# The New America

by **Sowelo**

## Summary

Imagine, you're just a normal teenage girl living in the year 2019. Waiting for your senior year of private school to end so you could travel to LA to become a dancer, or movie star, or hair dresser, I don't know its your dream. Your family's supportive and you have awesome friends, and everything seems fine. Till you find out that you're a nation, not just any nation, the personification of the United States of America.

To re-cap, Alfred, the last America sorta died... and I took his place. Thing is I didn't know this. For nearly 18 years, I grew at the rate of a human, adopted by a human family and was raised human... so like any person, you go through certain stages.

Denial: Oh I was big on that.

Anger: Ha... you have no idea.

Bargaining: Lasted for like a minute.

Depression: Didn't help that I had lost my grandpa around the time.

Acceptance: Sorta, kinda?

I thought knowing would be the end of it, but there's more to it than that. Alfred had left a lot of people behind, and they want answers. I'm also having dreams, really weird dreams and their not going away.

## Notes
This started as a guilty pleasure, it started as a simple fic but it grew. And grew, so if you're prepared for a journey, have at it.
Chapter 1

"Everyone, may I have your attention please," said our plump rounded teacher, Mrs. Lope. "We are about to make our way to the UN building to observe the World Meeting. Now I'm sure you're all excited to be in New York, but all of you must remember, we are here study cultural and national politics."

I yawned and whispered, "Yes, yes, we know. Why does she have to repeat this every five minutes?"

"To make sure the foreign kids get what she's saying," Sam Collins shrugged as he pushed back his blond dreads from his fair face.

"You've foreign," I remarked.

"I'm British," he said with a tone like it should be obvious.

"Oh yes," Daniela Aguero exclaimed in her Spanish accented voice. "Cause you come from the birth place of English, so you must know the language perfectly."

"Aw love you're being sarcastic," Sam smiled mockingly, "well you can just thank my beloved home land for creating it."

"Oh non, here he goes again." Ella Chasse whined as she brushed back her honey blond curls.

Jamie Chen rolled her almond shaped eyes, "just ignore him."

"Believe me, I have tried." Ella mumbled.

"Will all of you shut up, I'm trying to sleep," Dimitri Maier exclaimed; his dark clean cut hair was unusual messy.

"How about you try sleeping in the bloody hotel room," Sam snapped.

"Sorry if I'm too home sick to sleep in the hotel room," he snapped back.

Heisuke Sato tried to settle everyone down. "Come on everyone let's not fight. This is our spring break, we should enjoy it."

"Listen to our dear sweet Heisuke, for he knows best," I said as I cracked the volume of my iPod.

Sam didn't let the fight go, "I was simply explaining why our teacher would repeat the instructions to us."

"But Sammy you forget you go to an international private school filled with teenagers from all over the world, who know how speak English, let's not insult them. Remember our school's motto," and once I began, my friends quickly followed.

"We have come from all corners of the land to teach and learn"

"To respect cultures and customs"

"And create peace and harmony between nations." We finished.
"God," Dimitri smirked, "we've been brain washed."

And we all cried out in laughter.

We were quickly ushered out of the travel bus into the giant UN building. I took little notice of it and decided to name off the flags on the poles. There's Italy, Ireland, France, Britain, Russia, the Netherlands. . . Damn most of these flags have the same color theme, did they not realize that there were other colors in the rainbow. Like pink and purple? I glanced over to a flag with the colors black, red, and yellow. At least the Germans were creative.

"Amy Hawkfeather!" Mrs. Lope exclaimed, "Stay with the group!"

I sighed, "Coming."

After about an hour of boring lectures of how the UN was founded and how the system progressed all over the world; I was officially a zombie. Completely dazed and refused to think, I mean I know everything about history, world politics and cultures. I didn't attend school till I was ten so my grandfather practically drilled in world facts and languages into my skull from the time I was two. No offense to my grandfather, I am thankful but I preferred to follow the arts of the world, not politics, I mean it's so draining. I already feel like my soul was being sucked out just by standing inside the building. Also, I really need to go to the restroom.

"Now if you all kindly follow me we will be able to witness the world leaders discuss today's politics." Mrs. Lope said as she led us into a brightly lit room.

"Mrs. Lope I need to pee," I exclaimed.

She glared at me, "Oh Miss Hawkfeather you need to use the restroom? Like the time at the museum when you were supposedly using the restroom, but instead climbing the T-Rex skeleton. Or the time we had a nationally speaker, you asked for the restroom passed, but instead of going, you decided to free mice into the auditorium. Or the time we had a school production of the play Hamlet and you decided to pull the trap door on the main actor right in the middle of his most powerful monologue."

"Hey that one was accident, and I didn't even use an excuse for a restroom pass for that one." I said to my defense.

Mrs. Lope shook her head, "It doesn't matter, the answer is no." She said scornfully and ushered in the other students.

I rolled my eyes and turned to my trusted group of allies, "cover for me, I'll be back."

Each of them nodded and made sure to block Mrs. Lope's vision of me so I could make my quick escape.

After ten minutes of wondering through hallway after hallway, I was able to catch the sign for restroom. I sighed in relief and hastily do my womanly business. Once I began washing my hands, I took notice of my reflection. My naturally highlighted blond hair was cut into a boy like bob cut, with most of the hair brushed to the side as my bangs. The hair shaped around my long, light colored face, blue eyes, and full lips. I dried my hands on my skinny jeans and gray tee with a cartoon like drawing of a lion; mewing 'grrrrrr'.

I strut out of the restroom and sprint down the hall; till I heard a shout, "Yes I know, you well be taking the place of Alfred. Of course you couldn't a trace of him this year, again! Frankly I don't see why you bother; you all are clearly not concerned with this matter at the very least!"
The a woman in nice navy blue suite ran out of a room, completely ignoring me as she ran passed me. Tears were streaming down her face. That instantly made my blood boil, who was the jerk that did that to her?! I slowly crept up to the white painted door and take a peek inside.

"You made her cry Anglterre," a tall man with wavy blond hair sighed.

"Don't call me that, you damn frog," a shorter man with shaggy dark blond hair exclaimed. Both men wore suits; the taller one wore a stylish white suit with a black button down shirt under his blazer. The shorter man wore a simple green suit with brown dress shoes and a tan shirt under his blazer.

The French man ignored his insult, "you always get yourself worked up over this every year and Arthur I believe its time you accept that he's gone-"

The British man slapped him and I covered my mouth to stop my gasp.

"Shut your bloody mouth! If America is still going then he has to be out there!"

The wavy blond rubbed his sore cheek, his blue eyes blinking away tears. "Alfred's gone."

"No he isn't," the so called Arthur hissed, then glanced down to his shoes. "I mean, America is still going. It's been seventeen bloody years and this nation as continued without him," he shook his head, "Could it be, that they don't need us?"

The taller man whispered soothing words as he patted Arthur's head and pulled him into a comforting hug. I inched forward, trying to hear what they were whispering about till a voice behind me whispered in my ear. "You know it's quite rude to eavesdrop."

I yelped and pushed myself inside the room only to fall face first into the carpet floor. "Ow," I groaned as I rubbed my head.

"What the-"

I looked up to find both men staring down at me. The French man had an expression of confusion and concern displayed on his face; while Arthur glared, his green eyes were buried under large dark eyebrows and his lip was twisted into sneer. I rapidly glanced behind me to find a young boy with chin length blond hair with a large curl in between his parted hair down the middle. He had blue eyes, glasses and wore a sad smile. But what really caught me off guard was that he had a cub sized polar bear in his arms.

"Who are you?!" Arthur demanded.

I quickly rose to my feet, "Hi I'm Amy, and I was, just, um, looking for the restroom-"

"As you could see this isn't the bloody loo!"

"Right! I was just leaving!"

The boy with the polar bear blocked my path, "I found her listening in."

Both men turned their attention to me, Arthur looked ready to chew my head off but the taller blond stopped him. "Let me handle this mon ami." He then gave his most dazing smile; he was very handsome with a strong featured face with a bit of facial hair under his chin. "Mademoiselle, please do not be afraid. Come, sit," he offered a chair at the dark brown table while I took a step back.
The boy smiled from behind, "We won't harm you."

"Unless you give us reason," Arthur snapped.

I take a deep breath, summon my courage and sat myself on the large black leather seat. The French man takes his seat at my right side while Arthur sits on my left. The boy with the polar bear sits next to him. I scanned my surroundings, searching for a possible escape route.

"Are you thirsty?" The French man asked and I shook my head.

"What about food, I'm sure I could find you a snack-"

"Dammit Francis stop beating around the bush!" Arthur glared at me, "What did you hear." It was a command more than a question.

"I didn't hear anything." I lied.

Arthur snorted, "I don't buy that for one bloody-"

"Believe me!" I shouted, "I was just passing by!"

"It seemed to me you were there for a while," the boy explained.

"Please," the man I knew then called Francis said. "You are not in trouble, we just wish to know-" once he placed his hand on mine, an electrical spark stirred inside of me. It started in the pit of my stomach and spreads to the back of my neck to the toes of my feet. It almost feels like about to barf my breakfast till I noticed Francis having the same reaction and he's staring at me with shocked eyes. "Mon Dieu."

"Francis, what's wrong?" Arthur gave a semi-concern expression.

"Touch her," he answered.

"What?!" I exclaimed but Arthur's hand was already on mine and the same electrical shock washed over my body. "Stop that!" I shouted as I pulled my hand away from him.

Arthur did nothing to stop me but only watched me with watered eyes. The boy gave quick looks to his companions then the polar bear in his arms spoke, "I knew she smelled like a country."

Did the bear just talk?! Okay, its official, I'm getting out of here! I jumped out of my seat and ran out the door. All three men yelling after me as I quickly retraced my steps through the halls. Edging around corners and sprinting through lobbies, in hopes of finding an officer to help me, or hell I'll even settle for Mrs. Lope!

They chased after me, calling out for me as they did, but I ignored them. I sighed in relief when I realized I was in the main lobby of the UN building and hurried out the door into the over bearing, loud city of New York. I could still hear them gasping and running after me, but I turned my focus on a police officer just across the street.

"Officer, help me!"

I should have paid more attention to my surroundings, fuck it I should've looked both ways before crossing the damn street. As I called out for the officer, a dark SUV slams into my side and my head made contact with the wind shield. A sickening crack resounded in my ears as I rolled over the car's roof and into the air. It almost felt like I was flying till I landed on the pavement and my
world turned black.
I awoke with a dry throat and hazy eye sight, my head was spinning and my neck ached when I lifted it off the white pillow.

"She's awake," a relieved voice called out.

I turned to meet with a shaggy blond with green eyes, at first I couldn't tell who he was till he started to speak. "Amy, Amy, you're in hospital, you had an accident and-"

I didn't give Arthur a chance to finish as I slammed my fist into his cheek. He cursed as I leaped to my feet and grabbed on to a silver pole that held my IV bag. I lifted it up so the bottom with three sharp edges was right in front of his face. "You got three seconds to walk out of here before I decide to smash your face into the wall!"

"Now let's be civilized here," he held his hands up in surrender.

"Arthur!" Francis burst into the room with the young blond that carried the small polar bear right behind him.

"Stand back or I smash his face in!" I threaten.

The boy and Francis share a worried glance and nodded. I turned my attention back to Arthur and gesture him to stand with the others. He follows and stands next to the boy, "Amy, please-"

"How long have I been out?" I shouted. "Has my family been informed? I was hit by a car so I know I had to been out for at least two weeks."

Arthur nodded with an understanding expression, "You had a fractured leg, three broken ribs and a concussion. A normal person would have been out for two to three weeks or left in a coma. You were out for an hour."

I knitted my eyebrows together in confusion and shook my head in disbelief. "You're crazy. All of you are crazy!" Then I took a quick glance to my clothes, and I discovered that I was in a white hospital grown with nothing else underneath. "What the hell?! Where are my clothes?!"

"We sent them out to be dried cleaned," the boy whispered as he clutched the bear to his chest.

"You better hope a nurse changed me, because if I found out it was either of you, I'll blind all of you!"

"Please, Amy," Francis begged, "hear us out."

I panted uneasily, what would be the point, these people are crazy. But deep down my gut squeezed almost if it said, 'give them a chance.' I bit my lip, swallowed my pride and fear and sat down the plow, "you got three minutes."

All three breathed a sigh of relief and Arthur said, "Glad that's over with." Then he pulled out a silver dagger with a vine like design on the handle from the inside of his blazer.

My instincts kicked in and in a blink of an eye, I snatched the stand and held it in a fighting position.

Arthur held his hands up, "this isn't for you. It's for us, to prove that we are the same."
I gave a confused look but he ignored my glare and pulled down his sleeve. He then placed the dagger on his wrist and slashed it across his skin.

My eyes widen as the cut bled but in an instant faded and disappeared, didn't even leave a scar. "Self-inflicted wounds never last. Wounds from a human, either with their hands or machine will last longer but still heal." He hands the dagger to the boy, "Matthew."

The boy called Matthew set the polar bear down gently and received the dagger. He also cuts himself in the same fashion and just as Arthur's, healed in a blink of an eye.

"What are you people?" I whispered.

Francis took the dagger and made a face, "do I really have to do this? I'm not a big fan of pain."

"Don't be a pansy," Arthur hissed and Francis made a light cut and he yelped, "Ouch."

Arthur rolled his eyes and I yelled, "What are you!"

All three took quick glances with one another then Arthur cleared his throat, "We're nations, countries if you will."

"Countries?" I asked, confused.

"Yes, we believe we're spirits, taking a physical form to represent our people, our culture-"

I snorted, "Let me guess, you're England, no wait Britain! Oh now a-days you prefer be called the United Kingdom, how about you stink to one name and one name only." Then I faced Francis, "You must be France." I turned to Matthew, "I even don't know who you are?!"

"I'm Canada," he said shyly.

"Oh," I danged out the word in a long sarcastic groan, "of course! And is the polar bear the North Pole?"

"I wish," the bear said.

"And it talks."

"I ain't an 'it', I'm Kumajirou."

I quirked a brow, "How come you have a Japanese name?"

"Can we please get back to the topic at hand," Arthur asked.

"You mean the topic of you all being countries? Oh of course how could we ever brush it off like that? Oh wait, I was talking to a bear!" I panted and fixed my gaze on all three men, "You say were the same? How exactly?"

Matthew took a deep breath and said, "You're America."

I snickered, "Ok, I'll play along. I'm America, woooo. No wait! We're spirits; shouldn't we go 'boo' instead?"

"You're making fun of us aren't you," Arthur remarked.

"No shit Sherlock."
"Arthur just show her," Francis interrupted.

Arthur nodded and pulled out an old photo from his pocket. He steps toward me and lifted up the stand ready for a fight.

"It's just a photograph," he soothed as he holds it out. I snatched it out of his hand and he winced, "Please, it's fragile."

I ignored him, glanced at the picture and froze. It displayed a man in a brown military jacket with a white t-shirt, khakis and brown hiking boots. He was standing in front of a gothic styled church with a large, happy grin on his face. His dirty blond hair was brushed back, thanks to the wind. His blue eyes shined and his glasses were askew, but still he smiled without a care in the world. But what really shocked me to my core was that his face had long features like mine, the same shade of blue as my eyes and we shared the same light complexion.

"That man," Arthur continued, "Is Alfred F. Jones and he's your father."

"How-"

"We," he hesitated for a moment, "took your DNA to be tested, it was a match."

I turned back to the photo and Arthur asked, "Amy, we wish to know, when were you found?"

I have no idea why I answered but I did, "September 11, 2001."

He nodded, he didn't seem surprised, "Do you celebrate your birthday on that day?"

"No, doctors said I looked like I could have been born in early July."

"So," Francis added, "you celebrate it on the fourth then?"

I shook my head, "the first."

"So you will be eighteen in three months," Arthur said, "perfect timing seventeen to eighteen is usually the ages we introduce new nations to the world. Or at least when they look like it."

That snapped me out of my trance, "What do you mean introduce me to the world?"

"The other countries mon cher," Francis gave a kind smile.

"They would be every excited to meet you," Arthur added.

"No." I said bluntly.

A moment of silence, then Matthew asked, "What?"

"You heard me," I cried, "I. Said. No."

"But-"

"NO!" I yelled, "You had your three minutes! Now you can take this," I hold up the photo, "and all your country crazy talk and shove it up your ass!" I threw the photo into Arthur's face.

None of them moved and I snapped of the IV bag and threw it at Francis face, wires and all. The needle in my arm ripped out and warm liquid ran down my forearm, but I ignored it. The IV bag collided into his face and its liquid soaked his hair and clothes, he groaned and rubbed his eyes.

"Last chance, get out," I hissed. "Or I will throw the stand."

Matthew quickly lifts Kumajirou into his arms and pushed Arthur towards the door. "She's serious, let's go." Arthur clearly disagreed but ended up guiding Francis out the door with Matthew right behind them.

I lay on the hospital bed allowing my temper to cool. At first I stared up into the ceiling, and then switched on to my side, where I spot the nook of my elbow. Where a bloody wound should have been, but healed in a minute after I threw the IV bag into Francis's face. Quickly my thoughts replayed my behavior towards the men and guilt was beginning to pile on to my conscience. I was rude, cruel, and violent; if my mom witnessed the situation she would have slapped me in that moment. I shivered at the thought; my mom was scary when she was pissed. We may not share blood but both of us share the same heated temper. I smiled at the thought, even if I may have found out whom my biological father was, (if he was, a part of me still didn't believe it) it still didn't change the fact that I'm still my mother's daughter. I bet she's sick with worry by now. The nurses informed me that Mrs. Lope will come for me the moment my clothes arrive from the dry cleaners, and I'm sure she must have called my parents in California. I'll have to call them once I get back to the hotel room.

The door open and a dark skinned woman walked in with my clean clothes, nicely pressed and wrapped in plastic. "Here you go sweetie," she smiled as she placed them on the bed next to me. She turned to leave, but I stopped her, "Where's the bill?"

"Oh, a nice young man paid for it," the woman informed.

"A young man?"

"Could've been in his late teens, early twenties; but what really stumped me was that he carried a stuffed bear. I thought it was for you but. . ." she trailed off looking around the room for the so-called bear.

"Yeah." So Matthew paid for my dry cleaning that sure was nice of him. But his actions only added to my guilt.

"Also your hospital bill has been paid," the nurse continued.

"By who?"

"Two men both had accents. One sounded like an actor from that new James Bond movie and one was quite handsome but he was a little girly for my taste."

Arthur and Francis, crap are they trying to guilt trip me here.

"Thanks, I'll get changed now," that was my goodbye to the nurse as she walked out of the room.

Once I had charged and formally been discharged from the hospital, I was greeted by Mrs. Lope in the main lobby. The taxi ride to the hotel was filled with a lecture of how I shouldn't disappear from our tour groups and not run on wet tile floor. I almost asked 'what tile floor?' Till I realized if I mentioned the car people would ask how I was able to raise back to my feet in only an hour. Clearly Arthur thought of this and conducted entire scenario for me, along with paying off some doctors, nurses, and witnesses. Well that's my theory.
We entered the hotel and Mrs. Lope glared at me, "you will not leave my side for the rest of the trip, do you understand me?"

"Yes ma'am," I answered in monotone.

"You will also move your things into my room and you will be spending your free day with me, is that clear."

"Yes ma'am."

We entered the elevator and she continued, "Also your parents are quite worried, I suggest calling them."

I nodded, "Yes, ma'am."

When the elevator hit our floor, I walked quickly to my shared room with Ella, Jamie, and Daniela. All three jump to their feet the moment I stepped in.

"Amy!" Jamie smiled as she tackled me into a hug. She may be a small, thin Asian girl, but damn she had a grip.

"Are you okay?" Ella asked.

"I'm fine," I answered.

"You gave us all a heart attack. At first we thought you ran off, but instead you get hurt?" Daniela said with crossed arms.

"I didn't mean to," I gave a carefree smile, "I tripped."

"What kind of trip lands you in hospital?"

An SUV kind.

I dropped my duffle bag at the foot of my new bed, next to Mrs. Lope. She sat on her bed in a long night grown with a romance novel in her lap. I pulled out my Galaxy Infinity, which was the size of my palm and decked out in a cool graphic design of a hawk and feathers case. I take my phone to the bathroom and said, "Call Mom."

The phone stirred to life, pressed on Mom's number and began to ring. She answered after the first ring, oh god she was waiting by the phone.

"Oh Amy! My little girl, are you okay?"

I nodded, "Yeah, I'm fine."

She sighed and I could hear the strain in her voice. "When Mrs. Lope called, saying you tripped and was sent to the hospital I was so worried. I tried calling you but then I remembered you kids aren't allowed to have your phones during field trips."

"Yeah, I know, but I'm okay now."

"Why did you leave the group in the first place young lady," Mom's voice was edged in harshness. There's her anger, good thing I'm across the country. "I needed to pee."
"Then why did you go by yourself?"

"I wasn't thinking."

"You never do!"

I sighed and she followed suite, both of us counting to ten.

"Sweetie," her voice was soft, "I was just worried; mothers are always like this when it comes to her children."

That brought a smile to my face, "I know and I'm sorry for making you worry."

"Just please, mind your teachers and come home safely."

"I will, and Mom?"

"Yes?"

"I love you."

"I love you too."

We ended the call and I stared into her photo icon I use for her and Dad. Their icons were the same one that I took with the camera phone. My dad had his arm draped around Mom's shoulders and both were smiling happily into the camera. Dad had his long raven hair tied in a braid down his back, his eyes were surrounded with crows' feet but he continued to smile as if he was still a young man. He had dark eyes and copper skin with a silver charm shaped like wolf hanging around his neck. My mom's skin was a lighter shade of brown, her dark brown hair was tied half way in the back and she had her head placed on the crook of Dad's neck.

My dad was Native American mixed with Cherokee, Navajo, Hupa, and Miwok; while my mom was Spanish, Mexican, and Native Hawaiian. People sure had a field day when they discovered they adopted a white girl. It wasn't hurtful more like surprised; especially when Mom would take me to the store as a kid and some tourists would ask if she was my nanny. Once my dad was suspected as my kidnapper when someone (another tourist no doubt) spotted me getting into his car and driving off towards the forest. Dad's a park ranger and would take me out on hikes whenever I felt up to it.

I shook my head, yup I was definitely the odd man out, but it didn't stop them from loving me.

Without thinking, my subconscious forced me back to the picture of Alfred F. Jones, my biological father supposedly. The image of him grinning disturbed me at some level; it was so close to mine. I didn't give a chance to second guess myself as I opened to a fresh Google tab and asked, "Search Alfred F. Jones."

Hundreds of links appeared on the screen and several people popped in through Instagram and twitter but not one person resembled the man from Arthur's photo. I tried multiple search engines and asked help through all my social sites. Hell, I even went back to my facebook account I had when I was twelve.

But I found nothing.

He wasn't on any social media sites and he didn't pop up in any high school yearbooks. There were plenty of birth certificates but so many were dated back nearly fifty years I didn't bother checking.
Plenty of death certificates, but they were dated back almost a hundred years ago.
Chapter 3

An explosion shook me from the inside, warm red liquid ran into my vision, and I was on my hands and knees. I crawled to a big block shaped phone attached to a cord on the wall but I didn't have the strength to reach for it. The pounding in my ears clouded my hearing, but I figured out the telephone was ringing. I tried to lift my body on the support of my knees, but I would only end up back on the floor withering in pain. I refused to give up and kept trying; till I pulled the cord and the phone collided against the polished wood floors.

A voice called out, "Alfred! Alfred! Are you alright?! Answer me!"

"Artie?" I groaned, but I quickly realized this was not my voice. It was deep and masculine.

Then I turned to face a full body mirror that was across the room and found Alfred staring right back at me.

I screamed as I rose out of bed, sweat ran like bullets down my back and chest and my hair stuck to my forehead. I began patting my face and body, checking for any signs of abnormally. Not fully trusting my hands, I ran towards the bathroom and examined myself in the mirror. My thin, toned body was still average height with slim hips. My A-cup sized breasts were still small, unfortunately. And my face was still feminine with long blond eye-lashes and white teeth.

I let out a huge sigh of relief and leaned my back against the wall, still facing my reflection.

A knock at the door made me jump, "Amy? Are you alright?" Mrs. Lope's voice sounded concerned.

I called out, "Yeah, it was just a bad dream." I began to sink down to the floor, "A bad dream," I whispered. Once my bottom hit the tiled floor, I curled my long legs towards me, and hugged them close to my chest, whimpering, "Just a bad dream."

Later that morning, I watched the sun rise from the hotel's wired style balcony. The sun's rays were glistening through the buildings as the sky changed from light orange to a calm blue. I had my iPod play Ellie Goulding's 'Anything Could Happen' as I watched the calmness of the city, slowly stir to life. It was almost peaceful, till Mrs. Lope tapped on my shoulder.

I pressed pause and pulled out my ear bud, "What's up Mrs. Lope?"

Mrs. Lope sighed, almost like what she was about to say was going to wound her pride. "I might have been a little harsh about the whole ordeal yesterday. And now that I had the chance to sleep on it, I decided for you to have your free day today."

"Really," I asked excitedly.

Mrs. Lope nodded, "Yes, mostly because I don't want to spend my free day babysitting you."

I smiled, Mrs. Lope may enjoy playing the hard-ass teacher, but deep down she was good person. When, she wanted to be. "Thank you Mrs. Lope."

A tiny smile played on her lips, but she turned away before I could see it. "Go and enjoy yourself. You're only young once."

I nodded, leaped to my duffel and dung through the bag for my cutest outfit. A light blue denim
shirt with sleeves rolled up to my elbows, dark skinny jeans, with a pair of light blue Converse sneakers and a stylish white fedora hat with a single black strip.

I send a quick text to Ella: "Lope is letting me have my Free Day!

Ella's reply was quick: "YAY!"

I grinned, took a fast shower and changed swiftly, not caring if my hair was a mess. That was the purpose of the hat. I applied lip gloss in the mirror, slid my phone and wallet into my pockets and ran out to meet with my friends.

New York City was massive. The skyscrapers almost seemed like they touched the heavens from our ground view. Hundreds of people walked the streets, taxi cabs, cars, and buses crammed together on the pavement. Languages collided together in the city from Chinese to Italian, to German to Russian, to Spanish to French and even Arabic to Japanese. Billboards lit up town central with ads and posters of famous Broadway plays.

"I have such an urge to sing Glee's version 'I Love New York'," Jamie smiled to the memory of our favorite TV show from when we were preteens.

"We could," said Sam as he pulled out his small red video camera and tiny microphone.

Heisuke and Ella nodded as Daniela pulled Dimitri back, who was trying to walk away. "You're joining too.

"I'm not a good singer," Dimitri said with blush.

"But you're a good dancer, and you can do the flips with me," I encouraged him.

After a moment he nodded and Sam grinned, "Nothing left to say but, action!"

We spent our morning and half of the afternoon filming each other at famous landmarks, stores, restaurants, and Central Park. We ran through the streets like crazy lunatics, singing at the top of lungs, "No other city ever made me glad expect New York, New York. It's the old, New Yoooooooornnnnnnnnnrrrrrk!"

Ella and Daniela would walk into thrift shops and strut like models in clothes from the 1920's to the 1970's. Heisuke and Jamie would fan themselves with colorful Asian styled fans and toss them in the air. As the fans were in the air, Heisuke would pull Jamie into a ballroom spin. Once she stopped and both held on to one another by their forearms, they would catch the fans with their free hands. That whole skit took about twenty takes.

Dimitri and I would climb on sculptures and flip ourselves off them. We were chased away by officers every time and Sam would only laugh, "This is brilliant!" and we would laugh along with him. People actually stared and that was something in New York. We singed and danced with no music at various places.

Jamie, Sam, and Heisuke song most of the parts; they were the better singers. Ella and Daniela song some parts, mostly the chorus. Dimitri and I had maybe one line and were we fine with that, we're better dancers. But we couldn't help but giggle when Dimitri sung the part, "Isn't that were they golf." In his thick Russian accent, he blushed in embarrassment but still laughed along with us.

We were such dorks.
After Sam gathered enough footage and recordings of our voices, he would send them through his phone, and then email it to his computer back at his dorm room in California. "There, all saved. I'll edit it when we get back home."

"Awesome," I said as I licked away at my ice cream cone.

We all sat around a large fountain eating hot dogs, pretzels, pizza and ice cream.

"Hey there's a book store," Ella pointed across the street to a small brown building with leather bound and paperback books displayed at the windows.

"Seriously?" Daniela asked expecting no answer.

Paper books slowly died out in the year 2015, especially when digital books were cheaper and the government raised taxes on paper. New Green Energy Laws were pushed and slowly newspapers and magazines moved to websites. Printing paper and ink were doubled in price and school textbooks became special tablets that only entered the required readings for students. I don't think any kid born after 2016 even owned a real book. Luckily public libraries still had them, but if a book was too damaged, they placed them in storage. Then the only way you could read the story was either borrow it from the public library's website through your tablet or buy your own digital copy.

"Let's check it out!" said Jamie.

Dimitri snorted. "Why bother? We can't afford to buy anything."

"True," Sam added, "books are so expensive now-a-days. I have an old Sherlock Homes novel that's worth at least two pounds."

No one asked, "Why don't you sell it?" Our generation grew up with books like *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson*, and *The Mortal Instruments*. We would clutch on to them no matter how much they were worth.

I rose to my feet and finished my cone in three bites. "I'm going," I exclaimed and skipped to the store. My friends either wolfed down their food or threw whatever they had into the trash, and chased after me.

We entered the store and an old fashion bell ringed from above. An elderly woman greeted us with a kind grandmother like smile. We all returned that smile and ventured into the maze of towering shelves filled with books. Sam was mystery and suspense fanatic while Dimitri preferred classics and Daniela enjoyed fantasy from medieval to streampunk genre. Ella and Jamie loved the supernatural and romance, while Heisuke and I cared for all genres.

Heisuke spotted a small section for graphic novels as I turned into a corner to skim through the art section.

As I was about to pull out a book about Greek sculptures, another hand reached over for the same book. Our fingers brushed and an electric shock zapped through my body, the same kind of shock I experienced with Arthur and Francis. I jerked my hand away, ready for a fight, but I ended up facing a new person. It was a young boy, might have been a little older than me. He had light brown hair with a long curl to the side and wore a simple white button down shirt with pants and dress shoes. His auburn eyes widen in confusion.

My gut feeling informed me that he might be connected to the strange men I met yesterday, so I played it cool. Better to be safe than sorry. "Um, ha, electric shock, we really should watch out for
these carpet floors." I gestured to the tan carpet on the floor and the boy tilted his head to the side.

*Dear God, please let him buy this!*

Then he smiled, "Si! Your right, we need to be very careful here."

*He's idiot! Thank you God!*

I chuckled, "yeah."

He continued with same innocent smile, "I'm Feliciano Vargas, what is your name bella?"

I smiled, "Il mio nome è Amy Hawkfeather."

His eyes widen in surprise, then he grinned with delight, "You know Italian?!"

"My mom's best friend is from Rome and she owns a restaurant with her husband. Both of them taught me when I was a kid." I answered as my shoulders shrugged; displaying that it wasn't a big deal. Even though, it kinda was.

"That's amazing! Not many Americans bother to learn any other language, but still come over to my place and they expect us all to know English," he said irritated.

I didn't know what to say to that, so I kept my mouth shut.

Then the bell ranged and a voice called out, "Feliciano? Are you in here?"

"Oh," the Italian jumped up and down excitedly and called out, "Ludwig! Ludwig! Over here!"

A tall man stepped around a book shelf and stood next to Feliciano. He wore a dark causal suite with a loose tie and matching shoes. The outline of his muscular arms and wide shoulders could be seen through his blazer and his face clearly displayed that he was annoyed.

"You shouldn't run off like that." He said disapprovingly as he pushed back his blond locks, which were already sleeked back with gel.

"But I met a new friend!" Feliciano said to his defense. He gestured to me, "This is Amy, isn't she pretty."

I rolled my eyes at the comment, Italians, such flirts.

Ludwig's blue eyes glanced to me and he quickly presented a professional image. "Hello, I'm Ludwig Beilschmidt." He held out his hand for me to shake.

I didn't think, for my parents always taught me manners and that shaking hands showed respect. But the moment our palms touched, an electric urge vibrated through our bodies. The shock was intense making the hair on the back of my neck stand on end. I pulled my hand away hoping that I could pull off the carpet excuse, but when I met Ludwig's eyes, he was serious and looked at me with a new found interest.

"You're-"

I burst into a run back in the direction where I left Heisuke. I could hear them both as Feliciano whined, "Ludwig! What did you do?"

"I didn't- Feliciano did you not see?"
I heard stomping and I quickly ducked into column of shelves. Moments after, Ludwig stopped in front of the book shelf I was at, but on the other side. He cursed in German as he scanned the store for me while I watched him through the open areas above the books on the shelves. I couldn't run straight ahead, he would easily see me and catch me. The opposite direction didn't help, it lead to a dead end.

Shit! What do I do?

Then I glanced to the books in front of me, erotic titles popped out; The Erotic Adventures of a Naughty Flight Attendant, Sex Experiment II - Erotic Exploration, (real books, no lie) and the Fifty Shades of Gray trilogy.

An evil grin played on my lips as I searched through and found a small leather bound book called, Confessions of a Beastiality Addict. I bend down and slowly reached out to pull his blazer outer pocket open and slipped in the book smoothly.

Once the book was planted, I ran out into his line sight and he called out, "Stop!" He chased after me and I purposely lead him out of the store. I stepped through alarm with ease, but the ear piercing siren rang out when Ludwig ran through.

Lucky for me Dimitri happen to be looking at old magazines in front of the store when he and I passed by. The old woman shouted, "Stop!" and Dimitri pulled him back inside.

I couldn't help but watch from the window as Dimitri patted him down.

"This is a mistake," Ludwig said annoyed. "I didn't take anything."

That's when Dimitri pulled out the book and read out loud, "Confessions of a Beastiality Addict." Dimitri gave Ludwig a disgusted look and the elderly woman shook her head and said, "Oh Lord help him."

Ludwig's face became bright red, "I didn't- this isn't mine! I-"

"If you think that's bad, you should check out his porn collection." Feliciano said with a carefree smile.

"Shut up you idiot!" Ludwig shouted at him and Feliciano began to cry.

I stepped back and ran down the street to a small coffee shop. I hasty texted my friends: "Meet me at the coffee shop down the street, Don't let beast man and cry baby follow you." I pressed send, order a coffee and take my seat in the back of the cool, hipster styled shop.

Later that afternoon, Jamie suggested to spend our last night in our hotel room watching Broadway plays in movie form, for none of us had enough cash to see a real show. Mrs. Lope wouldn't allow us to watch a movie with both genders in the same room so we stayed in her room, under her watchful eye. We watched Hairspray, Mamma Mia, and the new film Wicked with Mila Kunis playing the Wicked Witch.

As Hairspray played, Dimitri commented, "God, she's fat."

I elbowed him in the ribs and nodded towards Mrs. Lope who was about the same size of the main character.

Mrs. Lope glared at him and Dimitri said, "Sorry."
The girls, Heisuke and I sang along with Mamma Mia as Dimitri and Sam finished off the popcorn. Wicked made Ella cry as Daniela shrugged, "Eh, I prefer the books."

Evening came and went as the sun set on the opposite side of the building. Shadows of the towering skyscrapers clashed against the last rays of sunlight, but in the end the shadows won. The sky turned black, and in place of the stars were bright lights of enormous city.
Arthur Kirkland woke to the ringing of his mobile. He rose from his hotel bed and groaned; it was three o’clock in the morning, who's calling me at this god damned hour!

He reached for his phone and found the I.D. number surprising. It was Ludwig Beilschmidt; also known as the national personification of Germany. If he was calling, it had to be an emergency.

Arthur pressed the green button to answer and Ludwig greeted, "Hello Britain, I'm sorry to call at such an hour, but I'm calling an Emergency World Meeting. I need all the countries to cancel their flights later today and report back to the UN building. Immediately."

Ludwig hanged up after an awkward goodbye and Arthur sighed, "What could possibly have happen in the last twenty-four hours to cause such an up-roar?"

Arthur met his associates, Francis Bonnefoy and Matthew Williams in front of the UN's main lobby. Both wore the suites they had on day before; the suites just as his were winkled and disorganized. Arthur took the moment to notice other countries dressed in casual clothing or winkled suites. Clearly no one expected the call.

"What's going on?" he asked.

Francis shook his head, "I have no idea."

Matthew yawned, "I just hope we can solve it soon."

"Where's Kumajirou," Arthur asked curiously.

"He was too tired, so he said he'll hold down the fort."

"Well, its best we get this done with, shall we," Francis gestured to follow the other nations. Both of them nodded and all three made their way to the back of the building where only specialized personal were allowed to enter.

The countries quickly took their seats; Arthur sat next to Ludwig, who was at the head of the table. Francis sat next to Arthur and Matthew took his seat next to the Frenchman.

Once all the nations were settled, Germany cleared his throat, "Morning everyone, I'm sorry to have called in such hour but-"

"You better be sorry!" Gilbert Beilschmidt cried out, his red eyes had bags under them and his white hair was a mess. He was also the older brother of Ludwig, East Germany a.k.a. Prussia. "The Awesome Me was sleeping!"

"You don't think everyone else was sleeping?" Elizabeta Héderváry said annoyed. Her light brown hair was tired in a low pony tail and her green eyes shown her exhaustion.

"Yes, but my sleep is more important!" After his comment, Hungry grabbed him by the hair and slammed him against the table, knocking him out.

"There, take all the sleep you want."

All the other nations were too tired to react, but anyone that sat near Hungry did slid away from her.
Ludwig groaned and walked over to Gilbert, "Brother! Wake up!"

After a few shakes and slap to the face, Prussia awake, "I'm up! The Awesome Me is up!"

"Yes," Ludwig rolled his eyes to his brother's behavior and walked back to the head of the table. "Please, my fellow nations I have news about America; Alfred."

Instantly the room rose in tension. Some countries had stern looks; almost like they were waiting for bad news. Others had worried looks and few others had on hopeful expressions.

While Britain, France, and Canada turned to one another in surprise. All of them thinking the something; Does he know about Amy?

"I believe Italy and I have found Alfred's successor," Ludwig continued and the room was filled with whispers and questions.

"What's your proof?" asked Yao Wang as known as China.

"Italy and I've touched her, both of us felt an electrical shock and all of you know perfectly well when a new country or a successor meets another country for the first time, an electric bond surges through us. It bonds us together in knowledge of one other. I know it's been decades since any of us have felt it, but I was certain. I've met the successor to the national personification of America and her name is Amy Hawkfeather."

The room was then filled with excitement and joy; for most countries believed that because Alfred disappeared but yet America still continued that all of their governments were beginning to think that nation personifications were not needed. Even worse, they were starting to believe it, but now that there was a national spirit of America, they can all rejoice.

"This calls for celebration!" Roderich Edelstein also known as Austria announced. "We can have a good old fashion ball like we use to. We can have it at my house of course."

"It can be like, a debut ball for her," Feliks Łukasiewicz (Poland) added in.

"Exactly," Austria nodded with a smile.

Arthur took notice that all of the nations had smiles on their faces, most being of relief and joy, but one country had on a wolfish grin. Arthur then, met the violet eyes of a large nation across the table; Russia.

Ivan Braginski continued to grin, "Ah, a new country and she's a girl, so rare for our kind. Tell us Germany, how old is she?"

Ludwig answered plainly, "could have been sixteen, seventeen. But she didn't seem to know she was country, she ran away from me."

"Only because you're into beastiality," Italy exclaimed and everyone turned to stare at Germany.

"That book was planted on me!" Germany's face became brighter as Italy said, "But Mr. Germany you have that in your-"

Germany clapped his hands over Italy's mouth, "shut up you idiot!"

"Then if she doesn't know what she is, we need to find her and bring her home," Bella Vermeulen (Belgium) said. 'Home' was a term some used when everyone came together for meetings, events
or parties.

"Yes, but what if she doesn't want to come with us," Hungry added.

Germany lets go of Italy and sighed, "Then we would have force her, show her that she doesn't belong with normal people."

Prussia grinned, "So it's gonna be an old fashion man hunt! Whoever finds her first, wins!"

Ivan's grin widens, "Whoever finds her first can conquer her first."

That last comment was only heard by Arthur, for when Prussia said 'man hunt' countries stirred up with disagreements towards the idea. But Arthur quickly realized that Ivan wanted only him to hear. Anger boiled inside of him as he rose to his feet and slammed his hands on the table. The other nations turned to him surprised, for the country always believed it was best to stay calm in grave situations. But right now Britain let his emotions control him.

"You will not lay single hand on her!" He shouted at Ivan, but Russia only smiled on.

Britain was going to yell a crusade of insults but then noticed all the other nations staring at him. He settled his temper and displayed a serious front. "It is not necessary for a barbaric man hunt, for Amy has been under our protection."

At the moment the words left his lips, the nations were in an uproar.

"How could you keep this from us?!" Natalia Arlovskaya (Belarus) shouted.

Francis pulled on Arthur's sleeve, "What are you thinking?" he whispered.

Arthur gave him a severe glare, "Remove your hand. I know what I'm doing."

Francis sets his hand back to his lap and Arthur continued, "She needed stability and people who knew of American history and culture. Who other is best for the job than Canada and I? We took her under our wings and watched over her. Amy doesn't know, because we haven't truly explained to her. But we will explain it better this time, give us a few weeks and she will be there for Austria's party."

Later that morning, Arthur, Francis, and Matthew sat outside of a small café. Francis and Matthew had coffee while Arthur had tea. The waiter came, took their orders and hasty walked back inside the café. The tension seemed to surround them as they slipped their drinks, but Matthew couldn't hold back his question any longer, "How are we going to get Amy to come with us to Austria? She was this close at throwing a stand at us." He lifted his hand to show his index finger almost touching his thumb.

Francis sighed, "I agree with Matthieu, Amy clearly showed she doesn't want anything to do with us."

"Oh, would you two rather leave her to this so-called 'man hunt'' Arthur made air quotes around the word. "What if Amy calls the police, then it would become international issue. Or worse, Russia would find her."

Both Matthew and Francis shivered.

"We need to find her," Matthew said seriously.
Arthur nodded and pulled out a large folder out of his brief case. "This is Amy's file."

Francis smirked, "we should have known you would have done some snooping."

"Well, I am a spy," Arthur smiled.
Chapter 5

The flight back to California took about five hours and thirty minutes. During that time, Ella presented me her wedding dress designs for Celine Smith; my brother's fiancée. She was pointing out their positive points, but then she would second guess herself on it.

"See how I made the ruffle in the back of the dress flow, but ruffles are not in this year." Then she flipped to a new design. "Then I decided to add a pale blue ribbon at her waist for 'the something blue' but she might not want it." Then another, "Oh this one is simple and flow-ly, for easy movement and the veil will be lace, with blue flowers on it, but would she want a veil? Then of course the dress will be stamp-less but--"

"Ella, your dresses are beautiful. The only problem you'll face is waiting around for Celine to pick one to wear," I said, hoping that would boost up her confidence.

"Really?" Then she sighed in frustration, "Merde." Which I knew meant 'damn' or 'shit' but both can be used in the same context in this situation.

I asked for her sketch pad and she handed it to me willingly. I flipped through the pages and stopped at one from the beginning pages. "This one's good."

Ella takes a look, "Ugh, its plain."

"No, it's simple, but some changes could be made. Have you ever heard that 'less is more'?"

She nods and takes back her sketch pad. I watched as she stared at her design. After two minutes, a small smile took form on her lips. She pulled out a pencil, and began to draw-in small details. I sighed, content of my good deed and stared out the window into the blue skies and white clouds. Ignoring the nagging thoughts of Arthur, Francis, Matthew, and the talking bear (what was his name again? Kimi-something) for there was a logical explanation for everything they did.

_Name one_, said a nagging thought.

Well, I answered in my head, they must have staged the whole thing. I mean think of the knife, it must have been fake and made of rubber, with fake blood added to it.

_The knife cut flesh_, nagging thought remarked.

Fake skin and Halloween props, you can buy those anywhere. That also explains how they healed instantly.

_The talking bear_?

Robotic, duh.

_Your wounds_?

I've always been a fast healer doesn't mean I'm country.

_The electric shock? You felt it with the other two._

They must have been on the same crazy train with Arthur and his friends; besides at both sightings of these so called 'electric shocks,’ we were standing over carpet.
You're buying your own excuse?

If makes you shut up, yeah.

But it didn't and continued, your father?

Could have been some random photo they took from somebody's house. Or one they made. I couldn't even find this so called Alfred online.

Not everything or everyone's online.

I am not arguing with myself about this! They were mentally ill people and I hope they get enough sense to get help.

You're arguing with a voice in your head, and you say they need help?

"Shut up!" I hissed out loud and Ella gave me confused look, "I didn't say anything?"

I felt my cheeks heat with embarrassment, "Not you. Just, forget it." I turned back to the window, forcing myself to forget those strange people from New York.

The plane landed smoothly and we were ushered out quickly to the bagging area. I was a light packer, so I carried a carry on and small back pack that rode beside me on both plane rides. I noticed that girls would carry large suite cases that could have weighed hundred pounds more than their own body masses. I shook my head and craned my neck, searching for my older brother John Hawkfeather the Third, but everyone calls him Johnny.

A pair of arms grabbed me from behind and I yelped as they lifted me in the air. "Amy! My little sis; back from the Big Apple!" The voice was familiar, deep and easy-going.

I laughed, "Put me down you big ape!"

He sets me back on my feet and I turned to face my older brother. His eyes were the color of onyx and his skin was the shade of light copper. He was tall almost six-six with long raven colored hair like Dad's. It was in a low pony tail with a ribbon tied in it, I smirked, must have been the work of Blair Arora our niece and daughter of our older sister Melissa.

"Johnny!" my smirk became a grin as I wrapped my arms around him into a tight hug. Then I spotted Celine behind him, he long light brown curls flowed down to her waist and her pale green eyes shined against her white skin.

"Celine!" I squirmed out of Johnny's grasp and leaped into her arms. "I thought you wouldn't get here till next week?"

"The set didn't need me, so I was able to take another week off for my wedding." Celine worked as a script writer for ABC. She took part in writing in some of my favorite TV shows like Once Upon a Time, Revenge and Scandal. Now, she was working on her own scripts; she's on her way of becoming one of the best script writers for ABC.

"Awesome!"

"Yeah," Johnny moves to put his arm around her, "we're the dream team right here."
Johnny's a music producer and radio host in LA, he usually picks music from up and coming bands to play on TV shows, most of the time for ABC. Both worked hard for their dream positions and they were happy. I'll never tell Johnny this, for he already had a big head. He's my inspiration; for when life seemed bleak for him and was down on his luck plenty of times as he tried to get his foot through the door. Most people would have given up, but not Johnny he was stubborn and refused to settle for less.

Every time I felt like my dancing was never enough or when my thoughts were doubtful; I would have a little Johnny in my head shouting, 'Don't give up! Keep going!'

A beeping sound resounded from Johnny's jean pocket and he pulled out his smart phone. He read a message with slide of his thumb and said, "We gotta go, Melissa and the kids are already at the house."

*Home*, the thought brought a smile to my face as I followed Johnny and Celine to the airport parking lot.

Johnny drove from Santa Barbra back to our hometown, Summerland in less than fifteen minutes; thanks to Highway 101. I stared out the window watching homes, businesses, and restaurants passed by. While on the other side spread across the ocean, I watched as the sun's rays reflected off the surface of the water and blend against the blue sky. I truly loved our town. It was filled with supportive, fun-loving and hardworking people. Even after the Quake of 2014.

Around that year, a large earthquake struck through our beloved town and across the south of California. Taking hundreds of lives along with businesses, restaurants, department stores, schools and homes with it. Most families and businesses in Summerland moved to Santa Barbra, because the city was barely touched by the Quake.

But the people that stayed built Summerland back to its former glory. We have more family owned restaurants now, no more food chains. This gave Carlo and Gemma Russo a chance to rebuild their Italian restaurant in their own image, instead of the plain brick building they had for years. Homes were built with stronger foundations, schools were levitated about five feet off the ground. More small businesses took root and a certain private school was built in our location. Nightingale International Private School, literally only had two schools in the US (counting us). Same amount in Canada, five in Europe, (Britain, France, Italy, Germany, and Spain) three in Asia (India, China, and Japan) and one in Russia.

After another nuclear war was threaten upon the world at the end of 2013, some government officials believed it was time to promote world peace. Of course normal people knew that would never happen, so they settled for world respect instead. In other words gather up a bunch of gifted teenagers that could become the next world leaders and put them in close quarters with one another. It seemed to have worked out. For the founder; Elliot Nightingale personally arrived to our town (after the Quake) to persuade our city council to build a massive boarding school. In little over a year, we had teens from all over the world becoming part of Summerland.

Maybe our government believed if future world leaders spent time with us, they won't think about bombing us later on in life. It's working, so far.

My family and I lived in a large Victorian styled house. Mom took the chance to rebuild our home into her dream house when the Quake demolished it. It was three stories (counting the basement) the first floor held a gourmet kitchen with a matching dining room, master bedroom, a side bathroom and a living room. The second floor held three bedrooms and one bathroom. Of course I got the biggest room because both Johnny and Melissa were out of the house by then. The other two were used as guestrooms. The house was painted white with black roof tops. The dining room
and my room were part of the tower structure on the left side of the house. The porch on the bottom wrapped around the left side to the back and there was a balcony above the front door where a guestroom was.

We also took the chance to rebuild the stables out back. It allowed our horses more room and it was painted white and black, the same as our house. We owned two acres but we were surrounded by forest in the back, so I always took the chance to ride out there.

Johnny's BMW parked on a grassy area near the front and I practically sprinted out the car.

"Amy! Come back! Family first, horses later," Johnny called after me.

"I'll be quick! Promise!" I ran to open the doors, and found our horses in their large stalls. I turned to a brown stallion on my right, "Hey Jack, you missed me?" Jack was Dad's horse and he mostly rode him bareback, which scared the shit out of Mom. (I also rode bareback plenty of times, but I'll never tell Mom.)

Then on my left was a painted mare named Daisy, my mom's horse, a gift from Dad on their wedding anniversary last year. I lead them out into the open area so they could stretch out their legs. I quickly turned back into the stables to release my horse, Midnight. He was in the last stall and also the biggest for he was quite large. He was a solid black Percheron, his neck and head easily surpassed my height. His hooves were three times larger than my hands and the part were his legs meet his body, was where my mid-section was. This is big ass horse people.

"Midnight," I cooed as I petted his head and neck. He nudged his nose into my cheek lovingly, that was code for 'missed you' or 'love you'. I'll take it as both.

"I missed you too and I love you too," I smiled and lead him out of the stables. I took a moment to watch them gallop through the fields till someone tapped on my shoulder.

"Now we know you would pick the horses first when there's a fire." The voice said as joke and I knew who it belonged to, John Jr. Hawkfeather.

"Dad!" I jumped into his arms and he held me tight.

"I missed you kiddo, a week is too long for you to be away," he said as he led me to the house.

"What will you do when I'm eighteen and out of the house?"

"Cry." Dad admitted.

"No, you can't. If you start crying, Mom will start crying, then I'll start to cry and we'll all end up with puddle under our feet." We grinned at the thought as we entered through the back door into the kitchen.

The house was filled with laughter and the aroma of food.

"Amy!" Mom ran to hug me, "Are you okay? Have you been sleeping regularly?"

"Jessica, she's fine," said Dad.

"Yeah, Mom I'm good." I nodded along with him.

Then two dark haired children attached themselves on each side of my hips. "Auntie Amy! Auntie Amy! What did you bring us?" asked Blair as her twin brother Blake Arora only held on to my hip.
"Blair!" Melissa Arora gave a disapproving shake of her head, "Amy just got home, let her have some love, before you start asking for gifts."

"It's cool, Mel," I looked down; "after we eat I'll bring out the presents."

Blair grinned, showing her missing front teeth. She was wearing an Indian pink tunic with matching pants and slip on shoes. The color of the cloth brought out her light brown skin and bright brown eyes. Blake wore a green collar locked tunic top with dark brown pants and sandals. His hair was wavy and short while his sister grew her's out passed her waist.

Their mother and my older sister, Melissa was tall with the same coloring as Johnny. She wore a simple ankle length dress the color of maple leaves and flip-flops. Her hair was in a high pony tail and she wore gold hoop earrings that were a gift from her husband. She gave me a look, "You spoil them too much."

"Hey, I'm the aunt. It's my job, and I'm gonna be the same way with this one," I said affectionately as I rubbed her rounded belly.

"I'm sure he'll be every excited to have you as an aunt," Melissa giggled.

Then a tall man walked in and gave Melissa a kiss on the cheek. "How was the trip?" Sanjay Arora was Indian-American who worked as a math teacher at a local middle school.

"Amazing, everything was just magically." expect for the part where crazy people thought they were countries.

He smiled and lifted Blair and Blake away from my hips, "There now you can move."

"Thanks Sanjay, they definitely got a grip."

"They got it from their mother."

"Of course they did," Melissa kissed Sanjay back on his cheek, "I wasn't going to let you get away."

Sanjay grinned as I rolled my eyes and playfully said, "Cheesy much."

Then Mom called out that dinner was ready and we all took our seats around a large rectangle shaped table. Dad and Mom took the ends as Melissa, Sanjay, Johnny, and Celine took the side in front of the three way windows of the tower. Blake, Blair and I took the other side.

"Don't forget about us," a voice called out and I turned to find Grandpa and Grandma Hawkfeather.

"Grandma! Grandpa!" I grinned as I held the door out for them and Grandpa helped his wife up the stairs.

"G-Ma! G-Pa!" Blair bounced up and down in her seat as her great-grandpa took out Grandma's seat first before taking his own. Both had copper wrinkled skin with graying black hair. Grandma, Aponi Hawkfeather wore a long skirt, a matching blouse, and a chain that held a gold feather charm around her neck. Grandpa also known as John Senior Hawkfeather wore a white button down shirt that he tucked into his khakis. His long hair was no longer raven black of his youth but silver gray.

I seat next to Grandpa and he asked, "How was New York? Did you stay outta trouble?"
"Well," I pondered.

"Ah, here we go, story time," Johnny said as he rubbed his hands in excitement.

Melissa shook her head, "What did you do?"

"Me and my friends were doing a video, singing the Glee's version 'I Love New York'."

"I'm confused," Sanjay spoke, "Is that crime now?"

"No, that was not the reason why we were chased by the police."

"Chased by the police??" Mom's voice had a tone of horror.

"Auntie Amy's so cool!" Blair grinned.

Melissa groaned, "Amy, you're setting a bad example for your niece."

"Wait," Dad asked, "Did they press charges?"

"No," I answered.

"Then it's all good."

"John!" Mom glared disapprovingly at him and Dad only smiled.

"So what did you do?" Celine asked.

"I was flipping off of statues and sculptures through-out the city."

Everyone was silent till they started to laugh.

"Why am I not surprised?" Grandma giggled, "you were jumping off of things from the moment you well enough to walk."

I grinned, "I'm a bit of a dare-devil at heart."

Johnny laughed, "Just forget about being a dancer Amy. Be stunt woman, because clearly nothing kills you."

"She's immortal." Blake said softly.

"Yeah," Johnny smirked, "Like a Twilight vampire. Are you gonna go out and sparkle in the sunlight."

"Do you really want me to sneak into your room late at night and pour a bucket of sticky glitter into your bed? Again," I playfully threaten.

"Oh god, no; do you realize how long it took just to get that stuff out of my hair?"

"Glitter?" Celine asked, amused.

"He looked pretty!" Blair called out happily.

Laughter exploded from the table again.

This was what my family was like; filled with love, laughter, support and life. If I had known how
fast our family was going to change in the next few weeks, I would've tried everything I could to have frozen that moment forever.
Chapter 6

I found myself in darkness.

Floating. . .

As if I was lying on a surface of water.

The liquid was black and gripping, almost as if it had a mind of its own.

Pulling me in. . . .

I struggled against its hold.

Cried out, but my voice was mute.

"You can’t get out."

I used all of my strength to crane my neck up.

To meet with blue eyes, the same shade as mine.

Alfred gave me grief stricken look, "I'm sorry."

Blood ran down his face and his skin was paper white.

Fear swarmed inside me.

Again, I struggled.

But in the end, the water engulfed me in its cold embrace.

I gasped.

A dark painted ceiling with glow in the dark stars greeted me as I rose to sit on a bed with bright red sheets. The room was painted in the colors of dusk. At the bottom the paint fused together with red, orange, and yellow then faded into light blue to midnight at the top of the walls. A vanity mirror was across the bed with make-up and a hair brush scattered over the surface. The mirror had photos tapped around its edges. Photographs of family, friends, and myself framed around the mirror. It took me a good minute to figure out that it was my room that I was staring in wonder at.

I took a deep breath and shifted my leg to hang over the edge of the queen sized bed. I tried to control my breathing, refusing to think about Alfred’s sad expression or his pale skin or the blood that ran down his face like he just stepped out of a Stephen King's novel.

"Just a bad dream, Amy," I soothed myself, "Just a bad dream."

A small bark from a across the room shook me from my train of thought. I looked up to the three windows of the tower to find a medium sized dog lounging on the red valet seats connected to the windows. The fur was long around the dog's legs and its light brown floppy ears. The light brown patches spread from its ears to circle around its brown eyes; another patch was on its short tail and had bits of light brown splashed across its paws. The rest of its fur was wavy white, almost curling at the ends. It was Lady, my two year old Cocker Spaniel; and yes I've named her Lady from Lady
and the Tramp, because its my favorite movie of all time; don't judge me.

