The Wayward Tavern is home to merchants and hunters alike. It hosts almost every event on the planet of Evermore. It is a typical tavern with a common room where people can find great food, cold drinks and warm beds upstairs. Anyone who is anyone has passed through its wooden doors at least once in their live times. There are secret passages leading to and from the Tavern for those who need them.

The walls of the tavern hung pictures of epic battles and heroes. Heads of the hunted animals hung as trophies and memorials to those who had hunted and not survived. The wooden tables were round and sat here and there around the room. The rafters usually saw the leader of the werewolves when she was there, but they were currently evacuated. Stairs lead upstairs to bedrooms for the weary. The bar was the width of the tavern, bar stools that are unoccupied remained underneath the counter. The bartender is wiping the empty places off.

The wood floors are well worn from centuries of being swept, washed and walked on. A hearth stood across from the door, welcoming anyone. The bar had been built to the left of the hearth, long tables stood in the middle of the floor, while round ones sat in the darker corners.

Ivy has lived in darkness all of her life. She only knew of sadness and despair. That is until she found out that she was going to have a child. That was the day she decided to get away from her Owner. She had run to the Wayward Tavern.

She sits alone as usual. She had gotten hired as a waitress. For a seventeen-year-old girl that was in trouble, this job was her best chance. She sought refuge in the hustle and bustle of the tavern. She listened to the stories of the hunters and loggers that worked nearby. She loves hearing these stories, especially of the different Royal families that would visit.

She knew that there was a woman that sat in the rafters, smoking some kind of substance. Ivy was told her name was Willow. She loved hearing the heroic adventures of the royals. She has started to romanticize them. She just wished she could just glimpse one of them.

The owner had taken her in when she found Ivy digging through the trash to find something to eat. She had pulled Ivy into the Wayward and fed her, then gave her a job. What neither of them knew was that fate had something far greater than working in a tavern in store for the little green haired girl.

This night is unusually busy, there were more hunters lately. They had heard that the deer population had started to be overpopulated. Some places food was sparse. She didn’t notice the two cloaked figures that had been watching her all week long. There was no reason for her to even notice them, they were just two more patrons that blended into the rest of the patrons.

One of the cloaked figures just happened to be a boy that goes by the name of Nikolas. The other was Christoph. Nikolas had to make sure she was knocked up and he finally knows for sure that the young girl is going to have a child. He knew her unborn baby was killing her slowly. He stands slowly, grimacing a bit from the strain after sitting down too long. He grips his staff. Christoph stands also. They walk over to her. She is too distracted to notice them.

Nikolas removes his cloak, revealing his long silver hair, draping it over her shoulders. She nearly jumps out of her skin. She looks at them, fear in her eyes as if they were going to kill her. “You have no reason to fear us little one.” Ivy’s scrutiny didn’t seem to faze Nikolas, but made Christoph hesitate. Nikolas sits down, languidly. She struggles to make herself smaller than what she really is. She wants to be invisible.

Nikolas smiles kindly at her. She views his staff. On top is an onyx dragon, its tail wrapping around the rest of the staff. She couldn’t figure out what kind of wood it was made out of. Even though she wants to run for her life to her bedroom, she halts herself. He starts to explain his sudden interest in her. “I have a proposal for you my dear.” She finds herself focused on the floor. Nikolas knows that she is listening to him so he continues, “The Emperor and Empress cannot have children, so they are in search of a young lady that is pregnant. They wish to groom the child to be their heir and the mother is kept around to raise the child, so if you are interested, you will still raise the child, but she will become ruler.” Ivy doesn’t respond.

“Why do they want my child?” She speaks gradually. “The Emperor had a vision of you and your child, so naturally he wants you.” Nikolas waits a few seconds then continues, “If you aren’t interested, then I imagine we shall take our leave.” Both of them stand up and walk out of the Tavern. Ivy sits alone again, the cloak hung loosely off her shoulders. His scent caught her attention, she stays right where she is sitting.

“I would take their offer girl, it’s the best one you have.” She jumps again and sees another man with his arms crossed. He just shakes his head and walks away from her.

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Nikolas

Both men wander the streets, deep down Nikolas knows this girl is going to be coming, but that did not stop him from his curiosity peaking a bit. He knew she was the one he was searching for. His brother had given him a detailed description of her.

Christoph has been Nikolas’ bodyguard for most of his life. He just follows quietly for the most part on Nikolas’ adventures that the Emperor seemed to want to send him on. “Do you want to get a room? I’m worried that you will get a cold from this.” Nikolas leans against a wooden wall, “No old friend, the girl will come, the offer is too good to refuse.” He grips his staff tightly, he is relaxed by the warmth it is now producing, and the warmth spreads through his body like an old friend.

The evening air is cool enough to be irritating, but not freezing. Christoph fidgets, he is nervous at twilight. Anything can happen in the shadows if one isn’t careful. Nikolas watches as fireflies light up the sky, he seems unconcerned at what can happen to them. The night creatures would be coming out soon.

A woman approached them. She is pretty, but dressed in a short cotton skirt, that left her almost naked. Her shirt is a transparent blue, it barely covered pale breasts. Her fingernails are long and dangerous looking, as if she could skewer a person on them if she wished. Her black boots came up to her thighs, she seemed to be comfortable in the stilettos.

She smiles at Nikolas and Christoph. Both men knew that she would try to proposition them both, but she slinks up to Nikolas and smiles at him. “Us night people don’t get to see too much of the likes of you boys.” Nikolas politely speaks to her, “My dear lady, I’m sure that there is a lot that you haven’t seen.” The woman stops and smiles and steps closer to him. She puts her hand on his chest and rubs, ever so gently. “I’m sure the two of you could show me a lot, what do you boys say?” Nikolas pulls her hand off his chest, “Move along dear, neither of us are interested.” She pouts, but still attempts to proposition them. “You might like what I have to offer.”

He grips her wrist tighter as his eyes glow red to scare her. Christoph watches closely just in case this woman decided to go psycho on his charge. She doesn’t. “I see that you truly aren’t interested. I will leave you alone.” Nikolas releases her and she leaves. Christoph knew that he would never go for a trollop like that woman anyways.

It was a shame though that Nikolas didn’t enjoy the company of men, but it didn’t seem he was into the company of women either these days. In all the years Christoph has been in service to Nikolas, he had never said a word in anger nor abused his power. He thought that Nikolas was just not a show off, but also wondered if Nikolas wasn’t scared of his potential.

Christoph was brought back to the present by Ivy. She looks so small with Nikolas’ cape around her fragile shoulders. She was pretty, but couldn’t compare to Amelia or Victoria. Nikolas stands up off the wall and looks her over. “I’m glad you decided to come with us.” Ivy just nods shyly at them both. Her body language suggested that she was terrified of them. She tried to make herself smaller than she really is. “I’m Nikolas and this is Christoph. We have a long way to go, so let us get going.” She is unsure of either of them, but she felt as if she could trust Nikolas, something about him seemed to be familiar, but she wasn’t sure.

The trio travelled that night in the shadows. They were silent for fear of attracting unwanted attention. It wasn’t good to do that when one is pregnant. They finally made the next town just before noon the next day. Christoph had been carrying Ivy, since she was having a hard time keeping the pace they set. Nikolas is obviously exhausted also. Christoph puts Ivy down and searches for a room.

As they wait in an awkward silence, Nikolas and Ivy don’t speak to each other. Christoph finally returned after what seemed like an eternity. He leads them to a tavern where they managed to obtain the last room. They follow Christoph to the inn. Christoph checks them in and they go to their room.

Nikolas sees one of the beds, takes his boots off and lays down, falling asleep instantly. Ivy shyly eats an apple from the fruit basket on the small table. Two other bed occupy the room. Christoph eats one of the apples. “What’s wrong with him?” She asks him so quietly that Christoph almost didn’t hear her ask the question. “He was injured many years ago, but he is never willing to talk about it.” Ivy feels as if he is keeping information from her, but she decides that she isn’t going to push him, it’s not like her to push people that have a higher status than she does.

