose with a couple of snorts and sneezes.

"I'm putting it out. Just don't throw another hissy fit, okay." He squashed the white twig hard against the ground and I watched as it broke into tiny pieces. "Tell me about yourself, what's the last thing you remember about your dragon life?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Cara, I'm not the enemy. I'm only trying to help."

"Fine," I said. "Not much, Momma and Papa seem to be the only thing I recall."

"Who were they?"

"I can't remember what they called themselves."

"Did they live on this side?"

"I can't remember."

"Did you see other dragons when you grew up?"

"You want me to light up your ass again?"

"Your fire doesn't harm me Cara. I told you before, I'm exactly like you."

"I doubt it. I'm sure I'm prettier than you."

He chuckled.

I fell down on my paws. His questions stirred up so many things in my head that it felt as if they now swam around making me feel like I was going to drown. I closed my eyes and thought about Papa again. I couldn't remember what his human form looked like. Momma and he were mostly in their dragon forms around me and I couldn't recall any other dragons either.

ELENA



I COULD FEEL CARA taking over as I took off from the ground. This time was different though. I didn't black out and was left with my thoughts. Memories of Lucian and of Blake forcing me into this afternoon's training twirled inside my mind.

Then something else happened: it felt more or less like Cara could feel my emotion and I could feel hers. She was pining over Dad the way I pined for Lucian.

How much she must have missed him and what a shock it must have been to her, waking up and finding him no longer there. Our memories entwined with one another, as mine become hers and vice versa. It was a silent conversation between two strangers that would never be able to be together in the same room.

I started to see through her eyes but it was more or less the same as the pond inside the Sacred Cavern. I wasn't looking directly through her eyes but saw what she did through a memory. She was setting Blake's dragon ass on fire, heck she gave him some of everything, but I had to admit, Blake was really good. He protected himself with an invisible shield and blocked every single one of her blows.

Even when he charged for the mountain, the bolts he didn't dive away from he blocked instead.

He landed and she followed his lead.

I looked away when she landed too as Blake was back in his human form with both his arms in flames without a shred of clothes.

There was anger in his voice as he spoke to her, and it faded away leaving me with my thoughts again.

I closed my eyes thinking about all the things in my head. When I felt a soft, cool breeze against my skin, I opened them again.

I found Blake leaning against the tree with his eyes closed. He wore his robe again.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“Elena?”

I nodded and got the urge to stretch. I stood on all fours and my hind legs felt stiffer than the front ones. Before I realized what I’d done, my back arched and my butt moved towards the heavens.

That felt so good.

I found Blake’s eyes on me and he grinned as he looked away. “So that’s what it looks like when dragons stretch.”

I flopped on the floor again and gave him a sarcastic gurgle.

“Elena, you should deal with your anger.”

“How do you think I should do that, Freud?”

“See the Viden.”

“Oh please, she treats me just as badly...” I wanted to say “as you do”, but realized that Blake had actually gone out of his way to try and help me this time. He could’ve left me in that bed, but he hadn’t.

“I know she’s not an easy creature, but I also know she really wants to help you, Elena.”

“Why, now that I’m somebody special in her little black book?”

He squinted. “You have a prophecy?”

I looked away. “No. It’s just a saying,” I lied. I could tell by the look on his face he knew that I was keeping something from him. It wouldn’t help anyway as he wouldn’t know what any of it meant.

“Then talk to me.”

“You’re not very far from the Viden, Blake. I still don’t know why it is you are so eager to help me.”

“Because I benefit from it, Elena.”

“In what way?” Irritation started to rise up again. I knew he wouldn’t do this out of the kindness of his own heart. There must always be something in it for Blake, before Blake does anything for somebody else.

“When the time comes I’ll tell you. For now, just do as I say.”

“Urgh, you are so arrogant.” I got up and wanted to leave but the minute I came close to the edge my head started to spin again.

Blake chuckled behind me. “That height thing must really suck, huh?”

“Shut up,” I said and turned my back on the view and lay down again.

He got up. “Just because you are so rude, I think I’m going to go.” He pulled his robe off and shifted back into his dragon form again.

“You’re going to leave me here?”

He didn’t answer as he hauled himself off the mountain, and I realized that I’d just gotten my answer.

I shook my big head. Un-freakin-believable

CHAPTER FIVE



THE SUN HAD started to set, leaving only orange and pink-purple clouds in the rapidly darkening sky. I huffed, and realized Blake wasn't going to come back. Anger and a feeling of helplessness filled my core at the same time. I would do anything for Cara to take over again, but she wasn't here.

I'm here, it's nice to finally meet you, baby.

"Cara," I said out loud.

The mutt left you, didn't he?

"Yes," I chuckled.

You can do this! You're not a little helpless damsel in distress. Follow my instructions and I'll get us back safely.

"There is one problem I don't think you're aware of."

And what is that, Sugar?

"I'm afraid of heights."

I could feel her suppressing her laughter. It was a weird feeling, one I couldn't explain. It was as if I shared my body with someone else.

Afraid of heights, huh? Then I guess we'll have to work on that one first. Tell me, why do heights make you scared?

"I don't know, the falling part I guess."

Honey, you're a dragon. You won't fall and if you do, you get back up and try again.

“Cara, it's not that easy, what if I break something?”

Something I think you're not aware of, this mutt has plenty of abilities, baby. And one of them is healing. Something I figured out the last time I crashed into a bed of trees. I hurt my wing and the next time I came out, it was fixed.

I thought about what she said. “I can do this?”

No, we can do this.

I got up and took a deep breath as I walked over to the edge. The trees and the land at the bottom made my head swirl again. I closed my eyes.

Just do it, now, without opening your eyes and listen to my voice, Cara said.

I pushed my enormous body forward and hurled myself off the mountain. The wind from below blew against my face and Cara let out a huge pleasure howl.

Now spread your wings and trust the wind, she yelled and I could feel my wings opening. With a jolt I flew up into the air and felt how the wind supported and stabilized my body.

On my command flap both your wings together. One flap, two flaps, three, four. She counted and I flapped both of them on each count.

Now open your eyes, Sugar, this view is amazing.

I opened one and gasped. The other flew automatically open as I hovered over a bed of rainbow clouds. The first couple of stars began to appear. It was simply beautiful.

Turn your head to the right, Cara ordered and I could see the top of three towers in the distance. It was Dragonia.

“How do I turn?” I asked her.

Just angle your body in that direction without flapping.

I leaned towards the right and tried to turn in the direction I wanted. It was really easy with her voice giving the instructions.

For the next part I want you to give a giant flap and keep your wings tight against your body.

“Okay, I’ll try,” I said and flapped once, folding my wings right next to my body. I darted forward at a crazy speed and Cara let out another howl. I closed my eyes again as the surface zoomed in and back again. She really loved this and I had to admit the cool breeze against my scales felt amazing.

The towers came near and Cara told me to open my eyes again. The wind pushed me slightly back but as she counted again I started to flap them both together.

Tilt your body slightly forward so that you can descend.

I tried to do what she said but I must have leaned too far forward and I struggled to hear her orders while trying to regain my balance as my heart beat noisily in my chest.

The ground came closer and I came crashing down to meet it. Turf flew over my body as I skidded, and my scales burned as I came to a halt.

I lay there for a couple of minutes. The good part, I was still alive. The second good part, I didn’t think I’d broken anything, and the third, it was super awesome for my first landing.

I found a soft warm hand on my face and when I opened my eyes Constance stood right beside me.

“Are you okay, Elena?” Her eyes were huge orbs and when Cara started to laugh uncontrollably I joined her.

Constance stared at me as if I was losing it, but joined in too when she saw that I was having fun.

I turned my big head around and my laughter disappeared instantly. The main entrance had a long deep hole from my pathetic landing tactics. I’d missed King Albert’s statue by an inch. A tree hadn’t been so lucky and lay broken on its side.

“Sorry about the mess.”

“You’re fine, this mess is easy to fix,” Constance said and she handed me the robe Julia had just given her.

“You’re an amazing dragon, Elena. Ever thought about wanting to kill Blake?” Julia asked.

Constance gave her the eye and I laughed again.

“All the time, but not the way you think.” I closed my eyes and started to concentrate on my human form. It was easy as I’d seen her many times in the mirror. Her blond hair, green eyes and oval face came first. My frame with arms, hands and fingers, was next. I could feel my limbs growing smaller. It still ached but it wasn’t as painful as the first time had been. The lower part of my human form with legs, feet and toes was last and when I opened my eyes again I was back in my human form and quickly pulling the robe over my head. I looked at the scrapes on my arms and my eyes grew as they started to close up, leaving only blood on my skin.

“Your healing ability is working faster than I thought it would. Blake really struggles with that one.” Constance had admiration in her tone.

“I guess watching you taught me something,” I joked.

She put her arm around me and we walked to the infirmary. Inside I quickly jumped into the shower and when I got out, you wouldn’t have guessed that I had been in a collision with the earth a couple of minutes before.

The main entrance was back to normal and the tree that had been on its side was back in its spot and birds chirped from its branches once again.

Constance touched my skin and did a full inspection to make sure that there was no harm done and when she was happy she gave me a smile and a cup of tea.

“So where is Blake?” We sat down on the three chairs inside her office.

“The idiot left me.”

“He chucked you into the deep end.” Julia’s didn’t sound pleased.

I nodded.

She sighed. “You’ve got to admit, Elena, it is the only way you’ll learn.”

“Yeah, besides, I wasn’t really alone. Cara was with me.”

“Cara?” Constance looked at Julia and back at me. “Who is Cara, Elena?”

“My dragon.”

Julia laughed. “You gave your dragon a name?”

I frowned at her statement and laughed too.

“Yes,” I understood now why Blake didn’t believe Cara’s response. It wasn’t normal to have a second entity living inside of you. “She’s easier to deal with that way,” I lied.

“You sure are one special little lady,” Constance said.

I swallowed a big sip and the heat from the tea burned my throat slightly, but not as much as the Fire Powder had that day I’d taken a sip from Sammy’s hot chocolate. I sighed as the ache of missing those words coming from Lucian’s lips jolted through my heart.

“Sorry, I didn’t think.” Constance wrapped her arms around my shoulders and gave me a hug.

“You sure you can’t read minds?” I asked and she giggled. “It’s okay, at least I found a way to laugh again.”

“I’m happy to hear that.”

I left a few minutes later and found Blake at the bottom of the stairs in his normal clothes kissing Tabitha. Now I knew how Sammy felt that day and without thinking I pushed him away from her.

“You are such an asshole,” I spat. “How could you just leave me there?”

He laughed as Tabitha lunged at me but something invisible emerged from my body as my eyes fell on her and she smacked hard into it and fell on her ass.

Blake was at her side. “I know you’re pissed at me, but you don’t have to take it out on her.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that.”

Tabitha was resting on one elbow as Blake’s hands slipped under her body to lift her up.

“Just stay away from me you freak,” she spat and left. Blake just gave me the scolding eyes and followed her up the stairs.

Cara was silent and I wished I could hear her again. By the time I reached the top of the stairs anger and frustration took over once more.

I'd had such a wonderful afternoon, why on earth did I feel like this?

The room was empty and I saw the time on Becky's alarm clock. It was supper and to be honest I didn't even feel that hungry.

I thought dragons ate like crazy.

I pulled my PJs on and crawled into bed.

Sleep came fast and before I knew it I found myself above the clouds again. The stars shone brightly, not to mention how big and bright the moon lit up the grounds.

I twirled and dove and the most amazing feeling appeared inside my gut as I heard Lucian's excitement coming from my back.

I laughed and twirled again. He loved every second of it as much as I did.

Another dragon found us fast, one that looked exactly like me and I knew it was Blake.

“Elena, turn around now!” Lucian yelled and I didn't know why his voice carried so much panic.

Blake came closer with a frenzied speed and I could sense something evil inside of him spreading my way.

“That's an order, turn around.”

Pain jolted through my body and I did what he said, it left me the minute I turned around.

I woke up with a start, disoriented.

My lower lip started to tremble but no tears came as I realized it was just a dream.

I looked around the room and both beds were occupied. The alarm clock that Lucian had bought me last year showed that it was 4:30am.

I still felt drained but my body ached from lying in bed. I got up and moved to the bathroom. My hands touched the taps and I watched as water filled the tub.

The ache in my muscles disappeared the minute I lowered my body into the hot water.

I closed my eyes and tried to hold on to the dream I'd had a couple of minutes ago: to make a mental recording of Lucian's voice. It was already too late as different types of voices filled my head and I knew not one of them was his.

How can someone miss another person this much?

I ducked my head under the water and opened my eyes. I stayed there for a long time and could feel air filling my lungs. I touched the sides of my neck and jumped up as I felt three small vertical openings on each side of my neck.

I HAD GILLS!

My excitement disappeared fast and I sighed again. So drowning was out. That thought should've scared the living crap out of me. I never was the suicidal type, but how do you carry on living in a world where your favorite person doesn't exist anymore?

It was a pathetic thought, I know. Lucian gave up his life for me and I wished that it had been me dying in his place that day. He was so much stronger than me and he would've found a way to live each day as if it was his last and I doubted that he would have even considered taking his own life.

I was pathetic.

I lay back down in the bathtub with only my nose and the top of my head sticking out. I thought about the dream again. How much he would have loved to be flying on my back. Why was Blake so evil? Did it mean that he would turn soon? He had less than a year to go.

My mind went back to Lucian again and then it hit me.

Maybe Lucian wasn't wrong when he said he had to claim the Rubicon. He had been wrong about claiming *Blake*. I knew it the minute I thought the words. *Lucian had been my rider and I was his dragon.*

I would never be claimed now, and I didn't know if that was a good thing or bad.

CHAPTER SIX



HAT DREAM REALLY haunted me the next day and I could hardly hear what went on in any of my classes.

After school I met Blake again at the Parthenon dome. I missed the dome, it was a place where I'd felt powerful, and now that I was a dragon I only spent time inside the Coliseum. It was the complete opposite.

Cara didn't speak to me at all last night and I couldn't sleep as I wondered about her too. Who was Cara? What if Dad changed my name to keep me safe? What if I was Cara, but then again....no, nothing made sense. It would never make sense. I'd had a human baby form, dragons don't have one. Why was everything so different with me?

I found Blake in his dragon behind the Parthenon dome. He just stared at me with dark irises that had a red tint around the edges. I knew what he was waiting for and walked to the nearby tree.

When I was sure I was out of view I pulled off my clothes and shifted. It didn't take as long as it used to in the beginning, but as much as I welcomed Cara now there was still that couple of minutes that I didn't like. A feeling so enhanced that it made me want to hurl would

linger with me. I guessed it had to do with Cara and me, that our feelings clashed in some sort of way that made me ill.

I went back to Blake and the feeling grew less and less. He didn't say anything but pushed up into the sky and started to flap his wings to take him higher.

"Cara?"

Here, she says as if I was a teacher marking off her presence. *Let's do this*. She took over and followed Blake's lead. I didn't black out anymore as I watched her through dragon eyes gliding through the sky. She flapped, I flapped and it was done without me taking any instructions from her. It was a difficult feeling to explain.

The trees became smaller and I could feel the sweat dripping off my temple as my stomach turned. Cara on the other hand was the total opposite as she pushed us up into the sky, and dove down toward the ground.

I closed my eyes as trees and open land came really close and felt how she pulled up once again. She let out a sound of pure excitement and forced me to open my eyes. Blake was still a couple of lengths ahead of us, twirling so fast that it made him look like a huge arrow spinning from a hunter's bow.

Cara did the same and I was sure this time I was going to throw up. *C'mon Elena, it's fun!* she yelled inside my head and made excited sounds.

We followed Blake once again to the mountain and I could feel Cara's eyes on his naked human body.

He turned around to look at us and thank heavens he held his robe in his arms. "So who do I have the pleasure of dealing with today?" His voice was full of sarcasm.

"Hahaha," both Cara and I said.

Go for it honey, I'm not in the mood to deal with him.

"It's me, idiot."

"Elena." He grinned and pulled on his robe. "Was that you flying as well or was it Cara?" He raised his eyes once as he said her name.

“Always Cara, I told you I’m not fond of heights.”

He gave me a look as if I was insane.

“What?”

“Nothing,” he chuckled and threw me a robe too. I grabbed it with my one talon and went to the nearest tree before I changed back into my human form. How I would ever get used to parading my naked body in front of others, I didn’t know. I did know it wasn’t going to happen anytime soon though.

I found him sitting on a huge boulder.

“So do you have any questions about being a dragon?”

I thought about it for a while. “No,” I replied as I couldn’t think of anything and then a thought jumped into my head. “Yes, how could I not have known about her?”

He smiled. “I don’t know. What I do know is that she must have woken up when you realized that help wouldn’t come. I’ve never seen a dragon form stay asleep that long before. But I’ve read about it.”

“You have, where?”

“In a history book about the thirteenth century. It was when all dragons were still being slaughtered and hunted down. Some, which I assume were Metallic, hid as humans. A couple of them did it for so long that they no longer knew how to turn into a dragon.”

“Why didn’t he tell me about her?”

“Your father?” Blake asked.

I nodded.

“Beats me, Elena.”

I thought about Dad again and realized what my mother was too. If I was a dragon then she must have been one too. Why on earth had she run away then? If her reason wasn’t that she’d found out Dad’s secret and was scared of what I would turn into, then what could’ve been so terrible to keep her from staying with us?

“What’s on your mind?”

“My mom.”

“What about her?”

“Why did she leave me then? She’s a dragon too.”

“I can’t answer that for you, Elena.”

“Yeah, I know.” I sighed. “I just hate all these questions that will never be answered.”

It was quiet for a while.

“You really heard Paul’s voice in your head?”

“It was a trick, he planted it, Blake.”

He frowned.

“Why do you want to know?”

“Just curious. What did it sound like?”

“At first I thought I was going to lose my mind. The extra voice was distracting me and I couldn’t concentrate. Everyone knew something was wrong, but Lucian was the first to ask me about it.” My heart pulled slightly as I said his name and I took a deep breath to try and bury it again.

“Did you speak to one another in a regular basis?”

I shook my head. “I tried, but he never answered. I don’t think he wanted to, to be honest. It was just a trick, remember?”

“You reached out to him?” He frowned again.

“I just told you that I tried. I guessed his level of thinking was higher than mine and that he couldn’t hear me, or maybe he didn’t like the fact that I could hear him.” I looked at him. “Why do you want to know this?”

“Told you, I’m curious. It’s something that you wouldn’t find with a rider and their dragon at such a young age.”

“And yet I also keep telling you that it was his gift. Tricking people was his specialty.” I smiled. Who would have thought, Blake turning out to be so curious....about me. “I do know that he had a thing for poems. He kept reciting one over and over. His dragon voice used to scare me at first, but then it sort of calmed me down with the type of

poems he recited. Professor Pheizer really thought that it was my dark mark and that whoever my dragon was, our bond would've been strong. She was so wrong."

"A dragon that loves poems, it's a bit pansy, isn't it?"

I laughed. "It's not. I thought it was beautiful. It's how he tricked me into trusting him too. Someone that recites old Latin love poems like that." I shook my head. "There is no way he could've been evil."

"Evil comes in all forms, Elena. Even portrays itself as light."

"Yes, it would've been nice if someone had taught me that before the whole Wyvern thing."

It was quiet for a moment as I saw Blake staring at the ground, playing with a twig. "What did Lucian say about all of this?"

"He thought it was funny at first, but when he saw that it freaked me out, he got worried. He suggested I speak to Professor Pheizer about it. She, on the other hand, told me to embrace it." I sighed.

"Did you ever tell him about the poem thing?" he asked, sounding a bit skeptical.

"Yeah," I replied.

I could feel his eyes on me and I looked at him.

"And?" he wanted to know.

"And what? He didn't know who it belonged to, but he got really quiet and worried for a long time."

His face muscles pulled down.

"Are you sure this is just curiosity? Are you hearing a voice, Blake?"

He laughed. "No, I'm not as crazy as you."

I looked the other way and shook my head lightly.

"It was a joke, Elena."

"Funny sense of humor."

He chuckled again and looked at his watch.

"Tabitha's waiting for you?" I asked with a slight tease in my tone.

He smiled again. "No. She hates every moment of me being here with you."

My stomach turned slightly as he said the words "here with you". I knew it wasn't what he meant, but I'd grown quite fond of our training sessions. "Tell her she's got nothing to worry about."

He laughed. "I do, every day, but for some reason she doesn't believe me."

"Not my problem, Blake."

"Ouch! You always this harsh?"

I laughed. "Change of topic. I thought two Rubicons couldn't co-exist with one another."

"I said I was going to try, Elena."

My eyes rose and I gulped. "You want to kill me?"

His body started to shake as he buried his face in his hands. When sound came from him I realized it was laughter. He lifted up his head from his hands. "I'm joking."

"Haha," I said and threw a piece of rock at him which he dodged.

"No," he shook his head. "I don't want to kill you. I guess the old farts came to a conclusion about what two Rubicons in this world would do, before knowing two were born at the same time. Why do you ask? Do you want to kill me?"

"Urges come and go, but they've got nothing to do with being a Rubicon."

A grin formed on his face. I never recalled Blake ever smiling this much before.

"Lucian really told you about the date?"

He nodded and sighed. "I should've gone with him."

Both of us fell quiet and I thought about what the outcome would have been if Blake had gone too. Lucian might still be alive, or even have come back earlier. Those villagers wouldn't have been able to keep Blake hostage, or ask him to do all sorts of crazy things for them.

“Did he appear to you too?”

He thought about it for a while. “Appear, how?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Elena, what we say here, stays here. I won’t tell anyone.”

“Lucian found a way to be in two places at once. It was like the Cammy, but he didn’t need the Cammy, if that makes any sense.”

“It’s connected to the Cammy?”

“No!” I sounded as irritated as I felt. “I saw him, and touched him but he was pale and cold. It wasn’t really him. He told me that it was a trick he’d mastered and that it’d grown stronger while he was on his mission.”

Blake just kept staring at me.

“I’m not making it up, I’m serious.”

“Then why didn’t he warn us about Paul?”

“He tried, but the connection wasn’t very strong. I thought he was in danger and Paul knew exactly what Lucian had discovered so he executed his plan faster. You didn’t know that humans could do that?”

“No, but then again this is a world of the strange and unexplained. Anything is possible.”

“So, what does the Viden think about your date?”

“She doesn’t know. For some reason she really struggles to see me. After the Warbel games she struggles with plenty of things.”

“You think she’s lost her touch?”

“No, she just doesn’t trust it anymore.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s hard to explain to you how Irene’s gift works. All you need to know is that when she says something while she’s going *whoo whoo*,” his hands and eyes mimicked the action and it made me laugh. “Then you know you should pay attention.”

“Can you feel the darkness?”

“It comes and goes. For some reason when I make myself useful, like helping you or coaching the Warbel team, it’s bearable.”

“See, helping others is good.”

He smiled.

“Is that the reason you decided to do this?”

“It’s one of them.”

“There are more? What are the others?”

“You’re not ready to know that yet,” he said and jumped up. “Come, I’ll race you to the Academy.” He ran to the edge, pulled off his robe with one yank and dove off.

I got up and ran to the edge to see his dragon gliding above the tree tops as he ascended.

I closed my eyes, pulled off my own robe and for the first time ever, I, Elena Watkins, followed his lead.

My heart didn’t bounce the way it used to in the beginning and my mind didn’t think about me splatting on the earth. I knew that my dragon was real, and I guessed I’d finally started to make peace with what I was. I took a deep breath as the wind blew in my face and within five seconds the change came and my wings opened and trusted the wind beneath them.

CHAPTER SEVEN



THE NEXT DAY was Friday. I didn't meet Blake behind the Parthenon Dome anymore but on the top of the mountain.

He smiled as he saw my dragon form landing. "Cara or Elena?" he asked in a teasing voice.

"Be careful who you wish for rodent," Cara replied.

"Cara." Blake grinned and showed his canines.

"Or is it, idiot?" I said and his smirk disappeared.

Cara laughed as we went to the nearest tree to change.

See you later, sweets.

"Ciao."

I changed back to my human form, pulled the robe over my naked body and sat next to Blake on the boulder.

"So what are we going to do today, Yoda?"

He laughed. "What do you want to do?" he asked me in a seductive voice and I really hated the fact that he was making my stomach flip every time he used that honey voice on me.

“Nothing,” I said and lay on my back as I soaked up the sun’s rays. The wind was really starting to get cold but high on the mountain the sun was the master and it felt as if I was recharged by its rays.

“That sounds like a great plan.” Blake lay down on his back next to me with his arms resting under his head.

“Can I ask you a question?” I asked.

“Shoot.”

“How did your father beat you that last time? I mean, you are the Rubicon, and so powerful. I just don’t understand.”

He kept quiet for a while.

I turned on my stomach and rested my upper body on my elbows and looked at him. His eyes were closed and it didn’t look as if he wanted to answer my question. “Blake, I need to know how to control my temper if someone has to beat me.”

“Elena, I was drunk. It’s the only time that he’s tamable. Why do you think I get drunk on a weekly basis?”

“But you still do messed up things when you are drunk?”

“That is what happens when people are drunk.”

“They don’t burn down factories.”

“How do you know, you ever get drunk before?”

I laughed at the way his face questioned mine.

“Almost, and believe me burning something down didn’t come up,” I said and saw how the corners of his lips twitched slightly upwards.

“So he’s basically asleep when you are wasted?”

“I didn’t say that. He’s a bit calmer and it’s easier to hold on.”

“Why do you hold on, why not succumb to the darkness?”

“Would you?”

“I’m going that way, so I don’t know if I would fight it the way you do. I don’t think I’m that strong.”

He smiled. “You think I’m strong, fighting this?”

“Yeah, you are.” I swallowed hard and looked away. For someone that really didn’t want me to fall in love with him he was really making

it hard when he used that sweet voice.

“I don’t agree. If I had to tell you about all the shit I’ve done, you wouldn’t be here on this rock with me.”

“Nothing would surprise me anymore. I’m not a naive little girl.”

“Nice try, but if I tell you, I will have to kill you, and it’s not a Rubicon thing either.”

“Why did you push Lucian away? I mean, he was your best friend.”

“I told you that night why I did what I did.”

“Because of the darkness?”

“Yes, it didn’t want to be close to light. It made me nauseous.”

“It made you sick?”

“Yes, Elena. It made me sick. Being in the presence of my best friend made me sick. Telling him that would be worse, so I told him I didn’t want to be his friend anymore.”

“He never gave up on you, you know.”

“I had a feeling you were going to say that.”

“Well it’s the truth. I tried to talk him out of it the third time he tried to claim you. We got into a huge fight, our first one. He told me I knew nothing and if I knew what type of person you were, I would understand.” I giggled at his words telling me that he wouldn’t have stood a chance if Blake had wanted me. I didn’t tell him that though.

“Old Blake was pathetic,” he got up and rested his arms on his knees.

“Is that the Rubicon speaking or you?”

“Both, I *am* the Rubicon, Elena.”

“Yet you get drunk to control yourself. Yeah, it doesn’t make much sense.”

He turned his gaze back to me and just stared. “What do you want me to tell you, how chirpy I used to be and what a happy child I was? Giving my parents joy every day of their life, getting straight A’s. None of that matters anymore, Elena. That Blake is gone.”

I sat up too. “You used to get straight A’s?”

The seriousness of his face disappeared and a smile broke over his face again. He shook his head, slightly.

“The past doesn’t matter, we can’t go back and we can’t change it.”

“Says who? Maybe in ten years it will be a possibility.”

“You live in a dream world.”

“No, I live in Paegeia, crazy place, remember.”

“Well, if that happens, go back in time and see what I was.”

“Why did you ask George to prank me that day?”

“You really want to talk about that?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I don’t know, it was silly.”

“It was cruel. A Moon-Bolt killed my father and almost killed me too.”

“So I heard afterwards, sorry.”

“It’s fine. I should actually thank you for throwing me into the deep end.”

“Then what, you want me to take back being sorry?”

“You can do whatever you want, I don’t care.” It was quiet for a few seconds. “So Constance is your aunt. I didn’t see that one coming. What was it like when you were a child?”

“What is it with the million questions?”

“Curious,” I replied.

“I’m going to regret this.”

“That’s good.”

“What’s good?”

“You see a later; regret always comes later.”

He huffed, smiled and then he sighed. “It was fun, confused the living crap out of me, but they seemed to enjoy every moment of it.”

I laughed. “Now I know where you got your mean streak from.”

“Yeah, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. So what do you want to know next?”

“Curiosity is satisfied for now. If I want to know more, I’ll ask.”

“Matt told me about that night.”

“On Interstate 40?” I smiled sadly. “It sounds like a bad love song, right.”

He laughed, nodded his head. “It does.”

“So what did Matt tell you?”

“That your father fought at least five dragons.”

“It was four. And I’ve never been so scared in my entire life.”

“Sorry to hear that. I can’t image it was very easy not growing up with dragons and then getting your ass chucked into a world filled with them.”

I gasped. “The big bad Rubicon showing a softer side? We have to get back to Dragonia, the world is about to end.”

He rolled his eyes.

“Yeah it was crazy, but I would’ve given anything to tell him how sorry I was for being such an idiot every time he made me move. If time travel does exist one day, I would go back and tell him what a good job he did keeping my ass alive, although I still don’t know his reasons why.”

“He was your dad, Elena.”

“Still Blake, he should’ve told me what I was.”

“He probably had good reasons why he didn’t.”

“Reasons I’ll never know.”

“Fox, the guy that killed your father that night, used to kill plenty of dragons on the other side. I knew Matt was really worried about that.”

“How did you become such good buddies with Matt?”

“Easy,” he smirked. “I’m the Rubicon. Everyone wants to be friends with me.”

“Oh please.” I sounded sarcastic and we laughed. “Why did Fox kill all the other dragons?”

“He was a Moon-Bolt dragon and almost twice Irene’s age. I guess that man knew many things, but he was as evil as they come. Matt thought that he was working side by side with Goran. We all believed that when so many dragons died. I guess nobody will ever know why, now that he’s dead.”

“You think it had something to do with my father?”

“Well, whoever your father was Elena, he killed Fox.”

I froze as he said that. “I guess I never really knew him that well. For all I know he betrayed this Fox dude and killed all those dragons to get to him.”

“You really believe that?”

“What other explanation is there?”

“You were a Thunderlight, for one.”

It only raised more questions about why Fox was after Dad. It explained a lot too. Fox was probably the reason why we’d moved so much.

“You ever tried to find your dad this side?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, search for him. See if you have any family that still lives here.”

“No, now that you mention it, it never crossed my mind,” I said. “To be honest, I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“I can help you if you want.”

I gasped. “Blake Leaf offering me more help. What would Tabitha think about that?”

He laughed. “It would be with Tabitha though. She’s crazy smart when it comes to searching for things.”

“Mmmm, she’s not a big fan of me though.”

“Elena, she’s not a big fan of a lot of people.”

“Is that why the two of you get along so great?”

“Could be.” He raised his eyes playfully.

I giggled. *How could this be the same person that hated me so much?* My stomach clenched as another thought entered my mind. *What was the real reason behind all of this?*

We left our spot on the mountain after we took a couple of dives through the chilly air.

When we landed, I followed him to Tabitha's room and I'd been right about her. She protested like crazy when Blake asked her, and for some reason he switched over to Latin and sort of swayed her to help me out.

She just glared at me and spat the words to meet her in the Library at eight, before she stomped off. Blake went in her room but waved at me while pulling his mouth in an awkward position.

It made me smile as I descended the staircase back to the fourth floor.

When I entered our room, I found Becky and Sammy watching *Dagger Love*.

"So how're the flying lessons coming along? Made peace with the Rubicon yet?"

"Which one," I asked Sammy and both girls laughed.

"Yeah, both are okay, I guess. You guys would never believe what I'm going to do tonight."

Both girls stared at me.

"It's not like that," I said and laughed as I could only assume they were thinking about Blake. "Tabitha is going to help me find out about where I come from."

"Tabitha. Blake's Tabitha?" Becky asked incredulously.

"Yeah."

"What on earth did you do to get her to help you?"

"Nothing, your brother asked her."

"My brother?"

"He's not so bad. He said helping me and coaching the Warbel games keeps his dark side at bay."

Becky gave a sarcastic laugh. "Is that the story he spins you?"

"It's not a story."

"Elena he's twenty times worse than what Lucian was and he spends every night like a bear with a sore tooth."

"He's not like that when we train."

Sammy glared at Becky with huge eyes.

"Holy crap." Becky started to laugh and cup her mouth.

"What?"

"My mom was so right about him."

"It's not like that you two. He even told me not to fall in love with him."

"He did?" Becky pulled up her lip to one side.

"Yes, why would you say that to someone if you wanted to woo them?"

"What's he like?" Sammy wanted to know.

"I've got to admit, I've never seen your brother laugh so much."

Both just stared at one another.

"What else?"

"What else is there? We talk, that's it."

"About what?" Sammy wanted to know.

"About who we are. We are both Rubicons and I don't know. You guys always make everything so confusing."

"Elena, it's a huge deal. Don't you ever wonder why he is like that with you, but with everyone else he's the same jerk? He hasn't changed one bit."

"It's not true, he's not like that."

"Yes, he is," Becky said.

"Becky..."

"It's the Rubicon," Sammy said.

"What?"

“It must be, Elena. Why else would he hang with you? Your dragon has a calming effect on my brother.”

“Then that’s good, right?”

“Good for who?” Becky left her two cent comment.

“Would you stop with that?” My face fell as I thought about Lucian.

“It’s not like that.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean it like that. I know you loved Lucian, but you have to move on someday.”

“Someday, when the right person comes along. But that’s not Blake Leaf.”

“Okay,” she consented and I left them to their show.

After dinner I met Tabitha behind one of the computers. Her white hair was taken up into a small ponytail. She’d been growing it lately and a fringe covered her ice-blue eyes. She really was gorgeous.

“Hey, thanks...”

“I did this for Blake, no one else.”

“Okay,” I said and pulled the chair next to her from under the table.

It was quiet for a while and then she stared at me.

“What?”

“You want me to suck your family names out of my thumb too?”

“Oh, sorry. I only have my father’s name. Herbert Watkins.”

“Is that his only name?”

I nodded.

“When was he born?”

“I don’t know the exact year as he could’ve been 400 years old, but the day was the 5th of February and he said in 1969”

She gave an impatient sigh and followed it with more as she asked more questions to which I didn’t know the answers.

Her fingers typed on the keys so fast that I couldn’t see what she was doing. All I knew was that it kept saying ‘0 results found’.

“This doesn’t make sense.”

“What?”

“It’s like your father never existed, Elena.”

“Maybe he didn’t have a life in Paegeia.”

She typed only his name and surname with a couple of other codes next to them and in three minutes pages and pages full of Herbert Watkins filled the screen.

“Go through them, if you find the right one, then I’ll try to find out more.”

She hit the print button on the screen as she got up and strode out of the library.

Six hundred and eight pages of Herbert Watkins and their images formed an impressive heap of paperwork to go through.

I took the entire pack and left to go up to my room.

Becky and Sammy couldn’t even help as they had no idea what Dad looked like and around twelve my eyes started to burn and we decided to call it a day.

Tomorrow we could search again, he must be in that pile somewhere. I would find out who Herbert Watkins was.

CHAPTER EIGHT



ON SUNDAY, THE girls left with George and Dean around eleven. I didn't want to go with as I would be just a fifth wheel and the fact that they'd asked me to come agitated me more than it should have. I even struggled to go on with my search.

For some reason I kept thinking about Blake. A longing to be near him made me even more frustrated because it was a feeling that didn't make any sense.

I knew for a fact that I couldn't have fallen for him. I promised him, and yet I couldn't stop counting of the hours until I would see him again.

What about Lucian, what does this mean? Didn't I care as much for him as I'd thought?

No, I didn't believe that. I loved Lucian, but with Blake the feeling was similar to what I felt with Paul. It was messed up and confusing.

I shredded a couple of papers, and hatred filled my heart again as I thought about what Paul had done. How on earth could I have had feelings for him? We'd almost kissed. My mind went back to that day

inside the cave. I'd spat in his face when he mentioned it and...I gasped.

We'd almost kissed, and Lucian had heard about it right before he died.

A darker feeling emerged and took complete hold of me. Images of a bed post breaking and carpet tearing came in flashes; clothes were next. My heart pounded inside my chest but at the same time what I felt was good. I felt satisfied and when I found the wall against my back, I slid down and sat on the ground. I buried my head inside my knees. Anger rose again.

How could I have been so stupid to think that I would have been able to hide my feelings for Paul from Lucian? How betrayed must he have felt? He'd died knowing that I didn't feel the same about him. If I had, I wouldn't have fallen for Paul, even if it was only a bit; I wouldn't if I really loved Lucian the way I'd said I did. I felt horrible and I would never be able to tell Lucian how sorry I was.

Becky and Sammy entered the room around five.

"Elena!" both shrieked.

"What the hell happened here?" Dean's voice came right after theirs.

Sammy crouched in front of me. "Are you okay? Who did this?"

I lifted my head and glared at her.

She gasped. "Elena what is going on with you? Your eyes..."

"Why do you care?" It didn't sound like me.

Becky slapped me hard across my face and I growled. "Snap out of it. What the hell happened to our room?"

I looked past her and found feathers strewn all over the floor. My bedpost was completely ruined and the carpet was shredded in some places. Sammy's dresser was broken and Becky's clothes lay all over the floor.

The memory of what had happened in this room wasn't what I'd expected. I kept looking at it and found George lifting up one of Becky's tops. It was her favorite, or let's say it used to be her favorite. It was in pieces.

I looked at Becky, her jaw line was hard and she didn't look happy. Then I looked at Sammy. Worried eyes and thin eyebrows furrowed together changed the look on her face to pity. It made me angry all over again.

Stop it, Elena, Stop it. I hit my head hard.

"Don't do that!" Sammy grabbed my hand.

"What is going on with me? I feel so angry." I bit down hard as she held me close to her chest.

"You think you're angry! You shredded up all my clothes!"

"Becky, don't. This is much bigger than that." Sammy looked at me. "Do you remember doing any of this?"

"I don't know what I remember. It's hard to explain. It was so dark, you're right," I looked at Sammy. "I'm just like your brother."

She grabbed me around my neck and pulled me closer to her.

"You're not. It's going to be okay, Elena. It will be okay."

"You don't know that. I'm evil, look at what I've done!"

"It took years for Blake to be where he is and he's still fighting it every day Elena."

"He's got years, I don't. What else is this, Sammy?"

"You can't say that, Elena," Becky yelled.

"Then why am I like this?"

"I don't know," Becky said.

"Have you eaten anything?" Sammy interrupted.

I let out a disbelieving chuckle. "I ruined the room, and you're worried about whether or not I've eaten?" I shook my head and looked at Becky again. She didn't look angry anymore but worry lines dented her forehead and wrinkled her eyes.

"I'm so sorry, Becky," I said.

"I can get new clothes, Elena. Sammy is right, this is something different," she said and grabbed me too. "I'm sorry."

I just held her for a couple of minutes. "I promise we'll get to the bottom of this. Even if..."

“Don’t say it, please,” I whispered right into her ear.

We all left to go to the cafeteria and I heard Becky talking to George and Dean by the main entrance, asking them to tell Master Longwei what had happened.

She ran back to our side and hooked her arm into mine just before we entered the cafeteria. Eyes were on us the minute we walked in.

“Don’t let them get to you, sit.” Becky led me to the nearest open table and pushed me down onto the pillow. “I’ll get us something to eat.

Sammy sat right in front of me. I didn’t even want to look at her. How could I have done that to my friends’ belongings?

The hate inside of me started to disappear. At first it just became bearable, but I could still feel it inside my core. It made me want to throw up as I remembered what the room looked like after I’d trashed it.

The feeling dissipated after a while and I looked at Sammy who still had huge furrows between her sleek eyebrows.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t,” she said with deep concern. She looked past me and back to me. “Your eyes, they are different than before.”

“What do you mean?”

“They were almost red before, Elena, they’re back to green. How do you feel?”

“Like crap.”

“The dark, I mean?”

“It’s gone.” I shook my head. “What’s going on with me?”

“It disappeared?” She ignored my plea.

I nodded. “It doesn’t make sense, Sammy.”

“No, it makes perfect sense.” She looked past me again.

I shook my head softly and turned my gaze to see what she was looking at. I found her brother flirting with Tabitha.

“You were right,” Sammy said.

I looked back at her. “About what?”

“You’re just like him, evil and dark, but for some reason you share some sort of a connection.”

“What?”

“It must be a Rubicon thing,” she said without taking her eyes off her brother and gave a small chuckle.

I turned around again and found his entire table laughing.

“What’s a Rubicon thing?” Becky asked as she and George put four trays of food on the table. I turned my head as Blake’s gaze fell on our table.

“Tell you later,” Sammy whispered. “Too many ears.”



IDIDN'T WANT TO go back to our room. I was scared of confronting the horrible deed that I'd done an hour ago. Blake and Tabitha found my gaze and I watched them walking out hand in hand, bumping one another playfully as they exited the cafeteria. A part of me wished for the first time that it was me. I'd never felt this way about Blake before. I hated the jealousy of wanting to be Tabitha. She was shallow and only cared about herself and Blake.

“Let’s go,” Sammy said.

“Can we stay a bit, please?”

“You’ll be fine Elena. Tomorrow is Monday again and you’ll be training with him in the afternoon,” Sammy said and both Becky and I just stared at each other as none of it made any sense to us.

Sammy giggled as she saw our expressions. “I’ll explain inside the room, now let’s go.” We said goodbye to the boys at the stairs and started to climb. My heart pounded as Becky unlocked the door and I gasped again as I walked into the room.

Everything was fixed. My bedpost looked as if it’d never gotten attacked by a crazy person, and the torn piece of carpet was back to

its normal thick, lush brown self. Sammy's dresser was back in one piece and I didn't see Becky's clothes on the floor anymore. The feathers were gone, and all the pillows were fixed.

"See, everything can be fixed, Elena."

"I still did it Becky," I felt angry with myself again.

"It's going to be okay." She gave me a gentle smile and looked at Sammy again. "So what is this big Rubicon thing you couldn't tell us in the cafeteria?"

"Yeah, what did you mean that we share a connection?" I wanted to know.

"For some reason you and my brother are each other's salvation, you both are like light to one another. Your hatred disappeared because Blake was near."

"I don't understand, are you saying that we turn darker the more we are apart from each other?" It didn't make sense but it did explain the black out and me going psycho on our room. It was also followed by a new fear: "What if he refuses to carry on with the training?"

Sammy's eyes rose. "Don't tell him. You can't let that happen. He needs you just as much as you need him. He can't turn evil with you close to his side. It explains why he is so friendly."

"This is so messed up," Becky said and looked at Sammy.

"Welcome to my world," I said and both just looked at me.

Becky touched my shoulder. "I agree with Sammy, Blake can't know about this. He would cancel the training if anything like this happened. He would feel tied down and you know Blake."

I nodded and looked around the room again. "Who fixed the room?"

"Master Longwei took care of it." Sammy smiled. "It's normal, Elena. He understands."

I sighed. "I'm so sorry you guys. I'll somehow find a way to repay you for your clothes," I said to Becky

"Seriously, you didn't know what you were doing, Elena. I so blame the psycho inside of you." She laughed, and I smiled. I wished that I could feel the same way she did over my split personality. "Hey, it's

okay. I can buy new clothes. We just have to find a way for you to get your daily Blake doses.”

Laughter filled the room.

“You make it sound as if I’m addicted to him.”

“Well you have no choice, so it could be called an addiction.”

“I don’t want this.”

“Neither do junkies.”

“They have a choice, there is a cure for them and they can stop whenever they want. There is a difference.”

She smiled. “Whatever makes you sleep better at night, darling.”

I threw a pillow at her and the two girls broke out in laughter.

My lips vibrated like a horse’s with the heavy breath I let out. “This really is messed up.”

“Just remember, you do the exact same thing for him. He becomes darker the more he is apart from you too, Elena.”

“History has this so wrong,” Becky said.

“That’s exactly what he told me. I asked him if he had the urge to kill me, since there are two of us living at the same time, and he said no.” I smiled as I remembered his stupid comment before he said it was a joke.

“See, my brother is smart and I’ve got a funny feeling he’s known this for a very long time, Elena. It could explain why he always wanted to be around you when he was drunk.”

“So it wasn’t my virginity that drove his Sun-Blast crazy?”

“No, far from it.”



ON MONDAY AFTERNOON I struggled to handle our training session with the knowledge of Sammy’s little discovery.

“You’re really quiet today. Was Tabitha that mean to you?” Blake joked.

“No, she just left me with a shit load of paperwork to go through. It is going to take me forever to find him.”

“She will find him, Elena. That is a promise.”

“Yeah, I hope so.”

“I forgot to ask you something.”

“Sure, what is it?”

“The day that Paul died. Did you see his body turning into ash?”

I thought about that. I didn’t know what I saw. “Master Longwei put you up to this?”

“Elena, we need to know.”

“I don’t know what I saw that day, Blake.”

He stopped and I came to a halt a couple of paces in front of him. “I can help, if you want.”

“How? By reading my mind?” I joked.

He didn’t smile. “I can’t read minds,” he said in a harsh tone.

“It was a joke.”

“My persuasion can calm your mind and you might be able to remember more.”

“I don’t want to remember more. Believe me I’m struggling already with what it is I’m stuck with.”

He sighed. “I know it’s hard, Elena. We all lost an amazing person that day.”

“Blake...”

“He was my best friend. If Paul is still out there...”

“If he’s still out there? How could he still be out there?”

“What did you see?”

“You are not answering my question! Lucian drove an iron blade through his heart. Iron kills Wyverns.”

“Elena, please, just tell me what you remember.”

I looked to the ground and could feel furrows denting my forehead. What did I see that day? For a long time, I thought it could be paranoia, but Blake sounded adamant and if Paul was still alive... Anger boiled up in my throat again, but it disappeared immediately because of Blake. I looked at him and his peacock-blue eyes searched mine. He was still waiting for my answer. "I don't know what I saw that day, but I heard her forcing him to drink something." Blake froze and cupped his mouth as he turned around and paced for a while.

"What is it?" I asked, but he didn't answer. "Blake," I pulled him by his arm and he faced me. "What is it? Is Paul still alive?"

He looked to the ground with knitted eyebrows. "He might be."

"Might be, how?"

He walked to the nearest boulder and sat, ordering me to do the same.

I took a seat next to him and couldn't stop staring at him. He didn't look at me.

"There is a potion, it's two different kinds that make a whole."

"Stop speaking to me in riddles. What do you mean two different ones?"

"Two potions, but together they can do something unforgivable."

"Like what?"

"It's called the Calupso. One potion is drunk by the person that will become the host, the second is drunk by the one who needs the host. His body would disappear and his essence would be soaked up into the host."

"That doesn't make sense!"

"If you heard her say he needed to drink, it could only be that. Did you see her drink something too?"

"I was busy turning into a dragon, I don't know what I saw," I grunted.

"How does that work?"

“She’s a hippogriff, or I assume, a shape shifter. Hippogriffs don’t have human forms.” The worry lines dented deep into his forehead and around his eyes. “If she was a Wyvern she could sacrifice herself and he would take her place inside her body, but because they weren’t the same, she would’ve needed another host, a Wyvern, in order to save his life.”

“So you’re telling me that Paul is still alive?”

He nodded. “But we wouldn’t know who he is, as his human form wouldn’t be Paul’s. It would be the host whose life he took.”

“She loved him, you know. How was that even remotely going to work? A hippogriff and a Wyvern?”

“The same way it works between a dragon and a human.” He looked at me with soft eyes.

I closed mine as Becky and Sammy’s stupid conversation jumped into my head again. Why was he helping me? If he didn’t want me to fall in love with him...why was he being so nice, so perfect? I pushed my hand through my hair.

“I’m so sorry. I know how you felt about Lucian.”

I looked at him. For someone who says they don’t read minds he clearly knew exactly what I was thinking.

“What?”

“Paul still being out there must be hard for you to take in.”

Oh. “Yeah, I didn’t bargain on that.”

“I’ll find him, Elena, even if it’s the last thing I do.”

“Don’t say that. Lucian said that same thing, and then it happened. If you want to kill him, do it on your own terms, Blake. Not because of me,” I added. I couldn’t lose Blake now that I finally knew he was keeping me from the darkness.

“Okay, my own terms. But I will find him, and he will die. That is a promise.”

CHAPTER NINE



I COULDN'T SLEEP THAT night. My dreams were so messed up I couldn't tell up from down. Paul always found a way into them, and now I knew why. It was because the bastard was still alive.

He was out there, heck he could be close by and I wouldn't know it. Every night Blake turned into Paul, he would taunt me by laughing that horrible crazy laugh he had a couple of months ago inside the cave. I would always wake up with a dream that emerged a couple of weeks after I discovered what I was, with Dad yelling at me to wake up.

When I finally came to, I went to the couch and picked up the pile of paper I hadn't searched through yet. I didn't understand how it'd never crossed my mind to search for him this side. I could've had so many questions answered, but then again, so many things had happened that there hadn't really been time to worry about the dead, even though he would constantly haunt me.

So far I had looked through two hundred Herbert Watkins and none of them were my father.

It had to be Fox that night, otherwise why on earth had he stopped killing?

That gave me an idea and when my digital clock struck six I found myself inside the library.

I typed 'America's Most Wanted' and found the list I was looking for. There were a couple of pages filled with faces and I scrolled down to the ones that had a huge 'x' over their faces.

I froze as the image of a man with long black hair jumped on the screen. It was him, he had the same eyes and the same hard jaw. My entire body was pins and needles. The name read 'Cullen Briochinni' and in brackets it said '(The Fox)'.