Lady barked again and leaped off her favorite sleeping place to sit beside me. She laid her head in my lap. This was her way of saying, 'what's wrong? Pet me, I'll listen.'

I smiled and scratched her behind her ears, "Just a bad dream, girl."

I rose to my feet and walked to my door to head down stairs, with Lady at my side. I was dressed in an over-sized Batman t-shirt with matching pants and slippers. I yawned and heard the radio humming out some classics from the kitchen. I walked in to find Dad flipping pancakes while Mom fried the eggs.

"Morning Kiddo," Dad greeted with a grin as he flipped a pancake. "Chocolate chip right?"

I nodded and I took Lady out into the back allowing her to do her business. I closed the door and pulled out fresh strawberries from the fridge. I rinsed them off in the sink and placed them in a serving blow. Then set the table with three white plates and silver ware. I pulled out a mug for Dad and a tea cup for Mom. I brewed coffee for Dad while Mom had jasmine tea. I grabbed a Captain America cup from a cabinet and served myself milk.

I placed Lady's food and water bowels near our table and called her back in for breakfast. She came running as I sat on the back porch to put on my working boots. Mom lets her in as I went to feed the horses.

Once I came back, Dad sets three chocolate chip pancakes on my plate as Mom placed a small plate of eggs near it. They continued with serving themselves as I brought their morning drinks to them and we took our seats at the table.

"So what's the plan for today Amy?" Mom asked as I stuffed myself with a large piece of pancake.

"I'll think-" I swallowed quickly, "of something," I said with a shrug.

After I washed the dishes and released the horses into the open field, I was about to head back into the house to change, till Midnight nudged his nose from behind. He did it with a bit of force, his code for; 'I want to ride.'

I smiled and petted his nose, "later today, I promise."

He snorted and trotted away.

In less than five minutes was dressed in a cool blue graphic tee, jeans, and sneakers. I wore a black beanie and simple honey flavored chap stick. I slipped my phone and wallet into my jean pockets, grabbed my car keys and I was out the door.

I owned a blue jeep made from the year 2015, now any vehicle made from that year and after carried an energy green button. Another push from the Green Energy Laws; it still ran on gas, but relied more on electric energy. I pulled out my long silver drive and placed into the ignition. These cars didn't really have keys, more like flash drives that you can connect to a plug to charge, just like a cell phone. I charged mine last night so the needle was at full; I pulled out of our dirt driveway and drive into town.

I have no idea why, but I ended up driving to my grandparents shop; Spiritual Path. Come for all
your natural remedies, charms, and knowledge of Native Culture. Seriously that's what sign says, but hey whatever sells. I entered through the front to find Melissa balancing the accounts at the cash register.

"Mel! You should be resting, you're eight months in," I remarked.

She groaned, "I'm sorry but I got tired of sitting on my ass all day."

I sighed, it was frustrating to talk sense to her when she was pissed, so I decided to be smart, and offer my help. "Do you need me to do anything?"

She doesn't hesitate, "Dust the charms and statues, polish the wood, and could you vacuum the carpet?"

I nodded to everything she said as I gathered to the cleaning supplies. This took about two to three hours but I didn't mind. It was distraction from my dreams, which must have been the reason why I came into the shop in the first place, to talk to my grandparents.

"Hey where's Grandpa and Grandma?" I asked.

"Um," she thought, "they went to pick some herbs out back."

They had a little garden behind the shop, where they planted and nurtured herbs for their shop's supplies. "Cool," I muttered as packed up the vacuum and placed it back into the supply closet.

"Where are the kids?" I asked, curiously.

"With Sanjay and his parents at Temple," she answered.

"So they're going to be Hindu?"

"For now yes," Melissa sighed, "But when they're older they can choose between the Native, Catholicism, or Hinduism."

"Catholicism?" I asked, confused.

"You know Grandma Jessie, on Mom's side; she's Catholic."

"Yet married a Native Hawaiian that worships tikis," I remarked.

She gave me a look, "can you not. Besides, Grandma Jessie's not hardcore Catholic," she answered.

When I was about to head out to the back, a voice called, "Amy my little bella!"

I turned around to meet with Gemma Russo, my mom's best friend and neighbor on this block. Running a restaurant she and her husband named; A Slice of Italy. She was a curvy woman with dark curls and dark eyes. She wore jeans and loose purple blouse.

She smiled at me and ran to give me a hug, "Oh look at you! You've gotten so big!"

"I was gone for a week," I said but still smiled.

Gemma turned her attention to Melissa, "Oh Melissa, your glowing!" She skipped to her to plant kisses on her cheeks.

Then a dark haired teenage boy walked in with the same grin as Gemma, "Amy!"
"Michel!" I ran to give my best friend a hug.

"How was your spring break without me," he said with a bit of playful banter in his voice.

"Not so bad, but still I missed you," I smiled sweetly at him.

"How could you not? Put more importantly; whatcha bring me?"

I gave him a look, "Seriously."

"What? It's a valid question."

I rolled my eyes, "It's at the house; I'll give it to you tomorrow."

"You better," he grinned.

Then Grandma and Grandpa came walking in from the back, wiping off dirt from their hands. "Oh Gemma," Grandma greeted, "how are you honey?"

"I'm good; we just came to visit and to drop off the supplies. Michel, go get it," Gemma called out.

Michel sighed and quickly ran back to their car to pull out a large box. *Must be the blocks of wood and mineral rocks we use as charms.*

I faced Grandpa, "Gramps can I talk to you?"

He gave me a strange look but still answered, "Sure, come to the back."

I followed him to his small office where he stored all his Native staffs and clothing, along with books shelved all around the room.

"What is it Amy-bear," he asked using my nickname he gave me as a child.

I sighed and bit the inside of my mouth, "What do you know of the Spirit World?"

His eyebrows raised but he still answered, "The Spirit World, Heaven, the World Tree, Svarga loka; they all forms of the afterlife, but one in the same." He walks over and pulled out a large leather bound book from a shelf and cracks it open. "The Spirit World; its most renowned name, is a celestial realm filled with spirits."

"What kind of spirits?" I asked.

"Spirits of the dearly departed some can stay and become spirit guides for the living or choose to be reborn and return to the Earth realm. Then there are spirits that have existed since the beginning."

"What are they?"

"Living spirits, one's that were never human to begin with. These spirits either play with humans or assist them; it's where most myths of fairies, creatures, monsters, anything you could think of, began."

My thoughts send be back to the talking polar bear, "like talking animals?"

"Yes."
"And fast healing immortals?"

"Yes, most spirits choose to come to Earth, to cause chaos or to bring peace." He showed me a diagram from the book of a spiritual orb taking shape of a human. "Living spirits are shape shifters in nature, but most choose to take the form of a human, and can only be on the Earth plane for a short period of time."

That stumped me, "Could they be able to stay longer?"

"Yes, if they bind themselves to the land."

"Bind?"

"To the land or its people; they would be called Immortals, Fair Folk, Angels, Demons."

"Demons?!" I asked, almost scared.

"There is no such thing as good spirits or evil spirits. All are neutral till there is either a disturbance of balance or if they're bounded to the Earth, choose a side."

"Like countries picking sides in a war?"

He gave me a concerned expression as he placed the book back on the shelf, "Weird reference but yes something like that."

"Why would a spirit decide to stay on Earth?"

"The Spirit World is a magickal place filled light and beauty. It's a never ending spring land, where the spirits roam free in peace and love. But spirits do get curious and wish to explore our world. Some spirits grow too attached to the Earth and bind themselves to a certain amount of land or group. Usually most of these spirits would be worshiped as gods or goddesses, or be the personal guardians of the land and the people."

My head was spinning, everything Arthur said was repeating in my head. "Is there any way to prove a person is a living spirit?"

"Not much, they can heal fast but if they know you're trying to discover their true nature they can make their wounds last longer. There are only two ways, you can kill them and wait for them to come back to life or disappear, body and all. Or you find a person with the rare power of the Sight to see if the person is a living spirit."

"Sight? Like the Ghost Whisperer?"

"Something like that, they see spirits but also aura; the energy and the essence of our being. Average humans have normal colors like blue, red, pink, orange, yellow and green. Some rare humans could have purple, silver or white auras. But spirits have gold."

"Why gold?"

"Gold was believed to have come from the celestial world, so living spirits are closely connected to the metal."

I nodded, "Okay." Then another question popped into my head, "How can one get to the Spirit World? Well, without dying of course."

"Dreams." He answered, "Dreams are passage ways to the Spirit World. When we sleep, it is their
chance to send messages to us, to warn us, to haunt us." He gave me a worried look, "Why are you asking all these questions?"

"Uh," I mumbled nervously, "I've been having some bad dreams, nothing major just confusing."

He nodded and pulled out a small dream catcher from his desk. It had small wooden figures of deer, wolves, bears, hawks and eagles dangling from the strings along with fake feathers. He placed it in a leather clothed satchel and then puts in green colored stones into the bag. "This is called Aventurine; it's a healing stone, mostly for mental and emotional health. Keep it next to you when you sleep, it will help along with the dream catcher."

He hands me the satchel and I placed the strap over my shoulder. "Thanks Grandpa, for everything."

He smiled, "Anything for my little Amy-bear."

I kissed him on his cheek, say my goodbyes to everyone and jumped back into my jeep.

Once I returned home I parked the jeep over a shaded tree and ran to the stables. I pulled my black saddle out of the stable's storage room. It was made of leather with my name embroidered on the corner along with a Cherokee rose next to it. I pulled out an Inca print blanket along with the matching black reins and the satchel Grandpa gave me. I packed in a water bottle and a granola bar in the bag as I walked out into the field.

Midnight came trotting towards me, knowing perfectly well what was I doing. I placed the blanket and saddle on his back and strapped him in. I slid the reins through his face and threw myself over to sit on top of him. "You ready?" I asked and he snorted. He was restless, his muscles twitched under me, waiting for my command. "Ha!" I cried as I gave a little kick to his sides and he galloped into the forest.

Jessica Hawkfeather was watching her favorite programming when the doorbell ringed. She quickly answered to find her son in law gesturing his children to stand in front of him. Sanjay and his children were still dressed in their fine tunics.

"Grandma!" Blair smiled as she hugged her. Blake quickly followed as Jessica cooed over her grandchildren.

"I have to go help out Melissa at the shop, could you watch the kids?" Sanjay asked.

"Of course," she smiled and Sanjay handed her a bag of casual clothing for the kids.

"Thanks Jessica, I owe you," he gave quick kisses to Blake and Blair and sprinted back to his car.

"Grandma, can we have cookies?" Blair asked as Blake petted Lady in the corner.

"Sure sweetie, but first change out of your nice clothes."

"So this is where she lives," Francis said as he climbed out of the rental car. He takes a moment to admire the house, "Its cute, seems happy."
"Quite," Arthur added as he pulled out his briefcase from the back and Matthew placed the alarm on the car.

With a silent agreement all three walked to the front door, allowing Arthur to stand in front while Francis and Matthew stood behind. Arthur ringed the doorbell, "Remember, let me handle this."

"Did you forget what happen last time," Francis said sarcastically.

Before Arthur could say an insult, the door opened and the three nations turned to meet the eyes of a young Indian boy.

Francis gave Arthur a look that said, 'do we have the wrong house?'

"The adopted couple that took Amy in has a daughter who married an Indian chap, this must be their son," he whispered with his mouth covered. Then he turned back to the boy, "Hello there, can we speak to Jessica Hawkfeather or John Hawkfeather?"

The boy gave a blank stare.

"They should live here," Arthur added.

The boy continued to stare.

"Do you understand English," he asked and Matthew gasped, "Arthur that's rude."

"I'm sorry, but the lad is giving me blank stares and-"

"I speak English," the boy said with a monotone.

Arthur breathed in his frustration, "Okay, then can we speak with an adult please."

The boy stared, not answering.

Arthur's temper was raising and Francis took the lead before his friend could explode. "Little boy we only wish to speak with your grandparents, we have good news."

"You're here to take Aunt Amy away," the boy remarked.

The nations shared an uneasy look but quickly composed themselves.

"Well, not exactly," Matthew added, "We're here to tell her she's won a scholarship for college."

The boy narrowed his eyes, "You're like her, you have gold and you've come to take her away."
I rode through the back woods of Summerland as the trees towered over head and the sun was in late afternoon. Midnight's hooves dug into the trail with every stomp of his gallop. With another gentle kick from me, he picked up the speed allowing the trees to blur before us, only focusing on our destination. We cut around a large tree turning left, two minutes after, Midnight leaped over a fallen branch as I laughed happily. The adrenaline was running through my veins as Midnight landed with an earth-shaking stomp. Even after he landed he continued to gallop at full speed. He was excited; I guess a week without me was too long for him.

Once we reached uphill I slowed him down, "Whoa boy." He snorted in annoyance but he listened and settled into a pleasant walk.

Using his powerful muscles he climbed up; while I watched the birds flew overhead and the small creatures scatter into the woods as we came by. I breathed in the air, but the scent was off. Not of trees and clean air, but of something burning. I looked up and found a single line of dark gray smoke rising into the sky. It wasn't a forest fire but an unsupervised campfire could become one.

I allowed Midnight into a trot and when we reached the top of the cliff we found a small fire burning. I scanned the area but found no one, I sighed, "Seriously people," I whispered to myself. I swung my leg over and jumped to the ground, Midnight took the chance to graze near the grass and I began to gather dirt in my hands. I turned away from the flame for one minute but when I turned back a small man with a native headdress was sitting in front of the fire.

I jumped as the dirt fell back to the ground and a small girlish scream escaped from my lips. The man looked up, his face was layered with winkles, his eyes dark as night and his skin was the shade of dark copper with long gray hair over his shoulder. He wore simple khakis with a long sleeve tan colored shirt. The feathers of his headdress reached to his midsection and it was made completely out of eagle feathers. With colorful beads festooning the head band that held it all together.

"Hehe, you scared me," I said, trying to save face.

The man nodded his apology and turned back to the fire. I clapped my hands together nervously, "so is this your campfire?"

He nodded and I continued, "Well, you shouldn't really leave it alone like that. I mean, I'm not trying to be disrespectful or anything just-

"You care for the forest," the man spoke. "That's good, Great Mother will be happy."

"O-kay," I glanced back to my horse, "Well, I'll just be going now."

The moment I turned away from the man, I found myself facing him again, blocking my path to Midnight.

"Whoa!" I stepped back and quickly glanced back to the campfire, he wasn't there. I pushed back my fear and filled my voice with forced bravery and an edge of sarcasm. "Good trick. Do you rent yourself out for parties?"

"You cover your fear with sarcasm," he said calmly.

"It helps when old men can magically transport themselves in front other people."
He gave a cool stare, "So you believe in magick?"

"No, I believe in illusions. Like magic shows, and sawing a person in half, and Criss Angel." I said with a matter-fact tone.

He shook his head, almost as if he was sorry for me, and then he said, "They're coming for you Amy."

My eyes widen, "How do you know my name?"

He continued without answering my question. "They're regrets will be placed on your shoulders."

*Why the hell I'm still listening to him? He's just a senile old man.* I shook my head and mumbled curses as I moved around him, walking away.

He continued, "Are you really going to run away again? Cause no matter where you run they will find you."

Anger clouded my vision, "Listen to me you crazy, son of a-" when I turned around he was gone along with his campfire.

Jessica walked in from the kitchen to find Blake answering the door for three young men. "Blake!" she called out in surprise as she walked to his side. She pulled him back, "You're not allowed to answer the door by yourself." Blake gave his usually blank stare and ran back into the house. Jessica faced the men in suites, all three were blond with colorful eyes and all of them offered greeting smiles.

"May I help you?" Jessica asked.

"Yes," the man in front spoke. "I'm Arthur Kirkland," he gestures to the men behind him, "These men are my associates, Francis Bonnefoy and Matthew Williams. We are here to congratulate your daughter on winning our scholarship."

"Scholarship?" Jessica asked uncertain.

"Yes, the Student International Society Scholarship, it's for students that take part in international affairs, your daughter Amy Hawkfeather goes to Nightingale I believe, her essay on the whole experience was simply brilliant."

Jessica gave a small smile, "Oh well, Amy isn't here right now, but she'll be back in thirty minutes or so. Come in," she held the door out for them and all three men walked in.

She leads them into the living room, with Arthur and Matthew taking the couch and Francis on the love seat.

"This house is truly lovely," Francis said as he took sight of the Native American styled room.

"Thank you," Jessica smiled. "Would any of you like something to drink?"

"Tea, if you may," Arthur requested as the others asked for the same drink.

Jessica nodded, "I'll be right back."
Matthew watched as she left the room and let out a sigh, realizing he was holding his breath for the entire time. "I almost thought she wasn't going to let us in," he whispered.

Arthur narrowed his eyes, "Just stay calm Matthew, we'll be fine."

"Hi!" a light brown skinned girl jumped from behind the couch to hang between them.

All three nations jumped in surprise and the girl giggled, "Got you."

"Well hello there," Francis smiled.

The girl knitted her brows, "You talk funny."

Arthur smirked, "See Frog, even a child can tell your English is horrible."

"Then I shall speak in French," he remarked in his native tongue. "My language is so much prettier anyway."

"What he say?" The girl asked.

"Oh, just some insults that will start-" Matthew was cut off when Arthur hissed, "The Queen's English is just as beautiful as any other!"

"And there they go." Matthew sighed.

The girl giggled, "You guys are funny, too bad we're gonna have to banish you back to hell."

All three countries snapped to attention and turned to face her. "What did you say?" Matthew asked, afraid he misheard.

The girl leaped over the couch and jumped on top of the coffee table. "You heard me demon!" She pulled out a crucifix from her back pocket, "Blake said you're not of this world and that you came for Auntie Amy! You won't have her!"

Matthew and his once care-takers stared at the child; dumbfounded.

"Be gone demons!" she waves the crucifix in front of their faces. She gets annoyed when Matthew and the others show no sign of pain and yelled, "Blake get out the sage!"

All three turned to the bottom of the stair case where the boy that answered door stood. He held a tied stack of sage in his hand and a lighter in the other. He lit the top of it and blew out the fire allowing the smoke to spread.

The girl continued, "Be gone demons! Be gone!"

"They're spirits," Blake called out.

"What?" the girl gave a frustrated look, "It doesn't matter. We want them gone right?"

Blake nodded and the girl turned back to Matthew, "The power of Christ compels you!"

"What's going on here?" Jessica walked back in and her face paled. "Blair! What are you doing?!" She walked over to lift Blair off the coffee table and took the crucifix out her hands. "Is this the crucifix that my mother gave me?"
Blair darted her eyes around the room, "no."

Jessica looked up to meet with Blake's eyes, "And is that your Grandpa's good sage?"

Blake stared at the floor and whispered, "no."

Jessica closed her eyes; Matthew caught her counting to ten when she mumbled.

"Tell these nice men that you're sorry this instant," Jessica said as she took the sage from Blake's hand.

"But Grandma, they're here to take Auntie Amy away," Blair shouted.

"No one's taking anyone away."

"They are! Blake said they're not human!"

Blake nodded and Jessica shook her head, "That's enough; if you two aren't going to apologize, then go to your rooms."

Blair gave her a confused look, "We don't have rooms here."

"Then use the guestroom, now go!"

The twins quickly retreat upstairs, entering a room and closing it behind them.

Jessica turned back to her guests, "I am so, so sorry. They don't usually act like that, especially Blake. Again, I am so sorry."

Arthur gave a forced smile, "it's quite alright; they're just children with over reactive imaginations."

"Oui," Francis added, "just children having some fun."

The kettle whistled and Jessica said, "Oh, I'll be right back."

Once she left the room Matthew faced his companions, "Do you think Amy talked about us?"

Arthur shook his head, "No, the boy has the Sight."

"The Sight?"

"It was before your time Matthieu," Francis said, taking a moment to think. "It has been four hundred years since the last time I've seen one."

"What exactly is the Sight?" Matthew asked.

"It's a rare gift that allows a human to see spirits and auras." Arthur added.

"They can see we're not... human?"

"Yes, by our auras."

"You see Matthieu," Francis took a moment before continuing, "We have different color auras than other humans."

"What color?"

Matthew sighed, "That explains why Blake said we had gold."

Arthur nodded, "But we can't allow the child to distract us. Just play off his accusations as childish misunderstandings. Remember our mission is to persuade Amy's parents that she has won our scholarship and to send her to the University of New York."

What the nations didn't realize, that at the top of the stair case Blair and Blake were listening in.

"You were right," Blair whispered to her younger twin brother, "They really are here to take Auntie Amy away."

"What do we do?" Blake asked.

"We need call G-Pa."

"How? We don't have cell phones."

"We'll use Grandma's."

"But she's down there; we can't get by those guys without them seeing us."

Blair glanced to the balcony and grinned, "I have an idea."

John Senior Hawkfeather sat in his office when his phone rang. He searches through his scattered books on his desk and found his phone lying face down as bookmark. He pulled it out, saw it was Jessica and answered, "Hello Jessica."

"G-Pa! It's me, Blair!" the voice of his great-grandchild whispered, but sounded scared.

"What's wrong?" John asked as he rose from his desk.

"Bad guys are here to take Auntie Amy away!"

"What?"

"Blake said they're not human! Tell him!" The phone was silent till he heard Blake's voice, "it's true G-Pa! They're-"

"What are you two doing with my phone?" Jessica's voice called out from afar, and the phone was quickly pulled from their grasp. The children protested but Jessica ignored them.

The call ended and John knitted his brows in confusion. The pit of his stomach began to stir nervously; I got a bad feeling about all this.

A few moments before hand...
Jessica placed the tray of jasmine tea on the coffee table, "Hope you don't mind, all we have is jasmine tea."

"Oh no, its quite alright," Arthur nodded to her as he lifted the tea to his lips.

Jessica was about to take her seat but stopped when she heard the frighten whispers from the kitchen. She excused herself and quickly walked back into the room.

"What are you two doing with my phone?" she asked her temper slipping.

The twins stuttered for an answer but came up with nothing for their defense.

When Jessica snatched back her phone, her finger slide across the touchscreen to end the call. She checked the phone to find they've called John Senior, she shook her head. "Why did you call your great-grandfather?"

"We need his help!" Blair shouted.

"G-Pa's the only one that can protect Aunt Amy from them!" Blake added in.

"That's enough! Mr. Kirkland and his friends are people just like you and me. The way you two have been acting has been ugly and when your parents get here I will make sure they know exactly what you did." Jessica lectured them as she guided them back to the stairs.

The men noticed her and she smiled, "I'm sorry, please excuse me, again."

She gestured them to the guestroom and quickly noticed that the sheets were missing from the bed. She then turned to the balcony to find a hand-made bed sheet rope tied together by the ends. The first sheet was tied to the rail of the balcony as the rest fell to the front porch.

Jessica clutched her fists, "You two, next room, now."

The twins quickly ran into the next guestroom, knowing all too well their grandmother was about to lose her temper.

Jessica counted to twenty, for ten no longer worked. Once her temper was in check, she walked downstairs to meet with her guests.

"Sorry for the wait," she said as she finally sat down in the matching love seat across from Francis.

"It's fine," Matthew said with a smile.

"Children are quite a handful," Arthur added as he sipped his tea.

"Yes they are," Jessica sighed. "So, what is this Student International Society?"

"It's our group that allows young adults to interact with people from other countries and to discuss the world's issues. This grant is offered to students that wish to take part in world government."

Jessica gave a confused look, "That's strange my daughter doesn't really care for politics."

"Well her paper says otherwise," Arthur than pulled out a small stack of papers. He hands her two sheets of paper stapled together.

Jessica looked over the essay, and found it thought-provoking and well-written. "I never thought she cared this much," she muttered to herself.
"Amy has the intelligence and skill to continue on with this career, that's why we're offering this scholarship through the University of New York."

"New York?" Jessica's brows rose.

"Yes, the university has amazing programs for her major."

"You should really talk this over with Amy," Jessica turned to the clock, "it's five forty-five. Amy knows she has to be home by six for dinner so you can give her till then. If she doesn't make it, you can come back tomorrow." Jessica rose from her seat and walked back to the kitchen. It was about time to take out the enchiladas from the oven.

Arthur held back his tongue as he watched Jessica leave the room. Matthew sighed as Francis groaned, "Great she wants us to wait for Amy. Quick. Drink your tea before she could use it as a weapon."

Before Arthur could comment, the front door of the house opened and closed. The countries became alert; expecting Amy. But instead of the young nation; they found an elderly native man in her place.

His dark eyes were wide and he was pointing at them with a shaky hand. "No," he whispered at first but his voice increased in volume, "No. She- she's not ready!"

Arthur and his colleagues shared a worried glance with one another.

The old man continued, "She's not ready for y-" his voice deserted him as he clutched a hand to his chest and fell to his knees.

Arthur jumped to his feet and ran to his side. He gently moved the man to lie on his back, "This man is having a heart attack. Call an ambulance," Arthur commanded calmly.

Matthew nodded and ran into the kitchen, "Where's your phone?!"

The man grabbed on to Arthur's arm, "Mess-age," he choked out.

"Save your strength sir," Arthur soothed but he continued.

"Mess-age from. . . Al-fred," he choked.

Arthur's eyes widened as Francis muttered, "Mon dieu."

"You knew Alfred? How?" Arthur cried.

He didn't answer only continued with his message, "He. . . wan- ted . . . me. . to say-" he coughed and said his last words, "I'm sorry."

His hand lost its grip and fell to his side as the light disappeared from his eyes.

Five minutes earlier. . .
I took my time heading back home, riding through the forest trying to clear my head. Repeating the events with Arthur, Matthew, and Francis, then with Ludwig and Feliciano and finally to the old man and his magic tricks. *Am I magnet for crazy people?!*

I was almost happy that school will start tomorrow, I needed something distract me from these thoughts. I yielded Midnight to stop and took a moment to breath in the pleasant sensation of the forest. *If only I could hide out here forever.* I gave two kicks at Midnight sides and guided him home into a full gallop.

Once I arrived home, I unsaddled Midnight and guided him out into the open field. I entered the house through the back to find Mom pulling something out of the oven.

"Hey Sweetie, I made your favorite enchiladas," she greeted me with a smile.

"Awesome," I slid into a dining room chair.

"Oh, there's also three men here talking about a scholarship."

"Scholarship?" I asked confused.

A loud thud resounded from the living room and someone came running in, "Where's your phone?!"

I jumped to my feet at the sight of Matthew, "What the hell are you doing in my house!"

"Amy!" Mom snapped.

Matthew ignored me and continued, "Someone's having a heart attack!"

I grew tense and pushed aside Matthew as I ran into the living room.

Arthur was kneeling beside a body, its shape and clothes were all too familiar. Arthur and Francis jolted and looked up, both looked like a deer caught in the head lights. I ignored them for now and stepped towards the body. My gut twisted as I laid eyes on my grandfather lying on the floor; lifeless. I released a silent cry as my knees dropped beside him. My vision blurred with tears as I tried in failure to shake him back to life.

"Amy, he's-" I glanced to Arthur who was talking, but I heard nothing except for a buzzing in my ears. The moment I laid eyes on his face, anger boiled in my veins. I saw red as rage clouded my thoughts. I leaped over Grandpa's body and tackled Arthur to floor; screaming, "I'm gonna kill you!"

I punched and backhanded him again and again. He spat out blood but I refused to stop. Arms grabbed me from behind and pulled me off of him, "Go!" I heard Mom yell, "I can't hold her for long!"

"It's your fault! Everything's your fault!" I shouted as Francis lifted Arthur from the floor and half dragged half carried him to the door, with Matthew right behind him. When I heard the door shut behind them, I released a scream like howl and I slumped into my mother's arms. She held me to her chest, soothing me with sweet words as I bawled like a baby.
Chapter 8

The following week passed in a blur.

Funeral arrangements were made by Dad and the local native tribe. Mom called in family and friends from across the state, along with her parents from Hawaii and her brother Alejandro Kama from Texas. They flocked to Summerland to give their condolences and to offer their services in our time of need. Our house was filled with people, flowers, food and sobs.

Dad was wiping his eyes every hour while Mom carried tissues with her everywhere she went. Melissa and Johnny took comfort with their partners as I found solitude in my room, only bothering to come out to greet family and friends.

Grandma didn't stop crying once she heard the news, whimpering Grandpa's name even in her sleep. I would hear her from the guestroom next to mine, Dad thought it was best for her not to be alone, but like me, she doesn't want to leave the room.

The paramedic said it was a heart attack "might have been caused by a fright," he said.

A fright, those words repeated in my head over and over as I sat at the three windows of the tower.

What kind of fright? I wondered. Did it have anything to do with Arthur? With Francis or with Matthew? Or did I wish that they had something to do with my grandfather's death just so my guilt would lessen. The memory of Arthur under me as he spat out blood came to me and I shook it away and pulled my knees into my chest. Tears fell as the thought of Grandpa being so close to that awful scene made my stomach ache and my shoulders shake with another guilty sob.

Everyone wore black to the scattering ritual. Grandpa's will wished for his ashes to be released at the beach. The city council gave permission without complaint, for Grandpa was a big influence in the council.

It was early dawn as the Chen's, Jamie's family floated lotus blossoms on to the surface of the ocean along with Sanjay and his family following in their example. Everyone held a small candle as people made speeches and told stories of John Senior Hawkfeather. The stubborn antics of his youth, the maturity that slowly grew in his middle age as he married the love of his life and raised his son, and the wisdom that he passed on to the young adults in his life.

Towards the end, one of my old tutors, Christopher Walker played on his violin. The music was sad almost as if the song was crying itself. Christopher's dark eyes closed as he swayed along with his music. The wind picked up and blew his brown hair into his face but he didn't stop, only continued in my grandfather's honor.

The song moved me to tears as memories of Grandpa flooded my mind. His smiling face whenever he laid eyes on me. The affection that passed through his eyes whenever he would ruffle my hair or place his arms around me, and watching the skill of his hands as they carved into wood or weaved blankets and baskets.

My shoulders began to shake, a warning sign for another breakdown.

A hand slid on to my back and I turned to find Michel offering a sad smile as he pulled me into his
embrace. His arms wrapped around my back, comforting me as I wept in the nook of his neck.

When the ceremony ended in late morning; Dad, Mom, Grandma and I came back home to mourn in private. Dad went to check on the horses and clean the stables; he found work was the best way to deal with a passing. While the ladies of the house just wanted to crawl into bed and never leave its warm embrace.

I was walking Grandma up the stairs when she said, "I have something to give to you, from your grandfather."

I nodded and remained silent as she stepped inside her room and came back out with a homemade DVD. "Watch this," Grandma sighed as she placed it in my hand, "It will explain everything."

I must have given a questionable gaze because once she gave me the DVD she retreats into her room and shuts the door behind her.

In the corner of my room there was a small plasma screen TV usually used to watch dramas and movies with friends, but truthfully I haven't touched it since Grandpa died. It stood on a medium sized book shelf where I placed books, movies and photo albums. The TV had a built in DVD player so all I had to do was push the DVD into its side and command, "play."

The TV analyzed the DVD and in less than a minute Grandpa's face displayed on its screen. My eyebrows rose in surprise but before I could think of anything else, he spoke.

"Amy, if you're watching this," he began, "I didn't live to your eighteenth birthday and I wasn't able tell you this in person, and for that I am sorry."

I shook my head, "You have nothing to be sorry for," I whispered.

I watched as he breathed in, his face becoming serious, "Amy, what I'm about to say is shocking, so it would be best for you to sit down."

I was still standing in front of the screen, a part of me knew it was best to sit but being stubborn I refused.

"I knew your biological father. His name was Alfred F. Jones and he wasn't an ordinary man, he was national personification, the spirit of America." He paused, then, "And now, you have taken his place." Another pause, "Amy, you're a country. You're America."

I lost the feeling in my legs as my knees crashed into the wooden floors. My eyes left the screen to stare at the ground. Arthur's words once again repeating: We're nations, countries if you will.

No...

Yes, we believe we're spirits, taking a physical form to represent our people, our culture-

Shut up... Grandpa continued, "I know it must be overwhelming or at least insane to think that you're spirit. But you are-"

Shut up...
"A living spirit that binds itself to Earth to be a guardian for their people; will that's what Alfred and I believed."

"Shut up," I finally voiced but it came out more as a whisper.

"You must have noticed you're remarkable healing abilities. How you would become ill every time the economy was in trouble or when there was a government shutdown."

"Shut up," I hissed as tears fell down my cheeks.

"I remember, you would cry or feel pain whenever a national disaster took place, like hurricane Katrina or the Quake. Of course you lived through that disaster but still you cried and asked me why you couldn't stop."

"Shut. Up." I said through gritted teeth.

"Then there were the shootings that took place all over the country, but you cried the hardest for the elementary school in the north. I remembered your teacher sent you home because you broke down in the middle of class."

"Shut up!" I yelled till I started to cry, "Stop, just stop!" Then I finally released that the only way for the DVD to stop was to say, "Pause!"

The screen froze along with my grandfather's confession.

I stared at Grandpa's face with teary vision till that stare became a glare. Then I lifted my fist, wanting more than anything to crush that screen into pieces, but instead my fist settled for the floor. It was soft pats at first till they grew more powerful and aggressive. I screamed out every curse I knew as my fist made contact to the floor. During this, memories of my childhood displayed the truth; when I was four, hurricane Katrina stormed through and I would wake in the middle of the night to bawl my eyes out for the people affected by the storm. Then at six I was bed ridden with a strange illness that lasted for a year and a half, during the time of the Recession. Then at eleven, I heard the voices of children screaming in fear. My emotions ran high that day as I felt my heart squeeze inside my chest and I began to sob in front of my classmates and teacher.

That's how I felt now; my heart squeezing till I almost thought it would burst. I lost strength the more I punched the floor, becoming soft pats once again.

I slumped, my forehead connecting to the floor as my tears came to a stop. I no longer had the strength to even cry. I turned my head to the side to look at my hand. It was bruised black and blue with split tears in the knuckles, the blood dripped from my fingertips till it stopped. I watched with widened eyes as the splits of skin fused back together and the bruises faded. My body was repairing the broken blood vessels and the torn skin in rapid speed, right before my eyes.

If I needed a final example; a good slap to the face that screamed, this is who you are deal with it.

Then that was it.

After my tantrum I decided that it was time to put on my big girl panties and allow my grandfather to finish his confession. "Play," I said calmly.

Grandpa sighed and gave a sad smile, "I'm sure you're wondering how I met your father. Well in
truth I met him several times throughout my life. When I was young man traveling in the pow wows to educate people of Native American culture, he was there. Usually watching our people dance or looking through the art we featured for locals to buy. Of course through the years I noticed that he didn't age and I confronted him."

Grandpa smiled at the memory, "He took me out to dinner at a local Denny's and asked if I could keep a secret. He didn't wait for my answer, instead he just cuts himself with his stack knife and I watched no doubt in terror as it healed right before my eyes."

Grandpa shook his head, "He was reckless fool but he had. . . I wouldn't call it good judgment in a person's character, more like luck in picking people. For I told no one I met a country," he let out a snort, "who would believe me?"

I smirked and he continued, "We stayed in contact with one another as the years went by. I even invited him to my wedding and I showed photographs of my son and grandchildren." His eyes grew sad then, "The moment Alfred saw those photos his eyes and body language would show his true age. His smile was no longer childish but sad, almost like an elderly man with regrets."

Grandpa sighed, "He wanted a family. Of course he told me of his brothers, Britain and Canada, but more than anything he wanted to settle down and have children." A smile appeared on his lips, "He even showed me ring he wanted to give to this girl, she was country too but . . . Shit. I forgot the name. Curse my old age," he grumbled.

He sighed again, "This family talk was in the late 90's almost reaching the twenty-first century." He stopped, blinking back tears. "When the planes hit the twin towers, Aponi and I were with John and Jessica watching it all on the news in the family room. Jessica was crying along with Aponi and John shedding a few tears. I was worried for Alfred, for he told me when something disastrous happen to the country itself, the national spirit would suffer greatly. I had no way of contacting him, for he always called me." Tears finally fell but he quickly wiped them away.

"When the towers fell. . . I felt a pull of some sort. . . leading me to the back of the house. I followed this . . . feeling till I came face to face with Alfred."

"He was different; his body shimmered in a golden haze surrounding him in its light. His legs were transparent but yet he was solid above the waist. He held a baby in his arms; he was rocking it to sleep, with a loving smile on his face as he hummed a lullaby. The image was so touching it was best not to disturb, but he saw me and his smile grew sad at the result."

Grandpa breathed through his nose, "Alfred asked me to raise you. That he was going to disappear, just like his mother before him." Grandpa shed more tears, "Oh Amy, he wanted you. It pained him to part with you; if he could, he would have defied all the laws of nature to stay with you. But he had to let you go and he knew that we would love and care for you in his place.

"I asked why he didn't want Arthur to raise you that it would've been better for you to be raised by a country. He simply said, 'I don't want history to repeat.'"

"I agreed and took you from his arms; his heart broke when I did. That was the first time I ever saw him really... sob." Grandpa wiped away his tears, "He only had one request; to name you Amy. He always liked that name. He also wanted me to deliver a message to his brothers and his fellow nations. That he was sorry he wasn't strong enough to stay, that he had to leave all of them behind. If I'm not alive to tell them that make sure you do."

Grandpa held back a sob. "He was also sorry for leaving you behind. Believe me when I say this Amy, he wanted so much to be part of your life. But he knew if he tried to stay you would
His face grew serious, "But don't think for a one second I regretted bringing you into my family. I never saw you as country, just a child for me and my family to love."

If I thought I was drained of tears I proved myself wrong, for salty liquid was streaking down my cheeks as he spoke, "Jessica and John loved you the moment they laid eyes on you. Melissa and Johnny cared for you like you truly were their sister and Aponi was thrilled to have another grandchild to spoil. We are your family Amy, no matter what you are or whose blood runs through your veins. We're family and that will never change."

The movie cuts to black as the disk popped out of the DVD player.

I wiped away my tears, grabbed the DVD, placed it back on its case, and slid it between my small movie collection and photo albums below.

I took a deep breath and released, it was like a huge boulder had been lifted off my shoulders, but my body was so sore from that lift that my limbs felt like they would give out any minute. I willed myself to simply stand in front of my bed. Then once I was facing it I dropped; permitting my aching eyes to close and my throbbing head to settle.

Dreamless sleep never felt so good.
Chapter 9

I was awoken by Lady licking my face, I moaned, "five more minutes."

Lady barked and I groaned, "Okay, I'm up." I rose out of bed and rubbed the sleep out of my eyes. Lady jumps off and sat at the foot of my bed, waiting for me. "I'm coming," I muttered.

I take a moment to glance at the window; the rays of light were low and slowly rising. Is it still morning? I looked to my clothes, I was still in my simple black dress and it was covered in wrinkles.

I walked out into the hallway and found Mom, Dad, and Grandma in the living room below. All of them drinking hot coffee or tea and wearing casual clothing. I must have slept through yesterday, I yawned.

Lady ran down the stairs and I followed, "Should I say 'morning'?" I joked as I sat into the love seat across from Dad. Mom and Grandma sat on the couch, sharing worried glances with one another.

"Well, it is morning, of the next day," Dad said as he drunk from his mug.

"So it's the weekend, yay," I said in monotone.

Mom breathed in nervously, her words were forced to be casual. "Ella and Daniela brought over your school work you missed this week. I mean it's not much but its best to be on top of things."

"How long did you know?" I asked, straightforwardly.

Awkward silence filled the room, till Grandma said, "Oh come on now. You two knew this day would come. Tell her."

Mom sighed, "We knew since you were six. When you became very sick and couldn't get out of bed."

I remembered this; it was in the middle of the year 2007, where I collapsed during my soccer game due to a high fever. Mom and Dad thought it was cold, till I started throwing up and couldn't hold any solid food down for weeks.

"John Senior fasted and performed native medicine practices on you, but you only got worse. We begged your grandfather to let us to take you to a hospital," Mom continued, "but he refused, over and over again."

"He said that the hospital wouldn't help and it would only lead to trouble. But you began to have high fevers and cough out blood. We feared the worse and I confronted Dad. I used the hospital as a threat to get him to confess.

"He told us of Alfred and who he was, and who you were," he shook his head, "we thought he was crazy; till he slit your wrist in front of us."

I stopped him there, "I don't remember that."

"I'm not surprised, Sweetie. You were in and out of consciousness the whole time," Mom added as she wiped her eyes.
"We watched as your cut healed magically, not even leaving a scar." Dad continued, "My father said taking you to a hospital wouldn't help and that the reason you were so sick was because of the Recession. Once the economy got better you would too."

"Of course there was that small chance," Mom said, her voice holding back a sob. "You could've disappeared like Alfred," tears fell down her cheeks, "You were so small Amy, your body couldn't handle it at times. I," she paused to release a cry, "I thought that every time you coughed, or threw up, or ran a fever it would be your last and you would be gone."

Grandma hands her a tissue and Mom took it gratefully. I rose from my seat and sat next to her. I wrapped my arms around her as she pulled me to her chest, whispering loving words in Spanish and running her fingers through my hair.

She held me for a minute till she placed her hand on my cheek and gently craned my neck up to face her. "I don't care if you're a country Amy, you're my daughter and that will never change."

I wanted to say, 'I love you', but a lump in my throat prevented me from speaking. Instead I placed my head in the nook of her neck and held her tighter, she knew I loved her.

Dad came in and circled his arms around us, holding us both close to his chest and whispered, "Amy, you will always have place in our hearts."

I smiled and hugged them, "And all of you will always have place in mine."

After we released our feelings for one another and parted back to our separate seats. It took us a couple of minutes to get back on track.

"So," I sighed, "Does Melissa and Johnny know?"

Mom nodded, "We told them after your grandfather told us."

"They thought we were crazy too," Dad smiled, amused.

"Did you slit my other wrist to prove it?" I asked, joking.

"That's exactly what we did," Grandma said bluntly.

"Why did I bother to ask," I mumbled sarcastically. Then I added in all seriousness, "Does Sanjay and Celine know?"

"Yes," Dad answered, "they noticed small things, like when you would fall off your bike and scrape yourself and in the next minute it would be gone."

"Or that time you fell off the jungle gym and broke your arm," Mom shook her head, "Sanjay was watching you that day and called an ambulance, but when they got there your arm wasn't broken."

"Poor man looked like a fool that day," Grandma said as she sipped her tea.

"Melissa had to tell him after that," Mom sighed.

"Celine took it surprising well," Dad added.

"Okay, what about Blair and Blake?"

Grandma sighed, "The boy knows, for he has the Sight. Blair on the other hand knows you're special, we'll explain it to her when she's older."
"Wait-wait, Blake has the Sight?" I asked, surprised.

Mom and Dad shared a look, and I narrowed my eyes, "you knew."

"If we had explained, you would have figured out that you were different. We just told Blake to watch what he said around you," Dad explained.

"So does that make him magically?" I asked.

"Something like that," Grandma answered.

"Does anyone else know?"

"Just you, us, your siblings and their partners," Mom stated.

I nodded, "then that has to be the same thing with me right?"

Mom, Dad and Grandma shared concerned looks, "not exactly," said Dad.

"My parents know," Mom added.

"Wait. Is that why I spent a year in Hawaii?"

"Dad wanted to teach you Native Hawaiian traditions." Mom proclaimed.

"What about Uncle Alex?"

"Oh no, my brother can't keep a secret to save his life. Besides he and his children don't visit often, there was no reason to tell him."

"So it's just the family and Kupunakane and Kupunawahine," I stated.

Mom, Dad and Grandma share uneasy looks with one another.

"That is all, right?"

Grandma sighed, "Get the list."

Thirty minutes passed and I found myself knocking on the front door of the Russo's home.

Michel answered the door; he wore jeans, a dark green tank top and his dark curls were in a mess. He always preferred to sleep pass noon on weekends.

"Amy," He yawned as he rubbed his green eyes with his hand, "What are you-"

Before he could finish his sentence, I slapped him on his arm, repeatedly.

That woke him up. "Ow! What was that for?" he whined.

"For not telling me I was country!"

His eyes widen, "You know?"
"Yes! And it turns out I was late to the party!"

"Amy I'm sorry but Mr. Hawkfeather said we couldn't tell you till you watched the video. You did watch the whole thing, right?"

"Yes I watched all of it, and yes I talked to my family and had heart to heart moment with them. But what really pissed me off was," I pulled out a sheet of paper from the back pocket of my jeans, "this! A list of everyone that knew I was a country before me, not just my family, but yours and Jamie's and my tutors! Does the whole town know?!"

"Amy, it's just us and the people on the list, I swear."

I took a deep breath, "How long?"

"How long what?"

"Michel, don't play stupid with me right now." I warned.

"You mean how long I've known?"

"Yes!"

He sighed and gestured me inside, "Remember when you ran into my dad's kitchen when we were five?"

"Yeah."

"Remember when you tripped and fell on a hot pan on the floor? Your knee was practically cooked."

"Your dad shouldn't have left hot pans on the floor, wasn't it like health code violation or something?!"

"Let's not change the subject here. Point is your knee suffered second degree burns and my parents were running around like maniacs trying to help you, but when they stopped to examine you, they watched as your skin repaired itself. The dead skin peeled over and your knee was left without a scratch. We waited for your grandpa to come get you and he explained to us what you were; a country."

"Wait a minute. Is that why Gemma and Carlo started teaching me Italian?"

Michel nodded, "Yup. I mean, Amy you were already learning Spanish, French, German, and Dutch. One more language wouldn't have hurt."

"That's easy for you to say, you didn't have to learn seven languages when you were a kid, and that's including English," I said annoyed.

"Seven?"

"Jamie's family was teaching me Mandarin."

He blinked, "You know Mandarin?"

"Don't ask me to translate anything, I am terrible." I sighed, letting my temper cool till I remembered, "So you knew since we were five."
"Truthfully," he announced, "I didn't get the concept of it till we were eleven. Remember that day in the fifth grade? Where the shooting took place in that school in Connecticut."

"The day when I broke down in class," I followed.

"Yeah," he said softly, "I held you while you cried."

I gave a sad smile, "You seem to do that a lot."

He shrugged his shoulders, "You held me when I came out to you." He stated. "Being a country doesn't change the fact that you're my best friend."

Guilt consumed me, "I'm sorry I slapped you. When I get mad, I take my anger out on people and that just ain't right." The memory of Arthur under me came flooding in and I groaned, "Oh Michel I messed up so bad."

Michel gave me a worried look, "What did you do?"

I shook my head, "Get in the car, I'll tell you once we get to Jamie's."

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Michel brushed through his curls with his fingers as I knocked on Jamie's front door.

Her mom, Yin Chen answered, "Oh Amy and Michel, come in," she said in her heavy accented voice. "Jia is in her room, you know the way."

"Thanks Mrs. Chen," we both said in sync as we walked down the hall to the second room on the left. I knocked again and Jamie answered.

"Hey Michel," she nodded to him, and then turned to me. "Oh Amy," she wrapped me in her arms. "How are you? Feeling any better?"

"I'm fine and by the way, I know." I said as I pulled out of her hug and walked into her room.

She knitted her brows in confusion as she closed the door behind us, "Know what?"

I rolled my eyes, "Are you messing with me or do you seriously don't know."

Michel whispers to Jamie but still loud enough for me to hear, "She knows that she's a c-word."

"C-word? Really?" I asked.

Jamie gasped, "Already? But I thought she had to be eighteen?"

"I guess there was a change in plans," Michel shrugged and gave me a side-way glance.

I sighed, "I know why there's been a change in plans."

Both of them took their seats on Jamie's bed as I took mine at her work desk. I told them how I met Arthur, Francis and Matthew in New York, and how they tried to tell me I was one of them. How an electric shock somehow told me that I was meeting a country. Why I ran away from Ludwig and Feliciano and how Arthur and his friends came to my house to give me a 'scholarship,' (I made sure to use air quotes and sarcasm when I used the word) where I found Arthur next to Grandpa.
"I just saw him . . . lifeless on the floor and Arthur was right in front of me, trying to say something but I was so . . . Angry. I just," I sighed, "I tackled him to the ground and started punching him in the face till he spat out blood and had to be dragged out the house."

Michel and Jamie gave me horrified expressions.

"You mauled Britain?!" exclaimed Michel.

"Oh God. Amy you could've started a war!" said Jamie.

"You think I don't know that! I'm scared out of mind!"

All three of us took a minute to breathe till Jamie asked. "What do we do?"

"I need you guys to help me find his briefcase. It's at my house; I think Mom put it somewhere." I explained. "It has to have a business card or a number or something in it; will you guys help me look?"

Michel and Jamie shared a look and nodded.

"We got nothing else better to do." Michel said as he walked out the door.

"Let's go stop a war that Amy started," Jamie said as she followed him.

"I didn't start a war." I bit my lip nervously, "Hopefully."

I drove twenty miles over the speed limit to reach my house. Both of my parents' cars were gone, meaning Mom was at the nursery home doing her rounds and Dad was at the south branch office for the Los Padres National Forest. Luckily for him the building was now ten miles away from Summerland, allowing him to be closer to home.

We speed walked through the front door and found Grandma in the living room reading, *The Lais of Marie de France*. She looks up, "Where's the fire?"

"Grandma did you see a briefcase?" I asked as my friends searched through the living room.

Grandma takes a moment, "No. Why?"

"Because Amy needs to contact the owner so she can stop a war that she started in the first place." Michel said as he looked behind the hall table.

"There's no war," I said through gritted teeth.

"Yet," Jamie added as she looked under the coffee table.

"Are they talking about the young man you attacked?" Grandma asked.

I nodded shamefully, "Yes."

"Why would that cause a war?"

"Grams he's a country. Britain."

"Britain? I think John told me about him, but he was the only one that ever knew what he looked
"What does Britain look like?" Michel asked, curious.

"Um," I took a moment to think, "He's a little taller than me, shaggy blond hair, green eyes, and has the largest eyebrows I have ever seen on a person."

"Eyebrows?" Jamie gave me a confused look.

"They practically cover his entire forehead," I admit, I might have been exaggerating, but they were pretty massive.

"I think I've found it!" Michel called as he pulled out a briefcase from the hall closet.

"Awesome. Bring it over," I gestured towards the coffee table as Jamie and Grandma joined us. Michel sets the case on the table and tried to click it open but it wouldn't budge. He bends down and narrowed his eyes around its rim. "Aw man it has a combination lock."

"How many slots?" Jamie asked.

"Four." He answered

"Okay, well each of those slots can range from zero to nine. We can make a list of the various number combinations starting with zero and work our way up. If we start now we might be able to crack it within a week." Jamie explained.

Grandma must have walked into the kitchen while Jamie was talking, because the next thing I knew, she was handing me a knife. "We don't have a week."

"Thanks Grandma," I took the knife, stabbed it through the lock and forced it open.

We scanned through the papers, "What's this?" Michel wondered as he flipped through two pages with my name on it. He reads it and holds back a snort, "Amy, what site did you steal this from?"

I snatched the paper out of his hand and skimmed through it. "What the hell? It's an essay about how I care about politics?"

"Did your mom really buy that?" Jamie asked sarcastically.

"And what is the Student International Society?" I asked.

"I can't find a website," Michel said as he checked his phone.

"They make up a society and they don't even bother make a fake website to it," I shook my head; dumbasses.

Jamie searched through more papers, lifts up a rectangle sized piece of paper and gasped.

"What is it?" Grandma asked as she looked over Jamie's shoulder. Her eyes widened and she muttered a Cherokee prayer.

"Can I see," Michel takes the piece of paper, glanced at it and cried out, "Sweet Mary Mother of Jesus!"

"What?!" I pulled the paper from his hands and froze. It was a check for eight hundred thousand dollars addressed to me.
"Way to go Amy you almost killed a guy for giving you a shit load of money." Michel snorted.

"It's not for her," Jamie proclaimed as she roamed through more papers and read a sheet. "It was a payment plan to pay for your education. That," she points to the check, "is the first paycheck."

"For a year?" Michel asked.

"For a semester," Jamie answered.

My eyebrows rose, "I'm guessing it won't go towards my dance school."

Jamie shook her head, "The contract states the money would pay for a master's degree in US Government and Political Science and a minor degree in World History."

"Goodbye sweet cash, we knew thee well," Michel mocks sadness as he slowly reaches for the check.

I rolled my eyes and threw the check back into the briefcase, "I won't be brought."

Finally after a few minutes of searching we found a business card with Arthur Kirkland's cell number on it. We all share some cheers but I quickly found myself just staring at the card.

"What are you waiting for? Call him." Michel exclaimed.

I sighed, "What do I say?"

"'I'm sorry' would be a good start," Jamie added.

"I know that! But it can't be done over the phone; he deserves my apology in person." I began to rubble, it's what I usually do when I'm freaking out or nervous. "But how could I get him to meet me? He must hate me or planning to jump me or-

"Amy," Grandma placed a hand on my shoulder and gestured me to face her. "I was going to wait till you were eighteen but you need this," she held a silver ring with a hawk on it. The hawk faced outward with its wings extended, the feathers were large and detailed along with the tail pointed up.

"Grandpa's ring," I proclaimed as she placed it in my palm.

"You are so much like him," Grandma smiled. "Headstrong and determined," her smile grew wider, "the sky was the limit for him and you seem to follow in his footsteps."

"But Grams this is his animal spirit, it wouldn't feel right. I'm a spirit, so technically aren't I my own spirit guide?"

Grandma chuckles, "It doesn't matter, the hawk is also a messenger of the Spirit World. With this ring you'll be connected with his hawk and any message you wish to send him, the hawk will grant it."

"Maybe you can ask him for sessions in angry management." Michel mumbled.

I ignored him and tried to put the ring on each one of my fingers. Grandpa had large hands so I wasn't surprised that the ring didn't even fit on my thumb. The ring reflected in the light, its eyes almost gleamed. Headstrong, the word followed, just a nice way to say stubborn, and we sure were stubborn Gramps. Both of us were determined to go after our dreams and in some cases, to protect our family and friends.
I looked up to Michel, Jamie, and Grandma at that moment. Michel had a bit of worry in his eyes but he still bared a grin. Jamie mouthed, 'you can do it.' and Grandma gave a knowing smile.

I took a deep breath and dialed Arthur's number.
Chapter 10

The phone ranged three times before he picked it up.

"Hello," he answered calmly.

I gathered my courage and spoke, "Hi Arthur, it's me, Amy."

Silence.

"Um," I took another breath, "I have your briefcase, and I would like to return it to you and also apologize for my behavior and for hurting you. I would like to do this in person; I mean you deserve an apology in person." I was beginning to rubble, *pull it together Amy!* "Are you still in the States?"

"Yes, we're still in California."

"Cool, I mean that's great. Uh, can we meet? There's a café called The Dragonfly in Summerland. Also, if it's not too much trouble, can Francis and Matthew come? I want to apologize to them too." I rushed through my speech nervously.

Silence.

Is he thinking about it? Will he say no?

I sighed, "You don't have come, just give me your address I'll mail it to-"

"Are you free later on today?" Arthur interrupted.

I was so shocked by his reply that I said, "What?"

"Are you free later on today." he repeated.

"Yeah, what time do you guys want to meet?"

"We'll meet at this café, The Dragonfly at three. Is that convenient for you?"

I check the clock it was close to noon, "Yeah that's perfect."

"Alright, we'll see you then." He hanged up before I could say 'goodbye'

"Rude much," I mumbled.

"So are you meeting them?" Michel asked.

"Yeah, at three at The Dragonfly." I fell on to the couch, totally exhausted. "I guess I could take nap."

"You can't take a nap!" Jamie exclaimed, "You have to get dressed."

"Why can't I go like this?" I was wearing jeans, a simple graphic tee, and sneakers.

Michel rolled his eyes, "You need to look presentable. Now go take a shower."

"But-"
"No buts," Jamie said as she pulled me off the couch and pushed me towards the stairs. "Go take a shower, make sure to use the Wonderstruck gift set I got for you."

"Okay, okay," I mumbled as I walked up the stairs into my bathroom.

I came walking into my room with a towel wrapped around myself but jumped when I found Michel and Jamie waiting for me.

"Holy- What the hell-you guys!"

"I've picked out some clothes for you to try on," Michel said smoothly.

"And I'm here to do your hair and makeup," Jamie added.

"I get that. But I'm naked."

"Oh please, I'm gay. Your lady parts just don't it for me," Michel proclaimed.

"Ditto," Jamie said, "Now drop the towel, put on some lotion, and try on these clothes."

My face and ears heated in embarrassment as I walked to my bed and dropped the towel.

Michel whistled. "Holy crap, I think you turned me."

I yelped and grabbed my towel to cover myself.

Michel and Jamie burst out laughing.

My blush rose twenty degrees hotter as I rubbed lotion into my body. After I was done, I hastily slipped on a pair of panties and clipped on a bra.

Michel was showing me his choices for my outfits. He forced me to wear the first one; a pencil skirt and a blouse, "Where did you get this?" I asked.

"From your mom's closet," he answered.

"I don't want to wear a suite, besides we're meeting at a café." I said as I unbuttoned the blouse.

"Fine," Michel sighed, "Try the second one," which was a thigh length blue dress with a white wool cardigan.

I looked at myself in the full body mirror, "It's cute, but this is more for a date."

"Well, isn't it?" he said.

I gave him a horrified expression, "No."

"You punched him, maybe sorry won't cover it."

"Make love, not war," Jamie said, using the 60's motto.

"I am not sleeping with him!"

Michel patted me on the back, "Sometimes you gotta take one for the team."

"Then you sleep with him." I hissed.
He raised his hands up with a dramatic shrug, "I'm not America. You are."

"I'm not wearing this." I tore the outfit off and tried on the third.

Then the fourth, then the fifth, and then the sixth; after my tenth try I fell on to my bed. "Can I please just wear my shirt and jeans?" I whined.