Ivy climbs into one of the beds and fights sleep, but sleep wins. Christoph watches her for a bit, deciding that she was going to be a bad person for the royal family. He gets in the last bed and drifts to sleep.

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Dream World

Ivy senses something is wrong. She refuses to open her eyes at first, but someone splashes icy water on her. She sputters water out of her mouth and opens her eyes. She finds herself tied up, unable to move. Her arms and legs are numb; she had never been so cold in her entire life. Her clothes had been ripped off.

She looks around trying to find out where she is, but she fails. She starts to panic when she hears laughter. “I always loved it when you were in fear.” She stops struggling and tries to calm down. This voice belonged to the one that had tormented her most of her life. A thousand questions fly through her head. She feels his warm hand stroke her cheek. “Don’t worry, I only have you in your dreams, but once I have you back, you will be punished for running away from me. You belong to me and so does that brat in your belly.” He smacks her face, leaving a red hand print on her.

“I will make you wish you had never run from me slut.” She tries to scream out, but as she opens her mouth, he shoves a gag into her. Ivy nearly chocks on it. Just as he goes to pick her up, she sits up. She looks around the room. She had woken herself up. She pulls the covers tighter around her as she shudders. Nikolas is still sleeping. Christoph was awake, getting ready to get their breakfast.

They hear a loud crashing in the room below them. Nikolas sits up abruptly and wide awake. He gets up, grabs his staff and limps out into the hallway and looks down into the tavern section of the inn. His long silver hair is in disarray. The tavern is being destroyed. The inn keeper has wrestled another man down to the floor, pinning him. “What is going on here? It is too early for all this noise.” He yells, everyone can feel the anger in his voice, he starts stepping down the stairs, careful not to fall. He has a few issues with stairs.

“He is being arrested, the guards are on their way.” The owner speaks, grunting against the other man. Nikolas squints and the inn keeper and the thief finds that they can’t move at all. “Theft is punishable by death.” Nikolas looks at him then back to the other man. He feels a little compassion towards the thief, sensing there was more to this story than him just being a thief. “How much does he owe you?” Nikolas asks a little kinder than he started out with. Christoph has migrated to his side, Ivy stays above, content to just watch the events unfolding before her.

“He owes two hundred gold pieces, plus the damages.” Nikolas looks at the drunk man, “I’ll pay his tab.” The drunk looks down at the floor, trying his best to avoid eye contact with anyone. “What of the damages?” Christoph hands the keep the gold. Christoph then writes a note and hands it to the distressed man. Nikolas speaks again, “Take this to the palace. I suggest next time you cut off anyone before this happens again.”

Nikolas releases the inn keeper, but levitates the drunken man outside to the river nearby the village. Ivy quickly follows Christoph out the door. Nikolas levitates him over the water, “Let me go you retarded cripple!” He yells at Nikolas, not realizing that he’s the one hovering above the cold water.

“As you wish.” Nikolas releases him and he plunges into the cold water. He swims to shore, shivering as he climbs out. “You bastard!” Ivy smiles slightly at the events, Christoph just watches, his face almost a constant frown, arms crossed. Nikolas holds out his hand to help him up. “I don’t want your help; you need more help than I do cripple.” Nikolas doesn’t even acknowledge the insult; he has gotten used to it the long years. He just watches the man stand up. “What do you plan on doing with your life once you leave here?” The other man looks up at Nikolas, “What’s it too you cripple man?”

Nikolas smiles at him, “The way I see it is you can continue to be a drunk or you can come with me and become the man you are supposed to be.” Nikolas is quiet for a few minutes, watching the other think long and hard about the offer. “What are you asking exactly?” Nikolas pats his back, “I am proposing that you follow me on great adventures and become better than you are now.” He continues to think about the offer. “I want to be better.” Nikolas smiles, “Then welcome to my team.” “I’m Ikky and you are?” Nikolas smiles at him again. “I’m Nikolas, the man that keeps frowning is Christoph and the girl is Ivy.” Ikky smiles and looks Ivy up and down. “Is she your whore?” Nikolas grabs him and flings him into the ground with surprising agility.

“You are not to talk to her like that. You will respect her and everyone else I decide to bring along; do you have that clear?” Ikky nods his head. “I’m terribly sorry ma’am.” Ikky can tell this man has some power behind him. Christoph smirks at him. Nikolas starts limping away, he shouldn’t have lost his temper like he did, but he wasn’t going to allow any of him followers to disrespect anyone else.

Christoph catches up with him. “Where are we going to stay now sir? You used the last of our gold to pay for that man.” Nikolas ponders that for a moment. “We will camp out. Come, we still have a long way to go before we actually get back to the palace.” Nikolas heads towards the woods, the others follow him. Christoph staying close to him. “Why do you say we have a long way to go? We only have a day to walk even with a pregnant girl.” “I have one of my feelings that we are going to be needed elsewhere first.” Christoph sighs, knowing that this is a bad idea, it always is when he goes off on a side adventure.

Once in the safety of the trees, Christoph goes to hunt, Nikolas sits against a tree. He winces as he stretches out his legs. Ivy pulls his cloak around him a bit tighter, then very guardedly, sits beside him. “Are we lost?” She looks at his shoes. “No, we have another stop.” Ikky pulls out a flask and takes a swig of the liquid inside. “Ikky go find some firewood and start a fire before we all freeze to death.” Ikky looks down at Nikolas, “Is it a good idea to leave her with a cripple like you?” Nikolas looks up at Ikky, never smiling. “Do you want to go another round with me?” Ikky decides it best not to, he valued his life as of right now.

He goes off to find wood, Christoph comes back with two rabbits. He finishes skinning them and cleaning them just as Ikky gets back. After a couple of tries, Ikky finally manages to get a fire going. Ivy’s mouth starts to water as the rabbit starts to brown. “Watch our food Ivy, I have to find enough berries for Nikolas.” She looks over at him, he’s still propped up against the tree, drifting off. She has moved closer to the fire to get warmer. “He doesn’t eat meat?” Christoph shakes his head indicating a no, then leaves.

“So are Ivy are you and the crip… Nikolas together?” She jumps at being spoken to directly, she is unused to this kind of treatment. She tries to make herself as small as possible, to be ignored. She looks as if she wants to cry. “We aren’t.” She finally replies. “She’s important though.” Nikolas tells them, reminding Christoph. “I’ll give my life if I have to just so she makes it to the palace.” Ikky takes his flask out again. “I’m glad I have this little gem.” Finally, everyone settles in to sleep.

Christoph wakes everyone up the next morning. He helps Nikolas stand up, he’s stiff and is having a tough time getting off the ground. “Your freezing. You should take my cloak Nikolas.” Christoph takes off the black cloak, which isn’t fur like Nikolas’. He wraps it around his friend’s shoulders. “Any idea where we are going?” Nikolas smiles at his lifelong friend. “There is a farm over the next mountain. They need our help.” “Yes, but how do you know this?” Christoph looks back to Ikky and Ivy, to make sure they are following still. “The way I always know when people need me.”

Nikolas slinks down against a tree again, this time it’s almost dusk. He rubs his knees and winces as he does. Ikky goes to collect firewood, just as he did the night before. Ivy looks around. Woods surround them, she has never seen anything like this before. She continues to look around with wide eyes. She finally sits down next to Nikolas. Nikolas puts an arm around her to reassure her as he senses her tension. She tenses up at the friendly contact. “You are safe little one.” She starts crying, “How can you be so sure?” He just lets her cry, “I would have known if you weren’t.” It has been a long time since he allowed himself to be this close physically to a woman. Ikky finally returns.