I found myself with my head in my hands, eyes closed. Why had he been after Dad? Why hadn't he told me, why hadn't I known? Everything this side just had a way of finding me, and yet, I knew nothing about my life, or who my father was.

I decided to do a thorough search on Fox and printed out a list of the people he'd killed. I could tell by some of their eye color that they were dragons. The hair was normal, brown, blond and some even carrot red. Most of them were in their early thirties, others had peppered hair. There was no picture of Dad though, only a huge article about that night and that one of the corpses, or what was left of him, was assumed to be Fox through the dental records.

My fingers typed other words and when the search was done a big picture of Lucian's face jumped onto the screen.

"Why did you leave me?" I asked even though it would be yet another question that would never get answered. The pain jolted through my heart and I expected tears to roll down my face, but they never came. I still couldn't cry.

I pressed the 'x' button on the right hand top side, and Lucian's face disappeared.

Becky and Sammy were still sleeping when I returned to the room. I planned on finding Dad this week and finding out once and for all if I had family left inside Paegeia.

Most of the Herberts I searched through were from the other side. I found one Herbert Watkins this side. He was an engineer and owned his own company, making straddles, whatever they were. His picture looked nothing like Dad though, quite the opposite to be honest. For some reason the word 'patsy' came to mind, although I had no idea why.

Familiar words suddenly entered my mind: A day will come and a day will go, a choice you have to make otherwise the truth will never be known.

I promised myself never to wonder about those words again, but I couldn't help but think about what on earth I needed to do to make them become red.

Taking the wrong path would mean someone close to me will die, just like Brian and Lucian. I can't follow my foretelling again, but I couldn't stop wondering why it was so important that it had made the Book of Shadows.

What truth couldn't possibly be revealed if I didn't make that certain choice? It was never going to be revealed and I refused to lose any more people I loved.

I snuggled deeper into the duvet and thought about Queen Catherine again. For a couple of days after Lucian died I thought that she had prepared me for his death. He went into a forest and died after he came out, but a few weeks later she showed up again, pointing in that same direction, ordering me to go in.

Now the question that I was constantly struggling with was what was inside that forest that she so desperately wanted me to know?



THE NEXT DAY, I waited on the rocks for Blake for almost half an hour.

Please come, I silently recited in my head.

This was so messed up; for the love of blueberries I couldn't figure out how the boy that despised me had turned into someone that would keep me from turning dark.

I wasn't going to tell him this. Becky was right, it would freak him out and he would just think that I'd broken my promise and fallen in love with him.

Not that it would be hard to break. Blake was different when he was with me. Sammy and Becky said that and I could see it in Tabitha's eyes whenever she saw Blake and me together. She didn't like him spending this amount of time with me one bit.

The uneasiness of my chest started to fade and it felt as if my lungs opened and I could breathe properly. I knew what it was. Blake was close. I smiled but it disappeared fast. I didn't know if I loved this feeling or not. Why couldn't Lucian be here to be this to me?

I laid my head on my hand in thought, letting the sorrow rush over me.

"Sorry I'm late." His voice came and I didn't look up because I knew he was butt naked like usual. He chuckled. "You'll need to get used to that one way or another Elena."

"Today is not that day, just get dressed."

"Ouch, what Night Villain spat in your milk this morning?"

"I don't need a Night Villain's acid, I've got my own." I looked up and thanked the heavens he had his robe on. He dropped down right next to me. The smell of roast and musk filled my nostrils and for some reason it made me feel a bit drowsy. I swallowed hard and tried to get the dryness out of my throat.

The scent was mixed with a horrible stench and I saw Blake taking in a huge drag of his cigarette.

"I don't know how you can smoke that."

"It calms me down."

You want to know what calms me down....don't go there Elena.

"So what do you want to talk about today?"

I thought about it for a minute, I had to ask questions otherwise this training thing would end soon.

“How many abilities do we have?”

He gave me an unsure look.

“Seriously. I’m not the enemy here, Blake, and one of my friends already has a dragon. My lips are sealed.”

He blew out a breath. “Ten.”

“Ten?”

“Our flame is pink because of the Red and Blue fire. We can see the future the older we get, we can breathe lightning, chloroform and acid, we can persuade people with our minds.” He picked up a rock and folded it into his hands. When he opened his fist, the rock was frozen. “We can freeze things and as you know heal living things too. The healing part takes some practice and a lot of concentration.”

I didn’t tell him how easily that one came to me.

“We can move objects in our dragon form, and lastly we can make people see things that aren’t there.” I gasped.

“Relax, it’s nothing special. All the Chromatics have that.”

“Ten,” I said with a sigh. “How do you use them?”

He grinned and bit on his tongue gently. My stomach turned. It was a power Blake had always had and wasn’t new to me. “Now that the flying part and hopefully the fear of heights thing is cured...”

I giggled and he chuckled too. “I think it’s time to show you what we can do.”

He got up and moved a couple of paces in front of me. I pushed myself up from the rock and stood right next to him.

“It’s not easy conjuring your abilities while in human form. It takes time and the more you do it, the easier it comes.” He lifted up his index finger and a soft pink flame sprouted from the top of it. “This one you don’t have a problem with. Every being is afraid of the Pink Kiss.”

“The pink what?”

“The Pink Kiss.” He smiled. “I know it sounds stupid but I’ve grown quite fond of the name. When it touches skin, it spreads like a virus. Nothing can stop it and your enemy will die a slow and painful death. Constance can’t even heal it or slow the procedure down. There is no cure for the Pink Kiss.”

I’d heard that before and seen it the night the Wyverns attacked us. “It’s like the Hippogriff’s venom.”

“Exactly,” he said in a soft tone, just staring at the flame coming from the tip of his finger. He lifted up his middle finger, and right next to the pink flame a small spark of lightning came. “Lightning is handy in the ring, especially if it’s not the Dragonian’s ability.”

“You used lightning on Lucian before.”

He nodded. “He failed the first time because of my lightning.”

Then he lowered both his fingers and showed me his palm. A green fog with a strong smell of gas appeared in the palm of his hand. I coughed a bit and covered up my nose and mouth with the sleeve of my robe.

“It can’t harm you, Elena. You are immune to it. The smell is something to get used to though.”

The ball of green fog turned into acid and it ran down his hand and landed on the ground, incinerating the grass and rocks it fell on. A tiny bit of smoke evaporated into the air. “Deadly,” he said softly and closed his fist. When he opened it, it was gone. His hand didn’t carry any mark, not even a red burn to show that he’d just handled acid.

“It doesn’t burn?”

“Slightly, but it doesn’t hurt the way it would a person that isn’t immune to it.”

“How did King Albert claim your dad then?”

He smiled and huffed softly while taking his seat back on the rocks. I followed him.

“King Albert had a gift for making weapons. His armor was of the thickest metal there was, but it was also the lightest.” He smiled.

“Don’t ask me how.”

I giggled.

“He had a weapon that the royal council still uses today. It’s called an acid blaster. He used to fill it up with my father’s saliva and then use it on the enemy. He wasn’t the type of man that loved wars though, but he was the bravest man I’ve ever met.”

“You still remember him?”

He nodded. “A dragon’s memory works differently than a human’s. Usually humans don’t remember anything before their fifth birthday. It’s different with us. I remember everything. Even before I hatched. I remember the inside of my egg, my mom’s tone of voice when she was close and the temperature whenever she lay on me.”

I smiled thinking how amazing that must be, to remember everything like that. I couldn’t remember my father’s stupid stories and here he tells me what the freakin’ temperature of his egg was whenever Isabel lay on top of him. If that was normal, then I sure was a broken dragon.

“I remember King Albert. He had a special look just for me. I guess it had to do with them knowing that I would become their child’s dragon, if they ever got to that stage.”

“How did he look at you?”

He laughed. “Admiration, warning.”

“Warning. Why?”

“I don’t know, but that’s what it felt like.”

“I’m sorry that he died without giving you what you needed.”

He chuckled and shook his head. I could sense he was hiding something.

“What?” I smiled.

“You would laugh if I told you.”

“I won’t, just tell me.”

He picked a long weed that grew from inside the rocks and started to bend it. I couldn’t stop watching him. “I woke up from a strong jolt the night Matt brought you here.”

“What?”

He didn't look at me, but kept bending the weed. “I'd never felt anything like that before so obviously I had to investigate. Lucian woke up as I started to put on some clothes and wanted to know what the hell was going on. I told him something had happened and you know Lucian.”

I giggled. “He wanted to know as well.”

He nodded. “So we snuck to the infirmary and we heard Master Longwei and Constance speaking with Matt. He kept telling them that there is no way, kept talking about the wall and how no human could go to the other side if they are born inside Paegeia. That the girl isn't who they think she is.”

“Me?” I asked and he nodded. “Who did they think I was?”

He looked at me. “Matt saw me, and motioned for me to hide. I knew that he would speak to me afterward. Lucian left after his curiosity was filled and I waited for Matt. I had this weird feeling inside of me the entire night that I couldn't explain. When he found me, he told me about you and some details of the accident, but I swear he never mentioned Fox until the second time we met. He also told me about what he saw when he got a better look at you. He said that you didn't respond and he was really worried and when he saw your mark, nothing made sense.”

“What didn't make sense?”

“Why he never knew about you or your father, and if your father was a dragon how the hell you ended up with the mark of the riders.”

“That makes two of us.”

“For a long time people thought that you were somebody else. That your father wasn't your Dad at all.”

I thought about my dream, about what Paul said. People knowing who I was but not telling me. “What?”

“Why do you think when you walk into a place everybody stares at you, Elena?”

“I don't know.”

“Because of who you remind them of.”

“Who?” I give an irritated laugh. It felt like déjà vu and I knew that somehow I wasn’t going to hear the part I so badly wanted to. Like something was going to happen.

He took a deep breath and I could see the invisible wall covering him again.

No, no, no, please...

“It doesn’t matter now, you’re not that person, you’re just somebody that looked like him. We should get started and you should concentrate on mastering your gifts.”

He dropped the conversation right there. I just gaped for a while and knew that Blake wouldn’t say anymore.

“Fine, so how do I do this?” I asked, using one of my frustrated tones.

“You’re angry?”

“You started telling me this story and then you just drop it out of thin air. You have no idea how much shit I have to deal with and this will just go on top of that pile.”

“Elena, it doesn’t matter anymore. You are a dragon. It is not going to help you to move on. That is why I stopped telling you that stupid story. You are like me, that is why I woke up that night, nothing else.”

“I still want to know who they thought I was.”

“It doesn’t matter. You have to concentrate on what you are, not what everyone thought you were.”

“Fine! But I have no idea how to concentrate now I’m worrying about your stupid story.”

“I know it’s hard, but it will get better. I really should’ve kept my mouth shut.” He smiled again. He was enjoying every single moment of this.

“Fine.” I sounded like an annoyed little girl. “How do you do it?”

“Close your eyes.”

“You’re not going to kiss me, are you?” I joked and he laughed.

“I promise.”

“Good.”

He chuckled. “Concentrate and see your flame.”

I did what he said and thought about the pink flame I’d seen on his finger.

“Now fill in the details. The pink in the middle, the red and purple edges, feel its warmth spreading from your fingertips to the middle of your palm.”

I listened to the deep tone of his voice, and I swore I could feel my palm getting hotter and hotter.

“Now open your eyes.”

I did and saw a ball of fire in the palm of my hand. I shook my hand fast and the flame disappeared.

“Elena, you need to control it.”

“It’s not normal.”

“Nothing is this side.”

I rubbed my hand against my robe and took another deep breath.

“It’s not going to hurt you. It’s your friend and the sooner you make peace with it, the better it will be for you.”

“I know, it’s just weird seeing it.”

“Again.”

I looked at him. “Do we have to?”

“Yes, again.” He sounded adamant.

“Demon slaver,” I mumbled and he just laughed. I closed my eyes again and this time he touched my hand. He was warm and just like his music, his touch tingled through my body.

“Concentrate on the flame.”

We did that for the next hour. Every time I had it, he forced me to look at it dancing in the palm of my hand. I could feel the heat, and he was wrong. It burned which again didn’t make any sense. The minute he touched my hand and killed the fire, I imagined a big

blister on the inside of my hand but when he took his hand away, I found nothing. Not even a hint of a burn.

At four, I felt drained.

“I think that is enough for today, tomorrow we can practice lightning.”

I sighed.

“It’s not that hard, Elena.”

“No, I just remember Becky doing the shakes on the ground when she got her first dose of it.”

“I promise you won’t do the hippy hippy shake.”

I laughed and shook my head.

“How do you feel?”

“Like I haven’t slept for days.”

“Climb on my back.”

“No!”

“You want to fly back home yourself?”

“No,” I said softly and closed my eyes just in time as he ripped off his robe. He laughed again as he saw me standing there with closed eyes and I could feel him touching my arm and putting it around his neck. He lifted me onto his back in one movement and then he ran. I opened my eyes and saw how we dove off the cliff.

He changed in mid-air and I grabbed one of his horns just in time. It was a ride Lucian experienced once before he died and here I was getting one without even lifting a finger.

Thinking about Lucian again, knowing that he wouldn’t be waiting for me, asking me how it was made my heart ache. Still no tears would come. I rested my body in between two huge horns on Blake’s back and took in the air and the soft breeze. Even the sound of his wings flapping changed how I felt about everything.

There was no more Lucian, but there was now, there was this moment and there was this amazing dragon that would turn evil by the 23rd of August.

That couldn’t happen. It wouldn’t.

A familiar feeling jolted through my gut. I'd only had it once before but I would never forget it. It was the time when I knew I would succeed in finding the King of Lion sword. It was that same feeling, but this time it had nothing to do with that stupid sword or the words the Viden had spoken. There wouldn't be a substitute but there would be another mission. One Lucille wouldn't be happy about, and one that would lead me to find out what Lucian knew. I was the only one that could find the answer to save Blake.

CHAPTER TEN



FOR THE NEXT couple of days Blake pushed hard, even more than Lucian had.

Controlling my abilities wasn't easy. It would leave me drained and then Blake had to fly me back home. It became the one thing I looked forward to every afternoon. It felt so natural being on his back that I didn't know what I was going to do if he ever told me that we were done, that training was over and I was a real Rubicon.

The mission was always in the back of my mind. I didn't know where to start and going into the forest wasn't the answer, although I knew it was where answers lay. I didn't have Lucian's skills and I wouldn't know if I would ever be able to do whatever he had done to make it out of there alive, but I was a dragon, and not just any dragon, I was a female Rubicon, one I doubted the villagers would mess with.

The remaining question was, why was I so afraid of going into the Acker woods?

I tried to do as much research as possible. I typed 'Acker Woods' into the computer inside the library. When I hit the search key, the

computer peeped and then it shut down.

My hands jolted into the air and the fear of breaking the computer overpowered my emotions. I looked around and saw a couple of students reading in groups.

No one saw you, get up and move away from the computer, my voice said with a cop tone inside my head. It made me suppress my laughter but I did what it said and moved away as fast as I could.

I used huge steps to get my butt out of the library.

The next morning I found a huge 'Out of Order' sign on the computer I'd used.

Walking to another open computer, I decided to start with the wall and try to find Tanya Le Frey the way Lucian had the day after he'd discovered her existence. The computer didn't shut down like the previous one, but it still showed zero results when I typed in her name. I tried to search Queen Catherine's dragon, but that just showed me plenty of articles about the Queen and Tanya wasn't mentioned in any of them.

So instead, I ended up staring at photos of Queen Catherine. She was really so beautiful with her dark brown hair and shining grey eyes. Her features were soft and her eyes sparkled like diamonds. She was such a lovely person to watch and very photogenic. She was nothing like my dreams. The queen inside of my terrors was nothing compared to the one staring at me.

I shut off the computer as nothing I typed led me to any information about Tanya Le Frey.

Lucian was right, they cleared her off the database completely. It was sad though, thinking that she belonged to Queen Catherine and nobody knew about her.

Eventually life moved on. Classes got better, and I could now master four of my abilities while in my human form. Amy, the girl who had pushed me against the wall that day inside the cafeteria, stared at me with a terrifying look. I doubted that she still thought of me as being pathetic.

The feeling of power, the dark kind, grew stronger but it disappeared the minute I spent time with Blake. It was like he became some sort of neutralizer, taking away the good and the bad and just letting me become the old Elena for a while.

The weekend was coming up and it soon became my worst two days of the week.

“Come,” Becky said as she grabbed me under the arm when I backbit Sammy on Saturday. “It’s time for your daily dose of Blake.”

“Becky!” I grunted.

“Listen to yourself Elena, we can’t even look at you properly before you want to bite our heads off, I’m not going to let you ruin my new wardrobe again. It just so happens that I was due for a makeover and I so love my new clothes. Come!”

“Fine,” I said and led the way. They both had to run to keep up with my strides.

I flung myself down onto the pillow in the cafeteria and saw Blake sitting at a table far on the opposite side.

Sammy and Becky both stared at me and my eyes rose as I stared back at them.

“It’s not working.” Becky left her two cent comment.

“He’s too far,” Sammy said; nowadays she had an answer for everything. It was as if she’d become the bearer of all knowledge. A real know-it-all.

“I’m not moving closer, this is stupid.” I wanted to get back up but Becky pushed me down.

“I wish George was here, then he could ask Blake to come over.”

“I’m his sister, I’m sure he would come over if I asked him to.”

“Sammy! This is stupid.”

“Shush.”

“Blake!” She yelled his name and I buried my face inside my hands and grunted softly.

Becky bumped me hard. “Act normal.”

I looked up and wanted to say something when she took the shades that were resting on her head and put them over my eyes. "They are red, act normal," she hissed.

I just stared at Blake as he reached our table. I couldn't believe that it had actually worked.

"You heard anything from Dad?" Sammy asked.

I cringed as I thought about it. Blake even looked at her funny.

"You called me over to ask me that? No!" he sounded agitated. "Why do you ask? Should I have heard something from him?"

Becky tried to suppress her smile and I kicked her calf.

"No, I'm just worried about them. Aren't you?"

"Samantha. Why should I be worried about them?"

"You know, that thing?" She raised her eyes slightly at him.

"What thing?"

"Blake, I'm not going to blabber the thing in front of everyone."

"Sammy you are not making any sense."

"What's wrong with you? How can you not remember the thing?"

The feeling started to go away as Blake and his sister quarreled about the thing Sammy was clearly making up.

"I'm not going to fight with you over this, Samantha. I've got no idea what you are talking about and I'm going to leave now."

"Blake!"

Becky was really struggling to suppress her laughter and when Blake was gone I smiled too.

"Pathetic."

"I'm not good at this, how do you feel?" She mouthed the last word.

"Thanks, Sammy."

"She's back," Becky said and we got up and walked to the buffet line.

I gave the shades back to Becky.

"Let me see." She smiled. "Green as always."

“It’s getting worse.”

“It’s not all bad, Elena.”

“Yeah, sure.”

The next week Becky and George were playing in their first Warbel games. I didn’t know if I should go or not, as I could feel the dark rising inside of me. Blake postponed our training, which made it hard for me to see the light. Becky found ways though. She dragged my ass every day to their practices where Blake would be. She wasn’t kidding when she said he was like a bear. He was nothing like the Blake that met me every afternoon on the mountain: he was Jerk Blake, and he pushed Becky and George the hardest. Even when they scored every single time.

“Stop celebrating. We only celebrate when we have the cup in our hands, Becky.”

I could see her eye roll behind her goggles and could just imagine what was going through her head.

On Friday night the first game was played.

It was against The Brothers, who had been Dragonia Academy’s winning team for the past five years. Most of the dragons and riders were in their last years and they were extremely good.

Clark and Simon, two last year students, were broadcasting the game. They were the ones who broadcasted all the games to the people who couldn’t be present.

Becky was really good on her raider and George somehow managed to always stay very close to her.

Sammy managed to get us seats close to Blake who was yelling instructions from one of the player boxes.

Being near him like this did help, sort of, it wasn’t as magical as the time I spent with him one on one, but it was sufficient.

We all wore the colors of Blake’s team. They were a funny red and white, which really didn’t go with Becky at all. She hated their uniform and even begged her mother to fund them new ones. After seeing them still wearing it, I guessed Lucille’s answer hadn’t been

yes, unless she'd made a deal with Becky and was waiting for her to deliver first.

We all cheered as Becky scored, but as soon as she saw Blake her posture changed and she went back to her position.

Then The Brothers scored six times. They had a black uniform that for some reason reminded me of Batman's. Still, their winning streak didn't leave a good mark on Becky and the rest of her team. Blake was close to breathing fire.

"I thought you were joking when you said he wasn't fond of losing," I said to Sammy.

"I feel sorry for Becky and them if they don't get back on track."

By half-time the points were miles apart. There was no way that Blake's team was going to win, but still, he kept reminding them of the strategies and how they could beat this.

When the whistle blew again, we witnessed a completely different team enter the field. The Brothers struggled to get to their bell and Jenny, another girl on their team, scored. George scored the next one while blowing a Thunderbolt at his attacker, which he got a two minute down time for.

Becky and Damon, another team member who I'd gotten the pleasure of meeting by being present at every single practice, scored the next couple of goals, and I was really surprised that they lost only by one point to The Brothers.

Blake still wasn't happy but it wasn't a bad loss. I thought the other teams would think twice now about his team, and if they won every single one from now on, they might still come up against The Brothers again in the finals.

I was happy that it was over which meant on Monday our training would carry on again.

On Monday morning Master Longwei's voice filled the entire school as we were on our way to the cafeteria. "On Thursday afternoon, Nicole Brigitte will claim Elena Watkins in the ring..."

The three of us froze and that was all I heard. Becky and Sammy stared at me.

“Are you okay?”

“I think I’m going to puke,” I said as I hurtled over to the nearest plastic pot plant. Nothing came out but the noises the girls made who passed by us told me it wasn’t the best way to handle it.

“Move on, there’s nothing to see here,” Becky remarked. “It’s Nicole, Elena. Seriously.”

“Becky!” Sammy sounded mad.

Inside the cafeteria people still congratulated Nicole. Becky and Sammy glared at her on my behalf as I still felt sick to my stomach.

I lifted my head and found Blake. The horror on my face told him exactly how I felt. He winked and smiled which sort of calmed me down as this afternoon he would guide me through what would happen in that ring on Thursday. Still, a heaviness fell on my chest. Rumors had it that Lucian hadn’t trained her but that her father had paid a shit load of money to get her four trainers ever since she entered Dragonia.

I wasn’t ready for the ring and to be honest I didn’t know what to do. I heard Becky back biting Nicole, who just laughed it off. She didn’t even seem worried or anything. That freaked me out more.

Sammy put a tray of food on the table in front of me.

“I can’t do this.”

“Elena, it’s just a claim.”

Becky slumped down onto the pillow next to me.

“What if she succeeds?”

Both of them stared at me with raised eyebrows.

“Worse, what if I end up killing her. I don’t have full control of my dragon.”

“Now that’s what’s supposed to come out of your mouth. Besides, she deserves to get her ass kicked Elena,” Becky said.

“I can’t end up killing Lucian’s cousin, Becky.”

“She should’ve never asked for this.”

“How on earth did they even give permission for her to face Elena in the ring?” Sammy sounded as if she couldn’t believe it herself.

“Daddy has plenty of money,” Becky offered, and jumped up as George reached our table. She gave him a long kiss before he sat down on the pillow next to her.

“Thursday.” George had this huge grin with both thumbs up.

“Your timing sucks,” Becky snapped at him and he dropped the thumbs and his smile vanished. “You’re not scared, are you? It’s Nicole we’re talking about here.”

“She’s had trainers, George.”

“Still, Elena. You’re a freaking Rubicon.”

I ignored his over confident comments. “I can’t become her dragon. She’s like Arianna, even worse.”

“You won’t. George is right. You have a shit load of abilities. She doesn’t stand a chance, Elena,” Sammy said.

“Maybe you should stop seeing Blake for a couple of days,” Becky said. George just gave her the ‘huh?’ look.

“Are you insane?” I grunted at her through clenched teeth and looked at George. She rolled her eyes.

I couldn’t do that. I would go dark and that girl would die. I wasn’t going to kill Lucian’s cousin.

“Just a suggestion.”

“No.” I took a huge breath and pulled out my ponytail. I was used to the rainbow fringe and didn’t stare at it the way I used to anymore. “I will have to be calm and not give in. She can’t possibly be that good yet.”

“Don’t underestimate her trainers.”

“Seriously,” Sammy said and gave Becky the look. “Make up your mind if you’re going to help. You just told her that she has nothing to worry about.”

“I’m just saying.”

“So what do you say, give up, let that horrible girl become my Dragonian?”

“Elena, she’s not going to become your rider. She doesn’t have what it takes to claim you. I’m sure my brother will have some sort of plan.”

I nodded.

“What is this about Elena not seeing Blake?” George still wanted to know.

“Eat your food,” Becky snapped at him.



CLASS WAS DIFFICULT because I couldn’t stop thinking about Thursday. I hated every minute of it. Two o’clock couldn’t come soon enough and when Blake landed on the mountain I just started to explode.

“How could she do that? How did they even let her?” My back was turned to him and my hands went up in every direction. I was so furious but with him being close to me, the feeling disappeared faster than it appeared. “I don’t understand. I can’t face her, I’m not ready.”

Blake grabbed both my arms and for a minute I really thought he was going to kiss me to make me stop ranting, but he just stared at me. “Stop freaking out.”

His peacock-blues took the heaviness from my chest and I could breathe again.

“The ring isn’t your enemy, it’s theirs.”

“I don’t know how to do this.”

“Then I suggest we get started.”

For the next four days Blake drilled me. The minute I brought Cara out and told her what was going to take place, she wasn’t happy.

Spending time with Blake’s human form while I was in my dragon form was fun, but not easy as he would bring both of us back to

reality on an hourly basis.

“Elena, your biggest asset is changing the ring into what you want Nicole to see.”

“*Hell*,” Cara said and I laughed.

“What is the worst place you’ve ever imagined?” I asked Blake.

“I once imagined a place filled with scorpions, snakes and spiders when Arianna tried to claim me. Let’s just say it was over before we even started.”

“Would I see the same as she does?”

“Elena you control it, you have to imagine it, otherwise she won’t see it.”

“So, yes.”

He chuckled.

“*You scared of spiders, Sugar?*”

“Spiders and scorpions are so not going to work.”

“*Bummer*,” Cara replied.

“Even if it’s Nicole’s worst fear?” Blake asked.

“I don’t even know what her fear is.”

“If you ask me super nicely, I can find out for you.”

“Will you?”

He chuckled. “Just don’t believe the rumors you hear.”

“*I like him more and more.*”

“Easy tiger,” I snapped at Cara.

“What?” Blake asked.

“Nothing, I wasn’t talking to you,” I snapped back.

“Let’s practice. Imagine a volcano and that everything around you is covered with lava.”

I sighed and closed my eyes.

I took the picture in front of me and imagined the mountains as a volcano. Lava ran down from the top and into huge rivers of red and

orange liquid fire.

“Amazing.” I opened my eyes and found myself on the same spot, but the view wasn’t breathtaking anymore.

“Put a bit of heat Elena, to make it more real.”

“Leave that to me, Sugar,” Cara said and the air became dry in one second and heat blew in our faces.

Blake stepped back covering his face. “A bit too much.”

Cara laughed and turned off the temperature. *“I could have fun with this.”*

“You think this might work with Nicole?”

“I told you, leave it to me. She isn’t afraid of combat, you need to attack her worst fear otherwise you will face her again real soon.”

“Okay.”



ON WEDNESDAY I gasped at a rumor one of the girls in my Arithmetic class told the girl next to her.

They sat three rows in front of me, but the super hearing that came with being a dragon was awesome.

“Blake slept with Nicole. Tabitha is so not happy about that.”

“Is that why she slapped her this morning? Why did he sleep with her, I thought he was so over the girlfriend thing.”

“She what?” The third one asked. Why I’d never gotten their names beats me.

“Danika, I swear, we all saw that. Lucky bitch.”

Don’t believe the rumors you’ll hear. Oh Blake what did you do?

That afternoon he waited for me.

“You slept with her?”

He burst out laughing. “I told you not to believe the rumors.”

“Blake, I didn’t mean you should sleep with the girl in order to find her fear.”

“It’s the only way the female species spills their deepest secrets.”

“You know what, I don’t want to know,” I started to laugh. “Just tell me what’s she afraid of?”

“It really is pathetic.”

“Tell me.”

“She’s got a couple. One is vines that strangle you. Specifically, the creepers, then she’s scared of patsies.”

I gasped. “What’s a patsy?”

“You don’t know what a patsy is?” he asked through a huge grin.

“No, my father used to say it all the time, but he never told me what a patsy was.”

“It’s a small gecko that has a poisonous tongue, one lick will kill you but that’s a small piece of info that wasn’t shared with them, so instead of just licking their prey they roll over and pretend to be dead or limp, some even kill themselves.”

“Are you serious?”

He nodded with a huge grin on his face.

“She has others?”

“She doesn’t like the desert, something about the heat, and she has a thing for being ugly. I suggest you play with that one. Make her look ugly with boils and burns.”

“*Oh, I could have fun with that one,*” Cara said.

“My other suggestion is to give her hell, and she will never try to claim you again.”

“It’s funny you say that, it was Cara’s first thought.”

He burst out laughing. “You’ve got a funny way of dealing with things.”

“*What!*” Cara said.

He thinks I’m making you up.

Cara was speechless but through her emotions I could tell it was bothering her a lot more than it bothered me.

“So I’ve been told,” I said out loud and sent Cara a message that we would deal with this later.

He showed me what a patsy looked like.

It was quite big, and had all sorts of blues and yellows over its body. It shimmered in the sun.

I watched as it licked its eyeballs every few seconds and when it saw us, it started to bite himself.

“Okay, enough! You didn’t have to show me the gruesome killing themselves part. You could just let him fall over and pretend to be dead!”

Blake just laughed.

“Why on earth people are scared of them, I don’t know.” Another patsy took its place.

It looked cute and the blue and orange on its face made it look as if it was smiling. I took over from Blake and imagined a couple of patsies playing around us.

Blake laughed. “Don’t let them play, Elena. Make them vicious.”

“I don’t know how.”

“Let me.” He gave them teeth and made their tongue longer so that they almost reached us. I moved away from them, which made Blake laugh again.

“They’re not real, but I’m sure you get the picture.” Blake laughed. “If you add them to the pit of hell, she will scream for the hills.”

“I hope she doesn’t go insane.”

“It should teach her to never even consider going after a Rubicon again.”

“Can she reverse it, you know back to what is real?”

“If she’s good and not afraid, yes.”

“Could she create a world where I would forget that it’s only a spell?”

“She’s not a dragon, Elena, and she’s only in her first year, besides spells don’t work on dragons.”

I sighed. “So she could only make me see what is real?”

He nodded.

“Just as long as I don’t end up being her bitch.”

He laughed again.

“Is this how you felt every time Lucian tried to claim you?”

“It was different with him. A part of me really wished that he would succeed but the dark in me wouldn’t let him. I’m just glad that I didn’t end up killing him. That last time when he didn’t get up and I just wanted to keep on fighting...” he stroked his face hard at that memory. “No one will ever be as brave as him.”

“He surely was that, and so much more.”

“You’ll see, tomorrow. I promise you, Nicole won’t claim you.”

“Okay.”

“Not okay, Elena. She won’t.”

“She won’t.”

I tried to have a discussion with Cara on our flight back but the info she’d gotten from Blake today still haunted her. She had plenty of questions and I couldn’t answer all of them, but it elevated some of her fears.

That night I decided to go for an evening flight and slipped out of the window butt naked. I didn’t have time for a robe.

When I jumped off the ledge I turned in mid-air. It was crazy how fast I’d learned all of this, and how natural it all felt now that I’d made peace with my dragon form.

“*Oooh a night stroll?*”

“Night glide you mean,” I joked.

“*What’s on your mind, Sugar? You never do anything like this.*”

“I’m scared. What if Nicole succeeds?”

“*She won’t.*”

“But what if, Cara?”

“Honey bun told you what her greatest fears are, use them.”

“So what, we have a name for him now?”

She laughed. *“I know you like him too, Sugar.”*

“Yeah, but he warned me not to fall for him.”

“He’s a coward. You are amazing.”

I huffed. “So what, we give her hell?”

“No, we give her her worst fear. Desert, it will be a kind of hell she will never forget.”

“I don’t know if I can watch.”

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to,” Cara said.

“What if something happens? We can’t kill her Cara.”

“I know, Sugar, but I don’t want her to come after us again.”

“Me neither.”

“Let’s scare and repair.”

“Scare and repair,” I laughed as we glided on a roof of clouds. The stars shone brightly and they looked beautiful. This was the most amazing feeling ever and I couldn’t believe that I used to be so afraid of heights.

“Yes, we scare the living crap out of her and let Constance repair her.”

I laughed. “You sure have a plan for everything.”

“That’s why you love me so much.”

We took a sharp left and found the top of another mountain. It was beautiful.

“You still miss him?”

“Every day,” I said as we walked past huge trees. “But it disappears for a while when I’m with the idiot.”

“Whatever lets you sleep at night. Just remember, men don’t always mean the things they say.”

“When did you become an expert on men?”

“Oh my instincts say other things.” We just laughed. *“He tell you why he’s doing this?”*

“Not yet, but I’ve got a feeling that I’m keeping the dark in him away too, just like he does with us. So I don’t think he has a choice.”

“You always have a choice.”

We found a lake with beautiful trees whose branches touched the water. A wooden bench stood right on the edge and looked onto a waterfall.

“Isn’t this gorgeous?”

“I dreamt about this place.”

“What!” Cara laughed.

“I dreamt about it, every detail. How is this possible, it doesn’t make sense?”

“Everything is possible if you have love in your life, Sugar.”

“It’s not like that.”

“What doesn’t make sense?” She wanted to know the answer to a previous question.

“It’s like I’ve known Paegeia my whole life and yet I was born on the other side.”

“Mmmm, the heart wants what the heart wants. The way I see it, our homes are imprinted in our hearts and minds, every fiber carries its blueprint. Your soul longed for Paegeia even without you knowing about its existence.”

“Those are the most beautiful words I’ve ever heard.”

“What can I say, I’ve got a magic touch when it comes to words, and I’m lethal all at the same time.”

“The yin-yang.”

“Exactly.”

It was quiet for a while as I lay on the edge of the lake just staring at the waterfall. Night vision was amazing. You could see every detail, even when it was pitch black.

“You’re still scared?”

“Not so much.”

“Then let’s give this girl a piece of our mind tomorrow. Show her she should never have asked to claim us. We don’t need a Dragonian, Elena.”

“Agreed.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN



BLAKE CAME WITH me to the Coliseum. Nerves were tucking inside my body but it was because I needed to hear Cara's voice, to know that she was still up for taking the lead. I decided to be present. They say two heads are better than one, today we would prove that theory.

"You're extremely quiet today. You still scared?"

"No, not scared. I just don't like any of this."

"Now you know how all of us feel."

"You guys really don't want a Dragonian?"

He frowned as he walked beside me. "It's not really about not wanting a Dragonian. The Chromatics need one. I guess it's got to do with the type of person that wants to claim you. See Lucian was worthy of claiming me, but he wasn't strong enough. Arianna," he rolled his eyes. "I guess I don't have to elaborate on that."

I laughed. "That's exactly how I feel about Nicole."

"Then don't give in, Elena."

"I'm not planning on it."

He smiled. "That's the spirit."

We reached the Coliseum and he opened one of the gates as if they didn't weigh anything.

"Will Mia be here?"

"Mia will be prepping Nicole, but I can bet she wanted to be here, Elena."

We walked into a room and I could hear the crowds outside. "I don't have to run around like an idiot outside, do I?"

He laughed. "No, less is better. It's more intimidating."

"Thank heavens for that."

He chuckled. "What, no 'for the love of blueberries'?"

"Ha ha," I rolled my eyes.

"It's time. You should get ready."

I went into another small room and started to undress. I didn't know when I'd get used to ever being naked in front of Blake or any other person. I pulled the robe over my head and it covered everything up to my ankles. I took a deep breath. *Cara, I hope you are ready for this.*

I found Blake sitting on the stone bench which was molded into the wall, with his eyes closed. I stepped forward, and his eyes opened and he looked at me with a soft smile. I sat down next to him and rested my head against the wall.

The crowd started to cheer loudly. "It's time. You should get your ass out there."

I blew out a breath hard and got up. "Any last minute advice?"

"Yeah, don't get claimed."

"Yes, sir."

He chuckled as I pressed the button and the gate in front of me rose. I stepped out into the ring and immediately spotted Becky, Sammy, Dean and George in the crowd; they weren't hard to miss as George and Dean held a huge banner saying: *Give her hell, Elena.* It made me smile.

When Thunderstruck started to play I looked back at Blake.

“Seriously,” I mouthed and he shook his head.

I lifted up both my arms and jumped with everything I had. Cara came out and I could feel my robe tear into pieces. The crowd went crazy as we flew around the ring.

“Are you ready for this, Sugar?”

“I’m ready, just don’t kill her.”

“Me, never. I’m just going to give her what she deserves.”

“And what is that?”

“To wish she was never born.”

I laughed.

Nicole came out wearing something similar to Becky the day she’d claimed George. The crowds cheered and I caught King Helmut resting his head on his arm. He looked bored, older. My heart ached for him.

“Honey, now isn’t the time,” Cara said. *“Whatever it is, it has to wait.”*

Cara ducked a bolt of lightning. “What the hell?” both of us yelled.

It brought me back to reality. “She doesn’t have the mark, where the heck did she get lightning from.”

“I don’t know but this is turning into a different ball game, Sugar.”

“Do what you have to do, just don’t get claimed.”

“Not planning on it.”

For the next ten minutes we ducked and dived lightning. A couple zapped me on my butt, but they didn’t do the kind of damage Nicole had hoped for.

“It’s time,” Cara said.

I closed my eyes and let Cara take over, while I concentrated on the driest desert I could muster. An ocean of sand formed in my head with no sign of a tree or shade. I couldn’t see what Nicole saw as I had to keep my mind clear. The more details my picture had, the better we would succeed in giving Nicole what she deserved. When the picture in my head was done I imagined a patsy. She shrieked

and started to scream as I imagined more than just one. The crowd was gone and the only sound was the sizzle of the blazing sun. Vines sprouted out of the earth.

"I wish you could see this, Elena."

"Don't mess with an artist."

Cara laughed. *"Ditto."*

"This isn't going to work, Elena, your ass will be mine," Nicole yelled.

"Yeah, we'll see about that."

I could feel heat emerging from my core and leaving my throat. My eyes were still closed as I held on to the picture of what I wanted Nicole to see.

She screamed a couple of times.

"I got to give it to her, Sugar, she sure doesn't want to surrender."

"I don't care what she wants, she's not claiming us."

"We need to push this one up."

What could be worse than her fear?

I could feel Nicole's lightning burning on my skin. She threw them fast and didn't stop. I struggled to gain my balance and started to lose my grip on the picture inside my head.

This can't be happening! It was both mine and Cara's thought.

I had to do something but at that moment I was too worried about missing one of her lightning bolts to regain my balance.

Cara and I stopped in mid-air as we found ourselves inside the pits of hell. It was dry and there were rivers and rivers of lava. It made the scales on my body smell as if they were roasting. The picture in my mind wasn't mine. It came from another source. More patsies ran towards Nicole. She started to kick at them and dodge their tongues. Their evil glares were nothing like I'd imagined. The whole picture was nothing like I'd imagined. Hands made of thick, worm-like creatures with teeth snapped at her. Nicole screamed again as the teeth of the worms almost grabbed her. The earth shook slightly as more fire sprouted out of the ground, she tried to keep her balance on a small rock, with flailing arms. Then a huge rock hand formed

from the rocks that weren't engulfed in flames, and trapped her. I could see fire starting to lick her and boils and burns consumed her face. She screamed in agony.

"Cara, enough," I yelled as Nicole's face boiled.

"Honey, this isn't me doing this."

"Then who?"

"I don't know."

Nicole yelled "Give," and everything disappeared. We found ourselves inside the ring and she was crying in pain like a crazy person.

"Don't, just walk away," Cara told me as I wanted to go and see if she was okay. *"She's showing signs of life. You don't need to go to her."*

Dragons flew in front of us blocking my view. Mia was still in her human form. "She gave up, Elena, just calm down."

"I am calm. Is she okay?" my deep voice asked.

"She'll be fine. The pits of hell, it was a bit drastic, Elena. I doubt that she will try claiming you again soon. Unless she's like her cousin."

"She's nothing like Lucian," I snapped at Mia and walked toward the area I had come from.

Blake was nowhere to be found.

"Cara what the hell just happened in that ring?"

"I don't know, Sugar. I thought it was you."

"It wasn't."

"Then we better find out who."

Something told me I already knew the answer, but how? He told me he didn't have that ability. He couldn't read minds and yet that picture was exactly what Nicole was afraid of. The boils and the patsies; the same patsies he'd conjured that day on the rocks with their tongues a bit longer and their evil glares.

"I'll speak to you later," I whispered.

"Okay, Babe."

I shifted and pulled on my clothes fast. Becky and Sammy were waiting for me outside the ring.

“You are the shit!” Becky sang and held out her hand for a high five, but when she saw that I didn’t share her enthusiasm, her grin faded and Sammy’s smile disappeared as they saw the confusion on my face.

“What’s wrong?” Becky asked.

“I’ll tell you later, too many ears,” I said. “Any of you seen Blake?”

“He’s not with you?” Sammy asked.

“He was, but he disappeared.”

We went back to the castle and I hoped that I would find him on the way, but he was really gone. When we reached the room they couldn’t stop talking about the pit of fire, saying that it would go into the book of worst places Dragonians ever faced inside the ring.

“I’m so glad that I didn’t have to claim you.”

“You don’t get it Becky, that wasn’t me.” I looked at Sammy. “I think it came from your brother.”

CHAPTER TWELVE



WORRIED WAS AN understatement and Blake was missing in action. What Blake had done was called Intervening and by law, Nicole could claim me as her dragon without any further ado.

How it all worked was still Greek to me, but the one thing I got was unless you're Blake, if someone interferes with a claiming, the dragon automatically becomes that Dragonian's property. I didn't know if it went for me too, since I was what he was, but I wasn't going to tell anyone and find out.

I hate the word claiming now even more, and I had never thought so much about it until now. I guess seeing everything through a dragon's perspective was a whole different world.

The rest of the day I searched everywhere for Blake. It was hopeless and I had a restless night.

The queen still somehow managed to jump in-between a giant Nicole claiming a baby Rubicon, which I assume was me. She dragged me to that forest and then turned into the queen. I could

hear her saying my name, but it wasn't directly, it was floating on the wind.

I woke up the minute she burst into flames again. Cold sweat ran down my back as I remembered Lucian telling me about Queen Catherine being strapped to her bed and set on fire. No person should die that way.

The next day, class couldn't move fast enough. Every subject dragged and I kept staring at the clock. Each second that ticked by felt like an hour.

When the last bell rang I ran to my room to change. I pulled on my robe over my naked body and ran to the trees close to the lake. When the coast was clear I shifted and flew to the mountain where I'd met Blake for the past five weeks.

He wasn't there and I shifted back, pulled on the robe and waited by one of the boulders. If it was him who had put that image into my head....he'd lied.

I racked my mind for any other explanation, but none came. It was just an image, but I knew for a fact it wasn't mine. It had that same familiar feeling as the image I'd gotten that day in Professor Gregory's class when we covered the Green Vapor.

Could Blake really do that? Lucian said he didn't own that type of ability, but then again, Lucian only knew about four of Blake's abilities.

"Sorry I'm late."

I jumped but didn't look at him. I could see through the corner of my eyes his hands fiddling with getting the robe over his head. I closed my eyes.

I could feel the heat from his body radiating as he sank down onto the boulder next to me.

"Are you okay?" he bumped me softly.

"I don't know."

"Elena, she didn't claim you."

I gave him a stern look. "Was it you?"

“Was it me, what?”

“You know what I’m talking about Blake.” I got up, scared to speak about this, afraid someone else might hear.

“No, I don’t.”

“The hell, with the evil patsies and everything,” I spat at him. “It wasn’t me, and it sure wasn’t Cara, so I don’t know who the hell imprinted that scene into my head. Paul was the only one, Blake.”

“It’s not Paul, okay,” he said fast. “The desert wasn’t scary enough, Elena.”

“I don’t care.”

“She wasn’t afraid of it. It was as if she expected it, so I wanted to change it... and it happened.”

I kept staring at him. “She could claim me if she ever found out.”

“They won’t, you’re a Rubicon, Elena.”

“You don’t know that.” Nicole was Lucian’s cousin, but she was far from Lucian. The total opposite to be exact, and I so didn’t want her to become my rider.

“What is going on with us? I don’t get this.”

“I do.”

“Please share.”

“We’re the same, Elena. We’re bound to have some sort of link with one another that makes us different from all the other dragons.”

“All my life I’ve been different, but never in a million years did I expect to be this.” My hands gestured down my body.

“You still don’t like being a dragon?”

“That’s not what I said. I love my dragon. She has helped me with a lot of things that I would never be able to make peace with on my own.” I went back to the boulder and sat down. “Why did you help me?”

“She’s not worthy enough to claim you,” he said.

“Why do you care who is worthy enough or not?”

“You’re a Rubicon. Only the best of the best should be able to claim you, never forget that.” He looked at me in such a way that I thought he was going to be able to see my deepest secret. The one where I’d broken his promise and crashed madly in love with him. I hid my face inside my hands.

I looked back at him, he was still staring at me and I could feel his peacock-blues. His face came closer to mine and for a short moment I couldn’t breathe, then he snapped his head away, got up and walked to the nearest tree.

My heart started to thump and I didn’t know what had just happened. I could feel we were almost there. I could sense that Tabitha was far from his mind and Lucian was nowhere near mine. It was only us.

“There are rumors that Arianna is going to try to claim one of us next. I’ve got a feeling that it’s going to be you, so we should start preparing for it. She’s a bit more fierce than Nicole.”

“Are you shitting me?”

“I can help you.” He was back in front of me in a crouching position.

“Blake, you can’t. If anyone finds out what it is you can do...” I closed my eyes and shook my head. “I can’t become Arianna’s, she’s even more evil than Nicole.”

“You won’t, just trust me.”

“I take it you know her fears too?”

“All of them.” He gave a seductive smile.

“You know when she’s planning this?”

“The way some of the Dragonians spoke about it, soon.”

“Then we should get started.”



FOR THE NEXT couple of days I froze every time Master Longwei’s voice came from the speaker system. He hadn’t once mentioned my name or Arianna’s, or the word claim, but it’d led to a

lot of restless nights and I somehow missed Paul's stupid voice inside my head. He sure had a way of calming me down.

The afternoons with Blake were the only things that helped, even though he trained me harder than ever; I somehow forgot what it was he was preparing me for.

I was drained every afternoon and barely had the strength to notice anything else that was going on around the Academy.

Becky and Sammy disappeared after dinner and I took a long bath. I would wake up every single time when my gills appeared and realize that I had fallen asleep in the tub.

When I got out, I would usually be wide awake and have a bit of strength left to do my homework for the next day.

When I left the bathroom that night the most beautiful dresses were strewn on Becky's bed. Not the modern fancy type of dresses but the princess kind, with undergarments and corsets.

"Is Halloween coming early this year?"

Becky laughed. "No silly. It's for the Testrial ball."

I gave her the best confused look I could muster.

"Seriously Elena, where is your mind lately? You know what?" she said with her hand in the air. "Don't answer that."

I giggled.

"The school has banners everywhere," Sammy said.

"I guess my mind is not on balls and ...okay, that did not come out the way I wanted it to."

The two of them laughed after they gasped.

"My brother is seriously rubbing off on you."

"You guys are talking about balls?"

"No," somehow I managed to blush which made them laugh even harder. "Whatever."

Becky got up and put her arm around my neck. "Not to worry, dearest Elena. I got you a ticket and a dress."

"You are the best," I said and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“I know, I’ll be here all week.”

She guided me to the bed and for the next couple of hours we tried on dresses with all the undergarments and corsets. It took about half an hour just to get in and out of one, but it was the most fun I’d had in a long time. I’d gotten lucky with a dress that transformed me into some type of frost princess. It was gorgeous. It snuggled my torso beautifully, even pushed up my breasts and showed a bit of cleavage, but not the slutty kind.

The fabric reminded me of snowflakes, and the bottom of my white dress fanned out in a beautiful ice-blue color.

“Elena, that dress was made just for you,” Sammy said with admiration.

“I love this. It is gorgeous.” I looked at my figure in the mirror and then at Becky. “Where did you get these dresses?”

“Mom dropped them off about an hour ago. She’s been in Elm for the past couple of days shopping for the ball and everything. She even said she will make our masks, if we decide on the dresses.”

“Elena is going to be the snow queen.”

“I should really try to harness my frost.”

“Tabitha is not going to like that.”

“Screw Tabitha. She’s not the only frost princess in town,” I said with a twinge of jealousy in my tone.

The girls laughed.

Blake popped into my mind. I wondered if he would even be there. Maybe he was one of those guys that didn’t even like dances, that would be a shame.

I crawled into bed thinking about the ball and really started to wonder if Blake had some sort of a link with me. If he could hear and see what I was thinking. That would be just my luck.

I closed my eyes and in a couple of seconds I started dreaming about dresses and knights hiding behind different masks.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



THE NEXT DAY I saw all the banners about the Testrial ball. Maybe a ball was exactly what I needed. To just enjoy myself with Becky and Sammy. Then Dean and George popped into the picture too, and although I'd gotten really close to both of them, in a brotherly kind of way, I still felt like the odd one out.

I met Blake on the mountain, but we had to cut it short on the Thursday because Becky had gotten permission to go and meet Lucille to pick up our masks.

"Elena it's just a ball."