"No." Michel exclaimed. "Just pick something."

I groaned as I rose off my bed and skimmed through my closet. After a few dramatic grunts and pushing aside hanged clothes; I found a gray dress. It had a few black trees at its bottom side; the branches grew up to the top and faded before it reached the collar. The material was made with light-weight cotton. The sleeves were long and loose with slight ruffled ends. I slipped on the dress and it came to mid-thigh. Then I grabbed some black jeggings and a pair of simple silver sandals. "How's this?"

Michel nodded, "I like it."

"Finally! Now sit your butt here so I can do something with that hair," Jamie gestured me towards my vanity mirror. I stayed quiet as she brushed and blow dried my hair with shine oil. She pushed my bangs to the front of my forehead, and brushed back the rest to it's usually boy cut style. She then instructed me to put on BB cream and curl my eye lashes. I listened, and once I was done, she took over.

During this, Michel tied a thick black string around Grandpa's ring and placed it around my neck. I mouthed my thanks and he returned a smile.

Fifteen minutes passed till she said, "Done." She turned me to face the mirror and my eyes widen. I usually never wear makeup except for lip gloss but I had to give Jamie credit, she had skills. My blond eye lashes were cloaked with mascara, making them darker, longer and fuller. She outlined my eyes in black eyeliner, giving me the cat-eye style. Then she highlighted my cheeks with a natural blush and painted my lips with red lipstick, making my mouth stand out with the only splash of bright color.

"Red lips are a classic." Jamie said as if she read my mind.

Michel whistled. "Hottie alert."

"Shut up," I mumbled but still I smiled. "Thanks guys." Then an idea popped into my head, "Jamie, Michel, I need you guys to do something for me."

I drove down town in record time and parked across the street from the café. It was a small hipster styled building with the words: The Dragonfly painted on the window. I climbed out of my jeep, grabbed the now broken briefcase and set the alarm on the car. I walked across the street (no need to worry I looked both ways beforehand) and pushed myself through the front door into the cozy café. 'Drumming Song,' by Florence and the Machine hummed through the speakers as teenagers and college students sat on small couches or at the mini stylish tables beside the window and around the walls. The stage where they usually held poetry readings or band performances was currently empty.

I stepped to the front counter and asked for honey milk tea. The young man behind the counter gladly served. He handed me a blue mug and smiled, "To match your eyes," he winked.
I raised my eyebrows; he was cute with his brushed to the side brown hair and hazel eyes. His body was slim but toned, I could see that clearly through his black button down shirt and his face had a slight shadow from a lack of shaving, but he pulled it off nicely.

I smiled, "Thanks, how much do I owe you?"

"It's free if I get your number." He was suave, but I didn't bat an eye to his request.

"My number is worth more than a cup of tea," I flirted as I handed him my debit card.

"Then I guess I'll go with plan B," he smiled and handed me back my card and receipt.

I saw the outline of black writing on the back of the receipt and turned it over. It was a number and beside it was a name that read Noah. I smiled, "I'll think about it."

I turned away before he could say anything and walked towards the back, practically skipping to an empty table. He's so cute, I giggled at the thought of his handsome face. I sat myself on small brown couch with mismatched love seats across from me and a worn out coffee table in the middle. Once I came down from flirtatious high, I found myself back to being nervous and stressed.

It was fifteen minutes till three and I was anxious. I crossed and re-crossed my legs and pulled at the short stands of my hair in the back. I tried to relax with drinking my tea and ordering a batch of chocolate chip cookies. Chocolate always calms the nerves.

It felt like hours till I heard, "Hello Amy." I looked up and found Arthur and his friends in front of me. Arthur wore a simple white button down shirt with long sleeves along with a green tie and a dark green vest button over it. He wore pants that matched the vest and brown dress shoes. Francis wore a stylish white suit with the blazer open, allowing the blue button down silk shirt to be seen and had black dress shoes on. The only one who decided to wear causal was Matthew; he had on jeans, sneakers and a baggy light blue sweatshirt. He held Kumajirou in his arms; currently the bear was focusing on laying still.

But when I stopped paying attention to their appearances, I took the chance to glance at their faces. They were blank with emotion, even Arthur who was sporting a fading black eye, a healing split lip and a bruised cheek.

"You haven't healed yet?!" was the first thing that came out of my mouth and the second it left my lips; I was mentally kicking myself in the butt and changed the subject fast. "Cookie?" I lifted up the tray that was on the table and motioned it towards them.

Silence was their answer as they took their seats. Francis and Arthur were on the love seats and Matthew sat beside me, placing Kumajirou between us.

Silence continued to engulf the air and I figured the best way to break the ice was to bring out his briefcase, "Here you go."

He looked over it and his brows knitted in confusion, "Why is there tape wrapped around it?"

"Oh well funny story. We couldn't open it so Grandma gave me a knife and I forced it open." I gave a sweet smile, but Arthur only returned a disapproving glare.

"I'll pay for a new one."

"That won't be necessary, I've plenty at home."
Then why the stink eye? I thought bitterly in my head.

Arthur sighed, set the briefcase beside him and continued with answering my question. "The reason I haven't healed, is because you gave me these wounds. Injuries from other countries take longer to heal."

"Oh," my voice grew soft. "I-I'm so sorry, Arthur. I-I was-" I stopped myself and shook my head. "There's no excuse for what I've done. I can only hope you'll forgive me and not cause war over this."

"War?" Arthur gave me a confused look, "who said anything about war?"

"Isn't that what countries do when they fight?"

Matthew shook his head, "If that was true, these two would have caused a war last night, or the day before that or the week before that or the month before that."

"What Matthew is trying to say," Arthur interrupted, "is that countries can fight with one another without starting a war. That usually takes our bosses and several world leaders to start that."

"We have bosses?"

"Yes, like your president, or-" he stopped and lifted a large brow in question, "Did you just say 'we'?"

I sighed, "Yeah, my grandpa told me everything. I actually have the video on my phone, you need to see this." I sent a copy of the video to his phone as I clicked the video to play on mine.

Arthur muttered over his phone, trying to open the video on his touch screen, "Bloody hell. This stupid-"

"Let me see it," Francis gestures for his phone.

"I can figure it out," he clicked his phone to lock. He mumbled some curses and unlocked it; Francis took the chance to snatch the phone from him and slid his fingers over the screen. His smug quickly turned to an annoyed scowl.

Matthew shook his head and asked for the phone. Francis handed it over and with less than a minute Matthew had the video up and running.

"Don't you guys know how to use phones?" I asked.

"Yes." Arthur hissed, "But when they keep changing every bloody year, it's hard to keep up."

Francis hushed Arthur, "Mr. Hawkfeather is talking."

I watched as Arthur gritted his teeth to hold back his comment. Matthew watched the video on my phone while I just listened.

"I knew your biological father. His name was Alfred F. Jones and he wasn't an ordinary man, he was national spirit, the spirit of America. And now, you have taken his place. Amy, you're a country. You're America."

I watched as Arthur, Francis and Matthew tensed at Grandpa's blunt statement. Their faces soften when Grandpa announced my childhood experiences, his examples of me being who I am. The three nations shared knowing looks to the stories of my childhood.
Then when Grandpa got to the story of how he met Alfred and the incident at the local Denny's. Arthur hissed, "Idiot." but he still spared a smile.

Francis chuckled and shook his head as Matthew smiled, "That's just like Al."

They listened to Grandpa describe his time with Alfred.

"We stayed in contact with one another as the years went by. I even invited him to my wedding and I showed photographs of my son and grandchildren. The moment Alfred saw those photos his eyes and body language aged over two-hundred years. His smile was no longer childish but sad, almost like an elderly man with regrets."

Matthew and Francis wore a sad expression as Arthur bit his lips to a tight line, trying to keep his face blank.

"He wanted a family. Of course he told me of his brothers, Britain and Canada, but more than anything he wanted to settle down and have children."

Matthew's eyebrows rose, "he never told me that," he whispered.

"He even showed me a ring he wanted to give to this girl, she was country too but . . . Shit. I forgot the name. Curse my old age."

"He wanted to get married!" Francis exclaimed.

"But to who?" Arthur asked calmly.

"I was kinda hoping you guys would know," I said as I bit into a cookie.

Matthew shook his head, "he didn't really talk about his love life."

Arthur snorted, "We thought he didn't have one."

Then Grandpa began to speak about 9/11 and everyone stood quiet. He told of his worry for Alfred during that day and how a strange feeling pulled him to the back of the house. Where he found Alfred, "He was different; his body shimmered in a golden haze surrounding him in its light. His legs were transparent but yet he was solid above the waist. He held a baby in his arms; he was rocking it to sleep, with a loving smile on his face as he hummed a lullaby."

Arthur's blank expression began to break, revealing some emotion.

"Alfred asked me to raise you. That he was going to disappear, just like his mother before him."

I noticed Francis blinked back tears as Matthew sucked in a shaky breath.

Grandpa continued about how Alfred would have tried to break all the rules to be with me, how Alfred wanted so badly to be in my life, and how he and his family would love me in Alfred's place.

"I asked why he didn't want Arthur to raise you that it would've been better for you to be raised by a country. He simply said, 'I don't want history to repeat.'"

I watched Arthur as he held back tears; clearly the last sentence hit a nerve.

"He also wanted me to deliver a message to his brothers and his fellow nations. That he was sorry he wasn't strong enough to stay, that he had to leave all of them behind."
The countries finally let their tears fall as I tried to hold back mine for what came next.

"But don't think for a one second I regretted bringing you into my family. I never saw you as country, just a child for me and my family to love. Jessica and John loved you the moment they laid eyes on you. Melissa and Johnny cared for you like you truly were their sister and Aponi was thrilled to have another grandchild to spoil. We are your family Amy, no matter what you are or whose blood runs through your veins. We're family and that will never change."

The video ends and Matthew hands me back my phone as Arthur sat his on the table. His elbows were on his thighs and his hands were in his face. His fingers were messaging his temples and the sides of his nose. Francis leaned back in his seat and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. Matthew pulled off his glasses and rubbed his sore eyes.

On the other hand Kumajirou was taking a nap on the couch.

I made sure to block the bear when Noah came walking by, "Hey," he quickly senses the mood. "Um, anyone need anything?"

"English tea, please," Arthur asked in monotone.

"I'll take a coffee," Francis added.

"I'll have water," Matthew whispered.

"I'll take a refill," I handed him my cup, "Thanks Noah."

He gave understanding smile, "No problem."

After we received our drinks and took a moment to relax and unwind. I tried to change the subject, "so do any of you have questions for me?"

Arthur didn't skip a beat, "How many people know?"

"Twenty-one's the lucky number," I painted on my most innocent smile.

"Twenty-one," his eyes widened as he pronounced the number.

"Yeah, don't feel bad I was late to the party too."

"This is no joking matter Amy," Arthur whispered harshly, "This is serious. If too many civilians know about you or us it could lead to a public riot."

"Oh come on. My family and friends have kept this secret for seventeen years, you have nothing to fear."

"Do we? This so called family and friends do you really trust them?"

I made no hesitation, "Yes, and if you don't believe me. Then give me a chance to prove it." I rose from my seat, "I want to invite you all to dinner."

By some amazing source of luck, they agreed and followed me to my house by car. I took deep breaths the entire way, please let this work.
When we arrived and parked our cars beside one another, I was grateful to find Gemma's van and the Chen's SUV out in front; along with Christopher's Honda and Neill Shaw's motorcycle beside them.

"What's going on?" Arthur asked as he walked to stand by my side.

"It's a party," I grinned as I gestured them to follow me to the back of the house.

Six portable tables were placed side to side, going long ways and each one was covered in different cloth. Each table had plates of food; enchiladas, quesadillas, meat and pork dumplings and lo mien noodles. Italian pasta, stuffed shells along with Caesar salads and garlic bread; Indian and Belgian cuisine stood side by side, and finally on the last table was haggis.

"Is that haggis," Francis whispered as he covered his mouth with a hand; horrified.

"Yeah, Neill must have brought it," I reached for a piece of the baked bread stuffed with haggis. I took a bite as all three nations gave me shocked looks. "What? It's good."

"It doesn't matter if Arthur raised you or not! Your lack of taste buds must be genetic!" Francis placed his hands on my shoulders, "Don't worry," he soothed. "We'll find you help."

I took a step back from him, "O-kay." I quickly finished my haggis and gave a loud whistle.

My family came out from the back door, followed by the Russo's and the Chen's, and finally my tutors.

Lady came running ahead of them to greet me first, "hey girl," I cooed as I petted her. My family and friends were silent as they stood across from me and the nations.

"Everyone, I want you to meet Arthur, Francis, and Matthew; also known as Britain, France, and Canada." I announced.

Everyone was silent till, "Aren't you going to introduce me?" Kumajirou asked.

"Did the bear just talk?" Laura Walker asked. Her Belgian accent ringed out as her dark eyes widened and her long red hair flowed with the light breeze.

"If we did I believe all us are short of kettle," Christopher said to his wife.

"It can talk!" Blair shouted excitedly as she pulled out of Melissa's grasp and ran to stand in front Matthew. "Can I hold him?"

"I don't know if that's for the best," Matthew stuttered.

"Put me down," Kumajirou commanded and Matthew set him into Blair's arms.

"Oh you're so cute and fluffy!" she said as she hugged him. Kumajirou didn't even flinch from her tight hold.

"The lass got nerves of steel, must've got it from Amy," Neill said as he brushed back his blond hair and winked one of his dark eyes at me.

I smiled as Dad walked over to Arthur, "Welcome to our home, I'm John Hawkfeather." he held out his hand.

Arthur glanced to his hand with a blank expression but shook it, "A pleasure."
Francis and Matthew gave their hands with a smile and everyone quickly followed my dad's example. Everyone making introductions and side comments towards one another; "So you're my country," Christopher said as he shook Arthur's hand. "Forgive me for asking, but why do you have such large eyebrows? Is it because everyone else believes that's what we like?"

"I was born with these eyebrows," Arthur said through gritted teeth.

"Christopher, don't be rude," Laura lectured.

"I was just asking a question love," he said with a sly smile and Laura shook her head but still beamed lovingly at him.

"Your Canada," Jin Chen, Jamie's grandfather said as he shook Matthew's hand. "I admit, I never heard of you till I heard of the Justin Bieber."

Michel, Jamie and I burst out laughing as I patted Matthew on the back. "Sorry Mattie, seems like they'll gonna hold this over your head for another ten years."

"Mattie?" he questioned.

"What? You don't want me to call you that?" I asked.

"No, um, Al use to call me that." He smiled at the memory and all I did was smile back.

"I'm Carlo Russo," Michel's dad greeted as he shook Francis's hand. His blond hair was brushed back and his green eyes shined against his light skin.

"Francis Bonnefoy," he smiled.

"France." Carlo took a moment, "Francis." Another short pause. "You didn't leave much to the imagination did you?"

Arthur chuckled, "I was wondering when someone was gonna pick up on that. I never thought it would be the Italian."

"We're not as stupid as you believe," Carlo said.

"Well of course, but you don't have brightest country representing you."

Carlo threw up his arms dramatically, "That explains everything," then he laughed and Arthur actually joined in.

Then Mom announced, "Come on everyone the food's getting cold."

Dad took the head of the table as Mom sat on his right and Johnny sat on his left. I sat next to Mom and Celine sat next to Johnny. The second table had Melissa and Sanjay on the left and Michel and Gemma on the right.

Third held Blair with Kumajirou in her lap and Matthew right next to her, as Carlo and Blake sat across from them.

Fourth held Grandma and Jin on the left as Francis and Jamie sat on the right. Fifth sat Arthur and Neil on the right and Dong (Jamie's father) and Yin on the left; the last table was left for Christopher and Laura.

Once everyone was settled Dad rose from his seat. "This meal is to represent the coming together
of family, friends, and nations," he nods to Arthur, Francis, and Matthew. "It was actually my
daughter's idea to have this meal," he takes a moment to smile at me and continued. "I'm sure the
nations are worried about our intentions, that we could reveal their secret at any time. We are here
to prove them wrong. We have been in Amy's life ever since Alfred brought her to us and never
once for a second even considered of telling anyone of what Amy is. We've watched her grow,
matured into a beautiful young woman, not just on the outside but also on the inside. We've taught
her various lessons of life and knowledge, shared our love and culture with her, and gave her," he
smiled to himself, "a place in all of our hearts. She is a part of our family, our friends and of our
community. No matter what anyone may say, this is her home, this is her family and we never
betray family."

He looked at Arthur, "We would be honored to able to call Britain, France and Canada our friends
and maybe one day, family." He held up his cup and everyone followed, "A toast to family and to
friends; make new friends but keep the old."

"Amen," Carlo grinned as clicked his drink with Matthew's.

I watched as Arthur clicked drinks with Neill and Christopher and Francis and Jamie clicked theirs.

I sighed and held on to Grandpa's ring, it would be perfect if you were here.

"Hey pass down the stuffed shells, all we got is the haggis," Christopher called out.

"Try it, it's good," Neill exclaimed.

"Over my dead body," he proclaimed.

"I can arrange that," Neill smiled.

"I've always wanted to go to Paris," Jamie said.

"Oh yes," Francis smiled, "Paris is a city I'm very proud of. Whenever you get chance to visit, call
me. I'll be happy to be your tour guide."

"Francis she's child," Arthur hissed at him.

Francis's jaw dropped, "What are you implying?"

Arthur snorted, "When you offer to grant someone a tour, they usually end up in your bed."

"I would never. You're just jealous because my city is the number one city to visit."

"Have you forgotten 2013? Where London was number one and Paris was number three."

"It was a fluke! A fluke!" Francis shouted.

Matthew sighed, "Eh, can't we have one dinner without you two getting into a screaming match."

"They're funny," Blair grinned as she fed Kumajirou a baked fish and garlic bread.

After the bear chewed his food, he said, "I like this one." Then opened his mouth for a fish and
Blair happily gave him another.

Matthew shook his head, "It's because she's feeding you, you like anyone that feeds you."

"Who are you?" the bear asked.
"I'm Canada your owner," he mumbled as if he said this a thousand times.

The table was filled with laughs, stories, questions and answers. Friendship and respect was building as affections grew along with it.

I smiled, *but I'll settle for this.*
A week passed as I tried to get back into routine.

I would rise at five a.m. to clean the stables and feed the horses. At six a.m. I would take a shower and get dressed into my Nightingale uniform. A white button down shirt with a dark blue tie and a matching blazer with the school crest over the heart, the crest was a black raven. (I know it makes no sense, isn't nightingale a bird too? Why do we have a raven for a mascot? Simple, Mr. Elliot Nightingale like ravens, so the mascot's a raven.) The dark blue plaid skirt had light blue and green lines and it came to mid-thigh. I always wore mini shorts underneath; you never know when that gust of wind will show up.

Six-thirty, eat breakfast with the family, the only difference that took place was that Arthur, Matthew, and Francis were now taking a place at the dining table.

"Morning everyone," I greeted as I took my seat across from Arthur.

Arthur nodded to me, "Morning Amy," he takes a sip of his tea.

"We made cream stuffed French toast," Matthew said as he placed a pastry with strawberries and whip cream in front of me.

"Thank you, just want we need on a Monday morning," I smiled and took a bite. "Mmm, I'm in heaven."

"We also made some eggs and bacon," Mom placed a large serving plate in the middle of the table.

Dad beamed at Mom, "We have beautiful angel serving us, so Amy your right we are in heaven."

Mom playfully slaps him on his arm but still blushed like a school girl, which didn't fit when she wore her light blue nurse scrubs. When Mom took her seat at the other end of the table, across from Dad, Francis sat a tea cup beside her, "For the angel."

"Now Francis you do know that angel is my wife," Dad said jokingly.

"Well of course, but still she is an angel for letting us stay here," Francis smiled.

"Heel boy," Arthur grabbed his collar and pulled him down into the seat next to him.

Matthew placed five pounds of fish into Kumajirou's dish and dog food into Lady's. The pair waited by his heels till he moved away. Both have become fast friends; they ate together, played together, and napped together.

Matthew then sat himself next to me, "So do you have anything planned after school?" he asked.

"The girls and I are going shopping for prom dresses," I answered as I took another bite of my breakfast.

"Prom? At an international school?" Matthew quirked a brow.

"It all started at our sister school in New York. The American students were pissed that they
weren't going to have a prom. So they wrote up a petition and argued that prom would be a perfect example of American culture," I explained. "It's not any different from the other schools- I mean I heard that the Nightingale in Japan have cultural and sports festivals."

"Is the prom during the first week of May?" Dad asked and I nodded.

"Make sure to get something for the wedding," Mom added.

I nodded, Johnny and Celine's wedding was pushed a week behind, so instead of the wedding being this Saturday, it would be the next. "You guys gonna stay for the wedding?"

Arthur and Francis share a look before Matthew spoke, "Um, we would love to, but Amy there's something we have to-"

I glanced at the clock on my phone, it was seven. "Oh I gotta go." I wolfed down the rest of my food, kissed my parents on each of their cheeks and said, "Bye you guys see ya later." I ran out the front door.

Nightingale was across town and only a mile away from the beach; some of the classrooms have great views of the ocean. The school was made of brown brick with five buildings surrounding the main building with the bell tower. The main building holds the auditorium, cafeteria, two gyms, the library, the teacher's office and some classrooms for cultural and history courses.

The building on the right of the main was the math and science building with several labs and computer rooms. The building on the left was reserved for the fine arts; it had art rooms for painting, sculpturing, and for photographing. Dance rooms, mini theaters and some literature classes. The last three buildings were the dorms for the students and teachers, the boy and girl dorms were only a short fifteen minute walk away from each other, but the teacher's dorm was right in the middle of them; that's how they get-cha.

I parked my jeep in the student parking lot, grabbed my backpack and made a mad dash to the main building as the first bell rang.

"No running in the halls," a teacher exclaimed but I was already running around a corner, trying to reach my first period.

I burst through the door of my world cultural class and found that Mrs. Lope was not in yet. "Safe!" I declared and sat myself in the back with Ella and Heisuke. "Morning," I greeted.

"Amy!" Ella rose from her seat and gave me a hug.

"Good morning," Heisuke greeted in his native tongue and adorably soft voice.

Both Ella and I cooed, "Awww," and I pitched his cheek affectionately. "Has anyone ever told you how cute you are?"

Heisuke blushed, "You have."

I giggled as Mrs. Lope came walking through the door. "Take out your tablets, and open your textbook to page 340."

With that class was in session.
Three hours passed till fourth hour began, which was my free period. I used this time to blow off some stream in one of the empty dance rooms. I quickly dress into my black yoga pants, purple tank top, and black ballet slippers. I stretched my limbs, plugged in my iPod into the speakers and played Adele's classic song, 'Rolling in the Deep'.

I took a moment to listen to Adele's enchanting voice, allowing me time to pick up on the well-known beat. I threw myself into the music, throwing up my legs into powerful leaps, landing with one foot on to the wooden floor and twirling myself into a spin. When the beat would pick up with the claps I shuffled my feet to the beat with a mix of tapping and stomping. I tried to tell a story in my dancing, the song tells of heartbreak so I displayed a girl in the stages of losing someone she loved. That wasn't hard for lost was something I knew.

When the song ended, I was left standing with my hand wrapped around Grandpa's ring. I haven't taken it off once since Michel laced it around my neck.

"Wow, you dance pretty good, doesn't she Raivis?" a British voice spoke from behind and I turned around to find two teenage boys around my age. Both were dressed in Nightingale uniforms, which were pretty close to the girls except the guys wore pants of course. The guy that spoke had dirty blond hair and blue eyes with large thick eyebrows. The guy behind him had light brown hair with violet eyes and was currently peeking behind the door.

"Come on out Raivis, it's just America," the first boy pulled the other in.

I tensed, "You're countries."

"Yup," the blond grinned, "and may I say Miss Amy Hawkfeather you have an interesting life." He pulled out a folder from the inside of his blazer, "Britain thought he sealed these but unlike him I stay in touch with today's technology and became a pretty good hacker."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I'm Sealand and this is Latvia," he gestured to the boy behind him. "But I'm pretty sure you want our human names."

"Yeah," I said, a little annoyed.

"I'm Peter Kirkland and the chap behind me is Raivis Galante."

Raivis finally seemed to gather some courage to say, "Hello Ms. America."

"Kirkland? That's the same name as Arthur's. Are you two related?"

Peter snorted. "Haven't seen him as my brother in decades, usually that guy never cares for anything but himself."

_Sounds like some bad blood between those two._ "What do you want?" I asked, changing the subject.

Peter seemed thankful for the change for his smile came back, "At first we just wanted to see where Britain was hiding you. So I took a peek into his computer's system and found you're records," he cracks the file open. "You were founded September 11, 2001, adopted by John and Jessica Hawkfeather. You live in Summerland California, and you go to Nightingale. But what
really got me stumped was that neither Britain nor Canada was ever stated in these records. They weren't part of your life for seventeen years."

"Yeah, so?"

"Well just a few weeks ago, right at the end of spring break Arthur said they were raising you."

"What?!" I shouted.

"You didn't know?" Peter grinned at the thought of knowing something that I didn't. "You do remember Feliciano Vargas and Ludwig Beilschmidt right? Well they're Italy and Germany and they made sure to report their sighting of you. The countries were so excited to find out you were alive. Even Prussia called out for a man hunt, most countries found it barbaric but in truth, curiosity would've gotten the best of us and we would all come searching for you. But Britain said that wasn't necessary and that he'll have you ready to come to Austria's party which is only a few days from now."

This information sent my thoughts spinning. Man hunt! There's more coming?! Who the hell is Prussia? Wait, Arthur lied about raising me! Is that why they're here?! To take me away to Austria!

I clutched my fists, digging my fingernails into the skin of my palms. I counted to ten and controlled my breathing. "What are you two going do with this information?"

Peter shrugged, "This would make some good gossip don't you think?"

"Wrong answer," I said through gritted teeth and smashed my fist into his cheek, knocking him out cold.

Raivis yelped and I pulled him by his collar to meet me at eye level. He and Peter were a few inches taller than me. His violet eyes widened in fear and he was beginning to tremble. "You two are coming with me."

During lunch, we sneaked out of school, which was already hard enough when I was half carrying half dragging an unconscious boy. Luckily the back hallways were empty and we made our clean escape through the track field into the parking lot.

I unlocked my car doors and helped Raivis throw Peter in the back. I then gestured for him to sit in the passenger seat; he nodded and sat him himself nervously next to me. I clicked in my seat belt and waited for Raivis.

He noticed and his eyes became doe like, "w-w-why are you looking at me?" he said in a weak voice.

"Seat belt," I remarked.

"O-o-o-h r-r-right," he stuttered and with trembling hands he pulled the belt close but kept missing the buckle. I grew annoyed quick and grabbed his hand to help him but he screamed and pulled from my grasp.

"Dude, calm down I'm just trying to help you."

"Like you helped Peter," he whispered harshly.

I sighed, "I'm sorry okay, when I get mad I lose it, especially when my family is threatened."
He stopped trembling, "he wasn't threatening your family."

"No, but he wanted to tell the other countries of my family, and what I can gather you people find it real interesting that I was raised by humans. I don't know what that interest would lead to, so I'm taking precaution."

"By kidnapping us?" his eyes widened at the thought and he was shaking again.

He had such a baby face that it made him look like a little boy. I always had a soft spot for kids, maybe that's why I placed a gentle hand on his cheek. He tensed under the touch of my skin but I quickly soothed him, "Hey no one's going to hurt you, not even me. I swear."

He was holding his breath as if he was waiting for a hit in the gut. "Hey, breathe. Come on, in and out." I began to breathe in large amounts of air through my nose and exhale through my mouth. "In." I inhaled, "Out." I exhaled.

I repeated this twice till he joined me, "See you're fine," I cooed like he was a frighten animal.

He stopped shaking and nodded. I gave him my sweetest smile and gestured him to hand me the seat belt. He gives it willingly and I buckled him in. I started the engine, pulled out of the lot and sped my way home.

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I parked my car in front; both Mom and Dad were at work by now so their cars were gone. I turned my jeep off and jumped out, “Help me with Peter.” I didn’t need to ask twice for Raivis was already opening the back door to pull Peter out. I leaned him on one of my shoulders and Raivis grabbed the other side.

“Uh,” Peter groaned, “where are we?”

“At my house,” I said as I helped him up the porch steps and through the front door.

We met Matthew in the living room, “Amy what are you-“ he stopped when he took a closer look at boys beside me. “Raivis? Peter! What happen to you?!”

“He pissed me off,” I proclaimed as Raivis and I sat Peter on the sofa. “Oh that also reminds me, I’m pissed at all three of you!”

“What did we do?!?” Matthew exclaimed.

“You lied to them,” I pointed at Raivis and Peter. Then I yelled, “Francis! Arthur! Get your asses down here!”

Both of them took their sweet time reaching the living room, Francis had a concerned expression while Arthur had on scowl. “A young lady shouldn’t use such language-“

“Oh shut the fuck up! No one gives a shit! What I want to know is why you told all the other countries that you were raising me!”

Arthur’s eyes widen but narrowed when he laid eyes on Peter, “What are you doing here?”

I stood in front of him, “Don’t you dare try and change the subject. What happened to being truthful with one another huh? I let you into my house, into my family and this how you repay me!”
“This was before we ever made this so called agreement. What I did, what I told them was for your own safety,” Arthur said calmly.

“From what? Them,” I pointed to Peter and Raivis, “I took the blond out with one punch.”

“Which was not necessary,” Peter added, “I would’ve came here if you just asked.”

“Sorry,” I gave a blunt reply and turned my attention back to Arthur. “He even told me about this so called party that Austria is throwing and that you wanted to take me to it. Is that why you’re here?!”

“One of the reasons yes, but Amy-“

“What other reasons?! Was it because I was raised by humans? That I lived my entire life thinking I was human?”

Arthur finally snapped, “Yes! I’m angry that Alfred would choose bloody strangers to raise you over his own family! That these people had the audacity to hide what you are and to hide you from us!”

Everyone was silent till I spoke, “I knew it. I didn’t want to believe you were just playing along with me and my family, but my gut feeling was right. You hate this don’t you? You hate that I’m happy without you and the other countries. That I don’t need you.” His face was breaking composer and I continued, “I see why Alfred left me here. He didn’t want you to be anywhere near me and you know what I think it was the best decision he ever made. Like he said, he didn’t want history to repeat.” With those final words left in the air, I stormed out of the house.

Chapter End Notes

I decided to make Peter and Raivis older than what they're portrayed in the anime/manga. I mean in World Series we see Sealand older- so I decided to go with it, and I didn't want to leave Raivis behind. I'll also make Seychelles and Liechtenstein look like they're the same age as Amy- I figured they would make good friends.
I stomped to the stables, counting to twenty as I did. When I hopped on to the fence to sit, Midnight came trotting to my side. He nudged his nose into my shoulder as if to say, 'what's wrong?' I placed my hand on his nose, slid it to his mane and then back down to his nose. I sighed; feeling my temper cool as I gently touched my forehead to his. His strong breathing and the smell of his fur made the tension in my body disappear. I took these peaceful moments to relax and to clear my thoughts.

"Amy?" a gentle voice called out.

I turned around, "What do you want Francis?"

He shook his head, "Nothing. I just wanted to see the horses." He held out his hand to Midnight to sniff. Once Francis believed it was safe, he petted Midnight on his nose and neck. "He's beautiful."

I nodded, "Yeah, he was gift from Dad when I was fifteen." I smiled at a memory, "I remember he had to carry me out the stables every night because I would fall asleep next to Midnight's stall."

Francis smiled, "You care for your horse. Alfred was the same way. He was animal lover, like me."

"Do you have horses?"

He shook his head, "I live in Paris, I used to have a house in the country but I had to sell it when the economy was bad."

"Why don't you get a new one?"

He shrugged, "I would usually forget, with work and what's going on now," he sighed, "It's a lot to keep up with."

"If you ask me, that's the reason why you should get one; a safe haven from all this crap."

He chuckled, moved his hand away from Midnight and leaned on the fence beside me. We allowed the peaceful silence to last between us. Midnight snorted and walked away to roam the open field with Jack and Daisy.

"Amy," Francis took a breath before continuing, "Arthur did what he had to do to protect you."

I shook my head, "Francis I don't want talk about him." I crossed my arms and refused to say anything else.

He was silent, till, "Do you know of Joan of Arc?" he asked.

I lifted a brow in confusion, "Yeah."

He nodded, "Good. Then you must know what happened to her."

"She got burned at the stake for witchcraft."
"No. The main reason she was..." he sighed heavy, "burned; was because she knew what I truly was."

My eyes widened, "They put her to death because she knew you were a country?"

He nodded, "She found me when she was twelve, after I dug myself out of the grave Britain put me in."

"Grave?!!" I repeated in worry.

"Yes, he cut of my head and buried me in the ground when I refused to be his colony. It took me about twenty years to heal."

"Not even cutting off our heads can kill us."

"The people of France still fought, so I had the strength to continue." He paused, "When Joan found me I was still weak. She dragged me to a church and helped me heal. When I was able to walk, she asked me to train her so she could fight the English."

"Did you?" I questioned.

"At first I refused, told her to live out her life in peace, but all she said was, 'there is no life when France is held captive.'" He smiled at the memory, "So every day I trained her how to use a sword, even thou I told her she will never fight in a battle, but it was best to be prepared. I taught her military strategies against Britain and instructed her how to put Charles VII on the throne."

"But she said that God told her to do all that." I remarked.

Francis gave a sad smile, "That's what she told the public, but when she went to the French court I told her of the test and when she passed. Charles asked to see her in private, that's when she brought me in to meet with Charles, we then told him of my plan to take my land back. But Joan and Charles believed it was best for me to keep playing the role of 'God'," he used air quotes around the word.

"Only members of the royal family, noblemen, and army generals could ever know I was country, but when I 'died'" air quotes again. "They believed France died, the French people were losing confidence and they needed something more powerful than knowing their country was alive, they needed to believe God was truly on their side. Joan continued to play role of God's messenger, even after she was captured by the English."

He sighed, "Like the fool I was I ran to Arthur, begging him to release her. But when he and his generals found out she knew what I was. They charged her for seventy crimes from sorcery to horse theft. But in the end they charged her for relapsed heretic, due to the fact that she wore men's clothes after she swore she wouldn't. But the only reason she did, was because she was threatened by her guards." He tensed as he inhaled a shaky breath.

"In the end she was sent to the stake for knowing too much."

"But," I whispered, "She helped you."

He shook his head, "It still didn't matter she was a farmer's daughter that knew who I was and because of that she was able to rally the public against the English. Even if the public only knew of me as the voice in her head, she still assembled my armies to free me." He paused, "That's what all our governments fear. If the public knew of our existence they would side with us against the government, or believe if they could change us it would change their government; either way it all
leads to civil war."

"Is that what they see my family and friends as, a threat?" I asked.

"Most countries would, you're lucky it was only Sealand and Latvia that found out first, at least with them we could try and talk things out."

Both of us were silent till I asked, "Did Arthur try? To free Joan, I mean."

He shook his head and I sighed, "You know if this story was to make me see the goodness in Arthur, it's not working."

"It's not about Arthur, it's about your family and friends. If the other nations find out they know, the nations will-"

"Kill them?!"

"No." he exclaimed, but then he thought about it, "Well, in some cases they would. They have world leaders in the back of their pockets; they could frame your family for drug possession, theft, fraud, or murder. Even for federal crimes if they want."

"But they can't-"

"They will. If it's to stop civil war from even starting, destroying a few lives won't bother them. That's why Arthur said he was raising you, so none of the other countries would come searching for you and your family." He sighed, "He also told them he would take you to Austria's party so you would meet them in a safe environment and not have to worry about your family."

"Why didn't he tell me any of this?"

"We tried this morning." Francis proclaimed.

The memory of breakfast came to me and I groaned.

"Wait! Why would the countries care about me? Doesn't everybody hate America, or prefer to make fun of it," then I remembered I was America, "Me." That sounded weird, so I gave up, "Whatever."

Francis chuckled, "Yes, America was always the punch line in our jokes but when Alfred disappeared. We feared for the country, thinking it was on its last legs; but when America continued without Alfred it frighten us to a whole new level. World leaders began to think that they didn't need national personifications and worse, we were beginning to think that. They lost confidence, and I admit I was the same way, till I met you." He smiled, "When they found out you were alive, you brought hope to them, but belief can only go so far. They need to see you."

"And what am I supposed to do when I get there? Give a cheer? Throw poms poms in the air as I do back flips? Do I look like cheerleader to you?" I said sarcastically.

Francis's eyes sparkled with irritation as he spoke harshly, "Okay don't go for us. Go for your family, go for your friends. If you still refuse to go, we can't stop them from coming here. And I already told you what the consequences will be." With those final words he walked back into the house.
Francis slammed the door as he came back inside, *that girl is so stubborn*.

"How did it go?" Matthew asked as he came into the kitchen.

Francis shook his head, "I told her what she needed to know." Then he sighed as he rubbed his temple, "How's Arthur doing with Peter?"

"Oh, the argument started out on why Peter would hack his computer, but it quickly turned into a screaming match about Arthur not seeing him as a country," said Matthew.

"You're not a country! You're a bloody fort!" Arthur's voice ringed out from the living room.

"Then why am I here!" Peter's voice met his in volume, "You're just angry because my people have more faith in me than yours!"

"Do even have people on that sorry excuse for a port?!"

"Stop yelling." Francis commanded as he walked in.

"We don't have to listen to you frog!" Arthur hissed.

Francis placed a firm hand on his shoulder and whispered in his ear, "I know you're angry but I need you to be quiet for one moment." He doesn't wait for a reply and focused his attention on Peter and Raivis. "Peter, please understand we need keep Amy's situation a secret."

"Why?" Peter asked as he sat himself beside a nervous looking Raivis.

"If the nations find out about her life here, they will take it away from her. You don't want that do you?"

Peter pouted and crossed his arms like a spoiled child. Raivis suddenly took an interest in his shoes, avoiding eye contact with anyone.

"Fine, do you want Russia to find her then?" Francis said as his last resort.

Both teens tensed and looked up to Francis. "He doesn't care," Peter said uncertainly.

"Arthur heard him." He turned to Arthur, "tell them."

Arthur sighed, "He wants to conquer her, and we all know what that means."

Raivis began to tremble and crossed his arms over his body to hold himself. Peter swallowed back any backhanded comment he had and rubbed his friend's back. "Hey Raivis pull yourself together, it's not like he wants you."

"Are you saying it's okay if it's Ms. America?" Raivis whispered. "No one deserves that."

"He's right, Peter," Francis proclaimed. "Will you help us lock away Amy's files?"

Peter was silent till Raivis begged, "Please Peter, help them. Help Ms. America. She's not so bad," he said as his face turned a shade of crimson.

Peter took a moment, "Fine, give me a computer and a few minutes and I'll have those files buried in firewalls."
I tried to block out the conversation I had with Francis mostly to the part where I became a sarcastic smart ass. Guilt ate through me as my conscience reminded me of my actions today. Punching Peter in the face, scaring Raivis, hurting Arthur's feelings and dissing Francis when he was trying to make me understand. I groaned out loud, "Why do I keep messing things up!"

When no answer came, I sighed and hopped off the fence. "Okay Amy time to say you're sorry and that you're going to that stupid party," I mumbled to myself.

I walked through the back door and headed straight into the living room. Peter was on a laptop, typing rapidly over the keys. Raivis sat beside him, looking over his shoulder in a respectful distance. Francis sat on the love seat rubbing his eyes and forehead with his fingers. Arthur wasn't in the room, and Matthew was the first to see me.

"Uh, hey Amy," he greeted with an uncertain smile. Francis and Raivis turned in my direction and I nodded to them.

I took a deep breath, "Francis, I'm sorry for my attitude and," I exhaled, "I will come to Austria's party."

Francis sighed in relief, "alright."

"And Peter, I-"

"Yes, yes, you're sorry. Thank you but right now I'm busy," Peter said, his eyes never leaving the screen.

"What are you doing?" I couldn't help but ask.

Raivis answered, "He's locking away your files so none of the other countries will find you."

I beamed, "Really," I came to stand over Peter's shoulder along with Raivis. The screen displayed computer language as Peter placed power firewalls upon more firewalls.

"I even hid some viruses in there just in case," he grinned to himself.

I grinned, "Peter you are officially the coolest person I ever met."

He grinned from ear to ear, finished with the key 'enter' and announced. "Done," he closed the laptop. "The only person that can ever get through those walls will have to be as brilliant as me, which is impossible."

I gave a quick peck on his cheek, "Thanks Pete, I owe you one."

A slight blush swept over his cheeks as he smiled bashfully.

I moved away from the couch and asked, "Where's Arthur?"

"Probably sulking in his room," Francis proclaimed.

I bit my inner cheek nervously and ran up the stairs to the guestroom next to my room. I stopped and knocked on his door, "Arthur it's me, can I come in?"

No word came and when I decided to walk away, he said, "Come in."
I slowly opened the door and found Arthur leaning on the rail of the balcony.

"Hey not planning on jumping are ya," I opened with a distasteful joke.

He didn't respond, only stared at an object in his hand. I walked over and saw that the object he was holding was the photograph of Alfred he showed me back at the hospital. His green eyes stared into his face, as if they were asking questions that will never be answered.

"You know, I didn't mean what I said-"

"No. You did," he said it as a fact. He gave a sad smile to the picture, "You're so much like him. We would fight over the most ridiculous things and in the end he was always the one to say he was sorry first. Even if it was my fault, he would say he was sorry. Cause he knew. He knew I would never say sorry first; I was too prideful and he never liked it when we fought. Especially after that fight we had about his independence, it took so many years for us to get back on speaking terms."

"You really loved him huh?"

"He was my little brother, I practically raised him. Tried to protect him from anything that would hurt him, which was mostly the reason why I wanted him to stay my colony, so he would never have to carry the responsibilities of a country. But all I was doing was smothering him. I drove him away," he sighed.

"But," I leaned on the rail next to him, "you guys worked that out."

"'Brothers shouldn't fight'" he chuckled sadly, "that's what he always said when he came to apologize to me. I was the oldest; it was my job to be mature." He muttered.

I giggled, "Sounds like Alfred beat you there."

"Yes, yes he did." He paused, "I see why Alfred didn't want me involved in your life till you were eighteen. He wanted you to have a family, and what kind of family are we? I pick at any small thing that irritates me, be a smothering mother hen one minute then be a, in Alfred's words a complete control freak the next. Matthew would be better but he's a pushover, you've gotten away with anything."

"You forgot Francis," I remarked.

"I didn't forget anyone; Francis barely took any part in raising Alfred. I admit he had a longer time with Matthew and got him to call him papa. But I raised them both."

"Papa? Does that make him my grandfather?"

"No."

"But don't we share the same blood?"

Arthur sighed, "We're not technically bounded by blood. None of the countries are."

"So, Alfred was not your brother?"

"He was. Some nations make family ties with one another; it gives us the idea of family."

I smiled, "Arthur, you and my family are more alike than you think. I share no blood with them but they still love me just the same. I don't want to be corny but, blood doesn't make family, love does."
He takes a moment, "You're right," he pushed himself off the rail to stand, "that was corny."

I laughed, "So you do have sense of humor, I was worried there for a sec."

He grinned and placed the photo on the night stand. We both took a moment to look at Alfred's smiling face. *I wonder was he smiling down on us now. Is he happy that they found me ahead of time? Annoyed? Is he proud of the person I came to be? Is he not? I admit a part of me wants to know more about him. Maybe Austria's party will have some answers.*

"So when do we leave to Austria?" I asked.

"Tonight," Arthur answered.

Chapter End Notes

History Notes: About Joan, she was sent to the stake for relapsed heretic, meaning she wore men's clothes after she signed a paper swearing she wouldn't. She also told the judges that she heard the voices again, that only encouraged her death penalty. If you want to know more, type in this: 7-things-you-didnt-know-about-joan-of-arc
Chapter 13

Did you ever wonder how long a flight was to Vienna from Summerland?

Here's the answer: thirteen hours, well to be precise twelve hours and forty-six minutes. Believe me you would count every agonizing minute if you had to spend it with Arthur as he quizzed you over history, current events, people and which countries they were.

"Amy," Arthur called out as my eyes began to droop to a close.

"What? I'm here," I yawned.

"Pay attention," Arthur said as he held up his phone with a photo of a young man with brown skin and dark hair. His eyes were light brown and he wore a white tunic with gold trim, matching pants and a red scarf draped over his shoulders. "This is Akram Verma, also known as India."

"Cool." I said in a monotone.

He slid to a photo of a tall man with light skin, spiked blond hair and pale green eyes. A girl stood next to him, she had blond shoulder length hair, green eyes, and the same light skin. "This is Lars Vermeulen," he pointed to the man, "and his younger sister Bella Vermeulen. He's the Netherlands and she's Belgium."

"Neat." I said in the same tone.

He moved on to another photo of a young man with light brown skin and dark eyes. He wore some kind of plain white head dress and a white tunic dress, most likely to protect him from the sun, I'm guessing. "This is Gupta Muhammad Hassan, he's Egypt."

"Woooo," I said in a tired tone.

"Amy, you have to take this seriously," Arthur hissed in irritation.

"Arthur," I groaned, "It's been seven hours, and you want to know what we're been doing? Going over historical events which I already knew thanks to Christopher, an infuriating British man I had to deal with when I was a kid. Now fate decides to screw with me and put me next to you. Then you decided to go over current events, which, I will admit it was interesting till it was one o'clock in the morning. Then you decide to go over all of the countries, their names, and pictures even though I'm about to kill over. It may be eleven am in Vienna right now, but I'm still on Summerland time, and guess what it's two am and I'm tired."

He sighed, "I know Amy, but-"

I gripped him by the collar of his shirt and pulled him close so our foreheads were touching. "No buts. I want to sleep and you will let me sleep or-God help me, I'll bang your head against that window as many times as needed for you to go night-night." I threatened in a whispering tone. "Do we need to use the window Arthur?"

He shook his head and I let him go, "Goodnight then." I turned over on my side and finally allowed myself to sleep.
Arthur sighed in relief, "that girl has to control that temper of her's."

"Maybe, you shouldn't have pushed her," Francis said from behind him. "We still have at least two days before Roderich's party, that's enough time to prepare her."

Arthur rubbed his temples, "No matter how much we tell her about the nations, she'll never be ready."

"You're still worried about Ivan aren't you," Francis proclaimed.

"And you're not?"

"We'll be with her the entire time and she will be surrounded by the other nations, he won't have a chance," Francis said as comfort.

"Dear God I hope so," Arthur mumbled to himself.

Our plane landed at four fifty pm Vienna time, during the next hour we walked through security and waited in the bagging area for our luggage. Francis had a car waiting for us outside the airport and gestured us to follow him, but I couldn't help but notice Peter and Raivis were walking in the opposite direction.

"Hey, where are you guys going?" I ran after them.

"I got to meet my parents at the hotel," Peter proclaimed, "And it would look suspicious if another country saw us walking with you."

"Oh," I was kinda disappointed; Peter and Raivis were fun to talk with, and I was just beginning to like them.

Raivis must have noticed my gloomy expression, "Don't worry Ms. Amer- oww." Peter gave him a light punch to his arm.

"We're in public," Peter hissed.

"Oh right," Raivis nodded and turned his attention to me, "Don't worry Ms. Hawkfeather, we'll see you at Mr. Edelstein's party."

The way he said Hawkfeather sounded like he put too much force on the 'a' and forgot the 'h', I couldn't help but giggle. "Call me Amy, Raivis."

A slight embarrassed blush spread over his cheeks, "Yes of course."

"Say it with me now," Peter said, "Amy."

"Amy," he whispered loud enough for us to hear.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure he works on it," Peter grinned and pushed Raivis in the direction of the south exist. "We'll see you at the party, bye-bye."

"Seeya later you guys," I waved goodbye.

"Amy," Arthur cried, "our car's here."
"I'm coming, I'm coming," I called out, and then mumbled to myself, "geez, who died and made him my mother."

I walked out of the north exist with Arthur and Matthew by my side. Kumajirou was sleeping in Mattie's arms and Arthur carried a large brown luggage in one hand and his cell phone in the other. He was currently talking on it, "Hello Roderich," a pause, "yes we're here." He gave me a side way glance, "Yes, your guest of honor has arrived." He nodded, "Yes of course, we'll see you then, goodbye." Arthur ended the call.

"I'm guessing that was Austria," I whispered as I slid the strap of my carry-on off my shoulder and handed it to the cab driver. He nodded to me and took my bag as he grabbed Arthur's luggage and walked over to the trunk of the car.

"Yes," he answered, "he is anxious to see you."

"So what I'm supposed to do when I see him? Give a curtsy?" I said as a joke.

"Yes," he said seriously, "do you know how?"

"I was joking."

"I'm not, you going to need to know how to curtsy."

"What kind of party is this?" I asked.

"Think of it as a royal ball set in the late 19th century," Matthew whispered in my ear.

"Are you serious?" I gave him a shocked expression.

He nodded and I cursed, "You people are old, like O-L-D old."

Arthur knitted his large brows in annoyance, "Get in the car."

"Oh did I make you mad," I bashed my lashes innocently at him.

His eye twitched and I grinned, "Annoyance level reached eye twitch, twenty points."

I slid into the car before he could make a comment, Matthew sat in the middle with his bear in his lap and Arthur sat at the other end. Francis took the passenger seat next to the cab driver, leading him to our hotel in his accented voice.

"We're staying at the Vienna Marriott Hotel," Francis said in German, "Do you know where that is?"

"Ja," the cab driver nodded and pulled out into the road.

I stared out of my window, observing the landscape as it passed by. The buildings were old fashion and they seemed to be styled in French and Roman décor. People walked the streets, mostly locals or tourists that were able to get some time in before tourist season came into full swing. The architecture of one building I was able to spot, was tall with windows only inches apart from one another. There were plenty of buildings in this style but in different shades of color. I had my face practically against the window, taking in all the sights. I still couldn't believe I was here, along with the fact that my parents actually gave permission for me to come.

"It will be an amazing experience," Mom's voice spoke in my head.
"You should meet the other countries, they are going to be part of your life," Dad's voice came after.

"Your first time in Vienna," the cab driver asked me in English.

"Yes, it's beautiful," I proclaimed in German. I had made a promise with Laura that when I spoke to locals, I would use their native tongue.

The cab driver gave me a surprised look through his rear-view mirror, "You know German?" he asked.

I nodded and he smiled, switching to English. "Good thing, it won't be long till people will mistake you for a local."

I grinned and continued to stare out of the window.

The Vienna Marriott Hotel was a massive building with hundreds of pine windows and glass roof tops for the dome area in front. The lobby was filled with red couches and matching love seats, the walls were painted with a bronze color and the ceilings were white along with the tile on the floor.

Arthur immediately walked to the reception's desk, "Hello, I'm Arthur Kirkland."

The woman behind the desk smiled, "We've been waiting for you Mr. Kirkland," she pulled out four card room keys. "The rooms are made and ready."

"Thank you," he took the keys and gestured for us to follow him to the elevator. We all piled in and waited as the elevator pulled us up the seventh floor. Arthur leads us to four rooms, two of the rooms across from the other two. "Francis and I will be staying in 712 and 710, Matthew you'll be in 709, and Amy your room is 711."

"Cool," I smiled as I received my room key. This was the first time I ever got a hotel room to myself and I was excited.

"Get some rest," Arthur said, "we have a big day tomorrow."

Everyone nodded and retreated into their rooms. When I swiped my card through the lock and opened the door, my eyes widen and my lips smiled in delight. When I entered, I'm met with a small living room with tan carpet and a light green couch with matching single seats on its sides. The room was painted white and filled with all around shelves with small statues and little knick-knacks here and there. The small dark brown coffee table was polished and clean with a gift basket from the hotel. The basket was filled with honey milk soap, a bath robe, candles and other bathroom supplies.

I walked over to the tan colored curtains and pulled them apart to reveal the sun and the view of Vienna. When I turned on my left I found a pair of French doors, I stepped towards them and opened to find a large bed with three white pillows, simple green covers and a small decorative red pillow on top. Above the bed was a green drape that seem to be connected to the ceiling as the cloth fell to each side of the bed.

On my right there was a small light brown work desk and a matching seat. I sat down my bag near the desk and pulled open the curtains in that room to allow the light in. In front of the bed was a plasma screen TV with white wall shelves surrounding it. I walked across the room to the
bathroom; it was designed with dark tan tile walls and black tile floors and sink. I turned back to face the bed and leaped into it. I wrapped myself in the sheets as the thought of room service came to mind.

I grabbed the phone from the night stand, "Hello room service," I said in German, "What's the best dish you guys got?"

The next day, Arthur woke me at nine am and told me to be ready in an hour. We had brunch in the hotel's café as he and Francis planned a route filled with boutiques for us to visit. Matthew had to leave Kumajirou in his hotel room, but we made sure there was enough fish for him and instructed the maid service to leave his room alone.

Once we were out and about, Francis would lead us through the streets till he found a dress store and forced me to try on ballroom gowns. The first one was a strapless white dress with large puffy cloth starting below the waist down to the floor.

"Guys, this isn't me," I tried to pat down the dress.

"Are you saying you're not a virgin," Arthur said with a vengeful smirk.

"No," I said with a slight blush, "White's too plain."

"She's right," Francis proclaimed as he came in with ten different gowns, "She needs color!"

I groaned, I'm gonna be here awhile.

After discarding another gown over the changing door to Francis, Arthur called out, "Amy you have to pick something."

"I know," I exclaimed, "But my mom always said if you don't love in the store you won't wear it. And you guys are paying for it; I don't want you guys to waste money on me."

I heard Arthur sigh, "Amy, we're not wasting anything on you, think of it as a gift for all of the Christmases and birthdays we've missed."

I smiled, "thanks." I inhaled, "Bring on the next set."

Matthew's voice ringed out, "I think I found something she might like."

I hope so, I thought. This was the twelfth boutique were been to and I've forgotten the number of dresses I've tried on. Matthew flipped it over and I knitted my brows in wonder at the light violet dress. It was a simple long gown with a lace covering the violet cloth; it was sleeveless with a small sweetheart neck line that leads around the shoulder to the back. I shrugged and quickly slipped it on.

"How does it look?" Matthew called out.

"Come on out, let us see," Francis exclaimed.

I opened the door and stepped in front of them, "Whatcha think?"
All three of them sat on the couch in the waiting section right outside of my changing room. They looked up and their faces were stunned with awe.

"What?"

Francis's mouth grew into a large grin that spread from ear to ear, "turn around."

I lifted a brow at him; confused but I followed his orders. I turned to a three way mirror and had the same stunned expression when I laid eyes on my reflection. The dress hugged the curves of my waist and chest. The sweetheart neck line was below my collar bone, right above my breast. The straps were just lace, showing off my shoulders under the light violet colored material. These straps that were connected to the neckline, wrapped around my shoulders and lead to a backless design. The lace outlines the sides of my back and connected to an arch at the lower back, playing at the curve of my bottom. The cloth of the dress covered my front, bottom, and legs. The lace covered dress fell to the floor smoothly and dragged a bit from behind. The color made my eyes darker, my hair lighter, and it blended nicely with my light skin tone.

"Please tell me you like this one, cause this bloody torture," Arthur's comment broke me away from the mirror.

I smiled, "Yes."

After we found a matching shawl and silver flats, we headed back to the hotel for Arthur's dance lessons.

We're in my room now as Matthew played simple ballroom music from his phone while Francis stood in front of me.

Arthur instructed me to hold Francis's hand as his other hand was placed on my lower back and my hand was on his shoulder. "The waltz is a simple ¾ time dance."

"Arthur-

"Don't interrupt," he held up his hand to me. "The male always leads and the female follows."

"Arthur-

He ignored me and turned his back to us, being dramatic. "This dance is supposed to be graceful and elegant."

I shook my head, "Francis start dancing," I whispered.

He grinned and together we danced the waltz in perfect sync right behind Arthur's back. Matthew grinned mischievously from the couch as he watched us and Arthur continue in his monologue, "You will need to know this dance for the party, for Austria does love the waltz and he has me to thank for it of cour." He turned around to find us dancing perfectly.

"When I told Mom I wanted to dance, she signed me up for ballet and ballroom dancing the next day," I explained as Francis waltzed with me around the room.

Arthur crossed his arms, "Why didn't you say anything?"

"I tried, but you don't seem to listen to anyone but yourself."
Francis laughed, "She got you there mon ami."

"What other dances do you know?" Arthur asked.

I took a moment, "The Tango, the Foxtrot, even the slow one. The Quick Step, the Cha Cha, the Rumba, the Samba, and the Viennese Waltz. As you can see, I’m a big fan of Dancing with the Stars."

Francis stopped, "We're only doing slow dances at the party, unless Antonio begs for the Tango, most likely he will, so you're ready." He stepped away from me and sat himself on a single seat.

I grinned to myself, and once the music ends it quickly changes to the song called 'Wobble Baby'.

Matthew jumped, 'I'm sorry my music is on shuffle.' A slight blush lit his face as he made a grab for his phone.

"No," I cried out, "I love this song."

"Why I'm not surprised," Arthur shook his head in disappointment.

I ignored Arthur and pulled Matthew to stand with me, "do you know the dance."

He nodded guilty, "yes."

"Then dance!" I started to shake my hips to the rhythm, and after a minute Matthew joined me.

Francis smiled and even joined us on my right. Together we danced in a straight line doing the wobble. I should get this on video.

"Arthur, join us!" I gestured for him to stand next to Matthew.

"No." He said bluntly.

"Oh come on," I pulled him in the middle of me and Francis. "It's easy." I showed him the foot work, how to sway his hips and to jump and 'wobble' when instructed. He was hesitant at first but after another minute he danced along with us. Now I really wished I was recording this.