Christoph watches the duo, feeling a twinge of jealousy over Ivy being so close to him. He quickly disperses the rest of the rabbit between them. Ikky’s flask has finally run out of liquor. “I need more.” “No you don’t Ikky.” Nikolas claims as his eyes never stop surveying the surroundings as they ate. Nikolas notices a pond, surrounded by bushes and trees, it will keep anyone from looking at him while he bathes in the morning. Ikky starts to sulk slightly at being told no for the first time in his life. Nikolas slides down to go to sleep. His sleep comes almost instantaneously. Ivy moves closer to the fire, careful to stay away from the other two men.

Ikky breaks the silence first. “How long have you two been following him around?” Ivy doesn’t answer, she is actually terrified of him. “I have known him all my life. I can’t imagine protecting anyone else.” Ikky looks at Ivy and smiles slightly. “Do you belong to him? Do you service him? You surely aren’t innocent at all.” Christoph glares at Ikky, “What I just want to know if she’s his personal whore or if she can be shared.” With that comment, Christoph jumps up and pins Ikky to the ground by his throat. “Don’t you dare talk to her like that. Go to sleep before I slit your throat.” Ikky is let go, he mumbles at his treatment, but doesn’t dare repeat it at all. Christoph tucks a blanket around Nikolas, before settling in for the night.

Nikolas wakes first. He finds that Ivy has wrapped her body around his. Her arm is draped across his chest; her leg is over his legs. He’s stiff from sleeping on the ground two nights in a row and with her cutting off his blood circulation to his arm and leg. He manages to get out from under her without waking her up. He limps to the pond they had found, he undresses and rinses his clothes out, then hangs them on a branch, in the first rays of sunlight. He then walks into the pond, waist deep. He plunges into the cold water.

Ivy soon wakes up and almost panics at his disappearance. She starts to search for him, finding him in the pond. She blushes when she spots his clothes hanging in the tree. She stays out of sight, but can’t seem to stop looking at him as he cleans himself off. He isn’t built like the loggers and others at the Wayward, he is slender instead. He seemed to glow. His silver hair separated over his shoulders. He has an ethereal aura around him.

She sees the horrible scar on his backbone and wonders where he got it from, she couldn’t see him fighting hand to hand combat at all. Ivy began to wonder what it would be like for him to willingly to hold her. Nikolas was bringing out feelings she had thought she lost a long time ago. She was unsure of what it was to feel anything and he was making her feel, it was strange.

Nikolas starts to get out of the pond, she hopes he doesn’t see her as she runs back to camp. She also hopes her embarrassment from showing. Christoph has packed up their small camp, he looks at her. “Where have you gone? I hope you weren’t bothering Nikolas.” She shakes her head no, but avoids eye contact. Nikolas limps back, Ivy avoids his eye contact too. Ikky is whining about not having any liquor. Nikolas looks at him, “It’s for the best. You will find that you aren’t going to need alcohol for everything. I don’t know what drove you to abuse it, but you will find a reason to let it go.” Ikky just shrugs off the advice and continues to pout.

They start walking north east, toward the farm. The sun rises high into the sky; they decide to stop for a break. Everyone is hot and sweaty. Nikolas drops to the ground. Ivy wishes there was something she could do, but she also keeps her distance from him. Christoph slumps down beside him. “Are you sure you’re going to make it?” “This place we are looking for is farther than I thought it was, but yes I’ll make it, we just need to rest for a bit.” He stretches his legs out. Ikky is behind a tree, relieving himself. Ivy is surveying the area. It is a clearing; all kinds of flowers were in bloom. She has never seen anything so pretty before. She just looks in awe of it all. Birds are flying high in the sky; she spots little animals running every which way in the distance. This was so much different than being in the underworld, she was getting overwhelmed in all the different colors and smells. This new world was alive, unlike the dead smell of the underworld.

Nikolas stretches out, as he does, he’s falls to his back and starts to be dragged across the ground, being pulled by a giant spider. His staff is dropped. His left leg is being wrapped in webbing as he nears the monster. Christoph grabs the staff and runs toward the beast. Nikolas kicks at it with his free foot. He is flung onto the ground almost underneath the monstrosity. The wind is knocked out of him, he hears a crack. He finds it hard to catch his breath. He screams out as a searing pain wafts through his body. His insides start to feel like jelly as the venom starts spreading through his body.

Christoph gets too close to the monster; it uses its leg to fling him into a tree. Nikolas is struggling, but his energy is fading fast. Nikolas finally stops struggling, he knows he’s going to die right there. He tries to conjure up at least a small fire ball, but to no avail.

Ivy runs toward the fight, unsure of what she can do to help. She sees Nikolas laying there and gets mad. She stretches out her fingers and strikes the arachnid with bolts of lightning, finishing the beast off. It falls on top of Nikolas’ leg. He was not only dying, but pinned down. Ikky makes an appearance, staying hidden from the fight. The three of them get the monster off of their incapacitated leader. “Ivy tie a piece of your dress around his leg, at least get it to stop bleeding.” Ivy looks at the wound horrified at the blood loss. “I can’t touch him.” Ikky grabs her and jerks her down to the ground, “Woman, you will do this or Nikolas will die.” Ivy comes to her senses and does as she is told. She ties off his leg just above the bite.

Nikolas is starting to go into shock. Christoph takes out a knife, searching for the tip of the fang. As soon as he finds it, he slowly pulls it out with the knife. Nikolas screams out. “I’m so sorry, but I had to get the tip out.” Nikolas closes his eyes, his body trying to fight the poison, but obviously failing.

Christoph leaves to see how far the farm is from them. Nikolas shivers, Ivy takes off his cloak and puts it over him, wrapping it around him tightly. She puts his head on her lap trying to comfort him. A very long twenty minutes later, Christoph comes back with another man. The new comer injects Nikolas with a yellow thick looking liquid. “Antivenin, I just hope we got to him in time.” They manage to gently move Nikolas to the farmhouse. They lay him on the kitchen table, careful of his injuries. The farmer’s wife makes everyone leave so she can have room in the small kitchen.

She cleans his injury before packing it with a healing herb. Nikolas screams out, still out cold, as the herb starts to heal his leg. The woman binds his leg up to hold the herb in place. Next she checks his ribs; she notices that one is cracked. She carefully wraps his ribs so they can heal too. She puts a cold cloth on his forehead to soothe his fever. Her husband and son get him into a bed. Their daughter tucks him in tightly to keep him warm.

The mother finds his group sitting at the table now. “How is he?” Christoph asks the Mother. “It is completely up to him. Right now he has a fever. I did find a tiny piece of fang left in his leg, but it is now gone. He’s lucky to have gotten here when he did. He would not have survived out in the open much longer.” Christoph just nods, Ivy visibly relaxes.

The daughter comes out. Ikky sees her and its love at first sight. She has shoulder length hair the color of a mouse. Her eyes are as green as moss. Her face is a little bit too squared for her to be classically beautiful. Her skin is sun kissed from working out on their farm. She’s a bit plump, but he just did not care at all. She doesn’t speak, just sits down beside Ivy, who appears to want to shrink into herself right now. Ikky knew that she is perfect for him. Christoph offers them to help the farmer’s family out on the farm. Ivy holds onto the staff.

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Dream World

Nikolas felt great, no better than that, he is feeling rejuvenated. He finds he can actually run, something he hasn’t been able to do in a very long time. He just ran until his muscles hurt. There was only that pain, no pain from his injuries.

He comes to a field of lilies. He drops to his knees; tears swell in his eyes. He doesn’t know who is doing this to him, but he still curses them. How he missed his beautiful, sweet wife, Amelia. He picks on and just sits there. He always brought a lily back from his travels and she would plant it in their field behind their house. She believed that the lilies were his promise to come back to her when he was away. She wasn’t exactly wrong. He just loved seeing her smile when he found one in a color she didn’t have. He fights back tears. She had been his everything.

