

When All is Lost

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Chapter I

Ok, get this. I went on a walk to clear my mind. Being the princess of Arcem is tiring, very, very tiring. So, I got really lost in my thoughts and zoned out. Next thing I know, I'm in a part of the woods I *don't* know. And I thought I knew every inch of the castle grounds. The sun gets in my eyes a little so I close them for maybe 2 seconds. Then, as if by magic, there's this weird girl standing in front of me. She has sand colored skin, what seem to be golden tattoos, and pure white eyes that seemed to swirl with mist and fog. But that wasn't even the weirdest part. She had sunset colored hair, going from indigo to cool magenta to warm magenta, to a reddish pink, then reddish orange, then yellowish orange, and finally yellow at the ends. Her outfit was strange too, but I didn't notice.

“Who are you exactly?”

“I'm Mysti. You?”

“Hope.” I replied, choosing to leave out the fact I'm a princess.

“Well it's really nice to meet you, Hope. We don't really get visitors often, and they never stay. Always running off, screaming.” She smiled a little, but I don't think she was joking.

“If I may ask, why did you dye your hair 7 different colors? And where would you even get that much hair dye?”

“What's hair dye?” The confusion on her face looked real, and if it wasn't then she was a really good actor.

“Hair dye is like clothes dye except you use it on your hair.”

“So like when you stain something red with pomegranate juice to color it.”

“I guess? Um, where exactly are you from?”

“Rellea, why?”

Where in the world is Rellea?! I bet she just made that up.

“What... race are you?”

“Rellean.”

Ok, this is starting to get ridiculous, I have no idea what Mysti means.

“Yeah, I’m sorry but I’ve never heard of them before.”

“I think you guys call us ‘fairies’. Which is weird because those are extinct. You all killed the last one decades ago.”

“Yo-you’re a f-fairy?” This. Was. Bad. Fairies are the most vile and vicious creatures on earth. But Mysti doesn’t seem that bad-no. It’s a trap.

“You ok? You’re starting to look a little pale. Did... something scare you?” Weird, she actually sounded worried there, and... disappointed? I doubt it.

“Um...I-I gotta go. Bye!” I said hurriedly before running off.

“Bye, I guess? See you later. I hope.” I could barely hear the last part, but she did sound a bit sad. She must be a really good actor. But I need to get back to the castle before she curses me or something.

Chapter II

I wouldn't be able to tell you what's wrong with me. To be honest, I don't really know. My mind keeps telling me to go back to the enchanted forest. Like somehow Mysti is gonna be there. I doubt it. But my gut is telling me, 'No, stupid. It's a trap, set in broad daylight. It's one of the oldest tricks in the book, well, not really it was only invented 3 decades ago-but still! It's. A. Trap.' Then they slap me in the face. Not literally, that would be crazy, your gut can't slap you in the face, but still... Oh! And now I'm starting to sound like my gut! Aaaaand, that's a sentence I never thought I'd say. Think? Whatever.

But currently I'm walking around the castle grounds, trying hard to avoid the watchtower guards. They're *always* arguing with the visitors about pointless things. Like how a swallow couldn't carry two coconuts or something. The amount of things they know about airo-dynamics... Ugh. It's infuriating. Never, and I mean *never* ask them about anything even remotely related to airo-dynamics unless you enjoy lengthy descriptions of the differences between each bird's wings and stuff like that. I mean, Greg and Bob are great! Really funny. Just not good at being quiet. How did they even get this job anyway? Oh, Nevermind.

Then I look up and find myself at the edge of the forest. The *enchanted forest*. Now that I'm here, I might as well go in. Why am I thinking that? Dunno. But this time,

I'm still going to the enchanted forest unintentionally, but I'm going *inside it* intentionally. Hm. I finally make it to the clearing where I met Mysti last time, and sat down on a mossy tree stump with a large piece of bark at the back, almost like it was supposed to be a chair. My head is spinning a little from the heat of the day, though it's still morning and the very end of summer, nearly autumn. The fact I'm wearing a floor-length navy blue, cranberry, and forest green dress doesn't help. Like at all. Then as if the forest sensed uncomfot a cool breeze came through and I wasn't hot anymore. Weird.

"So, you gonna have a conversation or what?"

I immediately looked up, startled. I hadn't noticed anyone come into the clearing, but then again this was a magical forest, so what did you expect? I couldn't quite see the person because they were shaded by a tree. But I saw a bit of gold flicker in the escaping sunlight.

"Mysti?"

"Took you long enough."

"How long have you been standing there?"

"Too long." It was a short reply, but it puzzled me. I hadn't been here that long. And I doubt she knew I was coming-well, she's magic so who knows- but why was it too long for her?

"So, I know I kinda ran off a few days ago. I just..." I let out a sigh, "Well, I've been told stories about the fairies. I'm really sorry I ran off. So, can we be friends?"

"I was under the impression we were... but yes."

That was unexpected. I didn't think she'd say yes. But then again, she doesn't seem like the hostile type, and I've seen plenty of those.

"Can we move? I don't like being here. It's too dangerous and close to the humans."

I didn't know what her problem was with humans, but I could tell she was getting uncomfortable, so I got up.

"Where too?" I met Mysti's eyes-which were slightly unnerving, the girl was creepy- and waited for her to respond.

"We'll go to Dusk. It's further away."

I had no freaking idea what 'go to Dusk' meant, and for a second I thought she was crazy, but then I realized: it's a freaking magic forest, what would you expect?

We start walking out of the clearing and the sun gets less, and less bright, until all the light is coming from the forest itself. We eventually get up to a bridge made out of two tree roots. And when I say 'made', I mean the roots grew together.

Mysti walked across the roots with ease, like she'd done it a thousand times-and to be honest she probably had- before gesturing for me to follow. The roots were not as easy to walk across as Mysti made it seem. It's like a balance beam just level 10 and over a river. A freaking river.

And then it was over. We were walking again. Mysti must have walked this trail a thousand times because she didn't even pause when she was navigating the trees. She was so fast in fact, that I barely had time to notice the leaves change from green to purple. The ground soon turned hard,

like rock. Probably because the path had become rock. A tightly packed path of large, flat river stones, though there was no river in sight. The bark of the trees was pitch black and the leaves a vibrant violet. There was a glowing yellow ball of light at a turn in the path, most likely so we could see, we passed it no problem.

Soon, the forest got darker, covered in a blue glow with what looked like fireflies, except they weren't, they were floating flecks of light. And all the trees became dark silhouettes against... the moon? But it was morning! We walked into a small clearing that had a path on the other side. Mysti quickly walked to the other path. The full moon was visible over her head as she did so. Once on the path the plants started to change color again. The leaves faded slowly into purples and pinks as we went, the air filling with more light. As we entered what I hoped was the last clearing a blue light appeared. I heard the faint sound of water, and we approached the waterfall. I nearly tripped 12 times on the roots woven into the dirt.

“Sooooooo, is this Dusk?”

“Mhm. This is one of the glades.”

“Ok, what are ‘the glades’. Mysti, I swear sometimes I’d think you’d have lost your mind.”

“A lot of people say that about me.”

“Can’t say I’m surprised, but can you explain the whole ‘Dusk’ thing, because I’m lost.”

“Sure. The enchanted forest is divided into parts, Day, Night, Dawn and Dusk. Dawn and Dusk are grouped under night, making up the larger section of the Rellea. My

Mom rules Rellea, both Day and Night. But she decided to focus more on the people a few years ago, so to do that she gave the land to me and my twin brother. Being older by 12 minutes and 32 seconds, he got to choose first. He chose Day, despite it being smaller, because it's where the city is. So when my Mom retires he'll be the ruler of Rellea. Meaning I got Night, where all the magical animals are. My ruling over night is also why my hair looks like sunset."

"Cool, so, what's your brother's name? And what does he look like?"

"His name is Ralph. He has sky blue hair streaked with light grey, sand colored skin like mine, and golden markings."

"Is he annoying? Because my brother William is suuuuper annoying. And he's 5 years older than me!"

"I understand your pain." She put a hand on my shoulder and looked down in a joking 'sorrowful' way. Though it was probably a game amongst the 2 to see who could be the most annoying.