Later that night, Arthur continued to show me pictures of the nations. Countless names and faces invaded my mind as Arthur, Francis, and Matthew added in stories with the photos. I will admit, I blocked out what they said most of the time, and now that I think about it, I should've listened.
Chapter 14

On the afternoon of the party I connected my iPod to my traveling speakers and cranked up the music. Usher's song, 'DJ Got Us Fallin' in Love' blasted through the speakers and I danced and sang along as I took a shower. Using my Wonderstruck body wash and lotion set. I slipped on a simple tank top and sweats when I was done. I blow dried my bangs up and to the side, curling them at the bottom a bit. My forehead was in full view, which was what Arthur wanted, "You will not walk around with your bangs covering half of your face."

I rolled my eyes at the memory; at least my hair is brushed.

A knock at the door stirred me out from the bathroom, "Coming." Matthew was at the door, "What's up?"

Matthew held out a black valet box, "Francis wanted me to give you this."

I took the box and opened the lid to find small diamond pendent earrings and a matching necklace. "Please tell me these are not real."

Matthew inhaled a nervous breath, "They're real."

I closed the box and handed it back, "I can't accept these."

"Too late they're yours," he power walked back to his room.

"Mattie!" I called out but he ignored me and after a moment I cried out, "I'm not wearing these!" I slammed my door and mumbled curses as I walked back to the bathroom. I tossed the box on the work desk and unpacked my makeup bag. I pulled out my dress from the closet and unzipped it out of its gray bag. I started to compare my eye shadows with the dress, but none of my colors seem to fit with the light violet. Some colors were too dark and others had too much glitter. Arthur suggested (more like commanded) that I wore something natural. I will admit I'm not a makeup wiz that was always Jamie's area of specialties.

I checked the clock and it was three pm. I did the math in my head, it was six am in Summerland, so that means Jamie was right now getting ready for school. I called her phone quick and she picked up after the first ring, "Hey Amy how's Europe?"

"Very pretty and very old," I said, "Listen Jamie do you have some time? I need your help."

Jamie and I logged into our skype accounts and I placed my phone on the bathroom sink as her face appeared on the screen. "Whatcha need?" she asked.

I held up my makeup bag, "I need to figure out which eye shadow will work with my dress. Its light violet and I need to go natural or Arthur will have my head, red queen style."

She thought for a moment, "Put on the dress."

"What? Jamie we don't have time for this."

"We'll make time. Come on put on the dress, it will help me visualize."

I gave her a look, "You just want to see me in that dress, don't you."

She grinned, "Guilty as charged, now go put it on!" She was practically jumping when I left the
view of the screen.

I changed out of my clothes, into a backless bra and slid myself into the gown. I walked back into the bathroom to a stunned Jamie. Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped but swiftly formed into a smile. "Oh. My. God! Look at you! Give me a turn!"

I rolled my eyes but I did what I was told.

"Oh my god, it's finally happened. You're a woman now," she wiped away a fake tear for dramatic effect.

"Oh shut up," I said playfully.

"Okay serious time," her face became determined, "do you have some light purple eye shadow?"

"Yeah, but-"

"Hush! I know what I'm doing. Do you have eye shadow that can match with your skin tone?"

"Uhh, I don't think so."

"Do you have white?"

"Yeah."

"Then use that, with glitter."

"Are you sure that's okay?"

"Of course, glitter is a girl's best friend."

"Uhhhhh, I don't think my relationship with glitter has gone that far."

With Jamie's help I was able to apply light white shadow on the beginning of my lids and showed me how to fade it into the light violet shade at the end. I used the violet to outline the corners to give myself a bit of the cat-eye look. The glitter was surprising smooth and spread from the white to the violet with ease. Then she instructed me to cloak my eye lashes with mascara till they were as dark as night. Finally she said to use a light sun-kissed colored blush on my cheekbones and to wear pink lip gloss.

"And you're done," she exclaimed, "and also, you are gorgeous!"

I felt my cheeks heat, "Thanks Jamie."

"You're not done yet! Send me some pictures!"

I smiled, "Okay."

We ended our call with goodbyes, and I began to click away photos of me in my gown. Once I sent them to Jamie, she texted back, 'Please tell me you won't wear that ring necklace?!'

I looked down to my chest and Grandpa's ring was set right on the sweetheart neckline of my dress. I texted back, 'What? It's fine.'

'Nooooooooooooooo! It's a fashion disaster, take it off!'
I rolled my eyes, 'you're being a drama queen-chill.'

'I'm sure Mr. Fancy Pants England will tell ya the same.'

'I don't think he would ever use the saying 'fashion disaster''

'Please! Amy-take it off-wear something nice-like a pendent!'

My eyes instantly fell on the black box and I shook my head, 'NEVER!'

'Fine, but don't say I didn't warn ya-gtg-bye.'

If someone told me a month ago I would be wearing expensive gowns with matching diamond jewelry and taking trips to Europe the next day, I would've told that person to lay off the weed.

But there I was, dressed in a designer gown with my hair forced to the side and my hand wrapped around the only thing that represented the place I came from.

I sighed and I closed my eyes, this was to protect my family, I told myself. The only reason I was here was to show the nations that they were needed, and that America survived because I was growing. Once they saw me and I played along with stroking their egos I could leave and return back to Summerland. Back to my home, back to the place where I can be Amy.

But first, I need to play the part they wanted.

I took off the necklace hastily and placed a kiss on the silver ring, "sorry Gramps."

I set the ring on the desk and my eyes fell on the black box. Before I could talk myself out of it, I replaced the studs from my ears with the diamond pendent earrings and hooked the necklace so its pendent landed in the center of my collar bone.

I found myself in the reflection of the window; guilt quickly formed a lump in my throat. I reached out to Grandpa's ring.

"Amy," Arthur's voice called out from the door, stopping my hand from making contact. "We need to get going."

I spared another guilty glance towards the ring before I forced myself to swallow the lump and grabbed my shawl to wrap it around my shoulders. "Coming," I answered as I slipped on my silver flats and opened the door.

All three nations wore black pressed tuxedos; Arthur wore a black bow tie as Matthew chose to wear a black tie. Francis decided to wear no tie and popped out his white collar from the black blazer suit. Matthew spoke first, "Wow Amy you look beautiful."

I nodded, "Thank you, you guys don't look half bad yourselves," I forced on a smile.

Arthur nodded in approval, "You look acceptable."

"Acceptable." Francis gave him a look, "Arthur how can you down play it so easily? Amy practically radiates beauty; she'll have all eyes on her tonight."
"I guess I should get the bat ready," I said as a joke.

They all gave me worried looks, "Why would you need a bat?" Matthew asked almost scared.

*I forgot, they're not part of my family's inside jokes.* "When Melissa or I were ever dressed up for a special occasion, my dad would always say, 'you're going to need a bat to hold off the boys.' It doesn't really mean we get a bat," I explained.

"Oh," Arthur sighed in a relief, "We should get going."

"How early does this party start?" I asked as I took Matthew's arm to escort me.

"It starts at six," Matthew answered.

"Then why are we showing up two hours early?"

"So you can make your grand entrance when the party is at full swing," Francis proclaimed dramatically.

"Is that really necessary?"

"Yes," Arthur answered, "Also traffic is horrible, we need to have an early start if we want make it before everyone else."

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The car ride was over an hour and half long. I passed the time listening to music as I stared out the window. I watched as the sun set lower in the horizon and the light blue sky turned into darker shade of blue. The personal driver that was sent to us by Austria drove us outside of Vienna to the country side of the city.

It was about five forty when I spotted Austria's house. Did I say house? I meant mansion!

The building was painted white with three floors and large windows scattered all over the surface of the house. Balconies were placed in random locations on the third floor, a large main one was in front and some smaller ones were on its sides. The whole house was lit up and as we got closer I was able to spot the gardens more in detail. There was a large fountain in the front and rose bushes were placed around the house's bottom floor. Patches of flowers spread from the sides of the house to the back. Matthew informed me that was where Austria's maze was held. The entire obstacle was ten feet tall, football field long and made with dozens of different types of bush flowers.

"It's spring, so most of the flowers should be in bloom," Matthew said, "you should get a chance to see them."

I nodded and inhaled another nervous breath, my hand automatic reached for Grandpa's ring but it only found the diamond pendent. A flood of panic swept through me till I quickly remembered I left it behind.

Guilt washed away the panic and I was left with a sinking feeling.

The driver pulled the car around the back of the house, which allowed me to see the actually size of Austria's home. "How big is this place?"

"Well I don't have the exact number but this house could room every nation and still have more rooms left to spare. Bedrooms are mostly on the second and third floors, with their own bathrooms
in each room. The library is on the second and the ballroom is on the first. Of course the kitchen
and pallor rooms all over the first floor but there is one on the second. That's where you will be
hiding till I call you out." Arthur explained.

I gave him a look, "One guy lives in this house," a shook my head, "that's a waste."

"He's had this house for over five hundred years," Arthur proclaimed, "and through the years
nations have stayed here along with the royal family, but again times change and most of us have
to deal with fact that we all end up alone somewhere along the way."

Everyone was silent; Arthur sure knew how to darken the mood.

The driver stopped and Arthur narrowed his eyes at me, "Your phone and music player please," he
held out his hand to me.

I sighed; I was too stressed to fight with him. I handed him my electronics, he slid them into the
inside packet of his blazer suit and smiled, "Now then time to make your debut."

We had entered through the large gourmet kitchen and Arthur, Francis, and Matthew lead me
through the back hallways up a stair case. If I thought the outside was fancy, the inside was just as
elegant. It was filled with paintings on the walls, with sculptures and colorful vases at every
corner.

I followed till they pushed open a door into a pallor room filled with graceful furniture and flower
filled vases.

I took my seat on one of the white couches, "So, what do I do?"

"Francis and I will be right down the stairs, through that door," Arthur pointed to the door across
the room; it was on the opposite wall from the door we entered from. "When the nations have all
gathered, I will make the announcement of your arrival and Matthew will walk you down those
stairs."

"When you reach the bottom, make sure to give a curtsy to Austria, just like we practiced and start
the first dance with Matthew, which is always the Waltz." Francis added.

I nodded, "gotcha."

"Good," Arthur smiled and turned to the door, "let's go Francis."

Before he followed Arthur, Francis placed his hands on my shoulders and kissed my forehead,
"Don't worry, you're be fine," he said in French.

"Oui, merci," I gave a small smile.

Both Francis and Arthur walked out of the room as I heard their voices drift away. I could also
pick up on random voices; mostly these voices were excited greetings and restless chatter. I sighed
again, breathing in more air by the minute through my nose.

"You okay?" Matthew asked as he took his seat next to me.

I shook my head, "I have no idea what to do. I mean I know what to do for like the first five
minutes, but what about the rest? What do I talk about? What do I say to them? What do I do?"
Matthew took my shaking hands and held them in his, "Don't worry Amy, you'll be fine. Just be yourself."

I gave him a look, "Really, be myself?"

"I know it's a lame saying, but it's the best you can do."

I sighed, "But I'm so nervous."

Matthew took a moment, "What do you do when you're nervous to go on stage?"

I lifted a brow at him, and he continued, "Your mom told me you used to perform ballet at the local theater back home."

"That was two years ago," I rolled my eyes.

"What did you do?" he asked again.

"I danced," I answered, "I mean that's what I had to do but," I took a breath, "it calmed me, got rid of all the performance jitters. When I dance it's like I'm at peace."

"Well good thing you'll be dancing," Matthew proclaimed.

"I can't dance the entire time, also I'm going to be dancing with other people-I mean nations. I still have to talk to them; I don't want to say anything stupid."

"You won't," Matthew encouraged.

I gave him a disbelieving glance and pulled my hands away. We're quiet till he said, "You still have a choice." I turned to him, "You can walk out that door," he pointed to the door I entered from. "I'll call up the driver and he will take you back to the hotel. There will be a credit card waiting for you, and you can use that card to get on the next flight back to Summerland. But realize one thing, even if you run out that door, the people behind that door," he pointed to the other door, "will follow you."

"No matter where I run, they'll find me huh?" I said with a sad tone.

"Yes," he nodded.

"Everyone, can I have your attention please," Arthur's voice boomed through the bottom floor, vibrating the floor boards below us.

"It's time," Matthew rose from his seat, "Last call."

I took another breath and rose to stand with Matthew, "Running away won't solve anything."

"It has been seventeen long years that I've hid this secret," Arthur's voice continued and Matthew and I stood at the door with my arm hooked around his.

"For that I am sorry, but now she is ready to meet all of you," Arthur's voice rose and I took in one final breath, "I present the successor to America, Ms. Amy Felicita Hawkfeather."

I quirked a brow, "is it really safe to say that? I mean, there are normal people at the party."

"Most of them are part of the military or the government in some way," Matthew answered.
"What?! Seriously? Even people in the orchestra?"

Matthew nodded and opened the door as both of us stepped out to the top of the stair case. Music from the orchestra played out a soft melody as dozens of eyes looked up and I immediately tighten my hold on Matthew.

He patted my hand, "You'll be fine," he smiled.

I nodded and slowly took one step at a time with him by my side. As I walked, I repeated the same words over and over in my head, *don't trip, don't trip, don't trip, don't trip.*

I took the chance to scan the people; all of the men were dressed in stylish tuxedos with a few wearing bright colorful eastern clothing. Women were dressed in current fashionable gowns all of them long and vibrant. Once I reached the bottom step, the music came to a soft end and I was met with Arthur and Francis on my left. They spared me small smiles. I smiled back and turned my attention to the man in front of me.

He was little taller than Arthur, with dark hair and violet eyes, he wore glasses and had a curl in the parting of his hair. He smiled and bowed to me, "Welcome Ms. America."

Stepped away from Matthew and curtsied to Austria. When I rose back up and I gave him my best actress smile and repeated the sentence Arthur instructed me to say, "It's a pleasure to finally meet all of you." I held out my hand to him.

He took it, gave a light kiss, and called out, "Composer, begin the Waltz."

The composer nodded, tapped his baton on his stance and brought his band to attention. Matthew came to my side when Austria stepped aside. He placed his hand on my lower back as I slid mine on his shoulder and our free hands held on to each other.

"Why does everyone have to stare," I whispered to him.

He shrugged and matched my tone, "You're new; countries love new things."

"I ain't a thing," I hissed.

"Then show them your something more." he smiled. When the music began, we danced and with each step my anxiety eased. My feet became lighter and the faces of the crowd seem to fade as I twirled with Matthew.

But I knew this peace would not last for long.
Chapter 15

The moment the song ends, Matthew was pushed aside by an overly excited Italian.

"Dance with me! Dance with me!" Italy grabbed my hand and waist before I could answer and yanked me into another waltz on the dance floor.

Italy spins me around till the faces of the crowd blurred, but I could tell they were dancing along with us.

"You look so pretty tonight," Italy smiled.

Once I was able to get my footing for the dance, I nodded, "thank you Mr. Italy."

"Ve, that's too formal, call me Feliciano."

"Okay," I stayed quiet after I answered. I focused on my footwork and made sure Feliciano wouldn't try and spin me again.

"Can I call you Amy?" he asked.

"Sure," I answered quickly and continued with the dance in silence.

Feliciano frowned, "Why are you so quiet? Did I do something wrong?"

"No," I gave him a kind smile, "I'm just," I decided to be truthful, "little nervous."

He beamed, "That's easy to fix." He pulled me closer to his body and began to twirl me around the dance floor. He danced at a fast tempo completely forgetting the slow melody of the orchestra.

"Please-" I almost tripped, but I caught myself, "Feli-" he swung me around, bumping me against a girl around my age. She had long dark brown hair tied in red ribbons and wore a matching red dress. Feliciano continued to spin and I had no choice but to follow. I called out to the girl, "I'm sorry."

Feliciano swung me around to collide with another dancer; his hair was blond and spiked to the side. I was able to meet his blue eyes before Feliciano pulled me away, "sorry."

Feliciano continued to dance with a happy carefree expression, I was quickly becoming irritated. "St-" before I could snap a person placed a firm hand on Feliciano's shoulder and forced him to stop.

"Italy, stop, you're causing trouble," the man had broad shoulders, slick back blond hair and blue eyes. The same man I met at the book store; Ludwig also known as Germany. I took my chance to back away from Feliciano.

Ludwig turned to me, "I'm deeply sorry for the trouble he has caused."

"It's fine," I reassured.

Then a hand grabbed me by the shoulder and jerked me back, "Good job West, take care of him, I'll handle the lady."

I was turned around by this person and twirled back on to the center of the dance floor. This partner
followed the slow tempo, allowing me the chance to catch my breath. I looked up, meeting his strange red eyes and sarcastic smirk. "You can thank me now."

"For what?" I lifted my brow at him in confusion.

"For saving you," he shook his head, "not so bright are you, well I'm not surprised, you are Alfred's kid."

I narrowed my eyes at him, "and you are?"

"Oh you silly little girl, I'm the Awesome Prussia!" he seemed to be waiting all night to say that.

"Never heard of you," I said bluntly.

His composer broke slightly but he quickly recovered, "How can you not know? I'm the most Awesome country there is."

"Not ringing a bell," I said in a monotone.

His smirk was falling, "but it was in the east of Germany."

"Keyword: was." I said harshly. Before he could say anything else, I proclaimed, "Wait, I'm starting to remember." His face became superior again, "You were demoted to East Germany," I said in my most Mean Girl tone, "No one knows of East Germany, they know only of Germany."

His face fell, and I continued, "I wonder? How does it feel to be over shadowed by your younger brother? Quite sad I imagine."

The song ends and I stepped away from a shocked Prussia, "It was a pleasure to dance with you, Mr-" I gave a sarcastic curtsy, and acted like I needed to take a moment to think, "East Germany, wasn't it?" I gave my sweetest smile and walked away.

Take that bitch, I smirked to myself.

In the next two hours I danced with various countries; faces blurred together till I was only able to remember a few. Denmark, the man I was thrown into earlier was making jokes the entire time we danced. He was funny and he made me laugh, he actually made my nerves settle as well. China wore a red Chinese styled outfit and complemented me on my dress. Cuba was practically pushed into dancing with me; he was polite but he seemed distant. Japan wore a white eastern style suit with gold buttons down his shirt and matching pants. He was formal and polite and asked for my forgiveness for Italy's recklessness.

"Its fine, he was just excited," I smiled.

"Thank you for understanding," he bowed when the music ended.

"No problem," I continued to smile. When Japan turned away, a waiter with champagne passed by. I quickly grabbed a flute and walked along with the waiter. I dodged through the countries and ducked into a corner. I sneaked a peek at the party; no one seemed to have noticed my disappearance. I sighed in relief and walked further down the hall. I wondered till I found a stair case. Part of me was curious to explore while another part urged me to return to the party. I ignored that urge, swallowed my champagne, placed the flute on a nearby hall table and ran up the steps.
I explored the rooms, took moments to admire the paintings and sculptures, and because the hallways were empty I decided to twirl as I walked. I've been forced to act serious and polite the whole night, I needed to loosen up. With the massive house, and its numerous rooms along with the party going on at the bottom floor, I couldn't help but imagined myself as a super spy. Trying to gather intel on world leaders, for one was trying to take over the world, and I have to find out who it is. I ran down the halls, leaped up the stairs, and used some pallor rooms as short cuts to avoid the wait staff. I pretended that I had a communicator on my wrist, which allowed me to contact HQ. I wrapped myself around walls and corners along with making a gun with my fingers. I even started humming the James Bond theme song.

*I'm such lame-ass dork,* I thought to myself. I sighed and leaned against the wall, the memory of my friends and I running around New York came to mind. *It's more fun to be a dork with friends.* I imagined Sam being HQ, and giving me assignments and telling me if the mission was ghost protocol or not. Heisuke would be the scientist with all the cool gadgets and also be a badass ninja. Ella would be the master of disguise, Dimitri would be the driver, but he can do all those cool *Fast & Furious* tricks and drive planes, ships and even a tank. Daniela would be the incredible hacker that can bring down nations with a tap of computer key. Jamie and Michel would be my partners and together would be the most epic spy team to ever exist.

*God, I miss them.*

"Well Amy," I mumbled to myself, "If you want to see them, you have to play nice with the countries." I sighed; *I should probably get back to the party.*

Francis held in a chuckle when Gilbert finished his story of his encounter with Amy. Antonio Fernandez Carriedo on the hand burst out laughing.

"It isn't funny Toni," Gilbert glared.

"No you're right, it's not funny. It's hilarious," Antonio laughed harder and Francis finally joined in. Gilbert narrowed his eyes, "France, you're the one to blame here."

"Me," Francis gave him a look.

"Ja, you need teach that girl some manners," Gilbert crossed his arms, "teach her some respect for the older nations."

Francis rolled his eyes, "I'll get right on that." He grabbed a flute from a waiter and sipped the champagne.

"France," a voice called for him and he turned to find Arthur. "Have you seen America?"

"No, why?" he asked.

Arthur cursed, "You haven't been watching her?!

"I thought you would."

"I was but- I only took my eyes away from her for one second and she was gone!"

"Did I hear you correctly," Gilbert stepped in between France and Britain, "Little Ms. Sassy Pants
is missing?" A large grin appeared on his face.

"Stay out of this Prussia," Arthur warned.

Prussia's grin never left his face as he walked away, *I know that smile*, Francis thought, *it never leads to anything good*.

And just as Francis feared, Gilbert ordered the music to stop and grabbed a microphone. He first called out for the wait staff and the orchestra to be dismissed into the kitchen, and once all the humans left the room, he continued. "Evening everyone, this is the Awesome Prussia here and I'm here to announce the first annual Hunt for America. America has gone missing and she's somewhere in this house, the first who finds her and brings her back to the ballroom, wins!"

"What's the prize?" Mikkel Densen (Denmark) asked.

Gilbert grinned evilly, "A kiss from Ms. America, but remember you can only get the kiss when you bring her here."

"Germany! Japan! We have to find her!" Italy grabbed Germany and Japan by their hands and pulled them into a random a hallway.

Victoria Marie Lambert (Seychelles) smiled, "That sounds kinda fun."

"Vic," Peter whispered to her, "we need to find her first."

"Why?"

"Cause I haven't found Mr. Russia," Raivis whispered on her other side. "He must have already left."

"Then we have to find her before he does," Peter grabbed Victoria's hand and pulled her up the stairs with Raivis right behind them.

"Hey buddies," Mikkel wrapped his arms around Lukas Bondevik (Norway) and Erik Steilsson (Iceland). "Let's go find America."

"Do we have to?" Erik complained.

"Yes. Hey Swedi, Finni you two joining?" Mikkel called out to Berwald Oxenstierna (Sweden) and Tino Väinämöinen (Finland).

Tino smiled, "This would be fun, ya." Berwald nodded and both of them walked to stand with Mikkel and the other Nordics.

"Oh right! Team Nordics are back!" Mikkel cried out in excitement.

"Do you have to be so loud," Erik sighed.

"But who gets the kiss?" Tino asked.

"We all do! But I'm first, cause she likes me best," Mikkel grinned.

Lukas rolled his eyes and pulled Mikkel by his tie, "Let's go." He walked into another random hall with a choking Mikkel right behind him. The other Nordics followed.

"Lovino!" Antonio ran for the Southern Italian.
"What the hell do you want?" Lovino hissed.

"Be on my team!"

"No!"

"I want to be on your team Boss!" Bella lifted up her green gown so she could run to stand with Antonio.

"Sister, wait," Lars called out for her.

"Okay," Antonio grinned, "Come on Lovi, join us!"

"Join us!" Bella grinned.

Lovino blushed and mumbled, "Okay for you, Bell."

Bella clapped her hands together and turned to her older brother, "Lars! Join us!"

Lars crossed his arms, "Not with Spain."

"Come on, please," Bella batted her eyes and Lars sighed. Bella grinned, "He's in!"

"Then let's go!" Antonio leads them up the stairs.

In minutes, the countries broke up into groups and made their way through out the house; leaving Francis, Matthew, and Arthur alone in the ballroom.

"What the bloody hell just happened!" Arthur exclaimed.

"Were you not paying attention?" Francis said sarcastically. "Prussia just called out a hunt for Amy."

"I know, what I'm shocked about is that everyone joined in."

"Calm down," Matthew soothed, "We'll just find Amy first."

"I doubt it," Francis sighed, "This house is massive; we'll never be first."

"Wait! That's it!" Arthur grinned.

"What's it?" Matthew asked.

"I'll put a spell on the house-

"Oh no," Francis cried out, "Your spells never work!"

"Yes they do," Arthur glared and pulled out his wand from his sleeve. "Now stand back!"

Francis groaned and Matthew stepped back. Arthur chanted in ancient English, summoning the elements to his side. Thunder roared, shaking the building. Lightening flashed as the sky darkens and the lights of the house began to flicker.

"Arthur," Francis warned but Arthur continued to chant, till finally the lights shut off and engulfed the house in darkness. Francis could hear the girly screams of countries as he himself held back a shriek.
The lights came back on just as quickly as they were shut off and the house was once again filled with light. "What did you do?!" Francis exclaimed.

Arthur smirked, "I simply placed an enchantment on the house, to allow Amy to be one step ahead of everyone else." He turned around and walked up the stairs.

"Then how are we supposed to find her?" Francis asked as he followed.

"The spell is immune to us, so we will be able to find her before anyone else can." Arthur explained as he opened the door to the parlor room and stopped in his tracks. The room was now filled with ceiling high shelves with leather bound books filling each shelf and a dark brown work desk in the center. Leather chairs and couches scattered around the room.

"Last I checked this was a parlor room," Matthew proclaimed.

Arthur closed the door and reopened it again to find a dark secret passage way. "What the-" Francis wrapped his hands around Arthur's neck and shook him, "What the fuck did you do?!"

Arthur pushed him off, "I don't know exactly, but the rooms in the house seem to be changing locations."

"I don't remember a dark hallway," said Matthew.

"This house is filled with secret passage ways; they were built so whenever this house was invaded Austria and royal family could escape."

"So the passage ways are changing too," Francis threw up his hands in frustration. "Arthur, stop the spell."

"I can't," Arthur answered. "This spell can only be broken by Amy."

"What do you mean?"

"Magick needs rules, so when I cast the spell, I used Prussia's rules from his game. The only way this house will go back to normal, is when Amy is found by another country, brought back to the ballroom by that same country and then be kissed by her."

"That's when the spell will be broken?" Matthew asked.


"This is why I don't like magick," Francis mumbled to himself.

I opened another door to find the kitchen, on the second floor. "What the hell." I walked in and found the wait staff and the orchestra band passed out on the floor. I ran to their sides and tried to shake them awake, but all of them were out cold. I ran back to the door I entered from and opened it to find a bedroom, not the hallway. I closed the door and for some strange reason I reopened the door; it was bathroom now. "Okay, this is just random." I closed the door, "I must have had too much to drink," I massaged the bridge of my nose. "Yeah, that's it, I'm going with that."
I ran to the back door which leads outside, but instead I found another hallway. I threw up hands, "of course it leads into a hallway, not the backyard, why did I even think it would." I sighed and walked out into the hall, further down this hall I found a small balcony that overlooked the maze. I leaned over the white stone rail, hoping to spot anyone that might know what's going on, but the backyard was empty.

I groaned in frustration. "Well, at least I know I'm on the third floor," I mumbled to myself. "What is happening to this house?"

"Да, I would like to know that as well," a deep voice said.

I jumped and faced a tall, broad chested man with silver hair and dark violet eyes. He wore a simple black tuxedo but instead of a white dress shirt underneath the blazer he wore a white turtle neck sweater.

"I didn't see you there," I tried to laugh off my nervous, but it didn't seem to work under his intense stare. I took a breath, "Hello, I'm Amy Hawkfeather," then I corrected myself. "America," I held out my hand for him to shake.

He took it in his hand and brought my hand close to his lips, "I'm Ivan Braginski."

A cold chill ran up my arm the moment his breath made contact to my skin. I had a split second thought of pulling my hand away, but I ignored it, I didn't want to be rude.

"Russia," he finished and kissed my hand.

"Should've known," I smiled and tugged my hand away. It took couple of tries but I was able to free my hand, that guy had a grip.

"Sorry," he gave a smile, but it didn't reach his eyes. "Your hand was every soft and warm, it felt good."

"Thank you," I said uncertainly.

A moment of an intense silence engulfed the atmosphere, and the chill quickly spreads to my spine down to my toes the longer I stood under his gaze. "I should probably get going," I tried to walk around him but he blocked my path.

"You shouldn't travel alone, the house is acting strange, its best to stay together," he said.

"I'm a big girl, I can handle it by myself," I stepped away, but he hooked his arm around my waist and forced me to face him.

"Да, you are a big girl," he smiled and guided his hand from my face to my neck, "Almost a woman."

Alarm bells began to go off in my head as I slammed my fists on to his chest. He didn't even flinch and pulled my waist closer to his. His hand continued to travel as he pushed away my sleeve to reveal my naked shoulder. "Your skin is as smooth as new snow," his other hand found my lower back. "I will enjoy leaving my marks on you." His cold fingers forced themselves under the cloth my dress, searching for more skin.

I lifted my fist ready to make contact to his face, but before I could throw a punch, someone yelled.

"Let her go!"
Ivan and I both took notice of a slim toned young man standing at the entrance of the balcony. He had chestnut brown hair that barely touched his shoulders and dark aquamarine eyes that seem to change from blue to green in different lighting.

"Lithuania," Ivan smiled, not effected by the other's tone. His hands lose their grip and I took the chance to push myself away from him, fixing my strap.

Lithuania took a hesitant step towards him, "Leave her alone, Russia." He tried to put force into his warning but I could see him trembling.

"Oh, and what would you do if I don't," Ivan steps in front Lithuania and I watched as Lithuania's eyes widen in fear.

"Oh Lithuania, do you wish to be the hero? To rescue the damsel in distress?" In one swift move, Ivan tangled his hand into Lithuania's locks and forced his face up to meet with his. "Or, maybe you're just jealous. Have you missed me that much Toris?"

Then he did something I didn't expect; he kissed the smaller man. Pressing his lips harshly against Lithuania's and using his teeth to force open his mouth. I watched with surprised eyes as Ivan forced himself on Lithuania. I caught Lithuania making eye contact with me for a brief second; his gaze was a mix of fear and humiliation.

Once he was able to gather his courage; he slapped Ivan hard across the face. The balcony was then filled with heavy pants and a building tension.

Ivan turned back to Lithuania with a mean smile, "You will pay for that." He smashed his fist into Lithuania's cheek and gave another to his gut. Lithuania gasped for air and was rammed against the rail. Blood traveled from his lips and dripped off his chin. Before Lithuania could even defend himself, Ivan grabbed him by his shoulder and leaned him over the edge.

I finally burst into action and threw my shoe at Ivan with all my strength. It slammed into his face, the heel making a direct hit to his eye. It wasn't much to knock him off his feet but it was enough for him lose his grip on the smaller nation. I quickly ran to Ivan and shoved him to the floor.

I pulled Lithuania by his arm, "Come on."

He nodded and followed me as we ran back down the hall. Then, as if fate wanted to screw us; the lights shut off, sending the house into complete darkness. What the hell?! This isn't a horror movie!

But for some strange, stupid reason, both Lithuania and I stopped and turned around to find Ivan slowly rising back on to his feet. He violet eyes found us through his silver hair. The pair of eyes glowed with pure cruel delight.

Or maybe it is. I pushed Lithuania forward, shouting, "Run!"
Chapter 16

I gathered my dress in my hands and sprinted down the hall with Lithuania right by my side. We cut around a corner and my foot twisted under me. I yelped as I landed on my side, "shit." I groaned.

"Ms. America," Lithuania called out and kneeled down to help me up. I discarded my last shoe as Lithuania dragged me into a nearby room.

He locked the door and I ignored the pain in my ankle as I pushed a work desk to block the door. "Help me with the bed!" I ran to the queen sized bed and began to push. Lithuania took the other half as we shoved it next to the table. When we couldn't move the bed another inch we collapsed against it, finally allowing ourselves to catch our breath.

"What the hell was that guy's problem?!" I panted.

"Russia," Lithuania panted, "is a complicated country."

"Oh, really?" my voice was laced with harsh sarcasm, "What was your first clue? When he was all up on me? Or when he was all up on you?"

His color changing eyes widen into a hurtful expression and he hastily turned away from me; ashamed. He tried to wipe away the blood on his lips with the back of his hand, but the wound still bleed. The moment I saw that injured look on his face, I mentally kicked myself in the butt.

He went out of his way to try and save me from Ivan, and here I was acting like a bitch.

I sighed and pulled off my shawl, "Lithuania," I said softly and he slowly turned to face me. "Here," I offered him my shawl, "use this to stop the bleeding."

Before he could object, I swiftly covered his mouth with the cloth, "Oh look your blood is already on it, you might as well use it." I turned away from him and sat myself on the floor with my back against the bed. Lithuania adjusted himself the same way and held the shawl to his lips.

A moment of awkward silence passed before I said, "I'm sorry." He glanced to me and I continued, "I'm a little shook up right now and I use sarcasm to cover my fear. But that's no excuse for being harsh, I'm sorry."

He sighed, "No, Ms. America, I'm sorry. I tried to be something I was not, and it only led to more trouble."

I gave him a look, "What the hell are you saying? If you didn't show up when you did, I could've been in some deep shit with that guy."

"Oh, so I was a distraction then," he gave a sad smile and turned away from me.

"No, you weren't," I used two of my fingers to gently turn him back to face me. "You saved me. Thank you."

He smiled, "And you returned the favor, thank you."

I grinned, "We saved each other." I held my fist up to him and he lifted a brow in bewilderment.

"Are you going to hit me?" he asked.
"No," I grabbed his hand, formed it into a fist and touched our knuckles together. He still had a puzzled expression on his face.

"It's called a fist bump or a knuckle touch, pretty much the same thing." I explained.

He still gave me the same confused look and I shook my head, "Never mind. I forget you guys are way older than you look."

He chuckled, "Yes we are quite old."

"If you don't mind me asking, how old are you?"

He took a moment, "I'm over seven hundred years old."

My jaw dropped, this guy could pull off being nineteen. Twenty-one if he tried. He noticed my shocked expression, and gave another smile, "Is it that surprising?"

I shook my head, "No, no, it's just, to live that long is a bit hard to grasp."

"Yes, but time moves fast, after a hundred years or so, you will get used to it."

Something in his voice convinced me that he didn't even believe what he just said. "You don't seem to be used to it."

His eyes widened in surprise and I smirked, "Hey, can I ask another question?" I decided to change the subject quick. "Is it just me or are the rooms in this house changing places?"

Lithuania nodded, "It's not you; it is the house. That's how I got separated from Feliks and Eduard. I walked out of the room and the door closed behind me, and when I opened the door, the room changed and they were gone."

"Do you know why this is happening?"

"No, I don't."

I groaned; then asked. "What about the other nations?"

"They are out wondering the halls."

"Why?" I asked.

"Uh, well, you see, um," he began to stutter.

"What are you not telling me?" I asked; a bit irritated.

"Do you know of Prussia?" he asked me.

I made a face, "Yeah."

"Well, he called out for a game."

"What kind of game?"

"A game to find you and bring you back to the ballroom, and . . ."

"And what?"
"When a country brings you back, you are supposed to kiss them as their prize."

"Wait a minute," I took a moment to think, "Is that why Russia was out there. Is that why you are here? To get a kiss?" My anger was rising, and I poked my finger into his chest with every word I said. "Sorry to disappoint you, but you ain't getting shit from me!"

He held his hands up in surrender, "No, Ms. America, I didn't come looking for a kiss, I only came out here looking cause Raivis asked me to keep an eye on you."

I raised my brow at him, "why?"

"Russia has had his eye on you the moment he found out about you at the meeting during your spring break. Raivis asked Feliks, Eduard, and I to watch out for you."

"Why didn't Raivis tell me this?"

"You met Raivis before the party?"

I caught myself, "No I danced with him earlier this evening."

"Really?" he furrowed his brow in confusion, "I didn't see that."

"Well, it happened, we danced, we had fun. Now can we get back to the topic of Russia coming after me?! Did Raivis hear Ivan say that he wanted me?"

"Raivis said that Mr. Britain and Mr. France told him of Russia's interest." I must have given a wide-eyed expression, because Lithuania quickly added, "they didn't tell you?"

My body trembled as I rose to my feet and dung my nails into the skin of my palms. "After everything I've done," I mumbled in an eerie whisper, "They're still keeping secrets from me."

"Ms. America," Lithuania called out for me, but I ignored him and continued my rant.

"Didn't they think I had a right to know?! I mean, if did I would have been prepared to deal with this! But no! They decided not tell me and look what happened! We were sexually assaulted! You were almost thrown over broad! And now, we have a crazy psychopath after us! When I get my hands on them... "

I mentally counted to twenty and inhaled through my nose as I massaged the bridge of it. Once my temper was in check, I said, "I'm sorry; I'm under a lot of stress right now, and it's not helping that Russia wants to get into my pants and that the house has developed a fucking mind of its own." I leaned myself on the wall; why is this happening to me?

Lithuania's face softens, "There is no need to apologize Ms. America; anyone would be stressed under these circumstances."

I gave a small smile and before we could say anything else, the door shook as if someone was trying to force their way in. Lithuania jumped to his feet and slid to my side.

"Could Russia get through that?" I asked, pointing to the barricaded door.

He was shaking like a leaf and stared at the door with a mix of fear and alertness.

"I'll take that as a yes. "Hurry! Through the bathroom!" I pushed him towards the door on our left.

"The bathroom won't lead anywhere," he proclaimed.
"Have you forgotten what's happening to the house?" I gave him a look. "It might lead us to another room or something." I opened the door and found a pitch black hallway. "What the-

"So it is true," said Lithuania.

"What's true?" I turned to him.

"That Mr. Austria's house is filled secret passage ways."

"Shocking," I rolled my eyes.

The room door shook harder and I tensed. "Beggars can't be choosers. Let's go!" I pushed Lithuania inside and slammed the door behind us.

"Why is this bloody door locked," Arthur hissed as shook the knob.

"Let me see," Matthew proclaimed as he crouched down and pulled out a small lock pick from his blazer pocket. He quickly picks the lock and tried to push it open. "I think something's blocking it."

"All together then," Arthur exclaimed as he placed his shoulder against the door.

Francis and Matthew took their places at Arthur's sides and forced the door open. Pushing apart the furniture that was left in front, "why would someone barricade the door?" Arthur said as he placed his hands on the knees to take a breath.

Francis walked around the bed and picked up a light violet shawl, "Oh no."

Both Arthur and Matthew stared in terror at Amy's blood stained shawl.

The second I closed the door, Lithuania and I were plunged into a new degree of darkness. The kind that you can't even see your own hand if it was five inches in front your face.

"Lit!" I called out, "You're still next to me right?"

"I believe so," he answered.

"Stay where you are, I'll find you." I held my hands out and began to walk through the darkness. Before long I crashed against a warm back; my forehead slamming into a shoulder and my hands circling around a waist to regain my balance.

Lithuania screamed and I soothed, "Lit! Lit, it's me calm down."

"Oh," he breathed a sigh of relief, "Ms. America you scared me."

"Really? I couldn't tell with the girly scream," I remarked sarcastically.

I removed my hands from his torso and searched for his hand. I patted up to his shoulder and found an arm.

"Ms. America, what are you doing?" he asked in a soft whisper.
"Trying to find your hand," I stated as I slid my fingers over his forearm and clapped on to his wrist. "Do you have a cell phone on you?" I asked.

"No, I don't usually carry it around with me."

I sighed, "Okay then, let's just feel our way out of here."

"I'm sure this hall only leads one way."

"Let's hope." I mumbled and laced my fingers around his palm.

Lithuania was hesitant at first but wrapped his fingers around mine in the end. We walked through the darkness and remained quiet, allowing the eerie silence to fill the atmosphere. The pitch blackness felt like it was surrounding me, draining me of air and it didn't help that there was a chill along with it. Goose bumps spread from my arms to my toes and I began to inhale deep intakes of cold air. My nightmare was replaying in my head and I had frightening thoughts that Alfred would grab me from behind. *Or from above,* I glanced to the ceiling and I was met with darkness. *Or from below,* I turned to my feet and to my sides, again found nothing but blackness. The unknown was the reason why human kind were afraid of the dark for centuries.

I breathed in once more and tried to soothe myself. *Pull it together Amy. Lit is right next to you, you're not alone.*

"Ms. America?"

"Yes," I jumped.

"Are you okay?" Lithuania asked, worried.

"Yeah, I'm good," I tried to cover my fear with a laugh.

His doubt in my reply was obvious as he held my hand tighter. "Don't worry Ms. America you're safe."

I knew he was trying to make me feel better, and I should have just stayed quiet, but my tongue had a different idea. "Yeah, I'll be totes safe in your big strong arms." I muttered sarcastically as I pulled my hand away, and began to strut down the hall. "I can take care of myself." I collided against an object and something fell to the floor with a crash. My hands instantly placed themselves on the object in front of me, the corners dug into my waist and my toe had jammed into a wooden leg. "Shit." I said through gritted teeth as I hopped on one foot. "What the hell was that?!"

"I think it's a table," Lithuania came from behind, his hand finding my back. He slid his hand up and over my shoulder, following my arm so he could place his hands on the table. "Feel this," he pulled my wrist to a circle of smooth wood.

"So the table is made of wood, what do you want? A cookie?"

Lithuania ignored my comment, "Feel around it." He guided my hand outside the circle to feel the dust building around the rim. "You know what this means," Lithuania proclaimed.

"That Austria needs a better cleaning service." I continued to be a smart-ass.

"No, that there was a candlestick here." He continued to feel around and jerked out a small drawer. "I think I found matches," as he said that he lit one match and I was finally able to see his face.
With the light from the match I was able to spot the scattered candles on the floor. I bent down to
grab a white candle and held it up for Lithuania to light it. He blew out the match and reached for
the golden candlestick.

I stood over him to offer the light from the candle as he placed the four remaining candles on the
stick. I lit each one and placed the fifth candle in the middle. Lithuania lifted the candlestick to
reveal a stone brick hall filled with spider webs. They crisscrossed in thick webbing, nearly
covering the entire ceiling.

I yelped and wrapped my arms around myself.

"Ms. America, are you okay?" Lithuania asked, concern displaying on his face.

I decided to stop playing through and admit, "I'm terrified of spiders; they just creep me out, you
know."

His eyes widened in surprise, "Oh," then he smiled, "they won't bother you." He offered me his
free hand, "Come on."

I swallowed my pride and laced my fingers around his. His smile grew wider as he guided me
down the hall.

"I bet Alfred wasn't afraid of anything," I mumbled.

Lithuania picked up on that and chuckled, "No he was afraid of some things."

I raised a brow in interest, "of what?"

"Ghosts, demons, spirits, anything to do with the supernatural really," he answered.

"But we're spirits, right? I mean we're something like that, so he was afraid of himself?"

Lithuania thought for a moment, "He could've been. You see, Ms. America, Alfred was a very
strong fellow. He was able to pull a car for miles with one hand, without breaking a sweat. He
would break stone walls with one punch and was the only one that could hold Mr. China when he
goes on a rampage."

My mind pictured China's gentle face, long black hair and sweet amber eyes. "China doesn't seem
the type to go on a rampage."

"If you can get him angry enough, he can."

I nodded, "So Alfred was Superman?"

Lithuania laughed, "He would usually call himself that, he loved his superheroes."

"Hey Lit, can I ask a personal question?"

"I don't see why not."

"Were you and Alfred lovers?"

His body tensed and his eyes widened in shock as he stared at me. "What? No! Why would you ask
that?"

"Well, you seem to know a lot about him and it seemed like you had a close relationship with him,
so I just thought -"

Lithuania shook his head, "It wasn't like that." He sighed, "Do you know of the Soviet Union?"

"It was when Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states were united under Russia's rule."

"Yes," he nodded slowly, "Russia forced us to live with him, and used the Baltic states as his own personal entertainment." His body began to tremble; the candlestick was shaking in his hand as he avoided eye contact with me. "He was cruel and heartless. He enjoyed causing pain to others. Being physical or mental." his voice became nothing but a whisper as his body shuddered.

I pulled my hand away from his and slid my arm around his back. He tensed the moment he felt my warmth and didn't move as I placed my head on his shoulder. My other hand wrapped around his on the candlestick, to settle his trembling hand.

"Did he save you? Alfred I mean," I asked.

Lithuania nodded, "Yes, he took me into his home, gave me a warm place to sleep, food to eat and allowed me to work for him to save money for my country. He was good, kindhearted man. We became good friends after that, almost like brothers."

I smiled, "Does that make you my uncle?" I asked, trying to lighten the mood.

He gave a soft laugh, "I guess so."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I stepped away from him and gave a faked pained expression, "You don't want me to be your niece? I'm adorable."

"I wouldn't use that term exactly," he grinned.

I gasped dramatically, "Your lost pal."

We both burst into laughter and the sound of it bounced off the walls. After we released the well needed laugh, I held out my hand, "Call me Amy, because no offense I'm getting really tired of people calling me 'Ms. America' sounds like I won a beauty pageant."

He smiled and shook it, "I'm Toris Laurinaitis."

"Nice to meet you Toris," I let go of his hand, "Now, let's get the hell-"

The floor broads were swept away and the next thing I knew, I was falling. Darkness engulfed me as I dropped through the floor and the warm light of the candlestick faded. Hearing nothing but my own screams mixed with Toris's terrified cry of my name.

Pain shot through my left shoulder as I landed on tiled floor. I groaned and craned my neck up to watch the large square shaped hole in the ceiling close; leaving behind no evidence of it ever being there in the first place.

"Seriously, a trap door," I muttered.

I sighed and the thought of Toris being left behind came to mind, *he'll be fine, he's got candles.* I soothed myself with the thought.
I rose to my feet, brushed off the dust from my dress and tapped my toes around the area, checking for anymore trap doors. I shook my head, "this is insane," I cursed.

I scanned the area and found myself in another hallway. By the windows and the number of rooms I guessed I was on the second floor. As I turned the corner I rammed into another person; our foreheads smashing into each other and groaning together in pain as we came apart.

"Ow," I whispered and turned to face Japan. "Hey, sorry about that; still trying to find my way through the dark."

"It's okay America-san," Japan nodded to me, rubbing his forehead.

"It's Amy!" Feliciano cried out happily and ran into me for a hug.

"Hey, Feliciano, it's good to see you," I said in monotone and patted his back.

Before I could react Feliciano placed his lips on mine. I instantly tensed and did nothing as he pulled away and grinned, "I win!"

I slapped him hard across his face, "You didn't win shit!"

Feliciano cried and ran to Germany's side, "Germany! She slapped me!"

"You deserved it, you shouldn't force yourself upon others," Ludwig lectured.

"But I won," he whined.

"I believe the rules were that we have to guide her back to the ballroom; then America-san gives the kiss," Japan explained.

"No one's getting anything!" I exclaimed and turned around. "I'm outta here!"

"Wait!" Ludwig called out, "You shouldn't run off on your own; the house is acting strange-"

"Yeah, I figured that out when I fell through the ceiling," I remarked harshly.

"Like a trap door?" Japan asked.

"Yup, so I suggest you look before you step," I proclaimed.

Feliciano took a moment to think; and it took all my will power not to say, 'don't hurt yourself, Italy.' "I don't think Mr. Austria's house had trap doors the last time I was here."

"And when was that?" I asked sarcastically.

"A couple of centuries ago," he smiled.

"You don't think it might have-oh I don't know-*changed,* I hissed at him.

"Enough bickering," a new voice joined in and I turned to find an average height man next to Japan. He had jaw length blond hair, green eyes, and carried himself with a sense authority.

"You three said you would help me find Liechtenstein," he continued, "Not stand around and argue with one another."

"We know Switzerland," Ludwig added, "but we can't just keep wondering around till we find her.
"We need a plan."

"Wondering around is our plan," I proclaimed, "The house has gone bonkers. The rooms are changing with every shut of a door, separating nations from one another, and if what Italy says is true about Austria's house not having any trap doors in the first place. The house is making up new tricks as it goes; its learning people!"

"I agree with America-san," Japan said but was quickly interrupted by Switzerland.

"You always agreed with America, even when Alfred was America! You barely know this child," he pointed at me.

My anger was rising but I inhaled a calming breath, "You might not know me, but I'm willing to help you guys find Liechtenstein."

"We don't need your help! You're the reason this all started in the first place!" he exclaimed. "If you just stayed in the ballroom, we wouldn't have to come searching for you."

"I was going to come back! If you need to blame it on someone blame it on Prussia for starting this whole thing."

"Typical," he shook his head, "You are just like your father, refusing to take blame for anything he did."

That hit a nerve. Before I could say anything to defend myself, a moaning grind resounded through the house.

"What was that?" Ludwig questioned as his body tensed, ready for a fight.

A wall grew out of the corner I came from out and connected into the wall across from it. Then two more walls from the ceiling grew out and slammed into the floor, leaving us trapped inside.

"What the-"

"I told you," I exclaimed at Ludwig, "The house is learning!"

Then the walls on our sides began to slide inwards.

"What's happening?!!" Feliciano cried.

"The walls are closing in!" Switzerland answered.

"Fellow me quickly," Ludwig ordered as he ran down the hall.

We followed till Ludwig stopped at the blocked wall. He began to slam himself into the new wall as Switzerland and Japan placed their hands on a sliding wall and tried to push it back. Feliciano was crying and I tried to push back the other wall.

"Germany, what can we do?!!" Japan called out.

"Give," he slammed into the wall, "me" he body slammed once more, "a" again, "minute!"

The walls were closing in rapidly and I screamed, "We barely have a second!"

He stopped and turned to me, "That's it! Ms. America punch the wall!" he ordered me.
"What?!" I exclaimed.

"Just do it!" Ludwig yelled and took my place at pushing against the moving wall.

I groaned, "This is insane!"

The walls were closing in almost forcing Ludwig and Japan to touch backs, Feliciano cried harder and Switzerland was cursing in various languages.

I didn't think, I just focused all of my fear and frustration into my fist and smashed it against the wall, leaving a crack in the brick. My jaw dropped, "it worked."

"Don't just stand there!" Switzerland shouted, "Get us out of here!"

I threw my fists, ignoring the pain as I beat down the wall. After a couple of punches, I was able smash open a hole, large enough for me to jump through. Ludwig flipped Feliciano over his back and chased after me. Then Switzerland and Japan leaped through after them, barely escaping the walls from crushing them.

I slumped to the ground, "I can't believe that worked," I panted.

Ludwig sat down a whimpering Feliciano and leaned himself on the wall. Japan placed his hands on his knees as he gasped and Switzerland wiped his forehead.

"Thank you America-san," Japan nodded to me.

"No problem," I gave weak smile and a thumbs up.

Feliciano screamed and I spun to find Ludwig and Feliciano being dragged in through the wall. It was like the material had become quicksand and the harder they struggled, the quicker they sank. Japan ran to their sides and tried to yank them out, but he ended up being pulled in instead. It took only a minute for them to disappear, kicking and screaming into the next room.

"Guys!" I shouted and ran to the wall, it was solid again. "What the fuck is happening!" I slammed my fists into the wall and the house groaned.

"I think you made it mad," Switzerland stated.

Then a tile fell, leaving a black square shaped hole in the floor. Another tile fell beside it, and then another, and another; till rolls of tile were falling through the floor.

Switzerland grabbed my arm, "Run!"

He pulled me into a sprint as I bundled my dress above my knees. *How do girls run in these!*

Tile was dropping in rapid speed as we ran down the hall and edged around corners. Still the falling tile chased us and only fell faster as we pushed ourselves to our limit.

Then two pairs of hands reached out and yanked us into a room.
Chapter 17

The moment Switzerland and I were pulled in; we immediately went on the offense. I flipped my attacker over my shoulder and held them down with their arm in a painful lock with my foot on their chest. Switzerland backhanded his attacker, twisted their arm around their back and rammed him against the wall.

"Is this any way to treat a person for saving you?!!" a familiar voice cried out.

I looked down, "Peter?!!" I let go and stepped away from him, "I'm so sorry; it was a reflex."

"Reflex my ass," he groaned.

"Brother," a voice called out from across the room, "Please let Raivis go."

Switzerland snapped out of his warrior instincts and found Raivis before him; whimpering. Switzerland stepped away from him and said bluntly, "Sorry Baltic." He turned away and walked towards a girl who shared the same hair and eye color as him. "Erika," he placed his hands on her shoulders, "Are you okay, no one hurt you did they?"

"No," she answered, "Raivis and everyone found me after we separated; they have been watching out for me."

I took a moment to notice her features, which were soft almost childlike. She was an inch shorter than me and just as slim. She wore a pink strapless dress and carried herself with an elegance of a princess. She also wore a matching ribbon in her blond hair.

The girl behind her was also around our age and had deep tan skin with dark hair and eyes. She was the girl I bumped into earlier that evening.

The girls took their notice of me, and Erika curtsied to me. "Hello Ms. America."

"Erika," the tanned girl shook her head, "You don't need to be so formal." She came to my side and shook my hand, "I'm Victoria Marie Lambert and I'm the nation of Seychelles."

I smiled, "Cool, I'm Amy, but I guess you already knew that."

She grinned, "Call me Victoria." Then she pulled Erika to her side, "And this is Erika Zwingli, the nation of Liechtenstein."

"Nice to meet you Erika," I shook her hand.

"The same to you, Ms. America."

"Please call me Amy."

Switzerland cleared his throat loudly, "Ms. America, didn't Britain teach you the proper way of addressing nations? Calling us by our human names is intimate affair and too formal-"

"Vash," Erika turned to him, "It's fine."
"Yeah," Peter remarked, "Lighten up, old chap."

"I'm not your 'chap'," Vash hissed.

"This is not the time to fight," Raivis whispered, "We need to figure out how to get out of this house."

Vash glared at him, "For once I agree with you."

"Maybe if we figure out the reason why this is happening, we might be able to stop it," I proclaimed.

Victoria lifted a brow at me, "How are we supposed to figure that out?"

"Recap," I announced, "When did this all start?"

"After Prussia called out for the game to hunt you down," Peter proclaimed.

"Could Prussia be behind all this?" I asked.

Vash shook his head, "He's not that smart to pull all this off."

"Wait, I think all this started when the lights went out the first time," Victoria recalled, "Remember, right after we left the ballroom, the lights went out and thunder roared outside and then the lights came back on."

"But after ten minutes or so, the lights went back off and have been off since," Raivis added.

"I don't think the lights are the reason why the house has come alive," I proclaimed.

"Alive?" Peter questioned, "What do you mean by that?"

Vash and I quickly described our ordeal of the house. First my experience with the trap door that sent me to the second floor. Then I ran into him and the Axis (his words not mine) and described how we were trapped in new walls that grew out of the ceiling.

"The walls even tried to crush us," I added.

Vash continued to explain how we got out and how Ludwig, Feliciano and Japan were pulled in through a wall like quicksand. Finally we told them of the falling tile that chased us through the second floor and we're saved when Peter and Raivis pulled us into the room.

"Thanks guys, we owe you one," I nodded to Peter and Raivis.

Vash rolled his eyes and continued, "Also let's not forget that the rooms are changing places."

"And the humans that are knocked out cold in the kitchen," I added.

"This all sounds oddly familiar," Peter said as he scratched his head for the memory.

"Try and remember Seeley," Victoria encouraged.

Peter blushed embarrassingly, "Don't call me that." He turned away from her and she knitted her brows in confusion at him.

I raised my brows, what's up with them? I bit back my curiosity and focused on the problem at
hand. "Well, Pete?"

It came to him, "Right! When I was younger, I wanted to pull a prank on Britain and I asked help from his older brothers, for they hate him just as much as I do."

"Arthur's got older brothers?" I asked.

"You didn't know?" Vash questioned.

Peter came to my rescue, "I'm not surprised, Britain avoids his brothers and sister like the plague. Anyway I asked Wales to place a spell on Britain's house to come alive." He smirked, "He was lost in there for weeks."

"Wait! A spell?! Like a magic trick?!" I exclaimed.

"A magic trick is used by magicians that put on illusions. I'm talking about magick, the real deal."

"What's the difference? They sound alike."

"It's the spelling; real magick is spelled with a 'k' at the end."

Vash snapped, "There's no such thing."

"No offense," Victoria added, "But the way the house is acting, is a pretty good example."

"So," I turned to Peter, "you can you use magick?"

"No," Peter shrugged, "Never had the gift for it. But this spell had to be done by one of the members of the United Kingdom or Ireland."

"Can they stop the spell?" Erika asked.

"Erika, magick doesn't exist," Vash lectured.

"Then what's your explanation?" I asked.

"Special effects, remodeling of Austria's house," he named a few.

I sighed, "Whatever this is, we need to find the person behind it."

"I place my bet on Britain," Peter mumbled loud enough for us to hear.

"If so, I'll give him a good punch that will knock some his teeth in," I cracked my knuckles.

Victoria giggled, "That might actually fix his teeth."

Peter and I grinned along with Victoria.

Raivis shook his head, "Why do you all dislike Mr. Britain so much?"

"He's a wanker," Peter remarked and Victoria agreed.

"He continues to keep secrets from me, and I'm tired of it." I added. "He didn't even tell me about Russia."

Raivis and Peter's eyes widened in concern, "Did he find you?" asked Raivis.
I gave him carefree smile, "Don't worry, Toris came and saved me before Ivan could do anything."

Raivis sighed in relief; then asked, "Where's Toris?"

"I left him in a dark secret passage way," they all gave me questionable glances, "long story. Let's just find Arthur or one of his siblings and get them to end this nightmare."

Vash sighed, "Again, magick does not exist. If all of you want to go searching for Britain so be it."