“Nikolas, my son, Amelia still loves you.” Nikolas jumps and turns to see the massive golden dragon behind him. He drops back to his knees in a fit of anger. He crushes the flower. “Amelia worked so hard to get this field how she remembers it in her life. She would be disappointed.” The deep voice tried to be soothing, but he failed. “She isn’t here anymore, so it doesn’t matter.” Nikolas spits out realizing just how angry he truly is about her death. “She watches over you. She’s worried that you have just given up.” Nikolas looks at the ground, “You are supposed to protect the good and innocent, where were you when we both needed you?” Ten years of anger and hurt bubbled up inside of Nikolas. It was like a volcano, everything that had been buried deep down kept coming up. The dragon patiently lets him get everything out before speaking again. “She fulfilled her destiny. You have to fill yours now.” “I don’t accept her destiny!” This time the dragon speaks loudly, the finality in his tone made Nikolas calm down a bit. “You truly are a Star! You are still wallowing in your despair. You have another young lady that needs you now.” The dragon sees the infamous Star stubborn look in his eyes.

“Victoria has my brother now.” The dragon knocks him over, but does not hurt him. “Not her, Ivy. She needs you. It is time to wake up dear one.”

Nikolas opens his eyes, he tries to move, but the familiar pain shoots through his body. “Don’t move. Christoph get him some water. Don’t try to speak yet either.” The farmer’s wife instructs him. His eyes dart around the room. A dresser stood beside his bed, a tiny fireplace sits in the wall sits across his bed, across from the dresser is a door.

Christoph returns with water; she takes it from him. “Drink slowly, you are hurt pretty bad young man.” Nikolas sips, grateful of the water to soothe the dryness in his throat. “How long have I been out?” He asks, his voice cracking slightly. “Two days.” “Where’s my staff and Ivy?” He didn’t know how he knew that she would have his staff, but he did. “The young lady has not left the corner of the room. She refuses to do anything, what have you done to that child?” She asks him, suspicious of him now. “I found her like this.” He wished she would just leave him be, his head is throbbing. Ivy shyly gives him his staff. He smiles at her and holds it near his leg, the staff heals him, leaving just a gash on his leg. His rib heals also.

He sits up, setting his feet on the ground. His silvery glow is beginning to return to him. He shivers from his fever. “Well, it is past time to be asleep, everyone out.” She rushes everyone out, except Ivy, naturally.

His bare legs are sticking out, the blanket draped over his lap. Ivy slowly moves over to him, kneeling in front of him. She reaches and touches his leg, he tenses and she jumps slightly. He says nothing. Her free hand, shaking, slowly goes under his cotton shirt.

She feels his hard muscles and ribs underneath his soft skin. She gets a little braver, moving closer, nipping his neck. He gently grips her upper arms, slightly backing her away. “That is enough Ivy.” She quickly stops looking him in his eyes, dropping her hands to her side. She was unable to read his emotions.

“Do you not find me attractive?” Nikolas looks at her, “I don’t.” He stretches back out on the bed. Ivy leaves, hurt and confused. She goes out on the porch and sits on the step. Devlin, the farmer’s daughter, walks out after her. She sits beside Ivy. “You shouldn’t be so sad.” Ivy doesn’t say a word to the other girl. “It’s him isn’t it?” Ivy finally speaks to her. “It is. I don’t know how to get his attention.” Devlin smiles at her. “Well we need to sleep and get up early and I’ll help you.” Ivy smiles at the other girl. “What do I owe you for your kindness?” Devlin laughs, “How about we just be friends?” “I’ve never had a friend before.” They hug, go back indoors and go to sleep.

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Ikky and Devlin

After her talk with Ivy, Devlin walks back into her bedroom and changes to her bedclothes. She hears a knock on the door. “Who is it?” She asks. “It is Ikky, may I come in? I wanted to see you again.” She smiles to herself and opens the door. He walks in and sits on the edge of the bed just as she closes the door.

“You are so beautiful.” She blushes at his comment. She had never been told she was beautiful before. “You must be blind.” He stands up and walks over to her, placing his hands on her face, making her look at him. He could see the mixed emotions in her eyes, he leans in and kisses her.

Her lips felt as if they were on fire. He made her go weak in the knees. His arms go around her to help her be steady. He breaks the kiss, but nips her neck ever so slightly. He pulls her over to the bed and lays her down. Ikky just lays beside her, stroking her cheek. Her lips and neck tingled where he had kissed her. “I have never wanted someone as badly as I want you.” She tenses up slightly, realizing that he couldn’t stay in her bed. Her father will kill him. “You must leave, Ikky.” He looked hurt at her words. “Please, my father will kill you if he finds out you are in my room.” Ikky kisses her again, but gets up and leaves. He is intoxicated by her. After he closes the door, she touches her lips and smiles at the thought of her being able to leave this farm.

Early the next morning, Ivy finds herself having her hair done and dressed in a dress. Her mother is helping the girls, understanding the issue. They dress her in a blue spaghetti strap dress, she’s a little self-conscious about her scarred arms and such.

The girls walk outside, the working men nodded respectfully at them, Nikolas sat on one of the wooden rocking chairs, wrapped up in a blanket. He looks over at them. Ivy is beautiful, but he just turns his head back to the woods and stares at the tree line as if he was expecting something to happen. Ivy is hurt.

The ground rumbles and splits open. A huge red skinned demon appears, almost completely naked. He looks around the farm and roars out. “Ivy, I know you are here.” He is only wearing a loin cloth. He looks at all as Ivy slowly steps off the porch. His black horns encircle around his ears. Nikolas stands and grabs her wrist, stopping her. He limps out, he looks small compared to the massive demon. Ivy is worried about him. “I want my property back.” He stares at Ivy, she steps back, fearful of what might happen to any of them. “She obviously doesn’t want to go back to you.” The Demon roars in anger. “It doesn’t matter what she wants, she’s my slave. Hand her over and I won’t destroy this farm.” Nikolas grips his staff tightly, “You will have to go through me.” The Demon now laughs at him. “You are not much cripple man.” Ivy wished that this demon would just go away and leave her alone. “Ivy, come here.” There was a dangerous tone in his voice, she wasn’t sure what his plan is, she slowly steps over to him, shaking in fear. “Did you run away from this demon?” She starts to cry. “I did, please don’t make me go back.” The demon reaches out for her to take her back to his domain. Christoph has moved closer to Nikolas to help him out.

Tension built between the two over Ivy. She slowly backs away from them. Nikolas stands his ground, just as the demon grips her wrist, Nikolas is flung back. Ikky moved like a dancer, slicing the demons hand off. They topple over and roll on the ground as they fight. Everyone is shocked at what they see. Ikky loses his knife, but pulls a dagger out of his boot. He plunges it over and over in the demon before slitting its throat. Christoph pulls him off the demon.

Devlin had been watching him, worried that he would be killed. He’s covered in the demon’s green blood. He walks to Nikolas who had been so stunned at this, he stayed down. Ikky holds his hand out to him to help him up. “I’m sorry to knock you over like that.” Ivy steps over dry heaving, demon blood stinks to her. Devlin holds her hair out of her face, she bites her bottom lip looking at Ikky. “We have to get moving again.” Nikolas tells them. “Are you well enough to leave?” Nikolas smiles. “I’ll be fine Devlin.” The farmer loans them two horses to get them back to the palace.

After their goodbyes and the horses are saddled, Devlin watches them leave, tears in her eyes. Ikky hadn’t even offered to take her along with him. Ivy rode with Nikolas. His arms around her. She had never been on a horse before. Theirs is a sweet brown mare. Ikky rides the black one and Christoph walks. Ivy wonders about that, but doesn’t asks.

Nikolas sighs to himself. Ivy smelled like vanilla. He hated being so close to her. She was driving him insane with her skittish ways. It brought out the protective side of him, a side he buried down when Amelia died. She wiggles in front of him, he grips the reigns tighter. They all ride in silence until high noon. Nikolas slowly gets down. Christoph helps Ivy get down.