"Thank you, but can you tell me more about Relleans and stuff? I don't know many *accurate* things about them."

"Sure, Hope. Where should I start... oh! I got it. Ok, so Relleans are currently the only magical beings in the forest, other than the animals, like the unicorns and crystal foxes. All the other species of magical beings have died out and are now just whispers."

"How exactly were Rellaens created? Did you just poof out of a flower? Or something?"

“That’s fairies, and something. We’re what happens when humans hunt the magical creatures for sport. Fairies and leprechauns have kids, elves and spirits, and witches and wizards. Then eventually, there aren’t any original species left. There’s just hybrids. This goes on until there’s only one magical race.”

“So you’re at least a bit human.”

“Hm?”

“Witches and wizards are human aren’t they?”

“Of course not. Witches and wizards are the children of balance. Just like elves and fairies, are the children of nature. With spirits being more of a personification of it.”

“What are leprechauns then?”

“The children of rainbows. Duh.”

“Ooooooaaaaay?... So, why do us humans call you extremely dangerous? That’s literally the only thing they bring you up for. ‘Fairies are dangerous’ ‘don’t go into the forest’ and all that nonsense.”

“So, around 6 years ago, the Arcemans ‘needed more land’ so they tried to burn the forest down. They’d killed off the elves and fairies and what not years ago. So all protecting the forest was us. We don’t attack unless provoked or with good reason. And they had provoked us, the idiots. The minute they started to burn the forest down, we came out in full force. We had a strong battle, but the only losses were on our side, because we refused to kill anyone. After the battle we retreated back after putting up spells so the forest couldn’t be burned again. But humans

being humans-no offense by the way- thought that this meant war. They kept attacking, and attacking, until we lashed out again. This time we killed a few. Maybe, 5 out of the 100 soldiers sent to the border, compared to their 23 of our 50, but we injured many more. Earning us the 'dangerous' reputation we have."

"Hm. Whenever my Dad explained it to me, the reason he always started and ended with was that the 'fairies' killed my uncle."

"The prince? We didn't kill him. Not at all."

"Then what happened to him?"

"He hated Arcem. Thought it was brutal and too violent-which it is, no offense. So he ran away into the woods." She said nonchalantly.

"And you expected him?"

"Of course. He was in need, and had a good heart. He soon learned magic, and found a life here."

"Mysti, so you're saying that humans can learn magic?"

"No. His Mom was Rellean, a very powerful sorceress. Your Dad's wasn't though, she was human. They were half-brothers."

"So, is Uncle Aspen still alive?"

"No. One day he was walking through the woods, cause why not? We like to do stuff like that. It was how I found you. Oh, I'm off topic, sorry. Back to the story. Then a soldier from Arcem came up. The soldier didn't recognise him because his appearance had changed to reflect his magic. The soldier, who was still fighting in a 'war' because

this happened a few days before our last battle, ran him through with a sword. But his family is still alive, his wife and kids.”

“Who? Can I meet them? Or one of them?”

“You’ve already met one of them.”

“Really? Where, when, who?”

“In the forest, 4 days ago, me.”

“You’re my cousin?”

“I think so.”

“This is the best day of my life!” I then got up and danced around happily.

Chapter III

I've been so happy for the last week. I have a cousin! A *magic* cousin. Problem is, my Dad hates magic and definitely won't let me visit her. Also, it's the royal ball in 2 days and I'm going to have to be all prim and proper. Life sucks. Anyway, I should probably tell you, I'm running away. Now I *don't* have to be prim and proper. I hate this life and all the restrictions. So I'm pulling an Uncle Aspen. Yep, that's what I'm calling it. I'm not going to go immediately into the enchanted forest. I'm going to head up to the edge of the non-enchanted forest and watch what my Dad does about me being missing from there.

So now I'm walking around in the blindspot of the tower guards. You know, Greg and Bob? Yeah, even though they're kinda distracted arguing with another visitor about the wingspan of birds, I don't want to risk them seeing me. Though they probably won't.

I should probably get out of my thoughts, or I'm actually gonna get caught.

Ok, so, the woods are drawing nearer and I can see a small entrance that used to be used by hunters. As I walk through the woods my dress keeps getting caught on the twigs and whatnot sprinkled across the ground. My eyes dart nervously around when I hear a cracking sound like feet snapping twigs. I whirl around but it's just a chonky squirrel. Thank goodness. I finally find a good place to sleep and settle down for the night.

I awoke at the crack of dawn. My eyelids peeled open in rhythm with the rising sun. I stretched out my back and looked around. I wasn't at the castle, in my room. I was in the middle of the woods, sleeping on the mossy part of a tree. That explains the soreness. But why was I here? Then it all came back to me. I had run away. I heard faint footsteps in the distance. Except they didn't sound so distant, there were maybe 20 of them, making the faint sound of footsteps far off in the distance a quiet-ish thunder of chorusing feet. People were coming. Probably out looking for me.

I grabbed my bag and scrambled up the tree. I reached one of the topmost branches and crouched down, shrouded in leaves. I slowly bent over to observe the nearing troops.

"Have you found anything?" My father's voice echoes around the clearing as he barges in. His elegant red cape flowing behind him.

"No, sire. There is no trace of her." A knight states as my father's eyes grow secretly worried.

"We won't be able to find her in time for the ball, will we?"

"N-no sire. We do not believe any trace of her could be found before the ball." My father's gaze darkened, he stared straight into the heart of the knight.

"I don't care what you believe! Increase your efforts! I want her found by Wednesday!" He boomed, making everyone in the area turn their heads, even a few animals. (Including the chonky squirrel from last night.)

“Y-yes, S-sire.” The knight stuttered, trembling in fear. My Dad was not to be messed with.

“Ok men, get a move on! Uh, try harder?!” The knight was trying to sound brave, and he was doing a better job than all his rigidly silent comrades, but he was still shaking.

“Onward!” One of them yelled, and all the knights charged through the woods looking for me, in the opposite direction of where I would actually be going.

Once they'd passed and been gone for a while I jumped down from my tree. I slang my bag over my shoulder and walked further into the woods, looking for a good hiding spot.

After about 10 minutes I wandered across a small clearing, it's shaded by a thick canopy of trees and has tons of roots sticking out for me to hide in. This would be perfect.

Chapter IV

The next morning the knights set out through the woods once more. I caught a little bit of their conversation as they passed.

“So what did the letter say again? Why are we leaving?” A knight whose helmet was a bit crooked said breathlessly.

“Oh my god. Do you not pay attention at all?” Another one said, she had a bow and quiver of arrows on her back. “The other kingdom, Ferox, has the princess. You know The King has had many quarrels with their king, and I’m pretty sure they’ve both wanted to wage war for years. Ferox might not even have the princess, though unlikely. But either way, it’s just an excuse to wage war. But the princess is definitely one of the major factors.” She said, rattling it off like she’d already done it 5 times. Whether to this soldier or others, I didn’t know.

“So, we’re going to war?” Said the first knight, less like a question and more like a statement. “If Ferox returned the princess, do you think the King would call off the war?”

“No.” The girl said bluntly, before running off toward the castle.

“Hey!” He yelled after her as he, too, ran out of the clearing.

My head was honest to goodness spinning as I tried to comprehend what I’d just heard. There was going to be

another war! And I was the cause of it! I should go back and-no. That wouldn't work. The girl... Tysha, that was her name, was right. My dad had already declared war. He wouldn't back down until it's won, even if I come back.

I shook the thoughts out of my head and came out from behind the tree. I ran my fingers through my tangled brown hair for a second before deciding to go through the path to my right.

The path was extremely long with twists and turns at every step. It's hard-packed dirt ground had quickly turned to cobblestone after a while of me walking on it. The trees seemed to get livelier (and more colorful) as I walked along though, so I must be going in the right direction.

Then a tap on my shoulder shook me out of my thoughts. I quickly pulled out a gold knife I'd stolen from the armory and whirled around.