"I don't care. I'm sick and tired of practicing how to be a Rubicon. Arianna's threats have to wait for now." I walked behind the tree to shift back into my dragon figure. "Let me guess, you don't like dances and dress-up?"

"Is that even a question?" he asked and I giggled.

"So I'll take that as a no." I stepped out from behind the tree.

He just chuckled. "So, I'll meet you here tomorrow?"

I shook my huge dragon head. “Nope, I have to get ready for the ball.”

“Elena.”

“One day is not going to make me worse. I need a break. Go do something with Tabitha, you guys are still together, right?” I couldn’t believe I’d just asked him that.

“Yes,” he said in a sarcastic tone.

“There you go, see you on Monday,” I said and dove off the cliff.

“*See what I mean?*” Cara said.

“It’s not like that.”

“*Yeah right. That boy feels exactly the same way about you as you do about him.*”

“You haven’t met Tabitha yet.”

“*I don’t need to.*”

I giggled at Cara’s comment. She sure knew how to make someone feel special and I was glad that she was a part of me.

At three the tram stopped right in front of the Bayside Inn where we’d stayed a couple of months back for the King of Lion’s revealing.

Lucille had been living in one of the suites for the past week.

When she opened the door, I received a big embrace and a kiss on the cheek. Sammy and Becky were next.

“So, where are the masks?”

“Patience,” Lucille answered her daughter and led us into the small lounge area that was right in the middle of the gigantic suite.

She disappeared into another room while Becky made us some coffee.

Lucille carried three boxes and placed them gently on the table. Becky thrust our cups into our hands and went for the boxes.

Her mother just stared at her with a slight twitch, tucking in the corner of her mouth.

Sammy and I went closer to see what the masks in Becky’s hand looked like.

“Mom, these are gorgeous. Did you kill a swan for these?”

Lucille laughed. “They are fake feathers Becky. I know a thing or two about making masks.”

She handed Becky the one that went with the green dress she was going to wear. The texture of the mask felt soft, with huge green feathers around the eyes. It was really stunning. It even had a bit of a green shine if the light reflected on it at just the right angle.

The yellow dress had a yellow sequin mask to match and I never knew masks could be so beautiful. There were yellow feathers too, but not as many as the first mask.

Then Becky took out the mask that went with my dress. It was pure white, and Lucille had used a sparkling white fabric to cover it. It really looked like it was made of frost.

“I love it, it’s gorgeous, Lucille.”

Lucille shrugged her shoulders and had a huge smile plastered on her face. “I’m glad you girls love them. I can’t wait to see what you are going to look like tomorrow.”

We put the masks back into their boxes and placed them gently on top of one another.

“So how are things going at school?” She looked straight at me.

“You mean how am I dealing with being a dragon?”

She gave me a soft yet concerned look.

“I’m fine. I got over a lot of things, things I never thought I would and it’s all thanks to ...my dragon form.” I wanted to say Cara, but I knew I would get funny stares from Lucille and I really didn’t want her to worry about me any more than she already did. I was fine.

“Then I’m glad.” She smiled. “I know it couldn’t have been easy for you. I was shocked when Becky told me that you turned, and into a Rubicon. I have to admit it’s still a bit confusing on so many levels.” She looked at me and shook her head. “Forgive me, I’m babbling way too much again.”

“Not at all,” I said just as I put the coffee mug to my lips.

We enjoyed the afternoon with Lucille, she even got pizzas brought up to the room and we ate until it was time to go.

“So, we’ll see you tomorrow at two?” Becky said as she hugged her mom.

“I’ll be there five minutes before two.” Lucille wrinkled her nose at her daughter.

“Thanks for the pizza,” Sammy gave her a hug after Becky.

“You are welcome.”

I was last. “Thanks for the beautiful masks. They are really something.”

“I’m glad you love them. I can’t wait to see you girls tomorrow in all your glory.”

“Okay,” Becky broke our hug. “It’s time to go. I don’t want to be late or make Master Longwei mad and decide to ban us from the ball.”

“Drama Queen,” her mother mumbled.

“Love you,” Becky yelled as we ran down the corridor to the elevator.

“Love you back.”

The tram ride back to the Academy went fast but only because we couldn’t stop babbling about how beautiful the masks were. We tried them on in our room and I had to say, they were all uniquely stunning. I really couldn’t wait for tomorrow to come.

I struggled to fall asleep that night and when I did, I dreamt about the twenty cannon shots and the crazy, wailing, clucking sound of baby Elementals. I woke up in a cold sweat as the pain of Cara stirring inside of me felt real. It disappeared the minute I realized I was inside my bed and safe. I glanced over at the other beds and found two heaps covered with blankets, sleeping soundly.

My head hit the pillow hard as I just stared at the top of my posted bed.

When was I going to get rid of all these stupid dreams? I knew my answer was as soon as I spoke to someone about what had happened, but I couldn’t. I didn’t trust anyone, and Blake was

already helping me with so much. He also had a lot to deal with himself, and I couldn't burden him with more Elena crap.

I stayed awake until Becky's alarm clock went off and I couldn't wait for the school day to just be over and done with, then it will be the time for the ball.

Classes were boring as everyone around us talked about masks, tiaras and hair appointments in Elm this afternoon. That was why Lucille was coming to help us get ready.

For the past two days, we weren't allowed to go down to the Coliseum or Parthenon dome as Master Longwei had gotten a company to come and set up for tonight's ball.

None of us had any idea of what it would look like tonight, as it was a huge surprise and guarded twenty-four-seven by people from the company.

At night the site was protected by an invisibility spell, so we couldn't even peek.

In history class we had a break and everyone began talking about the balls King Albert's mom used to host. It was why Dragonia Academy had a masked ball every year. We hung onto the Professor's every word as she gave us a history lesson, one that wasn't boring, but reminded me a lot of Cheng's lessons.

I really missed him a lot.

I closed my eyes and pushed myself back into the story about the queen's dances she'd held on a regular basis, which, I might add, King Albert hated. We all laughed at that part.

At two Sammy and I ran back to our room. The hallways were crowded with students trying to get to the lobby and down to Elm. I was grateful that we would get ready in our room.

We found Lucille with a table with snacks inside. Our dresses lay beautifully on each bed with the masks and shoes.

I cringed when I saw high heels.

"Elena, you have to get used to them, seriously." Becky rolled her eyes.

“I’m going to break—”

“No you are not,” Lucille said. “They go beautifully with that dress and it’s a dress that doesn’t go well with pumps, now go get your butt into that shower.”

I did what she said and when I got out, Sammy slipped in after me. Getting into the dress took up half an hour all by itself. Lucille put up a fight with the corset and I felt as if I was never going to breathe again. I just hoped my gills wouldn’t come out to help with breathing tonight. It would ruin the picture completely.

The frost dress with the ice blue skirt was an absolutely stunning picture. Lucille used plenty of whites on my eyes and used some sort of glue and applied small white stones at the side of my lids to make them stand out. My hair was taken up with curls hanging loose over my shoulders. When I was done, Becky was next. She bitched and complained when Lucille pulled the corset tight.

“It’s painful to be beautiful, suck it up,” Lucille said and pulled the strings tighter.

“Does it have to be this tight? I can hardly breathe,” she said as her mother tied the laces together. Sammy just shook her head and I giggled softly.

Becky’s dress was absolutely beautiful. It was green and went perfectly with her swan mask, as she’d dubbed it.

Her hair was taken up into a French roll and her mother did an amazing job with her eyes. They stood out and the picture was a mixture between fairy tale and Goth, which was so Becky.

Sammy had the yellow dress. She sucked it up like Lucille had told Becky and when her dress was on, Lucille took a small break. We had a couple of snacks and some champagne. Becky’s mom was the coolest ever.

After our break it was time for Sammy’s hair, and when she was done, Lucille helped us with our masks.

The picture in the mirror of three princess-like figures wearing masks was breathtakingly beautiful. Lucille took a couple of pictures and we jumped at a hard knock on the door.

Becky slipped into her high heels, pulled the dress slightly up and went to open the door for who I could only assume would be George and Dean.

“Wow!” George said and threw his arms around Becky.

“I’m in here too, mister,” Lucille said which made us laugh.

“Sorry, Lucille, thanks for the heads up.”

Lucille shook her head softly and gasped as George and Dean entered. They looked absolutely stunning in some sort of tuxedo, but the jackets weren’t traditional, they were something completely different, something that reminded me of fairy princes.

“No wings?” it slipped out, and Lucille and Sammy laughed.

Dean just gaped when he saw Sammy and she twirled. “You like?”

“You look absolutely breathtakingly beautiful.”

An ache tugged at my heart again, thinking how Lucian wasn’t here to see any of this.

“Wow, Elena. Ice Queen.”

I laughed. “I had to put something on that was going to fit me, don’t you think?”

He smiled gently and gave me a hug. “You are far from an Ice Queen.”

“Thanks, Dean.”

“Picture time,” Lucille said again and we all huddled together.

Before she took the picture she squinted at me and her eyes ran down my dress. “Where are your shoes, missy?”

My face fell. “Do I have to?”

“Elena, put on your shoes,” Becky said in a not-so-impressed tone.

“Fine,” I grunted and walked to my bed, struggling to bend down in order to get them.

“Let me,” Lucille said as she crouched to get my shoes from under my bed. She gave me a surprised look. “Were you seriously going to go without shoes?”

“A girl’s got to try.”

She laughed. "Give me your foot," she said and I lifted up my dress and felt like some sort of deranged Cinderella with Lucille putting them on.

"That picture does not look right," George joked and I could hear Becky slapping him.

"You want to say I can't be a Prince Charming?" Lucille bit back.

"No, that hadn't crossed my mind at all."

We all laughed.

I was like a head taller when she was done and almost pulled Sammy down with me as I reached her and lost my balance. Dean helped us regain our balance.

"I'm seriously going to break my neck tonight."

"It's going to be okay." She then looked at Dean. "I'm going to need your help with this one tonight."

He laughed. "Your wish is my command lady."

Sammy giggled and gave him a soft kiss on the lips.

"Okay, seriously we should take these pictures and move on otherwise we're going to miss our entry," the Drama Queen complained again.

"Haven't I taught you anything? It's the last entry that gets the most stares, Sweetheart. There's plenty of time for pictures, trust me."

Lucille took about a gazillion pictures of all of us and then we had a glass of champagne.

She came down with us as she said she wasn't going to miss our entry for anything. At least she was there to help me get down the stairs in one piece and without breaking my ankles. I had to admit, the shoes were to-die-for but I hated feeling like a duck, unstable on my own two feet.

Some of the stray students all stared at us as we made our way across the yard and down another gazillion steps that led to the area where they'd set up for tonight. We all gasped in unison as a huge marquis tent with a gazillion small lights welcomed us. There was a huge stage set up with a band and a disco ball hung from the ceiling.

“Is your brother going to play tonight?”

“Hell knows, you spend more time with him lately. Thought you would know.”

“He didn’t mention anything to me. By the look on his face when I mentioned all of this, I would say he hates every moment of it.”

She giggled. “Sounds just like him.”

We said goodbye to Lucille at the door. She even had tears glistening in her eyes as if this was our prom or something.

We found our table where we were going to have a small dinner served by hired staff.

I felt a bit uncomfortable as a thousand masks stared our way and I prayed that I wouldn’t fall flat on my face.

Dean and Sammy were a couple of spaces in front of me as they got distracted by the beautiful décor around them.

Please don’t fall, I prayed softly. As I tried to stay upright I didn’t see a chair moving right in front of me and when I bumped into it, I was flailing arms trying not to lose my balance. As I tried to stay upright I could feel the sole of my shoe sliding on the floor and I knew it wasn’t going to help as I felt my entire body tumbling backward.

Oh crap! I gave up and just let the fall take its course. I closed my eyes and felt a pair of arms catching me right before I hit the ground. I grabbed whoever was my savior around the collar and when he laughed I knew the idiot had lied about this not being his thing.

“I thought heights were your only fear?”

I couldn’t help but giggle. “High heels seem to be the new one.”

He chuckled and helped me up.

“Thanks, you don’t know the humiliation you just saved me from.”

“Elena, the way you look tonight, I doubt anything you do would lead to humiliation.”

I gasped. “Was that an actual compliment?”

“Hey, I still know how to give those. Besides, you really look different.” His eyes scrolled down my body.

“You are so not checking me out,” I whispered. “Go, before Tabitha gets a hernia or something.”

“You sure you’re going to make it to your table?”

Dean’s laughter interrupted our conversation.

“I’ve got her,” he said.

“Like the mask, Dean.”

“Yeah, well your sister made me.”

“Be safe, Elena,” he said as he walked away.

“Thanks,” I said to Dean.

“For what, I wasn’t even close when you almost hit the floor.”

I giggled. “For rescuing me.”

“You didn’t look like you wanted to be rescued.”

I slapped him playfully and thanked the heavens I’d made it to our table in one piece.



THE ENTIRE NIGHT went by so fast. We had a beautiful dinner with light music. Master Longwei said not much more than a couple of words and then the party started.

I was asked a couple of times by guys to dance, but I feared for their lives and toes, so I declined.

Blake vanished with Tabitha into thin air after a couple of hours and I couldn’t help but think about him, a lot. He saved me and then he gave me that compliment. Not to mention his eyes checking me out. Something he’d said that night we’d almost kissed for the first time jumped into my head. He was as drunk as a skunk, but I couldn’t help but wonder if it was really just the booze or had he been telling the truth.

Was him hating me all a big act?

Then why would he ask me not to fall in love with him?

Nothing about him made any sense, but that was Blake. Always luring people in and pushing them away whenever they got too close.

“May I have this dance?”

Speak of the devil and you step on his tail.

I looked past him. “You sure it’s safe? I don’t want to get a frost ball thrown at my head.”

He chuckled. “You have frost balls too, Elena.”

“I’m not a good dancer, and I fear for your toes.”

“Ahhh, there is the right concern. My toes will be fine, and I happen to be a terrific dancer.”

I gave him a raised eyebrow. “You?”

“If you tell anyone, you know what I’ll have to do.”

I gave him my hand. “Fine, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.” I pushed myself up off the chair and the first step I took made me want to tumble again.

Luckily Blake caught me, again.

I regained my balance and struggled to suppress my laughter. When I saw him with closed eyes and a huge grin, shaking softly with laughter, I laughed too.

“This is going to be a nightmare,” I whispered.

“It’s going to be fine.”

“Everyone is staring at us,” I whispered as I saw everyone’s faces on us again.

“Can you blame them? You seriously look hot.”

“Seriously? That’s like the best word you could come up with?”

I grabbed his arm again as my shoe slid and we both laughed.

“Okay, I can foresee this too now. It’s going to be a miracle if we get through this one dance,” he said as we reached the dance floor, and then put his hand gently on my waist, pulling me closer to him. “Just take small steps.”

“In what direction?” I asked him as I stepped on his feet.

He cringed. "Not that direction."

"Sorry." I laughed again.

He lifted me up gently and lowered both my feet onto his.

I started to laugh again. "You seriously going to do the side stepping for both of us?"

"It's the only way for us both to get through this alive. Part Moon-Bolt, remember?"

"Oh, how could I forget?"

He chuckled again.

The dance ended way too soon, and he showed himself to be someone I never thought I would associate with Blake Leaf. He was through and through a gentlemen. He said good night with a soft bow of his head and disappeared.

I decided to take off my shoes right then and there and go back to the table, but the DJ started playing an up-beat tune and Becky pulled me straight back. With my shoes in one hand and my other lifting up my dress slightly so I wouldn't step on the hem, I bounced up and down, just enjoying the rest of the night.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



THE NEXT MORNING we slept late. We'd hardly had the strength to get out of our clothes and just fell on our beds already asleep. My dreams were peaceful. I didn't hear the clucking sound of the Elementals, the cannons or even dream about the queen. There was nothing, just a black darkness with no sound.

Sammy got us each a cup of coffee from the cafeteria and I struggled really hard to ignore their stares.

"For crying out loud, what is it?" I asked and started to laugh.

"What's up with you and you-know-who?" Becky asked.

I gave her a skeptical look. "You sure you've never read *Harry Potter*?"

"Don't change the subject, Elena."

I giggled again. "Nothing. I told you he was different with me."

"You can say that again," Sammy said with a smirk on her face.

"C'mon you guys. It's not like that. We're the same species, that's all."

“Yeah, sure,” Becky joked.

“Whatever you say, Elena,” Sammy seconded and I couldn’t help but laugh.

I got out of bed. “I’m going to take a shower, and hopefully when I get out, this will be forgotten.”

“Ah-huh,” Becky said and I shook my head, but for some reason I couldn’t stop smiling.

The weekend went fast and I didn’t start to show Psycho Elena symptoms until late Sunday night. Supper helped as Blake was only sitting two tables from us. I didn’t want to make a big fuss about Friday night, scared that he might just go and cancel Monday’s training.

Monday afternoon couldn’t come soon enough and for some reason he drilled me harder than all the other days, but Cara was stronger now and I could handle more.

Around four, it was time to go back as Blake still had to coach his Warbel team.

“Can I ask you something?” he said while I was still in my dragon form.

“If you must.”

He laughed. “Don’t hate me because I’m trying to help you.”

“Seriously. You should make up your mind. Don’t love me, don’t hate me.”

He smiled.

“So what do you want to ask me?”

He’d already changed and had his robe on. He was sitting a couple of paces next to my humungous body. He didn’t answer.

“Is it stupid?” Cara asked.

“Probably,” he replied.

“Fine, I’ll laugh later, what is it?”

He kept quiet for a while and I just stared at him waiting for him to carry on. He chuckled nervously and I could feel Cara rolling her

huge dragon eyes.

“Just spit it out, Blake.”

“Fine,” he said. “I always wondered why Lucian desperately wanted to ride me and I was wondering if you would show me.”

We both looked at him as if he was crazy. “What do you...oh...” Cara sent me a picture of Blake riding on my back in his human form.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, I really want to know how it feels. Find out what the big fuss is about.”

We both started to laugh. “Fine, hop on.” I never thought in a million years that I would say those words to Blake.

A flashed image played through my mind of Cara twirling and flying like a dragon out of control. I chuckled at the image of Blake desperately clinging on to my back. “Go for it, this is going to be so much fun,” I replied silently to Cara.

“*Oooh, yay,*” she thought back, and lay down for Blake to climb onto my back. I hardly felt him, but when he twirled two of my catfish-like whiskers in his hands, I could feel a stabbing pain.

“Easy, tiger. That is actually attached to me,” Cara said and I could hear Blake chuckling. The grip became softer and Cara took over. She ran off the mountain and dove straight down to the ground. The earth came closer and I could hear excitement coming from Blake. He was so much like Lucian.

Then Cara pushed us into the air and we climbed the sky. Blake was still on my back.

“*You ready, Sugar?*” she thought.

“Go for it.”

She twirled into the air like a dart, did a couple of dives and flew faster than she ever had before. I closed my eyes and felt the wind beneath my wings and on my face. I could still see where I was going because of Cara.

Blake loved every moment of it. “More!”

Cara grunted. “This guy seriously isn’t going to let go.”

“That’s so typical Blake.”

She laughed and tried harder to get him off our back. He didn’t flail one bit and she decided to give up. We took him to the spot we found the night before Nicole tried to claim me.

“Where are we going?” Blake yelled.

“Just wait and see,” I said back and took a huge left toward the mountain. I’d flown it only once, but it was as if the direction to that beautiful place was imprinted inside my veins, just like Cara said. A couple of miles to the south and the mountain came near. I didn’t land with a thud anymore, it was graceful and when I was back on solid ground I wanted to lie down, so that Blake could climb off easily, but found him in crouching position right next to me. He tapped the side of my face gently.

Cara took us to the trees and found the biggest one she could for me to turn back into my human form.

“Speak to you later,” I said.

“Always, Sugar. Enjoy.”

“It’s not like that.”

“Whatever, honey.”

I laughed. I couldn’t hide anything from her. No matter how hard I tried. She was inside of me and part of me, and she would always know my deepest secrets.

It took not even a full minute before I was back inside my human skin. I pulled on the robe and found Blake sitting on the bench with his knees under his chin.

I sat down with him and for a long time we just stared at the waterfall.

“It really is a beautiful place, how did you find it?”

“Don’t know. It was the night before Nicole tried to claim me. I couldn’t sleep and I had to find a way to clear my mind.”

“I like it.”

“That’s why I brought you here, idiot.” I bumped him softly.

He smiled.

It was quiet for a couple of minutes. We just looked at the ducks and swans swimming in the opposite direction to the waterfall.

“I’m going to take a swim.” Blake jumped up. He bent down before me with both his hands leaning on the bench right next to my sides. His face came really close and I thought this was it, it has to be.

“Join me.” He raised his eyes once and ran toward the waterfall.

I closed my eyes as he took off his robe. What was he doing to me? He’d made it so clear that first day not to fall in love with him and here I was, lost and head over ass.

I breathed out like a horse and shook my head softly. For some reason I couldn’t stop grinning. I followed him to the waterfall and saw how he came up and shook his hair out of his face. My eyes rested on his big shoulders, and muscular arms. The sign of the Rubicon was inked into his skin. Why did God have to make them so beautiful?

He found my eyes and I looked away. “C’mon Elena, the water is perfect.”

“I’m not getting in there.”

“You still have a thing about naked bodies?”

I gave him a sarcastic, raised eyebrow stare. “Do your thing so we can go home.”

“No, come have a swim. Otherwise I’ll get out and come and fetch you myself.”

I jumped up. “Okay, fine.”

He laughed and turned his back to me. I quickly took off my robe and climbed into the lake. It was cold and I had to suck for breath. “I thought you said it was warm. It’s freezing.”

“Oh, c’mon. It’s not that cold. Just swim around it will get warm in a minute.”

I dove down into the water and the closer I got to where he stood the warmer the water’s temperature got. It must be a dragon thing, but then again, I was a dragon too. So it must be a Blake thing.

I came up inches from him and was thankful that the water wasn't that clear, but still I hugged my body tightly, scared that he would see my features.

He just shook his head.

I splashed him with water which he didn't expect, and did it a couple of times again.

He laughed as his hands tried to block some of it, and my heart started to pound as he made his way toward me. I let out a yell and started to swim away, but he caught my ankle and pulled me closer.

The last time someone did that to me, it'd turned into a kiss, but Blake wasn't Lucian. He dunked my head under the water.

We played around for a while before we both swam to the edge. When I tried to get out he pulled me back in.

I stared at him and found his eyes closed, all the playfulness was gone and something else lingered on his face which I never thought I would see. He was sad and scared. He looked as if he was in some sort of pain. "Are you okay?"

He shook his head and opened his eyes. Peacock-blue irises stared back at me. My stomach flipped and my heart felt as if it was inside my throat.

How could one guy's look do that to a person?

He came closer and I did the same. I closed my eyes and could feel his soft warm breath on my skin. My hand rested softly on his chest and it felt warm. I opened my eyes and found his lips and nose inches away from mine, then he grunted and pulled himself out of the lake.

A feeling so tense jolted through my body. I didn't know what it was. It was a sadness mixed with anger, *why was he doing this?*

I climbed out after him and felt as if I was going to breathe fire.

"What, I'm not good enough for you, is that it?" The words just came out. They sounded harsh and for a second I wished I'd never said anything.

He turned around and a huge crease pulled both his eyebrows together.

“It’s like I can’t even count how many times that happens, Blake. What are you trying to do?”

“Nothing, Elena. It’s stupid and I shouldn’t have done that.”

“I don’t get you. Surely you can see being with me makes you sort of calm and normal, Blake. Why are you fighting this? Lucian is dead, he’s never coming back.”

“It’s not about Lucian.”

“Then what?”

“I’m turning evil, Elena. I can’t do this.”

“You won’t as long as we are together,” I yelled, as if me raising my voice might get through to him. “Can’t you feel that?”

“Feel what?”

“You’re different when you’re here, with me. Hell I feel that even. I feel funny when I don’t spend time with you every day.”

“In what way?” He frowned and his tone sounded surprised.

“Like the dark becomes too much, but the minute you’re near, it goes away. C’mon Blake I know you feel it too.”

He shook his head. “I don’t, Elena.”

I swallowed hard.

“The dark is getting stronger. I will turn, no one is going to claim me.”

“You can’t say that.”

“Yes, I can!” The old Blake started to make his appearance again.

I shook my head and stared at the ground.

“I think it’s time to tell you why I’m helping you.”

I looked at him.

“You ever wondered how Paul found those Elementals so fast?”

“Yeah, he said that danger was coming, but instead it was already upon us.”

“He’s right, but it wasn’t in the form of the hippogriff or him. It’s me.”

“Blake!” I stroked my face hard.

“Don’t Elena. Am I the only one that can see this?” He sounded angry, even a bit defeated. “When the Elementals vanished with him, you turned. It didn’t make much sense, but when you started turning into a Rubicon, putting two and two together was easy.”

“What does me becoming a Rubicon have to do with anything?”

“I trained you for a reason.”

“And what reason is that?”

“So when I turn you can kill me!”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



THE EARTH AND everything around me felt as if it was being pulled from under me. “Are you insane? I’m not going to kill you.”

“You have no choice Elena. I don’t want to destroy my home, or the people I care for. The Rubicon doesn’t give a shit about any of them. When he fully takes control of me, I will no longer be. It will only be him.” Tears glistened in his eyes. “I don’t want to belong to Goran.”

“He’s trapped behind Etan.”

“And I would find a way to free him. I’m sure you know more or less what it is our blood contains.”

I nodded.

“Believe me, I would do anything to free him from Etan,” he said softly. He lifted his head and stared at me with those peacock-blues. “That can never happen. We will destroy this world.”

We just stared at one another for a short while. His eyes were filled with begging. My mind searched desperately for other ways than me killing him. “There has to be another way, someone will claim you.”

“No one is going to claim me!” He took a huge breath and closed his eyes to calm down. “I made peace with that, you have to promise me...”

My hand struck his face. “NO! I WILL NOT KILL YOU. I LOVE YOU.” His eyes flew open and the look in them changed from begging, soft, to hard and angry. I felt regret for finally admitting it, but I decided not to take it back. I did love him, the part that was kind and the part that was fighting to hold on, fighting to stay good.

“I told you not to fall in love with me. I specifically said that the first time we started with this.” He spoke through a clenched jaw.

“Well you didn’t make it easy for me, Blake.”

“I was being nice, Elena.”

“Oh and those almost couple of kisses we shared?” A small sarcastic laugh escaped my lips.

“I was being me. Nothing strange about that.”

I struggled to swallow as he said that. “So what, you don’t feel anything for me?”

“NO! I don’t. You are not a match against Tabitha.”

That struck me hard. Tabitha hadn’t been mentioned for such a long time. I took a deep breath and realized that both of us were still naked.

I darted past him and fetched my robe, pulled it over my head and just stood there. I could still feel his presence behind me.

“Elena, I told you...”

“Yeah, I know. Don’t worry about that.”

“You’ve got to promise me.”

“I can’t do that. You might not feel the same about me, but I do care for you Blake. I can’t.”

I ran past him and pulled off my robe. I struggled to see the edge and realized that the tears had finally come. I didn’t understand it. He was so mean and had just rejected me, why now! I wiped them away and pushed myself off the mountain.

Cara came out immediately and it only took a second for her to realize that something wasn't right. I could hear her gasp as I thought about everything he'd told me, and she took over the flight.



THE TRAINING WAS over. I found Blake after one of my classes resting against the wall like a Greek god. He said that I knew everything there was and that he didn't see why we should carry on with our training sessions.

I knew it was a lie because I still had to prepare for Arianna's claim, but I understood why he wanted to stop and to be honest, I didn't want to be around him knowing how I felt about him and that it wasn't a mutual feeling. I was so stupid telling him all those things.

The worst part of it all was that I'd fallen in love with a version of him, not the real him. Still it hurt.

Why was my dragon so weak? Cara was really strong, but we couldn't deal with the dark and we needed Blake close to us to stay calm. What was it going to be like without him?

I thought about what he'd asked for the next couple of days. That task was too big, I couldn't kill him. Sammy and Becky got really worried again as I just stayed inside my room.

They learned really fast not to mention Blake or the training in front of me as the dark inside of me crept slowly into my heart. The back biting came and the snapping heads off by saying the wrong things.

Even my irises turned red around the edges. I could feel their concern and it was really starting to piss me off. I didn't need their pity or worry. I had enough shit to deal with.

Talking to Sammy about why her brother trained me burned at the edge of my tongue, but a part of me couldn't. I guess it was the old me that kept me from yelling it in her face. But I knew what it would mean, I would lose her friendship and the old Elena was still fighting hard to keep it.

“Elena, please tell me what happened?” I found Becky next to me on the couch. It’d started to snow as December grew nearer and she threw a blanket over our legs. “Sammy isn’t here. Please. Why aren’t you training with Blake anymore?”

I stared at the window and I felt nothing but hatred toward his name. Becky wrapped her arms around me. “What happened?”

I flinched at her touch. I didn’t like this at all and I gave her a glare but releasing the information was all I’d wanted for a couple of days now. It had to come out. “He wants me to kill him.”

“What!”

“His darkness is starting to consume him. It was the reason Paul found the Elementals so fast, and when they were gone, I turned. It makes sense if you think about it.”

“Elena you can’t kill him,” she whispered loudly and her nostrils flared.

“Why not? He would destroy Paegeia, Becky.”

“What is wrong with you? It’s the dark, come.” She grabbed my hand and yanked hard for me to follow her.

“Don’t.” I yanked it out of her hand. “He can’t stand to be near me. I’m not going.”

“You need him, otherwise you will turn dark yourself.”

“I don’t. I have to make peace with this, the way he did. I can’t do this anymore.”

She looked at me with a gaping mouth and disappointment laced her eyes, lips and entire body. “You’re giving up? After everything that we went through, you’re giving up.”

“It doesn’t matter, Becky.” I got up and walked past her.

A pillow hit hard against my back.

“Don’t ever say that!” she yelled. “It does matter. It matters to me, and George, and Dean. Not to mention Sammy or the fact that Lucian died to save your life. You can’t give up.”

“I am what I am, Becky. I can’t change it.” A tear rolled over my cheek. They came easily now.

“Fight, Elena. You can fight it.”

“It’s not that easy. The feeling inside of me feels…”

“Powerful.” She finished my sentence.

“Seductive.”

“I don’t believe that. You don’t want to be evil, Elena. You will always fight for what is right. It is why you went after that sword and saved us from a terrible fate, Elena. You were the sixth woman to get out of a Cavern that no one even dares to go into. You can’t give up now,” she begged me. “Just come with me. He wouldn’t know.”

“I told him.”

“What?”

“He knows what he does for me.”

She nodded her head slowly. “And, what did he say?”

“It doesn’t matter. It’s over. He despises me.”

She frowned. “I don’t believe that.”

“Well he does, okay.”

She gasped. “You fell for him, didn’t you?”

“It doesn’t matter. He doesn’t feel the same for me.”

“He told you that.”

“Yes. I’m no match when it comes to Tabitha,” I said in a sarcastic tone.

“He is lying.” Becky’s jaw muscle clenched. “Tabitha isn’t a match against you. The way you guys calm each other down…”

I shook my head. “He said it isn’t like that with him.”

“What!”

“It’s the truth. If I was to him like he was to me, he wouldn’t have begged me to kill him.”

“No, you can’t kill him.”

“I have no choice.”

“You do.” She started to pace with her hands tangled in her hair.

“There’s got to be another way.” She stopped and looked at me.

“Someone will claim him. Arianna is busy training...”

“To claim me.”

She stared at me with her huge brown eyes. “You gotta be shitting me.”

I shook my head.

“That bitch.” Becky spoke softly. “Then someone else will claim him.”

“Who, Becky? The only one that was brave enough was Lucian. Nobody is going to claim him. He knows that. I know that.”

“Lucian found something, Elena. I know it.”

“Whatever it was, it wasn’t linked to Blake.”

“Elena, then why did he get that foretelling from the Viden?”

“I don’t know. The Viden hasn’t been herself lately.”

“She’s still the Viden and her foretellings still matter. Lucian found something.”

“We’ll never know what.” I started to lose my patience with her.

She could hear it and she just stared at me with a hint of fright in her eyes and then I saw it. It was like a lightbulb shining bright above her head. “Unless we discover what he found.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



MY HEAD SNAPPED to hers. “What do you mean?”

“C’mon, Elena. We can do this. We’ve been doing this ever since you entered Paegeia. You and Lucian had something special. You guys used to think exactly like one another, if there is one person that can do this, it’s you. I know it.”

“How? I don’t even know where to begin!”

She just looked at me and I could see the answer in her eyes.

“No, Becky. The Acker Woods...”

“He came out, you’re a Rubicon, Elena. It’s not that different from the Sacred Cavern.”

“It’s not the same. Lucian had to do crazy things for them, things so horrible he didn’t even want to tell me about it. What if they ask us to do the same?”

She gave me her ‘really?’ look. “Then you set their asses on fire with your pink flame, and they will set us free, Elena.”

I took a deep breath. I didn’t want to admit it, but in that second she said the words ‘set their asses on fire’ a familiar feeling rested inside

my core. I knew she was right.

A day will come and a day will go....No, stop it. The foretelling wouldn't be the reason this time. "Okay, how do we do this?"

"First we've got to tell the others, we are going to need all the help we can get."



WE TOLD SAMMY only half the truth, that we were going to try to find what Lucian had found. She was obviously up for it and so were George and Dean. I, on the other hand, didn't want anything to do with him, but the old Elena still had a say and she was really strong at times, especially when it came to saving Blake. Stupid idiot, he'd rejected her love and she still wanted to help him.

For the next couple of days we spent our afternoons and evenings in the library. Dean searched the internet, but the minute he went to search for a layout of the forest, the computer died.

So that was what happened that day, someone programmed the computers to limit our research on some things. To think that Lucian had had all the answers and he was the only one not able to tell us.

The date kept lingering in my mind. We only had nine months left and then I would get what I wanted. They wouldn't have a choice. My lips curved slightly thinking about how I was going to do this. It was going to be a slow death. I was going to make him pay for rejecting Elena, me...whatever.

Sammy did research on King Albert and Queen Catherine. I looked over her shoulder every now and then, but the minute I saw Queen Catherine's friendly face, I slouched back in my seat. None of the info she got really led to anything. I knew for a fact Tanya Le Frey was a dead end. There was nothing on her anyway. She'd disappeared the minute she betrayed the queen. A voice scowled in my head: she didn't betray the queen, she was the only one that knew the truth.

Stupid girl, she was so naive thinking that good would always overcome evil. The old Elena was going to see how wrong she was the hard way.

We went for dinner and the minute I entered the cafeteria the hatred vanished. The passion and need to kill Blake disappeared and were replaced with another type of want. A want I would never get fulfilled. I looked around and found Blake and Tabitha quarrelling at a table. I went right up to them, not knowing what I was going to say. When I reached their table both of them stopped and stared at me.

Blake glared.

“We’ve got a plan,” I said.

He started to laugh. “It’s not going to work.” He slouched back in his chair and put his foot on the table. Tabitha just stared at him. She really didn’t look very pleased with him.

“You don’t know that. It’s better than asking someone to kill you.” I spat back. Although he was near, his attitude still pissed me off.

Tabitha’s eyes raised in horror. “You did what!” she yelled at him.

“Calm down,” he told her in a stern voice.

So he hadn’t told her. I guessed the truth would get out sooner or later.

He turned back to me. “Stop this, you’re wasting your time.”

“We’re not. Lucian found something, Blake. I could see it in his eyes. He knew something he just didn’t have the time to tell us.”

“I told you, he found nothing but Paul’s deception.”

“That’s not true, and I’m going to prove it.”

“What!” Blake jumped up and his face was inches from mine. This time it didn’t look as if he wanted to kiss me. It looked as if he wanted to kill me.

“I don’t need your permission, but I promise you I’ll find whatever Lucian discovered.” I turned around to walk away.

“No!” Blake yelled.

“Excuse me, you are not the boss of me, Blake. The last time someone told me no, he discovered pretty fast that there is no way to change my mind when I’ve decided on something.”

The entire cafeteria fell into utter silence. I didn’t care anymore about what was going through their pathetic little minds.

“I’m not Lucian. You will kill me, that I can promise.”

I laughed. The entire cafeteria gasped. “I’m not…”

“It’s my fault Lucian is dead.”

I rolled my eyes and sighed. “The Hippogriff killed Lucian.”

“Don’t do this Blake,” Tabitha begged.

“No, she needs to know the truth.” He pulled his arm out of her grasp and walked over to me. “He came to me that day when he came back. He wanted to know where you were.”

“He could’ve asked Sammy or Becky that too. It doesn’t mean it was your fault.”

“I told him exactly where you were and with who.” He chuckled sadistically, but the emotion of it faded fast. “He told me that Paul was trying to hurt you, even begged me to come with him.” He stared at the ground as he spoke softly. Regret thinned out his big, succulent lips. “I refused.” He looked at me. “If I’d left with him, he would still be alive, Elena.”

I got what it was he was saying. My eyes darted everywhere in front of me, except on him as I tried to search for the truth in his revealing. He’d refused because it was me Lucian had begged him to help. But then again it could be a lie, a trick to get what he wanted. I looked at him “I don’t believe that.”

“You can ask Tabitha. She was with me when Lucian came into the room.”

I looked past him and found Tabitha. She just stared at the table.

“It was Tabitha that saved your life. She begged me to go after Lucian.” I looked at both of them and when Tabitha’s chin scrunched up, she buried her head in her hands, sobbing. I knew it was the

truth. I looked back at him and the worry of me chasing after what Lucian found faded away. He was responsible for Lucian.

“Elena,” Becky was at my side. “Don’t listen to him. He wants the easy way out.”

I pulled myself from her one-armed hug. “Don’t.” I shot her a warning and looked at Blake. “You want to tell me you couldn’t help out your best friend because you were too busy fucking Tabitha?” I yelled.

Heads everywhere ducked closer to one another but a lot of eyes were still on us.

He shrugged.

“You arrogant bastard.” My hands were alight with fire and everyone squirmed away from Blake and me as the Pink Kiss consumed both my arms.

“Elena, stop this!” George yelled from Becky’s side.

I let out a scream, it sounded angry and frustrated all at the same time and as I wanted to release the fire onto Blake I felt a tiny prick in the side of my neck. I touched it and a cold metallic dart grazed my fingers. Everything around me started to spin slowly as I took it out. My fire was gone and I looked at the dart again. When I wanted to look at Blake he wasn’t in front of me anymore. Everything in front of me was spinning as if I stood on a crazy fast carousel. George’s arms grabbed me but it didn’t stabilize my head from the spinning.

I knew in that instant it was just my head and I looked in Blake’s direction. I knew he was still there. I could feel the heat radiating off his body. “You’ve got your promise.” Then everything faded.

I woke up in the infirmary. Constance didn’t say a word, she just stared at me. Anger and hatred filled my gut. The first thing that popped into my head was something Blake asked me, ‘why didn’t Lucian warn me that day...’ he knew and he chose to lie to me so that I could trust him, let him prepare me so that I could kill him.

“Elena...”

“Don’t, Constance.” I looked away as her eyes begged me to understand.

“Nora killed him, it wasn’t Blake.”

“I don’t care. Blake should’ve been there,” I yelled at her.

“You can’t hold him responsible for that. It’s the dark...”

“Bullshit. I’m so sick and tired of hearing about the dark in him. Lucian begged him to come with him. He told him that Paul was dangerous and he didn’t do anything,” I spat and an angry tear rolled down my cheek. I wiped it away vigorously. I hated it, I always had, and now that I feel nothing but hatred, they decide to come.

“I know you feel betrayed.”

“You have no fucking clue how I feel,” I yelled again. “I will kill him, and that is final!” I ran out of the infirmary and shifted without taking off my clothes.

Cara immediately asked questions because she could feel my anger and I showed her in harsh flashes what had taken place the past couple of days.

“I can’t kill him, Elena.”

“You don’t have to, I will.”

“No, please don’t do this.”

“Don’t tell me what I can’t do Cara. He could’ve saved Lucian and he didn’t.”

Honey...”

“Don’t Honey me. I don’t need you anymore.”

She fell silent and after a while I knew she’d shut herself off from me. I was alone. Dragon was what I was. I now knew why I’d turned into the Rubicon. Blake was right, it was because of him. I was the only one that could kill him.



MY NIGHTMARES BECAME dark just like the darkness inside of me. Queen Catherine didn’t bother me so much anymore. Neither did Brian ever since Blake took his place. I knew it was the hippogriff that had killed Lucian but indirectly Blake had caused his death. If

he'd been there, he would've seen the hippogriff's tail and he would've taken her out before she could sting Lucian.

The Blake I'd met and knew was a trick. A trick to make me do exactly what he said and to push me into becoming a killer. He never liked me, and nothing had changed. He was still Blake and I was so stupid not to have realized that. No more.

What Lucian discovered would stay a secret. I wouldn't spend any more of my time trying to find out what he knew.

They kept Blake locked up after the day I wanted to fry his ass. The dark almost took over completely and one of the professors I didn't have class with had paid with their life trying to keep him from hurting anyone. The roomers were if he keeps getting darker that they would sedate him and would keep him sedating him until someone stepped up to claim him. When that was going to actually happen, nobody knew, it was just something everyone was talking about lately.

Arianna changed her mind and said she would try to claim him herself. When that pathetic day would come, was up to her. She was going to see her ass.

"Please Elena, we can't do this without you?" Sammy asked after the third day I didn't show up for trying to find a way to help him.

"Don't ask me for help Sammy. He killed Lucian," I yelled back at her. George, Dean and Becky all stood close to her.

"He didn't kill him, he just didn't go with Lucian when he asked him to."

"That puts him directly in the role of killer."

"You can't blame my brother. If you want to blame someone, blame me. Blame Becky, and Dean and George." She pointed in the direction of our dorm's bathroom. "Better, go look in the mirror and blame that person. We all trusted him."

"Get out!" I screamed at her and Becky stepped in between us as my hands lit up again.

"Don't do this, Elena. That fire kills, there is no cure. Sammy is your friend. I'm your friend. Just calm down. This isn't you."

I looked at her and could hear grunts coming from my chest.

“Just calm down. We don’t need your help, it’s okay. We’ll do this without you.”

“He doesn’t deserve our help,” I grunted at Becky.

“Lucian died for him too, Elena. He wouldn’t have wanted this.”

“Everything changed when Blake didn’t go with Lucian. You don’t know what Lucian wanted.”

“You’re right, I don’t. But he didn’t want the girl he loved to kill his best friend.”

I just stared at her. “I’m not that same girl anymore.”

Becky nodded her head. She knew it was the truth and it was as if it’d finally sunk in.

“You really want to kill my brother.” Sammy’s body lingered halfway past Becky’s. Disappointment changed her face.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t believe your brother can be claimed. I’m not going to lose my home or let Goran past the Creepers because of him.” I grunted the words. “He won’t be your brother anymore.”

She had tears in her eyes and nodded her head. “Then we can no longer be friends.”

“Fine with me. I don’t need you anyway.”

Sammy stormed out of the room with Dean right beside her.

George and Becky became silent and they just looked at me.

She opened her mouth to say something but George touched her shoulder and shook his head. “Don’t, it’s no use,” he whispered but my enhanced hearing made it sound as if he’d said it to me.

She nodded and they left.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



I WAS LEFT ALONE from that moment on and I found myself sleeping most of the time. It was my way of holding on. When I was asleep, the dream world took over and I could do whatever I wanted in there without hurting the people I loved. Keeping them at a safe distance from me was the only way I knew how to show them I cared anymore.

Christmas break was coming up. Becky and Sammy were going home. Both their moms invited me to come with, but I declined as I wanted to be left alone. Who knows what I would end up doing.

I entered the room after a really hard day and kicked an envelope that was lying on the floor a couple of paces away from me. The crest of Lucian's family looked back at me. I picked up the envelope and just stared at it.

The past couple of months they'd had nothing to say to me and now I get an envelope reaching out, or.... Maybe they weren't reaching out.

One hand lit up to burn the envelope that was inside the other, but for some reason I couldn't do it. I knew I had to face the things they had written. My fire disappeared and I tore the envelope open. A small note fell out onto the floor.

My eyebrows knitted together. *A note?* All they gave me was a note. I picked it up and opened it.

“Join us for Christmas. We have lots to talk about. It was what Lucian would've wanted.

M”

I turned the note around and it was blank on the back. Nothing made sense. I was exactly who they'd thought I would be. I'd led their son to his death and yet they still wanted me to join them. I didn't understand.

I put the envelope in my drawer as Becky and Sammy entered.

They dropped off their bags and left without saying a word. I don't know why they still wanted to figure something out. Blake was evil and there was absolutely nothing that could change that.

The rest of the week passed by slowly. I went down to the dungeon of the castle where they kept Blake. I'd never even known we had a dungeon but for some stupid reason I could still feel him close by; when I followed the feeling one afternoon it led me down a lot of stairs and I found him sleeping on a bed inside one of the cells. He was completely gone. No emotion showed on his face. I would end up staring at him for hours. He was so damn beautiful.

It was weird what we had, but it was strong. He was the only one that could keep me from the dark. Even when he wasn't here, he still had that effect on me. He controlled my darkness.

Things always ended up with me asking his sleeping body why he hadn't gone with Lucian, did he really hate me so much? But not once did I get my answer. I guess I never would.

I found myself down with him more than I wanted to, but controlling the dark was the only thing I had to do. Until it was time to kill him. Heaven knew I wanted to do it while he was sleeping there, but I wasn't a coward. I couldn't kill someone who had no ability to fight back. Sammy and Becky were right, this was so messed up.



THE MORNING OF the 23rd I started to pack. I'd replied to Queen Margerite's invitation and I thought maybe being back in the castle would be good for me.

Becky and Sammy entered and they stopped at the door as they stared at me.

"You going somewhere?" Becky was the first to speak. I tucked my hair behind my ear. The past couple of weeks even my ponytail annoyed me and I was wearing it down. "Yeah," I replied.

They didn't respond and for the next twenty minutes we just packed. The room had never been so quiet since that day we fought.

A knock on the door made the two of them jump. Becky ran to open it as she was sure it was George and gasped.

"Miss Johnson." Emanuel's voice came from the door and I turned around and looked at the huge ogre that hid a Sun-Blast dragon beneath his skin.

"I'm almost done," I said to him.

"Take your time, I'm in no hurry. I'll be waiting in the lobby." He turned around and I listened to his footsteps running down the stairs.

"You going to his parents?" Becky asked.

"Yes, they invited me."

"That's good," she replied as I zipped up my bag and pulled it over my shoulder.

I hated the vibe that had formed between us, but I couldn't back down on the promise I'd made Blake. I knew it wouldn't bring back

Lucian, but killing him would avenge him at least.

The ride to Elm was quick. Silence was one of the things that had become my friend. I missed Cara though. She still didn't want to speak to me, but she would understand after this break why Blake must die.

Lucian's presence was still there, and I knew if I was going to feel it, so would she. Cara was going to fall in love for the first time.

I got pulled out of my thoughts as flashing lights blinded me. Questions were asked but I blocked them out. I was good at doing that now. Emanuel answered one or two and forced himself through the crowd of cockroaches. A yearning deep inside of me to scorch their asses grew deeper and deeper. I pulled my hand into a fist, trying to stop myself.

The elevator ride felt like second nature now that I'd turned into a dragon.

When the door of the palace opened, Queen Margerite smiled at me; it wasn't warm like that first time I'd come to visit, but it was there. King Helmut looked different. He looked tired, older and troubled.

I got out and the queen opened her arms. She folded them around me and my entire body just felt as if it'd had enough. "I'm so sorry," I started to cry.

"Shhhh," she stroked my hair. "It's not your fault."

King Helmut's hand touched my shoulder gently. I looked at him and found tearful eyes looking back. "I should've listened to you."

"It's okay, Elena. He fooled us all."

"No, I should've never trusted him. Why aren't you mad?" I yelled.

"How is that going to help? It won't bring Lucian back, and it certainly doesn't change the way he felt about you. Believe it or not, we are happy that you are here."

"You don't mean that."

"Come here." She grabbed me again and held me tight to her chest. "You were Lucian's choice. That boy would've died a thousand deaths for you."

I wiped away another tear.

“Come, I’ll take you to your room.”

I paused for a minute.

“Can I have his?”

She looked at me and at the ground. I didn’t want to take it back. I needed to be close to the things that were left of him. She finally smiled and nodded. I walked beside her to Lucian’s room. Neither of us said a word. When she opened the door that led to his room, she had to suppress her tears. “Sometimes I wake up and I could swear I hear him pacing up and down,” she said softly. “But when I open his door, there is nothing.” She touched my arm again. “I know how you feel Elena, I feel the same way.”

“You lost both your children because of Wyverns.”

“And both Wyverns are dead.” She looked down the hall and back at me. “It’s the hippogriff Helmut is obsessed with.”

I closed my eyes. I forgot that it was actually her that had killed him. She’d gotten away and of course King Helmut would want to know where she was. He wouldn’t rest until she was dead too.

“Did he try to look for her?”

“He sent out his scouts but everyone comes back empty handed. We don’t know which Wyvern city she lives in, which makes it a bit harder than it was finding Wyland.”

“Paul told me he was his brother. That he wanted King Helmut to pay for what had happened to him. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I thought it might have been something like that.”

“I just don’t understand why they had to take the Elementals with them. They were only babies.”

“Danger is coming, Elena, and I think they need them more than we do.” Her hand caressed my face. She was wrong about that. But I was going to try to stop them from getting Blake.

“Make yourself at home. We serve dinner around six.” She smiled one more time. “It really is nice to have you here.”

After she closed the door I fell on Lucian's bed. My stomach and heart ached as I smelled his scent on the bedding. He was still here, somehow. I couldn't get him out of my mind. The way he looked when he'd found me. Knowing that he'd heard that I'd almost kissed Paul and that he'd still tried to save me....Blake was right, I didn't deserve him.