Ikky sulks, wishing he had brought Devlin with him now. Ivy gives them some bread and cheese for lunch. They tense up as they sense another presence appears on a horse. Devlin jumps down and smiles. Ikky grabs her and kisses her passionately. “How did you leave?” He asks her in between kisses. “I just left. My father will be mad, but he doesn’t understand how it is to want to wander around instead of staying home.” She looks at Nikolas, “You seem to be the leader, is it alright if I stay?” Nikolas looks at Ikky, who is almost begging him. Nikolas nods, “It would be an honor if you came along.”

Christoph glares at Ikky, he’s unsure still whether or not to trust him, even though he did save Nikolas’ life. They talk in hushed voices off to the side while everyone else eats. “Did you know he was a demon slayer Nikolas?” Nikolas smirks, “I had my assumptions. Give him time, he’s just lost his way. He lost it like I lost mine when Amelia passed away.” Christoph rolls his eyes, but he learned a long time ago that when Nikolas had one of his feelings about someone they are usually right.

After lunch, they ride again. Ivy this time rides behind him, gripping his waist. He was too aware of her breast against his back. His fingers hold the reigns so tight, his knuckles are white. Devlin rode in front of Ikky. Her hair felt like silk, he was happy that this angel is in his life now. Her body felt good against his and just imagined how she would feel all over him. Christoph rode ahead of the others; he’s scouting for dangers.

The sun is starting to set. Nikolas’ leg is starting to hurt from all day of riding. They all agree that it is time to make camp. Christoph actually helps Nikolas down. “I used to be an excellent rider, but now… well now I can barely stand it at all.” He sits against a tree, while everyone else sets up their camp. Devlin comes over to him, she slides his pant leg up to check for infection, it’s almost completely healed up. She smiles at him.

“You are a fast healer.” He actually chuckles, “Sometimes dear.” Christoph takes Ivy fishing to give Nikolas a break from watching over her. He’s teaching her how to bait her hook and how to cast the line. “Is he mad at me?” Ivy finally asks after ten minutes of waiting. “No” “Then why is he so distant from me?” Christoph sighs, “It’s not you, it’s all females he avoids.” Ivy is quiet for a few minutes, “I didn’t mean to put anyone in danger.” Christoph just shrugs at her comment.

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Gabriel and Victoria

Victoria paces, her raven hair tied in a low ponytail at the nape of her fragile looking neck. She’s anxious and worried about her brother in law. “Where are they?” She asks her husband, Gabriel. “Nikolas is usually fast in his travels.” She adds. Gabriel smiles at his gorgeous wife, even though he loved her, he found her to be intolerable at times like now. “You have to be patient, beloved, after all he is traveling with a pregnant woman.” Victoria smiles back at him.

Gabriel stood up from his desk and grabs her with his massive arms, pulling her into a hug. He wished he could sire children, but that was his punishment for stealing Victoria from his little brother, the favored child of everyone more powerful than he is now. His fiery wings lay against his back. She breaks his embrace and gets in bed, Gabriel sighs silently and walks to their fountain.

He hated being king. He wanted Nikolas’ job, to be able to go anywhere at any given moment, but alas that wasn’t in the cards for him. He was stuck in a palace with his aggravating but lovely wife. He sends out a speedy return to his brother, hoping that he was fine, just taking his time. He then joins his wife in their bed and holds her tightly.

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Serenity

Serenity has become the new vessel of Darkness, at least until Judas returns. She knew that he would one day, but for now, she would just bide her time with the goodies. She clawed her way up to being the advisor to Gabriel and Victoria. She enjoyed the privileges of the position also brings. She enjoyed humiliating and degrading her lovers, especially the guards.

Serenity holds a tolerance for the royals. As long as she didn’t step out of line, they would be blind to her plots. She walks through the palace without a sound, her raven hair hung to her calves, she knew her loyalty to Judas would be rewarded. He would let her rule Evermore. She smiled to herself at the thought of being Queen Serenity.

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Nikolas

Everyone is sleeping, except for Nikolas. He is laying on his back staring at the stars. Tonight he knew would be a restless night for him. He allowed a few tears fall. He couldn’t escape the emotional turmoil he is currently in. He is still in love with his beloved Amelia, but Ivy is beginning to get under his skin and he did not like it one bit.

His thoughts shifted between the two women. Amelia had loved to star gaze with him. They had made love in her field of lilies under a star filled sky. They had been so happy and so much in love. “You are so sad. Why Nikolas?” He continues to stare into the sky contemplating on how to answer the question. “You should be asleep Ivy.” She slides closer to him, almost on top of him. She looks at his thin face. “I feel your pain. You long for someone don’t you?” He pushes her back, then continues to star gaze. She gets braver and lays her head on his shoulder. He tenses up. “Relax, I just want to be close to someone. I don’t know why you get so tense when I’m near you.” He swallows hard, “I’m in love with someone, but she’s gone and I prefer to just be with her.” Ivy sits up, hurt. “Do you think she left you because you are an ass?” She senses his anger at her statement. He’s incredibly fast, he pins her to the ground by her throat. “You will never talk about her that way ever again. You aren’t even fit enough to clean the dirt off her shoe.” He screams in her face.

Silver wings appear on his back, right about his shoulder blades. She is scared of this sudden burst of anger, but he was beautiful with his wings. His feathers have hints of gold on the ends. He releases her and flies off, leaving them. Ivy leans against a tree, rubbing her neck. She then pulls her knees to her chest and wraps her arms around them, putting her head on them.

Sunrise, Nikolas still isn’t back. The rest of the group wake and realize something is wrong. Ivy tells them what happened very meekly. “Shit Ivy, if anything happens to him, I will make you suffer.” Christoph tells her as he stands up and starts to pace frantically.

They royal carriage appears about noon time. They watch it roll up. Gabriel steps out and down to the ground. Gabriel places his hand on Christoph’s shoulder, “Nikolas is fine, he’s at home, resting. He’s exhausted.” “This must be Ivy.” He looks at her and she shrinks back, unsure of him. He smiles at her, as does Victoria. “Well, we must get back home.” They all climb into the carriage, which is surprisingly big on the inside. Ivy watches as the rest of the country flies by and before she knows it, she is being whisked away.

She’s ushered into a huge bathroom with two servants to help her. A huge tub dominated the middle of the floor, she had to step down into the tub, since it was actually built into the floor. The floors themselves are marble. Ivy had never seen anything like this before, she is obviously unsure of what to even do. White pillars held the ceiling up, climbing vines grew up two of the six pillars. She couldn’t stop looking all around.

The servants help her into the tub after disrobing her. They take her dirty ripped up clothes and burnt them. They ever so gently bathe her in rose scented water. Helping her out, they covered her body in a silk robe, then lead her through a door. She gasps as she looks around the bedroom. It felt like a cavern compared to the tiny rooms she had slept in.

Her bed was made of solid oak. Hanging from the four post are white sheer curtains, tied back to the posts. One the right side of her bed are double glass doors that leads out to the balcony overlooking the city. A wardrobe is across from those doors, made of oak also. On the opposite wall is a fireplace to keep its occupants warm on the cold nights. A fur rug laid before the fire. Two chairs sat cater-cornered in front of the fireplace. In between the chairs is a table to hold whatever the occupants wanted. “Empress Victoria will be here shortly.” One of the servants tell her. “Are you her servants?” Both of them laugh, “We are, but we have been instructed to be yours. The Empress has many servants to attend her, milady.” Ivy is just looking at everything. The light is provided by candles that hung from the walls all around her room.