"Aaah, put the knife down, it's rude. Also you're holding it wrong." Why am I not surprised to see Mysti standing there? Also, why point out I'm holding it wrong? I thought her people were peaceful. Why'd she know how to use a knife?

"Sorry, you just startled me. Um, how can I help you?" I asked the last part a little nervously, this could either go uphill, or downhill. But that ending was probably really suspicious.

"No, no, no, no, no. *I'm* helping you." Yep, I screwed up. "You're not going to Ferox alone. I'm coming with. And

that means, we're staying for a little." She grabbed my wrist and pulled me through the woods. In my surprise my mind nearly slipped over the fact that she knew I was going to Ferox. I'll have to ask her about that later.

Then I noticed that the trees were going by in a bit of a blur, as if we were running. But, we weren't. We were walking.

We entered a clearing with roots forming stairs and trees framing a stair step waterfall holding glowing green water and a pond the water was draining into.

"Is this another of the 'sacred glades' or something?"

"We won't be here for long." I looked at Mysti with a that-didn't-answer-my-question look before dropping it. Then out of nowhere, we weren't there anymore. And don't look at me like I'm crazy, I'm just saying what happened.

We 'emerged' in a normal-looking forest. At least, it looked normal at first glance. The ground was covered entirely in moss, and the branches of the canopy were woven so thickly together that there were no cracks. It was like an actual ceiling. Then I noticed the candles. There weren't too many of them, but they were definitely there. They were kind of chunky, about an inch and a half thick and maybe 4 inches tall. But that wasn't the weird part. The candles were floating! Just suspended midair among the trees. I even saw leaves hanging into the fire, and they didn't get burned a bit. There were also little flecks of light floating around, like yellow hued glowing snowflakes that would never hit the ground.

“So, where are we?”

“Dawn. Well, part of it at least.”

“So, how did you know I was going to Ferox?” She looked at me for a second, as if trying to decide whether to tell me or not. Like it would decide the fate of the world or something.

“Should I explain the reason or do you want me to just say the answer and be confused?” Does the girl think I want to be confused?

“Explain.” I said.

“Ok, so every Rellean has a curse and a gift. Usually they are unrelated, but they can be.”

“So, your gift helped you find out? How?”

“I heard the letter from your dad.” Mysti stated the phrase simply, but she didn’t answer my question. And I thought I saw a brief look of sorrow cross her eyes.

I was still pretty confused, but apparently Mysti had decided the matter was closed and didn’t say anything else regarding my question.

“We’re going to have to go to the city. Do you want a new outfit? That one’s ripped to shreds.”

“Yeah, sure.” And with that Mysti waved her hands and my outfit changed from ripped and tattered to new. It was still floor length, but it was now a lighter shade of blue, the sleeves were really droopy, and there was a gold ribbon around my waist as a belt.

“So, this shouldn’t get caught on anything and you won’t feel how long it is.” I looked up at Mysti, who was still

wearing her usual outfit, which didn't look formal in the slightest.

"Shouldn't you change too?"

"Oh yeah, right."

Mysti waved her arm in front of her and her outfit suddenly changed. She had on a dress that had sleeves that went over her shoulders right at her neck, with purple strips of fabric over her shoulders sideways and long fingerless gloves along her arms that had a circle cut out in the top. She also had a purple ribbon around her waist much like mine.

"You look a lot more like a princess now. But also a bit like a witch."

"Thanks," Mysti said, "but I prefer sorceress."

"So, how are we going to get to the city?"

"Do you want to take the fast way or the scenic route?"

"I think I'd prefer the fast way, Mysti."

And with that she grabbed my hand and we disappeared in a puff of smoke.

We appeared at an archway woven from vines. Mysti pulled me through and we emerged into the city. There were trees about a hundred feet tall, and they had bridges crossing between them. There were log cabins nestled in the leaves and branches up high, cut-outs in huge bushes where a window might be and round stone doors set in trees where a house was. Then there were also structures made of crystals and rock. But the one that stood out the most was a huge tree in the very back of the city that had

green stained glass windows and balconies made out of branches. The tree looked like it had grown into the shape of the castle's architecture. Mysti led me towards it and then pulled me through the door.

The inside was beautiful. It was a circular room that had walls made out of tree branches with little beams of golden light poking through the cracks. There was moss on the ground as a carpet, and there were couches all over the place carved out of sideways tree-trunks with moss cushions. There was a chandelier made from a giant emerald suspended by tree roots with smaller emeralds, amethysts, and sapphires around it. The ceiling was a mosaic of tangled vines and branches.

Mysti headed to a hallway in the back of the room.

It had moss floors and tree branch walls but nothing else. Down at the end I saw a large ornate oak door with rivers of gold snaking through it. The door frame was made of sparkling sapphire with white hydrangeas dotted around. They looked like clouds.

Suddenly, we took a right turn down a branching side hallway I hadn't seen before. At the end was a circular door made of ebony wood with silver moons and stars on it. The frame was made of emeralds, amethysts, and moonstone. There were purple flowers dotting the edges. In silver on the very top of the door frame was what I'd guess was the rellean's language. There were 6 signs, then 7, then 7 again, and finally 6. Again.

Mysti opened the door and we went into a room with walls made out of ebony branches, purple moss on the

floor, and there were amethysts and emeralds and moonstones of assorted sizes hanging from the ceiling at varying heights casting a silvery moon-like glow across the whole room. In the very back there was a bed with silver sheets sitting on an amethyst frame with purple vines hanging over the top as a canopy.

“So... Mysti, is this your room?”

“Yep. It’s made to reflect which part of the forest I rule over. Hence, purples, blacks, and silvers. But, it occasionally has warm light as well.”

“It’s cool.”

“Thanks. Now, I’m guessing you want to ask me questions. Like, way too many.” She said, sitting down on some very tall and fluffy moss.

“Yep.” I said, sitting down as well.

“Fire away.” And with Mysti’s cue, I got started.

“First, I want to ask a probably dumb question.”

“What is it?”

“What do those symbols on the door mean?”

“Oh those? They spell out my full name. It’s just in runes, so you wouldn’t be able to read it.”

“What do they say?”

“Mystic Artemis Asteria Archer. Way too many As in my opinion.”

“Wait, hold up. Your name is Mystic?”

“Well duh. What did you think it was? Not like it says it on my door or anything.” She joked.

“So then your middle name is Artemis. Like, as in the made up mythical goddess from centuries ago?”

“Yep. Also, she’s not ‘made up’. Mythical, sure, but she is a very real person, well, goddess. She’s one of the twin archers along with Apollo.”

“You said ‘is.’”

“She’s my aunt, and very much alive.”

“Your Mom’s a goddess?!”

“Technically, I’m also a goddess since half-Rellean half-human counts as a Rellean, though only once they’ve realized their magic. Meaning my Dad was a Rellean. And half-god half-Rellean counts as god or goddess status. But I can still die, it just has to be in a magical way, and I have to be unable to stop it.”

“So you’re telling me you’re a *goddess*?” I said, my mind completely casting aside the death part of her answer. It probably wouldn’t be important.

“Pretty much, yeah.”

My mouth hung open wide enough that I’m pretty sure my jaw hit the floor. Mysti, my *cousin*, was a literal *goddess*. Like, what in the world?!

Then there was a knock on the door. It was in a rhythm. Like, bum, bum, bum bum.

“One second, Ralph’s here.” Mysti got up and headed towards the door. She opened it and a boy about her age walked in. He was exactly as tall as Mysti, with the same sandy color of skin and the same face shape. He had shaggy sky blue hair with light grey streaks through it, which I’m pretty sure were the exact same color as his stormy grey eyes. He also had gold markings on his face, except his were slightly less whimsical and more rune-like. He looked pretty

much identical to Mysti, minus the hair, markings, and eyes.

“Oh, hi. Are you our cousin?”

“Yes. I think.” I looked at Mysti for confirmation that this was Ralph.

“You’d be correct Ralph. This is our cousin, Hope.”

“Nice to meet ya! Well, I’d love to stay and talk, but I can’t. Mom needs me.” He looked disappointed. “Well, see ya. I’ll try to come and talk tomorrow. Try not to explode anything while I’m gone.” Ralph looked playfully at Mysti doing the I-have-my-eyes-on-you gesture with his hands, in response, Mysti rolled her eyes and smirked before waving Ralph out of the room, well, more like shooing, but still.