I lay there until Brigitte entered.

She just called my name softly and without a word she took me to the dining room which was only laid for two. King Helmut was nowhere to be found.

Queen Margerite gestured to the place opposite her and I sat down. The staff that served us only spoke when they had to offer a choice of food. They all carried the burden of losing Lucian. The rest of the dinner was shared in silence.

I found Cat on his pillow. He'd lost a few pounds, even he missed Lucian. The dog wasn't himself and he didn't even take the piece of bacon I offered him. He didn't even look at it.

"He is still looking for him everywhere," Queen Margerite said. "Bacon won't help if it's not coming from Lucian's hands." She looked back to her plate of food and carried on trying to eat.

I wanted to say something, but nothing would help this situation. So I kept my mouth shut and finished my meal in silence.

We bid each other goodnight around eight.

I couldn't sleep. The last time I'd slept in this bed was with Lucian. I could still see him looking at me when I closed my eyes. This time the memory was clear. His eyes were soft and his kisses were warm, feverishly warm. Another ache jolted inside my heart and I sobbed uncontrollably. I tried to muffle it in the pillow not to wake his parents and when it finally stopped I found myself leaving his room and walking down the stairs to where Cat was still lying on his pillow.

The dog didn't even look up when I stood right in front of him.

"Cat, if I can eat and carry on with life, you can too." I went to the kitchen and opened the fridge. I found ham and took it out. Tears lingered in my eyes as I kept looking at the spot where he was sitting

the day he asked about Tanya. When I closed my eyes I could still see him and hear his anger.

I cut myself by accident with the knife and clutched my bloody finger. I watched as the cut closed and disappeared. My healing ability was by far the strongest.

I put the ham roll away and took a heaped plate back to the dog.

I put it in front of him and he turned his head away.

“No!” I found myself lying in front of him and turned his head back to me. “I know how you feel. We all miss him, Cat. He would want you to eat.” A tear rolled over my cheek and to my surprise the dog lapped it up. I giggled at him. “Please, just eat.”

He looked at me for a couple of seconds and then at the plate of ham.

His tail started to wiggle slowly and I watched with relief as he started to eat.

I stroked his head softly. “That’s it. One day at a time.”

“I’ve tried everything to make that dog eat.”

I jumped at Queen Margerite’s voice. She giggled and apologized. We both started to laugh.

“Maybe he just needed someone to tell him how things will be from now on.”

She crouched down in her pajamas next to me and stroked the dog’s head too. “Thank you, Elena.”

“It’s nothing.”

She smiled and we watched Cat eat all his food.

We said goodnight again by Lucian’s door, this time with Cat right behind me.

Cat made himself comfortable on Lucian’s bed and I crawled in next to him.

Lucian’s scent that lingered on his bedding filled my nostrils. I was sure if I was human I wouldn’t have been able to smell him anymore, but I wasn’t human. “I miss you.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



THE NEXT DAY was Christmas Eve. The castle was pretty quiet and it was snowing outside. Every fire place was lit and it was toasty warm. Cat followed me everywhere and we ended up inside the library. I found a good book to read. The staff served us lunch inside the library, and around three in the afternoon Queen Margerite entered.

She came to sit on one of the chairs opposite me after she patted Cat.

I put the book down and looked at her.

“There is a Broadway Lucian and I used to go to. Helmut isn’t a huge fan of musicals and I doubt that Lucian was either, but he came with me every Christmas Eve. Would you like to come with me tonight?”

I smiled. “I’d be honored.”

“Thank you, Elena.” She touched my arm softly, got up and went to the door. She turned around right before she exited. “I’ll have the staff bring you up some clothes around five.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

She left and I looked at Cat. "We are going to a show, Cat." I ruffled his face the way Lucian used to and laughed as blobs of slime spattered everywhere.

At five Brigitte and the two other maids entered Lucian's room. They laid the most beautiful dresses and two piece suits out on the bed. I set my mind on the turquoise pants and a beautiful matching halter neck with a gorgeous cream coat. It came with a pair of cream boots that had killer heels.

I took a deep sigh and decided to go with the boots. I had to learn how to walk in them without breaking my legs someday, and today was just as good as any other.

Queen Margerite looked beautiful too and she'd also gone with a pant suit, a dark one.

"You look absolutely breathtaking, Elena."

"So do you, Queen Margerite."

"I told you not to call me that."

I giggled. "Now I know where Lucian got it from."

She giggled too and hooked her arm inside mine as we walked to the lobby. "Let's say I got it from him. He hated being royalty."

"And yet he was so good at it."

"Yes, he was."

I didn't want to say what I thought of next. It would've broken both our hearts and tonight we were going to try our best to get into the Christmas spirit. He would've been a great king.

We were soon picked up by a limousine that Emanuel was driving.

"How is he?" she asked.

I frowned because I had no idea who she was talking about.

"He's doing fine, my queen."

I looked at Queen Margerite. She just winked at me. "Nothing for you to worry about."



THE CAMERAS WERE flashing again as we exited the limo in front of the theatre. Queen Margerite gave them her most beautiful smile and you would never imagine she'd just lost her son. I followed her lead and she grabbed my arm as we walked to the theatre.

The balcony reserved for us was huge. It was cold but at the same time warm. It was a very hard feeling to describe. The stage had the most beautiful scene of a wishing well in front of us. It was stunning.

I opened the leaflet to see what this play was all about. It was about star-crossed lovers, one from a wealthy family, another from a poor family. It sure reminded me a lot of the love I shared with Lucian. It was very Romeo and Juliet. I hoped nobody died at the end.

"They say it's new and really something else. I hope it's going to be worth it," Queen Margerite whispered softly.

"I'm sure it will be."

"Have you ever watched a play?"

I shook my head. "It's my first time."

"I hope you will enjoy it, Elena."

"I'm sure I will."

The lights started to dim and loud music played. The characters entered and the story began. It was very Paegian-like with dragon figures flying in the air and some of the characters pretending to have abilities. The love between the rich girl and poor boy was beautiful. I found myself dabbing a couple of tears away and leaning forward, resting on the edge of the balcony to see things clearer. As the play broke for intermission, I quickly slipped into the bathroom to go to the toilet and found a huge tray of goodies when I returned to Queen Margerite.

We each had a nice cup of eggnog and tried to make conversation about the first half of the play. I really had enjoyed it.

When the lights dimmed the second half started and I found a completely different scene in front of me. The ambience went from

light to dark in a couple of minutes and if it wasn't for the characters I would have sworn that we were watching a completely different play. Half an hour later the stage moved to a cave. I watched in horror as I kept witnessing similarities to what I'd gone through that last time in the cave with Paul. The rich girl got her head bashed in and found herself tied up on a podium.

Images of what happened to me played in flashes on the podium. I had to shut my eyes for a few seconds to see what was real and what wasn't. Sweat dripped from my temple as Paul was dancing his steps across the floor. I shut them again and when I opened them the character was laughing the same way he had.

I shook my head. This couldn't be real.

"Elena, are you okay?" Queen Margerite asked with a concerned tone.

"I need to get out of here. I'm sorry." I got up and ran out of the balcony.

The lobby of the theatre was deserted but I found Emanuel at my side in only a few seconds.

"Elena, what is wrong? Where is the queen?"

At that moment Queen Margerite was exiting as well. She wrapped her arms around me. "What is it, was it the play?"

I nodded. "It felt as if I was back in that cave with him."

She hugged me again. "I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault. It just was so real."

She pushed gently away to look at me. "What do you mean it was real?"

"The dialogue, everything. It was exactly how I remember it."

She looked at Emanuel. "She's here."



I'M NOT GOING to leave you here, my queen. If that hippogriff is here, your life is in danger. Let's go back to the castle, you'll be safe there. I can always come back to investigate."

The queen nodded.

"You think she's here?"

"She might be." Queen Margerite looked worried. "Let's go."

I pulled myself out of her grip and just looked at Queen Margerite. "If she's here...we'll never get another chance like this."

"No, Elena." The queen's hands held mine gently. "In times of desperation the mind plays tricks on us. You'll see things that aren't real and the wrong people will pay for them." She begged me to listen. "I know what I'm talking about, please, just come with me."

"But..."

"It will turn ugly, please."

I desperately wanted to go search for Nora. She was Lucian's murderer and she was still out there.

"Elena, I'll come back once I know you and the queen are safe. I promise you I will find her. But not now, not when your life's at stake," Emanuel pleaded.

I nodded, it was hard but I gave in and Emanuel led us to the limo.

Queen Margerite had her arm around my shoulder, she hugged me tight as if she was scared I would break free and run off to go find Nora.

We exited the main doors of the theatre.

Again flash lights lit up the night and our faces. Gosh, I hated them and the feeling of wanting to roast their asses again grew stronger.

Emanuel kept them at bay as questions of why we didn't finish watching the play filled the air. Once outside I knew Nora wasn't going to be found. Our immediate exit would tip her off and she would know that Emanuel and King Helmut would be coming for her.

Regret washed over me like a bitter river. I cursed myself for listening to Lucian's mother, sickened by my obedience. Didn't she

want to catch her son's murderer?

I took deep breaths and buried my head between my legs.

The Queen's soft hands stroked my back gently. "I know how you feel, Elena, believe me I do. I want that bitch as much as you do, but believe me when I say a crowd full of innocent people will pay the price."

My head shot up. "How do you know that?" My tone was harsh.

"Because I was once where you are now." Her eyes were stern and her lips thin. She sat back in the chair as my big round eyes just looked at her.

"After Desi died I thought I was going to die too, but that was nothing compared to how I feel now. She took my baby boy and nothing is going to bring him back." She inhaled a deep breath. "I was at a function when Helmut searched for Wyland. Lucian was little and had stayed with the Nanny. I thought I saw Wyland in the crowds, but I was way off. He didn't even have dark hair. Our minds play tricks when we think we have what we truly want. It makes them real and I thought I had the chance to avenge my daughter, but I didn't. An innocent man died and it's on my conscience every day. I have to live with that. I don't want that for you." She touched my cheek softly.

"I'm sorry that I sounded so harsh," I apologized and gave her a hug. "I just wanted her to pay for what she's done."

"She will, in good time."

"Promise."

"With God as my witness, we will get justice for what she's done, Elena. I promise."

I nodded.

Emanuel drove at terrible speed back to the palace and once we stopped at the entrance the other guards could tell something was wrong. He spoke in Latin which made Queen Margerite pause in her steps.

She grabbed Emanuel's arm and pleaded with him in Latin.

What the hell is going on?

Emanuel spoke again and by the tone of his voice I knew it was nonnegotiable.

The queen started to cry and when King Helmut came out wearing a Vest much better looking than the Samurai 3000 I knew exactly what she was begging Emanuel for.

“Helmut, please. I can’t lose you too.”

He stopped but didn’t turn around. “You won’t, but this I have to do.” He climbed into the Range Rover with a couple of other guards and Emanuel looked at the queen. “I’ll bring him back, it’s a promise.”

I wrapped my arms around Queen Margerite. “He’ll come back.”

She sobbed and the maids took her from me and led her into the palace.

I couldn’t sleep that night. Cat was pacing up and down with me in the room, but half an hour into it, he jumped onto the bed and fell asleep. I kept gazing out the window, praying that the lights of the Range Rover would light up the court yard. They’d been gone for more than three hours now.

Flashes of Nora killing them all jumped into my mind. I shook them away fast as I couldn’t let them get the better of me.

The staff gave the queen some sort of a sleeping potion, she wouldn’t have slept any other way. They offered me a cup too but I declined. I wanted to know the minute they got back if she was dead or not.

Half an hour later I got my wish and the SUV pulled in.

I ran out of my room and wasn’t at all surprised that Cat was right behind me. The dog barked at the commotion outside. My heart was beating like crazy. Something was wrong.

The doors flew open just as some of the staff came out of their rooms on the third floor.

King Helmut entered with Emanuel and a couple of other guards carrying a limp body.

The first thing I saw was the black veins on his face and I knew they’d found her. I followed them to the nearest couch inside the living room and King Helmut yelled for Jeeves.

“I’m here,” I said and crouched right next to King Helmut.

“Get me very hot water and towels. Now.”

I got up, ignoring his tone and ran to the kitchen. I poured water inside a huge metal bowl and heated it up with my hands. The

glowing fire inside the liquid took my breath away, it was the most beautiful picture, ever.

Jeeves entered in his night gown carrying a couple of towels. He thrust the towels into my hand and saw them warming up the water. "You're a Rubicon," he said and grabbed me and ran back.

The guy was coughing up black ooze and didn't look so good. "Jeeves where are the water and towels?"

"I got something better, your highness." He pushed me toward the man. I just looked at him with a huge frown. What was the old fart talking about?

"She's a Rubicon, she can heal him."

King Helmut looked at me and then at Emanuel.

"It's better than our plan, Helmut."

"Elena, could you please see what you can do?" King Helmut stood up and put his hand on my shoulder.

"I've never healed anyone in my life before. I don't even know how to," I rambled.

"It's in you, you have to try. Please."

I could see it in his eyes, the begging. I couldn't save his son, but I could save this man. I nodded and crouched down beside the guard. One side of his face was a purple, black color.

"Where did she sting him?"

"His leg," Emanuel said and my eyes darted to it. Black ooze still poured out of his wound. I closed my eyes and lay my hand on it. I really had no idea how to do this, but I had to try.

I thought about Constance's healing touch and how her hands always glowed. The minute that jumped into my head, my hands started to become warm. I could feel the heat flowing from my hands into the body that was lying in front of me. The guy started to scream as my hands became hotter.

"Hold him down," King Helmut ordered. He took a spot right next to me. Our eyes met. "Whatever you are doing, just keep doing that."

I nodded and closed my eyes again. I really just wanted to save this man for Lucian's dad. When the guy screamed harder I could hear King Helmut yelling things at him in Latin. I didn't know what he said but it sure sounded like "Hold on."

The staff around us that witnessed the horrible deed that had been done to this man all gasped in unison.

"It's working," I could hear one of the maids whispering to another.

I wanted to look but I didn't, I just kept thinking about Constance's hands and hoped I was doing the right thing.

The guy was still screaming. Suddenly something yelled inside my head to stop, that voice, not Cara's but another, and I yanked my hand back.

I opened my eyes and watched the men who pinned him down.

"Why are you stopping?" King Helmut yelled at me.

I didn't answer and just stared at the black and purple fading back to a pinkish color.

The guy was grunting now and I saw the belt in his mouth. Our eyes met and the begging in them to save his life made me want to cry.

"Elena."

"She doesn't need to anymore. Look," Emanuel said and they all looked at the fading of the black and purple. When the color moved away from his cheeks a pink, healthy rose color emerged and moved down his neck. King Helmut tore off the guard's shirt.

We all watched how all the veins inside his body ran down his body back to his leg. I remembered what Sammy had told me that day, only a very old Swallow Annex could heal a Hippogriff's sting.

"It's a miracle," one of the men with tears in his eyes said.

"No, it's not." King Helmut put his hands on the guy's shoulder. "It was Elena."

CHAPTER NINETEEN



THE GUARD BEGAN to cough and King Helmut gave him some space to breath.

“Thank you.” The guard closest to me grabbed me and pulled me into his huge gorilla arms. “You saved my little brother.”

I hugged him back. “You’re welcome.”

The staff all cheered and to be honest, I didn’t know what I felt inside of me. I knew I’d heard his voice again. It was Paul’s voice, but it’d spoken for the first time in the language I knew. It didn’t make any sense as Paul wouldn’t have saved this man’s life. He would have let him rot and die.

Unless, what if this man....?

I shook my head. No, it can’t be. King Helmut trusted all his men. There is no way this guy was a traitor, working with Paul trying to get close to King Helmut. I could see it in his eyes, he wasn’t a dark person. He had gentle eyes that begged me to save him. Queen Margerite’s voice entered my thoughts. *Our minds play tricks on us in times of desperation.*

“Elena, are you okay?” Emanuel asked me.

I nodded. “I’m just tired.”

He smiled. “Do you know what you did tonight? You saved a man from a horrible death.”

I nodded. “Yeah, I know.”

He wrapped his big ogre arms around me. Why hadn’t I had this ability a couple of months ago? I could’ve saved him.

My entire body felt drained but I still managed to sob silently. Brigitte’s voice was right next to me in a flash.

“I’ll take her to her room,” she said.

“No, it’s fine. I’ll take her,” Emanuel said and lifted me up like a small child, carrying me to Lucian’s room.

He didn’t speak one word and tucked me in Lucian’s bed like a father would his daughter. “Sleep tight,” he whispered and left.

The next day I found the entire lobby set out for a feast. The entire palace, including the staff and guards, all sat in normal clothes around a long oblong table.

Queen Margerite was finally awake and was sitting next to King Helmut. She saw me standing on the stairs and she got up.

Her arms were reaching out to me as she came near. “Our little miracle worker finally woke up.”

I smiled and gave her a hug.

When the hug broke one of the guards stood right next to the queen. He gave me a warm smile.

“Thank you for saving my life last night.”

I frowned. “That was you?”

He chuckled and bowed his head in shame.

“You’re welcome,” I said but couldn’t help but frown. His hair was blond and I knew I’d saved a man with dark hair. Nothing made any sense.

I sat on the chair closest to Queen Margerite and enjoyed the feast with all the staff. It was a beautiful gesture that they celebrated

Christmas with all of them together.

Isabel was right, King Helmut was one hell of a ruler. He didn't deserve to lose both his children.

I even helped with the dishes and around five I went back to Lucian's room. I fell onto his bed and wished with all my heart that he was here, right now, with me.

My mind didn't want to play that trick.

A soft knock came on the door.

"Enter," I said and the queen's head popped around the door. She gave me a smile and entered.

She had something wrapped up in her hands and I grunted softly which made her laugh.

She came to sit on the bed. "It's just something small, it didn't even cost a thing, but I'm sure he would want you to have this."

My heart stopped for a couple of seconds as she said that last part, and I knew it was something that used to belong to Lucian. She handed me the gift and I tore the paper. I found a leather journal and I had no words when I saw the letters L.M. engraved on the front.

"Are you sure about this?" I asked her softly.

She nodded, got up, gave me a soft kiss on my head and left the room.

I sat there for a couple of minutes just looking at the journal in my hands. I gently stroked the top of the leather, then brought it to my nose and took a sniff. It smelled like leather, nothing like him, but his words were written in these pages, his thoughts. It was the most amazing gift anyone could ever give me.

I opened the first page and started to read. The version of his voice in my head was still not quite his, but it had to do for now.

Most of it was about the friendship he had with Blake and how he worried about him as he was clearly starting to change.

When my eyes stung I held the book close to my chest for a couple of minutes and closed them. When I opened them again, I put the journal away and felt like I needed fresh air.

I wrapped Lucian's blanket around me and went to sit outside on the balcony. The snow had stopped and the air was cold, but the stars shone beautifully in the sky.

I craved his arms around my body and closed my eyes and pretended that the blanket was his warmth, his arms, and that he was here with me. I snuggled my face deeper into the blanket and took in the scent that was left of him. I felt so tired.

The wind caressed my face softly and I realized that I was still sitting on the balcony. The blanket had really started to feel like arms around me and even the chair that touched my back felt human. I froze as lips touched the inside of my neck.

"I miss you so much," he said, and I turned around. My eyes were huge as I stared at him. I wanted to say something but the words were gone. *How was this possible? This couldn't be real.*

His thumb touched my cheek softly. "Shhh, don't cry," he whispered. "I'm here now."

I didn't think twice and I grabbed his neck and planted a kiss on his lips. They felt so real, he was really here. I didn't want to stop kissing him and I never wanted him to leave me again.

I needed to breathe and our kiss broke. "How is this possible?"

He chuckled. "The same way Queen Catherine haunts you."

"It's different Lucian. It's not the same."

"It is sweetheart."

"No, I dream..." I stopped and closed my eyes. "This is a dream?"

He nodded. "Something like that."

"Then I never want to wake up." I buried my face in his neck and took in deep breaths, filling my lungs with his scent.

"As much as I want to stay with you like this, I can't." He pulled me gently from him so I could look at him.

"I can't live like this, Lucian. It's too hard."

He smiled. "You know that isn't the truth, Elena."

I closed my eyes. Of course he knew about Blake and how I felt about him. "It was a mistake. It should've never happened."

He chuckled. "You don't have to explain to me, Sweetheart. You need to live your life."

"I can't."

"Yes, you can." His smile disappeared and sadness filled his eyes.

"Don't go."

"Not yet." His hand touched mine and our fingers curled around one another. He brought them to his mouth and kissed my hand softly.

"You've got to help Sammy and Becky."

"Lucian, I can't."

"Elena..."

"No, he chose not to come with you that day. He knew that I was in trouble, and if you tell me that it's because of his darkness, I swear I will wake up." I didn't mean any of it, but I didn't want to hear this from him.

"You're bluffing." He smiled.

"Okay fine, I'm bluffing, but I'm not going to help them."

"I found everything. And..." he struggled to speak. He couldn't say it.

"What is it? What did you find?" I wiped my stupid tears away again.

"I can't tell you. You need to find the truth for yourself."

Suddenly, the wind knocked the door open and I woke up. I was cold and Lucian was gone. I cried again. *Why does he want me to do this?*

"Otherwise the truth will never be known."

CHAPTER TWENTY



MANUEL DROPPED ME off at the Academy late on the 26th of December, with school due to start again on the 27th.

I had to admit, spending Christmas with Lucian's family changed me, I didn't feel so dark anymore, I felt more like the old Elena, but a bit stronger.

Becky and Sammy weren't in the room when I crawled in around eight. I couldn't wait to fall asleep. At nine I heard them come in. They whispered to each other for about ten minutes then went to bed too.

I struggled to fall asleep and when I did, I dreamt about everything except Lucian. I wanted to feel him again, to kiss him and to hold him, just one more time.

The next day I felt like a zombie as I went from one class room to another. Blake got sedated over Christmas. His dark totally consumed him they had no choice. Still I could still feel his presence the minute Emanuel dropped me off.

The funny part was I didn't feel so angry anymore. I felt almost like myself again, although I was still missing Lucian.

My dream and his words lingered with me the entire day. It'd felt so real.

After class I went back to my room and started to read from Lucian's journal again.

I was still at the pages of him at thirteen. He wasn't a constant writer though and I smiled as I wondered if this might have been his mom forcing him to put some of his thoughts into words. A couple of months passed before his next entry. It was still mostly about his friendship with Blake. One thing I noticed was the Blake Lucian spoke about was the same Blake I'd met, the one that easily laughed and made jokes, but when he started to turn even Lucian struggled to accept it.

The next couple of entries were about his first year at Dragonia Academy. He talked about Dean and the friendship he'd started with him. He also mentioned a couple of girls which I didn't like so much.

Then another couple of months passed and the next entry had me fuming. It was about him and Arianna.

I ground hard on my teeth as I realized I wasn't his first, and hated that cow so much that she'd gotten to be the one. He wrote pages and pages about them and I wanted to tear them out and burn them, but I couldn't. They were his words, even though I hated them. Then there was an entry when he broke it off.

She'd slept with Blake. So he'd known about them.

She was such a bitch. She'd broken his heart. Through the next couple of entries I wanted to kick him for considering taking her back, but he remembered how she'd betrayed him and hurt him.

I'd betrayed him too, and the worst part was that he'd known that before he died.

The next entry was about the night Matt brought me to Dragonia Academy. Blake told me about that. Lucian wrote about how they heard Constance and Matt speaking Latin to Master Longwei. I remembered that day too, but I didn't know we'd had a small crowd

outside. He hadn't paid much attention to it, but he did say how it made Blake feel. It didn't make any sense as the last word he used was hope. He'd seen hope in Blake's eyes.

It followed with the day he'd met me. The words brought tears to my eyes. It was love at first sight for him as he'd written 'where have you been all my life?', and 'how am I going to do this to Blake?'

I frowned. *What does Blake have to do with all of this?* I could hear Lucian laughing at me in the back of my mind, not unkindly, it was the special laugh he would give when people were being stupid and just didn't get it. *What did you find out?*

"It's for me to know and for you to find out," he replied in my mind and I shook my head softly.

Another short entry confirmed he'd spoken to Blake about his feelings and described how Blake had laughed in his face. He was appalled at Lucian for even considering that he would have a problem with Lucian going for me. I shook my head. He was such an idiot.

The next line he wrote, "I kissed her, and it was as if I'd never kissed anybody else before that time. It felt so perfect, was so real, and I was scared to wake up."

I never knew that was how he felt about me. *Why didn't he tell me about this?*

There were a couple of questions after that entry. One was about my voices, he was worried and the word "poet", with the entry, "could it be?"

I froze when I saw that.

He'd lied to me, Lucian knew something, but who he thought it was, he'd never written down.

Well it didn't matter anymore as I'd turned out to be a dragon. Then I thought again about "could it be?"

Maybe he'd discovered what I really was and didn't know how to say it.

Holy crap, what if that was Lucian's voice I'd heard, but then again how did I hear him that night in his father's lobby, saving the guard

from the same fate that'd killed him?

I closed the journal and held it tight against my chest. "You've got to find the truth for yourself." Even after Blake betrayed him, he still wants me to help him, to find the truth.

I put the journal away. I'd read more later. I found myself walking down the stairs and entering the library.

They were all there. Becky with George and Sammy with Dean. Three pairs of noses tucked behind three books and one behind the computer typing away. I went to their table and Becky was the first one to look up.

"I'm sorry. You were right, both of you." I looked at Sammy. "I'll help if you still want my help."

Becky jumped up and grabbed me around my neck. Sammy remained in her seat. I just looked at her, pleading with my eyes and hoping that she would give me another chance.

"We need Elena's help, Sammy."

She bit her lower lip with a huge frown in-between her eyebrows. Hurt was written all over her face, my words that day had hurt her and I didn't regret saying them until now. She nodded. "What about my brother?"

"I don't know. Lucian wouldn't want me to kill him." I sighed. "I'm still working out the kinks."

She finally got up and hugged me too. "I'm glad you're back."

"Yeah, I don't know about that one, but I'll try."

"That's all I want."

George and Dean just laughed, they both had such forgiving personalities and both were suckers for their girls. Becky started telling me what they had found. They'd found a guy named Resumus that was the only one, besides Lucian, who'd made it out of the Acker Woods. She and George were planning to go and see him on the next free weekend. "We are going to make a small road trip of it," she finished.

“So you guys think this Figgelhorn will help us with a map or a layout of the forest?”

“For the right amount of money.” Becky smiled.

“You’re going to buy him off?” I sounded a bit disappointed.

“How else are we going to get a map, Elena?”

I thought about that. The minute you type anything that contains the words Acker Woods the computers shut off. Becky and George even tried it on their own Cammys, the screens just stayed blank. Still, I didn’t like this much.

“We have a problem,” Dean said and we all looked at him.

“Mr.Figgelhorn passed away a week ago.”

Becky jumped up and leaned over his shoulder to read the information. “You’ve got to be shitting me!”

“Now what?” Sammy asked.

“We’ll hit the books again,” I suggested. “We will find something.”



THE NEXT COUPLE days we all searched again. I tried to find something that was connected to Tanya Le Frey, but there was nothing. Not even the scrolls carried any information about her.

Dean had a student to tutor since he was crazy smart in science and the boy he helped needed it badly. Becky tried to take his post but the information she found led to nothing.

Sammy fell back into her chair with tears in her eyes. “We are never going to find anything.”

Becky went over to her and gave her a side hug. “We’ll find something, I promise you that.”

We all looked up as Dean entered with Cheng a couple of minutes later. “I thought we could use some help. I hope you didn’t mind, Elena.”

I smiled. "Not at all." The last time I'd seen him we'd had a huge fight about Paul. If only I had listened.

"So it's true, you're going on another mission?" Cheng threw himself onto the open chair next to me.

"I have to put this dragon of mine to good use."

He laughed. "What did you find out?"

We started to tell him about everything but each time we'd hit a dead end. I agreed with Sammy, it was a hopeless case and I didn't see a good end for Blake.

"Lucian got a date," I said when they forgot to mention that.

"Dean told me."

"There is nothing else out there, Cheng."

"You haven't checked everything, Elena."

"She doesn't exist on any of these scrolls. I've looked."

The others just stared at us as we discussed Tanya Le Frey. Cheng and I started to laugh as their faces remained clueless.

"I think it's time we told them about her," Cheng suggested.

"About who?" Becky asked.

"The queen had a dragon, her name was Tanya Le Frey," I said.

All of them gasped and Cheng told them the story he told me the first time I'd met him.

"So the queen was a dent?" George asked looking confused.

"Lucian thought that they could've been the first."

"You told Lucian about this?" Becky looked at me.

I nodded. "He told me about the date and how he had no idea where to start, and that Sir Robert knows nothing, so it slipped out."

"I can't believe the council and everyone else kept something like that from us," Dean said.

"The Ancients think that she betrayed the queen, Dean."

"She would never," George said.

“We believe so too,” I replied and looked at Cheng. “Lucian must have found her. She left a year before they died, and she came back two years later. No one knows where she is. That’s why he went to the Acker Woods,” I explained.

“So she lives there?”

“I don’t know. The last time he spoke about it to me, he only said that he thought she was there. He wasn’t sure.”

“That’s why he had to do those crazy things you spoke about?”

I nodded.

All of us thought about this for a while.

“Then we need to find her.” Becky broke the silence.

“Easier said than done.”

“No it’s not.”

She went back to the computer and started typing on the keys. The Wall web page and archives jumped on the screen. “She’s not there. They don’t have a date when she left, only a date when she came back.”

She stopped and looked back at me. “It doesn’t make sense.”

“Yes, it does.” Cheng said. “She had a pass from the queen.”

We all stared at him. “Are you sure about this?”

He nodded.

“You know what that means Cheng?” Sammy said.

“It means that Lucian might be right about something being able to claim Blake.”

“So the answer lies with Tanya,” I said. “How are we going to find her?”

Cheng looked at me. “Now that’s the hard part.”

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE



FOR THE NEXT few weeks we worked hard inside the library. The boys even came to our dorms to carry on the last couple of days before our board meeting.

Cheng had drawn up a plan. It was a really good one but we had to mention Tanya's name in order to get the board members' attention. We racked our brains about how we could do that without telling them that we knew who she was and then it hit me.

My dream about the queen. He'd said it was just like a foretelling from the Viden. If you dream of someone really important that guides you on a path, it could lead to greatness, your destiny.

So we all helped with making up this story about how Becky had started to dream about Tanya Le Frey as if it was her and George that would go and find her. I volunteered but since I had declared my hatred for Blake, and was still not sure about how I felt about killing him, Sammy didn't trust me entirely.

Cheng worked on all the ins and outs. He thought about every possible question they could have, the only thing we couldn't answer

was what she looked like, so he even took care of that by saying she came to Becky wearing a big cloak that covered every inch of her body from head to toe.

“It should work,” I said when we were finally done with everything.

“It must, this is our only chance,” Cheng said.

“No pressure there,” George joked and we all laughed.

“Just leave all the talking to me,” Becky said.

We said goodnight to the boys and they all left.

I picked up Lucian’s journal again and read a couple of entries. I found the foretelling that the Viden had given him about the date. It sounded Shakespearian and I had no idea how he could make head or tail of it.

I couldn’t stop thinking that in eight months Blake would turn evil. I felt as if I hadn’t slept in a year but when my head hit the pillow I couldn’t shut off the whirlwind of thoughts inside my mind.

I froze as I felt someone climbing onto my bed. When I opened my eyes Lucian was back. His journal skidded off my bed and landed with a thud on the floor. Both my arms were around his neck and we shared a long kiss.

“I could get used to that.” He spoke softly against my cheek.

“Where were you? It’s been months.”

He frowned. “I visited you last night.” I shook my head and he huffed.

“Guess time is different on the other side.”

“It’s not fair,” I sulked.

His eyes found his journal lying on the floor. “You read that?”

“It’s all I have of you. Why didn’t you tell me about you and Arianna?”

“It was ancient history.”

“About me?”

“I didn’t want you to have all the authority in our relationship. If you knew how I felt...” he sighed.

“I would’ve loved you more, even though I doubt it was possible.”

We lay down on the bed and it felt good to be in his arms again.

“So did you change your mind yet about helping out?”

“Yeah, I know the answer lies with Tanya but I’m scared for Becky and George’s sake.”

He jumped straight up. “I told you that *you* needed to discover the truth.”

“Sammy doesn’t trust me. Becky and George have got it.”

“Elena...”

“Please just let them go. They’ll find out the truth.”

“No they won’t. I” The words didn’t seem to want to come.

“Oh for crying out loud, what is this?”

“I can’t tell you. *You* need to find the truth. Not them.”

“I told you I can’t. Sammy doesn’t trust me. We already spent a lot of time on this plan to present to the board members. Starting over now will mean another month, if not longer; what if they reject us, then it’s another don’t know how many months and Blake will turn despite our efforts.”

“I got the date wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“He could turn anytime, Elena.”

“What?”

“The answer to the date lies in my foretelling. That’s all I can say. Ask for help.”

I woke up. I didn’t want to and I looked for Lucian but he was gone. Reality kicked in and these dreams, as wonderful as they were, were going to make me sick. My eyes found the journal on the floor. He said the answer lies in the date. It didn’t make any sense.

I looked at his foretelling again. I paged through a couple of pages further and I couldn’t find anything else that was linked to this stupid riddle. There wasn’t an answer. *Ask for help.*



THE BOYS WERE already searching like mad when we entered the library. I gave Cheng the journal.

“I don’t think the date was about Blake turning. I’ve got a funny feeling it’s about something else,” I lied but I couldn’t tell Cheng that I was dreaming about my dead boyfriend who was helping me.

“Elena,” Sammy asked. “What is that?”

“It’s Lucian’s diary.”

“Why didn’t you tell me you had that?” she said using a harsh tone.

“Because it’s all I have of him. I didn’t think there was anything that could help us, until last night. His riddle doesn’t make sense.” I sat down across from Cheng who was paging through the journal. “You have to help me to find the answer, Cheng.”

He nodded and I took him to the page where the riddle was written in Lucian’s handwriting. He read it a couple of times to himself and then looked up at nothing. He was thinking really hard, I could tell. He looked at the riddle again and then at Sammy. “Elena is right. It’s not the date Blake will turn, Sammy. Look.” He showed her the journal. “You see how many question marks there are next to the foretelling. He even underlined the date a couple of times.”

Sammy stared at the foretelling. “He kept questioning the date.”

Cheng took the journal back from Sammy and read the foretelling out loud. We all listened to it.

“Everything is written in the past tense.” Dean said.

“What!” We all looked at him.

“The date is not the future, it’s in the past.” He turned his chair around and started typing away again.

Plenty of 23rd of Augusts filled the screen, and it scrolled as each new one appeared.

“It’s going to take forever to go through them,” Becky said.

“So what does this mean? Blake is already evil?” Sammy asked.

“I don’t know sweetheart.” Dean gave her a hug. “But one thing is for sure, it’s definitely linked to him.”

“How do you know that?” Sammy asked.

“The Viden, she spoke using the past tense. Her riddles are never past tense. It’s a date alright, but a date that matters. We need to go find out what happened on the 23rd of August.”

“So we have to go through all those dates?” George sulked.

Cheng got up and hit the print button. “I think it’s time to work full speed guys. The meeting is only a couple of days away.”

We each got a couple of pages and started to go through them. We took turns asking one another if a date and what happened there meant anything to them, but none of them did.

“We need help,” Cheng said early Saturday morning. We’d spent an entire night searching and came up with nothing.

“What kind of help?” I asked.

“Leave this to me,” he said. “But first we all need to sleep.”

We agreed and went to bed. I felt bad for Blake. Ever since they had sedated him, I no longer had a feeling of wanting to kill him. It was gone and a part of me was ashamed of how badly I’d wanted him dead.

I fell asleep and hoped that I would wake up with Lucian again, but nothing. If a month felt like a day, I’d probably see him again next month, which was eons away.

The three of us woke up around three. Becky made us all a mean cup of coffee before going to the library to meet Cheng.

I couldn’t help but stare when we found Tabitha sitting next to him.

“Are you insane?” Becky hissed.

“She won’t tell, but she can help.”

Tabitha looked at me. “Just as long as you promise not to kill him.”

“I said I’ll try my best to help find a way to stop him from turning.

When he’s dark and destroys everything, I can’t stand by and watch,

Tabitha.”

“Swear you will help,” she spat.

“I’ll do everything in my power,” I grunted back.

“Fine.” She turned her chair and started typing away. She came to the website of the Wall and archives.

“We already tried that,” both Becky and I said.

Cheng held up his hand.

“Please, you haven’t done shit yet,” Tabitha said.

Cheng suppressed his smile and I stared at him.

He tapped his forehead and I watched Tabitha typing away codes and keys. “What are you doing?”

“Shush, for Blake, I’ll do anything. Now shut up, I need to concentrate.”

“She’s hacking into the system,” I mouthed at Cheng.

He nodded.

We all just stared at her as she typed away like a crazy person. The codes appeared and disappeared followed by more codes and in ten minutes she stopped. Another archive file filled the screen.

“Tada,” she said and I stared at her. “What do you want, what is that date again?”

“23rd of August. No year.”

“First just a name and now no year.”

I rolled my eyes at her knowing she was referring to when she’d tried to help find my dad.

There were six August dates and two that landed on the 23rd.

“Matt entered on the one, and someone named Tanya Le Frey exited on the other one,” Tabitha said.

We all cheered and the entire library shushed us. We giggled as we flinched and went back to silence.

“Tanya Le Frey, I guess.” Tabitha sounded sarcastic and I found Becky shaking her head softly.

“So the answer does lie with Tanya. Lucian was right.”

They all looked at me.

“You know what I mean,” I said, hoping they didn’t see through that one either. “Can you find a picture of Tanya?” I asked Tabitha.

Tabitha didn’t reply but she typed away like mad. She stopped and we all stared at the computer watching the codes disappear.

“What is it?” Cheng asked.

“I don’t know. It is un-hackable. I’ve never seen anything like this,” Tabitha answered as she tried one more time. We watched again as her codes disappeared. “Whoever this Tanya was, they didn’t want anybody to know about her.”

“Yeah, we know,” Becky said in a sarcastic tone.

Tabitha just glared at her. “You need me for anything else?” She looked at Cheng.

“Nope, that’s it.”

“Remember our deal, Cheng.”

“I’ll remember.”

She got up and walked away.

“What deal?” I asked.

“Don’t worry about it. It won’t come to that.”

We now knew that Tanya Le Frey was the key to Lucian’s foretelling and Blake’s destiny. In what way, George and Becky still had to find out.



THE BOARD MEETING was set for this afternoon and we all worried about the outcome.

Cheng gave them a really good reason to give to the board members, but if they didn’t see fit to grant permission to go on this quest, then they wouldn’t even reconsider it. The truth was far from the reason though.

“I wish we had a stupid foretelling inside that book,” Cheng said.

My head snapped to him. “Why?”

“Because then they don’t have a choice.”

“Really?”

“It’s linked to Paegeia, Elena. Everyone who has a foretelling inside that book has to make it known the minute they discover it. It’s law,” Becky said.

My heart stopped for a couple of minutes. I so didn’t know that. Shit, what if they were going to find out about mine? I could never tell them about it now.

“Are you okay?” Sammy asked me.

“You have a foretelling inside the book?” Dean made a joke.

“Hahaha, if she did she would’ve told us a long time ago,” Sammy joked back.

I giggled with them. They were so wrong about that last part.

“What is it, Elena?”

“It’s nothing. It’s just crazy with all these foretellings and stuff. I mean, Victoria went on one and she isn’t even back yet.” I sighed. Victoria, or Vicky as Becky called her used to be one of their roomies. I got her spot while she went on her self-discovery quest. Cheng chuckled. “She hasn’t found what she needed to find. They won’t let you come back until you find it.”

I looked at Becky and George.

“Oh, please Elena,” Becky said. “Have some faith. We are not that stupid. Besides we are dreaming about someone remember,” she joked.

“I hope it will be enough,” Cheng said.

“You and me both. These knots inside my stomach are driving me insane.”

“Says the most incredible and fierce dragon alive,” Becky joked and we all laughed again.

Cheng went over the plan one last time as we went to the location of the board meeting which was to be held in the hall right next to Constance's infirmary.

"We get it, Cheng. Don't worry," Becky was starting to sound annoyed.

"I'm just saying, Becky. These are key points and you can't forget about them."

We waited outside for a couple of minutes before a girl in her mid-twenties came out and called George and Becky's names. They disappeared and Cheng caught the door right before it closed.

"Come," he said softly.

"Cheng, are you insane?" I whispered.

"They can't mess this up, Elena."

Sammy and Dean stayed behind as Cheng and I crawled inside.

We hid in the small hallway and could hear Becky starting to describe her quest. She was really good, she spoke loud and clear and they all gasped as she told them that she was dreaming about a woman in a cloak named Tanya Le Frey. Then the question came of how much money they wanted for the quest and what went with it.

"This is good, usually they throw it out before they ask questions like these," Cheng smiled.

They broke for a short while and Becky and George had to wait.

"I think they got it," Cheng whispered and gestured for us to leave.

Just as I took that first crawl, the members came back and Cheng took his post again right at the door.

"What is it?"

"They never make a decision that fast."

"We've come to a decision." One of the board members spoke. "We do consider this dream important, but it's not life threatening and it's not written in the Book of Shadows, so I'm sorry. We can't grant you this..."

"No, but you don't..."

“Our decision is final, Miss Johnson.”

I looked at Cheng. His eyes were closed and he clenched hard on his jaw.

We’d worked too hard on this to just get a ‘no, sorry’. It was time and I’d just have to deal with my friends’ wrath later.

I touched Cheng softly on his knee and his eyes flew open.

“I got this,” I whispered, got up and went into the board meeting.

“Elena!” I could hear Cheng’s whisper behind me. Becky and George’s eyes flew up when I came in and I gave both of them an unsure look, but turned to the board members that were halfway out of their seats ready to leave. Master Longwei was one of them.

“My name is Elena Watkins. They were here on my behalf,” I lied.

“I’m sorry for the trickery, but I couldn’t deal with all of this. I’m ready now.”

Through the corner of my eyes I could see Becky’s mouth gaping slightly. She had that disappointed look frosted on her face, the one I really hated.

“Elena?” Master Longwei asked.

“I have a foretelling.” I spoke softly.

“What?” A couple of people asked at the same time.

“I have a foretelling,” I almost yelled.

The Viden’s head snapped up. “I don’t recall...”

“It was the first day we met.” I looked at her. “It’s in the Book of Shadows.”

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO



ALL THEIR EYES were on me.

“Which one?” the Viden asked.

“Believe me I didn’t want to know what it means as I keep on losing the people that are close to me when I follow it. It has caused nothing but heartache and headaches. But not knowing what it means drives me insane. I want to go on a quest with Cheng in order to help me to find out what this means.”

“WHICH ONE!”

I sighed and took a deep breath. “A day will come and a day will go, a choice you have to make otherwise the truth will never be known.”

The Viden knew exactly which one I was talking about. I didn’t even have to finish it. It was written on her face.

I closed my eyes as I could see Becky through the corner of them. She was shocked and hurt because I hadn’t told her about any of this.

“Irene?” Master Longwei asked, and I opened them.

“The girl speaks the truth. It’s hers.”

“The two of you are excused, we have to speak to Elena and Cheng,” Master Longwei said to Becky and George.

“Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Shush,” George grunted and left the room.

Cheng answered all the other questions as to why I wanted him with me. He was really smart and his answers came naturally.

“We’ve come to a conclusion. You do know what is at stake here, Cheng?”

He nodded.

“Don’t come back if you haven’t fulfilled it Ms. Watkins. That is final.”

He pounded his hammer and that was it.

Cheng led me out.

He opened the door and I pulled my coat tighter as the wind felt icy against my skin. I got pushed hard from the side. “Why didn’t you tell us?” Becky yelled.

George grabbed Becky from behind.

“Shush, Becky. As far as those people inside the board meeting are aware, you were Elena’s cover up. Speak about this later.”

She shook George off her and walked with huge strides to the main building. I closed my eyes as Sammy just stared at me. “What else did you hide from us, Elena? It feels like I have no idea who you are.”

“Sammy...”

“No, Cheng, she should’ve told us.”

She and Dean left, leaving Cheng and I behind.

“I’m so sorry about that. I shouldn’t have brought your name into all of this. I’m just so scared...”

“Shhh, Elena, this is my last year. I don’t have anything to lose. It might be my only chance to see the rest of the world.”

“It’s not a joke, Cheng. If I don’t find out what that stupid foretelling means...” My hands tugged hard on my hair. I realized what he’d just

said. "Is it just Dragonia Academy, or all of Paegeia?"

"All of Paegeia for us dragons."

"That sucks."

"At least I'll be able to spend it with the one dragon that knows the other side."

We started to walk back to the main building. Neither of us said a word.

Then Cheng finally opened his mouth. "Why didn't you tell me that it was yours that day we saw it?"

"I don't know. Scared, I guess."

"Scared of what, Elena?" We paused at the bottom of the stairs leading to the girls' dormitories.

"Cheng, I'd just started. I still had to get used to the fact that dragons were real, and that magic existed. My dad had just passed away. The more I kept it to myself, the harder it became to tell someone about it."

He nodded and then sighed. "It's going to be okay. Just don't keep any more secrets from those two. They are your best friends, Elena. You are supposed to share this type of things, not hide it from them."

"I know."

"I'll meet you in the library, say around six. There is a lot to go over."

I nodded and watched him climb the stairs to the boys' dormitories.

"Cheng," I yelled.

He turned around.

"You can always back out of this. I will do it alone if it comes to that."

He grinned. "Elena, you might be a Rubicon, but you'll always be a damsel in distress to me. I'm in, no matter what."

I smiled as he waved goodbye and carried on running up the stairs.

When I opened the door of my room, both girls sat on the sofa with George and Dean beside them. Seriously. This needed to stop.

"Dean, George. Can I please have a chat alone with Sammy and Becky?"

All of them looked at me and then the guys looked at the girls. Becky nodded and Sammy smiled at Dean saying she would be okay.

When the boys were out both of them started yelling at me at once.

“Stop it. This is why I didn’t tell anyone about anything. It’s got nothing to do with any of you. Those words were directed to me, what I must find, not you Sammy and not you Becky.”

They looked at one another.

“Still, you should...”

“No! I should’ve nothing, Becky. It was mine and if I wanted to keep it a secret it was my choice to do so. You can be mad as long as you want to be. To be honest I didn’t say anything in the library because of how I felt about your brother, Sammy. He doesn’t deserve the things we are doing for him, and I still believe that. But now I’ve got no choice. If I don’t find out what those words mean, Cheng and I can never come back.”

Both gasped and looked at one another.

“What do you mean?”

“Seriously, it’s not just exile somewhere inside Paegeia for us dragons, Sammy. It’s the other side.”

They both shared a horrified look.

“It won’t happen, you have Cheng with you.” Becky walked over to me and hugged me. “Together you will find what Lucian discovered.”

“I’m sorry, Elena. I just hate the fact that you’ve kept something from us for such a long time,” Sammy said. “Sorry that you have to give up your home to save my brother.” She had tears in her eyes again.

I opened the hug I shared with Becky and pulled her into it. “I’ll do anything for you Sammy Leaf. I know it sounds crazy, but you guys are the best friends anybody could ask for. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, I just didn’t know how to tell you guys that I’ve got a stupid foretelling in the Book of Shadows.”

Sammy looked at me. “Is that the reason...”

I nodded. “It’s the reason why I decided to trust Paul too. Every time I followed that stupid riddle, trying to fulfil my destiny, someone close

to me died. Now it might lead to me never coming back.”

“Don’t think like that. If there is one person that can succeed Elena, it is you.”

“Becky if those words don’t turn red when I return, they are going to send me away. I’ll never be able to come back.”

“You will. After you find Tanya and discover what can claim Blake, you phone us. And then go and find what those words mean. You’ve proven plenty of things, this will be solved. I promise you.”

I nodded and sighed again.

“I want to take a bath before six o’clock.”

“Why, what’s happening at six?”

“Cheng and I are going to prepare for this stupid mission.”

“Please can we just promise no more fighting, and no more secrets,” Sammy mumbled inside my shoulder.

“Agree,” Becky seconded and joined our hug.

I winced. “Oh for crying out loud, what else?”

“I sort of dreamed about Queen Catherine. It’s how I came up with that idea.”

Both stared at me again.

“You dreamed about Queen Catherine?” Becky spoke first.

“Yes, and no I don’t know what it means but I’m sure I’ll find out once I discover what can claim Blake. Just don’t make a big deal about it, please.”

“I can live with that.” Sammy lifted her hands up in the air.

“Elena?”

“Please Becky. I don’t know why I’m dreaming about her. I can’t answer your questions.”

She sighed. “Fine, but whatever it is, Elena, it’s big to dream about royalty, especially her bloodline.”

“The story of my life. Just another thing to throw onto the pile of the unknown.”

They both started to laugh and I couldn't help but join in.



THE NEXT COUPLE of days Cheng and I thought about everything we would need for the mission. How much money we needed for food, lodging, and camping equipment. It added up to a lot of Paegolians. The day we got our budget we had to make a few cancelations. It wouldn't be enough for everything. Cheng at least had a tent and Dean had let me borrow his sleeping bag and everything that went with it.

"I could always ask Queen Margerite for a loan."

"No, Elena. Nobody can know where we are going."

"She's going to put two and two together when I go to see her tomorrow, Cheng."

"Then lie to her. But she cannot know."

I nodded. "Okay."



MY MEETING WITH Queen Margerite was scheduled at a very high-end coffee shop. The minute I walked in I got that First Wives Club vibe. It was just women in suits and had that business feel to it.

The lady by the door looked up from behind her desk. A broad smile spread over her clean face.