Ivy touches the bed, she looks at the two girls, they nod. She gets on the bed. That bed formed to her body. She got so comfortable and warm, that she didn’t notice Victoria enter. They two girls, bow to her and stand off to the side of the room awaiting instructions. “I’m glad you are enjoying yourself my dear.” Victoria circles Ivy, sizing her up. “She will look lovely in the red dress we had made for her.” One servant rushes to pull out the required garment. The dress is deep red, flowing down to the ground. “Perfect.” Ivy stays quiet, she doesn’t know how to address the Empress of an entire planet. “It is too much for me Empress.” Victoria stops and turns back to the other woman. “Are you refusing to please your Empress?” “No milady, not at all. I just never worn anything so nice before.” Victoria smiles at her, “This is not nice, my clothes are nice. You will wear this; it will look lovely on you my dear.” Ivy senses a little bit of hostility in that statement, but decides it best to keep quiet. The servants help her dress, then curl her green hair, she decides to speak again, “Is Nikolas going to be ok?” Victoria’s smile disappears. “You have no right to ask about him. You are below him, just remember that. Now be a good girl and sit still.” Ivy did as she was told, for fear of punishment. Victoria is right about Nikolas; he was too good for her.

Finally, she is finished, her makeup was applied. She looked at herself in the mirror of the bathroom vanity and didn’t recognize herself. Her scars were covered up, couldn’t even tell she had any of them. “So are you ready to be reunited with your friends?” She looks back at the two servants; their eyes are cast down to the floor. She follows Victoria.

Ivy is self-conscious of how she looks, even when Devlin joins her. Devlin is dressed in a similar dress, only in blue. This new room holds a long table with chairs all the way around it. There is another fireplace on one of the walls that stretched down its length. A huge chandelier hung from the center of the room, in the middle of the table. “This is our dining room. There is to be no eating outside of this. Ivy, we haven’t decided if you are going to be a servant or not yet, you can join us until it is decided. Devlin, you are a guest along with Ikky. You two are more than welcome to eat with us also.” Victoria explains to the two girls. Ivy gets the horrible feeling about Victoria again.

Ikky finally joins them. He can’t take his eyes off of Devlin. She blushes slightly at his staring, wondering what he even was staring at her like that before. Her mud colored hair brushed her shoulders ever so slightly. She felt like a princess now. He didn’t even realize that he hasn’t even complained about not having any alcohol in days.

Ivy shyly looks around the dining hall, but there is no sign of Nikolas. She hasn’t seen him since he flew off earlier that night. She felt so alone now. “Now if you will excuse me, I have to go see my dear Nikolas. I leave you in the hands of Brigitte and Nicolette.” Victoria leaves them.

The two servants start to give them a tour of the palace. Ivy manages to sneak away to try to find him. She walks down a long hallway, she starts to feel as if she must turn back and find Devlin when she hears voices. The doors are slightly cracked, she peeks in, curiosity gets the better of her this time.

Victoria is sitting in one of the chairs next to a shiny desk. She can barely see Nikolas sitting on the edge of his bed. She laughs. “Don’t laugh, I don’t have feelings for her.” He sounded annoyed at Victoria. “You should at least tell her why you are giving her the cold shoulder, Nikolas.” Nikolas looks as if death is ready to claim his life. “I don’t have to explain anything. Now leave, I tire of you.” Victoria stands up and walks over to him, “My dear Nikolas, you have no idea how women see you, do you?” With those words, she kisses him. He pushes her back into the opposite wall with his power. She stands back up and walks over to him, “Do you remember how it used to be Nikolas?” She is disrobing slowly as she is walking to him. “I said get out, you made your choice.” Victoria redresses. Ivy has left before hearing him tell her to leave again. “Don’t worry, I won’t say anything, you know I won’t.” She leaves him.

Ivy searches for Devlin to talk. They talk throughout the night. The two drag themselves to breakfast. Their meal is a bit awkward feeling. Nikolas and Christoph aren’t there. Gabriel has already eaten and gone to do what he needed to do for the day. Victoria hums to herself, unaware that Ivy had seen what happened. She does notice Ivy playing with her fruit. “Eat my dear, that precious baby isn’t going to get strong that way.” Ivy eats a little bit. “I would love for you two to join me in the gardens this morning. It gets so lonely being around men all the time.”

The two girls follow Victoria to the massive gardens. “Ivy do you understand your duty to me is besides raising your child while Gabriel and I guide the little one into ruling?” “No milady.” Ivy stares at the ground, she learned a long time ago that eye contact was the fastest way to get a beating. “You are going to be my servant after this child is born. I have decided this last night. So as your first task for the rest of your life is to stay away from Nikolas. Do you understand?” “Yes Milady.” Devlin doesn’t say a thing as she listens to them.

“He is like a brother to me. I do adore him and will kill anyone that would cause him heartache and you did just that, but I am willing to forgive you, since you weren’t under my thumb.” Ivy looks confused, Victoria continues to explain, “He is still in love with his wife. You made a comment to him that was very unkind. His wife didn’t leave him. She was murdered brutally.” Ivy pales as they continue to walk through the gardens. “I did not know milady.” “I know you didn’t, but next time, you should respect the dead and other’s heartbreak no matter the circumstances.” “Yes milady.” They arrive at a clearing with a table and umbrella to shield them from the sun. The men soon going them.

Nikolas is making an appearance. Unlike Gabriel, who is dressed in fancy clothes, Nikolas prefers clothing that are plain. He wears a cotton shirt and cotton pants; Gabriel wears all silk. Ivy stays quiet. “My love, I’m glad you are here.” Gabriel kisses Victoria’s cheek. Nikolas looks at Ivy, “We have to talk.” Victoria’s smile fades when she hears these words come out of his mouth. Ivy stands up and follows him.

They travel through the surrounding woods to a clearing a few miles away from the palace. Lilies and weeds have overtaken the small hut. She senses his reluctance at being in this place. She looks around the area and senses the happiness that had been here once before. Her heart breaks as she senses the horrors as they approach the hut. The terror seemed to cling to the very walls.

He pushes open the door with his staff, they enter the kitchen. Her hands go to her mouth as she looks around the room. The small table is blood stained. She spots where someone had been tied down to the ancient looking wood stove. Blood stained the iron. Nikolas gently puts his hand on the table, lost in thought. He starts talking to her, “This is where my life ended. The love of my heart left me right here on this table. My wife was murdered and there wasn’t nothing I could do to save her.”

He closes his eyes and scars appear, wrapping around his arms and neck. Ivy realizes that he was using a glamour to hide all of his scars. He looks at the jade chains that still hung from the stove. Ivy stands perfectly still, barely breathing, but still listening and watching him.

Nikolas unbuttons his shirt to reveal burn marks crisscrossing over his chest. He turns around, exposing his scar on his back. She wants to cry for him, but doesn’t. He puts his shirt back on and rebuttons it. “We should be getting back; Christoph will be wondering where I have disappeared too.” He starts to walk out the door, “Nikolas, thank you for sharing this with me.” Nikolas shrugs, “It’s just a hut.” She follows him out. As they walk, she trips, he catches her by her arm and hold onto her until she gets her balance back. “Thank you.” “Don’t read too much into it.” He starts coughing as they walk back to the palace gardens. Christoph is furious and drags Nikolas to his room. “You worry too much old friend.” Christoph pushes him into bed. “I do, but if anything happened to you, your mother would have my head.” Nikolas laughs but starts to cough. “Stay in bed and get some rest.” Christoph leaves and sits outside of his door.

Later that evening, just before dinner, Ivy is standing behind Victoria’s hair. Nicolette is picking out both women’s outfits. “Darling, do you know what your baby is yet?” Ivy shakes her head, “No milady.” Victoria smiles, “I suppose we will know soon.” They eat dinner, Ivy sneaks away to Nikolas’ bedroom. Christoph has left his post. She timidly knocks on the door. “Come in.” She steps into his sanctuary. He is sitting in a chair looking into the fireplace. He looks a bit defeated. She shyly walks to him. “Please sit Ivy.” She sits in the other overstuffed chair. “I get it Nikolas; I can’t compete with your late wife. You still love her.” She stands up to leave, but he grabs her wrist. Pulling her into his lap. She’s straddling his lap. “You are only half right. Amelia was my wife. I have to live with the guilt of her death every day for the rest of my life. It wouldn’t be fair to you if…”

Ivy leans in and shyly kisses him, she shyly touches his hair. He kisses her back, entwining his fingers in her thin hair. Her fingers slide to his chest, slowly sliding under his cotton shirt. She leans in and nibbles his neck, grinding her hips against him. She feels him tense up, she pushes a little further. She sucks on his ear a little bit, he stops her. “You need to leave Ivy.” She gets up and leaves, hurt and angry. Nikolas goes to bed.