“So, Hope, was there something else you wanted to tell me?” Mysti said, shifting her mood, and I’m pretty sure the brightness of the lights in the room. (They got a little dimmer)

“Mysti, I started a literal war. Can you *please* help me fix this?!”

“... We’ll leave next week.” I stared at her dumbfounded. She waited for about 8 seconds and then said we’ll go next week in a normal voice. Like she wasn’t saying ‘yeah, I’ll help you stop a war. We’ll start next week’. Honestly, I don’t get her.

Chapter V

It's been a little bit less than a week, and Mysti and I have made a game plan. Sorta.

The plan is: make our way to Ferox as fast as possible. And once we're there, Mysti can pull some strings. You see, apparently she knows someone on the inside who would gladly start a major protest movement to get the king off his throne and the prince on it. Ferox has a pretty annoying and selfish king—from what I've heard—but an amazing prince. Mysti also said that if the prince doesn't want the throne, or if circumstances change, she might be able to get the princess on the throne.

“Hope, come on. We're going to be leaving tomorrow. You need to come get a weapon.”

“Did I hear you wrong?”

“I don't think so. What did I say?”

“You said we were going to go get a weapon for me. Relleans are a peaceful people. Why do you even have weapons?!”

Mysti rolled her eyes—I think. They're completely white it's hard to tell—before saying, “Yeah, we're a peaceful people. But like I said, if we're provoked we lash out. Meaning we need to know *how* to lash out. Also, we got a little less peaceful after the war. Everyone is now required to learn to use a weapon, though they are requested to not use it on any living thing, other than trees, they don't mind.”

“Ooo-kay.” Well, apparently trees don’t mind being immobile sparring partners. I’m gonna have to ask about that.

As Mysti led me towards the armory I couldn’t help but notice the sheer amount of people in the city. I knew lots of Relleans—or ‘fairies’ as my people called them—lived in the forest, but I never thought it could really be this many people. And we were always told that they lived in caves made of mud with weeds and mushrooms growing on them, too humid for a fire. If only they could see this. The look on their faces would be priceless.

“Aaand... here we are.” Mysti opened a large bronze door to reveal a shed with walls made of branches and lengths of bronze woven so thickly that no light got through. There were torches lining the walls, and there were piles upon piles of weapons and armor.

“Take your pick.” Mysti said, “We’ve got plenty.”

I walked around the shed, which was quite a bit larger than you’d imagine. It was about as big as a small room, not a garden shed.

My eyes were pulled to a sword in the corner. It was double-edged with an ornately carved handle that had a lion’s head at the end. It was about 3 feet, maybe an inch or 2 more. The blade was made of shining steel, with a less-shiny steel as a rectangular cross-guard. The handle was made of red-stained wood (well, it probably was naturally red, because this is an enchanted forest) it had a small crown of gold set in the handle about an inch away from the lion’s

head at the end, which was frozen mid-roar and was made of gold. The handle itself was about 6 inches long.

“How about this one?” I ask Mysti, but right after I say that the sword shifts into the pile of weapons, making only the blade visible.

“Well, I guess that’s a no.” I said, disappointed.

“Actually, that’s a yes.”

“Say what now?”

“Hope, that’s a yes.” Mysti said as if it were obvious. “If the weapon moves it means that it’s yours. That sword moved.”

“Well, there’s no use in the sword moving if we can’t get to it.”

Mysti rolled her eyes at me again—I think—looked at the sword, grabbed it by the *blade*, then handed it to me and said: “You were saying?” Before walking off back to the castle. I followed.

Chapter VI

Well, it's finally the next day, and we're setting off. I have my sword with me, which Mysti taught me how to use. She actually knows how to use quite a few weapons. Probably the whole 'goddess' thing.

Mysti gave me a traveling outfit a few days ago. It consists of a navy blue dress with a forest green trim around the neck and long sleeves that are a bit baggy. It also has cranberry leggings, and gold boots. The belt is forest green with gold details. It looks a lot like the dress I met her in, just smaller.

I haven't seen Mysti all morning, and to be honest she's probably at archery practice with Ralph, who is probably the funniest person I've ever met. Mysti said we'd leave at dusk. Since that would give us cover of darkness, and the patrol in the non-magic part of the forest wouldn't be as heavy.

I finally found Mysti around noon, and she was talking to a wolf. Weird, I know. The wolf had moon colored fur, and eyes that looked like they were reflecting the blue moon. Lot's of moon-like features, I know, but hey, it's a wolf. What do you expect?

I walked up to her and tapped her shoulder. "Hey, Mysti, why are you talking to a wolf?"

“Oh, this is Luna. She’s a hunting wolf. A gift from my aunt Artemis, also a creature who lives in Night. She’s going on the trip with us. I was just telling her about the plan.”

“Mysti, we barely *have* a plan.”

“Meh.” She shrugged.

“Don’t we have to like, pack or something?”

“I already packed for the both of us.”

“So, what do we do until nightfall?”

“For me, archery and stuff like that. For *you*, sleep.”

“Mysti, I am not about to sleep in the middle of the day.”

“It’s either you sleep willingly, or I put a spell on you and wake you up when we’re leaving. Your choice.”

“Fine, I’ll go to sleep. But why aren’t you going to sleep?”

“Our anatomy’s different. I don’t have to.”

“Then why do you have a bed in your room?” I asked exasperatedly.

“Sleeping for us isn’t necessary, it’s just something we should do every few days. So I don’t *need* to sleep. But sometimes I *should*. And today, I don’t have to sleep.”

“Got it.” I said, “How old are you again?”

“11.”

“Great, I’m getting threatened to go to sleep by someone a year younger than me.” I grumbled and then ran off towards the castle. I saw Mysti running off into the woods with Luna. Probably to go shoot some trees.

Just as the sun was beginning to set, Mysti opened the door. I'd already gotten into my outfit, and I'd put on my crown because it was the only thing that would be proof that I was the 'Lost Princess.' My sword was at my side, hanging in a red and gold leather scabbard that was magically attached to my belt. I had my bag slung over my shoulder and hanging at my waist on the opposite side.

Mysti, on the other hand, for once actually looked like a goddess. Her dress was midnight blue and had a strap that went over one shoulder, and the skirt that came down looked like a triangle. Underneath that top skirt, which didn't have any sides, was a normal looking skirt that was black with shining silver stars on it. She had a silver sash around her waist and dark purple leggings. She had fingerless gloves made of dark leather and her boots were made of the same thing. Her hair was braided down her shoulder and there was a silver laurel wreath with a moon in the middle shining on her forehead.

"Hey Mysti. Are we leaving now?" I asked.

"Yep. Luna's waiting outside."

"Great. But, why don't you have any weapons on you?"

"Well, since I'm not planning on using them in the city, they won't appear until I want or need them."

"Sounds good. So, should we get moving?"

"'Course." And with that, we headed outside.

Chapter VII

We've been walking for about an hour, and haven't met any resistance. There aren't any guards snooping around the forest. Probably because they're either too scared, or they're all being directed towards preparing for war. I hope it's the first one. But Mysti still insists on getting as far into the woods as possible so that we'll be outside of their perimeter. Luna warns us whenever anything that sounds like a patrol comes close, but it's often just a squirrel with too many acorns or a swallow carrying coconuts (reminds me a lot of Greg and Bob). We've stopped multiple times to hide when the animals pass by. But they never bring a threat. I mean, unless you count the chance that the swallow could drop the coconut, have it land on your head, and then you get a concussion from a falling coconut.

My best bet is that it won't happen. Well now that I've thought about that watch it happen tomorrow. Just me and my rotten luck. I bet I'll be remembered as 'The Girl Who Started a War and Got a Concussion From a Coconut.' And Mysti (who I have given the nickname Myst) would probably be: 'The Weird One Who Can Talk To Wolves.'

You know what? I'll ask Mysti what she thinks our titles will be if we're remembered. Or maybe she won't think we'll be remembered.