"Hello, Elena. The queen is waiting, follow me," she said and led me through a couple of round tables of women enjoying their tea, scones, and cake.

I found Lucian's mom at the back of the room. The table was facing the most beautiful view of the ocean and when we reached it she got

up and planted two kisses on both my cheeks. “I take it you didn’t struggle finding this place?”

“Not at all, once I told the cab driver where I wanted to go, he knew I was going to have tea with you.” I sighed. “It’s so weird.”

“What is?”

“A year ago, nobody even knew who I was, and now everyone just knows who I am.”

She laughed. “It comes with the territory of dating the prince, even if he is gone.”

I touched her hand softly. “I miss him so much. I wish this all had a different outcome.”

“You and me both,” she said softly.

“He should’ve never been there that day. He would still be alive if not for me.”

She dabbed at a tear. “And what, let Paul kill you instead? He would’ve been a living corpse if he wasn’t with you Elena. Losing you would’ve meant his death, so the way I see it, he would’ve died no matter what.”

“How can you be so nice to me? He was your only son. I was responsible...”

“Shhhh, you forget. I might be a mother, but I’m the queen of Tith too. We have to make sacrifices for the people. His mission was for Blake and we all made a vow when Blake was little that we would do anything in our power to save him from turning evil. Lucian was my sacrifice.”

“But his death had nothing to do with Blake.”

“I don’t know about that Elena, maybe it did. I’ve been thinking about that lately, but it’s not a discussion for today. We are here because I need to ask you a few questions, well actually just one.”

I looked at her with surprise.

“Are you going where I think you are going?”

Lie to her Elena! Cheng’s voice yelled in my head, but she’d given up so much and she deserved the truth. I nodded. “He found

something, I know he did. I have to find out what it was.” I couldn’t tell her about my dreams. It would be weird and she would just think that I was insane.

She huffed with a slight smile. “I knew that journal would make a bit of sense to you. It drove Helmut crazy as there was nothing other than his foretelling.”

“It’s got nothing to do with Blake’s date. It’s a link to Blake but not the way we thought.” I told her what we found and that Tanya left on the 23rd of August seventeen years ago.

The queen frowned.

“Lucian was right to search for her, she knows something and that is why I believe he knew exactly what could claim Blake. I have to go and find out.”

She took a deep breath and took out a thick envelope. “Please, take this. Keep it safe. I don’t want you guys to run into trouble and not have enough money. Pay them off if you need to but make sure you get out of that forest, Elena.”

I took the thick envelope and knew exactly what was inside. “I can’t.”

“Please, do it for Lucian. I won’t be able to forgive myself if anything happens to you.”

I sighed and nodded. “Thank you.” I put the envelope inside my backpack and had a light lunch with the queen. We talked about everything. My foretelling, and how King Helmut was doing. Losing Nora when she was literally inside his grasp made him more determined than ever to find her.

I said goodbye around three as she had a meeting to attend to.

“Take care of yourself, and I hope you find what it is you are looking for Elena. Phone me the minute you are back.”

I gave her a hug and breathed in her fragrance without making her uncomfortable. “Thank you so much for all your help.”

“You’re so welcome. Stay safe.”

Jeeves walked up to our table.

“Jeeves will take you home, and good luck, Elena.” She gave me two more kisses on both my cheeks and another tight hug before she let me go.

The drive to the Academy was silent. Jeeves didn't say anything to me just a 'good luck with the mission' as he dropped me off at the Academy.

I disrobed behind a tree and flew up. I wasn't going to tell Cheng about the money and would use it like she'd instructed me. Only when it was needed; hopefully it wouldn't come to that.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE



ON FRIDAY MORNING, the day of our departure, I found Emanuel in the lobby. He gave me a set of keys. Cheng's eyes grew in alarm and I shrugged slightly, trying to hide the fact that I had no idea what was going on. When we left the academy and exited the woods, we found Lucian's Range Rover. Cheng's eyes sparkled and he couldn't take them away from the SUV.

"Don't scratch it," Emanuel ordered us both and I handed the keys to Cheng.

"I'll try my best." Cheng smiled.

I gave him a hug, well a waist hug. He was huge, but then again he was the King's dragon.

"Thank you, Emanuel."

"Take care, Elena." He smiled. "If you need anything, let me know, okay," he said as he took my Cammy and paired it with his. He walked toward another SUV and turned around as he opened the door. "Take care of her," he yelled at Cheng.

"Which one, the Rover or the girl?"

“Both.”

Cheng laughed.

Constance and Master Longwei together with Becky, Sammy and the guys went down with us. Cheng repacked our luggage from a tiny car over to the Range Rover. George and Dean helped. When they were finally done, we started to say goodbye.

Constance was first. “Just come back, please,” she whispered into my ear. “Take care,” she said out loud.

“I will,” I said with a soft smile.

Master Longwei was still speaking to Cheng in Latin as I grabbed Becky next. Her grip was extra tight and she didn’t want to let me go.

“I’ll come back, even if I have to set their asses on fire. I promise.”

She giggled into my shoulder. “You better.”

Sammy didn’t say anything, she just grabbed me around the neck. I knew she was thankful for the things I was about to do for her brother. George gave me a hug. It was the first time he’d hugged me of his own will, the other times were to keep me from killing someone. “Take care, Elena. Please come back for Becky and Blake’s sake.”

I giggled. “I’m not planning to die in there.”

“Good girl.”

Dean was like Sammy, he said nothing but I could feel his worry and concern behind his hug. The two of them made a perfect couple.

I climbed in as Master Longwei handed something to Cheng. He came around to my window and stuck his head into the car. “Don’t think that I don’t know what this is all about, Elena. You can thank me later when you come back,” he said and pulled his face back out the window.

“What no goodbye?” I joked.

“I don’t believe in them. I’ll see you later.”

“Later it is then,” I yelled as Cheng turned on the engine.

I closed my eyes and lay with my head against the back of the chair. The last time I'd been in this SUV was with Lucian. It was that day at the gallery, the day that he played me that song of Blake's. The one that spoke to my soul.

He still hadn't appeared to me after the last time, and it felt like it had been forever.

Cheng honked again and I looked back and saw all the people I cared for waving one last time.

At least they would be safe from whatever was out there. I picked up the heart charm that dangled from my necklace and brought it to my mouth. My lips touched the rough edges. Please, don't let me go through this alone. I said a small prayer and hoped that Lucian and God could hear it.



CHENG BLEW OUT a huge gush of air. "This looks like a good place to stay over for the night. Tomorrow we can find a way to enter the Acker Woods."

We'd been driving straight for a shit ton of hours. My legs felt numb and I really needed to stretch them. "Is it still far?"

"No, Elena, but I need my rest, and so do you. We've been driving for the past 20 hours straight. We both could do with a bath as well."

"Hey, are you trying to tell me something?"

"Yes, you smell," he joked and I threw an empty can of soda in his direction.

We walked over to the small guest house. A funny feeling had rested inside my gut for the past day. I didn't know what or where it would lead to, but something was going to happen.

Cheng opened the door and we walked into an old tavern type of place. It had wooden tables and a podium which I assumed was used to play live music. It felt as if I'd stepped back into the

seventeenth century. Everything screamed ancient. The tapestry and even the faint lantern that lit up a front desk.

A young man slept behind the desk in a chair. He jumped when Cheng touched his shoulder and barely caught the table as his chair started to fall backward.

“Sorry, we just wanted to know if you have a room for us.”

“Jeepers, sir,” he said and I gave him a look.

That voice, it couldn't be. It sounded just like the guy inside the Sacred Cavern. How was this possible?

“Can I help you miss?” He looked at me after he gave Cheng two room keys.

“No,” I said and followed Cheng up the stairs.

He laughed. “You look like you saw a ghost.”

I gave a huff and smiled slightly. “Something like that. Is it just me or does this place feel a bit out of date?”

“Elena, it's fine. We'll be fine.”

I nodded as we ascended to the top floor. “Here, you can have 301, I'll take 300. If you need anything, just yell. I'm sure the walls are thin enough.”

“You sure?”

We both laughed.

“Goodnight, Elena.”

“Night Cheng.”

I opened the door and walked into this old room with white walls covered in flowery wallpaper.

Everything else was wood. It was cold and I pulled off the blanket after I lit the lantern with my breath. Ever since I'd seen Sammy do it, I'd wanted to try it. The lights didn't work at all, but at least the water in the bathroom was hot.

A knock on the door made me jump. When I opened it I found nobody but my luggage. This place was getting creepier by the minute.

I took a long bath after I made sure the door was locked and just wished for all of this to be over. I had no idea what I was going to do if I couldn't go back to Dragonia. *Worse, what am I going to do if they send me back to the other side?*

To never be able to come back. *How was I going to hide my dragon form?* All these questions stayed with me, because I knew there was no way I would be able to find what could claim Blake and what my foretelling meant.

I needed to find a way for the council to never find me again. To hide, like an outcast the way Tanya had been sounded like my only option. But what about Cheng? I should've never dragged his dragon ass on this mission with me.

The bath warmed me up. It was weird how hot George and Blake always felt, but how cold I was.

There were a lot of things that didn't make any sense but then again, it could be the differences between male and female dragons. I still knew so little about them.

When I got out, I dressed myself in the warmest pajamas I owned. I pulled on four pairs of socks because my feet took forever to warm up, and slipped them into a soft pair of wool slippers.

I grabbed the blanket again when I stepped out of the hot bathroom and into the cold room. There was a fire place, but what I knew of starting a fire was dangerous and this guest house was doing everything in its power not to crash down to the ground as it was.

The bed was big, cold and hard. It made a squeaky sound as I climbed in and I read Lucian's foretelling again. *Why couldn't he have just written the answer in here, then none of this would've happened?*

I finally managed to fall asleep and woke up the next day to the smell of fresh bread. I got dressed and found Cheng at one of the wooden tables downstairs. He was having a huge breakfast and my stomach growled as I took a seat in front of him.

"Sleep well?"

"Yeah, just cold."

He frowned. "You're a Rubicon dragon, Elena."

"Tell me about it."

He chuckled.

Around nine we handed back our keys and left the tavern. The drive wasn't that long but it took us about four hours to get to where we wanted to be.

We parked the Range Rover at a safe place and grabbed our tents and backpacks as if we were going on a hike.

The detour to the Acker Woods was long and we needed to be prepared for anything. We passed a couple of meadows and took another path that led through tall grass. I flinched a bit because I could hear things crashing through the brush a couple of paces away from us.

"Just walk, Elena. They can sense we are dragons. I promise you they won't attack."

I took a deep breath and wanted to kiss the ground when we exited the path.

As we approached a steep mountain of a hill, the expression on my face told Cheng I was so not looking forward to this. He just chuckled and handed me a bottle of water.

We had to stop a couple of times and shake off our backpacks to catch our breath, but I had to admit the scenery was beautiful.

"How much further?" I said, out of breath.

"We're almost there," Cheng said from ahead as he paused and waited for me to catch up. "Here have a drink. It's just over that hill and then we're there."

"You think Lucian took this same route?"

"It's the only path that leads to the Acker Woods, so yeah, he took exactly this same path."

I looked around again and closed my eyes. My footsteps were taking the same path his had a couple of months ago.

I looked at the end of the hill again and took a big sip. Then something else flashed through my head. The view was different but

it was the same. I coughed and water flew out everywhere as I realized where I was.

“Elena are you okay? You should swallow.” He tapped my back hard and the coughing stopped. “What is it?” He followed my gaze.

“Nothing, it’s just, I know this place.” I sounded like a crazy person.

“How could you, you’ve never been here?”

“Weird,” I looked at Cheng. “Right.”

I picked up my backpack again and carried on walking. I couldn’t stop thinking about whether or not it was the right place. I kept looking over my shoulder trying to make sense of it, but I knew it was the hill from my dream. It felt like *déjà vu* the closer I came to the top and my heart pounded because I knew who used to wait for me at the other side of this hill. Would she be there this time? I hoped not because Cheng would definitely have a heart attack which would mean that I would have to carry on alone.

My feet slipped on some loose turf and Cheng helped me to climb further. He reached the top first and pulled me up with him.

I took in the view before me of row upon row of tall trees. They were big and nasty. In my dreams they had suffocated me so many times and here I was in real life. This wasn’t a dream anymore and there was no turning back or waking up this time.

Why on earth did Queen Catherine want me to come here?

“Elena, you okay?”

“Huh?” I snapped out of it.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” He laughed. “I know it’s intimidating, especially with those tall trees.” He smiled again and started running down the steep hill and toward the forest.

I followed him and skidded off on my bum. My shoe got caught on a rock and I tumbled over and landed flat on my face.

Cheng laughed again as he tried to help me get up. “You seriously are the worst Rubicon I’ve ever seen.”

I laughed with him. “Tell me about it.” I sighed again. “I just don’t know about this, Cheng,” I finally admitted as I stood up.

“Elena, we’ll get out. I promise.”

I nodded. Then I remembered what Lucian said that night. When I told him about George and Becky going on this trip. He got upset that it wasn’t me, implying that *I* should be the one to do this.

What was inside that forest that both these ghosts wanted me to find?

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR



WE FOUND A path and I couldn't stop watching the top of the trees swaying high above my head. I felt tiny, like a fairy with these gigantic trees surrounding me. I was waiting for a huge animal to run into our path any minute, but nothing came.

Huge roots forced the two of us to climb like one would on a wall, and as we climbed the more the forest welcomed us, and I had to admit, it was beautiful.

Cheng found a tree and stopped.

"You think that's wise?" I asked.

He smiled. "We found the tree, Elena."

"What tree?"

"The tree that looks like an old lady's face. See." He showed me and I looked up at the entire picture. It sure did resemble the face of an old lady. An old ugly lady.

"Now what?"

“Now we wait for a while, until the sun reaches her nose. Master Longwei said it will show us the way to go.” He took out a map. “The rest is easy to follow.”

“You’ve got a map?”

“Master Longwei gave it to me before we left.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“He said not to, until it was time.”

I shook my head softly and shook off my backpack. It landed with a thud on the ground. I sank down next to it and took the map from Cheng. It didn’t look like the kind of maps I was used to. It had funny dots and marks on it that I didn’t understand. I handed it back to him. “Even the maps are Greek.”

He chuckled again. “It’s a very old map, at least 300 years old. Master Longwei said there are only two in this world. He’s got one, and the other one is somewhere on the other side of the Wall.”

“Just tell me you know how to read it.”

“I can read it, Sort of.”

“Sort of?”

“I’m joking with you, Elena.” He laughed. “That look is priceless though.”

“Urgh!” I slapped him playfully. “My nerves are already shot. I don’t know what we are going to find there. Lucian didn’t even want to tell me.”

“Lucian communicated with you? How? Phones don’t work inside here.”

I took out my Cammy and it was dead. “Yes, he did,” I said as I kept staring at the Cammy inside my hand. “Lucian might not have had an extra ability, but he sure was special.”

“He mastered one of the transmission spells, didn’t he?”

“What is a transmission spell?”

“You can communicate with someone without the use of stupid towers or bars on your Cammy.”

I nodded.

“Which one?”

“I don’t know what they are called, but he appeared to me. He felt so real.”

Cheng’s eyes grew. “He mastered the dimperius spell?”

“The dim what?”

“A dimperius.” He looked at the ground. “Not many can. He sure was one hell of a guy.”

“Now he’s no more,” I said softly.

“Elena, it’s not your fault.”

“Cheng, don’t. I trusted Paul when I shouldn’t. I should’ve listened to you.”

“I had my doubts after a while too, Elena. He was really good at fooling everyone.”

I laid my head back against the tree’s bark and listened to the birds chirping high in the branches. I closed my eyes and let their cries transport me back to when he was still alive. It started to ache deep inside and I took a deep breath. “What if Lucian was my rider?”

“Don’t think like that. It would only drive you crazy. Besides, a dragon always knows, Elena. There is no what ifs with us.”

“How do you know? What does it feel like?”

“I don’t know how to explain it, it just is. It’s like when you know that the sky is blue and the ocean green. It’s not pink and it’s not red. You just know.”

I got what he was saying. So Lucian couldn’t have been my rider. Then who was?

He tapped my leg and I saw him looking up at the old lady’s nose. A light fell onto the path to the left of us and we picked up our bags.

Cheng walked with a map in one hand and a compass in the other as we walked through huge plants that made funny hissing noises. It really freaked me out and I walked as close to Cheng as I could. He just chuckled and shook his head slightly.

Yeah, I get it. I'm supposed to be a freakin' Rubicon.

"Just slap them if they get in your personal space."

"Who, the plants?"

"Yes, the plants. They're very curious."

I giggled at the image in my head, and somehow it made my fear of them disappear.

The path we took wasn't worn like most were, and it made it really hard to see where we were supposed to go.

I kept bumping into Cheng when he would stop dead in his tracks. Once he confirmed where we were on the map we carried on walking.

"So what, your tracking ability isn't that good?" I teased him after the tenth time we paused for him to look at the map.

"Not all dragons are born with that ability." He kept looking at the map with a hint of a smile on his face. He looked at the compass then. "Master Longwei said this would happen." He looked at his watch.

"What would happen?"

"It's getting late, we need to go back until the compass can show us north again. It's not safe to set up camp."

We turned around and walked back for about half an hour, Cheng went a couple of miles further, just to be safe. He made a huge red marking on one of the trees and then took a different direction. He found a huge hollow tree. "Would you do the honors?" he said as we peeked inside.

I lit up my hand like Blake showed me and the fire lit up everything in front of us. The inside was massive but creepy too.

The first thing we made was a fire and then we set up our tents inside the tree. Cheng took out tinned food and we each had a can of soup. I couldn't help but think of my dreams again. Why had Queen Catherine wanted me to come here?

"What's on your mind, Elena?"

I shook my head and saw him frowning because he kept staring at me. "I might as well tell you. I dreamt of this place."

"What?" He looked at me, surprised. "When?"

"Ever since I came to Paegeia."

"I thought it might be something like that. You came up with that plan of Becky dreaming about Tanya way too fast." He smiled. "What happens in the dream?"

I wanted to tell him about Queen Catherine but for some reason I had a feeling that Cheng was much safer not knowing. "Not much. I keep waking up when the trees try to pull me in."

He smiled. "It means then that you are on the right path, maybe we can go home after all of this."

"I'm not going to chase my foretelling, Cheng. People around me keep dying when I do. I can't lose you."

"Elena, you don't need to worry about me. I can look out for myself and I don't believe in that kind of destiny. You shouldn't need to get punished for the wrong choices you make, well not like the way you do. I can't tell you what to do, but answer this, would you rather go back to the other side? What if we could never come back?"

"I thought that is what you wanted?"

"We are different from the humans, Elena. We don't age like they do and we would be on the move every couple of years or so."

I smiled. "I like the 'we', it means that I don't have to face whatever is waiting for us alone."

"I'll miss Andreas," he said in a soft voice.

I'd never thought about that and what it was he would have to give up. "I'm sorry Cheng. I should've never mentioned your name in that meeting."

"Are you insane? You wouldn't have been able to do this by yourself. I'm happy to be here. It makes me feel important, as if I'm finally going to be part of something big."

I huffed and smiled. "Guess you weren't wrong about seeing my name inside that museum," I joked and we both laughed. "Thank

you, Cheng.”

“You’re very welcome. So what exactly did that foretelling say? ‘A day will come and a day will go...’”

“A choice I’ll have to make, otherwise the truth will never be known.”

“Any speculations to what it might be?”

I shook my head. “First time I thought it had to do with finding the sword, proving to everyone that dragon offspring can be worthy of the mark. Turns out the Viden was right. It was only a birth defect.”

“You can’t say that, Elena.”

“I’m a dragon, Cheng.”

“I think I know your reason the second time: it had to do with Paul. That’s why you were so angry with me, wasn’t it?”

I nodded.

“I’m so sorry, Elena.” He blew a gush of air out. “To have something that big in the Book of Shadows, not knowing what it means, it can’t be easy.”

“It’s a curse. I don’t know why everyone wanted theirs to appear inside that book. I never wanted it.”

“The ones that usually don’t want one, are the ones worthy enough to handle it. You will find what it means, Elena. I’ll help you, even if...”

“Don’t say those words.” I stopped him before he could say it.

“Lucian said the same before he came here, and it turned out to be exactly the last thing he did. I can’t lose more friends, Cheng. Not like that.”

He nodded. “We should try to get some sleep. I’ll take the first shift.”



T WAS HARD to fall asleep. I jumped at every noise in the forest. At twelve I heard a huge growl and it woke me up. Cheng was peeking out of the tree.

“What was that?” I whispered.

“Don’t know,” he said, still looking outside. “Master Longwei said that there are really dangerous creatures here at night, that was why I had to turn around. Go back to sleep. I’m sure whatever that was is way too big to get into this tree.”

Easier said than done, but somehow I dozed off.

Cheng woke me up around three. I sat at the entrance of the tree with the orange coals that were all that was left of the fire.

Outside looked creepy. The trees all had these huge dark shadows and I could see a couple of blinking eyes from the animals that roamed the night. I kept thinking I heard someone close by. I guess it was because of the growl I heard at twelve.

My heart would accelerate and I had to keep telling myself it was just my imagination. If Cara came out, it would be disastrous.

I must have dozed off because when I opened my eyes again, light started to pour into the entrance of the tree; I went outside and the picture of the sun’s rays seeping through the forest was breathtaking.

Some of the plants that curled up for the night, unwound into gigantic plants and it almost looked like all the trees were stretching out. I smiled as I looked up at them all. There weren’t a lot of animals because it was still cold. But the forest did block most of the breeze and winter away.

Cheng woke up around six-thirty and we had bacon and eggs for breakfast. I’d really started to like this camping thing as we had everything we could possibly need. We checked out the map that Master Longwei had given us and we knew more or less which way to go to find the tree with Cheng’s red marking.

Around seven-thirty we were all packed up and ready to move on.

Cheng put the compass away the minute we found the tree with the mark he’d made yesterday.

“Whatever happens from this point on, just let it happen, Elena. They won’t kill us. They are very curious people, some of them have never been outside these woods. I can promise you that.”

I nodded, but it was scary as I didn't know what they would do once they found us.

For the next two hours my senses were on high alert. I could smell every change in the forest and I could feel danger as it crept near. We passed a beautiful waterfall and Cheng looked at the map again. He turned his head in the waterfall's direction and then to the left.

"What is it?"

"We made it to the waterfall. Master Longwei said that it's a marker. If we got this far, they haven't detected us yet."

"Who, the forest people?"

He grinned. "You make them sound as if they are savages, Elena. They're not. Some of them are the smartest people in Paegeia. They don't live in a village, it's a city made in the heart of the forest. I can't tell you what it looks like, as most never make it back out, but I can tell you that it's not what you think it is. We're close." He started to walk forward again.

I closed my eyes for a second and thought about Lucian again. Did he get this far?

"So, what am I going to face with these people?"

"They're very private and they will not like that we are here one bit. But Master Longwei said the leader has a deep fascination for dragons. That is why I believe Tanya Le Frey is here."

"How does Master Longwei...whoa." Something tight trapped my angle and before I could spell my name I was dangling upside down.

"What the hell!"

"Relax, Elena." Cheng hung next to me. "It's only a matter of time before they get here."

"I don't like this Cheng."

"Don't bring her out, Elena. We are safe. This needs to happen. Remember. We're going to be fine."

I could feel the blood rushing to my head and I looked down to the ground. My cammy, change and gum that had been inside my pockets were lying on the floor, next to Cheng's cammy and a couple

of loose change, but only for a second. I watched as the earth opened up slightly and swallowed it. Guess I know now where people got that saying from.

“Cheng?” I whispered.

“What?”

“The earth just swallowed our Cammies.”

“Guess it needs it more than we do?”

“It’s not funny. How are we going to phone Master Longwei, and explain to me how can the ground open up and...”

“Elena it’s Paegeia. A lot of things don’t make sense.” He cut me off I blew out a deep breath. How long were we going to hang here? Then noises filled the area close by. It was a horrible hooting sound, a lot like Native Americans chanting around a fire, but worse. My skin crawled and I knew I shouldn’t be afraid. I was a Rubicon for crying out loud, but something in their tone made me believe that Master Longwei had no idea who these people were.

“We come in peace,” Cheng said and I tried to look at who he was speaking to. I found a brown and white painted face with huge earrings in the ears and nose. “I thought they weren’t primitive?” I whispered.

“I never said that. I said they weren’t savages.”

More appeared and they started poking at us with long spears. “Hey stop that,” I yelled. I looked at Cheng. “You sure about that last part?”

“Elena, don’t infuriate them.”

“No they shouldn’t infuriate me,” I grunted back.

Suddenly, I crashed to the floor without warning and my back and arm ached. I didn’t think anything was broken but I must have strained a muscle or something. The men circled us and all pointed their spears into our faces.

“Remember why we’re here, Elena. We need to be taken, so lift up your hands and surrender.”

I didn't like this one bit but I did what Cheng said without taking my gaze from them.

The tallest one said something in a different language and another one wearing a skimpy animal skin that only covered his private parts took both my hands and tied them up really fast. They did the same with Cheng and pushed us from behind to move forward.

I had to endure a lot of shoves from behind and needed to keep counting to ten to stop myself from lighting their asses on fire, or burning these stupid ropes from my wrists. They could thank their lucky stars that Cheng was with me otherwise they would've been little heaps of ashes.

We walked deeper into the forest for what felt like hours. I couldn't stop thinking about Lucian. He'd had to do this all alone.

The men at the front gave another order and I could hear a huge boulder moving in the distance. We followed them again and I saw an entrance appear through the mountain. When I looked up a figure looked down at me, but vanished from sight when it saw me staring.

The entrance was dark but the tight grip on my arm guided – shoved me in the right direction until light came up ahead.

When we exited the passage, I found myself in a beautiful place. It was inside the mountain and was so light that I would've thought that I'd died and gone to heaven. Vines ranked against the hard edges of the walls and trees as huge as the ones we'd just spent the night in, were used to build houses high up their branches. Tiny windows and little porches with ladders were all around the houses. I could make out a palace made of rocks way at the back. It was majestic and overpowered all of the trees.

A small trail close to the wall of the mountain led deeper into the city.

My feet skidded on a couple of small rocks and I was thankful that Cheng walked in front of me to block me from skidding down this trail.

The tree houses and palace disappeared as we descended and I couldn't stop looking at all the fauna and flora around me. Huge purple flowers with roots that moved and lots of green leaves and

vines wrapped all around the trees. Birds chirped and I jumped as a huge yellow bird with a long tail took flight. I watched it soar to the top of the mountain and leave through a large opening.

We finally reached the edge of the trail and came to a beautiful manmade lake. Women were grabbing children when they saw us and I looked at the way they climbed like little monkeys up the ladders and into their homes.

It made me feel as if I was the savage.

An animal roared near me and I jumped in the opposite direction. My eyes fell on a black as night puma, growling inches away from me.

The men that led us here started to laugh.

“It’s not a real puma,” Cheng whispered. “It’s a shifter.”

“I thought they were dead?”

“Apparently not,” he said. “These people crave the gifted. You should by no means show them what you are and what you can do. They will not let you go if they know you are a Rubicon,” Cheng whispered.

“Why are you telling me this now? Can they understand you?”

“No, they can’t. Only the leader can speak English, and of course, Tanya Le Frey.”

“Master Longwei tell you that too?” My tone sounded sarcastic.

We reached a cable car before Cheng could answer and we were shoved into it, followed by most of the men. It descended down into another part of the city. This time modern buildings and houses on top of each other passed us by. I tried to take it all in. “Not so primitive after all.”

Cheng suppressed his smile. He really wasn’t scared at all.

The cable car came to a halt and we stopped with a jerk. It opened onto another passage where the men handed us over to guards who were fully clothed. Each one carried a huge gun.

They had a short conversation with the four men still aiming their spears at us and when one of the guards took out a bag stuffed with

something, they gave us over to them. I looked at Cheng who for the first time looked worried too.

The new guards shoved us into the halls of what I imagined was the palace, or with my luck, the dungeon.

They led us past more dark halls and stopped right in front of a door. When two of the men opened the doors, a light coming from the other side blinded both Cheng and I. It took a couple of minutes for our eyes to adjust. The guards shoved us again from behind and I almost fell into a huge throne room.

I looked at the man sitting on the throne in front of me. He didn't look very impressed that we were there. At least Master Longwei had been right about something.

A dark hatred danced in his eyes. This was a cruel man. I could feel it inside my dragon bones and Cheng had been wrong: we weren't going to come out of this alive. That man looked as if he was going to execute us at any moment.

"Bow," Cheng said and I did as he asked. My hands started to become hot, and I knew at any minute the rope around my wrists was going to fall off.

"Why are you here?" the man asked.

"We wish to speak with Tanya Le Frey, sire," Cheng answered.

"Another one." The leader or whatever he was sounded annoyed. It was Lucian he was referring to.

"Please sire, the one that came before us died and we don't know the verdict of the business he had with Tanya Le Frey; I beg you, we need to speak with her," Cheng pleaded.

My heart sunk as the guy next to me pointed his gun straight at us. He was ready to pull that trigger when their leader gave the command.

"No, he promised no one else would come and that he would never set foot here to speak with this so-called Tanya Le Frey ever again."

"Sire, I beg you..."

“I said no.” The leader got up on both his feet, roared and nodded to the guards.

I shifted without thinking about it and blew fire on the one guy right next to me as I hit Cheng down with my tail.

“Elena, stop. Please, stop,” Cheng sounded worried and had both hands up in defense. I did as he asked and the leader was staring at me with huge brown eyes. He showed the halt sign as his eyes just lingered on my majestic body.

“Where are we?” Cara asked.

“Not now, Cara. We are in grave danger, these people want to kill us and we have to get out of here.”

“Just give the command, Elena and I’ll kill whoever you want me to.”

“Deep breaths, Elena,” Cheng said again.

“They tried to kill us, Cheng. You promised that wouldn’t happen.”

“You speak English?” the leader asked.

“Yes, and you are?” Cara spoke this time.

“I’m Balitomora De Ganor, son of—”

“Balti is just fine, no need for the entire history lecture.” Cara sounded so rude.

The sire laughed as if she was merely telling a joke. He touched his chin and kept staring at us. There was lust and want in those big brown puddles and I felt sick.

“What the hell is he looking at?”

“Us?” I replied.

“What is it you want with Tanya?” Balti asked.

“My friend already explained that to you,” I said.

“He’s your rider?”

“I don’t have a rider,” Cara spat.

“She’s a Rubicon dragon, sire.”

The guy looked at Cheng with horror then back at me. “She can’t be, only one can live at a time. We know the one is male.”

“It turns out that they were wrong, sire. We believe Tanya has the answers,” Cheng said.

“I don’t.” A woman’s voice came from behind us. “I told Lucian everything I could. Now get the hell out!”

I turned around and my entire body froze on the spot. In front of me was a woman I’d only seen once. In a picture that I’d lost that night on Interstate 40.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE



COULDN'T SPEAK. I was bowled over. *Tanya Le Frey was my mom?*

"Please, Tanya, you have—"

"What is the Rubicon doing here? Are you insane?" She looked at Cheng through slits.

"It's not him. It's another one," Cheng said.

"Tanya," the leader spoke. "You said this wouldn't happen again."

"Mom," I finally found my voice. She turned her gaze from Balti back to me and her eyebrows furrowed hard.

I heard Cara gasp. *That is our mother?*

I ignored Cara completely.

"Who are you?" Tanya wanted to know.

Betrayal and hurt jolted through Cara's body and mine. It numbed her completely, so it was my time to be strong now, and ask the questions. "What are you doing here?" I yelled at her.

She looked at Cheng for the answer. “How is it that this dragon can speak English? Who is he if not Blake?”

Cheng stared at both of us. I could see in his eyes that he felt my pain and anger. It was silent for a short while before he spoke again. “It’s not a he, it’s female. Her name is Elena.”

Tanya grabbed her mouth. “Change back immediately. Now!” she yelled at me.

My head turned to Cheng who was still protected by my tail. We both just stared at each other.

“Now, Elena, turn back,” Tanya yelled again.

I did as she asked and she ran over to wrap a table cloth that was spread over one of the tables around my naked body. My eyes didn’t leave hers. “I’m sorry that this is happening.” She looked back at Balti. “I know the consequences but I need to speak to my daughter in private, please my liege.”

The leader nodded. “But the boy stays.”

I looked at Cheng. “It’s okay, Elena. Go talk to your mom. I’ll be fine.” He sounded stunned, mixed with confused, exactly the way I felt.

I looked back at Balti. “If you hurt him, I swear to you...”

“Don’t,” my mom grunted.

“He will pay if he hurts my friend,” I grunted back.

“Understood,” the sire said and my mom pulled me away into another passage. I just stared at her as I kept the same pace as hers. Hurt jolted through my entire body again followed by a lot of anger. We took a lift and my eyes didn’t leave her for one second.

When the door closed I gave it to her. “You left us. How could you do that? I was only two years old.”

“Elena, I had no choice.”

“Don’t give me that bullshit, Mom. How could you do that?”

“Watch your tongue.”

“Don’t tell me what to do, you gave up that right the day you walked out of my father’s house.”

My words stung her, but it was not nearly the hurt I felt. She closed her eyes. "Believe me I've been punishing myself every single day for leaving you and Jako." She flinched. "I mean Herbert."

"So, Jako was Herbert?" I asked. I should've known that. I should've looked for what Jako looked like when my curiosity about him was piqued. They were so similar in so many ways.

She nodded.

"Why didn't he tell me? About what I am? About this?"

"This isn't the place Elena."

"What!"

"I know you have many questions, but this isn't the place to get them answered."

My nostrils flared and I thrust myself against the elevator's wall with both arms curled, still clutching the table cloth around my naked body.

My mind went crazy with questions and Cheng managed to enter it too. "Is my friend going to be okay with this Balti guy?"

She smiled slightly. "Yes, he knows he's a dragon. He finds dragons fascinating."

"So I've been told."

The elevator opened and I followed her down another hall. She opened a door that led into a small apartment that was very high class. Everything was marble and pure white. The kitchen had a glass table and the most beautiful oven I'd ever seen. All the décor was crystal, and on the table stood a crystal vase with the most beautiful flowers in a million different colors. A huge tree even grew right through her apartment.

A monkey came out of nowhere and jumped onto her shoulder. She patted it softly and gave it air kisses before she took it off her shoulder and put it onto the tree.

"Sit," she ordered me. "I'll make you some tea and get you some clothes to wear."

“I don’t want tea, I want answers,” I yelled again. “Why did you leave?”

“I couldn’t stay, Elena. I wanted to so badly, but I couldn’t. Jako kept moving us around. Said there were dragons that knew about you and that they wanted to kill us. He moved deeper into the city and I couldn’t change anymore. I am what I am, even if I try not to be. I couldn’t go without my true form, so the best thing for me was to leave.”

“You only thought about yourself. What about me and Dad? You couldn’t just try to make it work. You never even came back.”

She closed her eyes. “I couldn’t...”

“Oh please, don’t give me that crap.” I wiped off an angry tear and threw myself down onto the whitest couch I had ever seen. This entire place would drive me insane.

She came over to me and sat down on the opposite couch. I could feel her eyes on me but I didn’t want to look at her. I’d never felt so betrayed in my entire life.

“When did you turn into a dragon?” she asked.

“The day Lucian died.”

Her eyes grew and a gasp left her mouth. “Lucian died?”

“Don’t, it’s not like you knew him.”

She sucked in a silent breath. My words stung her more than I’d hoped for, but she deserved it, all of it.

“I knew how he felt about you and you about him. I’m sorry,” she said in a soft voice. It was silent for a while as I kept staring at the tree that grew majestically through her apartment. “Did he tell you anything?” she asked.

“Nothing, he told me nothing because he died. Why do you think we are here? Vacation?”

She bit hard on her lower lip and took a deep breath before her gaze turned down another hall behind her. “Anna!” Tanya yelled.

I frowned as a girl in her early teens came running into the room. She had blond hair like mom and bright blue eyes. She was slender

and really tall.

“Please give Elena some of your clothes.”

“Mom!” The girl protested.

“Please, Anna, do as you are told.”

The girl turned around and disappeared.

I started to laugh. “You are unbelievable, you know that.” I glared at the woman who I would have given anything to find a couple of years back. “Does she know who I am? Did Dad know?”

“Yes, Jako knew.”

I couldn't believe I had a half-sister. “Is she a dragon too?”

“No, she's not, and neither are you.”

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX



“EXCUSE ME,” I said. “Are you blind? What do you call that thing that was in the throne room a couple of minutes ago?”

She gave me a sarcastic look she had no right to give. She’d *left*. She deserved everything that was coming to her.

Anna came back with some clothes and dropped them on the couch. She glared at her mom and then at me and left. Ungrateful little brat.

“Thank you, darling.”

Darling? I shook my head again and took the clothes that were lying on the couch. The jeans were a bit too long and I rolled up the legs. The shirt and jersey were long too, but at least they kept me warm. I hated winter and I hated the cold, but it was warm here.

“I know what it is you’re thinking, but the dragon in you should have never awoken.”

I laughed again. “The dragon in me...” I whispered. “I’m so sick and tired of the crap that keeps on happening to me.”

“Elena I know you are angry, believe me this wasn’t how we wanted you to find out about Paegeia and who you are.”

I shook my head in disgust. She didn’t know me at all, how could she possibly know who I was now. I was only two years old when she’d left. I’d needed her just as badly as that brat, Anna, did.

“I know you think by leaving you...” She stroked her face hard.

“Believe me, I know seeing Anna doesn’t help, but I’m not as selfish as you think and I do love you, that is the truth. I’ve thought about you every single day.”

I wiped away another tear. “Spare me. Just tell me what you told Lucian, or must I guess the way he did, too?”

She looked down at the carpet. “You don’t need to guess.”

“Is there something that can claim Blake?”

She nodded.

“Where is it?”

“It is sitting right in front of me.”

I looked behind me and found an empty table pushed against the wall. I turned back to her because she didn’t make any sense. Then it hit me, as if it was a hand that had slapped me across the face. She was referring to me. I started to laugh. “What? If you haven’t noticed, I’m a dragon. And one that resembles him.”

She looked up at me sternly. “I told you before, you’re not a dragon, Elena.”

“Then what am I! Cause I know you saw that dragon a couple of minutes ago too.”

“It’s not what it looks like. She was never supposed to wake up. You have to get rid of her.” She got up and leaned on the kitchen table with her back facing me.

She? “What do you know about her?”

“It doesn’t matter anymore, what matters now is you, you have to get rid of her, Elena.”

“How do you suppose I do that, I can’t kill her! I’ll die too.”

She turned back around. “No, you won’t. But I promise you if you ascend and she is still inside of you, you will die.”

“Then so be it because I’m not getting rid of Cara. She’s the only being that truly understands me.”

Tanya gasped. “Cara.” Tears glistened in her eyes.

“You do know her?”

She didn’t nod but the expression on her face and the tears glistening in her eyes told me she knew who Cara was. I had a horrible feeling that the story behind her and me wasn’t a good one.

“What did you do, Mom?”

She was silent for a few seconds.

“My sister was so happy the day Irene told Robert that his son’s Dragonian would be coming from their bloodline. It’s the only thing she ever wanted, Elena.”

“Your sister…” I thought hard. “You mean the queen.”

Tanya nodded.

“That never happened. She died before she could?”

“That’s not entirely true. She had a child. But nobody could know about the baby. We still didn’t know who was going to betray them and therefore everyone was a suspect, except me. I shared a dent with Katie, I would never have betrayed her like that,” she said and wiped away another tear as she spoke about the rider she’d left alone to die.

“Before her belly grew too big, we told the council that we were going on a quest in order to enhance Katie’s hearing ability. They had no clue it was a lie because dents don’t have to go on quests to enhance anything.” She sighed and bit hard on her lower lip. “We couldn’t tell Robert about it either because we didn’t know who was going to betray them. Jako found out when the baby was born and he promised to keep our secret. We were going to let another woman claim the child as hers and she would be sent for to come and live in the palace, that way the baby could always be close to them and when the danger was over, the truth would be revealed. That was the plan, but the circumstances we found ourselves in after

the child's birth made it impossible. Two weeks later we found out that the little one was sick. An infant that small will die if a Swallow Annex tries to heal it, so I had to watch my sister say her goodbyes to the one thing she wanted the most in the world." She shook her head. "I couldn't." A tear rolled over her face and dropped from her chin. She didn't even wipe it away. "Irene gave me a foretelling when Cara's egg hatched, she said one wouldn't make it, but two might. I never knew what that meant until that very moment. I knew what had to be done and I sacrificed Cara to keep my sister's baby alive. I gave both children the Calupso potion. One that would draw the essence of the sick child into the strong one. Cara didn't have her human body yet, and if it worked, she would turn into their child, meaning that their blood would flow through her veins and the stronger one would die."

I remembered what she'd said earlier. That I could claim Blake. She'd sacrificed Cara to save the queen's baby. The air was sucked out of my lungs. *What the hell was she saying?*

"What?" I whispered.

"You're that baby, Elena. Your mother loved you so much." She looked away and I took another deep breath.

"No," I jumped up. "Dad would've told me."

"He tried." Her tone turned harder as she tried to reason with me. She got up too and just watched me as I paced up and down her living room with the huge oak growing through it. "When you were ten, he told you the truth. You cried so much and you didn't want to accept it. He called me and asked me to wipe it clean from your memory. He never tried it again, he was always afraid you would react the same way."

I stopped in my tracks as I remembered that night on Interstate 40. Dad wanted to tell me about something important, he wanted to take me out to dinner but he didn't get the chance. Then his stories of Paegeia that I couldn't remember suddenly came back.

"Wait, what do you mean you wiped it clean?"

"I can erase some memories if needed, persuade minds if I have to."

“You wiped away Dad telling me that I was King Albert and Queen Catherine’s daughter?” It sounded unreal.

She nodded.

“You didn’t just wipe that away, you wiped away everything he ever told me of Paegeia.”

“What?” She stared at me.

I started to pace up and down again, biting hard on the flesh inside my mouth, my hand tangled inside my hair. “I knew there had to be some explanation for why I couldn’t remember any of the details,” I murmured. I just never imagined it was something that would be so hard to swallow.

“I’m so sorry. I don’t have control over it completely if it’s someone I care for.”

I stopped in my tracks at her words. “You never cared for me, just like you never cared for Cara.”

“Don’t say that. I cried for my child every day, Elena. I still do. She was never meant to come back, but something awoke her that day. She’s not a Rubicon, she was a Thunderlight. The reason she turned into a Rubicon was because of who you are and who your dragon is. You turned into a Rubicon, because of the bond you share with Blake.”

“I don’t share a bond with him. He hates my guts,” I yelled.

She started to laugh. “How did he react when he saw you as a dragon?”

I squinted. Forcing my mind to remember when Blake ran into the cave the day Lucian died. He was shocked.

“You don’t have to tell me, I can see it on your face. A dragon always knows who his rider is.”

“No, he would’ve said something.”

“He’s dark Elena. The dragon part of him doesn’t want to be claimed, yet he saved you a couple of times, or so Lucian told me.”

I just stared at her. Lucian knew. The dream of Paul...did that really happen somehow in-between all the craziness? He was talking

about Blake? He didn't care that Paul claimed to be my rider. He didn't care.

"It's the good in him," Tanya said. "The part that keeps holding on. He knows who you are, but Cara threw him off that path. I think she threw plenty of people off that path."

"What do you mean?"

"Ever wonder why everyone you met ended up staring at you?"
Blake's unfinished story jumped into my mind.

"It's because you look just like him, Elena. You have your father's hair and soft eyes, but your mother's grace and beauty."

"How did I get past the Wall?"

"You were inside Cara," she said. "Jako found us three days after. When he found Cara, he was so happy that she was still alive. I never told him what I did or why I left. He assumed so many times that Katie's daughter was dead and I never corrected him because I wasn't sure if it would work." She looked at me as I found my way back to the couch. "A couple of months passed. It was the best time of our lives. Then it was time for Cara to get her human body. She was supposed to be a little girl of five and I was with her in the bathroom when the shift came. It wasn't a five year old girl, Elena, she was only one. Jako knew immediately what I had done and everything went downhill from there. He tried not wanting anything to do with you, but for some reason you wanted nothing to do with me and just wanted him. So yes, he was your father in so many ways, but your true father was someone so much more, Elena. Your parents wanted you so badly and both had to deal with the fact that they might never see you again."

I shook my head fast. It was spinning with so many questions that had finally gotten their answers. "Why did we move so much?"

"Other dragons found out about you, they just had to look at you once and they knew who you were. Not all of them wanted to protect you. Fox was one that was desperate to kill you, but there were twelve groups of dragons that vowed to protect you. They always found a way to warn your father, before they died. That is why he

didn't register us with the council. Because he couldn't let them find you."

Tears glistened in my eyes as I thought about my dad. How much he must've hated me in the beginning, knowing that I killed his daughter.

"You have to kill Cara, sweetheart."

"Are you insane?" I yelled. "I can't kill her. She is mine."

"She's not yours. Blake is your dragon and when he turns, Elena he will take you with him. Your bond was supposed to be made a long time ago, you weren't supposed to wait like this." She was starting to get angry now.

"Kill Cara, or I'll do it myself."

"She's your daughter, still."

"That isn't my little girl in there, it's something else."

"I can't kill her. I won't kill her and I don't care what happens to me."

"Then your mother and father died for nothing."

"Well, she couldn't have loved me that much if she gave me away."

Tanya slapped me across the face. "You have no idea what that woman went through when she gave you up. Now go to your room."

"You're not my mother," I yelled.

"Finally."

I turned around and just ran down the hall. I flew into the first room I found and fell on the bed. My cheek still hurt from Tanya's slap. *How dare she, how dare they?* I didn't understand any of this. Who I was, what I was supposed to do.

Tears flowed down my cheeks, but I refused to wipe them away. I couldn't kill Cara, she gave me something I'd never had before: strength and courage. She'd gotten rid of my fear, she'd given me freedom. I would die if I killed her. She was mine and I loved her with all of my heart.

I fell asleep and found myself on that hill again.

Queen Catherine was waiting for me.

I ran to her this time. I'd never felt this much anger, betrayal and rejection before. "Why didn't you keep me?" I yelled and she just stared at me.

Tears sparkled in her eyes and for the first time she moved toward me. Her touch felt so real, she wrapped her arms around me and squeezed so tight. "I love you so much," she said and pushed me away so she could see my face. The kind Queen Catherine from the pictures stared back at me. She stroked my face gently. "You look so much like your father." A tear rolled down her cheek and her head touched mine gently. "I would've done anything to keep you, my sweet, sweet girl. But I couldn't." She smiled. "You finally know the truth, I can rest in peace."

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN



WOKE UP AND had no idea what the time was. When I went outside I found Tanya in the kitchen. She was brewing something. Cheng lay on the couch sleeping and unharmed.

Relief that he was safe washed over me. I almost wanted to curl up beside him and just lie on the couch right next to him, but he looked so peaceful.

I covered my nose with my sleeve, blocking the stench of whatever Tanya was brewing. When she heard me she turned around.

“You must be hungry, come sit.” She pulled out a chair.

“When did he come back?” I gestured to the sleeping Cheng as I took the seat in front of the breakfast nook.

“Around five.”

“Did you tell him who I am?”

She nodded.

That’s just great.

“Elena, I’m so sorry about Lucian. I know how you felt about him.”

“You know nothing.”

“He told me about the two of you.”

“Did you tell him who I was?”

“I couldn’t because of the vow I had made with your mom. He guessed it right on the first time.”

“What do you mean the first time?”

“It was like he knew, he just wanted confirmation.” She smiled at me softly as she put a plate of bread, ham and cheese in front of me. “I was shocked to learn that you were inside of Paegeia and couldn’t understand why Jako didn’t tell the council who you were. When he told me that Jako died, and that Matt brought you here without giving an explanation as to who you were, I realized he’d never gotten the chance to tell you.” She sniffed hard and turned around to stir the brew again. “How did he die?”

“It was a rainy day. We were fleeing again....” Pausing to think about how stubborn and hateful I’d been toward him every time he made us move, I didn’t finish that sentence. I hated myself for that. “Fox found us, he caused a car accident. Dad transformed for the first time in front of me. I never knew what he was.”

She gave me a sad chuckle while shaking her head softly. “Metallic dragons are so good at hiding their true form.”

I imagined Lucian, how he would have acted when he realized Blake was my dragon, not just my dragon but my dent.

“He struggled to accept it, Elena. But before he left, he’d made peace with it.”

I looked at Tanya who was staring at me. “You can read minds?”

She laughed. “No, your mom wanted to know if I could read minds too on so many occasions.” She filled a cup with juice and placed it in front of me. “She used to ponder things, you carry the same look as her, you know. It’s really not that hard to know what you are thinking.”

“I dreamt about her.”

Emotion left her face as she looked at me. “You dreamt about Katie?”

I nodded.

She huffed. "It doesn't surprise me. Sometimes our loved ones who are no longer with us guide us to the truth in our dreams."

"Why didn't they tell Sir Robert?"

"That was my fault. I was sure that he was with whoever was going to betray your father. They didn't share a dent."

"If that was what you thought, you don't know him one bit. He loved the king, he would've done anything for him."

"We had our differences, Elena. We could never see eye to eye, it blinded me then. I know now that Robert would never have done anything to hurt Albert. What they did to Robert and still do, Albert would turn in his grave if he knew."

"How do you know that?"

"Know what?"

"What they are doing to him?"

She smiled again. "I might live here, but we do hear about everything that is going on inside Paegeia. Not letting your father share the news about you with his dragon is the second thing I will never forgive myself for, Elena."

"What is the first?"

"Breaking my sister's promise. That I would treasure her child as if she was my own. That I would watch over her and enjoy every milestone, every birthday that she wouldn't."