He takes Erika by the hand, "I'm going to find the exit."

Erika placed a hand on his arm, "Brother, please, can we go with them?"

"No."

"But-

I cleared my throat, "Switzerland, I don't want to question your wisdom, but the house will continue to change and cause trouble for you and your sister if you wonder alone. We need to stick together. The best chance we got is to find one of the members of the UK, so they can stop," I chose my words carefully. "Whatever this is, being a prank, special effects, or magick. If it's not them, then we need to gather the other nations. The process of elimination could lead us to the culprit."

Vash gave me a long analyzing gaze, "Well that isn't much of a plan, but at least you come up with realistic ideas. Not like your father, he would rabble on about making a hero to solve our problems."

I inhaled a calming breath; clearly Alfred was joke to him. I refused to be a daughter of a pun. "I'm nothing like Alfred," I vowed.

Everyone was silent till Vash nodded, "Very well, let's find the other nations." He walked to the door and opened it to a hallway with perfectly intake floors. He taps his foot on the tile and declared, "It's safe."

Erika and Victoria followed behind him, while Raivis, Peter and I took the rear. The hall was filled with windows and I quickly noticed that some of the windows were doors that led to small balconies. *We're back on the third floor, I shook my head; this is extremely irritating.*

Then I caught Victoria and Erika talking, giggling and passing inside jokes with one another. My heart squeezed; they reminded me of how my friends and I were. I could have been with them right now. Shopping for our prom dresses. Helping Celine decorate the backyard of Melissa's beach house for the wedding and deciding which songs should be added to the playlist.

I've already received word that Grandma Jessie and Grandpa Makani have arrived from Hawaii and were staying with Melissa. Most likely Grandpa Makani would be taking Blair and Blake out surfing and teaching them the hula, like he did with me when I was their age. Grandma Jessie and Grandma Aponi would catch up with each other over tea and share stories with one another. I also heard that Uncle Alex and Aunt Emily were staying with Grandma Aponi. Their daughters: Sofia, Mia, and Josefin have joined the party along with their husbands and children were at my house. The whole family must be together right now, along with close family friends and neighbors, and where was I, some might wonder.

In Austria, visiting the personifications of nations, and being trapped inside a living house.

_Yup, this totally beats spending time with family and friends. Note the sarcasm.__
The girls continued to giggle and whisper to each other and I took notice of Peter and Raivis stealing glances at them. Well more accurately, Raivis would stare longingly at Erika while Peter would glance at Victoria, hastily turned to face the floor and repeat the same actions every two seconds. I raised my brows at the boys, *what is going on here?* I will admit, I was curious about what was going on with these four but I decided it wasn't the best time to ask.

Then a strange awareness of being watched came over me, as if someone or something was following us. I quickly dismissed the thought, *oh Amy, you've been watching too many horror movies.* But still the sense refused to stop nagging me till I turned around.

When I did, I found a wolf.

Its golden eyes stared into mine, and its solid white fur shined in the moonlight. The wolf was massive; it was the size of a small horse and had long legs, almost like a dire wolf from the *Games of Thrones* series.

The wolf only stared at me and slowly stepped toward me. I tensed, "Switzerland," I asked in a calming tone. "Are there wolves in Europe?"

"We are trying to repopulate the wolf packs in the wild, but I highly doubt there would be any near the cities," he answered.

"Cool," I nodded, never breaking my eye contact with the wolf as I walked back. I'm amazed that Raivis and Peter didn't notice the wolf. *They must still be drooling over the girls.*

The group kept walking and I followed backwards. "How big do your wolves get by the way?"

The wolf followed, keeping its eyes right on me. Switzerland sighed as he thought, "A bit larger than a German Shepard, like most wolves."

"Does Austria keep wolves as pets?" I asked.

"No. Why are you-" he must have turned around because he stopped in mid-sentence. The girls followed suite with gasps and Peter and Raivis both tensed like deers caught in the head lights.

"Oh good, you all can see the wolf. I almost thought I was going crazy," I gave a nervous laugh.

When all eyes were set on the wolf, it bared its teeth and growled. It broke into a run towards us and Raivis pulled me aside as bullets flew through the air. The bullets hit the legs of the wolf and it yelped. It shook off the injuries and leaped at Vash. Erika and Victoria jumped to the walls and Vash tucked and rolled, dodging the wolf. It landed several inches away from him and turned back around to attack once more. Vash shot two more bullets at the wolf's mouth. The wolf dropped to the floor and Vash lowered his pistol.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief but the wolf's eyes shot open and rose back to its paws, shaking its head like it woke up from a nap.

"Girls in front, go!" Vash shouted.

Victoria yanked Erika into a sprint and I followed behind them. Peter and Raivis ran behind me and Vash took the rear as the wolf gave chase. Vash continued to shoot his gun at the wolf, but it only made it angry and picked up speed. We cut around a corner and Vash slid to a stop to shoot two more bullets.
"If the gun isn't working, stop shooting it!" I screamed at him.

It happened so quickly; he took a second to glance at me and the wolf tackled him to the ground. The wolf growled and threw its teeth inches away from his face, trying to bite Vash. He held it back by the fur of its neck and tried to aim his gun at the wolf's face.

My instincts kicked in and I grabbed a vase from a hall table. I threw it at the wolf's face and the vase smashed to pieces as it collided into the animal's skull.

It shook its head and I ran back around the corner to stand behind it. "Over here you overgrown bitch!"

It snapped its head around and growled at me. I lifted up my skirt and ran down the hall. I could hear its large paws slapping against the tile as it chased after me. This was not my best plan, but it was all I got. I ran down the halls and leaped down the stairs; the wolf kept its pace and picked up speed whenever I slid around the corners. I stopped at a large sculpture and gave a silent apology to Austria for what I was about to do. I pushed the sculpture to the ground and it smashed into large pieces as it blocked the wolf's path. This only lasted for two seconds, which was enough to run into a nearby room and lock myself in. The wolf howled and I leaned against the door till I slid myself to sit on the floor.

I panted, "Can the house create wolves now?" I tried to laugh but I ended up groaning in frustration and fear. "If this is magick, I fucking hate it."

After I took a five minute break, I rose back to my feet, opened the door just a crack and peeked through. The hall was empty when I stepped outside, or so I thought.

A hand grasped my arm harshly and threw me to the wall. My head slammed against the wall, resounding a sickening crack in my ears. I cursed and my vision blurred, it took a second to recognize the silver hair and violet eyes looming over me.

"You almost got away from me, маленький котенок," he whispered in my ear as his hands traveled to waist and ass.

Fear grew from the pit of my stomach and spread throughout my body. I reacted on pure instinct as I smashed my fist into his cheek. He groaned and I took my chance to run. His foot stomped over my dress and I fell to the floor with a rip of my gown. Pain shot through my side and I hissed out a curse. He fell to his knees and pulled me between his legs, he forced me to my back by pressing his hand on to my waist and squeezing my hip roughly.

I yelled, "Let me go!" I threw my fists but he easily caught them and pinned them over my head.

He smiled, "you have gotten your marks in, now it's my turn." He lowered himself to my neck and bit; hard.

I cried out and kicked up my feet and legs. He smirked against my skin and used his free hand to push my hips to the floor. He found the rip from the back of my gown and tore it across to the front, revealing my calves and thighs.

"Stop!" I cried.

But when I opened my mouth he took the chance to force his lips on my own. His teeth clashed against mine as his tongue explored my mouth. His hand slipped under my knee and roamed up my thigh. My eyes widened as his hand reached my ass and his fingers snaked into my inner thigh. If he thought it was going to be this easy, he thought wrong. I opened my mouth along with Ivan's
and bit down on his bottom lip. I tasted blood when he shoved me back.

"You little-" he stopped and stared ahead with a rage filled expression. I craned my neck up to find the large white wolf growling and bearing its teeth at Ivan. I don't know if a wolf could have looked as angry as this one did. Its lips were curved up in fury and its eyes shined with blood lust. The wolf leaped and collided into Ivan, tackling him off me. The wolf barked and growled as Ivan tried to hold it off with both hands.

I was stunned for a few moments till every nerve in my body screamed, run!

I rose unsteadily to my feet and felt a large throbbing ache in the back of my skull. I placed a hand on my head and hissed out a curse when that hand came back with blood on the palm. I fell to my knees and cursed even louder as I once again, rose back to my feet.

A buzzing noise clouded the growls and grunts of the fight between man and beast. My sight was losing vision and my legs wobbled as I jogged slowly down the hall. When I turned the corner I knocked into a broad chest. Arms wrapped around my back as a large hand supported my head and neck. The last thing I saw before I blacked out was a pair of green eyes.

When I awoke, I was covered in bed sheets and had strange source of heat radiating behind me. I blinked away the sleep in my eyes and found an arm draped over my waist. The arm was slim and muscular with fair skin; it was definitely a man's arm. I immediately tensed under its touch and inhaled slowly through my nose. The memory of Ivan finding me and slamming my head against the wall came back to me. I touched the back of my head and felt bandages wrapped around my forehead. Then the memory of Ivan being on top of me made the hair on the back of my neck stand on end and my body stiff. My brain questioned if the arm belonged to Ivan, but just as quickly as the thought came to mind, it was dismissed by the memory of the wolf attacking him.

Right, I thought. Then I tried running but ended up stumbling down the hall and running into another person. When the thought came to mind, I turned around. It was difficult at first, for this person was attached to my back. I could even feel his breath on the back of neck and ear, god this was awkward. Once I faced him, I was surprised to find someone so young. But why should I be surprise, I thought, all the countries for some reason were young and attractive.

This country had dark jaw length curly hair and a fair complexion. His features were soft and long with dark eyelashes and thick brows. Not like Arthur's super massive brows, I'm talking about average thick eyebrows.

In his sleep, he tugged me closer and nuzzled our faces together. He mumbled in his sleep a language I didn't understand, "Πηγαίνετε ξανά στον ύπνο, αγάπη." Then he kissed me. It was soft, sweet, and asked for nothing else but a gentle caress, but my mind and body instantly returned to the kiss Ivan had given me. His was rough, demanding, and harsh. Fear once again swirled in the pits of my stomach and I shoved the young man off the bed.

"Who the hell are you?!!" I demanded.

He groaned and rubbed his head, but answered sleepily. "I'm Heracles Karpusi." Then he asked, "Why did you push me?"

My cheeks heated with a blush, "You were all over me!"

"Ugh, Greece what the hell did you do?!!" a voice called out.
I turned to the corner to find a large man, about the size of Ivan. He was wide and muscular, with tan skin and short black hair. He wore a white mask that covered his eyes and wore a simple tuxedo, just as Heracles.

"I don't have to answer to you Turkey," Heracles hissed.

The broad chested man rose from the armchair he was sitting in and took two long strides toward Heracles. He gripped his hand into the smaller male's dress shirt and pulled him to his feet. "You do, when your actions cause me to lose sleep."

Heracles glared, "Then go back sleep, this has nothing to do with you."

I seriously did not have the patience to deal with this. I threw pillow at them to get their attention. "You can settle this stupid fight later!" Then I picked up the lamp from the nightstand. "Now, tell me where I am or I'll smash this over your heads!"

"There's no need for violence Ms. America," a new voice spoke from another armchair.

The two men stopped fighting and separated for a young man to step forward. He had light brown skin and well groomed dark hair with short bangs. He had light brown eyes and wore a nice black tuxedo with a matching vest underneath the blazer. His white dress shirt was thin and his tie was loose. It took me a moment to place his face in the stack of photos that Arthur had shown me.

"You're Egypt," I remarked as I sat the lamp beside me.

He smiled, "Yes I am." He held out his hand and I shook it. "A pleasure," he said.

"Wait," the tall man exclaimed, "You know him, but not us."

"There are a lot of you, how can anyone keep track?"

He rolled his eyes and took my hand to his lips, "I'm Sadik Adnan, Turkey."

I pulled my hand away, "I'm really getting tired of that."

He crossed his arms and smirked, "Feisty aren't you."

"You have no idea," I glared at him.

"Stop picking on her," Heracles hissed at Sadik.

"I can pick on whoever I want," Sadik grinned.

I rolled my eyes, "Enough!" They turned to me and I focused my attention on Heracles, "You're Greece, right?"

He smiled, "Yes."

"Why did you kiss me?" I asked annoyed.

He blushed, embarrassed, "Well, I was half asleep and I thought for a second you were one of my lovers. When they wake up and I wished to stay in bed, I would kiss them and tell them to go back to sleep. It usually works."

I glared at him, "You thought I was one of your lovers?!" I said through gritted teeth.
He shrugged, "You are quite beautiful," he said the statement as if it was a fact.

I tried to glare but ending up blushing and turning away, "Flattery won't get you anywhere."

"You sure about that," Sadik smirked.

"Shut up," I hissed at him and jumped off the bed. I took a moment to examine myself. There were white bandages wrapped around my neck and head. My dress was torn unevenly around my thighs; one side nearly displayed my hip and ass. I felt my face heat as both Sadik and Heracles gawked at the revealing piece of flesh.

Egypt took notice and held his hand out to Sadik, "Your jacket."

"What?" that broke Sadik from his trance.

"Your jacket," Egypt repeated with more of a threat in his voice.

"Fine, fine," he removed his jacket and handed it to Egypt.

Egypt shook it out and draped it over my shoulders. Sadik was a large, muscular man and his jacket only proved my point when it stopped two inches above my knees. The sleeves were baggy and the buttons landed in front of my flat belly. Egypt rolled up the sleeves and pinned them to stop at my elbows. "How's this?" he asked.

"Its fine, thanks Egypt." I gave him a small smile.

"Please, call me Gupta," he smiled back.

The door burst open and all three nations stood ready for a fight.

"Relax everyone," a voice called out, "it's just us."

"The room was locked," Gupta stated cautiously, "you can't really blame us for being jumpy."

Gupta was an inch or two taller than me so it didn't take much to spot the person that walked through the door. "Arthur?"

Arthur's eyes widened in surprise but his face quickly formed a relieved smile. "Amy! Are you alright?"

I stepped between Heracles and Gupta to stand in front of him, "do I look alright to you?!" I yelled at them.

Arthur's smile turned to a frown as Francis and Matthew walked in behind him. Matthew's eyes grew to the size of saucers when he saw me and Francis gasped, "Amy, what happened-"

"Ivan, happened to me!" I yelled at them.

Everyone was quiet till Arthur cleared his throat, "Are you-

"I don't want to talk about it," I hissed at him. "I just need you to be truthful with me for one minute." I stepped closer, placing my face inches away from his. "Did you place a spell on the house?" I made direct eye contact with him, refusing to blink.

He slowly exhaled through his nose, "yes."

He swallowed his nerves, "I can't-"

"What do you mean you can't?! You were the one that cast the spell!"

"But you are the only one that can break it," Arthur kept his tone light.

"What?!" I gave him a confused look.

"Do you know of Prussia's game and the rules of how to win it?"

I finally snapped. "Are you saying, someone has to lead me to the ballroom and I have to kiss them to end this nightmare?! I am not in a kissing mood and will never be for very, very long time!"

In a fit of rage I pushed aside Arthur, shoved Francis and Matthew out of my way and stormed out of the room.

"Wait, Amy! Don't-" Arthur's voice disappeared the moment I slammed the door in his face.

After a minute passed and my anger cooled, it finally hit me of what my actions caused. "No," I muttered. "No," my voice rose, "No, no. No. No!" I opened the door and found a new room with no one inside.

"Fuck!" I cursed. "How could I be so stupid? How could I be so stupid?!" I fell to my knees and tried not to cry. "I just want this to end," a tear streaked down my cheek. "I just want to go home."

Then a grunt echoed behind me and I turned to find the white wolf staring at me. I sighed, I was tired of being afraid, "What do you want?"

It tilted its head to the side and walked down the hall. *Does it want me to follow it?* It stopped when it noticed I didn't move and sat itself in the middle of the hall, waiting for me. I had plenty of alarms ringing in my head as to why I shouldn't follow the wolf. The top main ones were: bullets and blows to the head didn't seem harm it and it could tear my throat out. But still I had a bit of sixth sense that the wolf would not harm me. That the only reason it attacked in the first place was because Vash shot at it. Also, it did save me from Ivan, *that has to count for something right?*

I rose to my feet and jogged to catch up with the large canine.

I walked in silence as the wolf led me through halls, down stair cases, and across parlor rooms. It wasn't until we entered a parlor room with a familiar white couch that I spoke. "This is-" I ran ahead of the wolf and opened the double doors.

The room was massive and had a long spiral stair case connecting the bottom floor to the second story. The room was dark except for the large windows on my left that streamed in light from the moon. "It's the ballroom," I whispered almost in disbelief.

"It's the ballroom!" I shouted excitedly and ran down to stand in the middle of the dance floor. The wolf was right behind me and sat itself aside as I twirled in a circle and giggled almost uncontrollably.

After a minute of celebrating, I stopped and turned to the wolf. "Do you think the spell will end if I kiss you?"
The wolf's golden eyes stared at me with an expression I couldn't read.

"I mean, it's not like anyone else is here and you did lead me." I kneeled in front of it and slid my hand into its fur to pet.

The wolf continued to stare and I placed a quick kiss on its snout, "thank you," I whispered.

"You're welcome." Its lips and jaw moved as it formed the words out of its mouth.

My eyes widened as my jaw dropped but it only continued; it's voice musical and feminine. "But we still need to have a little chat Amy."

A scream was caught in my throat as I tried to stand but ended up falling on my ass. The she-wolf leaped to tower over me and warned, "Don't scream."

Maybe it was the stress of the night or my fear and adrenaline working overtime or maybe that the reality of a talking wolf was too much for my brain to handle; because the last thing I remembered was my eyes rolling back inside my head and losing consciousness.

"Amy!" a voice called out, "Amy, wake up!"

I moaned as I opened my eyes to the brightly lit ballroom. Nations were crowded around me as Arthur and Francis kneeled beside me.

"Amy, are you alright? What happened?" Arthur asked, concerned.

I ignored his question and rose to sit up. I took a moment to scan the area; countries were staring at me with mixed expressions of worry and confusion. I found a few of my missing companions; Toris was standing next to guy with straight jaw length blond hair and green eyes. Toris was covered in dust and webs but he seemed fine. Next I laid eyes on Ludwig, Feliciano and Japan; all of them were giving me concern looks. Vash crossed his arms at me, as if waiting for a logical explanation. Erika, Victoria, Peter and Raivis shared the same worried gaze toward me and Sadik, Heracles and Gupta stood behind Matthew. Ivan wasn't in the room and personally if I ever saw his face again it would be too soon.

I turned to Arthur, "Can we go."

Arthur blinked at the calmness of my voice and Francis proclaimed, "Of course."

Francis helped me up and guided me to the main hall that would lead to the main entrance. Arthur and Matthew said quick goodbyes and followed us out of Austria's house.

The driver was waiting for us out front and he didn't ask one question towards my dress or of the party. He drove us back to the hotel in silence. Arthur tried to gather some answers from me but I refused to say one word to any of them.

When we arrived at the hotel, I ran out of the car and burst into the lobby. Reaching the elevator first and taking it back to seventh floor alone. Arthur had given me back my cell phone, iPod and key card back in the car so I was prepared to enter my room with no needed help from them.

Once I was in my room, I discarded my dress and Sadik's jacket to the floor. I clothed myself in the tank top and yoga pants I wore earlier that afternoon and stomped to the work desk. I removed the
diamond earrings and necklace and placed them in the black box. Grandpa's ring gleamed in the light of the small desk lamp and I smiled. I slipped it back over my head, feeling like myself the moment the metal touched my bare skin.

I'm never leaving you behind again.

I turned off the lamp and fell into bed completely exhausted. As my eyes began to close and drift away into unconsciousness, a wolf's howl resounded in the distance. My eyes shot open but I refused to acknowledge its existence. I bundled myself in the covers of the bed and played off the sound as the work of my imagination.

Chapter End Notes

Translations

Russian: маленький котенок (little kitty)

Greek: Πηγαίνετε ξανά στον ύπνο, αγάπη (Go back to bed, love)
I was engulfed in darkness. . . .

The cold embrace of the air chilled me to the bone.

My knees were sinking into muddy water, it felt almost like tar.

I struggled but I couldn't move.

A howl echoed in the distance and I froze.

I looked up and met the eyes of the white wolf.

"I need to have a little chat with you," she smiled.

I tensed, "What are you?"

"A part of you," she answered.

Then I remembered an old story Grandma told me, of the two wolves that live in everyone.

One wolf was good.

The other was bad.

"Which wolf are you?"

She smiled as if she knew what I was thinking, "Neither."

Before I could question her farther, the tar began to grip and pull.

I clawed at the ground, trying to pull myself up.

But my hands and arms would sink along with my legs.

"Stop fighting Amy," the wolf spoke calmly. "You're only making it harder for yourself."

I continued to struggle and the wolf shook her head.

"You can't go back."

I gripped on to any solid surface that I could find.

"Let go!" the wolf shouted.

The solid surfaces disappeared and the earth swallowed me whole.

I gasped and rose from the bed. Sweat ran down my back and chest and my hair was sticking to my
face. I took deep breaths as I wrapped my hands around myself and rubbed my arms. I glanced to the windows to find the morning sun shining through and sighed. "Everything's okay," I whispered and fell back to bed. "Just a dream, just a dream," I soothed myself.

A knock came from the door and I groaned as I rose from the bed. "Coming," I called out. When I opened the door, I had Arthur, Francis, Matthew, and Kumajirou standing in the hall. I crossed my arms, "What's up?"

Francis held up a room service menu, "We were wondering if you would like to have breakfast with us."

"Whatever." I shrugged, "Come in." I didn't bother to wait for them to enter. I walked back to my room and picked out a pair of jeans and a graphic tee to wear.

Arthur knocked at the door connecting the bed room to the small living area. I turned to him, "What?"

He sighed, "You don't have to be rude. I was just wondering what you would like for us to order for you."

I rolled my eyes, "Pancakes, chocolate chip, with a bacon and mushroom omelet and orange juice." After I answered, I gathered my clothes and locked myself in the bathroom.

When Amy walked away, Arthur sighed in frustration and Francis wanted to proclaim that Arthur had no one to blame but himself in this situation. Till he saw the dejected look on Arthur's face as he sat himself in the armchair.

Francis bit back his comment and turned to Matthew, "Should we call?"

"It will take them a while," he sat down Kumajirou on the couch and picked up the phone. Matthew gave a quick glance to Francis and he nodded. Matthew walked into the hallway with the hotel phone, leaving them alone.

Francis turned to Arthur, "What is eating you Angleterre?"

"Don't call me that," he muttered as he massaged the bridge of his nose.

He smiled, "You never complained when we were younger."

"That was centuries ago, you old sentimental frog," Arthur said annoyed.

"Yes, centuries; just the amount of time that I've known you," Francis proclaimed.

Arthur sighed, "I failed to protect her. Those humans had her for seventeen years and they were able to protect her from us. While we had her for a week, and she was nearly crushed by walls, dropped through trap doors, attacked by an animal and she was assaulted by Russia. And you don't need to say it; I know I'm the reason she was put through all that."

Francis nodded, "True, you were," Arthur glared at him but Francis raised his hand, "Let me finish. I know you had good intentions for Amy, and that the only reason you did what you did was to protect her."

Arthur shook his head, "She certainly didn't see it. Did you see her face when she looked at me?"
"She looked like she was going to kill me." He closed his eyes, "She hates me."

"No, she doesn't." Francis tried to comfort him with the thought.

"Yes, she does. I see it; she actually likes you and Matthew. She can't stand me," he snorted, "like everyone else."

"That is true," Francis remarked.

"If you're trying to comfort me, you're not doing a very good job of it."

"Arthur let me finish. It's true some countries can't stand you, but you seem to forget about Matthieu and me. Matthieu cares for you and I may not say it all the time, but I care for you." He placed a hand on Arthur's cheek. He tensed at first but he relaxed into Francis's hand. "You have to give her time, she can't just drop seventeen years from her life and run off with us, no questions asked. Arthur, she has a life, a family and she was willing to share it with us."

"And I screwed it up," Arthur moved away from Francis's hand. "I should have told her about Russia."

"No shit." Amy walked in, wearing clean clothes and a towel over her head.

Arthur's eyes widened in surprise and Francis couldn't help but grin to Arthur's embarrassment.

"How long have you been there?" Arthur asked.

"I came in around the part where you were filling sorry for yourself and being a baby on how no one likes you." she said bluntly.

"Amy that's a little harsh," said Francis.

"How about you let me finish," she proclaimed and walked to sit on the coffee table so she could be in front of Arthur. "I don't hate you."

Arthur glanced to her and she continued, "I'm mad at you and a little hurt that you couldn't tell me this."

"I was afraid you wouldn't come," Arthur explained.

"And risk Russia coming to my house and endangering my family. Hell no. I would've stayed at the party so I would've been surrounded by witnesses." She said with a bit of sass in her voice.

Francis smiled, "You don't give her much credit," he told Arthur.

Amy turned to Arthur and Francis with all the seriousness she possessed, "You guys gotta make me a promise. No more lies. No more secrets. I am tired of finding out things from other people, from now on you will tell me everything I need to know. Got it?"

Francis and Arthur glanced to one another and nodded.

Matthew opened the door, "Is it safe?"

Amy smiled, "Yeah, get in here; we're having a," she stopped, almost unsure of what to say. "Family moment."
When the bell hop brought up our food, we ate in the living room and passed around stories about last night.

"And I punched the wall and it worked, I really thought Ludwig had gone crazy for a second," I said as I bit into my omelet.

Matthew sipped his water, "I'm not surprised; Alfred had crazy strength."

"The fool didn't even know how to control it half of the time," Arthur said with a smile.

"Then Ludwig, Feliciano and Japan were sucked in through a quicksand wall," I added.

"I bet Feliciano was screaming the entire time," Francis smirked.

"Yes, yes he was," I proclaimed.

I recapped my story with Vash and the falling floors and of the wolf attack. I skipped the parts of Russia and the wolf talking. I moved ahead to Heracles, Gupta and Sadik.

"Greece kissed you," Arthur knitted his brows in confusion.

I shrugged, "he thought I was one of his lovers."

"See," Arthur turned to Francis, "this is why I told you to give the title of pervert to Greece."

"What?" Matthew and I asked in sync.

Arthur threw up his hands, "You tell them," he said to Francis.

Francis rolled his eyes playfully and explained. "When I was tired of carrying the title of pervert of the world, I decided to give it to Arthur."

"And I told you to give it to Greece!"

"But you were the one that made that condom survey."

"Yes, but Greece was the one that used them more."

Matthew and I started laughing. "I can't breathe," I choked out.

"My gut is hurting, but I can't stop laughing," Matthew laughed harder.

Arthur covered his face and Francis grinned.

Later that day, we packed up our luggage and caught the three o'clock flight back to Summerland. I counted the hours in my head and determined I'll be home by five to six o'clock in the evening. I was eager to return home and to see the family.

"Would you please stop jumping in your seat," Arthur lectured and I decided to tap my foot instead. It wasn't long till Arthur raised his brow at me, "Amy."

"I know, I know," I stopped my foot, "I'm just excited to see the rest of my family."
Matthew asked curiosity, "What are they like?"

I took out my phone and scrolled through my photos. I stopped at my mom's brother, Alejandro Kama and his wife Emily. "This is Uncle Alex and Aunt Emily," the photo showed them together. Uncle Alex had the same coloring as Mom, with dark eyes and hair with tanned skin. But he had almond shaped eyes, just like his father, Makani Kama. Aunt Emily was light skinned with dirty blonde hair and dark eyes. "Uncle Alex works as a landscaper and Aunt Emily is a pediatric. Uncle Alex is also part of a mariachi band," I grinned, "You guys are gonna be in for a treat at the wedding."

"You want us to be there?" Arthur asked, surprised.

"Yeah, why not?" I didn't expect an answer and continued. I slid through my touch screen to my three older cousins, "These three beautiful ladies are their daughters. The one on the left is the oldest, Sofia," she had Uncle Alex's dark hair and eyes while she had Aunt Emily's light skin. "She's a school teacher and has three kids." I pointed to the tallest woman in the middle. She had dark almond shaped eyes, dirty blonde hair and light skin. "This is Mia; she works at an office for the city she lives in. I think she deals with taxes of something." Then I pointed at the last woman, "This is Josefina," she had the same coloring as Uncle Alex. "She's a romance novelist; Melissa owns a copy of everything she wrote. Those two are so close."

Then I slid to a photo of a man with Sofia, "That's her husband, Rafael Garcia." He was a tall man with short dark hair and hazel eyes. I continued to slide through the photos, "This is Mia and her husband, Eduardo Herrera." He was just as tall as her and had brown hair and eyes. The next photo was of Josefina and her husband, Aaron Johnson; he had ginger hair and green eyes.

"Please tell me these people have no idea that you're a country," said Arthur.

"Nope, Uncle Alex and his family have no idea what I am; they think I'm a normal teenage girl, like I thought I was, till three weeks ago."

I made sure my voice was filled with good humor and slid on to the next photo. The photo displayed three children, "These sweet little angels are Sofia's kids, the oldest on the right is Alyce; she's about ten and the first grandchild of Uncle Alex. She's very kind and loves being the big sister, mostly because she's a little bossy." Alyce was tall for her age and super thin, like a twig. She had dirty blonde hair, hazel eyes and light fair skin. I pointed to the little boy with dark almond shaped eyes, dark hair and light skin. "The boy, Gael, in the middle is the youngest, about six. He's a little trouble maker, just like his sister," I pointed to the other girl on the left. She was petite compared to her sister; she had dark hair and eyes with natural tan skin. "Valencia, she's eight, the same age as Blair and Blake. Valencia and Blair are so close, and they love to pull pranks, so watch out."

The next photo was of Mia's kids, "The oldest here," I pointed to the boy with dirty blonde hair, dark eyes and light tanned skin. "Is Roman, he's a year younger than Blake but he's tall for his age so people always think Blake is younger. The girl next to Roman is his younger sister Lali, she's about five and she's just so sweet." She only came up to my knee the last time I saw her. She had dark hair, green eyes and light skin.

"Oh," Francis smiled, "They're all so adorable."

"I know," I grinned.

"What about Josefina?" Matthew asked. "Doesn't she have any kids?"
"Her and Aaron are trying," I crossed my fingers, "gotta keep thinking positive."

Then I slid to the last photo of Grandpa Makani and Grandma Jessie, but me and the kids call them, Kupunakane and Kupunawahine. "This is Makani and Jessamine Kama." In the photo, my grandparents on my mother's side were standing in front of their home in Kapaa, Hawaii. The same home I lived in during the year I was with them. Kupunawahine had dark hair and eyes with natural tanned skin. Kupunakane's skin was a shade darker with dark hair and almond shaped eyes.

"Why is your grandmother's name and mother's name so similar?" Francis asked.

I shrugged, "It's a family tradition to pass down names, in boys and in girls."

"Do these two know that you're a country?" Matthew asked.

I nodded, "Yeah, but don't worry they won't say anything. I'm sure they're excited to meet you guys."

Arthur thought for a moment, "What do we tell your other family members?"

My eyes widened, "Oh right, we need to come up with a back story." The thought came to me and clapped my hands, "I got it, you guys are my biological half siblings," I pointed to Matthew and Arthur. Before they could say anything, I continued, "Just hear me out. Alfred would be our daddy; he traveled the world as a reporter and met your mothers during that time." I pointed to Arthur, "Your mama's name will be Beatrice Kirkland, and you took after her looks." I turned to Matthew, "Your mom will be Naomi Williams, but you're like me, we look like Alfred."

"What about me?" Francis asked.

"Your Arthur's partner," I proclaimed.

Around that time Arthur was drinking from his cup and he choked on his tea.

"Aw, he's blushing," Francis smirked, "are you secretly happy about this."

"No." he glared at Francis and then turned to me, "You can't be serious."

"Of course, you guys already a bicker like a married couple."

"Can't you make him one of Alfred's sons?"

"And make Alfred look like he's a good for nothing dead beat that walked out on four different kids." I shook my head, "that's just cold."

"And three is okay?"

"He died never knowing you two were his kids. Naomi was a model, so she was financially stable enough to raise Matthew. Beatrice's parents were loaded, so you spent a lot of time with your grandparents. Also, they were able to put you through private school and that is where you met Francis and became good friends with him. Are you happy now?"

Arthur nodded, "its better."

I rolled my eyes, "Then, only a few months ago, when you and Francis went out drinking you decided it was time to find out who your father was. With Francis' help you were able to find out about his career and colleagues. You also learned about Naomi through one of Alfred's associates. That is how you discovered Matthew. Then the both of you wondered if there were any more kids,
so you tracked down more of Alfred's friends and found out about Justine, my birth mother. The love of Alfred's life, but then you quickly discovered that they both died in a car accident. Then, you tracked me down with the help of my grandfather, and we've been bonding ever since."

They were silent, till Matthew spoke, "You thought about this beforehand, haven't you."

I smiled, "Yeah, also you guys have to follow my story, because I already told Mom to tell our extended family and friends this tale. I believe it was about two days ago when I told her this."

Arthur's eyes widened, "You didn't."

I grinned evilly, "Think of it as good old fashion pay back. I pronounce you husband," I gestured to Francis, "and wife." I turned to Arthur, who grew paler by the second. "You may kiss the bride."

Francis gave a quick kiss on Arthur's cheek, "This will be fun."

Arthur continued to carry a stunned expression as Francis and I high fived and Matthew grinned.

After the flight Arthur was lecturing me on why I shouldn't make up back stories without consoling him first. We were all sitting in a rental car with Francis at the wheel and Matthew right beside him. I was left to sit next to Arthur as he ranted about him being married to Francis.

"If you made a marriage certificate in our names, I swear to God Amy I will end you!"

I sighed, "Again, you two are not married. I told Mom to tell the family, that you and Francis have been dating for two years. I only said the whole husband and wife thing just to mess with you."

Arthur groaned as he buried his face in his hands, "Why would you do this to me?!"

"Number one: to see that look on your face, number two: to explain Francis and why he's here, and the most important, number three: cause this fucking hilarious."

Francis grinned from the rear view mirror, "Don't worry Angleterre, I'll take good care of you," he winks.

Arthur paled and I sang, "Someone's getting lucky tonight." Matthew and I burst into laughter as Francis' grin grew wider.

"I despise all you," Arthur muttered.

"We love you too, Arthur," we all countered in sync.

When Francis pulled up on the drive way, I jumped over him and honked the horn. I leaped out the car and yelled, "I'm home!"

Blair came running out with Valencia right behind her and both of them screamed, "Auntie Amy!" The other kids quickly followed suite.

Gael called out, "Dog pile!"
Alyce and Roman were the fastest ones of the group, so they were the ones that tackled me to the ground. Blair and Valencia leaped on to Alyce and Roman's backs. Gael landed in the middle of those two and Blake picked up Lali and jumped to sit on the top of the pile.

"We missed you Aunt Amy," Alyce greeted.

"Kupunakane wanted us to ask if you will do the hula with us during the wedding." Valencia said.

"Can we sleep over in your room tonight?" Blair asked.

"We can make a fort!" Gael exclaimed.

"And watch scary movies all night long!" Roman said excitedly.

"Lali has a question," Blake called out and everyone fell silent.

"Can I ride Midnight?" she asked in a soft voice.

"Okay," I choked out, losing breath. "In order, I missed you guys too. Yes, yes, if you get permission from your parents. We'll make the most awesome fort ever. No cause the little kids will get scared, and Lali yes, you can ride Midnight, but I have to be there and you need to ask your mommy first." I inhaled a shaky breath, "I know you guys love me and all, but all of you are crushing me."

They all rolled off me and I rose to my feet. I glanced to nations and gestured the kids together. "Guys this is Arthur and Matthew, they're my biological half-brothers."

"What does bi-log-i-cal-i, mean?" Gael asked.

"It means they share the same blood as me," I explained, "They're my family."

"Are you gonna go live with them now?" Roman asked.

"No." I said quickly, "We're just getting to know each other."

Alyce walked over and gave her hand to them, "I'm Alyce; it's nice to meet you."

Arthur smiled and shook her hand, "I'm Arthur, a pleasure."

"You sound familiar," Gael questioned.

"Like Daniel Craig?" Alyce asked.

"Nah, like that lizard from the Geico commercials," he exclaimed

The kids laughed and Roman said, "Yeah, I hear it now."

Arthur had a tight smile, and I grinned, "Guys that's not funny." But we all shared the same smile, knowing it was a little funny. The kids continued to greet Francis and Matthew.

"Can I hold Kumajirou," Blair held up her arms for the bear that was in his arms.

Matthew shook his head, "Not now."

"Please!" Blair begged.

He sighed, "Okay." Kumajirou stayed perfectly still as Blair cuddled him into her chest and
Valencia scratched him behind his ears.

"Is he a real baby polar bear!?” Gael exclaimed as he stared into Kumajirou's eyes.

The nations and I shared a look, "Yeah," I smiled, "let's go with that."

"He can also-" I knew what she was about to say, so I wrapped my hand around her mouth and whispered in her ear. "The bear does not talk, got it."

Blair nodded and said, "He can also . . . do tricks."

"Can he dance on a ball, like a circus bear?" Roman asked.

"No," Matthew answered.

Gael jumped up and down, "We can teach him!"

"Let's go get a ball!" Valencia exclaimed and the kids ran back into the house.

Matthew called out, "Wait; hold on, he might bite you!" He ran after them.

Blake and Lali stood behind and Lali threw up her arms for me to carry her. I bent down and swung her to my waist with my arm under her bottom.

"Oh, she's so cute," Francis cooed and turned to Arthur, "Can we have one?"

"No." he glared.

Lali stared at Francis, "You sound funny."

Francis smiled sweetly to her innocent statement, "It's because I am French, bien-aimée."

"Is that where that pointy thingy is?"

"It's called the Eiffel Tower, and yes it's in Paris, France," I answered.

When we walked through the front door, we were met with laughter, excited shouts and music. Kupunakane, Uncle Alex, Johnny and Sofia made a small band in the living room. Kupunakane played his small dark brown ukulele as Sofia played the key broad behind him. Uncle Alex played the guitar, Johnny handled the drums and Celine and Aunt Emily sang a duet. Melissa, Sanjay, Kupunawahine and Grandma Aponi sat on the couch and love seats, clapping their hands to the beat. Couples were dancing, which were Mia and Eduardo, Josefina and Aaron and Mom and Dad. Rafael watched over the kids and Kumajirou at a close distance, with Matthew right beside him. Lady was nearby and began to play with Kumajirou and the kids, till she saw me. She came running and placed her front paws on my hip. I scratched her behind the ears.

"Hey Kiddo," Dad grinned, "welcome home."

I smiled, "It's good to be back."

Everyone quickly followed his example and I was greeted with hugs and kisses on the cheek. I formally introduced Arthur, Matthew and Francis to the family and everyone greeted them politely. Awkward silence filled the room right after; no one had a clue what to say. Till Johnny slammed his drumstick on cymbal, "What's everyone standing around for? It's our dinner rehearsal, we should be celebrating. We get to add four members into the family instead of one."
"This is a dinner rehearsal?" Arthur asked.

I shrugged, "It is in our family."

"Its good luck for the two families to come together before the uniting of the two households," Kupunakane announced, "It's a century long tradition."

"Oh, where are your parents Celine?" Matthew asked.

Celine gave a small smile, "They passed away when I was in college, but they're here with us in spirit." She gestured to a picture frame on the table with a couple displayed in the photo. The woman looked so much like Celine, with her pale green eyes and light brown curls. The man next to her had dark hair and kind eyes.

I smiled and glanced to Grandpa's ring, you better be here Gramps.

Johnny quickly changed the subject, "Amy, handle the drums," he tossed the sticks at me and I grabbed them with one hand. "I need to sing a song to my beloved bride."

Arthur, Francis and Matthew gave me questionable looks and I answered, "It's also tradition to sing to your bride.″ I sat down Lali and walked behind the drum set. Sofia whispered the song in my ear and I nodded.

I clicked the drumsticks together to lay down the beat, Kupunakane strummed his ukulele and began the song, 'Hey, Soul Sister.'

Johnny sang the lyrics with a husky tone but he made it work. Sofia abandoned the key broad and picked up the maracas. Uncle Alex slowed the guitar and I played the spare drums with smooth taps.

The family begins to dance into pairs or into three's and I was able to catch the nations being pulled into dancing by the kids. I smiled at the image of Francis allowing Lali to stand on his feet as he swayed from side to side. Matthew twirled Alyce in a circle and Roman and Gael showed Arthur how to shuffle his feet to the beat, which he failed a couple of times, but the boys kept encouraging him to continue. Blair danced with Kumajirou in her arms as Blake and Valencia danced together.

My smile grew wider as I tapped harder to the beat and I lost myself into the music.

Later that evening after we ate and celebrated as much as we could, people began to leave. Kupunakane and Kupunawahine were staying with Melissa and Sanjay. Uncle Alex, Aunt Emily, Johnny and Celine were staying with Grandma Aponi. But our house was much larger so Sofia, Mia, and Josefina's families stayed with us.

"Can we sleep over?" Blair asked with Blake by her side.

"Blair, the house is already so full," said Sanjay.

"Please Daddy! Amy said we can sleep in her room!" she begged, "Please!"

Melissa and Sanjay shared a look, "It is Saturday," Sanjay shrugged his shoulders.

Melissa turned to Mom, "Is it okay?"
"Of course, what's the point of having a big house if we can't fill it up with people," she said.

Blair shouted excitedly and grabbed Blake by the hand and ran after the kids up to my room. We could hear them toss around pillows and blankets as Lady barked and jumped around.

Matthew glanced at me, "are you okay with that," he nodded towards my room.

"They know that they can mess with my bed and pillows, but anything on my shelves and vanity mirror are off limits." I explained.

Mom, Dad and I continued to say our farewells to our extended family. When the last car drove away, Arthur handed me back my carry-on from their rental car, "we should get going."

"Aw, you guys aren't staying, we were planning to put you guys in the stables," I proclaimed.

Arthur shook his head, "as tempting as that sounds," he said sarcastically. "We need to get to our hotel."

I swung the carry on strap over my shoulder and grinned, "So you guys are staying for the wedding, good, you guys will have a lot of fun."

Francis winked, "We wouldn't miss it for the world."

Matthew gave me a one arm hug, for Kumajirou was out cold in his other arm. The kids really pushed him to his limit. "Goodnight Amy."

"Night Matt," I hugged him back.

I hugged Francis and Arthur goodbye and waved farewell as they drove away.

I walked back to the house and quickly ran up the stairs to my room. The kids draped blankets across my bed and made little forts around the room. Blair and Valencia had their fort and mattress near the TV. Roman and Gael had made their fort shaped like castle with blankets connecting to the other forts. Alyce made her fort around the tower windows with Lady lying on the red valet seats. Lastly, Blake and Lali draped a large blanket over my bed and stretched it so two of its corners connected to my head board and the last two were tied to the forts on the floor.

"You guys have out done yourselves, feels like I've entered a gypsy camp," I said as I closed the door.

"Auntie Amy could you read us a story?" Valencia asked.

"Sure," I nodded as I closed myself in my closet to change into my Batman pj's. When I walked out, Alyce handed me her Kindle, "Mom uploaded a bunch of books on it."

"I remembered when I was kid we actually read paper books."

"Paper books," Lali cocked her head to the side in question.

"You haven't seen one?"

"She's in kindergarten." Roman explained, "Our school won't let the younger kids check out books, only a child proof device tablet."

I shook my head, "I was her age when I held a book and nothing happened to it." I gave Alyce back her Kindle and checked my selves beside my bed and next to the closet. "What do you guys feel
"I want something with adventure," Valencia proclaimed.

"With fighting," Gael exclaimed.

"And magic," Blair added.

I snapped my fingers, "Got it!" I pulled out a blue colored hard cover book, "Have you guys heard of *The Golden Compass*?"

They all shook their heads and Alyce asked, "What's it about?"

I grinned and made my voice dramatic, "It's about a young girl named Lyra who travels north to fight child snatchers with the help of gypsies and witches and a giant armored polar bear."

"That sounds cool," Roman grinned.

I smiled and sat myself on my bed with my back on the head broad. Lali sat between me and the book with Blake and Gael on my sides. Roman, Alyce, Valencia and Blair squeezed themselves at the foot of the bed and Lady stayed in the middle.

I opened the book, "*Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening hall*. . ."
I swallowed the fearful lump in my throat and splashed my hand across the surface. The water rippled and when it settled the image of the woman was still there. She smiled and I knew perfectly well I wasn’t smiling.

"Now are you ready to talk?” she asked.

I gasped and found myself in bed with Lali and Blake sleeping beside me. *The Golden Compass* was on my nightstand and the rest of the kids were sleeping in their forts. I took deep breaths and laid back into bed. "You're okay Amy," I whispered to myself. "Just a dream, just a dream," I repeated that phase in a soft tone till I fell into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

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Translations:

French: bien-aimée (sweetheart)

Hawaiian: Kupunakane (Grandfather)

Hawaiian: Kupunawahine (Grandmother)
During the week of the wedding; Mom, Kupunawahine, Aunt Emily and Sofia argued over which dishes they would serve. Dad, Kupunakane and Uncle Alex debated and practiced songs that they would perform at the service and party. Sanjay, Rafael, Eduardo and Aaron were building the platform for the band while placing down temporary wooden floors for the dance floor behind Sanjay and Melissa's house. Josefina and Mia were designing the cake, and Grandma Aponi was purifying the small section of land near the ocean's shore where Johnny and Celine wanted to do their wedding vows.

That left me with the most important job; entertaining the kids.

Right after school, (which sucks right now, because being gone for a week has me swamped with assignments and school projects.) Typical, am I right? Anyway, right when I get home my cousins are practically sitting by the door waiting for me to take them out. They can only go so far when all the adults were too busy to watch them.

I didn't mind, I love the kids, and lucky for them Mom gave me enough cash to feed them. Sunday was mostly used to go shopping for dresses and fancy clothes for the kids and myself. All the kids decided to play hide and seek in Macy's, I found it pretty funny (when it was all over and we found them) but Mom, Melissa, Sofia, and Mia didn't find it so amusing. They called the mall's security and it took over two hours to find them.

Luckily on Monday, Dad helped me out with showing the kids how to ride the horses. Roman was a natural, he seemed to bond well with Daisy. Alyce, Valencia and Blair took turns riding Jack, with Dad watching them from a reasonable distance. I had Gael, Blake and Lali with Midnight. Midnight might not look it but he's a huge softie. Good thing too, cause Gael knew nothing of fear. He jumped and ran around Midnight, checking him from every angle.

I gently pulled him aside, "Gael, you can't go running around like that, Midnight may be used to it, but if you did that with another horse, it will get spooked and kick you in the face."

Gael nodded quickly and asked "can I ride him now?"

I sighed, it's like whatever I say gets in one ear and out the other. I now know how Arthur feels. I picked him up and slid him onto the saddle, "use your legs to hang on," I instructed.

He nodded excitedly and I gently pulled Midnight by the reins for a little stroll around the field. Gael kept asking to go faster, but I would only reply with, "Not without me on the saddle with you and you wearing a hamlet."

"You don't wear a hamlet!"

"It's because I got years of experience." And also the fact, if I do fall off Midnight and crack my skull open it will heal in less than a minute.

Lali got on with Blake behind her; she was too scared to go on herself. "Scaredy cat! Scaredy cat!" Gael jeered.
I gave him a little smack at the back of his head, "Be nice to your cousin," I lectured.

On Tuesday, I took them out hiking around the forest near my house. I pointed out birds’ nesting spots and animal tracks. I taught them which plants were eatable and how to find spring water. I even showed them how to make a fire without a lighter and matches.

"Why do we need to learn all this?" Valencia asked.

"So if you're ever lost in the woods, you won't be completely helpless," I answered.

Alyce pulled out her cell phone, "I can just call for help," she said in a sassy matter.

The rest of the kids smirked and I rolled my eyes, "where do you get your sass from?"

"Mom thinks I get it from you."

I snorted, "Oh please, she's lying to you child. I got all my sass from her and her sisters. Heck, all the women in our family are sassy."

Blair exclaimed, "There's got to be more than that."

"Your right," I said, "we're also brave, compassionate and simply adorable."

The girls giggled as Roman lifted a brow at me, "then what are the boys made out of?"

I took a moment, "The men in our family are talented," I nodded to Roman. "Fearless," I glanced to Gael and he grinned. "And wise behind their years," I turned to Blake as he gave me a knowing smile.

On Wednesday, we spent our time at the beach. The kids loved it. Blair and Blake lived right on the ocean's shore, so I wasn't worried about their swimming skills. I knew that the rest of the kids took swimming classes back in their hometown of Garland, Texas. During that time, Dad, Kupunakane and Uncle Alex were moving the band equipment to the beach house. Sanjay and the rest of the married in husbands gave a hand with unloading the musical instruments.

I told the kids to stay at the beach so they wouldn't get in the way, they didn't complain. Michel, Sam, Jamie and Heisuke even joined us. Ella and Daniela were locked in their dorm room finishing up Celine's gown, and Dimitri had to pack in a lot of gymnastic practice so his coach would let him come to the wedding.

I sighed; I sure knew how it felt to have the pressure put on you. The memory of Mrs. Lope lecturing me after class replayed in my head.

"If you don't finish all of your assignments by next Monday, I will have no chose but to suspend you from prom."

"Prom! But Mrs. Lope you can't-"

"It's either that or you won't graduate with your class."
I groaned and glanced at my school tablet and notebook, "this sucks."

"That's why we're here to help," Jamie smiled.

"So shut up and be grateful," said Michel.

"You don't even go to our school," I hissed at him.

"Oh excuse me Miss Fancy Pants, but your snooty private school is teaching the same shit as my public school."

I sighed, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to bring out the claws. I'm just really stressed."

We were sitting on a brightly colored picnic blanket that was a safe distance away from the ocean's water. Sam and Heisuke wore their swimsuits and were playing with the kids. They seemed to have the situation under control, so I focused all my attention on my schoolwork.

After I was finished with three pages of calculus work problems and astronomy study questions from chapters eight, nine and ten; I decided it was time for a break.

I laid myself out so the sun's rays would warm my skin, "please tell me that was it."

"No," replied Jamie, "you still need to do your personal essay for English class and your history project."

"Crap," I groaned, "I didn't even pick topics."

"Well you better pick something fast for your history project," said Michel, "you have to write about a time period, like the Romans or the Greeks, or you could go with something from the Dark Ages."

I waved it off, "I'll just write about American History."

"Surprising," Michel said sarcastically.

"Hey, I just want to make an A and not have to research too much. I seriously don't have the time."

"And your personal essay has to be about an experience that changed your life," Jamie explained.

I snorted, "I can write a damn book on the topic."

"That reminds me," Michel added, "What happen in Austria?"

I sighed, "It's a long story."

I quickly told them the tale of the ball, of me dancing with various countries and of Austria's house coming alive thanks to Arthur's spell. How I ran around the house with the other countries, trying to figure out what was happening. I told my adventure in order; the dark secret passage way with Toris, my drop from a trapdoor, my close encounter with Ludwig, Feliciano, Kiku (I found out later that his human name was Kiku Honda) and Vash. Then I informed them of the quicksand walls, falling floors, and the changing rooms. How I met Erika, Victoria, Peter and Raivis and how we figured out that Arthur was behind it all. By this part, I left out Ivan and the talking wolf, deciding that I was already blowing their minds with the fact that magick exists. They did not need to know of Ivan wanting to, as the other countries say, 'conquer me', and the talking wolf was in a whole another level of crazy that I didn't want to even acknowledge right now.
"Then I met Gupta, Heracles and Sadik, also known as Egypt, Greece, and Turkey-in that order. But then I got separated from them and broke the spell," I finished.

"How did you break the spell?" Jamie asked.

"Uh, I found the ballroom and said the magick words."

"What were the magick words?" Michel asked.

"Uhhhhhh, Bippity Boppity Boo," I answered.

Both of them shared a side-way glance with each other, "Really?" both of them said in sync.

I held up my hands, "Hey it was Arthur's spell-if you got a problem with it, complain to him."

Michel narrowed his eyes, "You're not telling us everything. How did you end up getting lost with that Toris guy in the first place?"

"What are you hiding?" Jamie asked.

"It's nothing," I reassured them.

Both of them stared at me, waiting.

I sighed; they weren't going to let this go. I decided to measure which would be best to talk about, the talking wolf or Ivan. I'm going with Ivan. I took a deep breath and rewind the tale back to the beginning where I first met Ivan. How he was all over me and how Toris came in to save me.

"Then, Ivan being the weirdo that he is started kissing Toris, Toris slapped him and Ivan tried to push him off the balcony. I threw my shoe at him and I pulled Toris into a run, ending up in a bedroom and later into the passage way."

"Oh my god," said Jamie.

Michel shook his head, "That guy has problems."

I nodded and continued to where I was separated from Erika, Victoria, Peter, Raivis, and Vash. "Ivan cornered me and pushed me to the ground," I took another breath. "He tore my dress trying to, you know-"

I was interrupted by Michel as he rose to his feet. "Where does this bastard live?! I'm gonna gather the guys and we're gonna go kick his ass!"

"Two problems with that plan," I exclaimed as pulled him back down. "You don't have the money to get to Russia and this guy is a country, whatever you all are gonna do to him, will only make him angry. Also, he can't die- you can."

"But he can't get away with this!" Jamie exclaimed.

"Relax, he didn't. I bit his lip and kicked him several times. Which was somewhat true, "I was able to get away from him and hide out with Gupta, Heracles and Sadik." I also added the fact that Heracles kissed me and Gupta asked Sadik to give me his jacket to cover myself up.

"So you're okay?" Jamie asked.

I sighed, "All he got from me was a good kick in the groin."
Michel gave an approving nod, "that's my girl."

"But what would stop him from coming here to get you?" Jamie asked worried.

"If he has the balls to," Michel added, "I'll have the guys ready to run him over with a truck."

I smiled, "Guys, relax. He won't find me, the whole reason I went to Austria in the first place was to reassure my existence with the countries so they wouldn't come looking in America. Also Peter locked away my files, no one's going to know where I live; it's all good."

They both nodded and turned to face one another, a wicked grin played on both of their lips. "Who do you think she'll end up with?" Jamie asked.

"I'm going with Toris, they shared that whole moment with crazy Ivan and Amy hugged him in that dark secret passage way, something must've happen." Michel wiggled his eyebrows seductively.

Jamie shook her head, "Nah, Toris is cute and all, but Heracles just sounds so manly and he totally kissed her."

"She didn't want it!"

"But Amy said it was gentle and sweet. Also he sounded so sexy, how he spoke Greek to her and thought she was one of his lovers."

"Amy wouldn't like that! She doesn't want to be a girl of many; she wants to be his only girl. I have a feeling Toris would be faithful to her, not sleep around like man-ho."

"How the hell did we get to this topic?" I asked, but they ignored me.

"But that would be so romantic, if Heracles gave up all of his other lovers to be with her," Jamie remarked.

"Keyword: 'if', you can't change a guy, a guy can change only if he wants to," Michel added. "Toris on the other hand is sweet and loveable like a puppy; Amy always goes with the sweet, sensitive types."

"But she likes the manly ones too, and I have a feeling Heracles could be sweet and sensitive," she said.

"I'm right here," I said through gritted teeth, but they continued to ignore me.

"Nah, how much you want to bet, Heracles-jar head has no brain. Amy would get bored of him and move on to Toris who actually sounds like a nice guy," Michel proclaimed.

"But he's got some major baggage; the whole Ivan/Russia thing? I mean, who wants to deal with that?" Jamie exclaimed.

"Um hello, they're countries. If we learned anything from world history class, they all got major baggage," he said. "Besides, why would the country of Greece call himself Heracles? Is he compensating for something down south?"

Jamie gasped as a bit of a blush spread from cheek to cheek. "Oh please, how much you want to bet it's Toris that's small!"

"Okay!" I exclaimed, finally grabbing their attentions, "Enough! I'm not gonna end up with any of the countries, I got too much going on to think about my love life."
"What love life?" Michel asked, "You never had a boyfriend."

"Yes I have," I narrowed my eyes at him. "There was Conner, Andrew, and Luke."

"Correction," Jamie added, "you never had a serious boyfriend before. You would date the guys, and only if they asked you first, because if they didn't, you would've never noticed them. Then after a few dates you would dump them."

"I didn't dump anyone, we would both agree that it just wasn't working out," I explained.

Michel snapped his fingers, "Because they were human! Maybe you can only date countries."

"Or maybe, I just I like my independence," I shook my head and rose to my feet. "I'm going to swim a couple of laps," I took off my shirt and mini shorts to reveal my blue one-piece bathing suit. I nodded my farewell to Michel and Jamie as I walked towards the ocean.

"This isn't over!" Michel shouted after me, "I'm Team Toris, all the way!"

"It's all about Team Heracles!" Jamie shouted along with him.

*Oh Lord, help me.*

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On Friday; the day of the wedding, the women of the household got up early to cook the dishes that will be served at the reception. The men of the family left at noon to Melissa and Sanjay's house to prepare the groom and the justice of the peace. They also had to set tables and seats and have the wedding planner, a.k.a Aunt Emily, decorate the stage, the dance floor and the wedding arch.

Melissa drove over with the twins in the minivan. She was dressed in a long beautiful peach colored tunic with light green designs and matching pants. Her round belly was covered and she had a green scarf draped around her shoulders. Blake wore a vibrant blue tunic with white pants and Blair wore a pink tunic with cream colored pants.

"Wow Blair, you look so pretty!" Valencia exclaimed as Mia was curling her hair in the living room.

Roman walked around Blake, "You look a little girly."