"Hey Myst, I was thinking. If people remember us in history books, what do you think our titles would be?"

"Do you want me to list all of them?"

“You’ve thought of this too, haven’t you?”

She shrugged. “It’s a yes/no question. Yes or no?”

“Yes, then”

“Righteous One, Our Saviour, The Lioness, The Warrior Queen, The Protectress, Queen of Magic, She Who Walks the Stars, Oracle.”

I looked at her with a somewhat impressed look, she had really thought about this. Then I noticed that she had set up camp. I must have been thinking longer than I thought. We’d eaten a little before we left in Rellea, and were going to settle down for the night.

The last thing I saw before I drifted off to sleep was Mysti looking at the starry sky, then I fell asleep to the branches rustling in the wind.

Chapter VIII

After days of travel we've finally made it to the outskirts of a village. Ostiaruis Village, to be specific.

It's the village that borders Ferox. It also monitors the people going into, and out of, Ferox. Like us.

"Hey, Mysti, I don't think they'll let us in with me dressed like this, and you, well, y'know, looking like the definition of magic. Also, we're traveling with a wolf."

"One second."

Mysti moved her hand in a swishing movement and then my outfit was replaced with a long muted blue dress that fell just above my ankles, with a brown cloak over top, falling to the same length. I had hard leather shoes and felt my hair go up into an intricate bun. I felt the slightly heavy feeling of a gold necklace around my neck, and I felt my crown change shape.

Mysti, on the other hand, was wearing black leggings, dark brown leather hunting boots, a silver dress that ended in the middle of her thighs with a black leather cord securing it around her waist, and a dark grey cloak over top, coming down around her ankles. Her hair was still in a braid down the side.

She whispered something to Luna, who then ran off into the woods.

I noticed that as we walked through the village, people flowed around us. Some looked at us like we shouldn't be messed with-well they looked at Mysti first like

that, and then me later. A few girls on the outskirts of the streets, all wearing the same outfit as Mysti with their hair braided or in a pony-tail gave Mysti friendly looks or kind smiles. One even beckoned to her and they talked for a few minutes about 'The Hunt' and 'Lady Artemis' before Mysti and I continued through the city.

After a few minutes more of walking we finally reached the gates of Ferox. They were large and majestic, made of shining gold woven into delicate spirals and images of coiling snakes and blossoming lilies. The city animal and flower. A large arch made of vines of gold just inside the gates had the city emblem on the top: A blossoming lily with a snake coiled around it, crossed spears behind them. It looked magnificent.

Off to the side about 7 feet in front of the gates there was a wooden desk under a midnight-blue tarp on top of 4 mahogany posts serving as a tent to shelter from rain and sun. Sitting at the desk was a bored-looking middle aged woman with dark olive skin and long stringy dark brown hair streaked with silver pulled up in a very loose bun that had about 2/3 of her hair hanging out of it. She wore an elegant dark green dress with a brown shawl draped over her shoulders to help with the autumnal cold.

We approach the desk and I walk up to her. She glances up from a book she's reading and closes it after putting in a withered looking leather bookmark.

"What weapons are you carrying? I'll be able to tell if you're lying." She asked in a bored voice. This was

apparently a regular occurrence now-people bringing weapons into the city.

“I have a sword and my cousin here has a bow and arrow.” I say, taking out my sword and prompting Mysti to take out her bow and arrow to show the old lady. Mysti pulls out her silver bow and quiver full of silver, gold, and black arrows. The lady nods to Mysti, like that’s what she expected, and eyes me suspiciously.

“What’s your business in Ferox?”

“Oh, we’re um...”

“We’re coming to see our cousin.” Mysti cut in quickly.

The women eyed us suspiciously.

“I realize I never got your names. I’m Haethen” She pronounced it Hay-then.

“Oh, I’m uh... Dylan! And this is my cousin, um...Vivian.”

She looked at us more suspiciously. I must have stalled too much saying our ‘names’.

“Why were you going into Ferox again?”

“To see our cousin.” Mysti said, smiling in a convincing way.

“I don’t—”

“Hey, Haethen, how about you take a break for a bit. It’s almost lunch. I’ll start my shift a little early.” A 25 year-old man cut her off. He had a mischievous teenage-ish look in his grey-ish sky blue eyes, and shaggy sand blond hair. He wore a bright light blue tunic with a darker navy blue scarf wrapped around his shoulders. He had laced

sandals on his feet, but nothing else to keep his legs warm. I had absolutely *no* idea how he wasn't cold. Or who knows, maybe he was.

Haethen begrudgingly got up and walked away, but not before throwing one more quick glance over her shoulder.

The man ushered us along, and we headed towards the gates.

Mysti told me to wait for her right as we reached the gates and she circled back around to the desk. She walked over to the man and gave him a hug. She was about $\frac{3}{4}$ of his size. I faintly heard her say: "Thanks Uncle Hermes." Then 'Hermes' broke the hug and I heard him telling her to: "Run along, now."

She ran back over to me and we walked through the gates.

Chapter IX

The city itself is a lot prettier than you'd imagine. Each building was made of grey bricks, with black roof tiles. The streets were made of either cobblestone or hard-packed dirt. There was a large main street in the middle, which had all the shops. And then there were streets that would branch off the main road into neighborhoods. In the distance I could see a beautiful castle. It was made of the same grey brick as the rest of the city, but it had lots of gold embellishments, and you could see the banner on the front from where we were: A snake coiled around a lily with crossed spears behind it embroidered in gold on dark green fabric.

As we walk through the city I'm trying to get a grasp on how Mysti plans to get to this person she knows who's on the inside. She said they live in the castle, so I have absolutely no idea how, A: she even knows this person, and how, B: we're even getting inside. I mean, we're 2 strangers walking up to the castle unannounced, and also, Mysti is 11, and I just turned 13 3 days ago. There's no way they're gonna trust us.

"State your business." I snap out of my thoughts and look up to see a guard addressing us in a monotoned voice.

"We're visiting family, they work here." Mysti said. Giving a convincing smile. (How is she so good at those?)

"Names?" He said, turning to me.

In the moment, I forgot the names I had previously said, so I had to make some up again.

“Um, I’m Rose, and this is my cousin...”

“Asteria.” Mysti said.

The guard smiled in recognition.

“Well, Rose, Asteria, say hello to your family for me.” The guard smiled again and then let us enter the castle. Passing another look of recognition towards Mysti.

We walked for a bit, with me trailing slightly behind Mysti. She kept going off into a branching hallway right when I thought we’d reached the destination. This went on for a good 10 minutes before we finally reached the end of a hallway with no branching hallways to go into. Mysti knocks on the door and waits for a second.

A girl with a regal face and pale skin opened the door. She had dark caramel blond hair, and hazel eyes. She’s wearing a green and gold dress and appears to be around my age, 13.

“Hello! Come in.”

Mysti and I walk through the doors, and what we find is a room with a bright chandelier and giant bed. It looks very akin to my room back in Arcem.

“Took you 2 long enough. So, let me guess. You’re Hope,” She pointed to me. “Anyways, my name’s Bellatrix, but please call me Trixi.”

“How’d you know we were coming?” I asked.

“There was a note attached to the neck of that wolf over there. Luna, right? It said that you two would be coming.”

“Well, we’re here. Also, quick question. Are you the princess or something?”

“Yes. And I’m related to you, actually. Our parents were siblings. I know, you’ve probably already heard that from Mysti, but I’m not lying.”

“Mhm. Trixi’s Dad was twins with my Dad. But he was taken from Arcem when he was around 6 months old, and ended up here. He was adopted and raised by the royal family, and we’re all cousins, like Trixi said. Since your Dad,” She looked at me, “is our parents’ older half brother.” Mysti explained.

“Seems legit.” I said, “So, Trixi, can you help us get your brother onto the throne and your Dad off?” I ask.

“I’m already working on it. Have been for weeks. Dad is the worst.”

“What’s the plan then?”

“We need to finish the war in 3 battles or less, try to make them as bloodless as possible. Then, while the kingdom has uncertainty in my Dad, we get Marcus to step in and take the throne.”