"You know how she died?"

Tanya nodded and quickly wiped away another tear. "I felt it that night."

"What?"

"I didn't know what was going on, but Jako did. I was withering in pain. If your mother was still alive, I wouldn't have been able to return to Paegeia. She bound me with her life to never come back until the right time. The bond vanished the minute she died."

"Nobody ever suspected Goran."

She shook her head. "He was their most trusted friend, Elena. Your mom even asked him to make her a coward's potion so that whoever would betray them might think she'd died and leave her. She tried everything in her power to be reunited with you."

Bastard. I closed my eyes trying to paint a picture of my mom and her wanting me so badly. There were so many blanks that would never be filled.

"Look who's awake." Cheng's voice came from behind me.

I turned around and looked at him. He gave me a hug and it felt nice.

"You finally got your answers?"

"Just not the ones I wanted."

"We can go home, Elena. You found out what your foretelling means."

"I can't claim Blake, Cheng."

"Elena?" Tanya's tone was harsh.

"No, I can't claim him. I don't want to claim him. You have no idea what he is like, and I'm not going to kill the one thing that knows me better than I know myself."

"Elena. Don't do this," Cheng begged softly.

"No Cheng, Blake is the last person that deserves to be claimed."

"It's already started."

We both looked at Tanya. "Cheng told me that they have sedated him. If that is the truth, there is no way she could feel it."

"Feel what!"

Tanya smiled. "Just shows you how strong your bond is."

"Again with this bond crap. I hate him, and I'll always hate him. Cara is not going to die because of him. I refuse to do that."

I got up.

"Elena?" Cheng's voice was close to me.

"Don't, let her come to terms with it in her own time," Tanya said just as I opened the door to the room I'd slept in.

I could hear Cheng and Tanya still talking. I couldn't hear what they were saying but I bet I knew what it was about. They were wrong, I would never come to terms with it, and I would make Cheng promise me never to tell them who I was. Even if I had to scare the living crap out of him, I wasn't going to claim the Rubicon.

I became tired again and fell asleep as I refused to think about anything anymore. I loved Lucian and Cara was my dragon, it was going to stay that way. Even if it killed me.



THE NEXT MORNING I walked in on Cheng and Anna having a conversation around the breakfast table. Tanya wasn't there and Anna gave me an awkward smile.

"Come, sit down have some breakfast, princess," Cheng said and smiled.

I pulled out one of the nine chairs and slumped down onto the seat. "Don't call me that."

He chuckled. "You are one, doesn't matter what you say."

"Now I know how Lucian felt."

They both chuckled.

"I liked him, I'm sorry that he died," Anna said right before she put a heap of scrambled egg into her mouth.

"It turns out that Anna's dad is the leader, or the Khumutsi, as you call him?" Cheng asked her.

She nodded. "He's not all that bad once you get to know him."

"I bet." I played with my food.

"Eat, it's a long way back," Cheng said.

"We can fly back."

"Elena!"

"Don't, Cheng."

He dropped it and the table fell silent.

I still couldn't think about it, let alone consider it. She was my life, she kept me alive. I was too weak to survive, if I killed her now, I'd die anyway.

The door flew open and Tanya came in. "You have to go, now."

"Mom!" Anna jumped from her chair with huge unblinking eyes.

"Your father has a deep fascination with Cheng, Anna. He doesn't want him to leave." She looked at Cheng. "You should've never told him what you were, Cheng. He's always wanted a Crown-Tail. Now get your bags and follow me."

We didn't need to be asked twice and followed Tanya to the back of their house. She moved a painting away and pressed a button. A door that was hidden in one of the wall panels opened. Two familiar chairs covered with cobwebs looked back at us.

"You have an elevator?"

"He doesn't know about it, now go."

We sat down on the chairs. "Where will this take us?" Cheng asked.

"Don't worry, you'll have enough time, just remember your promise Cheng."

"What promise?" I looked at both of them but Cheng looked away.

The door of Tanya's apartment flew open again and male voices filled the room.

"There is no time, just keep quiet," Tanya whispered. She didn't even cover the opening.

The men found her and she stood by the window pretending to look outside. My heart sat in my throat as the men saw me and Cheng.

I almost jumped up but Cheng held me down and shook his head.

Was he blind, they were going to kill us. I glared back at him and he tapped on his head with his finger and pointed at Tanya.

I looked at her figure still standing as if nothing was wrong at the window.

"Where are they?" one of the men asked.

“They left last night,” Tanya had questions in her eyes. “You didn’t take them out?”

One of the guys spoke on the radio and I could hear another answering back. They all turned around and exited. When the coast was clear Tanya came back to us.

“Why didn’t they see us? We were right in front of them.” I asked, shock mixed with surprise and relief laced my tone.

Cheng started to laugh.

“I’ll take that as a compliment, Elena,” Tanya said and gave Cheng two kisses on the cheek. She turned to me and I pulled myself away from her. “Okay, just take care and do as you are told, Elena. She will kill you if you ascend and she’s still inside of you. Don’t let your parents’ sacrifice be for nothing,” she begged.

“Remember our promise, please,” she said to Cheng again. “Take care.” She closed the door.

“What promise, Cheng?”

The two chairs dropped and I took a breath when they came to a halt. We flew forward and the chairs threw us into the air. I fell with a thud onto the ground.

It was night time and I looked back. The Acker Woods were behind us and there was no sign of an elevator.

I looked at Cheng who lay a couple of paces in front of me. “Let me guess, Paegeia.”

Cheng chuckled, but the seriousness in his face came back instantly. “We need to get the hell out of here, Elena. They will follow us.” He started to strip down.

“Wait, what promise did you make Tanya?”

He stopped and sighed.

“She told me what has to be done, and she asked me to do it.”

I clenched my jaw. “You want to kill me.”

“Not you, Cara. She’s not supposed to be in there. You’ll ascend, Elena, and it could happen any moment. You will die.”

“I will die if I kill her, Cheng.”

“Not with this.” He took out a bottle with purple liquid in it. “Only she will die.”

I shook my head.

“It has to be done, Elena. You are the only one that can claim him. Your father and mother gave their lives for the both of you. You can free Etan,” he pleaded. “In all our time spent together, there is one thing I’ve come to learn about you. You care more than you should. It’s a fine quality for a princess. We’ve got a way to reunite families, Elena. Think about Constance, Master Longwei, my father might still be alive. If not for Blake, please do it for us.”

I closed my eyes. Why did he have to bring that up? A part of me always wanted to find a way to free

Etan, to pay back Constance by reuniting her family, but never in a million years did I imagine that it was me that would have that ability.

“She will know the minute I turn what we have planned.”

“Then give her the choice. If she loves you the way you love her, she will do it, Elena. It has to be done.”

I pressed my palm hard against my right eye and started to take off my clothes too. I shifted immediately.

“Are we safe?” Cara’s voice filled my head. “Elena what happened, where is Mom? Where are we?”

She had so many questions and refused to look at the images of what had happened.

The picture of me nodding filled my mind. It was followed by the entire conversation of what her mom had done, how she’d sacrificed her life to save mine and how I’d protested at the idea of killing her.

We’d just started to ascend when a net caught Cheng and started to pull him back to the ground.

“Cheng!”

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT



CARA AND I stopped in mid-air. Cheng was growling and fighting as the rope of the net brought him down faster than we could react.

Cara didn't think twice, she darted back down. The flashes inside her mind showed me a war against the Rubicon and the savages that wanted to capture my friend. I agreed and we dove faster.

I saw Cheng tangled up in nets and another one shot out, aiming for me and Cara. Hot lava boiled inside my core and ran up my throat. A flame of pink fire turned the net into ashes, disintegrating it on the spot. I watched as each little dust cloud evaporated into nothing.

Cheng was dragged at the speed of light into the woods as Cara landed perfectly on the ground.

Through the corner of both my eyes I saw a couple of guards run fiercely toward me. My head snapped back and a snarl I'd never even known was in me growled their way. It blew them a couple of yards back. The ones attacking from the left found the soles of Cara's feet as she stepped on two of them. The crushing of metal didn't even hurt my paws as I thought it would. The sound of a weapon going off hurt my ears and I flinched. The bolt of the electricity came next as it connected with my scales.

It didn't harm my body as they'd hoped and two more guards felt Cara's wrath as my core and throat lit up once again.

I searched fiercely for Cheng and saw them pulling him with a device to load him onto the back of a truck. He was still speaking Latin and fighting against them with all his might.

The earth shook as I ran back into the forest and trees fell around me like dead bodies.

Every war has its casualties, Paul's favorite sentence jumped into my head.

The outline of a spear was loaded at the back of the truck. A human figure was making his way behind the spear as they finally managed to slide Cheng's huge dragon form on board. The sound of the spear releasing was way slower than the actual speed and it connected with my body. Cara gave a small grunting sound but I refused to let it slow me down and I pushed forward. I wasn't going to lose another friend because of this stupid foretelling. Not this time.

We moved faster and I could feel a nearby tree connecting with the side with the spear lodged in my body and the pain of the weapon breaking in half was ten times worse than when it'd hit us.

When we were free from whatever the spear was connected to, Cara let out another furious growl and my head jolted up into the guy that'd climbed in behind the spear. Cara opened her mouth again and zapped his ass with lightning. I watched in horror as he fell back and shook as voltage stung him over and over again.

The earth shook with every step we took and the truck carrying Cheng's dragon body came closer. Cara released chlorine gas and the entire area filled with green smoke. For the next couple of minutes we heard men coughing like crazy and then all sound died down.

I took a deep breath and the chlorine pulled back into my lungs. The burning sensation felt like euphoria and I wanted more, but the reality of the danger we were still in brought me back and I opened my eyes. Bodies lay everywhere, and the only one that was still coughing was an enormous heap lying on the back of the truck. I

knew I had to get him out of here and back to the sky where he could fill his lungs with fresh air.

The crushing of bodies under my feet as I tried to get to the truck didn't even bother me. These men were evil, and they shouldn't have tried to trap my friend tonight and drag him back to their lair. *What was going through their minds? They knew what I was, what I could do, did they really think I would let them take my friend?*

I ripped off the net that clung to Cheng's body like a spider's web around a fly. It wasn't hard to snap it in two and with a couple of bites Cheng was finally free.

"We need to move fast," Cara's voice said in my mind. *"More are coming. I can hear them."*

I looked up and felt their footsteps on the ground.

"I can hear them too," I thought back and looked down at Cheng still lying in the same spot. "We've got to move," I yelled at him.

He spoke Latin and I couldn't understand one single word. Then he tried to lift up his wing and I figured out what the problem was. He was hurt.

Shit. "Don't worry, just hold onto my back."

"Elena," he said my name in a protesting tone, but my claws were already around his body and with one flick I threw him onto my back. He landed with a thud and an 'oomph' escaped his lips.

"Just hold on, Cheng."

I ran toward the edge of the forest. The minute no tree tops were hovering over us, I took flight. The spear in my torso ached but I could feel Cara's strength pushing through all the pain. We jolted up into the air as if our lives depended on it.

"Our lives do depend on it," Cara thought and I added my strength just as hers was fading.

"Elena, I can't hold on anymore."

"We are almost there Cara, please, just a little bit longer. If we can just get the spear—"

“No, this is exactly what should be done. It’s time. I can’t let both of us die. So many people sacrificed their lives to keep you safe.”

A jolt of emotion, pain, and anger attacked my heart as she said those words. She was giving up. “I don’t care,” I said through gritted teeth. “You just hold on, you hear me. You are not going anywhere. I don’t care,” I said again.

“But I do, Sugar. We sometimes have to make decisions we don’t want to. I gave my life so that an amazing princess could live. It’s time to be reunited with my dad.”

“Cara, don’t leave me,” I choked as my tears flowed. “There has to be another way.”

“There is no other way,” she said in a weak voice. “You’ve got to let me go. I’ve done what I had to do and you gave me one last amazing flight.”

A dragon wail left my mouth.

“Don’t make that awful sound. I should’ve never woke up but your need for me was too strong. You are stronger now, and you know what must be done.”

“I can’t do that. I won’t do that,” I yelled at her. “You are my dragon, and that is final.”

“I’m not your dragon and I’m not going to fight with you. I don’t want that to be my last memory of you, Elena. I want it to be a peaceful one. You will be fine. You are stronger now, it’s time to let me go.”

Silence filled the air leaving us both with only the flapping sound of our wings.

“Can I ask you one favor though?”

I nodded.

“Can you please try and get me to see the stars?” Her voice came out a whisper, even the glimpses of the stars she was thinking of was weak. “I want to see them one last time.”

“Cara, I can’t do this. I don’t know how to, I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Baby, but no need for both of us to die. You were made for so much more, you need to save the people of Etan. It was

both our home. You are an amazing girl Elena, and I can see great things in your future. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise."

I knew it was a lost cause to try and talk her out of this. She'd made up her mind and she was exactly like Dad. When they made up their minds it was final. I swallowed my anger and the ache in my torso and used all my strength to climb into the sky. We entered a thick blanket of clouds and when we passed it we found the most beautiful sky filled with diamonds. There were so many that I started to lose myself in their beauty.

Cheng finally woke up as if the stars had given him extra strength and I could feel his weight dissipating from my body. He let out a soft wailing sound too. We might not understand one another in dragon form, and he might not be able to hear Cara's thoughts, but that wail said enough. He knew what was happening and the only way he could show me his sympathy was the noise he'd made a couple of seconds ago.

"Isn't this beautiful?" Cara said.

I'd taken the potion from him before I'd changed. If Cara was going to die, it would be through love.

"It's time, Sugar, I'm ready."

I chucked the potion, bottle and all, into my mouth and crushed the glass with my jaw. A hot lava-like liquid ran down my throat and I could feel it burn into my stomach. I screamed and another shrieking sound that pierced both our ears filled the night. The poison of that bottle ran through my veins and I could feel my dragon body turning ice cold, as if I'd swallowed liquid nitrogen.

"I will always watch over you," Cara's voice was faint and then it disappeared. I could feel my body shrinking, shifting back into a human. My heart was thumping in my chest as Cheng's dragon form flashed by me as I fell back down to earth. It was beating faster and louder. I saw my arm and hand with fingers and saw in slow motion how Cheng darted back down to me. My heart's rhythm beat slower and slower and then beat its last.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE



T WAS DARK, cold and the feeling of being utterly alone was all I had left. There was no more Lucian, no more Cara, there was nothing.

A jolt ran up my body, right through my core, and I couldn't breathe for a couple of seconds as pain I'd never felt before ran its course. Then stopped. A couple of seconds of darkness and loneliness filled the space around me again before another jolt of pain emerged.

What the hell is this?

"Elena?" The voice sounded far away, and hollow. I could feel my chest expanding and then there were three pushes. The cycle repeated a couple of times.

I heard my name again, it was a voice I knew. Not my father's and not Lucian's. It was ... Cheng.

With a hard and burning gasp my lungs filled with air. My eyes flew open and Cheng lifted me into an embrace. "I thought I'd lost you. Tanya didn't mention anything like this," he said into my hair.

I started to cry as I knew what I'd just done. I'd killed a part of me; I'd killed Cara.

"Shhhh," Cheng cried too. "It had to be done, Elena. She served her purpose. We have to get back to Dragonia before it's too late."

I nodded even though I didn't want to. How on earth was I going to be able to claim any dragon without Cara? How was I going to claim Blake when I felt so defeated, so weak?

He opened his backpack and took out a pair of jeans and t-shirt with a hoody. I only then realized that I was shaking from the cold.

We were stranded on a couple of rocks and the only light came from the full moon emerging slightly from a blanket of clouds.

Cheng helped me into the clothes that were way too big for me as I struggled to breathe. I didn't know if it was the effect of losing Cara or finally being exposed to Mother Nature's wrath.

When I was properly clothed Cheng rubbed his hands hard on my back trying to bring a little more heat into my frozen body.

"I'm fine, feeling much better, thank you."

He gave me a soft smile. "It's times like these I wish I was a freaking fire breather."

I managed to give a small chuckle but the feeling of losing my best friend was still gripping me hard.

"Okay, let's go," he said as he changed back into his dragon and picked me up with his front paw. He pulled me closer to his torso and I could hear the beating of his heart. He smelled like the forest and ocean mixed in one. His soft leathery skin warmed my body until I didn't feel the cold anymore.

My eyes felt itchy and heavy but for some reason my mind refused to let me sleep. I couldn't get over the horrible act I'd just committed, on someone I actually loved. I was wrong about this time being different. I'd lost another friend. I'd lost a part of myself I would never get back. I felt exactly the same as the day Lucian had died. He stayed in my mind as I didn't want to think about Cara anymore. It hurt more than thinking about Lucian.

How many more people am I going to lose like this?

The flight felt like hours, but the minute the legs that held me against his torso opened up I knew we were close to where he wanted to be. He opened his paw for me to climb out and I saw Lucian's Range Rover.

My body was drained and my knees gave in the minute I got up. Cheng changed in seconds and I could feel his warm hands grabbing me around the waist and underneath my legs. He carried me to the SUV and the hot air that crept through the venting system immediately started to warm my body. I fell into an exhausted doze as he drove us away at speed.

I woke as he picked me up and walked with me into the tavern and this time I didn't protest. I was too tired to say anything.

He knocked on the door and the man who was on night duty finally opened up. "Is she okay?"

"She's fine. Can you please make her something to eat and bring it up to her room? I'll pay extra."

I didn't hear what he said as I buried my face in Cheng's chest but the fast departure of his footsteps told me that he would do what Cheng asked.

By the rhythm of Cheng's walk and the sound of the wood creaking I knew more or less where I was. I heard a key slide into a lock and the soft bed against my skin felt amazing. I would have given anything to just close my eyes and sleep, but my demons weren't going to let me this time.

Cheng ran around in my room like a mouse looking for an escape route. I could see a faint light behind my eyelids, and the crackling of a new fire filled the room before the heat from the flames followed. His weight dented my bed and he pulled the covers over me. After I was tucked in he rubbed my body again.

"You feeling warm yet?" he asked, concern lacing his tone.

I didn't answer, I couldn't and I tried really hard not to cry but when my body started to shake I knew there was no way to make it stop.

"Elena, it wasn't your fault. She had to go."

Cheng stayed with me until I was calm. When the food came he begged me to eat, but the nauseous feeling inside the pit of my stomach made it impossible to think about food. He left after he finished his sandwich and glass of milk.

I closed my eyes when the fire started to die, and looked at the clock next to my bed which read three.

I dozed off and my eyes shot open again as my bed dented with someone else's weight. I hadn't even heard the door open. I froze knowing that Cheng was inside my room. I didn't mind before as he'd wanted to make sure that I was fine, but whatever it was he wanted this time, I sure didn't feel the same for him.

I turned around when his arm wrapped around my waist to tell him exactly how I felt and found Lucian.

Without thinking, my arms grabbed him around the neck and my lips found his. The tears flowed again. I'd missed him so much; I missed Cara and the emptiness inside of me was unbearable. My body shook again and I broke the kiss, trying my best to swallow my stupid tears. Who knows how long we had this time?

"Shhhh," he said into my hair. "I take it that you finally found all your answers."

I forgot about that. I forgot who I was and I forgot what it was I had to do. The image of Blake filled my mind. How much I hated him right now. "I can't claim him Lucian."

"Elena, you have no choice."

"He wants nothing to do with me, and to be honest neither do I."

"That's not true and you know it. He's not the type to show his true feelings Elena. He guards them, now even more than when we were younger. Did you know that he woke up the exact moment you entered Paegeia?"

"Yes, he said it was my dragon."

"He's lying. If he wanted nothing to do with you, he would never have saved your life, twice. Just think about that."

"It will never be like that."

Lucian chuckled. "Don't fool yourself, Elena. It will be exactly like that. You're made for one another. Your love has been foretold for centuries..." A sadness filled his eyes.

Foretold for centuries...what the hell is he talking about?The first foretelling, the one on the very first page of the Book of Shadows.

"I'm glad I died."

I shot him a glare. "You don't mean that."

"Oh, but I do princess. I told you before, the Blake I know will love you better than any human ever could, including me."

"I don't love him."

"You will, more than you ever loved me."

"That can never be."

"Shhh, I've made peace with that. I would die a thousand deaths for you. I don't regret anything that happened, because I know what I died for. You will free the people of Etan and Paegeia will finally live in peace because the two of you will fight for it. I struggled with that, but now I can see clearly."

"You met my mom?"

He laughed. "You're a lot like her, Elena. She begged me to tell you how much she loved you."

I shook my head. "Everyone is saying that, but it's not how I feel."

"I know, it's hard to understand. Maybe one day when you have a little one of your own, you will grasp how hard it was for her to give you up." He kissed me on the forehead and I buried my face in his chest again. His cologne filled my nostrils, but I knew it didn't matter how many sniffs I took, I would never be able to hold on to it. It would disappear the minute I woke up. "You need to claim Blake. I promise you, you won't regret it. I love you, princess."

I woke up and found myself hugging my pillow.

He didn't understand how much I hated Blake. I said I would find a way to help someone else claim him, now it turned out that I was that someone. It was so unfair, and what the hell did he mean by "foretold for centuries."



THE NEXT I found Cheng by the breakfast table downstairs. Two other groups of men wearing hunting gear sat at a huge table a couple of rows in front of us. They were loud and annoying.

A woman wearing tavern clothes placed a plate filled with eggs, bacon, hash browns and toast in front of me. I wasn't hungry, but at the same time I was starving.

"Eat, you're going to need it," Cheng said.

"For what?"

"Elena, you know what needs to be done."

"I told you I can't do that. I won't claim him," I hissed at him.

"You've got no choice."

"You're wrong. You always have a choice."

"Elena they'll force you."

I stared at him for a while. Glaring was more like it. "I thought you were my friend. I saved your life. *She* saved your life."

"And I'm super grateful for that. Just remember one thing: if I hadn't been there, you would've been dead. My debt is paid."

I started to laugh. "That's your answer? I can't believe you're going to trade me in." All laughter was gone and if I still had Cara I would've incinerated his ass on the spot.

I got up and left.

"Pack, we need to leave soon."

"Fuck you," I yelled back at him and the group of men all stared at me with huge eyes as I darted past them.

Cheng literally carried me to the Range Rover like my father used to. Without Cara's strength my kicks and punches got me nowhere. He was determined to get me back to Dragonia and would have even tied me up if I had carried on fighting.

He chucked me onto the front seat and my head hit the back of the seat hard. When he shut the door, he locked it at the same time. I hammered on it fiercely as I refused to go back and face my destiny. Who in their right mind would claim a beast like Blake Leaf? They'd had to sedate him for the past couple of months just to be able to handle him.

Cheng's door opened next to me and before I could slide over and escape that way, he slid down onto his seat.

I sat back in my chair, crossed my arms and ground hard on my teeth. Now that I was human again my tear ducts were once again connected to my emotions and angry tears threatened, but I wasn't going to give this dragon I'd thought was my friend the satisfaction.

I stared out the window at the view, but I took nothing in as my mind was filled with rage. How dare he do this to me? How on earth was I going to claim Blake? He knew who I was, he could've just told me that night and Brian would still be alive. I wouldn't have been in that cave with Paul because I would have known he was lying through his teeth when he'd told me I was his rider, and Lucian would still be alive. He'd made Cara wake up, made me love her, and then become the reason that I'd had to kill her. How on earth did any of them expect me to claim him?

Around eight Cheng pulled over near a couple of trees. He opened a huge packet of chips and shoved them in front of me. "Eat, you need your strength for tomorrow."

"I'm not—"

"Don't say it. You *will* claim him Elena, so help me, and you are going to need all the strength you can muster to do it."

"You can't make me," I hissed at him like an angry cat.

"Yeah, watch me. Now eat."

"I'm not hungry."

"Fine, suit yourself," he spoke a couple of Latin words and stared at me for a couple of seconds.

The anger disappeared first, then all my thoughts followed. I couldn't remember what I was even doing in the car or who Cheng was. Next

came the numb feeling. It started from my toes and spread to my tongue. Before I could even ask what the hell was happening to me, my eyelids became heavy and everything faded until all was black.

CHAPTER THIRTY



I WOKE UP WITH a mother of a headache. It took a couple of minutes to realize where I was and what had happened. Birds chirping loudly outside made me furious. I finally managed to open my eyes and saw that it was morning. Something wasn't right though.

My sight was halved, the edges around the images I saw were a dark red. They reflected perfectly what I felt inside. Hatred. Hatred for this stinking world, for these trees and those birds mocking me with their cheerful chirps. Something moved next to me, and I found him.

The person pretending this whole time to be my friend. He was the enemy and right now, I was in his captivity, taken as his hostage.

Not this time, CHENG!

I leapt onto his lap and my hands found his throat before his eyes could even open. When they did he just stared at me. I could feel his veins against the tight grip of both my hands on his neck.

"Now, you listen to me. You will promise that you won't tell anyone who I am," I said and he managed to shake his head. I forced my

hands to squeeze tighter. I felt a smile emerge on my lips. This felt so good. I'd never had this kind of strength before, and I wanted more. I needed more. A bit tighter. "Promise Cheng, or I will kill you and the truth will die with you."

His face became red and his lips turned blue. I loved that color. It looked so freakin' awesome.

"Fine," he managed to get out and my hands held on a bit tighter. He hit my shoulders, and I realized that I hadn't really heard his reply. I let go.

He coughed while I still sat on his lap, pinning him down with my newfound strength.

"I promise."

I grabbed a handful of his black hair and pulled his head up to face me. "Promise what? If you didn't forget, I was a dragon myself until a couple of days ago. I know the drill."

He stared at me with his dark eyes. "I promise I won't tell a living soul who you are."

I hit him twice on the cheek, hard. "That's my boy."

"Now get the hell off me." He pushed me back into my seat.

That felt good and I could still feel the smirk on my face. Hell that'd felt amazing. I couldn't recall that I'd ever felt so alive. Not even with Cara inside of me. This was like super awesome. It was hard to explain. The adrenaline of feeling a soft thumb of a pulse underneath your hands, and the more you tightened the faster it beat. It was like —

"You know what the hell is happening to you, right?" Cheng said as he finally started the Range Rover and pulled down the street again.

"What is happening to me, oh clever one?" I mocked him.

He opened the flap on my side of the roof and I saw the mirror. "Look for yourself. Look how pretty your eyes are Elena."

I looked and froze as I saw green irises with red where the white should be. It wasn't lack of sleeping kind of red, it was evil red. I kind of liked it. "So?" I said in an 'I-don't care' tone. "It means shit."

“You don’t get it, do you? Blake is awake, Elena. What you feel isn’t your feelings, it’s his. Your bond—”

“Don’t you dare say that!” I yelled at him. “I will kill you if you say that again. I don’t have a bond with him.”

He lifted up his hands in mock surrender and shut his mouth.

My smile was gone now, and anger filled me again. I hated Blake fucking Leaf. The anger stayed with me for a long time as I just saw his stupid face in front of me, knowing who I was this whole time. He killed all the people I loved and now they wanted me to claim him. He didn’t deserve a rider, he didn’t deserve to be claimed. He deserved to be Goran’s pet.

I watched out my window for what seemed like hours and let my hatred for Blake Leaf boil inside of me. When I saw the board that said ‘Welcome to Elm’, I realized how fast Cheng was really driving. For someone who’d just promised he wouldn’t tell anyone who I was, he was sure anxious to get back to the academy. Then it hit me.

Why did the chief of that village want Cheng so badly? He had the Rubicon, and yet he wanted a stupid, insignificant Crown-Tail.

“Why did the Khumutsi want you?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” he said and looked out his window for a second.

“You’re lying, I can hear it in your voice. You do have an ability, don’t you?” I said with a smirk.

“Elena, I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“Come on Cheng. I’m not stupid. All the dragons can do something, yet I have no idea what it is Crown-Tails do.”

“We have our theories, Elena. That is it.”

I laughed. “No, it’s more than that.”

“You are crazy, that is what you are. You think you know everything, you know nothing. You are so blinded by everything that is going on with you in the moment that you don’t even see the truth anymore. I’m one of your best friends Elena, you should know me by now.” He said that Latin incantation again and waited.

I waited for it to come, any moment now and I would feel it, but nothing came. I started to laugh.

Cheng's eyes rose and his lips grew thin.

"It looks like your little sleeping spell doesn't work on me anymore."

"No, it's not that. He's protecting you."

"What!"

"Even if he doesn't want to, he's protecting you. Elena, fight this."

I laughed again. I sounded so evil, so amazingly powerful. "Fight it. I've never felt this before. It's fucking amazing."

"Don't do this. Whoever you are, don't do this to my friend."

"Don't do this to my friend. It's still me, idiot."

"No it's not. The Elena I know would never try to choke anyone to death, not even her worst enemy, or force a dragon to make an oath. You know what will happen to me if I ever break that." He sniffed and wiped his nose with the back of his hand.

"Oh, poor Cheng," I cried animatedly. "Aw we gonna cry?"

"Stop it. I need to get back to the academy."

"To do what, Cheng?" I yelled as he stopped the car and I realized that we were right in front of the academy.

"To save whoever is trying to claim your dragon."

"He's not my dragon!" I yelled again.

"Whatever, princess."

"Yeah, that's right. I'm the princess of Paegeia, and you just remember your promise."

"Go fuck yourself! How's that for speaking to royalty?"

He morphed and got ready to fly. I grabbed his one talon and didn't even mind the cuts it made into my hand. The blood that seeped out of me looked so amazing. I tasted it and loved the saltiness. I wanted to taste more.

He threw me onto the ground right before the gate shifted back. I was still wondering what Cheng could do. His theories weren't the only things that wretched man wanted.

“I don’t buy that you only have your theories,” I said when he morphed back and threw the robe that he carried in his other claw over himself.

“I don’t care what you think.”

I followed him as he marched through the main gate and down the cobblestone path to the main building. He opened the door and I slipped in after him.

“Let me think. You can read minds?” I started to guess.

“No, we aren’t as psycho as you,” he said.

“Is that supposed to hurt me? I don’t read minds.”

He turned around and I almost bumped into him. “Oh, I forgot, you just hear one. Your dragon’s.”

“I didn’t hear his mind. It was Paul who put thoughts and things into my head.”

He winced. “Really, Elena? Whatever makes you sleep better at night, sweetheart.” He turned around again and walked faster.

I just rolled my eyes and followed him.

Think Elena, Think. You were a Rubicon. You had his ability, what can you do...he promised way too fast... “You sneaky little bastard. You can show people the truth, can’t you. That is why the Khumutsi wanted you. How does it work Cheng?”

“Elena.”

“Don’t deny it. You promised way too fast.”

“Because you had your freakin’ hands around my neck, I couldn’t breathe and I didn’t want to die. I have a rider who is still young. I am his protector and I wasn’t going to let this lunatic take that away from him.”

“You are so sentimental, Cheng. You bring tears to my eyes.” I burst out laughing again.

Cheng shook his head and started walking again.

“Tell me, how does it work? Cara used to show me everything, but I was too stupid to think that was our little special way of

communicating. How, Cheng?”

“Screw you.”

“You wish. How?” I pushed again. “A touch,” I asked and it made sense.

He stopped again.

“Yes, by a touch you freaking maniac,” he said.

I got closer to him. All the jokes gone.

“Promise you won’t show them either.”

He smiled.

“I said promise, or I’ll go give Andreas a little visit right now.”

His face froze. “Elena, snap out—”

“Promise!” I yelled.

“Fine, I promise I won’t use any ability to tell anyone who you are, but I also promise you this. If you hurt Andreas, I will kill you myself.”

“Awesome. Now let’s go and see who is going to get their ass kicked,” I said and started to skip toward the Coliseum.

“Girls, freaking fucking headaches,” I heard Cheng mumble.

As we came near to the Coliseum I heard a familiar song. It hit me straight in a place I didn’t want to be hit. It was Lucian. Lucian had come back. I ran to the Coliseum and was surprised when Cheng was right beside me. The main gate to the Coliseum was shut and I looked up the wall.

You’re not a dragon anymore, there is no way you will be able to make it.

“Here,” Cheng yelled. “This gate is open.”

I didn’t think twice and found myself in the room I’d only seen once: when Nicole had tried to claim me.

Blake’s robe was sitting on the bench. I didn’t have time for him, I had to find Lucian.

I ran to the gate where Cheng stood and my anger came back when I saw Arianna walking in the Coliseum with her hands in the air, wearing the shortest little skirt and a vest that managed to show her

cleavage. An urge to kill her and eat her heart right in front of her father emerged in my core. I wondered what it would taste like.

I bit my lower lip hard as Thunderstruck played and found Blake still in his human form, wearing the same expression as me. The only difference was his lip biting resembled someone that wanted to fuck her and not someone that wanted to taste her heart.

I shook his image away from me.

“We have to get her out of there, before she gets herself killed.”

“She wants to claim him, let her,” I said.

“Elena, he’ll kill her. She doesn’t have his ability, she doesn’t have the right blood flowing through her veins.”

“Not my problem.”

“Then help me save her.”

“Um,” I said. “No.”

He nodded a couple of times slowly and gave me his unbelievable smile. I just shrugged at him, finding it amusing. “Help me or I swear to you Elena, I will take whatever pain will be brought down on me and I’ll tell everyone who you are.”

I froze. I didn’t like that. “You wouldn’t dare.”

“You want to test me on that? You’ll be forced to claim him.” He smirked while looking at Blake. “It will be worth every single second of shriveling.”

“Fine. What’s your mighty plan, four eyes?”

“I’ll distract, you get her out,” he said and rolled his neck and shoulders a couple of times. He changed immediately.

I pushed the button and Cheng flew out of the gate. I could hear the crowd’s commotion. I imagined those two idiots up in the tower broadcasting this great event to everyone that couldn’t be here, wondering what the hell was going on now. It brought a smile to my face.

I crouched and glanced at Cheng who was dangling over Blake like a little irritating bird and when he looked up trying to snatch at him, I made my way to Arianna.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“Chill, puss in boots. This wasn’t my idea. Believe me if it was up to me, I would’ve let you stay in here so that he could scorch your ass.”

She hovered for a few seconds with her mouth gaping open.

“Oh shit, I forgot to say princess.” I pouted. “So sorry, your highness.” If you went and looked up sarcasm, you would have found me.

“What is wrong with you, your eyes?”

“Don’t be jealous, now scoot or I’ll kill you myself.”

Her eyes rose and we managed to duck one of Blake’s bolts of lightning. I started to laugh. “The boy is surely agitated today. Whoa,” I yelled.

“I’m so out of here,” Arianna said in a tone I’d never heard her use before – fear. She ran like a scared cat back to the entrance.

Another bolt of fire kept me from following. I just kept on laughing as it was so hilarious, and then everything disappeared as I heard a gate shutting.

I looked over toward the entrance and saw Cheng and Arianna safe behind it.

“You fucking bastard!” I yelled and got up to run to him, but ducked back down as Blake was releasing another jet of flame.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. To fall for his trick. You stupid idiot. I pounded the ground with my fist.

I couldn’t believe he’d played me like that. He only wanted me inside this ring to face Blake because he knew I was the only one that could. Well not today, Crown-Tail.

Think, Elena, think. Here are people that care about you a lot. Use that.

I started to cry, and really put all my fear into it. I looked at Constance and begged her with my eyes. Master Longwei started to give orders to send in a rescue team but Cheng refused to let them pass the gate. Arianna kept glaring back at me. The idiot hadn’t told them yet otherwise he would be shriveling in pain, somehow they

managed to not pursue the rescue. I looked back at Master Longwei. He was my only hope as he was still waiting for them to come and get me out of the ring. He had a confused look on his face and his mouth was shouting orders I couldn't hear because of the protection.

Arianna's dad was next to him, having a fit of his own which was clearly being ignored this time. Sir Robert was just sitting in one spot, staring at me with a knowing look written all over his face. So he'd had his concerns about me. Tanya said I looked like my father and now that I thought back, he'd been staring at me from the first moment I saw him inside their kitchen. I had just been stupid and misinterpreted it. He'd known all along, just like his son.

Screw it, screw all of them.

A pink flame passed me and brought me back to reality. A second missed me by inches.

I'm not going to ascend. Herbert Watkins was my father and I'm the offspring of a dragon. I'm no child of a king and I'll never be a princess.

Come what may, the people of Etan will stay in Etan.

The funny part was that I was actually enjoying Blake's little game. My heart wasn't even pounding and all the fear that I'd tried to mimic was just that, fake.

I waited for the sucker's flame to stop and the second it did, I rolled from behind my rock and into another one of Blake's flames.

It was over. I was dead. I didn't even feel it touching my body, that was how hot and fast it was. I knew then that what Tanya had told me was a lie. She was a Green Vapor and they were known for their lies. I wasn't the princess of Paegeia. I didn't carry any special blood and Blake wasn't my dragon.

When his flame finally stopped, they would find nothing, not even my ashes and then Cheng would really be sorry that he'd ever tried to push me into this.

Everything was silent and I opened my eyes to see where I was.

I didn't understand.

The pink, orange and red flames belonging to the Rubicon were still around me. They engulfed me, but for some reason didn't burn as much as I thought they would.

The skin on my arms and legs showed a different picture.

A horrible one with a mush of burned muscle and the white of my bones that were starting to turn black. My clothes were burned into my skin and still I didn't feel the pain.

My anger vanished like it'd never happened and my heart pounded like ten birds trapped in a cage made for one. I didn't want to die, not like this.

I watched my flesh pulling in all sorts of directions. The coils reduced until they were no more and the red and mush vanished as my skin pulled back over my body. My hoody even returned, but just enough to cover my boobs, and my jeans were reduced to really short pants.

My boots, for some reason were the only things that weren't scorched at all. It was as if someone pressed a rewind button and everything just went back in time, except for Blake's flame.

I only realized then that something else was horribly wrong. His flame didn't move. It wasn't alive, but frozen in time.

I pushed myself up from the floor and came face to face with his ugly mutt. His eyes were red, scarlet as if he was some sort of a demon and his entire body resembled his flame, frozen in one spot. I walked out of Blake's flame and found myself in a still picture. The people in the crowd all had fear and shock frozen on their faces. Constance and Julia were standing by the gate with Cheng and Arianna. All of the men that were supposed to get me out of this crazy plan devised by a Crown-Tail, were frozen.

The look on Constance's face jolted another emotion through my body. She was scared, petrified as she knew what the Pink Kiss meant and that I wouldn't recover from it this time.

Master Longwei and King Caleb's faces both faced the flame where I had been a minute ago. Not one single person moved. My head cocked slightly to the side as I stared at King Caleb's face. He wore a funny expression. A part of it showed anger, frustration about

something, and another part was shocked. A giggle escaped my lips. I'd only then caught a glimpse of Lucian's mom and dad.

King Helmut resembled a bit of his old self, not the shell with no soul working day and night trying to find his son's murderer. He looked as if he actually cared for another again. His wife cupped her mouth and tears lingered in her eyes. The rest of the people, I didn't know. My eyes left the podium where all the royals and Master Longwei sat and scanned down to the bottom row that was filled with media. All of their cameras flashed at Blake's flame.

I shook my head in disgust. They would do anything just to get a story.

I forced my gaze on the crowd and searched for a certain group. In less than five minutes I found Becky, Sammy, George and Dean. George hugged Becky as she covered her mouth, and Sammy didn't want to watch. Her face was hidden in Dean's chest.

Something moved in the corner of my eye.

It was only a split second and I scanned the crowd again. It was gone, no one moved. It must've been my mind playing tricks on me.

I saw it this time through the corner of the other eye and my head snapped to that side of the crowd. My feet ran slowly in that direction as my eyes scanned the crowd like crazy but came back with nothing.

It moved again a couple of rows below and it was gone, just like that. Something was coming for me and I was too slow to even comprehend what it was.

For the next couple of minutes my head jumped from side to side as if I was watching a tennis match playing in slow motion.

My heart raced a couple of beats faster every time my eye caught the movement and at last I saw its entire figure standing inside the ring, a couple of yards away from me.

It was the Reaper. He wore a cloak with a hood blocking his entire face.

He didn't carry the long shackle but I was scared to death. I huffed at the irony of my last thought. Scared to death, I was dead and yet I

still felt every emotion jolting through my body. A body I didn't own anymore. My heart beat as if I still had one and something told me that it was my last bit of brain activity that was making this all real. I retreated slightly as he started to come near. He glided toward me and a million goose pimples and an ice cold finger ran up my spine.

I couldn't take my eyes off him as my body felt like it was turning into a block of ice, but somehow I was still retreating slowly from him. Running away might be in me somewhere, but then again nobody has ever outrun the Reaper. It was known that souls suffered dearly when they ran away from him, and after he was finally done with whatever punishment he would bestow on me, he would drag me to where I should be in the afterlife. *Was I ready for this? What if I never saw Lucian or my father again?*

The inside of my mouth was dry and there was no spit to swallow but I somehow managed to gulp down this dry hard lump inside my throat as he came to a halt a couple of paces before me.

I couldn't see the face inside the hood but I knew it was something I really didn't want to see either.

White human hands went up to his hood and he slowly lifted it from his head.

My face fell in shock and a gasp escaped my lips as I stared into the same colored eyes I saw every time I looked in the mirror.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE



MY LEGS WOBbled and I found myself resting on one knee. It was him, the greatest king that had ever lived, King Albert.

My mind raced with questions, like why did they send him to fetch me? I didn't know him, why couldn't they send my father, or Lucian, someone I loved, who loved me.

I felt his hands touching my shoulder and arms gently. "Sweetpea, you don't need to bow before me."

I looked up and saw a soft, kind face staring down at me. Tears welled up in his eyes. "You have no idea how long I've been waiting for this moment." His forehead rested gently on mine. My heart thumped as I kept staring at him.

He frowned slightly. "Do you know who I am?"

I nodded. "You're King Albert."

His smile disappeared immediately, the laugh lines next to his eyes vanished. I could tell he struggled to breathe. He got up awkwardly and turned away from me, walking like a drunk man a couple of paces in the opposite direction.

I found my strength again and rose onto both my feet. He fell to his knees and then sat on the floor. Then with one swift motion he yelled with his head up to the sky. I covered my ears as I didn't understand any of this. I'd never heard a man yell like that before. It was a scream filled with sorrow, regret and something much worse that I couldn't put a name to, but it brought me to tears as I could see he was in real pain.

Then it stopped and he was out of breath. A couple of seconds later his body shook slightly and I could hear faint sobbing sounds. I knew I should go to him, but I couldn't.

I didn't know him at all.

When he finally turned his gaze back he stared at me with sad, red eyes, and my heart wanted to break. The only look on his face now was regret and betrayal.

"I also know that you are my father." It slipped out.

He looked at me again. "When did you find that out?" He got up and came back to me.

"Two days ago."

He clenched hard on his jaw muscles. He was angry. "Two days ago!" he roared which made me flinch. "You were supposed to know who we were from the beginning. What happened?" he asked in a softer tone and to my surprise I found a tear sliding down my cheek. I wiped it away with the back of my hand.

"It doesn't matter anymore. I know who I am now." I tried to put him at ease. I couldn't handle his outbursts. He always seemed so gentle and kind in the pictures I saw of him.

"Where was Tanya, Elena?"

"You know my name?"

He smiled awkwardly. "Of course I know your name. Your mother gave it to you when you were born."

I nodded. "It doesn't matter."

"Where was she?"

"She left when I was two." It came out in a sigh. I felt betrayal too.

His left upper lip rose, showing his teeth, and he resembled pure anger. "I told your mother that this would happen." He looked past me and stared into the crowd. His gaze locked on something and I turned my head to see what it was. I found Sir Robert. "I should've told him about you. He would've stayed."

"Dad..." It felt weird saying that. He looked at me with surprised but soft eyes. "Blake needed him more."

"You would've known who you were, Elena, if he was the one." He pointed at his dragon. "And you wouldn't have only found out two days ago," he said through clenched teeth.

"It doesn't matter anymore, it's over."

He looked at me, squinting. "What do you mean it's over?"

"All this, I haven't ascended and I know why you came for me."

He started to grin which soon burst into laughter. "Elena, I'm not here for you. You are ascending right now. This," he said as he waved his arm around in a sweeping gesture. "All of this is happening right now."

I looked around. "Wait, I'm not dead?"

"Far from it. Tell me about your life. If Tanya left who raised you?"

"Herbert Watkins," I said and flinched again. "I mean Jako did."

"He forgave Tanya for what she'd done." It was more of a statement than a question but I still felt the need to answer him.

"I don't think so, but he was never harsh to me one minute of his life. He protected me even though I didn't know his reasons."

"Then I owe him everything."

I looked at him with huge eyes. "He's not with you in the afterlife?"

King Albert looked at me with questioning eyes. "He died?"

"Before I came here, dragons attacked us and he saved my life. He's got to be there with you Dad. He doesn't deserve the other side." I spoke so fast that I don't think the king even heard me.

His hands touched both of my arms. "Calm down, Elena. I'm sure he is there."

“You’re sure he is...you’re not certain?”

He looked down and to the opposite side. He was hiding something. And then it hit me. I gasped. “You’re still alive!”

“Elena, no. Don’t. Etan cannot be saved!” he said in a stern, fatherly tone. “Promise me you won’t ever try to accomplish that.”

“If you’re alive—”

“I said no!” he yelled. “Goran has summoned the Saadedine. You know what that is?”

I nodded.

“He will kill both you and Blake. The people that side must stay lost for the safety of Paegeia.”

I shook my head. “No! I can’t promise that. It’s not my choice to make.”

“He will do as he’s told.”

“No! I’m not going to be like that.” I couldn’t believe that we were having our very first and last fight.

“Elena.” He grabbed me in both of his arms and pulled me into his chest. “I can’t live in a world where I know you are not safe, or dead. I’m nothing that side anyway, it’s only a matter of time,” he said into my hair.

“No, Dad, the people will fight if they know you are alive.”

“You can’t tell them. My dragon will come if he knows I live and he won’t make it further than the Creepers. Don’t give Goran that satisfaction, Elena. He’s taken so much away from me, don’t let him take you away too.”

“But you’re all I have. I have nothing, Dad.”

“That’s not true. You have him,” he nudged his head towards Blake’s dragon figure. It wasn’t like that. In fact it was far from like that. “And in due time I promise you, you’ll have everything.”

“It’s not enough. Everything I know about you and mom is through history. I want that chance. Please.”

“Elena, I love you, and that is why you can’t free Etan. Paegeia will perish if Goran gets free. You don’t stand a chance against the

Saadedine. He's under Goran's control and he will kill you before you get a chance to free me. Please promise me you won't try to free the people of Etan. Promise!"

"Dad! Please," I whispered.

"Promise."

I nodded my head in defeat. I didn't want to fight with him anymore.

"Fine, I promise."

"That's my girl. Now let's get your dragon."

"Wait, you're going to help me?"

"It's my privilege. I'll stay with you until the claim is made. You'll hear my voice and you have to do exactly as I tell you. Do you feel what he feels yet?"

I nodded. The anger was gone, the hatred for him was gone. I wanted to claim him.

My father took a deep breath. "When reality turns back, you'll feel it again. Don't ignore my voice. This claim needs to be made before he turns evil, Elena. Otherwise he takes you with him. You can't fight against it."

"I'm scared."

"I know, but I promise you everything will be okay." He stroked my face gently with his thumb, gave me his super smile that he used to give the cameras, and pulled me in for another hug. It felt so good and so real. It reminded me of the man who'd raised me.

"You need to step back into that flame again, Sweet pea, and no matter what, know that I'm always with you."

"Okay, if I say something evil, I don't mean it."

"I know. I grew up with darkness. I'm used to it. I love you, sweetpea."

"I love you too, Dad." I knew it sounded stupid, but a part of me did love him. It was as if I'd known all along who he was, I was just too scared to admit it to myself.

I climbed back into Blake's fire and waited. "Dad?"

“I’m here, just listen to my voice.”

“Don’t go away, please.”

“I won’t. Can you do me a favor? Please tell my dragon I’m so sorry. I never doubted him.”

I smiled. “I promise.”

I closed my eyes and the first thing that came back was my hatred toward Blake. It consumed me.

“Those are not your feelings Elena, they’re his,” my father’s voice said. “When everything comes back you have to move fast as they will try to interfere.”

“He doesn’t deserve this.”

“Hold on to who you are.” His voice was gentle, kind. I didn’t like that.

“Why should I?”

“This isn’t you, Elena. But it is who you’ll become if you don’t claim him.”

At once all the noise and the burn and everything that went with it came back. A scream of pain left my mouth.

“Now,” my father yelled.

I got up from his flame and somehow blocked his fire with both my hands. With a slight push I threw it away like it was a ball. My eyes found his red evil ones.

“Now, speak to him.”

“He doesn’t understand me,” I answered my father and Blake’s red eyes just stared at me.

“No, you are a dragon. This doesn’t count,” Blake yelled in perfect English. His dragon form had never spoken English before.

“Speak to him Elena,” my father’s voice rang inside my head.

“I’m not a dragon. It turns out that it was just the package I left Paegeia in seventeen years ago.”

“When did you learn to speak Latin?”

No idiot that was Engl... “I speak Latin?”

“I don’t understand this,” Blake roared again.

“Tell him who you are, Elena. He needs to know that you know,” my father’s voice said in my head.

“Don’t play dumb, Blake. You knew exactly who I was the first time I set foot in Paegeia. I asked you that night if there was a way you could have a Dragonian and you told me that hope like that didn’t exist. Brian died! Which tells me you knew exactly who Paul was and that he lied about claiming to be my dragon. Lucian died!”

“Elena take it easy,” my father said.

I looked at my hand and I could see the pink flame consuming my entire arm. I closed my fist.

“I had to kill Cara for you.”

The entire crowd was silent. “She was the only one that truly knew me,” I yelled at him. “You don’t deserve to be claimed!”

I threw the fire from my hand and it landed in a ball on the ground. I turned around and walked away.