"Roman," Mia narrowed her eyes at her son, "Help Gael get dressed."

Roman was already dressed in a white dress shirt and black slacks. He nodded and gestured Gael into my parent's room. Gael protested about wearing fancy clothes the entire way.

Melissa sat on the couch next to me as I curled and did up Alyce's dirty blond hair. "Is Ella here yet?" she asked.

"She's on her way," I answered.

Josefina was sitting on the love seat with Lali right next to her. "She better be; Celine is almost done with her hair and makeup." She was pulling in Lali's hair into a little bun and pinned pink tulips around the bun, making it look like a crown. Lali wore a long, fluffy dress the same color as the flowers.
Right at the moment I was done with Alyce's hair, the doorbell ringed. I sprinted to the door and found my girlfriends dressed and ready for the wedding. Jamie wore a knee-length Chinese styled dress; it was the color of light violet with pink cherry blossoms all over the dress. Her hair was done in lower side bun with a pink tulip designed into the stands. If you haven't guessed which flowers are being used in the wedding; well its pink tulips. Daniela wore a simple red dress and had half of her dark hair pulled up as the rest of the ends were curled. Ella wore a strapless light pink dress with a matching shawl. Her honey golden locks were pulled into a fancy bun and she was also carrying a large black bag with a hanger.

"Out of the way," Ella's accented voice ringed out, "the masterpiece is coming through." She stunts in and rushed upstairs to the guestroom where Sofia, Celine and Mom were in.

Daniela shook her head, "how about you ask to come in like a person with manners," she exclaimed as she followed Ella.

"Where are the guys?" I asked.

"They left with Michel to Melissa's house," Jamie answered.

"We're they dressed?"

"All in suits," she replied.

I nodded, "cool, I'm gonna go take a shower."

After my shower, I blow dried my hair and slipped on a simple knee-length blue dress. I wore nice sliver flats and implied a small coat of mascara and pink lip gloss.

When I walked down the stairs, the rest of the kids were dressed and ready. Roman and Gael wore matching dress shirts and black slacks. But Gael wore a light pink tie and black under vast with a black blazer, he was the ring bearer in the wedding.

Gael wiggled in his suit, "why do I have to wear this? Roman doesn't have to wear it."

"Because you're the ring bearer," Mia said as she groomed his hair back. Mia wore a light blue dress and had her hair pinned up. Josefina wore a long purple dress and had her dark hair down in soft curls.

"You should be proud," Alyce proclaimed, "you get to carry the wedding rings." She was dressed in a green dress with white shoes.

"But I don't want to!" Gael stomped his foot.

"Don't make me get your mother down here," Mia warned and Gael crossed his arms and pouted.

Lali tugged on my dress and I looked down as she asked, "do I look pretty?"

I smiled and lifted her up into my arms, "You're the prettiest flower girl I ever seen."

She grinned and Valencia came running down the stairs; she was dressed in a violet dress with her dark hair in a curly pony tail. "She's ready!" she called out excitedly.

Mom came walking down the stairs; she wore a simple black dress with her hair also in curls. Sofia wore a long dress with blue lilies splashed all over the material and had her short dark hair curled around her jaw.
Ella and Daniela followed after and stopped at the bottom of the stairs. "I present to you," Ella announced, "an Ella and Daniela original, please step forth, my beautiful model, it is your day!"

Celine walked out and we gasped in awe. Ella took my advice about less is more; Celine's wedding dress was strapless with sweetheart neckline. The gown flowed down to the floor and had two long simple ruffles draped over the layer that touched the floor. The inner layer was long and flowed with a small tail in the back. The front that displayed the sweetheart neckline was covered in sliver spiral like designs that caressed around her breasts and waist. Her hair was in long soft curls with half of it pinned up to revel the diamond pendent and matching earrings she borrowed from me. When she walked, we could spot the blue beaded anklet that Valencia made and she wore a silver bracelet that belonged to her great grandmother. Celine's makeup was natural and flawless and when she smiled, she looked like an angel.

"Wow," Lali whispered as her eyes widen, "she's beautiful."

"My brother is a lucky son of a gun," I grinned.

"You girls have so much talent," Mom smiled as she patted Ella and Daniela's back. The girls thanked her and smiled even wider.

Celine turned to them, "You two are amazing, thank you for my dress. Please let me pay you for it."

"No, no, no," Ella proclaimed, "this is a gift, just think of this a preview to when our clothing will be known worldwide."

Daniela rolled her eyes, "Dramatic much."

"You look stunning," Melissa said with tears in her eyes, "I remember when I used to be so thin.... now I'm fat." she cried.

"Mom, why is Aunt Melissa crying?" Alyce asked.

"Its hormones sweetie," Sofia answered.

I placed Lali in Blake's arms and I handed Melissa a tissue, "It's okay, the baby will be out any day now."

"That is what the doctor has been saying for the last two weeks," she said as she wiped away her tears.

"Well the baby sure is taking its sweet time," Roman said and everyone gave a small laugh.

I helped Melissa to her feet as Mom checked her watch. "Oh, we need to get going. Ladies help me with the food. Jamie, you and the girls drive Celine to the ceremony. Amy, take Melissa's minivan with her and the kids."

I nodded and instructed the kids to wait by the van. Melissa handed me the keys and I called out for Lady to come down. She was washed, groomed and had pink ribbons tied around her ears.

"Aw, how cute," Ella squeaked as she petted Lady, "Can she ride with us?"

I turned to Jamie and she shrugged, "I got the room."

"Alright," I called out, "Operation Wedding is now in effect! Let's move, let's move, let's move!"
With that, the kids ran out in excitement and Jamie led Celine to her Hybrid. Ella and Daniela gestured for Lady to sit in the back seat with them and Celine took the passenger seat.

The kids squeezed into the van and Melissa took the seat next to me. I started the engine as Jamie drove out of the driveway. I quickly followed her as Gael called out, "Race her! Race her! Race her!"

I ignored him and put all my attention into driving. In less than ten minutes we were parking Melissa's van with all the other cars in the front of her house. The house was one level and made with simple brown brick. Sanjay was waiting for us in front. Unlike all of the men at the party who wore casual suits; he wore a light brown tunic with matching pants and a scarf. He opened the door for Melissa and escorted her inside the house. I noticed that Jamie, Ella and Daniela were leading Celine quickly into the house, so that Johnny wouldn't see her. Lady followed at Ella's side, her tail wagging happily. I climbed out of the car and told the kids to wait inside the house.

But they didn't listen; only grinned in a certain direction. I followed their gaze to find Arthur, Francis and Matthew dressed in causal suits. "Uncle Arthur!" Gael called out and ran to hug Arthur at his legs. Valencia, Roman and Blair ran after him and collided into Arthur, tackling him to the ground.

"Get off!" he shouted, but the kids were only encouraged to hug him even tighter.

"Uncle Francis!" Lali cried out as she ran over to hug him.

Francis lifted her up in his arms, "Bonjour ma chérie."

"Uncle Mattie," Alyce smiled as she hugged Matthew. "Kumajirou's not with you?"

"I'm afraid so," he answered and the kids gave out a big 'ah'.

"Yes it's quite sad that the bloody bear couldn't be here, now could you children please get off of me," Arthur exclaimed.

Roman and Gael shared a smirk as Valencia and Blair proclaimed, "Let's tickle him!"

Before Arthur could call out for help he was covered by tickling hands. "Stop," he laughed, "please!"

Francis, Matthew, Alyce and Lali laughed and I decided to save Arthur. "Okay, you guys had your fun, that's enough." The kids grinned and moved away from Arthur.

He rose to his feet and brushed off any dirt that was on him, "You naughty little buggers, I have a half of mind to spank all of you!" The kids giggled and ran to the house, "That's right, you better run!" Arthur called after them.

I shook my head and gestured Francis to hand me Lali, "Come on sweetie, you need to get ready."

"I want to stay with Uncle Francis," Lali wrapped her arms around his neck.

Francis smiled, "No, listen to your Aunt."

"Okay," she said as he handed Lali into my arms.

I passed her to Alyce, "Get her inside." Alyce nodded and carried Lali to the house. Blake was quiet throughout the entire ordeal and glanced at me with a worried look. He still didn't trust the
nations; I guess he's still afraid that they'll take me away. I smiled, "Go on Blake, I'll be fine."

He faced the countries, then to me and nodded. He turned away and walked towards the house.

"I keep forgetting that boy has the Sight," said Arthur.

"What's the big deal? He sees spirits." I shrugged.

"Not just spirits, people of the Sight can see other people's emotions and feelings. A person's true
nature and can tell if someone's lying."

"That explains a lot," I mumbled as I thought about Blake, whenever I was upset he would offer me
a hug and smile. When I tried to tell a little white lie, he would always say, 'Aunt Amy, don't lie.'

Francis gave a small smile, "Amy just make sure to watch out for him, most people won't
understand him."

"Good thing he has family that does," I proclaimed.

"Hey!" a voice called out and we turned to find Michel waving to us, "The ceremony is about to
start!"

I took my seat in the front with Mom and Dad on my left while Melissa, Sanjay, Blair and Blake
sat on my right. Lady sat at my feet and the rest of our extended family sat in the rows behind me. I
was able to catch Arthur, Francis and Matthew behind them, and found a few of Johnny's friends
mixed in with some of the members of the community. On the bride's side, there were also
members of the same community and friends from college. Johnny and Celine shared most of their
high school friends; they were sweethearts since childhood, so most of us weren't surprised to be
here today.

The wedding arch and rows of chairs were facing the ocean, so we had an amazing view of the
water and of the mid-afternoon sky. The sun was in perfect angle of the wedding arch, which was
painted white with pink tulips decorating the entire arch. The aisle was covered with white carpet
with bouquets at the end of each row.

A small orchestra band stood to the right side of the arch, this band was made up of Jamie, Ella,
Daniela and Michel being the vocals. Christopher was on his violin and James Reed was on the
piano while each person in his band played an instrument. One was on a trumpet; another played
the trombone, then a French horn, a clarinet, a cello, a viola and a drum set. James was an elderly
black man that I've known since childhood, he's a sweet, loveable man that formed his band when
we all lived in the rec-center together after the Quake. I called them The Fedoras because James
would always wear a fedora and the name sort of stuck. Now the members of the band wear a
fedora when they performed.

The justice of the peace was a man in a dark suit and stood right under the arch. Johnny stood
beside him with his hands behind him. His long black hair was tied in a low pony tail and his black
tuxedo was cleaned and pressed.

Aunt Emily calls out, "They're coming, start the music." She cues the band and they begin the soft
melody of 'Love Like This,' by Natasha Bedingfield.

Daniela and Ella began to set the harmony, "Oh, oh, never find a love like this. Oh, oh, never find
"a love like this." The band kept the pace with the drums and James playing the piano. Christopher streamed on his violin and had the other wood string instruments follow his example. Jamie begins her solo:

"Well we go back so far swingin' in your backyard

"All the things that we used to do

"We were cool back in high school, ooh, I really liked you

"Must have been your attitude

"And that's why you keep on runnin' in and out of my mind

"As the years they all roll by, baby, now I know why

"I keep comin' back to you"

The maid of honor and best man stood at the end of the aisle. They walked out, swaying with the music. Daniela and Ella added in their voices when Jamie sang:

"You're the only one that knows me, love it when you hold me

"I'd never find a love like this, let me hear you say

"Now I'll never be lonely, look at what you've shown me

"I'd never find a love like this."

Jamie's voice grew to another solo:

"When this life tries to keep us apart

"You keep callin' me back to your heart, let me hear you say

"I'm so glad you found me, wrap you all around me

"I'd never find a love like this."

When the second verse came in, the bride's maids and groom's men followed. They walked to the beat and separated at the arch, the men stood next to Johnny and the women stood on the opposite side. Then Gael followed with a small white pillow in his hands.

"All the guys tried to take me; you're the one who saved me

"I feel like I owe you my life

"And as strange as it may seem, I'll go if you take me

"I'm willing to sacrifice

"And that's why you keep on runnin' in and out of my mind

"As the years they all roll by, it's not hard to know why

"I keep comin' back to you."
"You're the only one that knows me, love it when you hold me

"I'd never find a love like this, let me hear you say

"Now I'll never be lonely, look at what you've shown me

"I'd never find a love like this

"When this life tries to keep us apart

"You keep callin' me back to your heart, let me hear you say

"I'm so glad you found me, wrap you all around me

"I'd never find a love like this."

I watched as Gael counted his steps, wearing a determined face to not mess up. Lali came out right when Michel began to sing his part:

"May never find a l-l-love like this

"That still make me think about my middle school kiss

"I sit here in this chair and I wish for you not to leave me now

"My friends they always told me, not to make you my wifey

"Man they was puttin' you down

"And now they see we rollin', me and you, we strollin'

"They don't wanna come around"

Lali threw the tulip petals on to the carpet with each step and when Michel ended, Jamie's voice rose again.

"Let me hear you say

"You're the only one that knows me, love it when you hold me

"I'd never find a love like this, let me hear you say

"Now I'll never be lonely, look at what you've shown me

"I'd never find a love like this"

When Lali came to the arch, she stood with the bride's maids as Celine walked out and stood at the end of the aisle. I rose to my feet along with the rest of our family, friends and guests. I caught Johnny beaming with loving adoration at his bride and I turned to find Celine blushing. Jamie continued with the last verse as she began to walk down the aisle.

"When this life tries to keep us apart

"You keep callin' me back to your heart, let me hear you say

"I'm so glad you found me, wrap you all around me
"I'd never find a love like this."

Celine was holding a bouquet of pink tulips to her chest as she smiled and focused all her attention on Johnny. Then the crowd and I began to sing along as Celine made her way to the arch.

"Oh, oh, never find a love like this

"Oh, oh, never find a love like this

"Oh, oh, never find a love like this

"Oh, oh, never find a love like this

"Oh, oh, never find a love like this."

Jamie's voice raised above all the rest as she sang the last part.

"When this life tries to keep us apart

"You keep callin' me back to your heart, let me hear you say

"Oh, oh, never find a love like this

"Oh, oh, never find a love like this."

The song ends with Celine at the arch and Johnny beside her; both beaming at one another with love and happiness.

After the vows were said and the rings were placed on each hand, the justice of the peace finally announced. "I pronounce you husband and wife, you may kiss the bride."

Johnny placed his hands gently on Celine's face and pulled her into a long sweet kiss. The crowd cheered and clapped as they threw more flower petals into the air.

Chapter End Notes

Translations

French: Bonjour ma chérie (Hello my dear)
The sun still gave us several hours of daylight left, but we had cream colored lights draped around the band platform and were hanged above the dance floor, ready for when night rolls in. Small candle lanterns were set on each guest table and were aligned along the buffet table. The reception was in full swing as Uncle Alex, Kupunakane and The Fedoras jammed out on stage. People packed themselves on the dance floor, each one showing off their moves.

I was on my feet the entire time, maybe taking ten minutes to eat and drink. I walked around visiting family friends and neighbors, introducing them to Arthur, Francis and Matthew whenever I got the chance. Mostly because I loved the look Arthur gave when he had to choke out, 'Yes, Francis is my boyfriend.' Every time he said it his voice and face grew in bitterness, but yet Francis would still wear his million dollar smile and coo over his Angleterre.

I on the other hand would laugh my ass off.

When a song I loved played (which was pretty much every song), I would drag one of the nations to the dance floor. Matthew and Francis happily followed my lead while Arthur occasionally complained. Luckily for me, I had Francis and Matthew on my side to make him dance. Alyce and Roman were able to gather their cousins and any other child from the party into a large group. They would hop and twirl around the dance floor, play soccer or toss around a stick with Lady on the sandy shore. The bride and groom twirled with one another but would also separate to dance with family and friends. Mom and Dad were sitting with the Russos and the Chens, chatting happily with one another. Aunt Emily was dancing with her daughters, along with Kupunawahine. Melissa couldn't stand on her feet for too long, but she had Sanjay and Josefina to keep her company. Rafael, Eduardo, and Aaron were drinking with Neill. I even caught Grandma Aponi dancing with James when he got a break from playing.

I smiled at the scene, I was worried she would be lonely without Grandpa but she seems to be having fun. I caressed Grandpa's ring as the thought came and went.

"Amy!" Ella called out and hugged me from behind.

"Where have you been?" Sam asked, "We've been looking for you."

"I was just dancing with my bros," I proclaimed as I untangled myself free from Ella's gasp.

Daniela's eyes widened, "Oh right, your biological half-brothers."

"That certainly isn't a mouth full," stated Sam.

I rolled my eyes and Dimitri cracked a grin, "Well aren't you going to introduce us."

"Sure," I smiled, and gestured for the nations to stand beside me. "This is Arthur Kirkland and Matthew Williams my half-brothers." I gestured to my friends, "You guys have met Michel and Jamie," they both gave a little wave. I moved along, "this is Sam Collins," Sam was dressed in a simple dress button down shirt with dark slacks and had his blond dreads tied in a messy, but yet stylish bun. "Daniela Aguero and Ella Chasse," both girls gave a smile. "Heisuke Sato," I gestured to a Japanese boy a little taller than me, wearing a dress shirt, slacks and a blazer. His shaggy black hair bounced forward when he bowed and gave a swift greeting. "And last but not least is Dimitri
Maier. Dimitri wore a black dress shirt that outlined his wide gymnast body with khakis and black dress shoes. He was a few inches taller than Francis and had his short dark hair brushed back.

"And who's this?" Ella pointed to Francis.

My smile grew wider, "Arthur can answer that."

Arthur tensed and Francis bashed his lashes at him. Arthur tried not to glare and swallowed his pride, "This is Francis Bonnefoy." He slowly, and painfully, wrapped his arm around Francis', "my life partner," he smiled through gritted teeth.

Michel, Jamie and I shared a humorous grin.

Daniela nodded, "nice to meet you," she shook Francis's hand.

"The honor is mine, I heard you and Ella were the ones that designed Celine's dress. I must say, you girls have amazing taste." Francis proclaimed.

Ella's eyes sparkled to life, "Oui, and please tell me, you're a high end fashion designer, here to sign us up for a clothing line?!"

Francis blinked, lifted a brow and said, "No."

The spark in Ella's eyes died, "Then you are of no use to me."

Daniela elbowed her, "Could you be any ruder?! I'm sorry she does not have, what the Americans say, a filter."

"I am only being truthful," Ella exclaimed.

Sam shook his head, "you can learn to be less harsh about it."

Heisuke stepped forward, "please don't take Ella-chan's words to heart, she is just honest."

"More like blunt," Michel added.

"All of you are just envious of the courage I possess to speak my mind," Ella smiled wickedly.

Before we could say anything else, Celine called out, "It's time to toss the bouquet!" Single women squealed and swarmed onto the dance floor. Ella pulled an unwilling Daniela into the crowd as Jamie and I stood in the back. The boys and the nations stood behind us, staying out of the way. Celine turned her back to us and on the count three, tossed it in the air; but she threw it too far and it passed right over Jamie's head. On cue the crowd turns and we found the bouquet of pink tulips in Arthur's hands.

There is a God in this world, and he has an awesome sense of humor. Jamie and I burst out laughing as Arthur stared at the bouquet with a mix of horror and confusion.

"Congratulations Arthur!" Celine called out.

"What? No!" Arthur exclaimed, "This should go to a woman, Amy take it!"

"I don't want it," I lifted my hands in mock surrender.

"Jamie!" Arthur turned to her.
"Don't look at me," she replied.

Arthur didn't give up; he tried, almost begged for any of the women from the crowd to take the bouquet. The women politely declined and reassured him to keep it. Arthur was left in the middle of the dance floor, looking like he was about to cry.

Francis came up behind him and wrapped his arms around Arthur's waist, "You can't change fate Angleterre. You and I are meant to be together," Francis said lovingly.

Arthur finally snapped. "I will never be yours you bloody wanker!" He smacked Francis in the face with the bouquet, knocking him down. Arthur then took his chance to beat Francis with the bouquet. The stems of the flowers broke as pink petals flew through the air and scattered to the floor. After several hits, Arthur threw the damaged bouquet to the ground and stomped away, cursing the entire way.

People shifted from one foot to the other in awkward silence as Francis rose to his feet, and shook out the petals from his hair. "He's a little shy," he said as he walked in the direction where Arthur stormed off; giving apologetic replies to anyone he crossed.

"I'm gonna go make sure they don't kill each other," Matthew whispered in my ear and followed Francis.

"Well, that was certainly a show," Sam remarked.

"Thanks for pointing out the obvious, Sherlock," I countered sarcastically.

The band quickly begins another song as Uncle Alex grabs the microphone. He streamed his fingers over his guitar strings and sang 'Locked Out of Heaven' by Bruno Mars. Family and friends tried to ease the tension by pulling people back onto the dance floor. Jamie hauled Heisuke into the crowd as Ella and Daniela grabbed for Sam and Michel. I tapped my foot to the beat till Dimitri nudged me with his arm.

"I am waiting," he proclaimed.

"For what?" I asked.

"For you to ask me to dance," he smiled childishly.

I rolled my eyes, "Dimitri, do you want to dance with me?" I asked.

His smile became flirtatious, "I thought you would never ask."

I shook my head and yanked him to the center of the dance floor. We rapidly adapt to the beat of the song and shuffled our feet in sync. We were half serious about dancing, mostly we just goofed off and displayed our corniest moves. Then he would hold my hand as I did some exaggerated version of a flapper's shuffle. He grinned and took his turn to show off his moves. He spins himself fast, stopped and shook his hips unevenly to the tempo.

I laughed, "What is that? A cow's got better rhythm."

He narrowed his eyes at me, "Are you making fun of me Ms. Hawkfeather."

"A little, yes," I smirked.

He lifted a brow at me and then a sly grin spreads from ear to ear. In one swift move, he flipped
me over his back and I yelped in a girly squeal. My waist was right over his shoulder and my face was inches away from his lower back. He struts off the floor as guests smiled, laughed and cracked a few jokes.

"Dimitri, what are you doing? Put me down!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, I will," he said mischievously.

At that moment I heard the waves clash against the shore. Dimitri discards his shoes in the dry sand, then took off my shoes and tossed them next to his. He stood near the shore line as the water caressed his toes.

I tensed, "You wouldn't dare."

He grinned, "I would." He sprinted into the ocean, lifted me off his shoulder and threw me into the water.

My bottom splashed into the surface as the cool salty water soaked into my dress. I was completely submerged till I hastily rose to my feet with a gasp. The water circled around my waist as the humid air of the afternoon made my body shiver.

I glared at Dimitri, "You're dead." I splashed my hand over the surface in his direction. He turns back and I chased after him, kicking water at him.

"Let's go swimming!" Gael exclaimed and ran to the ocean's shore, kicking off his shoes and tossing aside his blazer, tie and vest as he did. The children followed suite before their parents could protest, discarding their blazers and shoes before they hit the water. Lady leaped after them, running around the children and dodging the water's edge.

Roman, Valencia and Blair came to my aid by splashing Dimitri at his front and sides. This gave me the opportunity to tackle him into the ocean. We fell back as a wave crashed against our backs. We were under the water for a second till Dimitri sat up with me in his lap. We looked at one another and we couldn't help but laugh.

"Group hug!" Michel called out and jumped on top of us, soaking his clothes with one splash. Jamie leaped in and pulled me under another wave. When I surfaced, it became a free for all. Ella splashed at Heisuke as Sam kicked water at Daniela. The kids joined in by splashing water at one another and ducking each other under the surface. The late afternoon was then filled with playful banter, excited screams and childish laughter.

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Twilight's light gleamed over the surface of the water as the day waned down. The children were still going strong, but the older teens no longer had the stamina to continue.

"Where in the bloody hell do they get all that energy from?" Sam asked.

I shrugged, "I put my money on the cake."

My friends and I laid out on the sandy shore, watching as the kids played in the water and the sun set over the horizon. I sat between Dimitri and Michel while Sam had placed his head in Jamie's lap. Ella was draped over his waist. Her elbows were in the sand as her hands supported her face. Heisuke sat beside Michel and had Daniela on his right, her head resting on his shoulder. We allowed the peaceful atmosphere to calm us, but this moment didn't last.
"Lady!" Lali cried, "Give me back my shoe!"

Lady jumped away from Lali's grasp and placed her front paws out with her tail in the air. Lady was being playful, but clearly Lali was cranky and didn't want to join in her game. Lady leaped into a sprint across the beach, Lali whined and tried to run but she was too tired. Blake came in and gestured for her to stay as he chased after Lady.

"Run Forest! Run!" Michel called out and everyone laughed.

I grinned and rose to my feet, "I'll be back." I sprinted after Blake, my feet sinking into the sand with every step. The ocean's waves brushed against my toes and heels as my second wind kicked in. In the distance, I spotted Lady and Blake stop in front of a tall man. My brows knitted in concern as I pushed myself forward.

This man had stooped down to pull the shoe from Lady's mouth and hand it to Blake. He wore a long sleeved white shirt with khakis. As I got closer, I noticed that he had a white scarf wrapped around his neck. His hair was silver but when the sun's rays clashed against it, it took on the color of white. I stopped inches away from the scene as Blake turned to me and violet eyes met mine.

"Hello Amy," Ivan greeted with a fake smile.

"Aunt Amy," Blake ran to my side and buried his face in my dress. Lady followed and growled softly at Ivan from my right.

I wrapped my arms around him, "did he do anything to you?" I whispered.

He shook his head and whimpered softly, "his aura's scary," he was beginning to tremble and I squeezed his shoulder affectionately.

"Blake, go," I told him firmly.

"But."

"Don't question me." I made my eyes hard and pushed him gently in the direction we came from.

He was hesitant and I snapped, "Go!" It pained me to raise my voice at him, but I refused for Ivan to be any closer to my nephew than he already was. Blake flinched and ran back to the party.

Once he was a good distance away from us, I turned to Ivan along with Lady bearing her teeth, "What the hell do you want," I commanded.

The waves splashed against Blake's ankles as he sprinted across the beach. His mind was spinning with thoughts of his encounter with the silver haired man. When he first saw the man's aura, Blake's immediate instincts were to run in the opposite direction. Yet he stayed; fear had frozen him in place. The man's aura was a mix of rueful dark crimson, greedy brown and murderous black. It was difficult but Blake was able look beyond those traits to discover the man's true celestial golden aura.

Then his thoughts turned to Amy, how her bright shining gold dimmed and flickered with fearful red when she saw the man. He never saw Amy so frighten before, but yet her gold seemed to thrive back to life when she turned her eyes on Blake. The moment Amy focused her attention on him, bright orange; the color of courage surged through her and her protective nature took the lead. Yet
he knew Amy couldn't face that man alone.

She needed a hero, a person that could stand up to a living spirit.

"Dimitri!" he called out, "Dimitri!"

A figure rose and Blake caught sight of a silver aura glistening in the light of the twilight sun. Blake quickly remembered what his great grandfather used to say about people with silver auras. They had strong leadership skills, a noble heart and a selfless personality. They were also the rare breed of humans that were compatible with living spirits.

He sprinted to Blake's side, "what's wrong?"

"Aunt Amy," he panted and pointed in the direction where she was. "A man is there and he's not nice."

The moment the words left his lips, Dimitri's eyes widened in concern, "stay here," he instructed and sprinted in that direction.

Blake knew Dimitri was strong enough to hold off the silver haired country, but it was best to be prepared. He ran back to the crowd of kids and quickly handed back Lali her shoe. He didn't waste time with talking with his cousin. He leaped into the party of adults and began to search frantically for three young men with golden auras.

Colors of blue, yellow and pink surrounded him, but under those colors there were hints of red, green, orange, and indigo. Auras are not as simple as having one color. A person's aura can fuse with other colors, these colors represented emotions. Several colors can also have different meanings and shades.

This blue was kind, while the yellow represented the optimistic and happiness of the mood and the pink was for friendship. To find someone's true color, the one that represents their personality. Blake had to focus and strip away their layers of emotion to reveal their true nature. The process was second nature to him, and this skill was helpful in these types of situations.

He scanned the area, locating Grandma Jessica's passionate red aura and Grandpa John's peaceful green on the dance floor. Blake looked away and collided against Great Aunt Emily.

"Whoa, where's the fire," her aura was the shade of bright yellow, but the true nature behind this yellow was a person that was a perfectionist and an intellectual.

"Have you seen Matthew? Or Arthur? Or Francis?" he asked.

She shook her head, "no."

Blake didn't bother with anything else she had to say and ran further into the crowd. Cheerful light yellow grew even stronger, surrounding him like a fog. Till a table from the distance shimmered with a shade of dark angry red, which Blake used as a guide through the fog.

At the end of the color, he found three young men sitting at that table. One had a calming shade of indigo, the other wore a wounded dark blue and the last held an angry red. But deep down, all of them carried gold.

"I can't believe you embarrassed me in front of everyone like that," Francis hissed at Arthur.

Arthur glared at him his red aura swirled in irritation, "You're the one that's embarrassed? I was
humiliated!

"I was just playing my part," Francis rose to his feet.

Arthur jumped to his feet and snarled, "Playing?! I know that look in your eye and you are definitely not playing!"

At that moment Blake caught a glance of pink and red fusing together with Francis’s dark blue. Matthew stepped between them, the colors of soothing indigo and compassionate green lingered off him. "You two are making a scene, stop," he begged.

Before they could argue any further, Blake sprinted to them and cried, "Help!"

They snapped their attention to him and Arthur sighed as he rubbed the bridge of his nose. "What is it lad?"

"There's a country here!"

All three nations widened their eyes at him, their true golden auras shining through the other shades of emotions.

"What did the country look like?" Arthur asked.

"He was tall," he answered, "with silver hair."

Dreadful red took shape in each of their auras but was soon drowned out by orange and gold.

"Where is he?" Matthew asked.

"The beach, go left!"

The nations leaped into a full speed run towards the ocean, Blake tried to follow but was stopped by Matthew. "It's too dangerous, stay here."

Blake was left behind in the crowd, watching the golden light of the countries fade away.

Ivan smirked, "I've only come to congratulate your brother and his bride on their wedding day."

"Bullshit," I hissed.

He shrugged, "it is the truth. Well, not entirely, it all started with simple curiosity. I only wished to know more about you, маленький котенок. You didn't really talk much about yourself during the party."

"I was too busy running for my life," I snapped harshly.

His smirk became a cruel childlike smile, "that was fun, Да?"

I glared at him as he continued, "So after the party, I decided to take a look into your files, everything nowadays is online. But to my surprise I found your files locked and sealed. Now I was really curious, what were you hiding?"

"You know the whole evil monologue thing is getting old, real fast," I said with sarcastic venom in
my tone. "If you could, you know speed this up a bit, that would be nice."

Ivan chuckled, "Very well, I hired a computer specialist to hack into your files. It took a couple of days, but may I say it was worth it to discover your little secret."

I took a deep breath and summoned all of my courage. "Good for you. Now get the fuck out of my sight!"

His smile disappeared as he moved to stand in front of me. His fists were clutched tightly as his eyes sparked with rage. "You must be mistaken; you think you have the power in this situation." He leaned down, his face mere centimeters from mine. "You don't; I do."

"Amy!" a voice breaks the tension and we turned to find Dimitri running towards us.

Relief surged through me, but that emotion quickly turned to worry and anxiously. Ivan took a step back as Dimitri made his way to stand on my side.

He glanced to me, and then to Ivan, "Is everything okay here," he asked more like a statement than a question.

"Da, everything's fine," Ivan smiled, "we were just having a little chat."

"And he was just leaving," I proclaimed.

"Oh no, not just yet," said Ivan, "I have a message to give you."

"Seems like everyone has a fucking message to give me, I thought. Irritation was building inside of me and I was about to tell Ivan to take his message and buttfuck himself with it. Before I could form the words, Dimitri placed himself between me and Ivan, "Then say it, and once you do, you can leave."

"Big talk for a boy," Ivan narrowed his eyes at him in annoyance.

"You have two choices," Dimitri's voice was filled with confidence and authority. "You can pass along your message and leave or I will escort you off the property."

Ivan glared at him, "Listen well boy, this has nothing to do with you. So I suggest you walk away or do you prefer me to beat your face in."

I pulled Dimitri back and was about to threaten Ivan with calling the police till another voice exclaimed, "Ivan."

All three of us looked up to the small cliff of grassy land that separated the brown dirt from the yellow sand. Arthur was standing at the top of the cliff with Francis and Matthew at his side.

"Last I checked you were not invited to the wedding," Arthur proclaimed as he jumped down and stood before him. Francis and Matthew followed and placed themselves beside me. "You have no right to be here."

Ivan smirked, "I believe I do. One of my many duties is to protect our secrets. Clearly all of you do not seem to take that to heart."

"Do you even have a heart?" I remarked.

"Amy, do you know this man?" Dimitri asked.
The nations glanced at him and Francis hissed, "This is not the time Ivan."

Ivan cocked his head to the side, "true, but this time would certainly be the most fun."

"I need you to go," I whispered to Dimitri.

"I'm not leaving you with him," he whispered back.

"I won't be alone with him, I got these guys. Now go, please," I begged softly.

"What's going on? Amy you can tell me."

"I can't. I'm sorry."

His face became expressionless but his dark eyes revealed his disappointment. "Fine, but I will be close by just in case he tries anything." With those final words he walked away, keeping a short enough distance to watch us but far enough not to hear us.

"So I am guessing he does not know," Ivan glanced to me.

I ignored his statement, "What do you have to say that was so important that you had to travel half way across the world to deliver in person."

"Humor me for one more moment," Ivan lifted his index finger to me. "How long have you known?"

I rolled my eyes, "A month."

"A month," he repeated with an ugly smile, "that's must have been quite a shock. All your life you thought you were human and now your life is no longer your own."

"What do you mean by that?"

"A nation's duty is to their country," he looked to Arthur, Francis and Matthew; all three of them glared at him but said nothing. "It is also," he continued, "our responsibility to keep certain things out of the public's eye, we all have learned from experience that it's best to keep civilians out of our business." He turned to me, "Enjoy these moments America," he leaned forward to whisper in my ear, "for they won't last long."

Before I could counter with a sassy comeback, he stepped back and walked away.

We walked across the beach in silence. The nations walked ahead of me as Dimitri and Lady took my sides. During this time, I tried to come up with an excuse for Ivan, but Dimitri didn't buy it.

"You don't have to tell me anything if you don't want to," he proclaimed.

I sighed and asked him to keep quiet about Ivan. He agreed with no argument and kept walking. When we returned to the party, the sun was setting and the lights and lanterns began to twinkle. Dimitri gestured me to go hang with the gang, but I could feel Arthur's gaze on me. I turned to him and the expression on his face read, 'we need to talk.' I declined Dimitri's offer and walked off with nations to sit at a far off table; away from the crowd of party guests.

As I took my seat, Lady slid her head on my lap to comfort me. I smiled and scratched her behind
her ears.

"What did Ivan say to you?" Arthur asked.

"About my moments of life not lasting for long; is that just a poetic way of saying that he wants to kill me?" I joked.

Before Arthur could lecture me about not taking situations like this seriously; his phone alerted him of an email, so did Francis' and Matthew's. They shared a worried look with one another and checked their emails.

Arthur's eyes widened as Francis gave a small gasp and Matthew groaned softly, "oh God, no."

I knitted my brows in confusion, "What is it?"

Arthur sighed, "Ivan has just sent an email to every nation, an email containing your files."

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Russian: маленький котенок (little kitten)
Chapter 21

I was in a zombie daze for the remaining time of the wedding.

If I didn't have my friends and family to pull me from place to place, I would have sat in my chair and stared off into space. My mind worked overtime, trying to understand the situation at hand; Russia had threatened my family. Emailing all the other nations and provoking them into a crazed state of panic. Arthur's, Francis' and Matthew's phones ringed five minutes after the email was sent and on the other side of the line, they were met with angry shouts. Some phrases I caught were in different languages. They had to make a hasty retreat back to their hotel, for privacy.

I barely noticed them, only nodded and placed my hands in my hair, pulling the strands in frustration. Lady curled herself around my feet, comforting me as I tried not to panic.

_Ivan/Russia has just ruined your life and put your family and friends in the sight of the nations,_ my inner voice exclaimed. _I think it's the perfect time to panic!_

_No_, I soothed myself, _there has to be a way to solve this._

_Yeah, change your names and move to Mexico!_

_Mexico. Really?_

_Your right, inner voice said Mexico might not be on your side. And all of you can't move to one place. I got it! Split up the members of your family and friends and have each of them move to Canada, Britain or France._

_No one's moving anywhere! So the nations have my files, it's not the end of the world!_

_Did you forget the story of Joan? She knew too much and got herself killed for it! Think about your friends. Jamie will never get her chance to act, and Michel will never go to that art school in Rhode Island! Why? Because-if they're lucky, they're be locked away in a mental hospital for the rest of their lives!_

_That won't happen!_

_Really now? Let's not forget your family, what do you think they're going to do to the people that raised America, the nations are certainly not gonna throw them a party! They can frame your parents, your siblings and their spouses for crimes they didn't commit! I'm sure Johnny and Celine would love to spend their honeymoon in prison, my inner voice remarked sarcastically._

_How about you shut up!_

_Oh are you mad that I'm right; and also, what about Blair and Blake? Oh let me guess, they might be sent to live with their cousins in Texas. Oh wait Blake has the Sight! That changes everything! How you might ask? Well, they'll throw that kid in an asylum with a straight jacket to match! Blake well never see the light of day again._

"Shut up already," I hissed.

"I didn't even say anything yet," a voice said.
I jerked up and turned to find Melissa sitting herself in the seat next to me. Lady rose up and stared intensely at my sister's belly. "Mel," I sighed, "I didn't mean you, I was-

"Talking to yourself," she answered for me.

"No, well somewhat," I sighed again, "I just have a lot going on right now."

Melissa's face grew with concern and worry, "Does it have anything to do with that man that was here earlier?"

My eyes widened, "How did you-" then it hit me, "Blake. He didn't tell anyone else, did he?"

"No," she answered, "Amy, who was that man? Blake was so terrified, he," she closed her eyes and clutched her stomach. "Oh," she exhaled.

I rose to attention, "are you okay?"

She held up her hand, "It's okay, I must've ate something-" she hissed in another breath. She tried to continue her sentence but stopped, her eyes widened as she looked down. I followed her gaze and found water dripping down her legs. I froze as Melissa whispered, "My water just broke."

Oh. My. God.

"The baby's coming, like now?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, now!" Melissa began to breathe in and out repeatedly. "Get Mom!"

I nodded and ran to the dance floor, "Mom! Mom!"

She found me at the edge and turned to me, "What's wrong?"

"It's Melissa! The baby's coming!"

My mom's nurse instincts snapped into attention and she instructed in a calm tone. "John, tell James to cut the music and inform everyone that the party's over." Dad nodded and sprinted to the stage. Mom turned back to me, "Find Sanjay, and tell him to get the overnight bag."

"Mom," Johnny called out, "What's going on?"

"Melissa's in labor," Mom answered, "I need you and Celine to start the car."

Both Johnny and Celine nodded as he held his bride's hand and ran to their red BMW with the 'Just Married' sign attached to the back.

"Amy," Mom shook me back to reality, "Get Sanjay!"

"Melissa's in labor," Mom answered, "I need you and Celine to start the car."

Both Johnny and Celine nodded as he held his bride's hand and ran to their red BMW with the 'Just Married' sign attached to the back.

"Amy," Mom shook me back to reality, "Get Sanjay!"

"Right," I ran around calling out for him, till I found my brother in law chatting with Rafael and Neill. "Sanjay, Melissa's in labor! We need you to get the overnight bag and met them at Johnny's car."

Sanjay's eyes widened as he stood and ran to the house. Rafael said he would gather the family into cars. Neill proclaimed that he would clear out the guests from the party.

The next two hours was filled with somewhat organized chaos; Melissa was guided into the back seat of Johnny's BMW with Mom and Sanjay sitting at her sides. Celine sat herself in the passenger seat and Johnny pressed his foot on the gas and sped down the street. Rafael and Sofia gathered the
kids into Melissa's minivan and drove after them. Mia and Josefina focused on clearing out the
guests with Neill as Dad, Uncle Alex, Kupunakane, James, Laura and Christopher boxed up the
band. Eduardo, Aaron, Aunt Emily, Kupunawahine, and Grandma Aponi packed up left over food
as the Russos, Chens and my friends carried large black trash bags and did a quick clean up.

I actually welcomed the distraction of cleaning and the baby coming, it took my mind away from
Russia and the nations.

Once all the guests had left, everyone climbed into their cars and drove to the hospital. I on the
other hand, sat myself on the stage with Lady by my side. I scratched her behind her ears as I
recalled that she had stared, ready and alert at Melissa's belly the moment before Mel started
feeling the painful contractions. "You were ready, huh, girl," I whispered.

A car honked and I looked up to find Jamie behind the wheel of her car. "Amy! Come on, the birth
of your nephew/niece is on the way!"

We all met in the waiting room of Saint Joseph's Hospital. James, Grandma Aponi, Kupunakane
and Jamie's grandfather Jin were playing mahjong around the table. Kupunawahine, Aunt Emily,
Sofia, Mia, and Josefina were chatting among themselves at one side of the room. Yin, Gemma
and Laura sat near Johnny and Celine against the opposite wall. Dad, Carlo, Dong, Uncle Alex,
Rafael, Eduardo, and Aaron were playing poker at another table, using snacks from the vending
machines as gambling chips. The kids sat around the TV watching Disney channel as Neill and
Christopher watched a soccer game on a tablet next to them.

Jaidev and Asha Arora, Sanjay's parents were even there, which surprised me. They were dressed
in traditional Indian tunics, Jaidev also wore a turban and Asha had wrapped her shawl around her
head. They were old school Hindus. When Melissa and Sanjay got engaged, they were furious. Not
only was Sanjay marrying outside of their culture and religion, Melissa was also mixed and her
parents didn't seem to take the situation seriously enough as of who they were inviting into their
family.

I was the main example, when they heard about my story they would call me the 'the stray' in
Hindi. To them, I was a vermin that had wondered into John and Jessica's home. Jaidev and Asha
believed that family is blood and they don't really understand the whole situation of adoption. I still
remembered when I was lying in my sick bed during the Recession, Jaidev had commented, "Why
are they spending so much money on a child that's not even theirs."

He thought I was sound asleep when he said that, but I heard it, and it still makes my blood boil
even to this day.

"What are they doing here?" Michel whispered to me, "I thought they didn't like us."

"More like they tolerate us," I whispered back. "It's the sacrifice they make so they can be with
their grand kids."

"Well, at least their trying," Jamie shrugged her shoulders.

"I guess," I rolled my eyes and sat where I wouldn't be able to make eye contact with them. That
was where Neill and Christopher sat. I took my seat a few chairs down from them as Michel, Jamie
and Sam sat on my left and Heisuke, Ella, Daniela and Dimitri sat on my right.

We were all still dressed in our wedding clothes, which got us some curious glances from the nurse
staff. Even some young, handsome male nurses were checking me and my girlfriends out. Jamie was shy and would turn away from their glances. Daniela would wave her fingers as Ella blew kisses. I ignored them and took turns playing a DS with Heisuke.

Once Ella lost interest in the male nurses, which wasn't long, she pouted. "I'm bored. Why couldn't we have brought Lady with us?"

"She couldn't come to the hospital," I said as my mind replayed our quick detour to my house to drop off Lady.

"It's not fair," Ella shook out her hair from her bun, "back in Paris you could bring your dog anywhere."

"I don't think hospitals were included, even in Paris," Sam remarked.

"Shut up, no one cares what you say."

He rolled his eyes, "and you wonder why you can't hold on to a boyfriend."

"Ha! It's because I have dreams and goals, and if a man can't understand that. They are not worth my time."

"Snooty much," Michel said as he and Jamie flipped through an super old issue of Cosmo. Daniela giggled as Ella glared at Michel, "don't even start Michel."

"You'll just mad cause what he said is true," Dimitri smirked.

"I am not snooty," Ella hissed.

"Yes, you are," we all said in sync as she crossed her arms in annoyance.

Before Ella could come up with a saucy comeback, Blair stood before me and tapped me on my knee. "Auntie Amy, can you answer my question? No one else will."

I gave Heisuke my turn with the DS and focused my attention on Blair. "Sure what is it sweetie?"

"Where do babies come from?" she asked innocently as she cocked her head to the side.

Heisuke snapped his head up to face Blair as the sound effects from the game echoed, informing us that the main character died. Sam looked away from his phone as Jamie and Michel closed the magazine and hid it away from Blair's sight. Ella and Daniela perked up and gave me a side-way glance and sly smirk. Dimitri tried to hide his smile with his hand as he gave me his full attention.

"Uh, well," I stuttered, "you see-"

Ella rolled her eyes dramatically, "Oh come on. Blair, sweetie, babies are made when a mommy and a daddy have se-"

Daniela slapped her hand over Ella's mouth, "I know what you are going to say Ella. And I refuse for you to scar this child for life."

I mouthed a thank you to Daniela and turned back to Blair. "What Ella means is that when a mommy and a daddy love each other very much, they decide to have a baby together."

"How?" she asked.
"Yes Amy," Sam gave a devilish grin, "Enlighten us on the subject."

The others smirked or giggled and I took a moment to glare at them before I answered. "The daddy has a seed," Michel, Sam and Dimitri tried to hold back their laughter as Heisuke shifted uncomfortable. I ignored them and continued, "He then plants it into the mommy's secret garden."

"Yes, gardening is so much fun," Ella proclaimed as Jamie and Daniela giggled.

I shook my head, but continued. "Then the baby grows inside the mommy's tummy for nine months. After that, the baby pops out, like a flower."

"Where does the baby pop out from? The tummy!" Blair's eyes widened in terror.

"Sometimes," Michel said and I slapped his knee, "let me handle this," I hissed.

"Michel speaks the truth, but mostly babies come from the secret garden." I clapped my hands, "that's where babies come from."

"But where is the secret garden?" Blair asked.

"You'll find out when you're older," I turned her to face the TV, "now go watch whatever is on right now."

Once Blair was a safe distance away from our group, Dimitri raised his hand, "Do you need someone to take care of your secret garden, you seem stressed."

The group burst out into laughter as I shook my head, but I still carried a grin. "Well, it certainly won't be you," I remarked.

The girls gasped and laughed as Michel went, "Ooooooooooh!"

Heisuke commented, "I believe the term this situation is: you just got burned!"

We all dissolved into uncontrollable laughter till a nurse had to ask us to be quiet.

Two more hours passed and Michel had to drive our boarding school friends back to Nightingale before curfew. We exchanged our farewells with one another as they followed Michel out the door of the waiting room. Jamie and I sat together as everyone in the room began to slump in their chairs. Alyce and Valencia laid their heads in their mother's lap. Lali curled herself onto her dad's chest and Gael was sleeping on Roman's shoulder. Blair and Blake slept on each side of Dad.

I leaned my head into Jamie's shoulder and yawned.

"If you're tired, take a nap, I'll wake you when the baby's here." Jamie said.

I nodded my thanks and slid my eyes to a close.

I awoke to frighten screams and angry shouts from the halls of the hospital. I jumped to my feet as Michel, Ella, Heisuke, Daniela and Dimitri were dragged back inside the waiting room. They were hauled in by the nations!

Several humans were behind them, all dressed in black heavy armor and matching helmets. They had blocked the entrances and exits of the delivery hall, and had pointed their large military guns
at everyone in the halls and instructed them to move to the waiting room. The nations also carried
guns, but had theirs strapped to their backs. The women of my family screamed and yanked the
children away from the them. The men formed a protective circle around them; all of them were
backing into a corner.

"What's happening?!!" Alyce cried.

"What's the meaning of this?!!" Dad ordered.

"This is a hospital, where's your warrant?!!" a nurse screamed.

"I don't think they're police," another nurse exclaimed.

"Mommy, I'm scared!" Lali cried.

I was stunned. Heisuke and Michel were held down by Germany, Ella and Daniela's hands and
arms were pulled behind them and held by Denmark. Dimitri was strong enough to put up more of
a fight and had sucker punched Greece in the face. But Russia quickly followed, grabbed Dimitri
by his arm and threw him to the floor. He pressed his foot on the back of Dimitri’s head.

"What the hell are you guys doing?!" I exclaimed. "Let them go!"

Russia gave me a cruel smile, "Amy, you forget, you do not have the power here. I do." He turned
to Greece, "Do you think you can handle a mother and a newborn."

That made my blood run cold. I turned to Greece; he revealed nothing in his facial expressions but
nodded and walked out of the room. Egypt followed right behind him.

"Hercules! Gupta! Stop!!" I tried to follow them but Turkey had snatched my arm and jerked me
back. As I began to kick and scream, he lifted me off the floor and held me close in an iron grip.
My feet dangled as I shrieked, "Sadik, let me go! Let me go!!" He didn't answer nor did he flinch
when I kicked him or banged my head against his shoulder.

The hall was eerie silent as a door opened.

"I'm sorry but you two are not... Oh my god they have guns!" Mom shouted.

"Who are you?!!" a male voice exclaimed, probably the doctor.

They didn't get an answer; screams echoed as gun shots ringed out. Dad screamed out Mom and
Melissa's names and ran to the door but was knocked back by Japan and China. A baby's cry
echoed but was quickly silenced with a bullet.

My jaw dropped as a mournful cry escaped from my throat.

Russia ignored me and faced the other nations, "Remember our rule: no witnesses."

On cue, Denmark and Germany threw my friends to the front of the crowd of cowering people and
aimed their guns.

"No!!" I cried, "Stop! Please!!"

My pleas were quickly drowned out by the sounds of bullets and screams. As Russia slammed his
foot into Dimitri's head, over and over again, I saw nothing but red splattered across the walls.
I gasped as my eyes shot open. I snapped my head away from Jamie’s shoulder and straightened myself in my seat. I darted my eyes around the room as my muscles tensed with an impending doom.

"Amy, are you okay?" Jamie asked. Concern was displayed on her face as she placed her hand on my forehead. Cold sweat was beading from my pores and my bangs were plastered against my face. "You’re as pale as a ghost," she proclaimed.

"I'm going to the restroom," I rose from my seat and sprinted out the door. I speed walked to the nearest hallway restroom and locked myself in.

I found my reflection in the mirror and just as Jamie said, I was pale. It also didn't help that my eyes had a crazed gleam in them. I stepped towards the sink and gripped on to the rim of the sink. My breathing came out in quick pants and my body was trembling.

"Just a dream," tears were streaking down my cheeks as I sobbed, "Just a very, very bad dream."

After I released some well needed tears and washed my face, I stepped out and found Jamie waiting for me by the door.

"Were you crying?" she asked gently.

"Nah, nah, I'm good." I changed the subject quick, "Has Michel come back yet?"

"Yeah, he's in the waiting room."

"And did everyone get to the dorms okay?"

Jamie gave me a confused look, "I'm sure they did."

That wasn't good enough for me. I walked back to the waiting room and found Michel sitting with his parents. I strolled over to them and pulled Michel away to the other side of the room.

"Is there a reason why I'm being dragged away against my will," Michel asked sarcastically.

I ignored him and sat him in chair with me standing over him. "Did everyone get to their dorms safely?" I asked.

"I think so," said Michel.

"Didn't you drop them off?"

"Yeah."

"Where?"

"At the entrance."

"So you're not absolutely sure that they got to their dorm rooms."

"Damn Amy what's with the third degree? They're big girls and guys; they don't need me to hold
their hands."

I sighed and sat myself next to him, "I'm sorry, I'm just really stressed."

"She was also moaning in her sleep," Jamie proclaimed as she sat on the other side of Michel.

"Oooh, were you dreaming about Toris?" Michel grinned mischievously.

"No," I was not in the mood for his 'Team Toris Campaign' crap.

"Michel," Jamie snapped at him, "she wasn't moaning like that."

He sobered up and held my hand, "Honey, are you okay?"

I pulled my hand away, "I'm fine."

They didn't buy it and were about to pester me with questions till Sanjay walked in. The room grew quiet as he removed a green cap from his head. He wore green scrubs and white sneakers, along with a big grin on his face.

"Well," Kupunakane raised up his hands.

"It's a boy," Sanjay announced, "a healthy baby boy."

Soft cheers echoed through the room as the family exchanged handshakes and hugs with Sanjay.

"Can we see them?" Dad asked.

"Yeah, but everyone has to take turns, it's a small room."

"Uncles, Aunts and Grandparents first," Johnny ran down the hall with Celine walking behind. Dad and Sanjay's parents followed suite.

Sanjay walked over to me, "Don't you want to meet your nephew?"

I smiled, "Yeah."

We quickly picked up Blair and Blake and walked over to room 420. Inside Melissa was dressed in a white hospital gown and had her newborn baby in her arms. She was sitting up in her bed as our family circled her.

"How are you sweetie," Dad leaned in and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"A little sore and tired, but," she glanced at her baby boy, "it was definitely worth it."

"Is that my new baby brother?" Blair asked.

"He sure is," Sanjay sat her next to Melissa.

Blair leaned over Melissa's shoulder to look at the baby, "He's got really big cheeks."

"Just more to pinch at," Mom cooed.

"He's beautiful Mel," Johnny smiled and turned to Celine, "Ours were be cuter though."

Celine slapped him playfully on the shoulder, "Be nice."
"His aura's pink," Blake whispered in my ear.

"What does that mean?" I whispered back.

"He's like Mommy; sensitive, caring and sympathetic."

"Good traits," I smiled.

"What's his name?" Asha asked.

"Did you choose a proper Indian name," Jaidev asked his son.

"Dad, his middle name will be Indian just like Blair and Blake's." Sanjay proclaimed.

"His full name is Raiden Sekar Arora," Melissa proclaimed.

"You do know that kid will be nicknamed Ray for the rest of his life," Michel said outside the room.

Our extended family and friends were making their rounds with Melissa and baby Raiden. Jamie and Michel came out with pictures on their phones and quickly sent them to Ella, Daniela, Sam, Heisuke and Dimitri.

"It's a cute name," Jamie said as her family came out.

"Come on Jia, let's go home," Dong gestured for her and Jamie gave me and Michel quick goodbye hugs.

"I should get going to," Michel yawned, "It's three in the morning, I need my beauty sleep."

I squeezed him into a hug, "Be safe okay; if anything happens call me."

He pulled away, "I have a worry-wart for a mother; I don't need two."

"I'm serious Michel; just send a text when you get home, okay?"

He kissed me on my forehead, "Gotcha, goodnight Amy."

I watched him walk down the hall with his parents by his side.

Before long, I was the only one left in the hospital room with Melissa.

"Why didn't you go home?" Melissa asked.

I shrugged, "To keep you company," I gave a lazy smile as I sat in a plaid armchair.

"I have Sanjay," she remarked.

"Yeah, but he's on a yogurt run, then who would you have to talk to? Raiden isn't much for conversation."

Melissa giggled and glanced at Raiden, sleeping in a clear mobile bed next to her. "Do you want to hold him? You haven't gotten the chance."
"Sure," I rose from my seat and picked up the sleeping infant from his bed. He was breathing softly with his full lips puckering in and out. He had a thin patch of dark hair and copper skin to correspond with. His cheeks were large and round, almost like a chipmunk's. "He's tiny, so very tiny," I whispered as I rocked him back and forth.

Images of my nightmare resurfaced in my head. The sound of a baby crying ringed in my ears till it was silenced by a single bullet.

My vision blurred with tears and I planted a long, sweet kiss on Raiden's forehead. "They won't lay a hand on you, I swear."

"Amy," Melissa sounded worried, "what's wrong?"

I gently set Raiden back in his crib, "Nothing, I gotta go take care of something." I stride for the door.

"Take care of what?" Melissa asked.

I stopped at the door frame and turned to face my sister one last time, "its nation business." I quickly sprinted down the hall before she could say anything else.
I drove over every speed limit there was to get to the Emerald Bed & Breakfast. It was a bright colored Victorian styled house at the other side of town. The house was in business ever since the 1930's, when the family of the house lost their fortune in the stocks. First, the Emerald family rented their twenty room mansion to strangers who lost their homes or to out of townies that were searching for work. After World War II, they made their home into a hotel and quickly gained popularity with soldiers. Then when the Quake hit; the house became an infirmary for the injured.

Now it has gone back to being a hotel and it was ran by a sweet elderly woman named Margaret Emerald and her grandson Liam.

I parked the jeep in the visitor's parking spot and ran up to the lobby. Liam was managing the head desk; he was in his early thirties with blond hair and dark eyes. He pushed up his glasses as he turned to look at me, "Hello, may I-," then he recognized me. "Amy? Well, look at you," he smiled, "I think the last time I saw you, you were working here for the summer."

"Yeah, it's been awhile Mr. Liam," I nodded to him.

"What's with the mister? You're old enough to call me Liam, besides it makes me feel old."

"You're thirty-two," I remarked.

He clutched his chest, "Still stings."

I got down to business, "Listen Liam, I need the room number for Arthur Kirkland."

He lifted his brow at me, "I can't give guest room numbers to just anyone Amy."

I nodded, "I know, but he's my half-brother."

His eyes lit up, "Oh, right. Your grandmother told my grandmother the whole story. How could I not see it before, one of them looked so much like you." He glanced to the clock on the wall, "Are you sure you want to talk to them now? It's about to be three in the morning."

"It's an emergency, Melissa's in labor," I lied.

Liam gave a small gasp and smiled, "Congratulations! Oh, let me call them." He picked up his office phone and dialed a number. The dial tone was busy, "that's strange," Liam mumbled.

"Just give me the room number, I promise not to disturb other guests."

"Very well," he checked his computer, "Arthur Kirkland and his friends are in the master suite, number: sixteen, that's on the third floor."