“Has your brother agreed to this?” I asked, her plan has a few holes in it, but it’s better than what I’d have come up with.

“Well, duh.” She says. “But he did say that if I won a duel to Dad that he would never accept. Don’t get why he even mentioned it.”

Mysti raised her hand slightly and then put it down.

“Just to let you know, we should prepare for the plan to get set in motion, because the Arceman army is approaching.”

“We should probably get some rest then. Sleepover?” Trixi said.

I nodded and we all got into the huge bed, which could fit 7 grown adults, easy. Then Luna jumped on and settled down between me and Mysti, curling up with her tail on top of her nose. Then we all drifted off to sleep.

Chapter X

I woke up at the crack of dawn to the sound of screaming. It sounded close, but not too close.

The sound was coming from outside, a bit away from the castle. I looked around the room, trying to figure out what the heck was happening. I spotted Luna sitting in the corner. Her fur was an inky black, and seemed to be draped in shadows. Her eyes looked the same as usual, but they stood out more against her fur. I looked a little to the left of Luna and spotted Trixi. She's wearing a knee-length black dress, and she has on a black ankle length cloak. Both seemed to be shrouded in shadows, even though she's in the full light of the chandelier. I notice that her hair is pulled up in a bun atop her head, with a pale gold crown with emeralds set in it perched on top. She pulls the hood over her head and gestures for me to get up.

I stand and Mysti appears from somewhere to the left. She's wearing something similar to Trixi, except her hair is still braided down her shoulder, and the circlet in her hair has changed, it's now just a plain silver band. Mysti grabs my hand and leads me over to where Trixi and Luna are. She waves her hand and my outfit turns to look like everyone else's. My hair stays down, but I can feel my crown shifting out of the disguise Mysti had put it in the day before. I look down and see that I, too, am wreathed in shadows. I move around slightly and I see the shadows following me.

Then the silence is shattered by Mysti speaking.
“Trixi, can you tell her what’s going on? I don’t think I’d be able to explain it that well.” Mysti says, not really looking anywhere.

“The war has made its way to the city. The Arceman army is here. We’ll escape in the chaos. Camp in the woods and form a plan. Then we end the war. And, the shadows are part of our disguise.” I nod my head in understanding.

I hear the screams from outside getting louder, and the smell of smoke seeps in through a window I didn’t know was broken.

“We best hurry.” Trixi said.

The 3 of us-well 4 if you count Luna- hurried out the door and down the winding steps. We exited at a large door at the bottom of the steps.

The scene was even worse than I’d thought. The edge of the battle was about 10 yards away from the castle, just inside the gates, continuing outward in the city as far as I could see, which wasn’t very far considering that the air was thick with smoke. I could hear shouts for a medic and shouts of grief, sorrow, anger, and hatred. You could barely see the sun or the sky through the smoke, and I could tell, even from far away, that there were a lot of casualties, but I didn’t take long to dwell on it, as Trixi was urging me to hurry. But at the very least, it was good that the battle looked close to ending.

I pulled my eyes away and followed after Trixi, Mysti, and Luna. Trixi led us through the winding streets,

until we reached the exit. I didn't even have time to catch my breath as Luna herded us through.

Then Mysti took the lead, navigating through the twisting trees and mess of bushes. She led us through with such authority that I nearly forgot she was 11. I mean sure, she might be a 'goddess' but still. I'm 13, and so is Trixi, and I'm scared to death. I can't even keep all of my thoughts straight right now. I can't imagine how Mysti's feeling.

She led us to a clearing in the woods, where I thought she would stop, but she continued all the way to a cliff. Below you could see the entire battlefield in the distance, but I didn't see anyone down there. Not anyone who was still alive, at least. But I could tell that there was not the entire army of either side there on the battlefield. Which begs the question, how long were we going through the forest. I'd guess a while, because the sun is high in the sky.

Mysti starts setting up camp with Luna as I contemplate my thoughts. I notice Trixi sitting down near the edge, pulling a dagger out of a scabbard on her hip. Then proceeding to sharpen it.

A few hours later all the sleeping bags are out and a fire is going. We've had dinner, and Mysti is already asleep, though the sun is just barely below the cliff's edge. Though it's not really like you could tell through the smoke still hanging in the air.

Another hour passes before I decide to go to sleep. Despite the smoke, which has cleared up a little bit, the stars still shine brightly. I fall asleep to the hum of the fire,

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and safety in knowing that I'm surrounded by friends, and
that Luna is keeping watch.

Chapter XI

I awoke to screaming in the middle of the night. Great. I woke up to screaming *again*. Is this going to become a regular occurrence?

Then I noticed that the screaming belonged to one sole person, so it wasn't a battle again. The voice sounded female, but I couldn't quite place it. So I looked up.

The screaming was coming from Mysti. She looked like she'd just witnessed a thousand deaths. Except her eyes were closed. She kept writhing around and screaming for someone in a language I couldn't understand. Probably whatever language the Relleans speak. She had tears streaming down her cheeks, and her face held a look of despair as she screamed.

Trixi was about a foot away from her, trying to calm her down, to no avail.

Trixi had just started to back away in defeat when Mysti snapped up. Her eyes swirled with glowing silver and gold mist, which also leaked from the corners of her eyes. More mist appeared around her and in it I could see the silhouettes of many figures. Mysti's eyes reflected the stars, and the mist surrounding her somehow did as well, then it absorbed the light, and Mysti opened her mouth to speak.

But the voice that came out was not just her own. It sounded like her voice was echoed with others in harmony with it. And what she said was even stranger.

*“One shall fall by healing’s hand,
Off to join a parent’s land.
Two shall see the war undone,
And lay eyes on peace under setting sun.
But alas, fate’s cruel hand must reap,
As many now rest in endless sleep.”*

Then the light and mist faded away and then Mysti collapsed. A few seconds later she sat back up, clutching her head. When she looked up and I saw her eyes, I knew that I hadn’t just imagined all of that, like I’d hoped.

Her eyes still held the swirling silver and gold mist in them. It actually made her look more innocent to be honest. Her eyes no longer looked as if she were dead, and that made you realize that she was just a kid, a magic kid who’s been a lot of help on this journey, sure, but she’s still a kid. 11 years old.

“I gave a prophecy. Didn’t I?” Mysti looked up at us expectantly, hugging her legs.

“Um, I think you did. Trixi?”

“Yes, you most definitely did. But how? As far as I’m aware, Relleans don’t have that power.”

“It was my gift.” Mysti said, looking down.

“Was?” Trixi questioned.

“Is, sorry.” She said quickly, looking panicked for a second. “My gift is foresight and prophecy, which go together as one. My curse is that I have to see death, destruction, and bad occurrences from every time, past,

present, and future. But I usually can't tell when they'll happen, unless they already have."

"When during the day does this usually happen?" I questioned.

"It happens at random times. Whenever I got that haunted look in my eyes, and you could kind of see flashes of war and chaos behind the veil over my eyes, I was having one."

I thought back to the journey here, on the way, the few times I'd seen Mysti's eyes, they'd looked how she described. Infact, Mysti hadn't listened to us when we'd asked her to slow down. It had seemed as if she hadn't heard us, like she wasn't there. Because she'd been having one of these 'visions'. She'd been leading us through the woods on pure instinct.

I racked my brain for more times I could think of. There were at least 23.

"Come on you guys. We need our rest. We can interpret the prophecy and make battle plans tomorrow. But right now, we need some sleep."

Then, though reluctantly so, my body fell asleep at Trixi's words. Which seemed to put a sort of spell on me, coaxing my mind to listen to her.

Chapter XII

In the morning, I'm the first one awake. So I just sit in my thoughts until Trixi shakes me out of said thoughts.

"We're going to try to interpret the prophecy.

Wanna help?"

"Sure."

She and Mysti sit down so that we're sitting in a triangle shape.

"Ok, so, Myst. Can you recite the prophecy?" I ask.

"Yeah, sure." Mysti's eyes glow faintly.

"One shall fall by healing's hand,

Off to join a parent's land.

Two shall see the war undone,

And lay eyes on peace under setting sun.