“Elena don’t do this, your mother died protecting you.”

“No, Dad, she gave me away to protect herself,” I grunted at the direction his voice came from. “You both did.”

“Coward!” Blake grunted and hit me with a lightning spark that pushed me onto the floor. I didn’t shake the way Becky had that day but the electricity did hurt for about a minute before it vanished to a soft hum. My head jolted back and I glared at him with a raised eyebrow. “You forgot, none of those abilities belong to you. They’re mine, they can’t hurt me.”

I turned around and walked to the gate I’d entered a couple of minutes ago. My hands were already flamed with fire again. “Don’t mess with me Cheng, open the gate,” I said and he did as I ordered.

A soft hum came from the crowd. I paused and turned around. It was the introduction to Lucian’s song. The song Arianna had used just a couple of hours ago, or was it minutes, it was all so confusing.

More people started to join and it became clear that they were singing or were trying to mimic the intro, they even stomped their

feet on the word 'Thunder'.

"Come on, Elena, don't let Goran win because he will own you if you turn dark," my father begged one more time.

"You still here?"

"Nothing you can say will make me leave until this is done. I know darkness, remember, you are not dark yet."

I looked back at Blake. His muscles jumped as he just stood there.

"Show him whose power he is carrying, make him scared."

"You and I, let's give them a claiming they've never seen before."

Blake started to laugh. "There will never be a 'you and I'." He blew pink fire my way and I dodged it. More followed, but my reflexes were so fast. I saw each and every single one of them pass me. It was a weird feeling, but I felt like a completely different person. Blake roared again and he used his telekinesis on me. I flew into the air like I weighed nothing.

"Use it, Elena. Own it!" my father's voice roared inside my head.

Before I hit the wall, I backtracked. My feet touched the invisible wall and I flipped myself around and landed on my feet like a cat in perfect harmony.

The crowd was going crazy. It was funny how I could hear them now, and not before.

"It's because you've ascended. You will hear a hell of a lot better than you ever used to."

He hit me with another blast, lightning this time. It hit my body again, but where I should have been flat on the floor, it only danced across my skin. I smiled as I looked at the spark running down my arm as it accumulated inside my palm. It formed a huge electric orb.

"Hit him with it, make it count!" my dad said.

I did as he ordered and threw the ball straight into Blake's leg. Every hit that found a part of his scales or limbs made a piece of my anger go away. He roared again as he stumbled and the earth shook.

"Now's your chance, Elena. Give him everything you've got."

Fire, lightning and ice orbs left my hands faster than I could think. Then Blake disappeared all of a sudden, the crowd turned into a swamp and I found myself in slick, thick mud that started to pull me in.

"It's not real, Elena. It's him..."

"You can see this?"

"My privilege, remember."

"Okay."

"All you do—"

"I know what to do Dad. I sort of became a dragon."

"I heard."

"What do you mean, you heard?"

"It's a long story."

"I'm never going to see you again."

"Elena, now is not the time, you have to claim him. Now think of a place you feel comfortable and claim him!" he yelled.

"I know what to do!" I shouted back at my dad and started to focus back on the Coliseum. I knew how to do it, Blake had shown me. The only problem was my imagination just needed to be stronger than his.

I saw a rock with very sharp horns in front of me, and all of a sudden, the color of the rock turned back to a purple-red. It was him, trying to attack at close range.

I grabbed the horn on his head and lifted myself onto his back.

At once the Coliseum came back but only for a second. The swamp returned and then the Coliseum again.

"It's no use Blake, this place will not get you anywhere."

"That's it, Elena. Show him whose abilities he is carrying."

"You've got nothing I don't know about. It sucks you don't have any secrets from me, doesn't it?" I whispered inside his huge, frilly ear.

He roared again and I was thrown off his back. I fell flat on my back and had to roll around in order to dodge the huge paws that tried to

crush me. The earth shook every time he stomped those huge legs of his.

My father was yelling but I was concentrating too hard on not being squashed like a bug.

“Grab onto one of his legs and let him think he’s thrown you unconscious.” my father’s voice finally got through to me.

I did what he said, although it wasn’t easy and I slipped which actually counted in my favor, but he did manage to dislocate my shoulder.

He threw me to the side and I used my telekinesis to make the landing a little bit softer.

“Now lay still,” my father said. *“It’s working. I’ll tell you when to strike. It was the same way I claimed his father. Just stay down.”*

I did what my dad said and tried to will back my energy. It wasn’t easy and my head ached but I could feel my core being filled and my tired muscles and lungs felt as if I hadn’t even shed one drop of sweat. I just wished I could do something about my shoulder, and then, like magic it disappeared. My healing ability kicked in.

“He’ll go with the pink flame, I can see it inside his throat. Use your ice and freeze the son of a bitch. It will buy you some time to tie him down,” my father spoke inside my head. Like the game, I thought. *“Now!”*

I pushed myself up and it was exactly as my father predicted, his throat was filled with the Pink Kiss. I released an orb of ice and chucked it inside his mouth. A familiar feeling of déjà vu jolted through my core. Lucian’s voice was yelling in the back of my mind to attack him with everything I had.

Blake’s entire face was a solid brick of ice and it started to run down his front legs and toward the middle of his torso. His one wing was iced in the process as well.

I had nothing to tie him down with, so I imagined the one place where I’d seen this done before. It was back on the mountain where Goran had used that Dragonian to try and kill all of us. Huge trees and roots grabbed him the way they’d grabbed Sammy that day and

Blake was forced slowly to the ground.

The ice on his head and legs melted fast and he let out a growl that blew my hair back. The force of his breath was making it hard for me to breathe. He broke free and I found the two of us back in the Coliseum. I didn't have him.

"Again, imagination doesn't work, Elena, but you had a really good idea. Now do it for real. Use your strength, grab the roots buried deep down in the ground."

"I'll wreck this place," I yelled in my head.

"Just do it."

I did what my father said and spread my hands downward as if I'd called for roots a million times before.

The earth shook and four different roots jumped from deep within the ground. I brought my hands over my head and saw the roots tightening over Blake's body.

Blake growled again and started to release another deep breath. I tilted my head as far as I could away from the blast.

I ordered the roots to tighten on him more.

"Easy Elena, you don't want to kill him," my father warned.

"Yield!" I yelled.

"Never."

He tried to squirm free, I could feel it in my hands. It was as if the roots were attached to my body. More roots sprouted out and grabbed him tighter.

"Yield!"

He roared again like a wild beast whose spirit couldn't be tamed. I saw myself inside the red irises of his eyes.

For the love of blueberries, Blake, just yield. He shrieked and growled all at the same time and I saw how his eyes started to turn another color. The red started to fade and a purple light filled his eyes.

"Yield," I whispered as the roots pinned him down more, and then his peacock blue eyes took the place of the red, evil irises.

"That's my girl, now remember your promise. I love you." My dad's voice faded.

"No, wait!" I yelled as the roots retreated back into the ground. I tried to follow my father's voice.

Blake roared for one last time and I froze on the spot.

My core started to boil and cool down at the same time. It grew with such a power that I knew my body couldn't contain it. It went up my arms and into my head. I fell onto my knees as I grabbed my skull and let out a scream. Then I felt my body exploding into a million pieces.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO



WHEN I OPENED my eyes I was in a dark place. I couldn't even make out the outline of where I was.

My heart rate started to rise as I remembered the last thing I'd gone through. *Am I finally dead?*

"Hello, sweetheart."

Lucian's voice filled the darkness. I *was* dead.

I crawled to his voice and collided hard with him. We both laughed. I didn't care anymore. This was where I wanted to be and if it meant that I no longer lived then I was fine with that.

"What is this place?" I asked.

"Don't know, I think it's time to find out."

"I'm not dead?"

Lucian chuckled. "I don't think so, sweetheart. The other side is very bright and peaceful. I think we are in some sort of closet."

"Closets aren't this dark, Lucian."

He chuckled. "You haven't played in one inside Paegeia yet." The sole of his boots found a hollow surface, and kicked, hard. I had to

squint as bright light filled the confined space.

A maid shrieked and linen fell onto the floor. She ran in the opposite direction as Lucian and I crawled out of what *did* look like a closet.

“Told you,” he joked.

“Whatever.” I looked around. “Where the hell are we?” We stood in a huge hallway. It was well-lit with a deep brown, lush carpet running from one side to the other.

“I don’t know, but something tells me we should find out.” He grabbed my hand and led me to the opposite side that turned into another hall. We looked around for a second before Lucian pulled me to the left into another hall. When we exited, we found ourselves facing a huge staircase running downward.

“Are we in a castle?”

“It’s not just any castle, Elena. I know this place.”

Lucian held me tight and we both watched his father passing without noticing either of us.

“I don’t think they can see us.” We followed his father but kept our distance. He stopped by some guards and a man wearing the thickest black coat I’d ever seen. His back was toward me and Lucian. The two of them spoke for only a second and then the man in the coat turned around, and flashed his perfect smile. It was my father, the king.

“Dad!” He looked different. I ran after him and could hear Lucian’s breath right beside me. “Dad!” We followed him down the stairs, but he was fast.

“He can’t hear you, Elena.” Lucian’s hand grabbed me around my arm and pulled me back.

I stopped as I watched him walking out of two huge doors. I looked around and found myself in a lobby. It was beautiful and there were three other staircases as well as the one we’d just run down. They all led to different levels of the castle. I sucked in a breath when my eyes landed on a large portrait of Queen Catherine, my mother, hanging on one wall.

“Lucian, is this what I think it is?”

He smiled. "Welcome home, princess."

"Don't call me that." I smacked him playfully with the back of my hand.

He chuckled again. "Come, I've got a feeling that we should follow your father." He grabbed my hand and led me through the same doors my dad had just exited.

For some reason we moved faster than normal humans and we soon found my father speaking to another man. He handed him reins that were attached to a big, cream-colored horse. My father hoisted himself onto the horse's back. The guy that gave him the reins looked past me, and another strong emotion jolted through my body. It was my dad, the one who'd raised me: Herbert, Jako, whatever his name was. He looked so different, younger, happier.

"Elena, you okay?"

"It's my dad."

"Jako was the man who raised you?"

I nodded and gave him a soft smile. My steps made for him, but Lucian's grasp found my arm again.

"He can't see you, sweetheart. We have to go." He looked past me and I found my real father leaving on the horse. He was in a hurry and we had to run to keep up with him. He kept looking over his shoulder which made me want to duck.

Lucian chuckled every time and pulled me back by the arm to carry on.

He can't see you, Elena. Nobody can see you, I reminded myself over and over. This felt so weird. If I wasn't dead then what the hell was I doing here? And how could I run like the wind?

King Albert went into a forest after he surveyed the grounds one more time. We followed him and watched as he stopped and climbed off his horse. He tied it up by a tree and took a small path to his left. We followed him further until he stopped in front of a huge boulder. He spoke an incantation and the boulder rolled out of the way. He looked around one last time to make sure that nobody followed him.

I froze as his gaze fell on me, but he looked back and disappeared through the hole in the rocks. We slipped through before the boulder rolled back into place and saw how King Albert lit a manmade torch and carried on, descending down a steep passage.

“Why are we here?” I asked Lucian softly as we followed the glowing light.

“I don’t know yet, but everything happens for a reason, Elena. I don’t even think that this is our time. I think it’s somewhere in the past.”

“The past? Don’t be absurd.”

“This is Paegeia, Elena.” He raised his eyes and passed me.

I exhaled softly and followed him further down the passage which finally led into another forest. We found a small wooden cabin in the middle. Horrible screams came from inside and King Albert ran to the door. We started to pick up our pace.

Lucian and I entered the cabin with my father and we both gasped when we found Queen Catherine lying on the bed. She was pregnant and looked like she was in horrible pain.

Tanya Le Frey was right beside her.

“Is there anything I can do?” my father said and crouched down at the side of the bed.

I walked to the front of the bed to see the queen’s face. She looked tired as strands of wet hair clung to her face and sweat ran down her forehead, but she was still as gorgeous as she’d been in all the pictures.

“Go get me a blanket and some more hot water. Not too hot, Albert,” Tanya ordered. “And what took you so long?”

“You know it’s not easy for me to sneak out. I actually had to tell Robert to go home. He knows something is wrong, Tanya.”

“We spoke about this, the fewer people who know, the better.”

“He’s my dragon,” my father growled softly as he prepared a huge bowl filled with water.

“I can’t do this anymore,” Queen Catherine grunted.

“Lucian what is this?”

“It’s the day you were born. Someone wanted you to see this. Could it be?”

“Be what?”

“Your mother kept asking me to tell you how much she loved you. She said giving you up was the hardest thing in the entire world. Our time was always so short and I never did get a chance to give you her message. I think she’s getting what she wanted.”

I looked back at the tired queen lying on the bed.

“One more push, Katie, you can do it.”

“I can’t,” she cried.

At once, my father was at her side. He grabbed her hand and she scowled at him.

“You can do this, love. You fought in two wars, c’mon, doing this is supposed to be easy.”

“Don’t make me hate you more. You try and push a melon out of your ass then we can talk.”

All of us had to suppress our laughter.

“It’s time, you can do it. One big push, Katie. That should do it.”

The queen yelled again and I buried my face inside Lucian’s chest. When I heard a cry I looked again. The baby was so tiny. *Oh shit, was that really me?*

Tears rolled over the queen’s face as Tanya just stared at me.

“We’ve got a problem.” She looked at them, sharing a good laugh and an embrace. Both their happiness dissipated the minute Tanya said those words.

“What’s wrong with him?” The queen asked.

Him?

Tanya didn’t answer.

“What is wrong with my baby?”

“It’s not a him. It’s a her.”

The king and queen looked at one another. The queen started to shake her head. “I can’t do this Albert.”

“Katie, we have no choice.”

“Just give her here.” The queen held out her arms and Tanya wrapped a blanket over the tiny baby. She placed the bundle inside the queen’s arms. She looked at her with eyes so soft. The look on her face spoke a million words. It was as if she’d won a prize, something she’d really wanted and that all the pain this baby had caused her was long forgotten. She placed the baby next to her on the bed and opened the blanket. Her tiny leg carried a big brown mark.

I looked at my own leg carrying a similar dark splat and looked back at mom and baby on the bed. I went closer to see the look on her face again as she inspected the tiny little girl. My father was right next to them, kissing the baby’s head softly.

The queen looked up at the king. “This wasn’t part of the deal, Albert. I can’t do this.”

“We can’t back down now,” Tanya said.

“Give me a minute with her,” my dad asked.

“Albert.”

“A minute, Tanya,” he said sternly and she just gave him the look.

“Fine, but you are only making this harder.” Tanya walked out of the room.

My father touched the queen’s face gently. “I know how long you’ve waited, Katie. But we can’t keep her. When the trouble is over, we can tell everyone and she can come to the castle. Right now, they will kill her if she comes home with us.”

“I can’t do this!” the queen yelled. “A boy was a totally different thing. I never thought that it would be a little girl, Albert.”

“The pond showed you.”

“It showed me both. First the boy then the girl. I never thought in a million years that it would only be one of them.” She wiped away her tears.

My father got up and paced around with his hand pinching his nose. He finally stopped and looked at the Queen. “So what do you want to

do? You want to take her home and endanger her, because I promise you Katie, I don't know who is going to betray us, or when. I don't have that answer yet."

"I know."

"Then what do you want me to do? As God is my witness Catherine, I want to keep her just as much as you do, but we can't." Tears welled up in his eyes as he kneeled before my mother's bed, begging her to stick with the plan. "When the trouble is over, I promise she will come home."

"What if the trouble is never over? What if she grows up without knowing who she is?"

"She will know who we are. She will know that you loved her. Tanya promised, and when it's all over, she'll be sent for."

"A baby this small needs her mother. She won't survive without me." Tears rolled down my mother's cheeks.

"Then what do you want me to do, Catherine? Because I don't know."

"I need time with her. A month."

My father closed his eyes. "Okay, a month."

"I stayed a month with them?" I asked Lucian who had tears in his eyes too.

He didn't have the answer. He didn't even know about me, he was like three, four years old. The queen kissed the baby on the head and brought her close to her chest.

Both Lucian and I couldn't stop looking.

"She loved you, Elena."

I nodded and wiped away a tear again.

He wrapped his arms around me and held me tight. We both jumped as Tanya walked into the cabin again. "We should go," she ordered.

"No, we're giving Katie a month," my father said.

She looked at both of them with raised eyes. "Are you insane? Katie, we can come back when it's safe."

“I want a month with her, that’s all I’m asking,” my mother replied in a stern voice.

“No, she needs to go now. We don’t know who is going to betray us, or when.”

“A month, Tanya. That’s all we’re asking!” my dad roared.

“And what is going to happen after a month, Albert? Another month?”

“Don’t patronize me. We need a month, it’s non-negotiable.”

“You are putting this child and the Rubicon’s life in danger.”

“Oh crap,” my mom said.

“What is it?” both of them rushed to my mother’s side.

“Opposite dent,” my mom said with worried eyes.

Lucian started to chuckle. My father and Tanya just stared at her and they all started to laugh.

“He will love her like nobody else, Katie,” my father said with a smile.

“That’s not easing my worries here.”

“I know. Mine neither. Make you a deal, the first ten years, we don’t tell them at all.”

They laughed again and my mom cupped my father’s face who in return succumbed completely to her. “I love you, promise me you will find whoever is going to betray us and kill them, Albert. I don’t care who it is.”

He turned his head, touched her hand gently and kissed the inside of her palm. “I promise you.”

Tanya went over to my mom and lay behind her. She looked over her shoulder and down at baby me. She stroked the little face gently.

“One month, Katie.”

“Thank you,” my mom gave Tanya a backwards kiss on the cheek.

The next couple of days Lucian and I were stuck in the cabin. I couldn’t stop staring at my mom and dad handling me. My mom breastfed and she even sang me the sweetest lullaby. It brought tears to my eyes thinking that one month was all she’d had. She

didn't get the chance to see me again like my father. I'd been so mean to her in my dreams.

Lucian sat behind me against the wall and held me tight.

Some nights my father walked with me in the room. We had our father-daughter dance at a very young age. I wish I could remember how their embraces felt. The dance was so beautiful.

Lucian squeezed me softly as we could just watched and my eyes caught something at the entrance of the room. It was just a glance of another person, and then it was gone.

"Elene," Lucian asked. "What is it." He looked at what I was staring. Nothing was there now, but I know I saw something, someone. It was there for a small second.

"It's nothing. Probably just my mind playing tricks."

Around the end of the second week, my mother panicked. I wasn't moving. Tanya helped and they got me to wake up.

They brought in a physician who Tanya compelled afterwards and he gave my mother the grave news. I was dying.

Both of them cried for the next couple of days and I could see on Tanya's face how it tormented her.

On the third day after the physician came, Tanya sat both my parents down. She was crying but I could see in her attitude that her mind was made up. "She might not have to die."

My mom looked up. "A Swallow Annex won't be able to heal her, Tanya, she's too fragile."

"I'm not talking about healing, Katie. I'm talking about the Calupso potion."

Both my parents gasped.

"Are you insane? It wouldn't be the same. She wouldn't carry our blood or be ours. She needs to be from our bloodline to claim Blake one day."

"There's a way. I know it's going to work."

"What way?"

“My foretelling,” Tanya said and looked at my mom.

By the look on my mom’s face she knew Tanya’s foretelling well.

“One might not make it but two might do the trick.”

Tanya nodded. “I never knew what it meant, until last night. Cara.”

It was quiet for a while.

“No, it won’t work. She’s a dragon, Elena is a human.”

“Cara will die when she gets her human form, which will be Elena.”

“You don’t know that, Tanya.” My dad was upset.

“It’s the only thing that makes sense, Albert. Cara is a Thunderlight. They haven’t existed for hundreds of years. It’s going to work, but we don’t have a lot of time. She’s going to get her human form soon, and when that happens, we’ll lose our only chance.”

“Are you sure it will be my little girl?”

“Cara will die.”

“I can’t ask you...”

“You don’t have to.” Tanya looked down at baby me. “She’s important.”

My mom kissed me again. “When do you want to do it?”

“Tonight.”

My mom cried again and my dad hugged her with me in her arms.

“Two weeks, I only got two weeks.”

“She’ll live, Katie. That’s the most important thing.” my father said quietly.

My mom nodded. “What about Jako?” She looked at Tanya again.

“He won’t give his consent. I’ll have to do it without his knowledge.”

“Tanya...”

“He’ll understand one day.”

That night I met Cara. She was relatively big but still young. I wished I could touch her, tell her how much I appreciated this. So many people had died to keep me alive. Was it really worth it?

We saw how Tanya prepared both the potions. My father played with Cara for a long time. He had a sad look in his eyes.

Around nine Tanya took Cara outside the cabin and they left for a short while.

“We can’t let her do this,” my mom said.

“Do you have a better plan, Katie?”

She shook her head.

“Then it’s our only chance.”

When Tanya and Cara came back, I watched how Tanya fed one part of the potion to Cara and my mom the other one to me through a bottle.

She struggled as I was already so weak. She kissed me for a final time. Her lips lingered for a long time on my head. “Be strong and know I loved you more than anything in this world,” she whispered. My father was next and Tanya took both me and Cara into another room. My mother collapsed in tears and my father knelt down beside her and wrapped his big arms around her tiny body. Both cried as they just held one another.

A strange feeling started to emerge in my stomach and I looked at Lucian.

“It’s time to go,” he said and a strong force pulled us out of that time warp. We landed on the top of a mountain.

We were surrounded by trees and the night was gorgeous with a million stars in the sky. Lucian went to sit near a tree and I took the spot in front of him. He wrapped his arms around me tight. “She loved you, Elena, both of them did. They never wanted to give you away.”

“I know. It’s just so unfair, so many people had to die, Lucian. You, Jako, Brian, Cara....my mom.”

“I’d die a thousand deaths for you. A part of me always knew who you were.” Our hands entwined with one another. “When you told me that day that you heard poems, I knew immediately. I just couldn’t put two and two together. How you’d escaped the Wall. I guess I didn’t want it to be true. Then my father told me right before I left why

they'd changed their mind and who you reminded them of. That's why he stared at you that night, because you are your father's child, Elena. You have his eyes, his hair, except the rainbow thing."

I laughed.

"My mother told me you carry her as well. The way you are reminded her of Catherine." He sighed. "When I finally got to speak to Tanya, it didn't take long for me to guess. I just had to say your name. She was devastated by the death of Jako and that you didn't know. I immediately knew that Paul was a danger and he wanted to hurt you, but I panicked, that was why the interference was so bad. I knew Paul was lying and I knew the darkness in Blake was too strong, otherwise he would've said something a long time ago."

"He knew?" I said.

"Elena, you would've died if you'd tried to claim him with Cara inside of you. Nothing happens without a reason."

I shook my head. "He lied to all of us, Lucian. People died because he lied."

"Can you blame him? He didn't want to be tamed, and that was not Blake. It was the Rubicon."

"I don't care, he's both."

"Elena, he will change."

"I don't care! He hates my guts."

"I don't believe that."

"Well I do. I felt it."

"There is another foretelling, it was the first one Irene ever saw. She predicted it when she was alone. It's about a love so strong that it could conquer anything it wanted, change barriers and make history. The words to the entire foretelling are beautiful. Many tried to live up to it, but none could ever hold it. I thought she was talking about us, but it wasn't us. It's you and Blake. He would love you like no other, Elena."

"I don't trust him."

“It doesn’t matter. The Blake I know will spend a lifetime earning it when he’s ready.”

“I’ll never love him the way I loved you.”

“And that is my biggest fear. That you will forget me faster than you think.”

I stared at him for a couple of seconds and then our lips touched. It was a feverish kiss and one I didn’t want to end.

“I want you to live, I want you to love again. Make love, have babies, Elena.” He touched my face gently with his thumb. “And I promise you, you’ll be happy. Just trust him.”

I squeezed his arms and they wrapped around me tighter.

Blake hurt me once, I didn’t know if I could let him in again.

We kissed for a second time and the same funny zing feeling inside my stomach started to turn. I knew what it meant.

“I’m going back?”

“It’s time princess. This is the last time I’ll visit. I love you, Elena Watkins,” he whispered inside my ear and then everything started to fade.

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR



T WAS DARK but I could hear things going on around me. The clatter of a pan and Julia's voice apologizing to Constance.

I knew where I was without having to open my eyes. The pain I'd felt the day I claimed Blake was gone. I took a deep breath and struggled to open my eyes.

"I think she's coming to," a male voice said. It was Sir Robert.

"Elena, can you hear me?" Lucian's mom asked.

"Give her some time. She'll get out of this soon." I heard Constance putting them at ease. Her hand touched my head. "At least the fever broke."

My eyes opened slightly, I could see the outlines of a bunch of people around my bed.

"Will she be okay?" Becky asked.

"Just give her time. She'll be fine."

"What happened?" I croaked.

"My stupid brother. He's such a coward," Sammy sulked through a blocked nose.

“He couldn’t control it, Samantha,” Sir Robert spoke softly. “It needed to happen.”

“How do you feel?” Becky asked.

“Like I exploded and was brought back to life.”

“Yeah, sounds a lot like mine,” Becky answered.

“Wait, you went through this too?” I opened my eyes more but my head ached and spun like a whirlwind. I closed them again as my entire face pulled at the pain.

“Here, let me help.” Constance’s hands rubbed my temples softly. At first I thought she’d lost her magic touch when nothing happened, but when the swirling started to calm down and the pain started to disappear, it felt amazing.

“King Caleb is trying to make your claim against Blake unofficial. He’s saying you are a dragon and you can’t be his rider.” Becky sounded angry. “He’s trying to get Blake to become Arianna’s dragon since you interfered.”

“That won’t happen.” Constance eased her worries. “Blake is the Rubicon. Arianna won’t be able to control him.”

“What were you thinking, Elena?” Sammy said.

“The claim was legit. My foretelling was exactly that. I had to claim Blake in order for the truth to be revealed. King Albert and Queen Catherine are my parents.”

Everyone gasped and I opened my eyes. Becky was sitting at the left side of my bed. Right next to me, Constance’s eyes looked worried. Her eyebrows knitted together. Julia froze in one spot right in front of my bed. Queen Margerite looked at the ground and on my right were Sammy and her father. Didn’t Cheng tell them? Urgh, my evil twin.

“I knew it,” Sir Robert said.

“Why didn’t Cheng tell us?” Constance asked.

“Because evil Elena made him promise not to. I did horrible things to that dragon.”

“Which I’m sure he will forgive, Elena.” Constance eased my worries.

“What is it Margerite?”

“She would’ve told me,” Queen Margerite looked at him. “Katie was my best friend...”

“They were in danger during that time, Margerite, they wouldn’t have.” Constance carried on rubbing my temples.

The Queen was my mom’s best friend?

“She’s a dragon, how is that even possible?”

“Easy,” I said. “I was sick and Tanya sacrificed Cara, her Thunderlight, to save my life.”

They all looked at me and then back at one another. Queen Margerite closed her eyes. “She didn’t betray them, she sacrificed her child to save her sister’s. There is no greater love.”

“She just left you?” Constance asked, shocked.

“She was a Chromatic dragon. She said that my dad, I mean Herbert, Jako, whatever his name was, kept moving to all the big cities and she couldn’t turn into herself. She couldn’t stand it anymore and when my mom died, she was free to go back to Paegeia, so she left.”

“Jako raised you?” Sir Robert asked.

I nodded as I turned my gaze to his. He looked to the ground and hurt pulled all his face muscles downward. “He asked me to tell you that he never doubted your loyalty. He knew that you weren’t the one, but that Tanya got to my mom and she forced my father not to tell you.”

Sir Robert looked up and stared at me.

“He also regretted that he never told you. I saw it in his eyes. He told me that you would’ve stayed.”

Tears welled up in Sir Robert’s hazelnut eyes.

“I told him that Blake needed you more.”

He closed his eyes and started to shake with tears and silent sobs.

Sammy hugged her father.

“It’s okay, my father loved you.” *And he still does*, but I’d promised not to tell him that.

“That’s why he sent me away that night? The night of the Creepers.”
Sir Robert asked.

“He never doubted you.”

“Thank you, Elena. Now I know what he was thinking.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Whatever you need, I’ll be there.” He put his fist on his chest and bowed his head.

“Oh shit,” Becky said. “You want to tell me you’re a princess?”

We all started to laugh as she just stared at me with huge shocked and surprised eyes.

“I guess I am, but I’m not your typical princess. I have no fortune.” All of them laughed again, Queen Margerite the loudest.

“You are like Katie in so many ways, Elena. She used to make jokes like you, no matter how difficult the situation was. She used to say that every cloud has a silver lining, and always saw the good when no one else could.”

“Yip, that’s Elena all right,” Sammy chirped and we laughed again.

“So where is that dragon of mine?”

Everyone fell silent.

Oh shit, what did he do now?

“He got up two hours after the incident and he left. We haven’t heard or seen him since.”

“Wait, how long was I out?”

“Two weeks.”

My eyes rose. “Two weeks!”

“Calm down, Elena.” Constance rested her hand on my shoulder as I tried to get up. “You need your rest.”

“May I speak with the princess before she sleeps?” King Helmut walked into the infirmary. Everyone nodded but he waited for Constance’s approval. She finally nodded and I had to say goodbye to everyone, including Sir Robert.

King Helmut took Sir Robert’s spot.

“How are you doing? I didn’t see you much during Christmas,” I asked.

“I miss him, Elena.”

“I know the feeling.” I wished that I could tell him about our time spent together, but I would sound like a nutty person.

His hand disappeared inside his jacket. “Your father...” he took his hand out and it was closed in a fist. “There wasn’t enough space for everyone inside the elevator. The door didn’t want to close and I wanted to get out, but your father pushed me back and shoved this inside my hand.” He opened up his fist and two beautiful matching rings lay inside his palm. “He hugged me once and said, “Keep these, until the right time comes. You’ll know what to do with them.” The door had almost closed when the entire floor exploded. We all crashed to the ground and I made a run for it. I thought my dragon was dead and I had just lost your father. He was one of my best friends, Elena. He saved my life. I think he wanted you to have these.”

He took my hand softly and dropped the two rings inside my palm. They sparkled and looked brand new. “Caleb believes you’re still a dragon. He’ll try to cloud everyone’s mind, even the Ancients. There will be an investigation, and I’m not going to lie to you, Elena, it’s going to be hard. No human has ever gotten past the Wall without the Wall incinerating them, but if you left inside of a dragon, it might have worked.”

“You heard all of that?”

“Enhanced hearing. If you think you’ve got it bad now, wait until you get part of his essence. It’s ten times worse.”

I smiled, but inside I was dreading the outcome of all of this. Typical, this was just my luck. Couldn’t my father have left a note with someone else besides Tanya? I gasped. “They can ask Tanya, she will tell them everything.”

“I’m already on it, Elena. They should be able to strike up a deal with the Khumutsi?” he asked the name and I nodded.

“Cheng told you about him?”

He nodded. "He also told me that he wanted Cheng badly."

"What about Cheng, he can also verify this? He spoke to Tanya."

"He will be questioned, but Caleb will say that the two of you are in on it together."

"It's not true."

"You don't have to explain yourself to me, or prove who you are. I saw it the first time I laid eyes on you inside that museum. You are their child, anyone that can't see that, is a fool."

"King Caleb can't."

"You're wrong. It's why he's fighting against it. I've got a funny feeling that he is afraid. Scared that he would lose everything. He's changed for the worst, Elena. Wars sometimes leave scars, and the last one left a huge one that never healed. He is going to find a way to strip you of your birthright, but I promise you, Margerite and I will stay by your side, no matter what they say."

I closed my eyes and nodded. "Thank you. I know that must be really hard for you to say after what I've done."

"What?" he frowned.

"If Lucian didn't love me, he would've never come back for me that day and he would still be alive."

"Elena," he sighed. "Lucian died the way he wanted to. He died saving the woman he loved, and protecting the princess of Paegeia. The thing that hurts the most is that he never realized that he'd fulfilled both of his dreams before it was too late."

I shook my head and bit the lower part of my lip. "He knew. Tanya told me that he guessed it on his first try. He just blurted out my name and she was free to tell him. It was why he came back."

Silence lingered around us as we just stared at one another.

"Thank you for sharing that with me." He smiled softly but the sadness in his eyes didn't make it a genuine smile. "He died for what he believed in. I will always miss him, both of them. But they gave me so much joy and made me so proud of them in their short lives. It will keep me human for the rest of mine." He got up and kissed me

softly on my head, just like my dad, I mean Herbert, used to do when I was smaller. "Sleep tight, princess. You're going to need it."

I closed my eyes and I heard his footsteps exiting the infirmary.

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE



FOR THE NEXT few days the academy was a mad house. A bunch of people came to visit me in the infirmary, people I'd never even met before. They all knew my father, the king, very well, blah, blah, blah, and for some reason they thought that I could carry on with his legacy.

The papers were overloaded with pictures of me claiming Blake and stating that I was the descendent of Queen Catherine and King Albert, but there were also those who didn't believe it, who protested like mad, especially over the radio.

"Where does she come from? The king and queen would've told us if there was a princess. If you ask me, Leonard, she is just ..."

Constance switched off the radio. "Stupid woman, what does she know?" Constance muttered in the office. It was weird how my super hearing had left the minute Cara died and how it had come back, ten times more enhanced when I'd woken up.

She never played the radio in the infirmary, but I could hear it every morning when the hosts talked about the claiming and about me, and who I was.

A knock on the door brought me back from the nightmare of thoughts I was facing.

Becky and Sammy's figures leaned against the doorway.

"Where is Constance?" Becky asked.

"You may enter," she said from her office and the girls smiled.

"Hi Doc," George entered right behind them.

She didn't reply as I heard her answering her Cammy.

Becky plopped another heap of various newspapers and two magazines on the end of my bed. My lip scrunched up.

"Do we have to?"

"You need to prepare yourself for it, Elena," Becky said as she sat down with one of the newspapers in her hand.

"Oh, this is actually a good one. This paper goes in the like pile. They actually believe it and they were so kind as to explain your foretelling, that you had to claim Blake so that all could know who you were."

"Still, there are those who say I only managed it because I'm a Rubicon dragon myself."

"Like this one." Becky chucked the magazine against the infirmary's wall, which made Sammy and I laugh.

So here I was, not knowing how on earth I was going to make these people see that I was who I said I was.

There was no DNA available from the king and queen this side of Paegeia, their lives were in Etan as well as their medical records. Because they were the royals their records were private, they couldn't be found on the internet like everyone else's.

Sammy looked up at me with soft eyes. "You never told us what happened to her."

I knew who she was talking about. "I'm sure you heard me in the Coliseum. I had to kill her, Sammy."

She shook her head softly and frowned. "How on earth did it not kill you?"

“Tanya brewed a potion, one that killed her from the inside. But Cheng was the one that brought me back.”

“We heard, he told us what happened when you guys wanted to leave. Did it hurt?”

I lifted up my t-shirt to show her the mark where the spear had struck me and found nothing. I searched frantically for it. I could still feel it, but there was absolutely no scar left. My head snapped towards the office. “Did you take away my scar?”

She didn’t reply.

“Constance?” I swung my legs off the bed.

Both Becky and Sammy got up. “Whoa, what are you doing?” Becky said.

“I have to speak to her. Why did she do it?”

“Why is that scar so important? We believe you.”

“It’s not that Becky.” I gave her a scolding look. “It’s more than just a stupid scar.”

My legs wobbled slightly as my entire weight rested on them but I managed, with the help of Sammy, to walk to her office.

When Constance saw me leaning in the door way she disconnected with whoever was on her Cammy and got up. “Elena, go back to bed.”

“Why did you take it away?” I asked as she touched my arm softly. She gave me a quizzical look.

“The scar, the one that was right here, Constance.”

She knew what I was talking about and her face softened. “It had to be done, I’m sorry.”

“Why?” I yelled frantically.

“Because you need to focus on the future, Elena, not the past. That scar would only have reminded you of what you did, and I didn’t want that for you.”

I shook my head. “You had no right. It was the last thing we shared. It was my reminder of what she’d done for me and you just took it

away as if that never happened.”

“I’m sorry,” she said really softly.

I turned around and went back to my bed. This time I didn’t want anybody’s help.

The girls left a short while after the incident.

Around seven, Chef brought me a dish of my favorite, Coq-au-vin. It was a French chicken stew my father used to make, it almost tasted the same, but Dad’s was so much more special. It was difficult to not look at him as my father anymore, or deny my real one. After what Lucian just showed me a couple of days ago...her tears and kisses still stayed with me.

After dinner, Constance came over to my bed to take my vital signs. We didn’t speak one word to one another and when she was done, she stood next to my bed for a couple of seconds.

“May I?” She pointed to the chair.

I nodded.

She sat down and looked at me with sorrow filling her eyes. “I’m so sorry, Elena. What I did, I had no right and I should’ve asked you first.” She took a deep breath. “Believe me, I had good intentions when I removed it.”

“I know. It’s just that it was a scar I didn’t want to lose.”

“Sorry,” she apologized again and gave me a soft smile which I returned. “Tell you what. Next time, I won’t remove any more scars unless you give me the go ahead.”

“Deal.”

“Besides, I don’t know how much longer you are going to need these healing hands. Your body is going to be able to heal by itself soon.”

“It will?”

She gave me a raised eyebrow and a smile. “You are the Rubicon’s Dragonian, Elena. It’s like you said, those abilities aren’t really his. They’re yours.”

I smiled. “Then why can’t I use them?” I wanted to see my flame, but my hands didn’t light up.

“Because he’s really far from you and he might be in his human form. When they are in their human form, you won’t be able to use your abilities, unless he gives his consent.”

“Which will never happen.”

“Don’t be so sure about it.” She bent down and planted a kiss on my head. “Sleep, you are going to need all the strength you can get.”



COUPLE OF DAYS later, Constance finally let me go back to facing my new life.

I shouldn’t have been surprised that the Academy wasn’t much different than the tabloids. There was one group that believed that I was a princess, and those kids treated me really nicely, and then there was the other group who still believed I was a dragon and that I had tricked everyone, hiding my true form. How was I going to prove that I wasn’t a dragon anymore? Chuck myself off a building and show everyone with my splattered body and guts strewn on the floor? Yeah, some darkness still lingered inside of me, deep inside of me.

What the hell was my father thinking when he’d kept my existence a secret? He must have known this day would come and that this would happen.

I held the letter inside my hand. I’d stared at this stupid thing ever since Master Longwei dropped it off.

I had my meeting tonight with the council and the Ancients were going to be there. My future lay in their hands. To be honest I didn’t care what they were going to choose, it wasn’t as if I’d grown up as royalty. I was still Elena Watkins.

Elena Malone... it didn’t even sound right. Still that was King Albert’s last name. The queen had been Squire, I’d seen that in the book the Keeper made me sign when I exited the cavern.

They felt like strangers to me, even though I saw the things I’d seen and I’d experienced the memory my mom wanted me to see. I

wondered what it would have been like if they'd defeated Goran? Would my mom have come for me if she was still alive?

"Of course she would, Elena," my inner voice sniped.

I hadn't dreamt about her since that last night in Tanya's place. She had been saying goodbye.

Tanya could explain everything.

"I've got to go, see you later," I said as I picked up my plate from the table.

"Elena, we've still got class," Becky said.

"I don't have a dragon, what could I possibly learn?" I rolled my eyes and she waved it away.

I ran up the stairs back to my room. Master Longwei wanted to give me one of my own, but it would feel weird without sharing with my besties and to be honest, I couldn't be alone right now.

I opened my Cammy and rang Sir Robert's number. He'd sworn his life to me that day in the infirmary and with every major interview from the paparazzi he was right at my side.

Whenever they got too pushy and demanding, he would literally chuck their asses out of the infirmary, sometimes he even answered questions on my behalf, and told many that he truly believed that I was his rider's daughter. He even asked me before one interview if he should lie. He'd gotten so desperate for them to believe my story, but I shook my head.

There was this one interview that went so bad when some reporter asked the question of how I could let my father's traitor protect me. It made me furious and I wanted to slap her silly, but it wasn't princess-like. So I answered her instead, "Oh now you believe I'm the princess?" A couple of them laughed, but I received a lot of negative comments after saying that.

I had a feeling this princess thing wasn't going to be easy and King Helmut was right. It wasn't easy to prove to people who I really was without any evidence.

Blake still hadn't returned. Part of me worried about him. I guessed I'd always known deep down inside who he was, but I didn't want to

believe it. He'd lied so many times. I even wondered if what Paul had told me was the truth, me hearing his thoughts or if Cheng was right. Thinking back to that time I'd fallen in love with Blake, he'd seemed really interested in what I'd heard. I had to admit, his voice sounded nothing like the dragon that spoke to me inside the Coliseum and the one in my head didn't sound anything like Blake. He loved poems and I couldn't imagine Blake ever loving poems. I huffed.

None of it really mattered as one thing was clear. He didn't want me to be his rider, dent or no dent, that boy had hated my guts since the first time I laid eyes on him. Lucian was wrong about him warming up to me, but then I thought back to the couple of times I'd thought Blake was going to kiss me.

I shook my head and spoke Sir Robert's name into the Cammy.

Three rings later his face appeared. "How can I be of assistance, princess?"

"I told you not to call me that."

"Sorry," he apologized with a soft smirk.

"Did King Helmut get back to you about Tanya? Do you know if they found her yet?"

"Not to worry, King Helmut always delivers. It's one of his specialties. She'll be there tonight, and then this mess will be cleared up."

I smiled. "Thank you, see you tonight."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world." His face disappeared again and I fell backward onto my bed. My thoughts were still a big mess. To think the greatest king that ever lived was my father, sorry, is my father. He was still alive somewhere behind those Creepers and I'd made a promise not to tell anyone or go and save him. The bravest queen, my mother. There was so much info on what they were like and yet I still didn't know them. I had a memory of our time spent together and an ascending to keep reminding me who I was. Sometimes it felt like I'd dreamt all of it and that none of it was real.



AT SIX, I went to Master Longwei's office. The meeting was scheduled for eight-thirty. It was to be held inside Areeth and this would be the first time I would see where Arianna lived. My heart and nerves were woven into a big knot, or that was how it felt.

Suddenly, I was pushed hard into the wall just as I went to enter the hallway that led to Master Longwei's office.

"You leave Blake alone," Tabitha spat into my face. "He's been through enough, Elena. You are what he is, just admit it and set him free." Her eyes were bright blue, soft, pleading but at the same time hard and scolding.

"I am not a dragon Tabitha. A dragon saved my life, that was it. She's dead."

She huffed. "If she was dead, you would be too."

"I was, I mean, I almost died, if it hadn't been for Cheng," I spat back at her.

"You are a dragon. Admit it or I swear you will pay."

"Don't threaten me Tabitha." I pushed her away from me and she staggered backwards. "You forget whose abilities Blake carries. I don't want him, I never did and that seems to be the problem here."

"It's not. Blake can't be claimed. They will find a way to bring out your dragon, even if it means that they kill you."

I sucked in a breath and let it go. They would really go that far?

"Then I guess I'll die, because I promise you it's only me in here. There is no dragon." I turned away from the wall and walked toward Master Longwei's office.

"It's not worth it Elena, you have no proof that you are theirs. You'll only get yourself killed," she yelled after me but I kept on walking.

I ran up the stairs and to Master Longwei's office. I knocked three times.

"Enter."

I opened the door and he smiled when he saw me. It disappeared fast when he saw the look on my face. "Are you okay, Elena?"

"I don't know," I said and threw myself into the seat right in front of his desk. "What were they thinking, Master?"

"They weren't, Elena. No disrespect. They trusted Tanya to keep you safe and I know a part of them believed that they would find whoever was going to betray them before it was too late. Tanya is the one to blame. She should've protected you or come forward with this knowledge when the danger was over, yet she hid and the truth never came out."

"They'll never believe me."

"Then they don't. It won't change who you are, Elena. You have their blood flowing through your veins. You saw him when you ascended, what more proof do you need?"

"I don't need any proof," I said. "What if King Caleb forces me to change?"

"What do you mean?"

"She's not in me anymore. I'll plunge to my death."

He sucked on his lips. "That won't happen. You've got my word."

I nodded.

He put on a long golden coat and I followed him down the stairs again. A carriage with two dragons waited for us behind the main gates.

I opened the door and found Constance wrapped in a thick warm coat herself. Her smile made me feel safe and I took the seat next to her. She grabbed my hand in both of hers as Master Longwei took the opposite seat.

"How do you feel?"

"Nervous," I admitted.

"Don't be, I knew who you were the minute Matt brought you here. Every one of us could see it, we just didn't know how they got you to the other side."

“Yet I turned into a dragon, one they probably want me to show tonight and I won’t be able to, because she’s dead.”

“Then what is the problem?”

“What if it kills me, you know the things they want to do? What if...”

“Shhh.” She put her index finger softly on my mouth. “They’ll have to kill me first and a couple of other dragons before that will ever happen. Sir Robert isn’t the kind that can be tamed. That was your father’s specialty.” She winked and I giggled.

“He’s sure changed a lot in the past few weeks.”

“What did you expect, Elena? You are his rider’s daughter. The one true ruler. They can strip you of the title and they might come to a verdict that you aren’t who you say you are, but you are their child, their blood runs through your veins and remember, there is nothing anyone can do about that.” She gave me the same explanation Master Longwei had.

“See, told you so,” he said nonchalantly and read today’s paper which carried all the news of tonight’s big verdict.

Constance and I just smiled.

“I don’t know how you can read that,” she said to Master Longwei.

“What? I like to know what is going on inside Paegeia.”

“It’s filled with people who are trying to prove Elena is a fake,” Constance scolded.

“It’s funny,” he joked.

“It’s not a joke.” She sounded irritated.

“Constance, why does this bother you so much? We both know who Elena is.”

“It’s just that the one who is behind this was one of Albert’s best friends.”

“When someone is out of the light, and out of grace, they tend to harden. Caleb is just lost, Constance. I’m sure he’ll find his way back soon.”

“It’s going to take a miracle for that man to see the light again,” she mumbled and everything became silent.

It would not take a miracle. It would only take a couple of seconds, my father lives. If he really cared for my dad, he would fight to save him.

We stopped at Elm’s port and more flashing lights went off in my face as we climbed out. Sir Robert waited for me by the carriage door and led me into the port. Reporters wanted to know how I felt, and what I would do if the outcome was negative.

I stopped, turned around and looked at all of them.

“Whether the outcome is negative or positive, they can’t take away the blood that flows through my veins. I know who I saw while I was ascending. It was your king, the greatest man that fought for the rights of dragons. I don’t have to prove to anyone who I am. You either believe it in your heart or you don’t.”

I turned around. My heart was beating like crazy and it was a miracle that I didn’t end up stuttering. Sir Robert smiled at me as he led me to the elevator that led to Areeth.

“What?” I asked him.

“You may look like your father, but what you just said back there, was exactly the type of thing your mother would have said.”

I smiled at him. Ever since I found out who I was, he was the first to show me what type of person my mom was. She didn’t take shit from no one.

I didn’t cringe anymore as the elevator teleported the four of us to Areeth. Becky was right, it would become exactly like the carriage ride. Besides, my fears were eliminated the minute Cara showed me how fun everything could be. I missed her so much and would give anything just to feel her again. But she was gone. I was once more alone.

In Areeth, more reporters wanted to know the exact same thing. But it was a completely different crowd, one that didn’t believe a single word I was saying. One that knew me as the person standing between their princess’s happy ever after. One that thought I had

killed their beloved prince and one that would never believe that I was the true ruler's daughter.

Millions of bystanders with protest boards stood around the cab that was going to take us to the palace. Sir Robert grunted when he saw the yellow car. "No respect."

"Let it go, I'm not that type of royalty."

"Yes, you are."

"You know what I mean." I climbed in the cab and looked outside the window. Areeth was really a rich and beautiful part of Paegeia. We crossed a bridge and I tried to see if I could find any buildings. I only found stars. The city reminded me of Dragonia.

I would be scared too if I was King Caleb. To lose all of this would drive me insane. I wondered what he would do if he discovered the truth about my father being alive. Would he really change his mind as I thought he would, would he change his mind about me?

You promised, Elena, my dad's voice played inside my head.

I know, I replied silently, but it was a hard promise to keep.

Ever since that piece of information was revealed to me, I'd been wondering about him constantly. What he must be going through. If he was still alive.

I held my head up high and was brought back to reality when Sir Robert opened the cab's door for me. He mumbled something about this not being a princess ride again, but I waved it off. I was used to this, and it didn't bother me as much as it bothered him. It didn't matter if I was transported in a limo or on a dragon's back. Just as long as I got to this stupid meeting.

I'd made up my mind, Master Longwei and Constance were right. I had their blood flowing inside my veins, it didn't matter who they said I was. They could strip me of my title, just like they denied me my name on that brass plate with my mom's when I exited the cavern. Both of them were just stupid titles, but I refused to let them take away who I really was. My mother died protecting me and my father still fought to protect everything, not just me, from the evil that lurked

inside Etan. I am Elena Malone–Squire Watkins and nothing they said tonight would ever change that.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX



THE MAIN CITY of Areeth was beautiful. It was called Vicali and was built of white stone. We had to take a carriage to the entrance as Vicali was built high in the air. It almost seemed as if it was supported on a thousand pillars, if not more. The houses were huge, beautiful double stories with a modern Victorian structure. The streets were linked with bridges running between them. Cobblestone marbles lined the surface and I couldn't stop looking at the street. When the path grew too small for the carriage we had to climb out and walk the rest of the way.

About a mile from the hall where the meeting was going to take place, people were lined up. They were more protesters.

Most of them spat in front of my feet, which riled Sir Robert. They started to spit at him too and words like 'Traitor' filled the air.

If only they knew the truth.

"Ignore it, we know it's not the truth." I tapped him on the arm and we carried on walking.