I nodded and ran up the steps. I quickly walked down the hall and stopped at the room door with the golden sixteen written on it. I slammed my fist on the door, "Arthur! Wake up! We need to-"

He answered the door; his dress shirt and pants were wrinkled, his tie was missing, his hair was disorganized and his eyes were drowsy and sleep deprived. "What?" he hissed.

Before I could answer, his smart phone ringed and he cursed. He checked the screen and groaned, "Germany," he forced himself to sound polite, "I believe this is the fifth time you called me-yes," he paused, the German's voice was screaming on the other line. "I know, I know, but-" Arthur was
cut off and he rubbed his temple, he glanced at me and gestured me to enter. "Yes, yes, no I-" he was cut off again as he paced throughout the room.

I stepped in and closed the door behind me. I found Francis, his clothes were wrinkled as well and his hair was tied in a low pony tail. His eyes were tired as he held the room phone in one ear and his smart phone in the other. "Gilbert, please hear me out. I went along with this because Amy-" Francis then turned his attention to the room phone, "Relax Antonio, these people care for Amy, they won't do anything to hurt her or us."

On the other line of his smart phone, a voice was shouting at him and Francis sighed. "Gil, I am not in the mood for this, you just have to trust-" a loud beeping sound echoed from his phone. "Hold it, there's someone else on the line. Oui, oui, I know, I know, hold on." He answers the other line, "Little Italy, what a surprise," his voice was dripping with sarcasm as Feliciano was panicking on the other line.

I turned to the couch, where Matthew was sitting as he and Kumajirou were drinking hot coco. "You two seem cozy," I proclaimed.

Matthew was wearing a t-shirt and jeans as he sat cross legged with a mug in his hands. He shrugged, "Not many countries remember me during times like these. Being invisible has its perks. Do you want some coco?"

"No, I'm good. What's going on?" I nodded to Francis and Arthur, both whom were still talking on their phones.

"The nations are scared, I can sense it," said Kumajirou.

"Uh-huh, well I need to talk you guys, so," I walked over to Arthur and grabbed his phone.

"What?! Amy!" he exclaimed, but I ignored him and hanged up on Ludwig. Then I strolled over to Francis and pulled the room phone from his ear and slammed it on the receiver.

"Amy what are you-" I cut him off as I grabbed his phone and pressed the end call button.

"You know the best thing about phones is that you can disconnect whenever you want and turned them off whenever you want." I turned off their phones and placed them in a hallway table drawer. Then I disconnected the room phone line from the wall, "Ah, blissful silence."

Both Arthur and Francis sighed and sat themselves on the couch; with Matthew and Kumajirou between them. "Damn Russia," Arthur mumbled under his breath.

Francis leaned his head back and stared up to the ceiling, "In times like these, I wished I didn't quit smoking."

"You've been saying that for last ten years," Matthew proclaimed as he rose from his seat and walked over to the small kitchen area. He grabbed two mugs and poured coffee in one and tea in the other.

"Besides, smoking is a filthy habit," said Arthur.

Francis snorted, "You're one to talk."

"O-kay," Matthew exclaimed, trying to lighten the mood. "I got tea for you, with one lump of sugar." He hands the mug to Arthur, "And coffee for you, with cream, milk and two lumps of sugar." He hands the other mug to Francis.
"Thank you Matthew," Arthur said as he sipped his tea.

"What would we do without you," Francis smiled.

I took my seat on the armchair next to the couch and gave them a few seconds to collect themselves.

Arthur quickly noticed my leg shaking impatiently, "Oh yes, Amy what do we owe the pleasure of you being at our door at three in the morning," he said sarcastically.

I ignored his tone and proclaimed, "Melissa had her baby."

All three of their eyes widened but their mouths quickly curled into smiles. "Congratulations!"

Matthew grinned as he sat down between Arthur and Francis.

"Is it a boy or a girl." Francis asked.

"Boy, his name is Raiden," I said.

"Raiden," Arthur repeated, "That's different."

"We need to get Melissa a gift," Francis said, "Do you think any stores are open around this time?"

"No," I said, my irritation was building. "Listen guys, I need to know what's going on. What are the nations going to do about this? Continue to run around and panic?"

Arthur sighed, "No, that's the thing Amy they're still arguing about it. Most of them are calling in an emergency meeting and I'm certain that it will take place in less than week."

"And what will this meeting be about?" I asked with a mean tone. "Which crimes they could frame my family with?" My voice was rising with rage I didn't even knew I had. "Or skip all that nonsense and kill them all, even an innocent baby!"

Francis's eyes widened in shock, "Amy, they would never do something like that."

"Really?! Arthur sent Joan to the stake without a second thought!"

Arthur grew pale, "That was long, long time ago things have changed."

"Yeah instead of being burned at the stake, they'll get a needle in their arms," I glared.

Matthew shook his head, "They still wouldn't do that, the meeting would most likely be about your family being a threat or-"

"They're not a threat!" I screamed.

"They could be!" Arthur exclaimed, "When a nation stays too long with a certain type of people, it could change their views."

"Like it did for Germany in the 1930's," Francis added.

My eyes widened, "My parents have raised me to value people for their hearts, not for their skin color or their religion or their sexual orientation!"

Arthur nodded, "that's all well and good, but it's also your down fall. You side with your parents, what if they wanted to over throw the government?"
"They wouldn't!"

"But what if they did? Would you side with them? Throw your country into a civil war?"

My anger was rising, "But they wouldn't do that!"

"But that is what the nations will be thinking," Francis proclaimed.

"Then they're idiots!"

"No, they're cautious," Arthur said, "They have seen good nations fall to manipulative humans."

"You've seen my family! Do they look like they're trying to control me? Believe me, they barely mention politics around me and when they do, they always ask for my opinions, for my views!"

Arthur sighed, controlling his temper. "Do you really think this will last?"

"What do you mean?"

"He means you and your family." Francis said, "Amy how long do you think you have till people start to notice you don't age."

"I'm sure your parents, siblings and friends know and don't care, but what about your extended family? Neighbors? Classmates? The people of Summerland," Arthur said. "We've seen the photos hanging around the halls," he gestures to the door. "Pictures of you and Jessica volunteering as nurses for the sick and wounded; you and your friends taking summer jobs here. Hell, we checked the rec-center and found more pictures of you with members of the community."

I narrowed my eyes, "When the Quake hit, hundreds of people lost their homes. Most of us had to retreat to the rec-center. Where dozens of families had to live and sleep at, most had to camp outside. We helped each other plant food, cook, clean, and build new homes. All this lasted for six months; let's say it makes a town close."

"That's just it," Matthew added, "The townspeople know who you are, who your parents are, don't you think they'll question how you haven't aged in the next twenty, thirty years?"

"Then I'll move away, have my family and friends come visit me. It's not that big of a deal."

Arthur shook his head, "How long would that last? Fifty? Sixty years? Your friends were get married and have children. Your family will focus their attention on the new generation to come. They will grow old and one day they will die."

I was stunned, did he just go there. My anger boiled, "You think that hasn't crossed my mind," I hissed.

"Maybe, maybe not; but this could be just the push you need."

"What kind of push," I gritted my teeth as I dug my nails into the armchair.

"We could make a deal with the nations; you can leave Summerland and cut all communications with your family, friends and anyone else from this town. They will then have no complaints when we ask for them to leave your family and friends alone."

I rose from my seat, "Not going to happen. This is my life! They have no right to control it!"

"If it involves our secrets, yes they do," Arthur exclaimed as he rose to his feet.
"I don't give a flying fuck about your secrets!"

"They are your secrets too!"

"Enough," Francis stepped between us and turned to face me. "Amy, he's right your family won't last forever, at least with this deal, you and your family can leave on good terms."

I shook my head, "I'm done! Clearly you three won't help me," I turned to the door.

"Amy," Matthew's voice made my hand stop on the door knob, "we're not the enemies here. We're family."

I turned to them, "Then start acting like it." I slammed the door as I stomped out into the hall.

I arrived home around three-forty; I parked my jeep in front of the house and walked to the door. But my legs wouldn't operate and I ended sitting on the top step of the porch. I took in deep breaths as Arthur's words resounded in my head.

"We could make a deal with the nations; you can leave Summerland and cut all communications with your family, friends and anyone else from this town. They will then have no complaints when we ask for them to leave your family and friends alone."

"Never," I hissed.

Then Francis' voice followed:

"Amy, he's right your family won't last forever, at least with this deal, you and your family can leave on good terms."

"Good terms my ass," I said through gritted teeth.

Matthew's words came in last.

"We're not the enemies here. We're family."

I slammed my fist into the pole that held the porch roof up, "Family doesn't do shit like this."

"You better not break that, or we all will face your mother's wrath." I didn't flinch when I heard Dad speak. I turned to him as he sat himself next to me, "Melissa called me, said you had nation business. Is everything okay?"

I closed my eyes and felt frustrated tears threatening to fall. "Yeah, everything's cool."

His dark eyes analyzed me, his gaze burning a hole into my soul. He wore a white tank and pajama bottoms as his long hair fell around his shoulders in messy waves. He must have heard me pulling up; he was always a light sleeper. He could also read people and I was definitely an open book. His continuous gaze made my muscles twitch and I couldn't make eye contact with him. He sighed as he placed his hand on my head and gently pulled me to his shoulder.

"Tell me all about it," he whispered.

My tears fell as I told the events of Ivan sending out my files to the other nations. How Arthur and Francis believed it was best that I leave and cut ties with everyone I love. Then I quickly recapped
the story about Joan knowing too much, and how our family might suffer the same fate. "For being arrested for crimes they didn't comment, not being killed," I took in a deep breath, "But I wouldn't put it pass them," my tears wouldn't stop as the images of my nightmare came into full view. "The nations are demanding answers, and I-" I sobbed, "I don't know what to do."

Dad soothed me with comforting words as his hand brushed through my hair. I wrapped my arms around his mid-section as he held me close to his chest. He continued to hold me, even when I stopped crying and fell asleep in his arms.

I woke up in the living room, with the sun blazing from the windows. I was on the couch with a blanket spread over me. I yawned and rose to sit up, finding a note on the coffee table next to a cherry Danish and a glass of milk. The Danish was cold and the milk was warm, but I still ate them as I read the note.

_Amy,_

_Your cousins had to catch a morning flight back to Texas, along with Alex and Emily. My parents also have a plane taking off in the afternoon. Johnny and Celine have left for their hotel in San Francisco, and Sanjay and the kids are with Melissa and Raiden._

_We'll be back around seven, there's leftovers in the fridge and if you go out send me a message._

_Love Mom._

I placed the note back on the table and turned on the Saturday news. A woman was displayed as a banner was broadcasting below her. It said: Child Abductions Escalated.

"Child abductions have increased over forty percent in the last two months," the woman said. "Inspectors believe that these abductions first began in Africa and Southern India, and it quickly spread throughout Asia, into Russia, then to the Middle East, and into Europe. International investigators believe these children are part of a human trafficking-"

I turned off the TV, "Man that's depressing. Now _that_ is what the nations should be dealing with, children that are being taken and sold as sex slaves. Not harassing my family, who are good, hard-working people, I might add." My voice was rising and before I knew it, I was on my feet and yelling at the ceiling. "They taught me to be a good person, to not discriminate against others and now they're being punished! God! Stupid nations, ya'll can go fuck yourselves in hell!"

I panted and fell back into the couch, "What will yelling at sky do Amy? Nothing. Nothing at all."

After I took a shower and changed into a pair of jeans and a graphic t-shirt. I spent the morning and afternoon watching TV in my room. I was hoping that the kids left it dirty so I could distract myself with cleaning, but my room was spotless. After five re-runs of _Law and Order SVU_, I curled into myself and fell asleep with Lady by my side.

_My door slammed open and I jumped to my feet as Russia practically strolled in._

_"What the hell?! Get out of my house!" I screamed but he ignored me as he wrapped his hand around my arm and started to yank me out of my room. "Let me go!"_
Lady rose up and attacked him with fur flying and teeth flashing. Lady bit into his forearm, blood was dripping from his arm but he showed no pain. He simply ripped Lady off his arm and her head made full contact to the wall. She fell to the floor and stopped moving, "Lady!" I cried.

I glared at Russia, "Let. Me. Go!" I kicked and punched, but he paid no mind and pulled harder.

At the bottom of the stairs, Mom and Dad were being tied to chairs in the living room by Lithuania, Latvia and two other men I barely met at Austria's party. One of the men had green eyes and jaw length blood hair. The other man had dark blond, bowl cut hair and square glasses. They all wore dark clothing and their faces were expressionless. Mom looked up, "Amy, what's happening?!

"Are you all idiots?!" Russia shouted, "Gag them!"

The nations flinched and Lithuania's hands trembled as he tore at the gray duck tape.

"Toris!" I cried, "What's going on?!

But he wouldn't look me in the eye. He walked towards my parents with the tape ready, but Russia stopped him, "Never mind, I want her to hear them."

I threw another punch, but he caught it and twisted my arm in a painful hold. I gritted my teeth so I wouldn't give him the pleasure of hearing me cry. He pushed me through the front door as my parents called out for me. I was about to scream a new range of curse words at Russia till I caught the scent of gasoline.

Oh God, no!

"What the fuck did you do?!" I screamed and kicked, but my attacks showed no effect. Once we were on the front yard, Russia turned around and forced me to my knees, so the house would be in full view.

"Did you set it," he turned to the man with glasses.

"Yes sir," he glared at him but did nothing.

Russia pulled out a pack of matches from his pocket, "Who would like to do the honors?" He turned to Latvia, "Raivis?" Latvia flinched and began to tremble. Russia smiled and turned to man with green eyes; "Feliks?" the man glared and looked away. "Oh wait, I know," Russia grinned like a child on Christmas morning. "Toris," he tossed the matches at him, but Toris didn't catch them. Instead, they hit him in the chest and fell to the ground at his feet.

He shook his head slightly and took a step back.


Toris wound his hands into fists and slowly, he crouched down and grabbed the box.

"No!" I wailed, "Please, Toris don't do it!"

His eyes found mine and for a split second he was considering it. Till he found Russia glaring at him, fear won over in the end and he pulled out a single match.

"Stop!" I begged.

He closed his eyes tight, lit the match and threw it behind him. The house caught like a torch as flames engulfed the bottom floor and quickly spread to the second. The cries of my parents
resounded as the fire burned and sparked out from the windows.

I screamed as I rose off the bed. Lady was ready and alert, her brown eyes set on me. I panted for breath and wiped off the sweat from my forehead. I quickly found that tears were running down my face.

*God. I am really sick of crying.*

Lady whined and placed her head in my lap. I sighed and petted her head, "I'm okay girl; I'm okay." The TV was still on and I checked the clock, it read two-fifteen a.m. I sighed, annoyed and placed my head back to the pillow, but I couldn't go back to sleep. I turned off the TV and grabbed my riding boots, I needed some fresh air. I tip-toed down the stairs and checked my parent's room. Dad was out, most likely thinking the TV was still on, and Mom was snoring. She was out cold.

I sneaked out the back and slipped on my boots. Lady barked and I hushed her, "stay," I whispered. She whined but obeyed.

I sprinted to Midnight's stable and saddled him up. He was always game for a late ride. I pulled his reins so he would follow me out of the gated field. I swung myself over his saddle, gave a light kick and he leaped into the forest.

I roved in circles, allowing my vision to grow stronger in the dark and the cool night air to seep into my skin. When Midnight showed signs of ware, I guided him to our secret spot so he could rest and I could think.

Once we were at the cliff, I jumped down and Midnight took his chance to rest and graze. I walked out to the edge and looked up to the stars completely covering the dark skies.

"A beautiful night is it not," a strangely familiar voice spoke from behind.

I turned to find the same native man I met last month. He still wore khakis and a dress shirt, with the same eagle feathered head dress. He even had his campfire burning in full blaze.

I was too frustrated to be frighten, "Oh great you're here. Come to give me another message." He stayed quiet and stared into his fire. Which only pissed me off even more, "If you're trying be a wannabe Yoda, lying down some mystical wisdom on me. Well guess what?! I'm not in the mood for your vague advice crap! So you should just pack up your magic campfire and hit the road!"

"Are you done?" he asked.

"No! I'm not done! And frankly I'll never be done! Once I think everything's okay and my feet have finally found a solid surface to stand on, some person or event decides to fuck that over and leave me without a paddle! My family is in danger, my friends are in danger! The nations are coming and I have no fucking idea what to do!" I panted for breath as my rant came to an end.

He looked up, his dark eyes found my blue. "What *do* you want to do?"

"Have you been listening?! I don't know." I paused, "Maybe, just-just make it all stop! It's happening too fast."

"That can't happen, what is happening now is all up to you."
"What the hell does that mean?!

"It means, you have a choice, you always have a choice," his voice rose in harshness.

I sighed, my temper cooling, "Well I don't see it."

He shook his head, "You really are a stubborn one, just like your father."

I froze, "You knew Alfred?" Then gritted my teeth in annoyance, "Why should I be surprised, everyone else knew him."

"Yes, but 'knew' wouldn't be the word I'll use, he's still alive but just as a spirit through."

"He's alive, but a spirit. Doesn't that mean you're dead."

"The afterlife is a strange thing," he gave me a sad smile. "But the main reason why I'm here is to help you. Your father has asked me to lend you my assistance."

"If he's alive, why can't he help me? Why doesn't he visit?"

"He can't. There are laws he must follow."

"What kind of laws?" I demanded.

"A successor cannot meet with their predecessor," he answered.

"That's stupid," I deadpanned.

"That is their laws. I am simply a human spirit; I can't really change anything."

"Then you're not much help, are ya."

He raised his brows, "Well, first off I can answer any questions you may have."

"Okay," I nodded, "can I send a message?"

He blinked, "uh-well-"

"Here's my message," I snapped. "Tell Alfred to get his ass down here and fix all this!"

"That is not how this works," he stated.

I shook my head, "then we're done here," I turned away, heading straight for Midnight.

He continued, "I can tell you who your birth mother is."

I stopped as long awaited questions began to resurface. Don't get me wrong. I've had the pair of the most wonderful parents that anyone would be lucky enough to have, but there was always a sliver of curiously to who my birth parents were.

I've found my birth father. I got his hair, his eyes, his coloring but what about my birth mom? Do I have her nose? Her lips? Do act like her? Is she a dancer like me?

Even new questions formed as I began to know Alfred.

Can nations have children? If so, can they only have babies with other nations? Can they have babies with humans? Was my mother a human or nation? What about that girl Alfred wanted to
marry, was she my mother? And what was this whole successor and predecessor thing?

I turned and walked back to the old man. I sat on his right; both of us were around the campfire. I took in a breath, "who is she?"

He smiled and pointed over my head, "there she is."

I followed his finger to a star in the far right corner in the sky, it was small compared to the others and I had to squint to see it. "A star?" I questioned.

I turned to him and repeated to make sure I had it right. "My birth mom is a star?"

"The star is your mother and the sky is your father."

"Back up, Alfred is not my dad?!"

"He gave birth to you as a nation but-"

"He gave birth to me?! Like an actually Virgin Mary sort of thing? But where the hell would I pop out of- never mind, I don't want to know."

"No, not like that." He sighed, "Let me show you." He waved his hand over the fire and the flames burst up towards the sky.

I crawled away, but the old man gestured me to stay. The flames swirled formed into a spiral; making colors in its flames to reveal a picture of the dark emptiness of space.

"When a star is born," the old man begins, "the particles and elements from the universe combine with a sudden burst." A bright light explodes and I shield my eyes. When the light dims, I looked up to find the star has settled, "The same particles and elements that made that star are also used to give you life." From that bright star, a small bright golden orb of light drips out and floats about.

"Is-is that me?" I asked.

"Yes," he nodded, "this was your birth some five hundred thousand years ago."

My eyes widened, "I'm how old?"

"Five hundred thousand, six hundred and twenty-seven years, that also includes your Earth years."

"Why don't I remember any of this?"

"To be bounded to the Earth, you lost all memories of your spirit life and begin anew. That is the deal you made when you become a nation."

Then the golden spirit orb (hash-tag: me) dives into Earth. "Why would I leave the Spirit World?" I asked.

The old man shrugged, "curiosity, compassion, I don't know for certain. But you are about to see your birth as a nation." Then he waved his hands over the flame and vision changed to Alfred clutching his sides as he coughed out blood.

My jaw dropped, "is this-"

"The day of Alfred's death, yes," he answered.
The image displayed Alfred on his knees, muttered under his breath, "no, not like this. I can't leave everyone like this." He hissed out as another wave of pain crashed through his insides.

"What's happening to him?" I asked.

"The people's cries and agony have reached him, and it's tearing him apart." He waved his hand over the flames again and this time it displayed me as a golden orb falling into Earth. The atmosphere tried to block me but I pushed through, taking the heat that came with it.

"At first you felt nothing but the warm sensation of the flames. Before long they grew too hot and burned you," the image showed the golden orb being engulfed in fire. The orb screamed. It sounded like angels roaring out a battle cry. "The fire became your heart." The old man said.

"Then once you hit the ocean, you were thankful for the refreshing cool of water to nurse your wounds. The water pulsed and seeped into your soul, sinking you to its depths. You found that you could not breathe," the images in the fire followed his narrating. "The water was filling your lungs and the pressure was crushing you. Once you believed it was the end, the ocean shot you up into the air. You were thankful for the life giving air, your lungs were cleared and you could breathe again. But you could no longer fly, and you fell towards Earth, sped pass clouds and birds and slammed into the dirt. By some miracle, you're alive but the Earth gripped its hold on you and pulled you into its dark embrace."

Then the pitch black vision in the fire exploded in a white blaze. A baby's cry echoed and I tensed as the vision went back to Alfred on the floor of his apartment, with my infant-self beside him.

I was still crying and Alfred was blinking several times, making sure that his eye sight wasn't playing tricks on him.

"At first he had no idea who you were," the old man continued to narrate. "He thought for a moment that you were nothing more than a delusion but deep down he knew you were his successor. He knew he had to leave, just as his mother did before him, but he didn't want to go. He didn't want to leave you. But if he forced himself to stay, he knew that would mean death for you."

"I would've died?"

"No, that's what Alfred thought, you would have simply returned to the Spirit World. You see that strong golden light around you; you were not completely a nation and could be sent back home with no harm done. But Alfred didn't know that, so he was left with a choice, stay and watch you disappear or go and let you live."

We watched as Alfred lifted himself up and with his remaining strength, nestled me into his arms. He slowly wrapped me in a quilt from his bed and soothed me with a lullaby. Even with pale white skin and blood dripping from the corner of his mouth, he was able to look gentle and fatherly. He closed his eyes and muttered a curse, he rose to his feet and limped to his desk and sat himself in his chair. With one arm he began to write on a single piece of paper.

"What's he doing?" I asked.

"I believe he's leaving a will," the old man answered.

Alfred finished, folded it and labeled it with a name I couldn't read. "Can't you zoom in?"

"This not a TV," he said.

Alfred then coughed out more blood into his spare hand and I awoke in a crying fit. He wiped the
blood from his mouth and cleaned off his hand on his pants. "Hey kiddo, it's okay," he began to rock me back and forth. "Everything's going to be okay," tears were falling from his lashes as he lifted my head up to face him. "You're going to have a long road ahead of you," he sucked in a shaky breath, "I'm sorry I won't be there for you. Heh, look at me, here I am always saying I wanted to be a dad and now here's my chance," he paused as his blue eyes blurred with more tears. "And I'm already screwing it up."

My baby self finally stops crying and my small hand reached out for his face. My palm softly touches his cheek and he smiled, "yeah I know, you're mad. But don't worry. if I'm going to do one thing as your father, it sure as hell will be the right thing." He kissed my forehead and muttered, "I give my title as America to you."

The vision disappears in another ray of light and the fire dies down, back as a small campfire.

"What happened?!" I exclaimed.

"You already know, Alfred took you to John Senior Hawkfeather for his family to raise you."

"Yeah, but why did the fire vision stop?"

He shrugged, "I got tired. That kind of magick uses a lot of energy."

I was annoyed that he cut off from the best part, but I let it go. "So I get how the Earth is my mother as a nation, but how is Alfred my father?"

"He gave you permission to take America, in some ways he gave you life. The Earth only provided a body, it was Alfred's choice if he wanted you to stay or go."

"Where is Alfred now?"

"In the Spirit World, when he died as a nation, all his memories of his spirit life came back to him and he was also able to gain back all of the knowledge and powers he lost."

"Okay," I brushed my hands through my hair, "so he-he," I tried to get my thoughts together. "He thought he was gonna die but he didn't. He just returned to the Spirit World but spirits that become nations don't even remember that they were spirits to begin with but they get it all back when they return?"

"Yes," he nodded.

I closed my eyes and a moment I had nothing to say but, "what?!"

"It is a lot to take in, yes."

I rubbed my eyes, "ok, so if I die, all this so called knowledge and power will come back to me?"

"Yes. If you return but also when a living spirit is born or when a human dies, the universe's knowledge is open to them and they can truly see that there is a higher power to it all."

"You mean," I glanced to the sky, "the big man upstairs."

He laughed, "No, but the force that drives the universe and all the worlds involved connect us all in the big scheme of things. This force might be what humans call God, but it is only the force of energy that comes from us."

"It kinda sounds like Star Wars."
"It's more like the circle of life, it cannot live without us and we cannot live without it."

"So there's no heaven or hell?"

"In some ways yes, you see when a human was indifferent in their lifetime here on Earth, they lose their human shape and take the form as an animal. They are then assigned a human to guide and protect."

"Spirit animals were once bad people?"

He nodded, "They also lose their memories of their human lives, only using their true nature to guide them. When their human succeeded in having a long, happy life; they would be given the chance to return to Earth and start with a clean slate. Hopefully they give out better karma in their new life."

"That doesn't seem so hard," I proclaimed.

"Oh but it is, some spirit animals have to help their person for a hundred lifetimes before they could get their chance back on Earth."

I rubbed my temples, "This is confusing and a lot to process."

"That's why your memories of your spirit life were taken away, to hold that type of knowledge in your state now would lead to insanity."

I nodded, "And yet you're still telling me all this. Shows how much you care, huh?" I said sarcastically.

He was about to say something else but quickly noticed his hand flickering and losing shape. "My time is up, I must go."

"Hold on, I didn't even get an answer to my most important question!"

"If it was that important, why didn't you ask it first?"

Before I could respond with a snappy comment, the old man slammed his fist on top of the fire and the flames cloaked him in its embrace. I screamed and scrambled to my feet, backing away from the heat.

"Find the eagle," were his last words as he disappeared in fire; leaving nothing behind but a burnt out campfire.
Find the eagle?

What the hell does that mean?!

The old man sure likes to give vague clues, but still, do I look like Nancy Drew to him?!

It was Wednesday morning and I was sitting in my homeroom class, still pondering over the 'find the eagle' clue; which hasn't gotten very far. I mean, does he want me to find a real eagle or is the eagle something else. Like a statue, or a painting or a photo; or is the eagle some kind of code word for something? Could it be for another person or an object?

Or it could be that the old man is messing with me and there is no eagle what's so ever.

Or I could have fallen off Midnight that night, cracked my head open and had one seriously over imaginative dream.

Or the most reasonable explanation: I'm losing my mind.

"Amy," Mrs. Lope's voice snapped me out of my train of thought.

"Yes," I haven't had a decent sleep in three days and I might have been a little jumpy.

She gestured to the white screen, which had a power point about Ottoman Turks and Egypt. "Answer the question," she proclaimed.

There wasn't much on the screen, mostly a photo of a pyramid and Turkish guy dressed in colorful robes. "Uh, could you repeat the question," I asked.

Mrs. Lope sighed, "How did the Egyptians keep their language and habits during the Turkish ruling?"

"Uh," my mind instantly brought up Gupta and Sadiq and I answered without thinking. "Gupta and Sadiq seem to get along, in some ways I guess." I shrugged my shoulders. "Maybe they talked it over, worked out a deal, I'll ask about it next time."

Mrs. Lope and the rest of class simply stared at me with confused looks on their faces. "Who are you talking about it?" Mrs. Lope said as she lifted a brow at me.

Then it hit me, I was talking about Turkey and Egypt as if they were real people. Which they were, but yet not; no they're people but not people people, they're nations. But they have human emotions, somewhat, I think. Does that make them human? Or do the emotions of their people make them have human emotions? "Shut up, you're over thinking it."

My classmate's eyes widened and Mrs. Lope gave me a worried look.

I wondered why they were looking at me like that, till I realized that I said the last statement out loud. "Crap. I mean, uh I didn't mean you Mrs. Lope. I just-I have a lot on my mind and I wasn't thinking. Well that's not true, I was thinking a lot but it just came out as rabble and-

"Amy," Mrs. Lope snapped.

"Yes," I said.
"See me after class," she proclaimed and turned back to the screen to continue her lecture.

Once class ended, the students walked out of the room and Mrs. Lope closed the door behind them. She gestured for me to come to her desk and I grabbed my backpack and walked over to a spare chair across from her.

"Look Mrs. Lope, I didn't mean what I said," I quickly said.

She lifted her palm up as her eyes soft, "I know. Amy is everything okay? You haven't been acting like yourself. You seem paranoid, stressed and well, frighten."

My muscles tensed, am I that easy to read.

"I don't mean to be nosy but I've heard that you have recently found your half-brothers and I can't help but think that was when you began to act a bit off." She reached for my hand, which was curled up in a fist and shaking. Her plump, smooth hand covered my knuckles and gave a squeeze to stop the trembling. "I'm here if you want to talk."

"Thanks, but I'm fine," I pulled my hand away and rose to my feet, "I need to go." I slipped my backpack over my shoulder and walked out of the door before she could say another word.

Ella and Heisuke were waiting for me in the hall. "So, are you in trouble?" Ella asked.

"Ella-chan," Heisuke sighed, "does the word 'sensitive' mean anything to you?"

"I was just asking," she proclaimed.

"Well I'm not," I snapped, "and also this, isn't any of your business. So stay out of it."

Both of their eyes widened towards my outburst and I walked away without another word.

Deciding that it was best to avoid any more slip ups like in first period, I hid myself in the girls' restroom on the second floor of the arts building. Not many girls use the restroom for it was in a far corner and not anywhere close to the classrooms. Besides most dance rooms had locker rooms, so they would use those instead.

When my free period came I found an empty dance room and changed quickly into my work out clothes. Even though I had no sleep, I was somehow filled with energy. I plugged my iPod in the speakers and hit shuffle, Lorde's smooth voice vibrated out with her song 'Glory and Gore'. I shook out my limbs and tried to clear out my head. I flowed with the music and busted out some ballet moves. Stretching my legs up and taping my feet in bourree and spinning myself in perfect pirouettes to the beat. I also did quick relevés and bent my legs in strong plies so I could lift myself in high leaps. Before I knew it, I was losing myself in the music and completely forgetting my issues.

Then Taylor Swift's song 'Eyes Open' played out. The song was pulling at my heart strings as images of Arthur, Francis and Matthew invaded my mind. I shook it off and focused on my bourree, but my mind continued to show them interacting with my family and friends. As if maybe, just maybe they cared, but I knew they didn't.

I moved faster, forcing the memories away but they were replaced by Peter and Raivis. Peter waving my files in my face and acting like my life was nothing more than entertainment for his boredom. Then Feliciano, Ludwig and Kiku came to mind; to the event of Feliciano swinging me around on the dance floor and later kissing me as a prize. But, isn't that what I am to them? A prize, something new to possess or in some cases break; Ludwig and Kiku would never admit it, but I saw them watching me as I danced with Matthew.
All of them were watching.

I shook the thought away and once again it was replaced with another nation. Vash's harsh comments about Alfred repeated in my head, "You are just like your father, refusing to take blame for anything he did." Then Erika and Victoria's smiling voices came to mind, but to me their smiles seemed smug and mean.

I tripped and fell to my knees; I gritted my teeth and rose to my feet into a fast frappes.

I tried to push away the thoughts, to bottle them away for another day, but they would not leave me be. They only got worse when my nightmares decided to fuse with my memories. First with Alfred, as his face switched from the caring expression he had as he held me in the fire vision to the pale bloody face from my dream. His words also repeated, "I'm sorry."

I closed my eyes and tried to do a pirouette, but the memory of Ivan's hands on my hips and his lips on mine stirred fear in the pit of my stomach and I fell to the floor again. The images quickly shifted to Gupta, Heracles and Sadik; all three wore smiles, actually looking like caring human beings. In a ripple, their faces switched to blank expressions, being almost robotic. They took orders from Ivan without a shred of hesitation. Then gun shots resounded along with the screams of the people I cared about. The image caused my head to pound and my eyes to sting with threatening tears.

I bit the inside of cheek, trying in failure to stop the whirlwind of emotions and memories. But my mind continued, turning its attention on Toris. From the brief moments I shared with him, to the nightmare where he set my house on fire. His color changing eyes carrying more pain than anyone else can see.

But in truth, all of the nations carry some sort of pain and still do; scars that may never fade no matter how many years pass.

Well I end up like them someday?

Shutting myself away?

Having no one to share my life with?

I shifted myself to my bottom, pulled my knees to my chest and wrapped my arms around myself. I pictured my life without my parents, my siblings, my niece and nephews, my cousins and my friends.

They will age and one day they'll be gone.

Then the song chose that moment to become louder, as if mocking me with its lyrics:

'Everybody's waiting for you to breakdown

'Everybody's watching to see the fallout

'Even when you're sleeping, sleeping

'Keep your ey-eyes open.'

The last sentence repeated four more times, till the song came to its end.

As the song ended, my vision blurred with tears and streaked down my cheeks. I didn't notice that
my shoulders were shaking till a rough coarse hand placed itself on one of them and squeezed it affectionately. I looked up to find Dimitri standing over me, even though this was his time to practice gymnastics. He was still wearing his uniform and his hair hasn't yet been tousled from doing flips in the air. He gently bent his knees so he could be at eye level with me. He gave me a soft, caring gaze as his hand traveled from my shoulder to my cheek. He wiped my tears away with his thumb and asked in a gentle tone, "What's wrong?"

I blinked and looked away, "nothing."

He didn't let go. "Does it have something to do with that man? The man that came to wedding?"

"I don't want to talk about it." I said harshly.

"So it's not 'nothing', something did happen."

"Nothing happened," I snapped.

He was silent but I heard him shift as he sat himself beside me. He continued to be quiet as he combed his fingers through the ends of my hair. The tips of his fingers brushed against the back of my neck, sending shivers down my spine.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Waiting," he said as he continued to play with my hair.

"For what," I asked, but deep down I had an idea of what his answer might be.

"For you to confide in me, it may not be today, or tomorrow, but when you are ready I will be here for you." His hand found my cheek again and I leaned into his palm, craving for an anchor. My legs stretched out as Dimitri moved closer. His face was mere inches from mine. He leaned forward, our noses brushed and our lips were only centimeters away from collision.

Then the bell ringed.

We jumped apart in surprise and I glanced at the clock, it was time for lunch. That was when I noticed I was holding my breath and I could hear the pounding of my heart in my ears. I glanced at Dimitri and the realization of what we were about to do slapped me with a heated blush and raising heartbeat. I stumbled to my feet; "I-I-I," nothing came out but a stutter as I grabbed my IPod from the speakers.

He stood up, "Amy-"

"I gotta, uh, bathroom!" I cried out awkwardly and ran to the girls' locker room. I slammed the door behind me and dropped my back against the door. "Oh god, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I do not need this, not now."

"Uh, you okay there? You look like your about to have a psychotic break."

I jumped at the sound of a new voice and found a light brown skinned girl sitting on a wooden bench. Her legs were crossed and she was twirling her thick dark curls around her finger. She wore a Nightingale uniform, but she had no tie and her white blouse was unbuttoned to reveal cleavage.

"I'm fine." I said.

"You should be," she grinned, "You were totally just getting it on with that dreamy Russian. But
that damn bell just had to go and ruined it."

"You were watching?!

She shrugged, "I had nothing else better to do. Now give me some dirt, are you two an item now?"

"W-what? No," my face heated in a deep blush, "there's nothing going on with us!"

"Oh please honey, denial isn't just a river in Egypt. I saw your auras clicking and auras don't lie."

"You can see-who are you?!" I demanded.

"Oh come on now, you don't remember me? I know it's been a couple of years but," then she snapped her fingers. "Oh this might help."

In a blink of an eye, a golden shimmer surrounded her. Her body shrunk; her clothes were replaced with a light green simple dress. Her eyes glowed emerald and her ears grew out and pointed. Her hair flowed past her bear knees and glittery green butterfly wings spouted from her back. Her wings fluttered as she flew to stand in front of my face, she was now five inches tall. "Remember me now?"

I screamed and ran to lock myself in the bathroom stall, only to find her sitting on the wall separating my stall from the other.

"You know, a normal person would scream at the sight of a monster or a serial killer. But I forget you're not entirely normal," she proclaimed.

"What are you?!!"

"Oh come on, can't you tell? The wings, the ears, my size; doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure this out."

"You're a fairy?"

"Yes, for now at least." she said.

"But how? I-I-I"

"I believe your grandfather explained this to you," she said in a sing-along voice.

My eyes widen, "You're a spirit."

"Ding! Ding! Ding! You've won the jackpot!"

I groaned, "What do you want?"

She pouted, "Is that anyway to treat an old friend?"

"I don't know you."

"Think about it Amy. All those tea parties we had, our adventures in the woods, and all the times we played Neverland, where you were always trying to rescue me from Captain Hook."

"I haven't played Neverland since I was five, when I had my imaginary friend-" I stopped and stared at the fairy, "Nina?"
"It's little me, back from Paris," she said in a French accent, which was always what she said when she returned to me as a kid.

"But you weren't real, I mean clearly you are, but," I sighed and sat myself on the toilet. "Are all spirits imaginary friends now?"

Nina giggled, "That's only one of the perks. You see children are open to wonder and have more faith in us than older humans, so that's why they can see us. Why do you think children always ask for others to check under the bed or the closet for monsters? Some spirits like to scare them but most of us are nicer and like to be their friends."

"Why am I seeing you now?"

"I'm allowing you to see me, duh."

I rubbed my temples trying to massage away the headache that was forming. "Nina, don't take this the wrong way, but why are you here?"

"Well silly, I'm here to help you. That message that you got wasn't nearly enough, so I'm here to give you a clue."

"A specific clue," I smiled hopefully.

She shook her head and became grim, "No, I'm already in great danger with just talking to you. If she found out I was helping you, she would have my soul."

"Who's she?"

"I said too much, now listen, I can only say this once:

"Look behind the shelf of knowledge

"There you'll find a secret storage

"Beyond that door; a past awaits

"Answers will then be in your wake"

Then she disappeared in a poof of green fairy dust (I'm serious, she used fairy dust).

"That can't be it!" I ran out of the stall and began calling out Nina's name. When she didn't answer I threw up my hands in frustration. "A poem? Seriously? The last line didn't even rhyme."

Then I spotted a note on the bench, in the same spot where Nina was sitting. I snatched it and read:

_It didn't have to._

_Good luck!_

_Kisses~ Nina_

I was so annoyed that I was about to tear up the note till I realized the paper became thicker, like a photograph. I turned it over to find a picture of me and Grandpa. I was five or six at the time, with my long wavy hair falling past my lower back. I was in my favorite blue summer dress and I was sitting in Grandpa's lap. He was wearing his usual khakis and clean white dress shirt. His graying hair was tied back and he didn't have as many wrinkles. We were in his office at Spiritual Path and
I couldn't help but notice that a small brown and green humanoid figure with butterfly wings was sitting on the shelf behind us.

I smiled, "Thanks Nina." I grabbed my backpack and sprinted out the door.

Nina watched from a dark corner of the locker room. She smiled as Amy proclaimed her thanks and ran out of the room. "Stay strong Amy," she said lovingly and prepared to open the vile from this world to the Spirit World, till she sensed an odd presence. Cold shivers passed through her body and warning bells ringed in her head. She tries to open the vile but she was a second too late from making a clean escape.

A vapor of darkness formed itself into a thick rope and wrapped itself around the small fairy. Nina cried out and tried to change shape but the vapor was draining her of her energy. She struggled and cried out for help but no one came.

"You're been a naughty spirit Nina, you must be punished for your betrayal."

Nina grew pale to the sound of her voice.

"No! Please, don't send me there!" she begged.

But she was given no mercy as the vapor pulled her into the darkness.

Dimitri was still in the dance room when I reentered. He wore a worried expression and I shifted from foot to foot under his gaze. Silence filled the room as our almost kiss replayed in my head. That's when I came to the decision that our almost kiss had to stay almost. That whole situation was just a moment of weakness and I can't drag him into this mess I called a life. I also can't lead him on; it wouldn't be fair to him. I heard a grin, "I gotta go Dimitri, but I'll text ya later buddy. Pal. Great oh friend of mine," I lightly punched him in the arm and walked out of the room.

Yeah, that wasn't awkward at all.

But there were more important problems I needed to deal with first. I sprinted into a full run, dashing through the halls and out the main building door. I ran to my jeep and started the engine. I pulled out of the parking lot and sped out into the main street. I slammed my foot on the gas pedal and weaved between cars and drifted around corners. I even had some close calls with some red lights; I'm surprised that a cop hasn't pulled me over yet.

I skidded to a stop in front the shop, cut off the engine and jumped out of the driver seat. Thankfully, the shop was closed for Melissa was at home with the baby. I had a spare key and I knew the security pass codes. I let myself in and kept the sign on 'close'. I can't have anyone distracting me from my search. I strut to the office in the back and headed straight to the book shelves around the room; trying to pull them out to look behind them.

Only problem with that was the shelves were built into the walls.

"Shit!" I cursed. "What the hell do I do now?" I took in a deep breath and repeated the first part of the poem: "Look behind the shelf of knowledge. There you'll find a secret storage." I sighed and stared at the leather bound books, they were in various sizes and colors with pages that yellowed
with age. Most were written in English, but some of the spines were in French, Italian, German and what I think is Latin. They were special copies that flipped with an English translation; Grandpa used them to help me practice my language skills.

I don't know what possessed me to take the books out from the shelves, but I figured it was one way to look behind a shelf. Its poetry; it's meant to be figuratively, right?

I pulled out the thick books from their spots and laid them out on the floor gently. The room was long with only one window in the back, a door in front and two walls that held the shelves. Both shelves had six rows and each row had about thirty to forty books on it. You do the math.

When I was finished with one wall, finding nothing I might add. I turned my attention to the other bookshelf across from me. I carefully stepped around the books I left around the floor and began the same process I did to the shelf behind me.

When I reached the second row from the top, I found a couple of lines that seemed to be carved into the shelf. I removed more books and discovered it was a carving of an eagle. The lines were smooth and clean. The eagle was in flight with its wings extended up and its head and beak were pointed to the right. Each feather was outlined and detailed and its eye was so realistic, it seemed like any minute now it would blink. I ran my fingers over the design, this was Grandpa's work. I trapped my knuckles on the surface and found it was hollow. I roamed my hands over the surface and found two small blots that looked like they would swing open. On the other side of the blots, there was a thin line that seemed to be plastered together to the wall.

I grabbed the letter opener from the desk and stabbed into the line, peeling away the plaster and forced the small door open. Spider webs were pulled apart as I did, and I squealed and jumped back.

Nothing came out and the small block shaped storage was dark and didn't seem to have anything in it. But I knew I had to put my hand in there to make sure. An uncomfortable shiver passed through my body at the thought of a spider scurrying across my hand. I shook it off, summoned my courage and slipped my hand in. It was cold and the walls were made of stone. I felt my hand around the tiny storage room, and found something on the floor. I pulled the object out; it was a journal with a brown leather cover. I wiped away the spider webs, blew away the dust and skimmed through the pages.

A letter fell to the floor; it was long and yellowed with age. I picked it up and found my name written on the front. It was in Grandpa's handwriting. I checked the journal and it was also written in his hand. I smiled, "It always comes back to you, doesn't it Gramps." I sat in his leather seat, set the journal on the desk and opened the letter.

Dear Amy,

If you're reading this you have discovered that you're a nation and wish to know more about your origins. I know you are only a child now, but I might not live to see your 18th birthday or live long enough after to tell you stories of my time with your father.

I don't wish to scare you, but other nations might not be happy with me knowing about you and Alfred. And as you grow, more people will come to realize that you are not entirely human. And as the list grows, more lives will be placed in danger of being caught in the crossfire.

If the nations ever do discover our family secret, you must seek help. Turned to the journal; it is a record of all the times I've spent with Alfred. Beginning from when I was 17 traveling to each pow wow throughout the country, to the moment he gave you to me.
March 9, 1968

It has been almost four years since I've seen Alfred . . .

I'm beginning to worry about him.

The last time I laid eyes on him was on the day of my wedding; the day he chose to tell me he was being sent to Vietnam. Heh, I should have known, he also decided to wear his military uniform that day.

Those were the thoughts that placed through my mind when I awoke this morning to the sound of my new born son crying. It's strange what you would think about at four in the morning as you hold your child.

It has been a month since the North Vietnamese attacked about a hundred South Vietnamese towns and cities. Word has gotten through that the US military was able to stand their ground; but it only proved that the North Vietnamese were stronger than we believed.

I couldn't help but think about Alfred. He fought in the Second World War, then this whole ordeal with the Soviets has caused a bit of a scare about Communism and now he has been pulled into another war in Asia. I admit we didn't leave on good terms. I should have just wished him luck instead of trying to talk him out of it.

Maybe faith is giving me a second chance.

Later that day, Alfred came to my shop. He was dressed in his military uniform. It was dark green with a matching cap. His golden buttons gleamed when the light hit them and his medals were pinned to his chest. As he came in, he opened the door for a young woman that was walking out. His smile was still as bright and carefree as ever.

When he closed the door, he switched the sign from open to close. He removed his hat and nodded, "Hello John, as you can see I'm still alive." He spread out his arms and grinned even wider, as if the hurtful comment I said during our last meeting was a joke.

I snapped and threw a wooden carving of fox at him but he ducked. "Is that what you have to say?!" I exclaimed, "You were gone for four years in the far east! Every day I wondered if you were shot or blown up! It wouldn't have killed you to send one letter!" I held up another carving, ready to hit his big fat head.

"John, put down the cow." he raised his hands in mock surrender.

"It's a bison, you idiot!" I shouted.

"Okay, I'm an idiot, I'm an idiot." He sighed, "It's been four years; can't we just forget our little fight and more on?"
I rolled my eyes and sat the carving of the bison down. "What do you want?"

He pulled up a stool, sat himself across from the counter and gave another smile. "I just came to check on you. Is the married life treating you well? How's Aponi?"

I sighed; this was how Alfred tries to smooth things over, by sweeping any issue we had under the rug. "Yes, and Aponi is just fine. She's home with the little one."

His brows rose as his smile grew wider, "a kid. You had a kid?!" He stood up and grabbed my hand, "Congratulations."

And before I knew it, we were back to our same old ways; chatting about recent news, family and friends and new inventions. "NASA says that they will be able to launch a space craft to the moon next year. It's going to be amazing!"

I was polishing some carvings as he spoke, "Alfred don't get your hopes up. Kennedy may have promised that we will get to the moon, but it's impossible."

"Nothing is impossible, my friend."

I shook my head, "there is a reason why humans were not built to fly. We are meant to be on the Earth plane."

"That's what they said about the Wright Brothers and look what happen. I'll tell you this now John, if you keep thinking the way you do, you'll end up being surprised for the rest of your life."

"You only want us to reach the moon so you could gloat about it to the Soviet Union." I told him.

He shrugged, "That's only one of the many perks," he beamed.

I sighed, "What is up with you and the Soviet Union? Wouldn't it just be best to leave each other be."

Alfred's eyes lost their light as his smile disappeared.

I should've just kept my mouth shut.

He sighed, "Ivan's hurting good nations, I just can't stand by and watch." He grew quiet and brushed his hand through his hair.

A wise man would just let Alfred deal with his demons on his own, in his own time. But I'm not a wise man; I'm his friend. And a friend listens and tries to take on the weight of his demons. So I said, "I'm willing to listen."

He took a deep breath, "Ivan sent a nation to the battle field, a nation that wasn't strong enough to handle this type of war. His name is Latvia, Raivis is his human name," he took another deep breath, "God. I don't know how Ivan was able to get Raivis through the paper work but they must have been desperate for soldiers and to get a nation, they must have seen it as an advantage. But Raivis wasn't a fighter, he may be centuries older than me but he looks like he's a thirteen year old boy. Arthur explained to me once that the aging process is different for each of us but mostly the reason why Raivis hasn't grown is because Ivan crushes him."

He continued to tell his story of how he found Raivis in the after mass of a landmine. Raivis was in agony and barely alive when Alfred stumbled upon him. Alfred said that when he found the small boy, he had a major head wound and had lost both of his legs.
I gave all my attention to Alfred as he told his story about carrying a half-conscious nation back to camp. He had a trusted medic look after the boy as Alfred hid him in a tent away from the other soldiers. He then sent out a letter to President Johnson to send out a plane for Raivis. After about a month the plane came and they were able to take Raivis to a decent hospital, but he was kept as a prisoner of war.

"He wasn't treated badly, he mostly spent his time at the hospital; healing," he finished.

"That poor kid, he'll never walk again." I said grimly.

"Oh he will. It'll take some time but his limbs will grow back."

I must have given him a very surprised look, for he cracked a sad grin and said, "Yes our limbs can grow back. It's a long process no matter how you get the injury, it's also very painful. You know when you were a kid and had growing pains?"

I nodded and he explained, "Well it's like that, but a hundred times worse."

He grew quiet again and I pulled a battle of liquor from under the counter. I placed two shot glasses between us and poured the yellow colored liquid into the small clear glasses. I picked up my glass, "For Raivis, may he get well soon."

Alfred gave a small smile and picked up his glass, "Agreed."

We tapped our glasses together and swallowed our drinks in one gulp. Alfred still carried a serious expression, and for a good reason.

"John, I'm afraid this is goodbye. Not forever, but it's going to be a couple of years. With this war going on and Ivan plotting my downfall, he'll try everything he can to find a kink in my armor. I don't want you and your family to be dragged into this mess."

I chuckled and played it off as a joke. "What? You think Ivan will try and get me?"

Alfred didn't answer, only stared daggers at me. "Yes. That's actually what he'll do. You know too much about me, and that can be used to get the other nations to agree with him."

That confused me, "To agree with what?" I asked.

"To make you disappear."

My playful banter was gone and Alfred pulled out a white card from his pocket, "Don't worry, I've made a backup plan. If you're ever in trouble call this number and say this code phase: 'I know the eagle'. You can only use the number once, so save it for a real emergency."

I took the card and found that the area code was for Washington DC. "Let me guess, you're the eagle," I said to lighten the mood.

Alfred smiled and he rose to his feet, "I may not have a spirit animal but I always believed if I did it would be a bald eagle."

I shook my head, "A bald eagle is nothing compared to the golden eagle, now they rule the skies."

"Let's not get into that debate again," he said with a playful grin on his face. "One for the road," he lifted his glass and I poured him his last drink. He finished it quickly and slammed the glass back against the counter.
"Are you sure you should drive?" I asked, concerned.

He laughed, "I can hold my liquor. But Artie, dear lord, he can't even walk after two glasses of the hard stuff." He grabbed his cap and walked to the door, but before he left he turned around and gave one final farewell. "Goodbye John, hopefully this won't be our last depart," he said.

I gave him a small smile, "It won't." Then I saluted him, "Goodbye Mr. America."

"Shut up, I know you're mocking me," he proclaimed as he placed his cap on his head.

We laughed and in the next minute he was gone.

Now I sit here in my office, pondering over the fact that other, not so friendly nations could come and harm me and my family. What would they do to Aponi? She barely knows Alfred.

And Jr. He's only a baby; would the nations take him away from us?

I don't wish to think about it, but why do I have an uneasy feeling that this is only just the beginning.

The entry ends and I turned the page to find the next entry was written ten years after. There was also a card attached to the page with a paper clip. I pulled it out, the number had faded but I could still make out what was written. I leaned against the chair and skimmed through the journal, my mind seemed to have finally cleared, yet I couldn't help but think I only ended up with more questions than answers.

I closed Grandpa's journal and grabbed my phone. If Grandpa had already used the number for help, I was screwed. But after the third ring someone answered.

"Hello, may I help you?" a woman's voice proclaimed.

"Uh, uh," why the hell am I stuttering?! Say something stupid!

"Ma'am, this number is only supposed to be used for a serious emergency. Now you have wasted this number for someone who would have truly needed it. Goodbye-"

"Wait!" I cried, "I know the eagle! I know the eagle!"

I was met with silence from the other line, and then she said, "Please hold."

"Huh?"

But she was already gone and I was on hold with a classical song playing in the background. After five minutes, another woman picked up. "Hello?"

"Uh, hi, um, my name is Amy Hawkfeather and I-"

"Oh yes, I was expecting you in July, but it's better to have an early start if you ask me. Now, what could be the problem?"

"Uh how did you-"

"Honey we don't have a lot time here. You need help, am I right?"
"Uh yeah, but-"

"Then tell me, when will the nations arrive?"

I decided to ignore my questions for this mysterious woman and answered, "I don't know."

"Then check your email. Quick."

I knitted my brows in confusion but logged into my mail and found a message from Arthur that was sent on Tuesday.

Amy,

The nations will arrive to the States by the end of this week. We will hold the meeting at your school, for the auditorium is the only place big enough for all of us.

The meeting will begin at ten in the morning on Friday, classes will be dismissed.

Prepare for the worse.

Arthur

My eyes stared at the line, 'Prepare for the worse.' My emotions were swirling and I couldn't think straight. It took the woman on the other line three times to get my attention.

"Sorry. The nations will meet at Nightingale International Private School in Summerland California. The meeting will start at ten on Friday in the auditorium," I informed.

"Every well, I'll be there," she answered.

"Wait, who are you?"

But the line went dead.

I tried calling back, but all I got was the operator, "The number you have reached has been disconnected."

After redialing three more times and getting the same robotic answer. I gave up and fell back into the leather seat, feeling completely drained.

I folded myself on the desk with my cheek on my forearm and my hand resting on Grandpa's journal. The pounding in my head had finally lessened and my eyes were beginning to droop to a close. I finally felt secure enough to fall asleep.

But Amy was not safe.

The small door of the storage was still open, allowing a dark vapor to sneak into the room. It slithered around the towers of books and headed straight to Amy. It wrapped itself around the chair and hovered around her. Amy's golden aura was beaming and so full of life. The vapor purred in pleasure of the thought of devouring it, but it was on strict orders.

The vapor seeped into the gold, engulfing itself into the light's warmth and disappearing from sight.
I was surrounded by black; the only light source that seemed to beam through was me.

My entire body was outlined in a soft white glow. When I looked down to examine myself, I found that I was wearing a simple summer dress. It was white with thin spaghetti straps and the dress stopped two inches above my knees. I was also barefoot.

A wind stirred and blew behind me with cold air. I gasped in surprise and wrapped my arms around myself. The chilled wind only grew stronger till a pair of muscular arms embraced me from behind. At first I was thankful, for this person was blocking the freezing wind but that thought was quickly replaced with fear when this mysterious person began to roam their hands over my breasts and midsection.

The dark figure's head bent low to nibble on my neck and ear. I cried out and thrashed myself free. The figure lets go and I spun back to find the nation of Turkey.

"Sadik?" I said uncertainly.

The last time I saw Sadik he was tanned with healthy dark hair and wore a mask to cover his eyes. Now, he wore no mask revealing ash gray skin. His hair was still black, but it was dry and lifeless. I've never seen his eyes before, but I was pretty sure that his eyes weren't the color of washed out gray like it was now.

He wore a casual black suit with a matching dark dress shirt and shoes. He adjusted his jacket sleeves to stretch out the wrinkles that formed when he hugged me. "Why do you sound so surprised?" Sadik said playfully as he smiled.

His smile may have seemed gentle at first glance but it was cold and it didn't reach his eyes. His teeth were also a shade of gray. It was as if all the color was drained from him, leaving behind nothing but the colors of gray and black.

He noticed when I stepped back, "Oh, America, why so scared?" He stepped forward with his hand out reached, "I won't hurt you," he gave a mean grin.

I ran in the opposite direction but I was blocked by Russia. He was about the same height and body build as Sadik, so I collided right into his chest. He was also wearing the same casual suit as Sadik but with an added gray scarf wrapped around his neck. Before I could react, Ivan gripped his hand on my arm to hold me in front of him. His other hand clutched under my chin and squeezed roughly.

"Don't lie to her Turkey," Ivan's skin and eyes were the same shade as Sadik's. But his hair was the color of dark gray, almost as if it was covered in ash. "You know as well as I do that you enjoy it better when it's rough."

A shiver ran down my spine as he said that.

"True," Sadik proclaimed as he made his way to my backside again. "But I plan to savor this dish," he leaned in low to lick my cheek.

His tongue felt like sandpaper and he smirked when he saw my uncomfortable expression. I shoved my hands out and I leaped out of their grasp. Once my feet landed on solid ground, I sprinted into the darkness.
Being a flash light had its advantages but when you're trapped in a place that seemed to have no walls or floors of any kind; just a dark empty space that seems to go nowhere, no matter where you go. It's kind of redundant.

I did a quick right turn but I was caught by the arm. I snapped my head to the left to find the nation of Denmark grinning. I would've been relieved but Mikkel had the same coloring as Ivan. His blond hair, blue eyes and classic ivory skin were gone and replaced with various shades of gray.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" he drew me to his chest and slid his spare hand into my hair. His gray fingers tangled into the stands and pulled so I would be forced to look up into his eyes. "The party is just getting started."

I slammed my fist into his face, kicked him to the ground and I did not wait for him to get up.

I sprinted into another mad dash and stupidly I decided to look back. Did horror movies teach me nothing?

I could no longer see any trace of Mikkel in the darkness but that left me open for another collision. I slammed into another dark figure and I fell back on my ass.