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Ikky and Devlin

Devlin leans against the railing of the balcony outside her room. She never thought she would be staying in the palace, after all, she is just a farm girl, and not a very pretty one at that. She has been enjoying the lap of luxury. The view of the city was beautiful at night, the lights seemed so far away from where she was standing. She looks up at the stars and smiles. Ikky has been quietly watching her for a few seconds before making himself known to the girl he is giving his heart to.

“Hello beautiful.” Devlin jumps at being disturbed. “I’m sorry to have startled you.” She turns around and smiles at him. “I was just lost in thought, so no need to apologize. You shouldn’t say things like that to people.” Ikky sets his glass of alcohol down next to her hand. He touches her cheek ever so softly, “You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.” Devlin blushes at his statement.

He continues to talk, wrapping her in his arms, “I have had you on my mind since I first saw you.” She can smell the alcohol on his breath, thick. “I can’t have a relationship with a drunk Ikky. Why do you do it? What are you hiding from?” He releases her, takes another drink, then sighs. “It’s not so I can hide from, it’s what I’m trying to forget.” He wraps his arms back around her. She tries to push him away, but he hangs onto her. “Save me from myself Devlin.” She looks into his blue eyes, “Then stop drinking. That is all you have to do.” He possesses her mouth, invading her with his tongue, then nibbles it ever so gently. She pushes him away. “No Ikky. You are going to respect me; I’m not going to be just another conquest to you.” He holds her face in his hands, looking deeply into her eyes. “You could never be just a conquest to me.” She breaks his eye contact. He’s feeling slightly defeated by her rejections. “Please stop looking away from me honey.” She finally gives into at least that much and looks at him. “Smile please my sweet.” She shakes her head no. He starts to tickle her. She giggles, “No stop please. I beg you to stop.” He does, something about her begging him to stop was highly suggestive to him. “Stay with me tonight?” She asks him innocently. “Always.” They get into her bed and she just snuggles against him, safe in his arms. His drink is long forgotten as they drift to sleep.

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Dream world

Christoph smiles, he’s on his knees in front of Nikolas, he waits patiently for an order. He knows this is just a dream, he did not care, he would do anything for Nikolas. He feels Nikolas’ hand on the back of his head, he opens his mouth and takes Nikolas as far as possible. “You are mine.” Those three words made Christoph extremely aroused.

The scenery quickly changes and Christoph finds himself naked on the floor of a cavern. Nikolas is gone, he’s furious, who would interrupt a dream like this one? His temper cools as he looks around the place and sees the golden dragon. “You must give up this dream Christoph.” “Why? I love him.” The dragon speaks again. “You belong to another as does Nikolas.” Christoph starts to fume again. “I only want Nikolas, have I not done everything asked of me?” The dragon bellows, “Do not confuse love with lust. You will have the one that completes you.” Christoph shrinks close to the ground, almost cowering. “You will love this other person more than Nikolas. If you do not allow it to happen, you will end up being lonely.”

Christoph sits up, alert in his own bed, glad it was only a dream. He looks in his bed and his current companion. He was beautiful in his own rights. Christoph moves a piece of hair out of his face before getting out of bed.

He joins almost everyone else at breakfast. Nikolas isn’t around, Victoria is eating a piece of fruit, still in her robe. Gabriel is quiet through the breakfast. “Where is Nikolas?” Victoria asks him. “He wasn’t ready to get up yet. You know how hard it is for him to recover from an adventure.” Christoph snaps at her. Ivy stays quiet, thinking it best not to say a word to these people. She wondered if anyone knew how Victoria even is, she pushes back tears.

Ikky and Devlin walk in their hands are entwined with each other’s. Devlin is smiling and both are lost in their own little world. They sit down and start feeding each other. “Rose is coming for a council meeting sometime today. I want you to behave Victoria.” She rolls his eyes. “She doesn’t deserve to be the High Empress.” The entire table looks at her, “It’s not like she is here. She’s done nothing to earn that title.”

“Good to know how you feel about me Victoria.” The woman jumps and turns, she turns a bright red. “How good it is to see you your highness.” Rose crosses her arms, her frown never breaks. “Cut the shit before I send you back from whence you came.” Victoria turns around. “You’re early.” Rose just shrugs. Ivy stares at the new comer, having a feeling that she’s seen this woman before. Her hair is her usual red and black color, cut short just below her jawline. Her skin is pale against her black silk shirt and pants. Her face is childlike, but it’s her eyes that intrigues Ivy. Rose’s eyes are the same shade as Nikolas’. Rose is gorgeous. Ivy and even Devlin feel inadequate next to this woman. This woman radiated power and authority. “We weren’t expecting you this early.” She smiles at Gabriel, “I know, but I wanted to see my boys… Where is Nikolas?” “He is still in bed.” Gabriel tells her. Victoria stands to leave, “Come Ivy.” Ivy looks longingly at her food and stands, “Sit and eat Ivy, besides I’m going to need you today and Victoria looks as if she can do what she wants by herself.” Nikolas finally makes his appearance, slowly and painfully he sits down. Victoria glares at Rose. Victoria starts to get angry about Rose turning things around on her. Victoria huffs and storms off. Rose has her hands crossed across her chest.

“Why do you have to make her mad Mom?” Rose looks at her eldest son, “I don’t like her, never have since Nikolas dragged her from where she came from.” Nikolas just sits there a little shocked by this sudden outcome of the situation. “You are making it hard on me though.” Rose shrugs her thin shoulders.

“I have an idea, Nikolas, why don’t we go and spar like we used to as kids?” Nikolas half smiles, he’s still hasn’t said anything to anyone yet.

Two hours later, they all meet in the gardens. Ivy sits in the grass, since that’s where she finds the most comfort lately from the earth. On the outside of the gardens, there is a massive circle for spars like that. There is no grass in the circle from years of being used, only dirt. Nikolas limps out into the circle, he’s biting his bottom lip. Rose sits on the ground with Ivy, running her fingers through the girls’ hair. Victoria is sitting on a cushioned chair.

Nikolas’ does his best to stand straight, but the wear of his travels are showing. The force field activates once Gabriel steps through the circle. The force field is there to keep the magick from hitting any spectators. Ivy is obviously worried about Nikolas; Rose is watching her reaction to the spar.

Gabriel grins at Nikolas as he starts to charge him. Nikolas calmly stands his ground, gripping his staff tightly, his knuckles start turning white. Once Gabriel gets closer, Nikolas holds his hand up, but Gabriel realizes his mistake too late. A white light blasts towards Gabriel knocking him across the circle and into the shield. Nikolas wastes no time; he has his oldest brother suspended upside down in the air. He’s still very calm.

Gabriel mutters a spell and manages to break Nikolas’. He smashes into Nikolas, sending him a few feet back. He quickly gets back to his feet, while Nikolas is a little dazed, he mutters a few more words, blasting him to the ground. His little brother is still dazed; Gabriel lurks over him. Serenity has arrived and is manipulating Gabriel.

Nikolas’ reaches for his dropped staff, but Gabriel kicks it out of Nikolas’ grasp. Nikolas kicks him in his knee, but it barely phases him. Gabriel flips Nikolas over from his side, then steps on his chest. Nikolas feels as if a ton of bricks are placed on him. He tries to knock him off, but he can’t. Nikolas starts to panic.