But alas, fate's cruel hand must reap,

As many now rest in endless sleep."

Her voice still echoed with the others, but she didn't look possessed. She just looked like she was in a trance with glowing eyes. Then she blinked a few times and the light faded away. But the swirling silver and gold mist was still in her eyes.

"Well, I can't really think of what the first line could mean. Healing is good, right? How could one fall by it? But, the second line might mean one of us has to become ruler of our respective kingdom in order for the war to be over.

Though it seemed as if the first 2 lines were connected, both applying to one person." Trixi said.

“And for the part about only 2 of us getting to see the war undone, maybe one of us gets blinded, or something like that.” I supplied. “And the last 2 lines are probably just talking about the losses of the final battle. From both armies.”

Trixi nods her head thoughtfully, probably trying to see if we could be missing a detail that might be important. Mysti was playing with a silver dagger, throwing it and catching it.

“So what about battle strategy? What should we do?” I asked, looking between my 2 cousins.

“Well, I don’t know about you, but I’m terrible at anything strategy related. So, if I had to make a plan, it’d be, run into the battle, don’t kill anyone, just injure them so they can’t fight, fight everyone, and try not to die.”

“Sounds good to me.” I say. Mysti just nods her head. Still looking down, distant, though it didn’t seem like she was having another vision thing.

“Ok, how about we all promise to go with the plan, Mysti, do you know any magic promises, or oaths or something?”

“Yeah. Cor praebeo, animam iuro. Then you say what you swear to do. If you break this promise you die.” She said, still not bothering to look up.

“Um, ok. Cor praebeo, animam iuro to not kill anyone on the battlefield, and to instead injure them, also to try not to die.” I said.

“Here, I’ll go next. Cor praebeo, animam iuro not to kill anyone in this war and to instead injure them, and also try not to die. There. Mysti, it’s your turn.”

Mysti looked down even further for a second before looking up and speaking. “ Cor praebeo, animam iuro not to kill anyone, but to injure them instead and-” She cut herself off, with a look of indecision on her face, seemingly trying to decide whether or not to do something, then deciding it was inevitable either way. Then she looked down again , and I thought I saw tears starting to trace their way down Mysti’s face. “To-to try not to die.”

She looked further down and I could kind of hear her whispering: ‘Paenitet me non possum servare fidem’. When I looked questioningly at Trixi she told me that Mysti was speaking Latin. One of her 2 native tongues. That was what the oath was in as well. But apparently last night she had been screaming in greek. Her other native language. Neither of which either of us could understand.

The rest of the day was spent sharpening weapons and practicing with them. Trixi ran through 7 different forms, each about 80 times. Mysti was shooting down leaves and branches on the trees with her bow, and also sword fought with me when I was tired of doing forms. But now we have to get rest. Because tomorrow, we have to finish this war.

Chapter XIII

It's early morning, and we're getting ready for battle. Each of us got armor. I got a gold breastplate and shoulder and leg plates as my armor, with 2 pieces also hanging down at the side of my thighs. Trixi has gold armor as well, but she has on chain links under it, and doesn't have the armor on her legs at all. Mysti had on silver armor, which consisted of a breastplate, shoulder and arm armor.

We each went over our weapons as well. Me with my sword, Trixi with her dagger, and Mysti with her bow and arrow.

Currently, we're looking down at the battlefield, where the 2 armies are just starting to approach. I admit, it might not be the best idea to go down into the fray, but right now, our best plan is to wing it.

A twig snaps behind us and we whirl around. I pull out my sword and get in a defensive stance.

"Dude, chill. It's just me. Do you always try to kill your cousins?"

"Ralph!" Mysti yells as she jumps into a hug. I just smile in defeat.

"Hello, Ralph. Nice to see you." Trixi said.

"Ralph what are you doing here?" Mysti asks.

"Well," Ralph looked down, tears threatening to fall. "The armies took Rellea before coming here. We fought back but..." He looked up, tears streaking his face, "They're all gone, Mysti. I'm the only one left."

Mysti's eyes welled with tears, and she enveloped Ralph in yet another hug.

I felt a few tears streaking down my cheek too. Rellea had been my home, for a while at least. But now it made sense why Mysti had not spoken yesterday. She must have been dealing with the knowledge that her people were gone. But it seemed like there was something else too.

After a few minutes we made our way further down the cliff, and stopped right at the edge of the battlefield.

"Ready?" I said.

Everyone nodded, and we ran into the fray.

Chapter XIV

We've been fighting for about 4 1/2 hours now, and I've gotten into a pretty good rhythm. I've managed to not die so far, so that's a plus, and I've broken up quite a few one-on-ones because both get really distracted and come after me. Then I manage to trip them up so they break their leg and have to go to the medical tent. Luna is running around launching people onto her back and then carrying them out of the battle, at which point they can't get back in so they just sit boredly at the edge.

I lost track of Trixi a while ago, but I can tell she's still alive and well. I can hear the army members of both Ferox and Arcem yelling at her. And I know Mysti's still alive, too. I can see the glint of her armor a few yards away from me, fighting back-to-back with Ralph, surrounded by about 50 soldiers. From how they've been fighting, I figure they'll be fine.

I turn my back for a second and break up a fight. I head in the direction of another one to break it up when I hear a scream of pain.

I whirl around and see that Mysti and Ralph have backed up into the cliff face, and Ralph has just fallen to the ground. Mysti shot the last soldier through both arms and legs, causing him to drop a bloody sword. The rest of the troops were already heading away, going to the medical tents.

I run over to Mysti and Ralph, pushing my way through the soldiers in the little fights of their own easily. I stand in front of my cousins with my sword drawn in front of me.

The soldiers who were coming towards us back away, carrying the downed soldier with them to go to the medical tent before they go off to fight other people. I still keep my sword up, though I look in the direction of my cousins.

Mysti is kneeling over Ralph, who's been impaled through the chest with a sword. Mysti is holding his hand, talking to him in latin.

"Nolite mori in me, Ralph. Mane mecum." Mysti said, pleadingly.

"Ne cures, ego te exspectabo." Ralph said, looking up at her.

"Non, mane apud me."

"Aut vincere aut mori, ius. Ne sana me." Ralph said it like a final wish, though I didn't know what it meant. But I knew whatever Mysti was going to do to try and save him, she no longer could.

"Mane mecum, bene?" Mysti begged.

Ralph shook his head sadly. "Vale soror."

Mysti looked at him with her mouth open a little bit, her eyes glistening with tears. "Vale frater." She said quietly looking down. "Exspecta me."

Ralph faded away, and then Mysti got up, wiped her eyes, and picked up her bow from the ground. She walked forward, past me. She turned and gestured for me to follow.

Chapter XV

Ralph's death happened about 5 hours ago, and, though I still can't find Trixi, Mysti's still in my sight.

Currently I'm locked in combat with a soldier from I think Ferox. It's hard to tell. There's too much dirt and grime covering their armor.

I've gotten pushed into an area around the cliff that doesn't have many soldiers, so I have a lot of room to move.

I slash forward with my sword and the soldier turns sideways to avoid it, also managing to cut the straps of my breastplate, so I now have little protection against any stabs he throws at me.

We continue fighting for what feels like hours but was probably just 7 minutes before the soldier slashes across my chest. I scream and fall to the ground. Then my vision goes black.

A few seconds later I open my eyes and get up, but it feels different. I walk forward a little bit, to just in front of the soldiers, but they don't notice. I wave my hand in front of one of their faces. They don't notice.

I turn around and what I see is extremely unsettling.

My body is laying on the ground, with a gash across my chest, and my sword lying on the ground in front of me.

Mysti is standing over me, with one leg behind me and one leg in front. She has both her hands out beside her,

an obsidian sword in her right hand. How she got it, no idea.

Her eyes glow for a split second, and then there's a swirling gold forcefield keeping out the soldiers.

She drops down beside my body, and I take a step closer. Only then do I look down and notice that I'm transparent and blue, like a ghost. Except, you know, blue.

Mysti looks over my presumably dead body, checking my pulse, which is apparently still faintly going.

"Come on Hope, don't die on me. Not like Ralph. Stay in there."