Some even yelled out the word 'Blasphemy' and said it was impossible to be who I said I was. One even said I looked nothing

like either of them. Sir Robert walked faster and I had to run to keep up with him because my wrist was lodged inside of his grip.

More people who were protesting waited on the million steps that led up to the huge building.

I ignored them as I walked next to Sir Robert through the doors.

Constance and Master Longwei both kissed the side of my cheeks twice but the fear of what they experienced with us was lodged on their faces.

“Be strong, Elena. It doesn’t matter what they say, you will always be my princess.” Constance said and Master Longwei just smiled.

“This ought to be good,” he replied before he followed Constance to one of the hundred seats that were on both sides of what resembled a courtroom.

“I’m right here,” Sir Robert took one of the chairs that were stacked behind us against the wall.

I took a seat next to him. My eyes found five thrones way in the front, slightly elevated. I huffed thinking that everyone in this world wanted to be more important than the next, no wonder they treated me this way.

“Here, let me help you with your coat,” Sir Robert said, tugging on my sleeves and I took it off gently.

“Thank you for not doubting me.”

He chuckled. “Elena, I saw your father that first time I laid my eyes on you inside my kitchen. It was just hard to think of why he’d never said anything to me. He used to look at Sammy with so much love but regret always followed shortly, and then the tears. I never understood that emotion until now. I might not have known about your existence, but I can tell you this. Your father loved you more than words can describe. Never forget that. Your mother was a completely different story. Their relationship went downhill and none of us knew why.”

“It did.”

“She’d gotten angry with your father because he didn’t find who was behind all of this. Now I know why.”

It was because he was keeping me away from her. I closed my eyes and wanted to tell him so badly about his rider being alive, but my father was right, he would kill himself trying to find a way through those Creepers. That was who this man next to me was and it was hard to imagine that his son was the one supposed to be here, to clear this all up.

The place filled up quickly with members of the council. I could feel all of their stares as I sat beside Sir Robert.

I found Constance's eyes and she smiled at me. Master Longwei winked and both of them leaned closer to one another to discuss something.

I jumped as five very old people took the five thrones in the front. The first had golden blond hair and golden eyes. He was a Fin-Tail dragon. The one next to him had white-grey hair. His face was wrinkled and his eyes a deep sea-blue color. I didn't know whether he was a Moon-Bolt or a human. There was another man with a copper glint in his white hair and copper eyes. Dragon, and the other two looked like humans.

"This is the hearing of Elena Watkins and the decision of whether or not she is the descendent of the Malone bloodline." The one who read the words started to frown. All of them looked my way with grey eyebrows knitted together.

"Stand up, child, come closer so that we may see you."

I did what he asked and walked to the middle of the room. Keep your chin up high, you are the daughter of King Albert and Queen Catherine.

"Is this true, do you claim to be their daughter?"

"Yes, your honor," I answered as Constance had told me to. All of them looked at me but the one sitting on the fifth throne squinted. It made me slightly uncomfortable.

The one on the third throne kept a pair of goggles in front of him and I could feel his eyes boring into me.

He mumbled something about not this happening again. The one side of the court room snickered softly.

“What is stopping this child’s claim?”

King Caleb stepped forward. “With all due respect your honor there is no proof. The queen died before she could produce an heir and so did the king. If this child is who she says she is, she had to find a way to go through the Wall. I know for a fact that she is a dragon, your honor. She changed a couple of months back when the prince of Tith was killed.”

“A dragon?” three of the ancients said in unison.

“It’s true, your honor.” Sir Robert came to my defense. “She was a dragon, the child was sick as a baby and the king and queen let a young dragon waiting for her human form soak up her essence in order to protect the infant.”

“Robert, we didn’t think we would see you here.”

I clenched my jaw as they showed him no respect.

“She is the daughter of my rider, and my son’s rider. It’s my responsibility to keep her safe, until Blake can fulfill that responsibility.”

“Your son’s rider? She’s a Rubicon, Robert. We all saw it. It’s the only way she claimed him,” King Caleb spat. “She’s pretending to be a human now and making this preposterous claim. You of all people should know better.”

“No, Caleb, you should know better. She looks just like him, not to mention the queen, may her soul rest in peace. You knew how depressed she was, and yet we all thought it was because of Tanya. That wasn’t the reason. We all know why you are making these claims that she’s not who she says she is.”

“Enough!” The Ancients roared.

“Is this true child, you are a Rubicon dragon?”

“I was, your honor. It is true what King Caleb says. I turned into a dragon, but it was because of my host that sacrificed herself years ago still lingering inside of me. I promise you now, she doesn’t exist anymore.”

“Another Rubicon, how could this be?” The first Ancient asked.

Didn't they hear anything I was saying to them? "I didn't use to be one," I spoke again. "When I turned I was a Thunderlight, but because of what I really was, and the bond I already shared with my dragon, I changed into his form. I'm neither anymore, your honor. She died a couple of weeks ago."

"How could you kill her, and still be alive?"

My eyes started to tear up.

"Your honor, maybe it's better that you ask Tanya Le Frey that. She was the one that sacrificed her daughter in order for Elena to live," Sir Robert spoke on my behalf.

King Caleb laughed again. "Didn't you hear? Tanya is dead. The scouts found her body on the borders of the Acker Woods."

I cried out and Sir Robert caught me before I fell in a heap on the floor.

"Silence."

"How do you know this, King Caleb?"

"I can answer that, your honor." King Helmut stepped forward. "I sent out scouts to where Elena said she found the queen's dragon. We have a witness that can tell you the exact same story as Elena."

"That witness doesn't count. Without Tanya Le Frey's evidence, Elena has no truth to her story."

"What happened to you, are you so blind that you can't see who she is?"

"So she claims that she looks like them. She isn't the first, Helmut. Many had their eyes or the queen's beauty. None of them turned out to be the Rubicon's rider or their child."

"Except for this human right in front of you. Blurting out that Tanya was dead like that, was inhuman and cruel."

"She didn't know her."

King Helmut shook his head. "How much more must she prove? She claimed Blake."

"That doesn't count if you're a Rubicon yourself."

“I think we’ve heard enough of this. We’ll have our decision in a couple of minutes. Just remember child, what we say is final, unless other proof can be brought forward.”

I nodded, still clutched inside Sir Robert’s arms.

He took me back to my seat.

“How can she be dead, she was alive when we left?” I asked him.

“I don’t know, Elena. I’m so sorry.”

“I’m screwed. A few minutes doesn’t say much does it?”

“You can’t say that.”

The minutes felt like hours and the scenarios of Tanya’s death consumed my mind. She couldn’t be dead.

When they finally came back, they called me to the middle again. The one on the fifth throne who kept glaring at me was missing.

“Elena Watkins, we have heard your claim, we see the resemblance and we can tell most of the time what is lies and what is the truth.” My heart started to jump with joy as he said all those words.

“But we can’t approve your claim. There is no evidence and without real evidence, we are sorry to come to this verdict. You aren’t the child of King Albert and Queen Catherine. No human can leave through the Wall and no human can survive inside a dragon. Your claim over Blake doesn’t count and it’s broken from this day forward.”

I froze as the hammer’s head hit a wooden board, hard.

“You can’t do this!” Sir Robert protested. “She is my king’s daughter and you know it.”

“Contain him,” one of the Ancients said and guards came out of nowhere and took him away.

“No, please, don’t.” My voice was merely a whisper. I fell onto my knees and shifted to my butt as the truth finally sank in.

I didn’t just get stripped of a title, I got stripped of my dragon too.

“Your honor, now that the Rubicon doesn’t have a rider,” King Caleb started to speak again.

I shot him a glare. How dare he do this in front of me?

“By law if a claim is interfered with, that dragon automatically belongs to the rider that first tried to claim it. Elena interfered with my daughter’s claim and I’d like the Rubicon to be returned to its rightful owner.”

The air in my lungs disappeared as he said those words. It felt as if I’d gotten hit hard on the back and couldn’t breathe.

Constance found me and helped me from the floor. “Let’s go, you don’t need to hear this.”

“That’s my son he’s talking about.” Sir Robert came out of the building they’d just taken him through.

“How did... Contain him!” another Ancient yelled.

“There are no guards to contain me.” He laughed a sadistic laugh. “I killed them all.”

The crowd gasped.

“I’m the king’s rider. I’ve been called traitor and prosecuted for a crime I never committed. The only crime I ever committed was caring too much for the king, obeying him when he told me to leave his side. I will not let my son’s fate lie with someone that can’t control him. He has a rider and a dent for that matter. Giving him to Arianna Kingsley would be breaking the law.”

“Robert!” Constance hissed.

“My daughter is of royal blood, traitor.”

“Royal blood. Elena’s grandfather gave your father Areeth, you are nothing but a commoner just like the rest of us.”

“Enough!” The hammer hit the board a couple of times.

“Robert Leaf by the power vested in us, you are sentenced to death. Taking guards lives and disrespecting royalty in public is against the law and you will die for the crimes you committed here tonight.”

“No! Please, your honor. You cannot do this. He is my father’s rider,” I yelled out and ran to Sir Robert’s side.

“He is not your father,” King Caleb said.

“With all due respect, King Caleb. I know what I saw, who I saw when I ascended.”

“You didn’t ascend, you are a dragon,” he roared.

I looked at the Ancients again. “Please have mercy. He’s given an oath to protect me and that oath means killing everyone standing in his way when he feels that person is in danger. I promise you I will find solid proof of who I am, and then you are going to ask me for mercy. I’ll give Arianna my dragon if that is what it takes, and I’ll give up the right to call myself a princess, but I’m asking you to let this dragon come home with me tonight. And I promise you when the time comes, this will be forgotten.”

The entire court heard my plea and the Ancients all looked at me with frowns and eyes filled with questions.

Sir Robert started to laugh again.

“Shush,” I whispered at him.

“You have to change your minds. She is who she says she is.”

“Robert without proof, we can’t. Our decision is final.”

“Your minds are clouded,” King Helmut said. “A couple of months ago you swore that a Wyvern could change and look where it’s gotten me. I have no heir. He killed my son.”

The hammer went down hard again.

“Elena is no child of Albert and Catherine Malone, unless she has a way to prove it, this matter is closed.” One of the Ancients looked King Helmut straight in the eyes and gave me the same verdict as before.

“As for the Rubicon, the only way your daughter can claim him is in the Coliseum, he must yield. If it was any other dragon there wouldn’t be a problem, but it’s not.”

“No! This is breaking the law.”

“Our decision is final.”

King Caleb growled at them, turned on his heel and walked with huge strides out of the hall.

“They aren’t all fools after all,” I whispered softly to myself.

I bowed my head to them and grabbed Sir Robert by the arm; it was trembling softly. I guessed he'd just realized that his anger had gotten the better of him again and that he'd almost gotten sentenced to death.

We exited the building and the ones who were protesting rejoiced. How could people be so cruel?

I ignored it and walked with my head held up high. When we reached the carriage a young boy, a bit younger than me, stopped us. "A word, my lady."

I looked at Sir Robert and we followed the boy after Sir Robert told the one dragon to wait for us.

It was funny how I never understood Latin and now I was speaking it fluently.

We ran to keep up with this boy through a long passage and into another dark alley.

I gasped as the Ancient that was missing from the verdict waited for me. The one who made me feel so uncomfortable

Sir Robert grunted.

"Sir Robert, I need a minute with Elena," he said softly.

We were both taken aback by the man addressing him as Sir Robert. He nodded and went to stand guard at the entrance.

"I'm sorry for the dark alley, my child, but if the others knew I was here..."

"Your dragon can read your mind?"

"My dragon died a long time ago."

"Sorry to hear that," I spoke softly.

"My vote doesn't count much, but I could see them both inside of you before I even knew why you were there."

"Thank you."

"You don't understand child. Catherine Squire was my great, great granddaughter. Did they tell you how we came to be the Ancients?"

I shook my head.

“The world wasn’t always against dragons you know. A handful rebelled thousands of years ago. We always knew the truth about dragons, we received the essence first from ours a long time ago, I had to leave my wife and children in a way no man should. They thought I was dead. We went far away and lived with our dragons for a long time, it was peaceful and we never said anything, not even when King Alexander changed the ways. You see, most of our dragons were Chromatic. Only when your father, King Albert, fought against his for the rights of all dragons, did we come forward. It was in that time I learned of my great, great, granddaughter. She wasn’t royalty or from noble blood but she was just like you.”

“So what you are trying to say is that we are related?”

He nodded, “But keep it a secret. I could lose my head on this one.”

My eyes rose.

“I’m just joking.”

I slapped him softly. “Don’t make jokes like that.” We both laughed.

“So what do I call you?”

“Call me what you mother did, Pappi.”

“Pappi,” I smiled. “Will I ever see you again?”

“In secret.”

I nodded my head.

He grabbed both my shoulders with his shaky hands. “You should go, and I promise you will hear soon from me.” He kissed me softly on my head.

“Thank you, Pappi,” I said and left the old man in the dark. “Let’s go,” I spoke to Sir Robert.

“What was that about?”

I giggled. “You didn’t hear that?”

“He had some blocking spell and I could only see his lips moving.”

“He just told me that he was voting for me. He saw both my parents in me before he even knew who I was,” I lied, well not really, he had said that.

Walking back, we found the carriage in no time.

Constance and Master Longwei were waiting for us when we got back.

“Where have you been?” Constance asked.

“Nowhere,” I said.

“I’m so sorry, Elena,” Master Longwei said.

“Well at least they didn’t throw me off the bridge.”

All three of them laughed, well Sir Robert smiled, but it was as close to a laugh as he would come tonight.

“I will see them again when I find the proof.”

Constance pulled me closer to her with her arm around my shoulder.

“That’s my girl.”

I laughed and the carriage took off again. I had a great, great, grandfather who happened to be one of the Ancients.

If that didn’t count for something, I didn’t know what did.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN



FOR THE PAST couple of months I'd gone back to my old schedule. The one I'd had before I turned into a dragon.

Everyone at Dragonia knew the verdict of my outcome. It was plastered all over the papers. I was a fraud. At least that was what most of the headlines said. I wondered if my father knew about this.

Tabitha finally left me alone and there were no more threats or glares whenever I saw her.

Arianna was a different story. She told everyone how she was deprived of her dragon. Tabitha didn't like that one bit and I absolutely loved the fight they had right in the middle of the courtyard.

It was funny how Arianna could wield her fire without a dragon, and I couldn't even muster a puff.

I still had so many questions, new ones that I didn't know how to get answered without Blake. I forced it from my mind. He wasn't my dragon anymore. Would he still turn dark? That was the one question that lingered on my mind.

Summer break came faster than we'd all hoped for. My exams were a walk in the park now that I could speak and understand Latin

fluently. The words looked foreign but they changed to English the minute I wanted to read them and it would come out as Latin even though I still heard English.

If Blake wasn't my dragon, then why could I speak Latin? I smiled. He was still my dragon, it didn't matter if the Ancients stripped me of him. We were part of a dent and nothing would ever break that.

I decided to stay the first three weeks of break with Sammy and the last few weeks with Becky. One day my Pappi sent a message via a crow. It scared the living crap out of me the first time I found Muffled inside our room at Sammy's house. He was trained and danced on his one claw with another one in the air. It was only then that I saw the band across his leg. A small note scrolled up into a tiny holster was hooked on the band. I took it out, and to my surprise he waited.

The note said that Pappi would visit me the last week before school started again. He wanted to show me something.

"I think the crow wants something, Elena. He is still waiting."

I turned the note around, and saw in my Pappi's handwriting. "Give the crow a note and a cracker."

I laughed. "He's waiting for a reply and a reward. Can I have one of your crackers?"

"Sure," Sammy said and I scribbled a note. A crow, really, owls aren't trained. I laughed at myself while I rolled up the note into a tiny scroll and put it back into the holster.

The crow grabbed the cracker with his beak and flew off.

Sammy cleaned her hand on her shirt. "Humph, that's something I didn't think I'd ever see in real life. Who sent you post by crow?"

"Post by crow," I laughed

"It's something they did in the old days. They usually spoke the message because they are really easy to train to speak."

"Crows can speak?"

"How didn't you know that?"

"Probably because I didn't grow up with post by crow."

They both laughed. “Neither did we,” Becky said, “but we learned about it in primary school.

I wondered on numerous occasions if mom had any other relatives I didn't know about, who were still alive.

I could have an entire family for all I knew.

Sammy and I took a carriage to Elm around three. She still treated me the same, just a tad more special as she truly believed I was King Albert and Queen Catherine's daughter. She tried to tell me so many stories but most of them were what she'd read in history books. I'd read all of those myself.

During our first couple of days of break, Dean was there every day. He spoiled us rotten and George and Becky would always come with. I still missed Lucian and a small part of me even missed Blake's mutt.

When was he going to come back?

Later that week, we spent the entire day at a theme park. There was nothing magical about it, just ordinary fun.

After our day of fun, Dean dropped us back off at Sammy's around five.

We all entered Sammy's house and found a man with brown hair and glasses having tea with Sir Robert and Isabel. She gloated as we walked in and the smile on her face made me curious.

“Someone win the lottery?” Sammy asked.

Isabel got up and came over to me. “Something like that. We might finally have proof that you are the princess, Elena.”

“What!” I looked at her and back at the man who sat on the couch. He stood up and walked right over to me. He took a deep bow. “My name is Borgen Haulster. I'm a banker and a dragon living on the other side. I'm so sorry that I haven't come sooner.”

“It's fine, what does this have to do with me?” I looked at Sir Robert who just stared into space with a cup of tea in his hands.

“Sit, please. We have much to discuss.”

“Mind if we stay?” Becky asked Isabel.

“Make yourself at home.”

I took a seat next to Borgen as Becky and Sammy took a seat next to her father. Dean and George made themselves comfortable on the floor.

“Before my father died he spoke to me in private. He told me about a sacred vault. One that belonged to the king and queen. He never said why the king had a vault in Elm, he only told me that when the day came, I would know when to tell. Also, that I should forget about it, until that day came. I tried to keep tabs on what was going on inside Paegeia and I apologize for the four-month delay. I only learned about you a couple of days ago, and I knew immediately that this was the day my father spoke about. The vault is located below a theme park in Elm. I don’t know if you’ve heard of the squeaky old vampire tree?”

“What!” Becky said excited. “That tree almost chomped my finger up.”

“What?” I asked.

The others started to laugh. “Becky is being a Drama Queen, Elena.” Sammy rolled her eyes. “It doesn’t chomp you, it pricks your finger for blood.”

“It’s not a vampire tree, it’s the vault’s lock,” Borgen said. “The vault operates on DNA. It’s your chance to prove you are the princess, Elena.”

“I don’t understand.”

“A drop of your blood can open the vault,” Becky said with huge eyes.

I jumped up and paced up and down.

“I thought this was what you wanted?” Becky asked and Isabel came to me.

“What is it, sweetheart?”

“What if it doesn’t open?” I said.

“Then you aren’t who you say you are,” Borgen said.

“Don’t you ever insinuate anything like that,” Sir Robert said.

“I’m just answering Elena’s question.”

“I am who I say I am.” I rubbed the inside of my palm hard. “I’m just scared, it’s been almost eighteen years.”

“It will open, princess,” Borgen assured me.

“Don’t call me that, please.”

“Did you tell anybody else about this?” Sir Robert asked.

“No one, yet.”

“Elena,” Isabel looked at me. “There could be something in there that only your parents want you to see. Something tells me your mother knew exactly what your future was going to be like. She knew this day would come, and you would need the chance to prove to everyone that you are their daughter. Not just for them, but for Blake as well. He needs to dent still, Elena. He can’t do that if you are not his Dragonian.” She gave me her motherly smile. “That vault will open.”

I nodded and she gave me a hug.

“Make a fuss, and I mean a huge one, so that everyone that ever doubted her will be there,” Isabel spoke with a slightly harsh tone.

“Consider it done,” Borgen said and stood up. “Will you excuse me? I have a lot of people to see.”



OVER THE NEXT few days the buzz around the secret vault of King Albert and Queen Catherine was plastered in every newspaper and every magazine with my face right next to it. King Caleb even spoke a couple of times over the TV, putting everyone at ease that the vault would not open.

“What if it does open, your highness?” one of the reporters asked.

He just lifted up his chin higher and smiled. His left eye twitched a bit. “I promise you, it won’t.”

Sir Robert switched off the TV and stomped out of the room.

“Hey, what’s wrong? This is good news.”

“I know it is, I’m just scared.”

“About the vault not opening?” Sammy raised her eyes.

I shook my head. “About what will happen if it does. I’m not princess material Sammy. I wouldn’t know what to do with the title. I’ll be in the newspapers and magazines all the time, people will print bad things about me, and I don’t know if I can run a country.”

“Then you can thank your lucky stars that my brother is amazing when it comes to the press.”

She made me giggle.

“Besides, you’re going way too fast, you need to slow down. Each day at a time. They won’t shove Paegeia inside your hands and say ‘there you go’.”

I giggled. She sure had a funny way of saying things.

“You are not alone, Elena. We are here, and when Blake comes back...”

“If he comes back.”

“He will come back. Then everything will be different.”

I huffed. “He despises me Sammy.”

“He’s just scared, Elena. He wasn’t always like that you know.”

“So I keep hearing.”

She huffed and I found her staring into space.

“What is it?”

“You know there is a foretelling about a love so strong that nobody will ever break it.”

Lucian told me about this and I saw it that day when I was at the museum with Cheng.

“My mom thinks it’s yours.”

“He will never love me, Sammy.”

“Don’t say that. You don’t know the Blake I do. He’s quite the charmer when he wants something, Elena.”

I giggled again.

“What if he never wants me?”

“I never met a dent or heard of one that doesn't. Besides stop thinking about tomorrow and live today.”

“You sound like Lucian now.”

“Well, he was bound to rub off on somebody.”

I giggled again. “I love you so much, Samantha Leaf.”

“And I you, princess.” She shook her head in a mocking way.

“Now I know why Lucian hated that so much.”

She giggled and we went to her room.

I still slept on the mattress on the floor. I giggled, what type of a princess was I going to be. One that sleeps on the ground and falls over her own feet, one that has absolutely no idea what a princess should be like. I wondered what was in the vault. It couldn't be much. I sighed. It didn't matter, just as long as I could get my dragon back and become who I should've been a long time ago.

“You'll see, tomorrow is going to be a walk in the park.” Sammy spoke in her sleep and I shook my head with a slight grin on my face. If only I had her confidence.



DIDN'T DREAM LIKE usual that night. I understood a couple of my dreams but why I'd dreamt about me turning into the dragon that killed Brian was still a mystery. Isabel thought it had to do with the fact that I felt responsible for his death. She sure had good theories and I thought maybe I should go with that. I still dreamt about Cara though, dreaming about being a dragon. I missed her so much. I missed the sky, the wind soaring through my wings and against my scales.

The next day we took an elevator to Elm. The protesters were there once again. This time their posters read “Proved you wrong once, we'll do it again”. I didn't answer any of the questions the reporters yelled at me.

At Elm it was ten times worse, but closer to the theme park I had more support from people who did believe that I was who I said I was. An old lady put a necklace made of flowers around my neck. "You look just like your father, but you have your mother's grace," she said in a sweet tone and smiled a crooked smile.

"Thank you," I replied and was led away by Sir Robert. We met Borgen who spoke to the media in front of the themepark.

My heart was thumping as I dreaded the moment we would have to open the vault. That vault hadn't been opened for eighteen odd years, what if it never opened again? Would I be able to live like a normal person, to never feel the wind in my face or to glide through the air again?

Lucille held my hand tightly in hers. "It's going to be okay," she whispered as we were led into a private area to wait for Borgen to finish with the press.

Queen Margerite and King Helmut were waiting for us inside with Constance and Master Longwei.

Lucian's mom gave me a tight hug. "The vault will open, you'll see."

I nodded and took a deep breath. It'd better open.

King Helmut and Sir Robert spoke softly to one another but I could hear every word they were saying.

King Helmut was apologizing to Sir Robert about so many things.

Sammy's eyes glistened with tears as she just stared at them and she couldn't help but smile. Isabel went over to her daughter to give her a hug. I wished Blake was here to see this.

When all the media's questions were answered Borgen came to fetch us and took us to the vampire tree.

We came to a clearing and found a huge oak tree. There was a huge opening and many bystanders watched, mostly press and friends of mine with their families stood around.

Borgen even asked a couple of people to move away from the clearing. "We don't want you to get hurt when the vault opens up."

Gasps filled the air as they moved further and further away until Borgen was sure they would be safe.

“How big is this thing?” Becky whispered.

“Shush,” her mother scolded.

My heart thumped louder and louder. “Please open up.” I mouthed fast with closed eyes.

I could feel a pair of hands rubbing my arms and embracing me in a hug. By the smell I knew it was Lucian’s mom. “The vault will open,” she whispered in my ear.

Becky and Sammy were right next to Lucille and Isabel. Sir Robert stood close to me. Constance took the spot next to her sister and they both gave me their identical motherly smiles. It was so creepy seeing them together.

“Elena, this is it,” Borgen said and reached out an arm for me to come closer to the vampire tree. “Put your hand in the mouth.”

I looked at the tree and saw the face of a dragon carved out.

I glanced at Becky. “Does it hurt?”

“Elena,” Sammy said. “Don’t listen to her. She’s overdramatic, remember?” She wiggled a finger and I laughed at how Becky bumped Sammy playfully.

“Only a little bit,” Borgen said with a smile.

“Elena who knows what is down there. Pain should be the last thing on your mind.” Becky finally gave her two cent comment and everyone laughed.

The cameras stood ready and even the media was standing close to document this great event. I felt a pair of hands on my shoulders and I turned my head to see who was behind me. Isabel smiled. “It will open, Elena.”

I gave her an unsure smile in return and closed my eyes as my hand touched the rim of the dragon’s mouth.

If you made this to prove I’m who you say I am, then let it be.

The prick came faster than I thought and I pulled my hand out. A drop of blood ran down my finger.

Isabel's soothing touch healed my bloody finger and I wished that I could fly away and not be here to witness what would happen next. We waited for what felt like an eternity. My eyes found King Caleb, Arianna and he had a smirk on their faces.

"I don't understand?" I looked at Isabel.

"It doesn't matter, Elena."

"No, I know what I saw. He was there. This should open."

"It's alright, Elena. You don't have to be here."

"See, what did I tell you. The girl is a fraud." King Caleb addressed the entire crowd and the cameras were all on him. Some even took pictures of me.

"Let's go," Lucille grabbed my hand softly and she started to lead me away.

"Her father isn't..."

A huge clicking sound made all of us stop. Even my heart stopped. Everyone sucked in a breath and I turned around. Sir Robert started to chuckle.

The earth started to shake softly as a biggest split I'd ever seen appeared in the middle of the clearing. It started to move apart and the opening grew bigger slowly. Becky and Sammy just stared as cameras flashed.

My heart finally started to beat again, faster and faster and then it felt as if I could breathe again.

"It's opening, Elena," Isabel finally said with tears in her eyes. I started to laugh as I looked at it myself and finally believed it with all my heart. I was their child. I was the princess of Paegeia. The bloodline of the Malone's, not the last though.

The opening finally stopped and it wasn't as big as Borgen thought it would be, but it didn't matter. I'd gotten what I needed. To prove I was theirs and that was all that mattered. Another clicking sound echoed and steps started to appear inside the hole in the ground.

Tears filled my eyes and I wiped them away. I'd never felt so overwhelmed and happy in my entire life. I never had to prove myself

to anyone ever again.

“Guess it was just a bit old?” Borgen said and went down on one knee. He was followed by the rest of the onlookers all bowing down. Sir Robert went on his knee too and so did Isabel, Lucille and my best friends.

What are they doing? My voice was gone as a million goose bumps crawled over my skin.

King Caleb went down, Queen Gizelle and Arianna gaping as he pulled them both down too.

It was a surreal moment. “Please, stand up.” I finally found my voice and lifted Lucille and Isabel who were closest to me up. “Please, rise,” I begged and all of them did.

Constance and every woman who had been a mother to me had tears in their eyes.

Queen Margerite found me and she hugged me tight. “Your mother was my best friend, Elena. I knew the minute I saw you that you belonged to her.” I looked at her with huge eyes.

“Why—”

“Princess,” Borgen interrupted, “The key is yours.” He handed me a huge copper key and my hands trembled as I took it from him. He kept his hand over mine. “A princess doesn’t show fear,” Queen Margerite whispered inside my ear. It was the first royal lesson I learned.

I took a deep breath and gained control over my shaking hand. “Thank you,” I smiled.

“So, you guys want to see what my parents put down there?” I looked at Becky and Sammy.

“You’re damn right, I want to know,” Becky said and everyone laughed again.

I nodded at Sir Robert and he took the lead down the stairs. I followed with my two best friends and Lucille with Isabel and Queen Margerite with King Helmut behind them.

It was dark but Sammy lit up one of the handmade torches and the entire passage glowed. I found a huge door and Sir Robert and Borgen wiped the webs away that covered it.

“Please, whatever is inside there, can we move it to a not so creepy place?” I begged.

“I’m sure that won’t be a problem, princess.” Borgen laughed. It was followed by a couple of other laughs and I pushed the key inside.

It would be just my luck if the thing didn’t want to turn.

But it turned easily and clicked open. More locks opened and shifted out of place. My heart was beating like crazy and I blew out a deep gush of air waiting for the opening process to finish. Air released and the door opened slightly. I looked at Sir Robert and he nodded. I didn’t even have to ask him and I watched as he opened the door. I closed my eyes before I could see the contents. It didn’t matter what they’d left me, it was mine, mine forever

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT



EVERYONE GASPED.

“Holy fuck,” Lucille said.

“Mom!” Becky teased. “But I’m with you. Elena! For crying out loud open your eyes.”

It opened and I couldn’t believe what was in front of me. Becky pushed me inside as my own feet couldn’t find their way.

It was a neat vault made of steel. Cages and cages filled with gold lined both sides. All of us were speechless. I walked to the end and another door slid open. It was filled with jewels. My father and mother’s crowns were both on pillows right at the end. And it had a third pillow with the most beautiful tiara I’d ever seen. Beautiful ball gowns and jewels lay open on the velvet shelves surrounding it. It was covered by glass that you lifted up but I was too scared to touch it.

“Elena,” Sir Robert said and I found him at the entrance we’d just come through. He had a huge envelope inside his hand. He handed it to me and I struggled to open it.

I took out a thick envelope with my name on it. There were a couple more envelopes inside of it, with a couple of journals. I took out all the envelopes and saw Sir Robert's name written in manly handwriting, and Blake written in the most beautiful cursive that graced mine.

I handed Sir Robert his letter and Blake's. He wouldn't accept anything from me and if it was from my mom, he should read it. Sir Robert took both envelopes with caution. He closed his eyes when he saw his name on one of them, and tore the top open.

I did the same with mine.

It was a thick letter.

"My dearest Elena," were the first words on the letter.

"I knew first love the minute I met your father, but I only knew what unconditional love was when I held you inside my arms. You were so tiny and so fragile, I can't imagine what life will be without you and I hope with all of my heart that you never get to read this letter, because it will mean that I never got the chance to meet you again. I love you so much and I miss you like crazy. You were the only thing, beside your father, I ever wanted.

To give you up in order to save your life was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. I'd fight twenty more wars if it meant that I could've kept you, but it's not how life works.

I'm writing this letter with deep sorrow inside my heart but knowing that one day you might read it, is the only pleasure I have.

We left you everything we have, and hope that it will be enough for you to find it in your heart to forgive me.

I tried everything to keep you, but the odds were against that the minute you were born. If only I was a Moon-Bolt and I could see into the future of who was going to betray us, I would slit him open from chin to navel to have you in my arms again. But again the Malones don't have the luxury of knowing what is to happen.

I love you more than words can say and I've written my stories down hoping that one day you will read them.

I wish I knew the type of woman you will turn into, that Elena I would give anything to meet. And remember, I will always be with you until we meet again.

Love, Mom.”

There were more letters but I decided to read them later as both my friends hugged me while I struggled to keep my tears at bay.

“Shhhh,” Becky said, but they didn’t say anything else, what could they say?

There was another letter apart from my mother’s thick one. It was from my father. It read almost the same as my mom’s. How much he wanted me and how badly he wanted us to reunite. He also said if I read this, that he would be dead, but he wasn’t. He was stuck behind Etan and who knows what Goran was doing to him. I’d made a promise I should’ve never made.

“P.S. Everything inside this vault is for you, except Vault F. It belongs to the Leafs, it belongs to my dragon.” A small key was inside that I assumed would open Vault F.

I looked at Sir Robert. He still read his letter but he finally stopped and turned to the wall.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” He spoke softly. I felt for him and Sammy and her mom both went to his side.

“This would’ve been different if he’d trusted me with his daughter and not Tanya. She left when she was supposed to stay.”

“Please don’t,” I said and went to him. “I told you, and I told my father that day, that Blake needed you more, and my father knew that. He did trust you.”

“I would’ve stayed, you would’ve known who you were.”

“I know who I am, if you’d left your family, what would’ve been the outcome? Everything was exactly the way it was supposed to be.” That was something Jako’d told me.

He nodded.

“Now wipe away that anger and help me find Vault F.”

We all walked past the huge vaults and finally found numbers hidden behind the bars. The last one had a door. "This must be F," I said.

I took the key and pushed it inside the door. The vault opened and we all gasped again. Bars of gold were stacked on the shelves and black sacks which I assumed were full of diamonds took up a small shelf.

I gave Sir Robert my letter. "Below, at the bottom."

He read the last sentence which said Vault F belongs to him and he froze.

"What is it, Robert?" Isabel asked him.

His eyes glistened with tears and he gave me a look and shook his head.

"It's not from me, it's from him."

"I can't. It's too much."

"It's what he wanted."

"Robert?" Isabel asked again.

"What the hell is going on?" Sammy asked her father.

He started to laugh with tears in his eyes and hugged Isabel and Sammy both. "This is ours," he whispered. "My rider took care of us even in death."

"What!" Both woman yelled and he gave them my letter stating that Vault F belonged to the Leafs.

Isabel cupped her face.

"The bastard came through. He always came through. I should never have left his side."

"He ordered you away, Robert." Isabel hugged him again, tears rolling down her own cheeks.

"I could've stayed."

"You would've been in pain if you disobeyed him. He wanted you to live. I'm thankful every day that he did what he did."

He hugged his wife again and they both cried. "I miss him so much."

My father was right. I couldn't tell him that he was still alive. He would have killed himself to get through those Creepers to be reunited with his rider.

"I know you do, honey, we all miss them."

Sammy was still in shock. I grabbed her by the arm and gave her a long hug. "Neither of us will ever have to worry about anything ever again."

"This is too much, Elena."

"I'm glad my father left that for you, your dad would never have accepted the money I wanted to give you guys."

She hugged me again.

"Who would've thought that the girl that struggled to accept this crazy place filled with dragons would end up becoming the person who will rule it one day," Becky said and I pulled her in for a group hug.

"You know what this means don't you?"

"That you're filthy rich and have a shit load of power." We laughed.

"No, that you will become part of my royal court one day. I won't be able to do this without my girls."

Becky grabbed me around my neck.

"I love you Elena Watkins Malone," she said and I laughed again. "I love you too, Becky Johnson Mills,"

We all giggled.



WE STAYED INSIDE the vault just looking at the various things each section contained. It felt so unreal to think all of this was mine, and my mind wandered back to my father who was stuck behind Etan.

He did all of this, him and my mom. They did know this day would come, they did know that no one would believe me and that is why

they made preparations.

I only took my parent's journals and the letters they'd written more than seventeen years ago and wondered what it would have been like if they'd found out that it was Goran who would betray them. What type of a person would I have been if it was Albert and Catherine that had raised me and not Herbert who was constantly on the run, protecting the girl that killed his own daughter? How much did he hate me, loathe me at times? I tried to remember if there was a time he treated me unfairly, but I couldn't think of any. I only remembered the times I'd treated him unfairly, blaming him because he was paranoid. If only....if only didn't exist.

Sir Robert opened the door we'd entered and we climbed up the stairs again. I almost bumped into Sir Robert who just stood on the top of the stairs. He moved away and thousands of people were standing outside.

They all became super quiet as I stood there, frozen in one spot. Then one by one they took a knee, just like the people had a couple of hours ago.

I gasped when it became too much and had to suppress my tears as all of this was so overwhelming. A couple of hours ago, it was only a small party believing me, now, it was half of Paegeia.

"Long may you reign!" one guy shouted.

He shouted it again and this time a couple more joined him. It grew and grew until it was a chant that didn't even seem real.

Sir Robert touched my shoulder gently, tears in his eyes too as he stared at all that was before us. Something in his eyes told me it wasn't the first time he'd witnessed something like this.

He looked down at me. "Long may you reign, princess."



MOONBREEZE
THE DRAGONIAN SERIES 4

BY
ADRIENNE WOODS

CHAPTER ONE

A PART FROM POISON

SIR ROBERT LEAF



My mind was full of questions: things I just couldn't comprehend. Why Al never told me about Elena, what he must have been going through.

In the old days we shared everything, and I mean everything. I wasn't just his dragon, I was his friend, his shoulder to cry on when nobody was watching, especially the time Katie rejected him, when she stopped living, crying all the time, fighting with him all the time.

His men and I always thought it was about Tanya. I even thought that Al asked her to choose between him and her dragon, and that she chose him, letting Tanya go free.

It was an easy thing to think as he never got along with Tanya and it was hard for him that Katie shared a dent with her, a bond so strong that we would never be able to comprehend how it worked. I was

furious with him because of it, but I never questioned him as he was also my king.

Now I know better, it wasn't just for Katie that he cried but for Elena too.

I huffed thinking of those times he tried to tell me so badly, but he always sent me away, telling me he wanted to be alone. I should've seen it, the way he used to look at Sammy's Dragon figure, stare at her for hours. I thought it was longing for a child he could never have, not the one he had to give up because of Goran and Blake.

How couldn't I see it? When Blake and Elena find a way to get pass those deathly snatchers, I will find Goran, I will kill him, and I will laugh and spit in his face while my blade is stuck in his chest. I don't care who his brother was, he betrayed us all. He will die, even if it's the last thing I do.

Footsteps entering the house brought me out of my string of thoughts.

I closed my eyes and let the swift came. I could hear everything, someone breathing, a faint heart beating. It was him.

"What the ..."

I switched on the light. "Hello, son."

He spun around. "Dad?" A confused look plastered itself on his face as he looked around him, bewildered. "What happened here?"

I smiled. "We don't live here anymore. I bought ground and we're rebuilding the manor."

He narrowed his eyes, thinking really hard and then he huffed. "She gave you money."

"No, I had been left some money in the king's vault a long time ago. I never knew he transferred it to the new one,"

I lied. My son would never accept any of it if he knew it came from her father.

The corners of his mouth twitched. "No more scraping around, turning each Paegolian over twice."

"I learned my lesson, it will be spent wisely."

He nodded.

“So you’re back.”

He shook his head. “I came because you need to get Elena out of there. She’s feeling trapped and I can’t deal with her feelings right now.”

My eyebrows knitted together. “How did you know about her, and what do you mean she’s feeling trapped?”

“Seriously,” he gave me a raised eyebrow. “Dad, she is royalty, by blood.” He chuckled. “You really think they were going to take it easy on her. They are forcing this stinking world on her.” He stared at the empty spot where the table in the kitchen used to be. “They took away her Cammy, she can’t even call for help. Well, except me and to be honest, I don’t care much at the moment, I just can’t deal with her feelings right now.”

Her feelings? “Blake, you want to tell me you can feel Elena’s emotions?”

He looked at the ceiling and shook his head slightly. He was really getting annoyed. “She asked for you tonight, for Becky, Sammy, mom, anyone that knows her, but they refused.” He huffed. “They even got her birthday wrong,” he mumbled. So he did care, but wasn’t ready to show it yet.

“Yeah, it’s tomorrow, not today.”

“Just get her out of there, before I lose my mind and who knows what I will do.”

“Blake, come home. We’re staying at—”

“I’m not coming home, Dad,” he said through gritted teeth. “She’s not my rider. I’m the Rubicon for crying out loud. I can’t be tamed,” he roared with red changing his mother’s blue peacock eyes.

It was the only way I could tell Issy and Constance apart.

“Just get her out of there.” He turned around and left.

I could hear the transformation, he was becoming more silent in ways that I never imagined.

He needed to dent, but at what cost?

Elena! Robert, she needs you.

I pulled out my Cammy. “Helmut,” I spoke his name. We paired phones a couple of weeks back when Elena was still with us. If you need anything, just phone. Well, I am going to need a shit load from you old friend.

His face appeared, sleep frozen in his features. “Robert? It’s two—”
“With all do respect your highness, but what are you doing to Elena? It’s my duty to protect her and I made it clear to not push Paegeia and taking her duty as the princess hard on her. She’s not ready for that.”

“It’s not like that. She is merely learning about her duty to Paegeia.”

“Her duty! Forcing her is more like it.”

“What? No.” He shook his head.

“Don’t lie to me. Blake was here.”

His face woke up in an instant. “Blake’s back?”

“Not entirely, but he passed by, asking me to free her. Why would he use those words if she is there of her own free will?”

“What do you mean free her?”

“You tell me, Helmut.”

“Look, they told me they will take it easy on her, getting her to know all the advisers and learn about her people and kingdom. I still don’t understand why you think she needs to be freed.”

“Blake is feeling her emotions. Their bond is stronger than any of us thought. If they dent, we are going to see something we’ve never seen in all of dragon and rider history.”

“He’s feeling her emotions. She’s not trapped, she is there of her own free will.”

“By taking her Cammy away, cutting her off from the people that matter to her. That doesn’t sound a lot like free will to me, Helmut.”

“No!”

“They threw her a huge party tonight in honor of her birthday. Not one of us was invited, Helmut.”

Margerite's face and shoulders popped up from behind her husband's. "No, I sent out the invites. None of you replied," Margerite said. "Elena was devastated about that."

"Are you sure?" Helmut looked over his shoulder at Margerite. "Did you speak to her tonight?"

"I said hi, but she had so many friends around her. She enjoyed tonight, but not the way she would've if Becky and Sammy were there. She really looked forward to seeing them."

"We didn't get any invitation, Margerite."

"I gave them to Stan—" she trailed off and stared into space; her eyes closed and her face turned into the old Margerite. When someone stepped on her children. "That fucking bastard." She got out of the bed. I could hear her searching for something and how she finally spoke Stanley's name.

She was right, he was a fucking bastard. Ever since he got his clutches on Elena, her old life didn't matter to him anymore.

"You promised me this wasn't going to happen. This thing is over. She's coming home."

"Robert she needs—"

"No, she needs people around her that know her well. They even got her birthday wrong."

"What!" Both Margerite and Helmut said as she was still waiting for Stan's face to disappear.

"It's tomorrow and they are making her go to Areeth. They'll have to kill me first before they drag her to that place. Get her out of there or I will, and you don't want me to do it my way."

I switched off the Cammy and both their faces disappeared.

I thought of Lucille. The kids weren't going to be happy about this. They thought ever since Elena left that she changed. Her new royal status turned her for the worst. A couple of pictures of her having fun were plastered all over magazines with new girls at her side. It wasn't like that at all.

I rolled up my sleeping bag and left. Lucille was about fifteen minutes away. It was going to be less soon, now that I'd purchased ground just a mile from her. It was a gorgeous piece of land with the most beautiful view of the mountains in Tith. My children and wife would feel free, not cramped up in that wretched piece of crap we called home for so long. We were going to rebuild the manor, the one we used to live in behind those terrible Creepers. Just a few more months and our home would be ready. It would have the old kitchen with the old fire place, big cupboards and a huge dining table, the fridge would have so much food, the pantry full. We were never going back to scrape and beg for anything anymore.

There would be seven rooms, each one having their entry from the outside, so they can just fly in whenever they want. Issy will have her library again, and me, I'll have my training room. I haven't trained for a long time, but now that I had a purpose to live again, I need to prepare.

The children can have whatever they want. Samantha can finally see and experience the old life her brother used to tell her about when they were little.

And Blake...I smiled. Will be king one day. When he dents, and he will dent whether he likes it or not.

I stopped right in front of Lucille's two dragon gates. I'd always admired them, I admired who they were protecting. She lost her husband the night of the creepers. Ettiene and his dragon William were an amazing pair, not a dent but still amazing. She'd been nothing but kind to our family and ever since I could repay her, she didn't want to take a dime from me.

You don't get people like that anymore.

My hand stretched out of the car and pushed the button. I had to push it a couple of times before Rosa answered.

"Rosa!"

"Sir Robert," she answered in a sleepy voice.

"It's about Elena, open up."

The old dragon did and I drove down their driveway as fast as I could. Tires screeched as I parked the car.

When I reached the front door I didn't even have to knock as Lucille opened up for me.

"What about Elena?" she asked in a concerned voice.

"Wake Becky, it's not what any of us think."

"Robert."

"Now, Lucille. She needs to know this."

She nodded at Rosa who rushed up the stairs. She led me to her dining table and we sat down.

"What is going on with Elena?"

"They are forcing Paegeia on her. Stan took away her Cammy and that's why the girls haven't heard anything from her. Margerite told me that they sent all of us invitations, she gave them to Stan who didn't..."

Lucille shook her head. "But those pictures."

"Come on, Lucille. Every time Blake wanted to get back at them, at me, he did something stupid and made sure press was around."

"She's rebelling."

"She's been crying out for us, trying to get our attention and we just sat here, did nothing."

"That bastard."

"What bastard, mom?" Becky appeared at the bottom of the stairs.

"And who is rebelling?"

"Come sit, honey," Lucille said. "Rosa, can you please get the kettle going. We need coffee."

"Not to worry, I'll have it ready in two seconds." Rosa disappeared.

"Mom, what is going on? Why is Sir Robert here?"

"It's about Elena, sweetheart."

Her face hardened the minute Lucille said her name.

"Oh, please I'm going back to bed."

“They took away her Cammy, Becky.”

Becky froze.

“She’s been asking for all of us for a long time, and they deny her every single time,” I said.

She turned around. “What? How do you know this?”

I looked down at the table. “Blake came back and begged me to get Elena out of there. He’s connected to her in ways we’ll never understand.”

“Blake’s back?” Becky and Lucille asked.

I shook my head. “He just gave me the message, said he couldn’t deal with it and I have to get her out of there.”

“But those pictures of her having fun, with her new friends,” Becky started.

“She rebelled, probably snuck out and did the opposite of what she had to do, sweetheart.”

Becky shook her head. “She could’ve come here.” Hurt laced her eyes.

“There are guards everywhere at all the ports,” I said. “If you haven’t noticed them.”

“Sir Robert is right. For all we know, she tried,” Lucille said.

She shook her head. “The cockroaches would have said something.”

“Unless they were paid a lot of money, Becky.” I looked at her.

“These people have all the money in the world to do whatever they want.”

She looked at me for a short while. I knew she thought about Elena, and whatever could be wrong. She took a deep breath, the hurt got replaced with anger. “You want to tell me that they are holding my friend captive because of what she has to learn?” Her voice rose slightly.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying.”

She shook her head and got up just as Rosa came back with the coffee. “I need to phone George. This Stan guy is going to regret that

he ever took her away with his false pretenses and everything.” She ran up the stairs.

I took a deep breath trying to calm my own anger. Becky might only be eighteen, but with those dark eyes and set mind, Stan was going to remember her for a long time to come.

“Have you told Sammy yet, she was really upset about tonight and I can’t recall her ever feeling so hurt.”

“Not yet, I came directly here after I spoke to Helmut.”

She blew out a breath. “Good, one royal on our side could get this sorted out as civilized as possible. I was imagining thunder and acid destroying a hotel to get her out of there.”

I started to laugh but it disappeared just as fast. I looked at her in the eyes. “It will come to that if Helmut doesn’t get her out, Lucille. I should’ve never let her out of my sight.”

“Robert, they promised that she could come home if this got too much. None of us knew that they would deceive us like this.”

“Still, I should’ve kept my promise.”

“Don’t worry, tomorrow is her birthday and she’ll be back with us. Being a normal teenager again.” A knock on the door made both of us jump and Becky stormed down the stairs and opened it.

“What about Elena, and who do we need to free?” George asked sleepily.

He got fast.

“Elena, they are holding her against her will. We were invited but that Stan douchebag didn’t send us the invites because we are not important.” Becky spoke fast, with anger and her hands were up in the air. “If I get my hands on him,” she mumbled.

“Calm down, Becky.” George grabbed her and pulled her to his chest. “We will get her out of there.”

It always amazed me how she never had to fully explain herself to him. He just understood what she was going through and would do anything in his power to fix it.

They came over to sit at the table. He greeted me with an open hand and gave Lucille two kisses on the cheek.

“Blake came back,” Becky told him

“He’s here?” he asked me and looked around.

“No, he left again. He just told me about Elena—

“He feels her, doesn’t he?” George interrupted.

“Do you, too?” Becky asked him with awe written over her face.

“Not like that, but yes. When you are upset about something, I can sense it if we are not together. I got woken up from it, a second before my Cammy rang.”

“Frawsome,” she yelled and we all chuckled.

“I don’t understand. This only happened a short while ago. How did Blake—”

“Their bond is stronger,” Lucille said, “and I guess in some way that’s the thing that scares him the most. He can hear and feel what she is going through already. He doesn’t want to succumb to that.”

“It’s exactly that,” I said.

“They’re lucky they haven’t dented yet,” George said and we all gave him a confused look... “Cause they will deal with us, and not him.”

We got what he said, and laughed. This would’ve never happened if Blake succumbed. “We keep this from Elena, for now. She has a lot to deal with, she doesn’t need to know about all of this and what Blake feels.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Adrienne Woods was born and raised in South Africa, where she still resides on the East side of Johannesburg with her husband and two little girls. She's been writing for the past four years and in her free time she likes to review books of new and upcoming authors.

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