Nikolas tries to breath and figures out a spell to get Gabriel off of him. Gabriel is blasted a few inches away, he coughs as he rolls onto his hands and knees, crawling to his staff. Gabriel grabs him by his ankle and yanks him back, almost breaking his leg. Nikolas knew that he needed his staff badly.

Gabriel holds onto Nikolas’ ankle, twisting it, snapping the bones. Nikolas screams, Rose jumps up realizing that something is terribly wrong. She’s going to break the barrier down. As she does, Gabriel kicks Nikolas in the ribs, creaking two. Rose annihilates the shield, pinning Gabriel down to the ground with some vines. She’s furious. Christoph is next to Nikolas in a flash, Gabriel’s body guard, Rizar is next to Gabriel. Serenity quietly leaves, realizing the danger she could possibly be in if she is found out. Christoph’s hands glow blue as he rub’s Nikolas’ ankle.

Nikolas has one of his arm, holding his ribs. He doesn’t want anyone to touch him at all. Christoph tries to move it, but Nikolas just holds it tighter. “Nikolas, you need to let us move your arm sweetheart.” Christoph lets Rose talk to him. He moves Nikolas’ arm and heals his ribs.

Rose lets Gabriel up; he quickly goes to his brother’s side. “I’m so sorry, I don’t know what happened. I wasn’t in control.” Nikolas lays on the ground, gathering some energy. Christoph and Ikky help him sit up then get him inside. “Mom, you have to believe me, I would never hurt him that badly.” Rose looks at her son. “I know.” She just simply walks away from him.

Nikolas is resting in bed, eyes closed. Ivy sits in the corner, patiently waiting. Rose steps into his bed room, “Come with me my dear, we need to have a serious talk.” Ivy stands up, looking at the floor, following the High Empress. They step into an office reserved for Rose. Rose plants herself into her chair and looks up and down Ivy. She is obviously nervous. “I like you, I’m going to help you.” Ivy recognizes her voice. “You… you taught me how to escape.” Rose has leaned back into the chair. “I don’t know what you are talking about, but it is good to see that you made it here.” Rose gives her a slight smile. “How are you going to help me?” Rose just grins, “Trust me. You already have what he needs, Nikolas just needs to see it.” “Wait, so you were the one that helped me escaped.”

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Serenity

Serenity pushed a piece of black hair out of her face. Nikolas has been neutralized temporarily. Gabriel is easy to control. There was no way to get Nikolas to bend to her will. That damned Rose could be a problem though. Rose could sense evil faster than a blood hound could find its prey. She smiles at her thought, though. Her plan to take out Nikolas was brilliant. She smiles to herself as she leaves to gather her supplies she needed. This is almost too perfect.

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Nikolas

Christoph is stationed outside of Nikolas’ bedroom door. Nikolas is physically weak from the sparring with Gabriel. Ivy shyly walks to him, “May I go in?” Christoph sensed something different about her, a slightly new confidence about her. He moves to the side and allows her to enter.

She finds him lying in the middle of the bed, staring at the ceiling. She knew he couldn’t fight against her if she wanted to do anything to him. She glides to his bed and sits on the edge. He looks at her, “Ivy, what’s wrong?” There is genuine concern in his voice. “I’m scared that I’m going to wake up back in that cage. May I stay with you tonight?” He rubs his eyes, obviously getting sleepy. “You can for tonight, sweetie.” She crawls into bed under his covers with him. His scent of soap and sunshine filled her nose. She lays on her side and rubs his chest over his shirt. His eyes are closed. She can’t take it anymore, being so close to him. She climbs on top of him. “Ivy get off.” He opens his eyes slowly. “I’m done obeying Nikolas.” She leans down and kisses him gently. He pushes her off with as much strength he can muster. “Ivy, I can’t do be what you need me to be for you.” He can see the hurt in her eyes, almost crying she leaves.

Gabriel is walking through the gardens for his routine stroll under the rising moon. He sees Ivy, she seems lost. She has been on his mind since he laid eyes on her. He walks to her, “Are you ok? Shouldn’t you be in your room or with Rose?” She smiles sweetly, but shyly answers him, “I got lost and couldn’t find my way back to my room.” He takes her hand and leads her into the right direction. As they walk, he makes conversation with her. “How are you adjusting to the palace life?” She bites her lip, unsure of how to answer him. Gabriel is a bit shorter and has more muscles than Nikolas. She was seeing him for the first time up close. She catches herself licking her lips. “You know Nikolas can’t love you the way you want him too. I have sensed your longing for him.” He continues to lead her to her bedroom, finally.

He has her against the door, his arms at her head, she felt trapped by them. She searches for the door handle. “You are a beautiful woman Ivy. I want to kiss you.” “Please milord, don’t.” He cups her breast with one hand. She wants to cry, but somehow manages not to. She looks to the ground, feeling used, her old Master made her feel this way too. He smiles at her. “I will have you Ivy, sooner or later. I will come to you but if you reject me then you will lose everything that you have been brought here for my dear.” He leaves her and she seeks the solitude of her room. She tries to sleep.

She becomes restless and feels the baby move around in her womb. She gets out of bed and creeps to Nikolas’ room. She pushes the door open and slides in. As Ivy slinks toward his bed, she realizes that there is a stream of moonlight falling on his body. She looks at the ceiling to find that it’s made of completely out of glass. One arm is draped over his eyes. His silver wings are out and looked as if the feathers are extremely soft. She ever so gently touches one of the wings and smiles at finding out that they are as she expected. He looked peaceful sleeping.

Now is the time to make her move. She lays next to him and starts to gently kiss his skin. She is surprised at how soft his skin really is. His body responds to her. He felt wonderful against her lips. She is too busy exploring his body to realize he’s waking up.

He flips her over, pinning her arms above her head, “What are you doing?” His face is inches from hers. He looks at her slightly angry and amused at the same time. “I want you Nikolas, ever since we left the tavern. Please don’t send me away.” The amusement in his eyes turns to anger, “You will never have me, get out of my room now Ivy.” He releases her as she gets up, she stops at the door to open it, turns to him and asks, “Am I not good enough for you?” He leaves her question unanswered as she walks out, shutting the door behind her. He finally speaks to the closed door, “You belong to someone else.” Ivy returns to her room and lays down, crying to sleep.

Rose woke her up and they walk out to the gardens. Rose loves being outdoors. “What was Amelia like milady?” Rose smiles as she pulls a stubborn weed out of her flower bed. “She was smart, funny, sweet and extremely loving. Why do you ask little one?” “She still has his heart though.” Rose stops pulling weeds and looks at Ivy, “Don’t be so sure. He is a man after all and stubborn. Why don’t you go find him and see if he needs anything?” Ivy nods, “Are you sure?” Rose continues pulling weeds, but ignores Ivy.

Ivy finds him with Christoph in the training room. She looks around unsure of what to say to either male. The walls of the room are filled with all different kinds of weapons, maces, swords, whips, staffs, axes and the sort. At present, Nikolas is watching a teenager practice with a deadly looking sword, twice the size of the adolescence.

She jumps every time their swords clash. Nikolas circles them, watching. The young one finally disarms the older one and has the sword at his throat, he hesitates to get the winning blow, Ivy sees why. The older man is a shape shifter, he has turned into a woman, the young one backs away. She quickly takes the upper hand, kicking his feet out from under the boy and pinning him. “I yield.” She turns back into a man and helps the lad up to his feet.

“Do you know what you did wrong?” Nikolas asks the young one. “Yes, I hesitated because he cheated and turned into a woman.” Nikolas smiles and laughs. “Never hesitate, even if it is a female. They can be as ruthless as men perhaps more so at times.” He rustles the boys’ hair. “Other than that, you have done much better.” Nikolas turns to see Ivy. “I was sent to see if you need anything done.” He looks at Ivy; she looks down at the ground. “No, go back to Rose.” He walks past her. She watches the sun set for a few minutes before going to her bedroom.