I sit down next to Mysti and my body, but she doesn't seem to notice.

Mysti waves her hands above my wound, appearing to weave golden light above it, but nothing happens. She sighs in frustration.

"Ugh! Come on! Why can't I heal you? Why?!" As she says the last part she looks up and glares at the sky.

I see my body's skin starting to lose more color, as Mysti gets a desperate look on her face.

"Hang on, Hope! You can make it! I haven't foreseen this. You don't die. You-you can't! This wasn't what the prophecy meant! You don't die! ...I-I do."

She looked down at her hands and took a deep breath. She put her hands just above my wound, about 2 inches away.

I heard her mutter 'I'm so sorry' right before a white light started pulling away from her body. The same white light that I could see was fading away from mine.

When All is Lost

She pushed the light towards my body and it seeped into my wound, which then closed up.

I felt a pulling sensation and was quickly yanked into my body, I sat up just as Mysti's form fell to the ground.

Though her skin looked no paler, her eyes looked lifeless. Silver and gold light left her mouth and eyes, with mist of the same color leaking from around her body, like an aura leaving.

I look up into the dark night sky, just as new stars form, creating the picture of a girl in the same pose Mysti had been in standing over me. Because the constellation was Mysti. Though I somehow knew that wasn't what her constellation was called. It was called 'The Protectress' and she was watching over the battlefield.

Chapter XVI

It's been about an hour since Mysti's death, and I'm heading toward the command tents. I put my breastplate back on a little while after I 'woke up' so I have full protection. Yay.

Anyways, when I arrive I find my brother William sitting, looking over a map with his sword at his side. Dad's sword stabbed into the ground beside the table. I wait at the entrance of the tent until he looks up.

"Hope, it's good to see you again. We were worried sick. Did they really get you?"

"No, they didn't get me. Not that it would've changed Dad's mind if I came back. He'd never call off a war."

"True, but look where it got him." He spread his hands, "He fell in that Fairy land. The queen, Astoria, I believe, stabbed him through the heart before teleporting to Olympus, apparently. Just as the last cry of the battle was heard. We wiped them all out, the fairies. Or we thought we did. Turns out there were 2 more. A boy and a girl. Both looked, what, 11? They fell easily."

"Like you were there."

"Were you?" He asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes, actually. And they chose to fall. The boy, Ralph, chose to not be healed after taking a fatal blow to decommission a Feroxian general and his entire battalion." I say, now knowing that Mysti could've healed him. That was

Ralph's final wish. To not be healed. Pretty stupid wish though. "And the girl, Mysti, chose to give her life to save me." At that I look down, for a second in sadness, then I look back up and glare at my brother. "They took out about a third of the battlefield."

"Ah yes, their strategy was to maroon the soldiers in the medical tents so they couldn't fight. It worked pretty well. None of the soldiers sent there by them have come out to fight again. It seems they're under some sort of spell. We've healed them, but they can't leave the tents, until the battle is over, I presume. Not like that will happen anytime soon."

"I've actually come to talk to you about that."

"Really, baby sister?"

"One, I'm literally 5 years younger than you. And two, yes, really."

"Well then, I challenge you to a duel. Winner gets the crown."

"I accept your challenge." I said, unsheathing my sword. And before you start lecturing me about how I'm probably gonna die, shut up. I don't need negative reinforcement right now.

William lunged with his sword, and I sidestepped easily. I slashed at his thigh but missed. William swang his sword at me and I parried, smashing the flat of my blade into his arm, a part of it that wasn't covered by his extremely clunky (and ugly) armor.

We continued like this for about 15 minutes before I started to sense our fight coming to an end. William slashed

his sword in a high horizontal ark, managing a small slash across my forehead. I hit him in the nose with the butt of my sword, giving him a nasty nose bleed. Then William lunged at me with his sword raised, and it all happened so quickly, that I couldn't even comprehend what I was doing. I stepped out of the path of his sword, and then judo-flipped him. Don't ask me how, I don't know how. I'm just running on adrenaline. I probably need to eat something. Never mind. I'll eat later.

“Yield.” I said.

“You have won. I forfeit the crown.”

Chapter XVII

William took the crown off his head, which had until now looked like it was made up of twisted bronze spires. As soon as I took it it transformed into a golden crown comprised of sloping points that looked like flat, thin mountains. There were red garnets set in the crown, and engraved into the point in the front, which was also the tallest, was the head of a lioness.

I put the crown atop my head. My hair had now come down and was splayed over my shoulders. As soon as the crown touched my head my outfit changed, weird right. I now wore a flowing blood red dress with golden trim, over top there was a corset of armor, with armor on my arms as well.

I stepped out of the tent, and into the battle. No one bothered me as I walked to a boulder in the middle of the battlefield. Nor as I climbed atop the rock.

I knelt and touched the tip of my sword to the stone. A low whistling sound emitted from all around, and the battlefield was silent. I stood up from my kneeling position. All eyes were now on me.

“Arcem! I am your ‘lost princess’. I have won a duel against my brother, your king. I call off this war. No more bloodshed. We are entering a new era of peace. Lay down your weapons! Ferox, we call a truce!”

Trixi walked up to me on top of the boulder, wearing a new dark green dress, her gold armor glittering

on top of it, a crown of golden branches and lilies sat on her head.

“A truce which we gladly accept.” She said, pulling out her dagger, and putting it down next to where my sword sat on the boulder.

The soldiers cheered, and started hugging members of the opposite army. I heard a few “I’m glad to see you’re still alive, brother.”s And a few “How you doing old pal?”s

People emerged from the medical tents, all in good condition except for the various bandages over wounds, and the occasional cast over a broken limb.

Overall, no one seemed at all phased by the fact that the new queens of both Arcem and Ferox were 13 year olds.

Chapter XVIII

~27 YEARS LATER~

Well, I'm 40 now. I've been ruling Arcem for 27 years. We've entered a new age of prosperity. There's barely any fighting, everyone has a good home and food, and last I checked, the kingdoms are still united.

Though it took a while, Arcem and Ferox are united as one. All the little villages that had been cast out are now part of a kingdom again. Trixi rules over the half that includes the original city of Ferox, which is called The Ferox Half, while I rule over the half that includes the original Arcem, which is called The Arcem Half.

But that's not really on my mind today. 27 years ago today I met Mysti. So now I'm walking down to the edge of the forest, which has been literally misty ever since Rellea fell. I'm sitting on a quartz bench about 8 feet away from the fog, which stretches 7 feet away from the forest, making a perimeter. It's an overcast day, making the forest seem haunted, which many people think it is.

For a split second I thought I saw Mysti. Her sunset hair cascading freely down her back. She was wearing a black greek style dress, with a see through black veil covered in silver and gold stars draped over her hair and running down to her mid back, flowing from a crown of gold perched on her head, like a headband.

Then I blinked and she was gone, disappeared into the mist. And I thought she had only been a figment of my imagination.

But just as I accepted the thought with finality, a wolf came rushing through the mist, followed by a young girl, and boy who was chasing the 2 with a smile of joy on his face. They seemed to be playing tag with the wolf, whom looked exactly like Luna. The 2 kids I didn't recognize though. They looked to be about 6. And I knew most of the people in Arcem and Ferox.

The girl had long gold hair, and ocean blue eyes with silver and gold flecks in them-don't ask me how I know that, it just popped into my head. She had a gold circlet on and was wearing a white greek style dress, with a gradient to black at the bottom. The mist seemed to unnaturally swirl around her, like wisps. The boy had slightly shaggy gold and eyes the same as the girl. He had a wreath of golden laurels in his hair, which surprisingly didn't clash with his hair, and was wearing a white tunic with gold trim. The mist seemed to be trying to hold him back, and slow him down.

From the boy's smile, it seemed that this was a part of the game. The girl had her hands out in front of her, and was laughing, holding the boy back with the mist.

A voice whispered in the back of my head that their names were Jason and Zoë, but I quickly dismissed said fact, as I had other things to attend to.

But I did allow myself to think for a second, and in that time the 2 kids and Luna disappeared, seemingly into the fog.

Family Tree