"Shit!" I hissed.

"Oh, I hope I didn't bruise you," a slim gray hand caressed my cheek.

"Victoria," I whispered as she straddles herself over my thighs. Her dark hair was just as dry and lifeless as Sadik's and her skin and eyes were the same coloring as the others. The only difference was that she wore a dress like mine; instead of being white it was black.

I tried to crawl away but Victoria slammed my forearms to the ground to stop my movement. "Aw, don't be afraid," she gave a wicked smile. "I promise," she leans in, leaving butterfly kisses from the back of my ear and followed the line of my vein. "To be quick," she bit into my neck. Her teeth sank into my flesh as I screamed in agony and began to kick her off.

When Victoria was tossed aside, I took the chance to check my neck. I hissed in pain as I placed a hand over the wound; it came back bloody. I heard Victoria moan and found her chewing as blood and bits of flesh dripped off her chin. "So good," she moaned in pleasure. "So warm," she wiped the blood and flesh away with her fingers and began to lick her them clean. Between her licks, she whispered loud enough for me to hear, "I. Want. More."

I scrambled to my feet and raced for an escape. Fear and adrenaline surged through my body. I ignored the burning ache in my neck and focused on putting distance between me and flesh eating Victoria.

Then I spotted a figure in the distance. I didn't know if it was my inner light that allowed me to see the figure or that my eyes have adjusted to the darkness; either way it didn't stop me from running straight to the figure. As I got closer, I noticed the person had jaw length hair and a slim body.

I perked up, I knew who it was. "Toris!" I exclaimed as he turned and I circled my arms around his midsection. "Thank God you're here," frankly I was happy for any friendly face. "Listen we need to get outta of here." I tried to pull him in the direction on my right but he gently pulled me back.

"You're bleeding," he proclaimed as his fingers caressed over my wound.

I avoided his gaze, "I'm fine. We need to go-"
Toris wrapped his arm around my waist to hold me in place and comforted me with soothing words in his native tongue. He bent his head to my shoulder so I wouldn't be able to see his face and kissed my naked skin.

"What are you-"

He placed a finger on my lips to silence me, "I'm only kissing away the pain." He kissed every inch of my shoulder and neck, leaving my bite mark alone. My skin heated under his touch as his fingers moved away from my mouth to support my neck and head. Finally he reached my bleeding sore and kissed it.

"Toris," I panted, "stop, please."

He ignored me and continued to lick and suck on the highly sensitive injury. I released a painful groan but Toris only grew more aggressive. I glanced to him and found that his light brown hair was now the color of ash gray. His skin was the same sickening shade and he wore the same suit as the other nations. When his eyes opened to meet me, I was slightly surprised and also afraid to find that his beautiful dark aquamarine eyes were washed away with gray. He noticed my fear and pulled away with my blood smeared over his mouth. He smiled but it was uncaring and emotionless, "I'm sorry Ms. America, I just couldn't help myself." He moved closer to my ear and whispered, "You taste heavenly."

I tried to push him away but in one swift move he flipped me over and I landed onto my back with a thud. He knelt down beside my head, grasped my arms and pinned me to the ground. No matter how much I struggled or kicked he was not fazed.

"Let me go!" I screamed.

"Calm down Ms. America," Toris said. "The sooner you allow us to devour you," my eyes widen as nations stepped out of the darkness to reveal themselves in their awful black and gray glory. They walked towards me; blood lust gleamed in their eyes as I caught several of them licking their lips. "The sooner it will all be over."

The nations attacked; their teeth sank into my skin as their hands clawed into my torso and tore me apart.

I screamed as I jumped from the desk and leaned into my grandfather's chair. My hands searched desperately over my body. A sigh of relief came when I found no bite wounds or claw marks of any kind. Cold sweat ran like bullets along my spine and face. My heart was practically springing out of my rib cage and I laid my head back on the desk, taking deep breaths.

A hand pats my head and I leaped to my feet, with my boxing fists up and ready.

"I come in peace," my grandmother held her hands up in mock surrender.

I let out another sigh of relief and sat back down, "sorry Grandma, I just woke up from a nightmare."

She nodded, "I see," she walks back to the books on the floor and placed them back on the shelves. "Makes sense, you were moaning in your sleep."

"How long I was asleep?"
"Well, I've been here for twenty minutes or so."

I checked the clock on the wall, an hour of sleep, great. I turned to Grandma, who was still fixing the shelves. I walked over and gave a helping hand. After about ten minutes, I asked, "Aren't you going to ask about it?"

"That depends, were you going to tell me?"

"No," I said truthfully.

She shrugged, "then what would have been the point?"

We continued putting the books back into their rightful place, till Grandma proclaimed, "I see that you've found John's journal."

"Have you read it?" I asked.

She shook her head, "it was meant for your eyes only. I do know of the number, but it was only to be used as an emergency, so I left it be."

"Well there is an emergency, and it's a big one."

She nodded, "Yes, I know, your father told me."

I sighed, "Does Mom know?"

She said, "Yes and she is worried. For you, for our family and for any innocent souls that could be caught in the cross fire." Grandma smiled, "But she is a strong woman. She had to be, to raise you."

I grinned, "Yeah, but maybe it would be safer to retreat."

"Believe me; a part of me wants to run. But a stronger part of me wants to stand and fight."

"Is that the Navajo warrior spirit speaking?" I smiled, my grandmother was a descendant from both the Cherokee and Navajo tribes.

"Yes, the same warrior spirit that runs through you," she placed a hand over my beating heart.

I sighed, "Grandma were not re-"

"Don't even finish that sentence." She said with a stern look but was quickly replaced with a knowing smile. "You are America. You represent the natives of this great land."

"The tribes? Well, I figured."

She shook her head, "not just them but everyone that was born here. Tell me Amy, how many people are born in the US each year?"

"I think around three to four million," I answered uncertainly.

"And tell me, would all those babies be descendants from the native tribes?"

"I guess not," I said.

"They wouldn't, they would be of English descent, or French, German, even African. They are your
Thursday came and went.

Now it's the night before Friday morning, well technically it's already morning. The clock had just turned twelve and I have not been able to get any shut eye since Wednesday afternoon.

Mostly because of stress, and also I don't want to experience another episode of The Walking Dead: Nation Edition.

I yawned as I clicked my way through hundreds of TV channels and yet found nothing to watch. Lady whined beside me, almost as if she was saying, 'you're still up?'

"I know, I know, I should go to sleep but I just can't seem to close my eyes. I'm tired yes, but it's like I have so much energy that I just cannot rest, you know."

Lady blinked at me and laid her head on my lap. "Yeah, yeah," I scratched her ears, "I talk too much."

"It's okay, as long as you feed me, I will love you," a voice giggled from the window.

I knew who it was, "Michel." I walked to the window and found him hanging off the edge. "What are you doing?"

"Oh, you know, just hanging around; making up some corny ass jokes. You gonna let me in or what?" he grinned.

I rolled my eyes and pulled him in. He was dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, sneakers and had a backpack strapped to his back. "Thanks, nice pj's by the way," he winked.

I looked down to my white tank top that displayed Captain America's shield in the front along with matching red bottoms that showed Captain America in various fight moves. I crossed my arms, "Don't be cute with me."

"But," he moved closer the window and waved his hands outside. A cooler was thrown in the air and Michel caught it and brought it in. "I have ice cream," he sang.

I laughed, "Jamie? Are you down there?"

"Yes, now tell Michel to send down the rope," she said in a loud whisper.
"Oh right," Michel snapped his fingers, swings the pack off his shoulder and pulled out a thick rope. He threw one end out of the window and gestured me to help him hold the other. Jamie climbed up, panting and cursing the entire way.

"Damn girl, you need to build some muscle," I proclaimed as I helped her through the window. "You know you could've used the front door like normal people."

"I wanted to do that," Jamie panted as she glared at Michel.

"Hey this was more fun," he grinned.

I giggled, but I still had to ask, "What are you guys doing here so late?"

"Aponi told us about the huge meeting tomorrow," Michel answered.

"We figured you wouldn't be sleeping so we thought we would come over and have a sleep over party." Jamie unzipped her backpack and pulled out DVDs. "I got the classics, The Breakfast Club, Grease, Mean Girls and Easy A."

"And I got the snacks," Michel pulled out family value chip bags from his pack. "I got Hot Lime Cheetos, Nacho Cheese Doritos and Takis."

"Let's not forget the drinks," Jamie pulled out large bottles of soda from the cooler, "We got Coke and Pepsi for us and Country Time Lemonade for you, both in original and in pink."

"And for the pièce de résistance ice cream," Michel walked over to the cooler and pulled out a three pint size ice cream carton. "We got mint chocolate chip."

"Cheesecake brownie," Jaime added.

"Cookie Dough," Michel followed.

"And your favorite," Jamie smiled, "cappuccino chunky chocolate chip."

I grinned, "I love you guys."

"Aw, we love you too Cap," Michel gave a mock salute. I raised a brow at him and he chuckled, "I'm sorry, I had to say it."

We laughed and Jamie slid the first movie into the side of the TV. Jamie and I sat on my bed while Michel and Lady took the floor with the air mattress from the closet. We divided the pillows among us and started our movie marathon. The snacks and drinks were opened and completely consumed by the end of the first movie. We sang along with Grease, keeping our voices low and by the third movie we were out cold.

We were awoken by my alarm clock at eight.

Michel sat up with sleepy eyes and mumbled, "Suit up! Battle stations!"

"Five more minutes," Jamie groaned.

On the sixth attempt, I punched the sleep button and laid my head back on the pillow. "Stand down soldier," I said into the pillow.
"Roger that Cap," Michel fell back onto the mattress and Lady yawned.

The door opens and a loud series of bangs resounded.

Jamie gave a girlish squeal as she rose to her knees. Michel sat up and grumbled sleepily, "We're being attacked!" Lady followed with a howl and I jumped to my feet but I was in a clumsy state so I ended up falling back on the window seat.

When I rubbed out the sleep from my eyes I was finally able to see that the loud bangs came from my mother. She had a large pan in one hand and hard plastic cooking spoon in the other. "Wake up you lazy bubs! If this is going to be our last breakfast together you damned well know it we're going to have it. Amy, get your butt in the shower and wear the clothes I hanged for you on the door. Michel, help out John with the horses and take Lady out while you do. Jamie, you will help me in the kitchen."

We all stared blankly at her.

"Did I stutter? Move!"

"Yes ma'am," we exclaimed.

Michel forced his feet into his shoes and ran out of the room, with Lady following right behind. Jamie tied her hair back and jogged pass Mom and out through the door. I speed walked passed Mom and headed straight to the bathroom.

My shower was short and the stylish suite that was waiting for me, fit like a glove. I tucked in a long sleeved blue blouse into a black high waist skirt. I blew dry my hair and brushed my bangs to the side. I shrugged the black blazer on and slipped on a pair of black pantyhose along with a pair of simple black inch high shoes.

When I came out, I found my parents and friends in the kitchen. Mom was cooking the eggs and sausage. Jamie flipped pancakes as her iPod played 'Love On Top' by Beyoncé, both her and Mom began to sing and dance along with the music. Dad and Michel were covered in hay and sweat, but that didn't stop them from shuffling their feet to the beat as they set the table. I took a moment to watch them as my grin grew wider from ear to ear.

Mom stepped side to side as she stood by the oven and placed the cooked food on serving plates. Michel would grab the plates and set them down on the table, shaking his butt as he did. Jamie finished the pancake batter and pulled me into a twirl. We started to sing off key along with the song as we danced. Dad grabbed Mom and they waltzed in place as Michel joined us and we began the line dance we learned from the music video.

The song came to its end and Mom turned off the oven and iPod. "Breakfast is ready. Who wants coffee?"

Jamie and Michel raised their hands and proclaimed, "We do!"

Dad pulled out the coffee pot from the coffee maker and grabbed three mugs. Mom took the kettle from the oven and poured herself her usual jasmine tea. I grabbed a cup of ice cold milk and sat next to Jamie. Michel sat across from us while Mom and Dad took the ends of the table. We served ourselves from the plates in the center and began the morning with small talk. "Next time you kids decide to come over, please use the door," Dad said as he sipped his coffee.

"Sorry Mr. H, we just found it more fun to sneak in," Michel grinned mischievously.
"Speak for yourself," Jamie proclaimed.

Mom turned to me, "You look amazing sweetie."

"Thanks," I mumbled as I chewed on a sausage.

"Hey your hair has gotten longer," Dad smiled, "It's nice."

I gave him a confused look, "it has?"

"Oh now I see it," Mom touched my hair, "its shaggy, like a pixie cut."

"Ooooh let your hair grow out!" Jamie cried out, "Please! I loved your curly hair."

I groaned, "Long hair's a hassle."

"Amy, believe me, you're gorgeous you could pull off any look you want but we just love your long hair more," said Michel.

I sighed, "If the nations leave us alone, I'll let my hair grow."

When our meal was done and the dishes were placed in the dish washer. I said my goodbyes along with a couple of hugs and walked out to my car. I slid in, cracked up the radio and checked my phone. Twenty minutes till the meeting, time to face the music.

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During this moment Blake was sitting in his third grade class right next to his sister, practicing their multiplication. He answers the questions with ease and waits for his classmates to catch up. Blair noticed and pouted, "You're so good at math, not fair."

He gave a small smile, "your better at art," he whispered.

She grinned and continued her work. Blake stared off into space, reading the colors that surrounded his classmates. The main colors that filled the room were of knowledgeable yellow fused with frustrated red. His classmates were having trouble with the sevens.

Then something light brown and white caught his eye. He turned his head to the left and found a barn owl standing on the teacher's desk. Its slim brown talons were smooth and clean; white feathers completely covered it from its breast to its legs and spread to the inside of its wings. Its face was heart shaped with a narrow pointed beck. Light brown feathers outlined its face and the top of its head. Darker brown and gray feathers scattered over the outside of its wings and its eyes were dark and knowing. The teacher and students paid no attention to the bird, only Blake.

He knew who this owl was.

He got up and asked for the bathroom pass, his teacher wasn't hesitant, for she trusted Blake to be a good student. Blake walked out of the room and knew the owl would follow. Once he reached the boys' restroom and made sure no one was inside. He looked up to the bird that was now standing on a stall door. "You're my spirit guide, aren't you?"

The owl nodded and Blake asked, "Why are you here?"

"You have sense it, haven't you?" Owl asked in a feminine voice.
He straightens, "you mean that weird stomach ache I had earlier today?"

Owl nodded, "you are a child of Sight. You're instincts are true, the moment you ignore them, can cause someone to lose their life."

His eyes widened, "It's about Amy isn't," he said it more as a statement than a question.

Owl's eyes narrowed, "if I say yes, what will you do?"

Blake ran out the door and headed straight for the nearest exist. He busted through the front entrance of the school and sprinted down the street. Owl soared above, "you are not thinking clearly."

"Shut up!" Blake cried out and grabbed his blue bicycle from the bike rack. He did the combination of his padlock and pulled out his bike. He took a running start, hopped on and pedaled off school grounds.

"Do you even know where she is," Owl asked.

Blake ignored her and curved on his right, heading into town.

"You're going the wrong way." Owl proclaimed.

He slid to a stop and looked up to the bird. "Where," he panted.

She landed on a stop sign, "Before I tell you, please take a moment to think. Why do you believe I'm your spirit guide?"

He sighed, "Owl represents wisdom and a spirit guide's job is to teach their human what they represent for their human would usually not carry that trait. Are you saying that I'm not smart?"

"There is a difference between smart and wise, boy," Owl exclaimed. "What you are doing is rushing in without a single thought of precaution. This is foolish and reckless."

Blake bit back his tongue and narrowed his eyes at the bird. "Sometimes you gotta be, to protect the people you love." He repeated the words his great-grandfather had always told him.

Owl's tone soften, "Tell me, what exactly can you do for her?"

"Whatever it is, I can figure it out," he said, determined.

Owl sighed, "Follow me," she threw up her wings and flew in the opposite direction. Blake rose up to pedal faster and headed straight for Nightingale.
As I walked through the front doors of the main building I was a little surprised to find the nations already waiting inside. The moment I entered, the nations turned their eyes on me instantly. All of them wore business suites, being in the colors of black, navy, khaki or gray. The female countries had the choice between a skirt and a stylish pants suite; most went with skirts. Their faces were unreadable, but a few gave me polite smiles.

I returned their greetings and walked through the crowd, looking for an isolated place to hide and collect my thoughts.

"Amy," Arthur called out and I sighed, there goes that plan.

I turned around to face Arthur, Francis and Matthew, "Well, fancy meeting you all here," I said sarcastically.

Arthur sighed, "Please restrain yourself of any sarcastic comments during the meeting."

"But that wouldn't be as fun," I smiled and scanned the area, searching for anyone that could possibly be the woman that I spoke with. But the only women that were in the room were the female nations.

"Attention countries," Ludwig shouted over the crowd and we turned to face him. "It seems everyone is here," he opens the door to the auditorium, "let's begin."

The countries followed him in and Matthew placed a hand on my shoulder, "Make sure when you're in there; call them by their nation names."

I nodded, "Got it," we waited for the room to clear before I walked in with Francis, Arthur and Matthew.

The nations took their seats in center section of the auditorium and I was about to walk into the twenty-first row till Ludwig called out, "America, please come and sit in the front row. This meeting is about you and your," he took a moment, "circumstances."

"Wow, subtle," I remarked.

Arthur pinched my arm, "Restrain yourself," he repeated through gritted teeth.

I rolled my eyes, strolled down the aisle and sat myself in the center of first row. Matthew sat on my left, Arthur on my right and Francis sat next to him. Everyone was eerie silent till Ludwig cleared his throat and began, "Welcome everyone, I hope there were no inconveniences."

"This is certainly an inconvenience," I mumbled.

Arthur squeezed my hand, "Enough."

I stuck my tongue out at him when he wasn't looking.

Ludwig continued with his speech and instructs of how to process the meeting in the proper way. While he spoke, I was tempted to make a puppet with my hand and mouth 'blah, blah, blah'. I think Matthew could read my mind for he sat my hand back down when I wanted to raise it.

Ludwig turned to Arthur, "Britain, I speak for everyone when I ask, why did you lie to us?"
Arthur sighed and rose to his feet, "America had no idea who she was, if we just simply showed up at her door and told her she was a nation. She would have called the police and most of you would ignore them, even go as far as to resist an arrest and persuade no wait, force America into believing she was nation."

"What makes you think we would act like that?" Mikkel exclaimed.

"It's because I know you. And I know America; she's stubborn, just like her father. She would have fought back, along with her family and friends. This would've lead to an international disturbance, we would've had to make a convincing cover story with the media and I believe our bosses would've had our asses the next day.

"I lied to all of you, and for that I am sorry. But I just couldn't take the chance of all of you getting on a plane and coming to this every town. America needed time to accept the truth. Once she was ready, I brought her to Austria, where she would've met all of you in a safe environment."

"Safe?" A red haired man laughed harshly, "Did you forget the part where you decided to place goddamned spell on the house and fuck with everyone."

"I did what I had to protect her," Arthur hissed.

"Who's that?" I whispered to Matthew.

"That's Scotland, Britain's older brother," he answered.

My eyes widened and I looked back to Scotland, he had the same green eyes as Arthur but he was taller and his eyebrows weren't as thick.

"Sorry to burst your bubble little brother but it's because of you, she was attacked by Russia," Scotland smirked.

Arthur froze and everyone waited in awkward silence for his response. I noticed his hands were curled into fists and they were shaking. I gritted my teeth together in irritation; the way Scotland seemed to enjoy criticizing Arthur and placing blame on him for Ivan's actions was pissing me off. It wasn't Arthur's fault that Ivan was a total bastard. My anger seemed to only grow when memories of Ivan and his attempt of rape on my well being invaded my mind. I dug my nails into my palms and took a deep calming breath.

I reached out and grabbed Arthur's hand. His hand stopped trembling and he side glanced to me. "I don't blame you," I whispered as I squeezed his hand encouragingly.

He squeezed back and focused on Scotland, "What's important right now is America's future, Scotland. If you prefer to ponder on the past, I suggest you sit down and be quiet." He turned away and sat back down, completely ignoring Scotland's existence. He gave me a small smile and nodded his thanks.

Ludwig moved on, "America."

"Yes," I said, annoyed.

He either didn't notice my attitude or simply ignored it. "Would you care to enlighten us on how you came to be adopted by a human family?"

"You don't know," my tone grew with harsh venom but I was able to keep it low. "These guys didn't tell you?" I glanced to Arthur, Francis and Matthew; they remained silent. I turned back to
Ludwig, he was waiting. I rolled my eyes and summarized the tale. "Alfred came to my grandfather in a bright burst of golden light and in his arms was me." My tone was over exaggerated, like a storyteller's. "Alfred bestowed his bundle of joy into John Senior's arms and told him to raise me as his own." I clapped my hands, "The rest is history."

He inhaled through his nose, he was clearly peeved. "And how do you know this?"

"My grandfather left a video," he knitted his brows in confusion and I said sarcastically, "what? That wasn't in my file?"

"No," he said through gritted teeth.

I rose to my feet, "Then tell me, what's exactly in it?"

"Adoption papers, test scores, and medical records. Then it also connects to your adopted parent's family tree charts, credit scores, occupations, and birth and death certificates."

"So, pretty much you people don't know shit!" I exclaimed.

"Amy!" Arthur slipped and called me by my human name.

I ignored him, "Let's stop beating around the damned brush, shall we. What do you want from me?!!"

I saw that the vein in Ludwig's forehead was throbbing but he still answered in a calm voice. "Who knows about you," he asked it more like a statement than a question.

"Who knows about me? Hmm, I have no idea," I shrugged my shoulders.

"I will not play games with you, America," he hissed.

"Then leave!"

"Enough!" we turned to face Yao Wang, "You are getting nowhere," he told Ludwig and turned to me. "America, we have asked nicely, but if you continue to refuse us we will have no choice but locate everyone you know. That means your adopted family, friends, teachers, classmates, and neighbors will be taken in for questioning." He narrowed his eyes at me, "Keep in mind, we have ways of getting what we want."

I gritted my teeth, my irritation and anger was building. When I spoke, my voice didn't seem like it belonged to me. "Lay one hand on anyone I care about, I will beat you to a bloody pulp."

Yao's amber eyes widened as he took a step back. Silence filled the room till a single voice boomed with laughter. Gilbert rose to his feet, wiping away a tear, "are you threatening us?"

He said this like I was a five year old kid who just said that unicorns existed. Something snapped and before I even understood what I was doing; I was stomping up the stairs to the side of the stage, lifting up the massive wooden podium our headmaster would use for announcements and hurling it right at Gilbert's face.

Unfortunately he ducked and the podium broke into pieces as it landed in the aisle. I screamed, "I sure as hell ain't asking you to senior prom!"
Blake was able to sneak into the private school through the front. He followed a young Asian man with shaggy brown hair and dark amber eyes. He didn't seem to notice that a child was right behind him when he opened the door. From there, he ducked behind a pillar and waited for the nations to enter the auditorium. Once they were gone, he followed Owl around the corner and entered through a side door that had a square window. He walked through the dark narrow hallway and found an opening through the red velvet curtain.

Blake watched from behind the curtain. His eyes widened as he saw Amy's aura transformed to wrathful red, but that color was darkening. After she threw the podium, Blake found a large black cloud like mist swirling around Amy.

"Is this what you do?" a man with slick back blond hair and blue eyes shouted. "When things don't go your way, you throw a tantrum!"

"I'll show you tantrum!" Amy leaped from the stage and tackled him to the ground.

Chaos broke out and Blake was only able to see the nations tripping over their own feet as they rushed to the front, trying to stop the fight.

"What's going on? What's happening to Amy?!" Blake asked Owl.

"You saw the dark mist, didn't you?" Owl asked but didn't wait for him to answer. "We call them vapors; they exist in the shadows and thrive off of chaos."

"Is that what's making Amy act like this? I mean she has a temper, but-"

"It doesn't matter; a vapor can make even the gentlest person violent."

Blake turned back to the crowd of countries, who were still trying to control the situation. He couldn't really see the fight, for it was right below the stage, but he could hear the aggressive shouts and the cracks of bones.

"Well," Owl said, "what are you going to do?"

He bit his bottom lip and stood quiet.

Owl was about to comment, till Blake noticed her feathers stood on end and her eyes widen. "Blake," her voice was alert, "we need to leave."

"No!" his senses were blinded by his emotions; he didn't see the shadows moving at first.

"Move!" she screeched and flew at him, her talons were out and she began pushing him out the door they came in from. "Go! We must go!"

"Stop it! Stop! Owl!" he exclaimed as she continued to shove him to the door. The lights from the hall shined through the window but when Blake turned to face the door, a cloud of mist swarmed and absorbed every trace of light. His eyes widen as black mist swirled in the darkness.

Owl's talons gripped the back of his collar and she flapped her wings furiously. "Back! Go back!"

He turned around and ran back to the curtains, but his ankle was caught and pulled down. He crashed to the floor, his head making full contact with a thud. His vision blurred but his sight quickly recovered. He looked to his ankle and found a dark cloud circling around his calf. Blake tried to crawl but the vapor was stronger. He was dragged away from the curtain and all he could do was scream.
At that moment, the vapor screeched in pain and released Blake from its hold. Owl ripped into the vapor, tearing it apart with her talons and beck. "Blake, run!" Move vapors surrounded her and Blake rose to his feet and ran into the costume room. Owl was right behind and once she was in, he slammed the door shut.

"Owl, what's happening?!" Blake's voice was high and scared.

Owl panted, "She's gotten stronger, and it's not helping that the nations are fighting. They're growing stronger because of it."

The door began to shake as the room darkens; a unisex voice vibrated from the door, "A child of Sight."

"It's been so long since we seen that violet color!" another unisex voice added. Then a series of voices resounded through the room.

"Come out, come out! Give us a piece."

"A delicious morsel!"

"We promise to be quick!"

"Do not lie!"

"We plan to savor this child!"

The vapors began to slam against the door, "She said we couldn't have the girl."

"But she didn't say we couldn't have you."

"But she would be proud."

"Yes, so proud!"

"To know we have gotten rid of the Sight."

"She would reward us greatly!"

"For a person of Sight would interfere with her plans."

"He would be a nuisance!"

"A bother!"

"A pest!"

"He must be killed," a voice whispered.

"Killed," all the voices hissed together.

"Killed," their voices rose in volume.

"Killed!" they chanted.

Blake backed away and closed his eyes tightly. "Leave me alone," he whimpered, "just leave me alone."
Owl grabbed his shirt and pulled him to a wardrobe, "hide in here."

He was frozen in place. Tears streaked down his face. He was terrified; all he wanted to do was fold himself into fetal position, close his eyes and picture himself anywhere but here.

"Blake!" Owl screamed, "Blake!"

But he sank to the floor, hugged his knees to his chest and rocked back and forth.

Owl cursed and transformed. She grew ten feet tall and had a massive fifteen foot wing span. Blake gasped but he didn't get chance to cry out. Owl wrapped her claw like foot around his waist and opened the door of the wardrobe with the other. She threw him in and slammed the door in his face.

She turned to face the door of the costume room as it burst open and the vapors swarmed in. The clouds of darkness swirled and twisted around Owl.

"Give us the boy!" they cried.

Owl flapped out her wings and clawed at them with her talons. The vapors screeched and sliced through her wings. Owl cried out in agony but she continued to fight. The vapors didn't stop; one circled itself around her neck and hauled her to the ground. Blake hid himself in the furs that hanged in the wardrobe and continued to watch in fear through the small crack of the door he opened. He was trembling and he had to cover his mouth to keep from crying out.

Once Owl hit the ground, the vapors twirled and completely covered her in a dark cloud. Blake heard Owl screech in horror and pain and he covered his ears to block it out. He closed his eyes and whimpered for help.

When the cries stopped, he looked out. Owl was still in her massive size but her feathers were no longer white and brown. The feathers that covered her breast and the inside of her wings were dark gray. The outside of her wings were covered in black. That color spread to her head, tail and talons.

Blake gulped and called out, "Owl, you okay?"

She was panting and her face was still connected to the floor.

Blake opened the door, "Owl?"

She lifted her head up, her feathers were dark gray and her eyes were soulless white. She screamed and sprang at him. Blake closed the door and Owl's talons scraped and clawed at the wood. Owl cried out and slammed her beck into the door. She was able to peel off a piece big enough for her to look in through. Her lifeless white eye peaked through and Blake screamed.

He crawled till his back hit the wall of the wardrobe. Owl continued to screech as she tore the door apart. Blake held his knees to his chest and began to sob, "Somebody help, please. Blair, Mommy, Daddy, G-Pa, I'm scared."

The dark feathered owl finally broke through and blew open the doors.

Blake held up his hands to cover his face, closed his eyes and screamed, "Leave me alone!"

A bright violet light exploded from his hands and Owl fell back. Blake opened his eyes and found Owl panting as she rose to her feet. His eyes widened when he saw a violet hole in the middle of her chest. She looked down and flaws began to break around the hole. The cracks spread
throughout her body and the violet light shattered her as she screamed in anguish.

Owl was gone.

Blake breathed in and out and curled up against the fur coats. Tears swam in his eyes as his shoulders shook and his sobs grew louder.

When I tackled Ludwig to the ground, I was only able to get one punch in before Gilbert dragged me off. I slammed my fist into his face and he cried out in German. "Shit!"

"America, calm down," Arthur exclaimed as he wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me back.

"Let me go! Let me go!" I screamed.

Matthew came to my side and placed his hand on my shoulder, his arm was across my torso as he held me back.

"You bitch!" Gilbert shouted.

Francis stepped between him and me, "Calm down Gil, let this go."

"That little bitch broke my nose!" Gilbert jumped at me, but Francis held him back.

"I was trying to break your face!" I yelled.

Gunshots echoed off the walls and we froze. We looked up to the door and found a man dressed in a dark suit with his gun pointed to the ceiling. "Clear the aisle," he ordered.
"I will not ask again," the man had a strong New Yorker accent, "clear the aisle!"

"Who are you?!" the nation of Switzerland shouted. "Do you have authorization to be here?!"

The man pointed his gun at Vash's forehead and showed his badge, "My name is Louis Catalano, I'm part of the US Secret Service; I work directly under the president. I know who you all are and I damn well know that a bullet in the head won't kill you, but it certainly will shut you up. Now get back." Vash glared but did what he was told. The man turned to face the rest of us, "All of you get back!"

The nations cleared the aisle as Louis walked to the bottom of the stage. He made sure to kick aside the broken pieces of the podium as he did. Once he reached below the stage, he aimed his gun at Matthew and Arthur, "Let the girl go."

"I don't think that's a good idea," Matthew proclaimed.

My anger cooled, "I'm fine," I said.

"But."

"I'm fine," I shook them off and turned to Louis. He had dark hair and eyes with fair skin. He was tall and wide, like a football player. I watched as Louis slid his gun back into his holster and buttoned his suit jacket. He pressed a finger on his ear piece and spoke, "Wolves have been tamed; repeat wolves have been tamed. Bring in Bunny."

*Bunny?*

Then a middle aged woman with two male bodyguards walked down the aisle. One man was dark skinned with a shaved head; he was the taller of the two. The man next to him was blond and fair skinned. The men wore the same suits as Louis did. The woman was of average height and had wavy jaw length brown hair. Her suit was navy blue with a white blouse underneath her jacket.

The woman was Isabella Garcia, the president of the United States of America; technically my boss.

"Hello nations, it's been awhile," she smiled and turned to me, "Hello Amy, or should I say America, your choice of course."

Her voice sounded familiar, "you're that woman I talked to on the phone."

"Yes, that was me. I'm sorry I took so long, traffic was horrible."

Arthur interrupted, "Amy you called her?"

"Is that a bad thing?"

"He's just mad that I've barged in with guns blazing. Presidents and Prime Ministers are not allowed to interfere with nations' meetings."

Ludwig added quickly. "Madam President, those rules are meant to be followed. Besides, this meeting has nothing to do with you."
"Nothing to do with me. Amy is my nation, she is under my protection." Isabella narrowed her dark eyes at him. "We have always watched out for her and it certainly isn't going to stop now."

"Hold it," Arthur proclaimed, "what do you mean by that?" He knitted his brows, "Have you known about Amy?"

She looked at him, "did you really believe the US government wouldn't know where their own nation was," she said this more as statement than a question.

"You lied to us," Arthur whispered at first, but his voice rose in volume. "Bush and Obama, they knew about Amy didn't they."

Isabella kept her face emotionless, "Yes."

"All this time," he clutched his fists, "you made us believe that Alfred was gone. Obama repeatedly gloated that America was thriving without him." He snorted, "Your government took great pleasure in rubbing that fact into our faces. But all this time you were all hypocrites, hiding his successor from us!"

"We were only following Alfred's last wishes." She pulled out an envelope from the inside of her jacket. Bush's name was written on the front.

"That's Al's hand writing," Matthew proclaimed.

Isabella opened the envelope and pulled out a letter. I noticed that everyone was quiet as they watched the president.

She read out loud:

"The last will and testament of Alfred F. Jones.

"I don't have enough time, so I'll try and make this quick.

"Bush, I don't want to scare you. But I'm falling apart. This was too much for me and I'm sorry and ashamed for my weakness, but I just can't. I'm disappearing, but don't worry.

"America will go on.

"Just think of it as a break for everyone, to grow and learn.

"Don't misunderstand me, I won't be coming back.

"America will now be represented by my daughter. You should see her; she's gorgeous with all ten fingers and toes. She's also got a pair of lungs on her. You told me once how it felt to hold your daughters for the first time. Back then I wished I understood; now I do.

"But it's bittersweet, because my time with her is so short.

"I know you would care for her in my place.

"I know you would let her stay in the White House with you and your family. But what if you don't get voted in for second term? And another family moves in, would this go on every four years? Families coming and going?

"Arthur, Francis, and Matthew would visit, but they can't be with her all the time. Amy would be alone, with only the White House staff to keep her company."
"I wish to give her a real family.

"With a mother, that would make her cookies just because. A father that would teach her how to throw a baseball, and siblings that would pick on her, but kick another kid's ass if they tried to do the same.

"I want her to have grandparents that will spoil her, aunts and uncles that would tell her stories around a campfire and cousins she can bond and play with.

"I want to give her everything I didn't have.

"Artie, Mattie, Francis, please don't take this the wrong way. You guys are my family, and you're a great family, but as a child I was alone. It wasn't till I was older we had the opportunity to see each other more often, thanks to planes and faster boats. But work always seemed to get in the way, and the only time we spent together was during times of war.

"I don't want Amy to grow up around that.

"I want her to have a normal life, to grow and learn at her own pace and to experience life before she has to become a nation.

"And for this wish to be fulfilled, absolutely no nations can ever know of Amy's existent till her eighteenth birthday.

"So Bush, I ask of you and all of presidents in the future to watch over Amy from a distance and to let her be raised by John Senior Hawkfeather and his family. I have known them for years; they're good people.

"This family is to be protected at all times, that also includes anyone that Amy gets close to. Extended family, friends, teachers, and neighbors will be protected by the government.

"The nations cannot harm them in anyway.

"Now for my possessions and properties; my assets will be placed in a savings account in John Senior's name till Amy's eighteenth birthday. My apartment in New York City will be given to Diana Butler. I knew her mother, Sophie Ross back in the seventies. I have found out that Diana has been accepted to NYU. Her rent and utilities will be paid for all four years. She can either pay for it herself after she's done with college or sell it.

"I leave the ranch in San Antonio, Texas to Carlos Lopez, he was a man I hired to watch over the ranch whenever I wasn't around, which was a lot. He practically owns it, let's just make it legal. Also, help him get his US citizenship, he's a good man, he deserves it.

"The beach house in Summerland, California will be left to John Senior Hawkfeather.

"And I leave my home in Charlottesville, Virginia to Amy. All of my possessions from the apartment, the ranch and the beach house will be moved to that house. Please leave them in the storage room. Amy can decide if she wishes to keep them or not.

"Also, my last words to my family:

"Arthur, I know we've had our fights and we were never able to see eye to eye, but we've had our moments. Thank you for raising me and caring for me like I was your own. For telling me stories of knights and fairies when I couldn't sleep. Cooking for me, even though I knew no better and even when I did; I still ate it. It was the only thing that made you happy. Please, don't hate me. I know
you must be angry and you have every right to be, but once you get to know the Hawkfeathers, you'll see that I did the right thing. Also, I forgive you for Karen.

"Francis, thank you for always giving me advice, even when I didn't take it; you always were so patient. You always made me laugh and I hope you can be that way for Amy. You raised Mattie, so you're somewhat of an uncle to me, and I hope you would be the same to my daughter. Heh, I'm sure you'll be spoiling her with gifts and clothes. Also, teach her how to cook; no offense Artie.

"Matthew, I know I never gave you much credit and I know that I over shadow you, and for that I'm sorry. You are my little brother and I always looked out for you, but in the process I only ended up making more trouble for you. I know that several of the nations confuse you with me and they go to yell and complain at you, again I'm sorry. God, why didn't I say this all sooner? I hope when I'm gone, people will finally be able to see you. Hey, if you want, could you play catch with Amy when she's older? Hopefully she'll throw the ball more at your pace, if not it only proves she's a chip off the old block. One last thing, make sure those two don't kill each other. You know who I mean.

"To the other nations, I'm sorry that I'm leaving you all after such a disastrous event. And it may seem unfair to you all that I'm keeping my daughter a secret. But we all know it's for the best.

"Who knows, maybe all of you would've became her family. When I think about it, seems amazing. For Amy to have so many people that would watch over her, that would teach her, that would love her; but I gotta stop being so optimistic. I know all of you. I've seen your good sides and I've seen your bad. Sometimes that darkness seems to over bear on all of you, and I don't want my daughter to be around that.

"Lastly Amy, I would like to say that you're beautiful. I just hope you'll be as beautiful on the inside as you are on the out. You should know that, at the very moment I laid eyes on you, I fell in love. God, I'd give anything to be with you, even if my actions cause a rip in the space time continuum, I'll still do it.

"But I know what I need to do.

"You'll be happy, I know it and also, when you're older, could you give the nations some of that happiness."

When Isabella was finished she slid the letter back into the envelope and handed it to me. "I believe you would want to keep this."

I whispered, "Yeah," I took it and held it to my side.

All of the nations were quiet, as if paying a final respect to Alfred. I glanced to Arthur, Francis and Matthew, they wore grief stricken looks, but it was also mixed with closure.

"We have kept his promises," the president spoke, "but one seemed to have slipped from our grasp." She turned to me, "I knew we should have interfered with your trip to New York, but Shelly Lope said she would keep an eye on you."

"Mrs. Lope?" I exclaimed, "She knows about me?"

Isabella smiled, "She worked as my personally assistant, till I persuaded her to take on a teaching job at Nightingale."

"Was she the only one watching me?"

She chuckled, "Oh, no. We had several people watching over you, but that information is
"classified." She turned back to the nations, "Well countries, I believe you got your answer. Amy will stay with her family."

"Wait," Ludwig called out, "America can't possible stay with them. How long can she have before people start to question her age? Two? Five years?"

"Well, she can always dress older and dye her hair with bits of gray," the president remarked. "Amy will stop aging and her family knows of this fact, and I'm sure they're prepared for it. Besides it's only the hometown we have to worry about. They can always retreat to Charlottesville, Virginia."

I perked up, "You mean I can still stay in contact with them? Even when decades pass?"

Isabella smiled, "Yes."

I released a breath I didn't even know I was holding in. I sat back into my seat and smiled.

"Madam President, this decision is too big," Kiku proclaimed, "it will affect us all."

"The Hawkfeathers have kept her secret for almost eighteen years, her grandfather, close to sixty-five. As long as they keep her's they'll keep yours."

"Will they?" Yao asked.

"Of course they will, because if they don't, they will never see Amy again. They love her too much to jeopardize their lives together."

"But-"

"There are no buts," Isabella's voice was calm but yet she held authority. "Your world leaders have agreed with me, Amy will stay with her family, end of discussion."

Voices rose with uncertainly, along with questions and comments like, "How did you get them to agree to with this?!"

"This is irresponsible use of power!"

"What makes America so special that we can ignore the rules that we have followed for centuries?"

Before Isabella could answer, a familiar voice cried, "Aunt Amy."

I looked up to the stage as everyone stopped talking at once. "Blake?" I ran up and knelt beside him. "What are you doing here?" I asked softly.

His eyes were bloodshot and puffy, snot was running from his nose and he kept wiping his face with his hands. "I-I-" more tears fell from his dark eyes.

"Hey, what's wrong," I soothed as I set my hands on his shoulders. I caught the nations and the president watching from the corner of my eye. I rose to my feet and turned to Isabella, "can I have a minute?"

"Yes, of course."

I grabbed Blake's hand and gestured him to the velvet curtain, "Come on, sweetie."

"No!" Blake screamed and pulled his hand away. "I don't want to go back! Please, don't make me
go back!" He fell to his knees, connected his forehead to the floor and protected his head with his hands. "It's dark," he whimpered, "so dark." His cries rose in volume as he sobbed harder.

"Hey, it's okay, it's okay." I lifted him up into my arms and began to rock him back and forth. One arm supported him under his thighs as the other rubbed his back. He wrapped his arms around my neck and hid his face into my shoulder. I began to sing 'Let Her Go,' by Passenger in a soft whisper. This was his favorite when he was little. I always sang it to him when he was scared.

He hiccuped back his sobs and tightens his hold on me. I continued to comfort him with the song as I stepped down from the stage. "Excuse me," I speed walked through the crowd, repeating these words till I was out the auditorium.

I set him down against the wall and I took my seat next to him. He brought his knees to his chest and wiped his nose with his sleeve. I rubbed his back, "Talk when you're ready. Okay." He nodded and I leaned my head back against the wall and tried to listen in on the meeting.

"How's it going?" Blake whispered, after five minutes of sitting.

I sighed, "It's stressful," I glanced at Alfred's envelope, "Alfred left me a house in Virginia."

He nodded, "that's nice."

We allowed a moment of silence to pass as I slid the envelope into the breast pocket of my jacket. Then I asked. "So you gonna tell me what happened?"

He closed his eyes and shook his head.

"Okay," I checked my phone, "Oh lookie here; a series of text messages from your mother."

He tensed and I continued, "It seems you asked for the restroom pass and ran out the front door. Grandpa and G-Ma are out looking for you, they're worried and Melissa's freaking out." I slid my phone back into the inside pocket of my jacket, "That's not good for a woman who just had a baby."

"I'm sorry, I just wanted to check up on you," he gave me the puppy eyed look.

"Oh, you think you can just bat those eyes of yours and I'll melt."

He tilted his head to the side and batted his eyes. I groaned, "The great country of America can be brought down by child," I shook my head.

"Does that mean you'll let this go and lower our taxes?"

I laughed, "I don't think I got that kind of power."

"Then what can you do?"

"So far, I think nothing."

"Then what do the nations do?"

"What I can gather is that we have a meeting, we talk about our problems, we argue about our problems and in the end, we get nothing done."

"Like Congress?"
"Yeah," I said with a bit of humor in my voice. Then I added, "You know what the worse thing about this is?"

"What?" he asked.

"I'm going to be doing this for the rest of my life."

"That sucks."

We laughed and I pulled him into a side hug. "You're damn right it sucks."

Then the door burst open and we immediately jumped to our feet. Isabella was walking out with her three Secret Service Agents.

"Madam President, what happened?" I asked.

She inhaled through her nose, "Don't worry, nothing has changed about you and your family. It's just the nations are whining about it like babies." She rubbed her temple with her fingers, "they may be centuries older than us but dear lord they act like children."

"I'm no exception," I sighed, "I kinda threw a podium at Gilbert. Uh I mean, Prussia."

"Wait you mean that obnoxious one with the red eyes and white hair?"

"Yes," I said, guilty.

The president laughed, "Please tell me you got him."

"Uh, no but I did break his nose and punched his brother."

Isabella grinned and turned to Louis, "check the security cameras, I have to watch this."

"Right away ma'am," he nodded and walked to the front office.

"But with all seriousness Amy, you can't just go around, throwing things," Isabella proclaimed.

I nodded, "yeah, it's just Yao said something that he shouldn't have, and Gilbert kinda made it worse."

She sighed, "I know what you mean. They can really push your buttons, Bush and Obama had a hard time with them as well. I'm sorry to say this Amy, but they're your problem now."

I groaned, "No offense Madam President; but politics are not really my thing."

She gave me an understanding smile, "there's more to being a nation than just politics."

"Madam President," the dark skinned man tapped her on the shoulder, "we must go; we have to meet Congress in less than six hours."

"Oh yes, about my re-election," she nodded.

"I would vote for you," Blake said, "but I'm not old enough."

"That still means a lot," she smiled.

"Um, what about," I pointed to the auditorium doors.
"Oh, don't worry about them. They have to leave the country in the next twenty-four hours. If not, I have permission from their bosses to hunt them down and deport them," she gave wicked smile.

"Can I ask? How did you get their bosses to agree to this?"

Her smile widened, "Let's just say, they didn't want certain things to come out to the public's eye."

I stared at her, "you blackmailed them?"

"Now blackmail is such a harsh word, I prefer the term creative persuasion."

I smiled, "Madam President you definitely got my vote."

Louis came back with a flash drive, "I have it." He turned to me, "Good throw," he winked.

"Thanks," I grinned.

"Goodbye Amy, oh, and good luck with your finals," Isabella turned away and walked out the door with her bodyguards.

I glanced to the auditorium doors once again and guilt began to eat away at me for the behavior that I displayed. This guilt would not leave me alone. I tried to shake it off, convincing myself I didn't do anything wrong. But I did.

"Wait," I called out and ran after them. I opened the door and stopped, "can you give them the weekend."

Isabella turned around, "What do you mean?"

"Instead of them leaving tonight, can they leave Sunday night. After everything that went down," I sighed. "I just, I just have an idea, it might be the worst idea I ever had or it might be the greatest. You just got to trust me on this."

The president sighed, "Very well, they can stay till Sunday night. I hope you know what you're doing." With those final words, she slid into a black limbo as the men sat themselves inside large black SUVs that stood in the front and in the back of the limbo. The first SUV drove out of the school's parking lot, with the limbo and the second SUV right behind.

"I hope so too," I mumbled under my breath and walked back into the building.

"Do you have plan?" Blake asked as he followed me to the auditorium door.

"No," I answered truthfully.

"What are you gonna say?"

"I'm sorry' would be good to start with."

"And after that?"

I shrugged, "I'm gonna wing it." I opened the doors and found that the nations were arguing with one another. I turned to Blake, "stay here," and I ran down the aisle.

Some nations stopped to look at me but most kept fighting.

When I got on the stage, I waved my hands in the air, "hey guys, I got something to say."
The majority of them ignored me and continued to argue.

I took in a deep breath, "Shut up!" my voice bounced off the walls and I'm pretty sure I saw Blake covering his ears.

The nations stopped and turned to face me. Ivan was the first to speak. Which surprised me; I didn't see one trace of him this entire time. "What are you doing here America, I believe your president just forbid us for having any contact with you."

I gritted my teeth, "Yeah, that rule was mostly made for you, because you are crazy psycho sadist."

All Ivan did was chuckle and Ludwig rubbed the bridge of his nose, "America, what do you want? Is it not enough that you have thrown years of law and order in our meetings out the window?"

"I got something to say," I proclaimed.

"Oh, of course you do," Yao exclaimed, "when America has something to say, everyone has to stop what they're doing and listen."

I bit back my tongue and Yao continued, "Well go on, what do you have to say?"

I swallowed my pride, "I'm sorry."

Several of the nations blinked in surprise, they weren't expecting that. I bit my lips together to hide my smile. "I'm sorry," I said again, "I'm sorry that I'm breaking rules left and right, I'm sorry that Alfred had plans to hide me from all of you, and I'm sorry that threw a podium at Prussia and broke his nose and punched Germany in the face." I took a breath, "I'm so incredibly sorry for my behavior today."

Ludwig sighed, "America, thank you for your apology, but your actions spoke louder than your words."

"I know, but I plan to make up for my actions with my next move."

Feliciano coward behind Ludwig, "You gonna throw something else at us?"

"No. I just want to say, you all are taking a mini vacation!" I said cheerfully.

The nations stared at me.

"I was expecting more of a cheer, not silence, but okay." I took in another breath, "I talked this over with the president and she has agreed to let all of you stay till Sunday night. Till then, go out! Summerland has restaurants, coffee shops, and boutiques. One coffee shop called The Dragonfly usually has bands playing during the weekends. We also got the rec-center, go and take a dance class or an art class. We also, got the beach, the broad walk and Toro Canyon Park, which is only ten minutes from here."

They continued to stare at me and I sighed. "Listen, you guys can leave if you want, but I would like all of you to see where I grew up. Summerland is my home. The people here are kind, fun, hardworking. I remember when all of us lived in the rec-center, James Reed started a band and they would play music when our chores were done. Which would lead to a dance party half of the time," I smiled, "after the Quake we realized that life was short, and that we shouldn't waste a single moment of it. These people made me the way I am today. They're an amazing community, and I'm grateful that Alfred left me in the care of a loving family."
"I think Alfred was right, after nine-eleven, America did grow. The generation I grew up in, was filled with acceptance and tolerance. I'm not saying we're prefect, I mean who is? But," I gripped onto my grandpa's ring, "I've had the most amazing years here, and I want all of you to go and see it for yourself." I didn't wait for them to react; I simply walked off stage and headed for the exit. "Come on Blake," I grabbed his hand, "let's go home."
Chapter 27

Blake watched his aunt with squinting eyes, her aura was back to her brilliant gold but the vapor was still in there; somewhere.

"Hey Dad," Amy was on the phone with his grandfather, "yeah, he's with me. Tell Melissa he's fine." Pause, "Yeah, we'll be home soon." Another pause, "Love you too, bye."

They were now in Amy's jeep, driving back home. He sighed; he was not ready to handle his parents' scorn. Not now anyway, his emotions were unstable and he felt as if he was feeling everything at once. Guilt for Owl and what he did to her; worry for Amy and the vapor that's inside her, and fear for what was lurking in the shadows.

"You okay kiddo?" Amy asked, concerned.

He shook his head.

"Hey, how about we take a detour?" a mischievous smile played on her lips.

He lifted a brow, "What kind of detour?"

"I was thinking ice cream," she winked.

She drove to the broad walk and bought two cones from an ice cream cart. She got cappuccino chunky chocolate chip while Blake got mint chocolate chip. They walked along the ocean's shore, eating their cones and taking in the sights. Not many people were around so they pretty much had the beach to themselves.

After they were done with their cones, Amy pulled off her pantyhose, balled them up into her shoe and dipped her feet into the cool water. She stretched her arms over her head, "God, it feels like the whole world was lifted off my shoulders. Heh, it kinda was," she turned to Blake, "You want to look for seashells?"

He shook his head and sat down in the sand.

"Okay, more for me then," she grinned, threw her shoes and jacket next to him and bent down to place her hands in the water.

Blake pulled his knees into his chest and closed his eyes, sending out a silent prayer for Owl.

"I'm not dead."

He opened his eyes and found Owl standing beside him. She was back to her average size. Her feathers were returned to their beautiful shades of white, gray and brown; and her eyes were once again glittery onyx.

"Owl?" he turned to face her but checked to see if Amy noticed him technically talking to himself but she was preoccupied with a pink seashell. Blake focused on Owl, "How? What-What happened? I thought-"

"You killed me?" Owl chuckled, "No, you didn't. But you did destroy the vapors."

"How?" he asked.
"With your aura," she answered. "A person of Sight can use their aura as a weapon against dark spirits. Just as it is easy for you to see other people's auras and spirits, this ability is just as natural."

Blake nodded, absorbing this information. "But why did you attack me? Why did you explode?"

"The vapors had complete control of me. They wanted to consume you, and if you didn't free me from their grasp they would've had me too. The reason why I shattered was because when your aura pierced my chest it was purifying the vapors. They were trapped in my body and had nowhere to run. Don't worry, you could never kill me. If I'm taken again by a vapor, just use your aura, as long as there is light in me, I will always be saved."

"But, where did you go?"

"I had to go back to the Spirit World to regain my strength and put myself back together."

He gave a small smile, "Sorry about that."

"I'm fine child," then she narrowed her eyes at Amy, "you have other things to worry about."

"Is the vapor still inside her?" Blake asked.

"Yes."

"I can get rid of it, right," he said hopefully.

"Blake I don't want to crush your confidence but I have to be truthful with you." Owl spoke in a firm tone, "What you did to me was a fluke; a lucky shot. Fear and instinct aided you today, but you cannot rely on it. Vapors not only thrive off chaos, but also paranoia, agony, strife, and hatred. They not only grow stronger from these emotions. They are also born from them."

He knitted his brows in frustration, "then how do I-"

"Tell me, if these emotions make them powerful, what emotions cause them to weaken?" she asked.

Blake nodded, "I think, I know." he kicked off his shoes and socks and ran into the ocean. "Aunt Amy, what did you find?"

"Hmm, let's see," she pulled out her shirt, which she used to carry her treasures. Colorful shells were stacked on top of one another. Some were smooth with natural brown and white colors. Others had ridges with pink and tan shades and she even found one that looked like a swirled unicorn horn.

"That one's cool," he pointed to the twisted seashell.

"You want it?" she grinned.

"Later, come on," he gestured to the shore, "let's lay them out so they can dry."

She agreed and together they arranged the seashells with no concept of order. Then they fell back onto the cozy sand, allowing the sun to warm their skin. Blake glanced to Amy, her eyes were closed and she was breathing softly. She was at peace.

He reached for Amy's hand and closed his eyes. "Focus," Owl stood over his head, whispering her instructions to him. "Imagine your aura forming into a cloud and stretching itself around Amy."
Blake took a deep breath and his violet aura sparked to life. It took on the same shape as a vapor and swirled around Amy. The purple colored vapor dived into her gold, searching for the darkness.

"Now, when you find the vapor, send out a massive blast of your energy. If you do this right, it will shatter." Owl finished.

He nodded, his eyes were still closed. He visualized his aura traveling inside of Amy's and striking down that vapor. He smiled, feeling like hero; but that thought didn't last for long. The dark vapor found him first and bit off a piece of his aura.

Blake cried out and Owl exclaimed, "Stay calm. Put up your defense."

His aura fell back and tried to rebuild himself, but the vapor took its chance to attack. It struck with a series of slices and stabs. With every blow the vapor gave, it tore apart at Blake's soul. Pain surged through his veins as tears filled his stinging eyes. He gasped for breath like a fish out of water.

"Blake, calm down," Owl soothed, "it's using your fear and pain against you, don't let it."

He grinds his teeth together and summoned his courage. His aura grew and went on the offense. Blake imagined his aura biting into the vapor and ripping it apart like Owl did. His aura fulfilled his wish and morphed into a violet colored barn owl. He reached out with his aura's talons and squeezed the vapor with all his strength. The vapor hissed in irritation and bit back, but Blake felt nothing.

He pierced his beck inside the vapor and ripped it in half. The vapor screamed in agony as it shattered and disappeared from Amy's aura.

Blake released his hold on Amy's hand and pulled back his aura. He was panting as if he had run a mile; his muscles were sore and aching. His eyes were stinging with every blink and his hair was soaked in sweat. He side glanced to his aunt; she was still fast asleep, wearing the same peaceful expression.

"Good work," Owl said with bright eyes and flapped her wings. She leaped into the blue sky and flew away, towards the horizon.

Blake's eyes fluttered to a close as he curled himself beside Amy and fell into a dreamless slumber.

Jamie and Michel were lounging in the living room, watching Mean Girls as they ate chocolate chip cookies.

"'Oh my God Karen you can't just ask people why their white,'" Michel followed along with the movie and laughed, "I love that part!"

"You love every part." Jamie said as she bit into a cookie.

He nodded, "oh but I really love that part with the girl and the cake speech."

"'She doesn't even go here!'" Jamie quoted and they both dissolved into giggles.

Then the doorbell ringed and they both calmed down. Jamie rose from the couch, they must have found Blake, she thought. John had to take a personal day from his job so he could search the town.
for his grandson. He told Jamie and Michel to stay at his house in case Blake came by. Jamie didn't mind, Amy's house was pretty much a second home to her.

She answered the door, expecting John or Blake; instead she found Arthur and several people waiting on the front porch. She spotted Matthew and Francis behind him, but she didn't recognize the last five men.

"Hey Arthur, um," she did a quick glance to the five men and turned back to Arthur, "where's Amy?"

"She's not here?" he asked, concerned.

Michel came up behind her, "wasn't she with you?"

"Yes, well, she left early," Arthur answered.

Jamie and Michel shared a worried look. "Does that mean you guys are here to capture us and send us to secret lab where you will place rods into our ears and erase our memories of Amy?" Michel asked.

Jamie lifted her brow at him, "really."

"It's valid question."

Francis chuckled and Arthur sighed, "No. Everything has been settled, no one is going anywhere."

She smiled and Michel threw up his hands to the ceiling and exclaimed, "Praise Jesus!"

"Michel," she rolled her eyes, but couldn't wipe away her smile.

"If you two are done," a blond haired man said, annoyed. "We need to speak with Amy. Could you contact her? She won't answer any of our calls." He had the brightest blue eyes that she ever saw. *Almost the same shade as Amy's*, Jamie thought. His hair was brushed back and he also had a white bandage over his cheek.

Jamie took her phone out and scrolled through her contacts. She pressed on Amy's smiling face and waited for her to pick up. The dial tone repeated six times before her voice mail came into play. "Her phone must be off." Jamie then decided to leave a message.

"Can we speak with her parents?" the blond man asked.

"Two problems with that handsome," Michel proclaimed. "One: Jessica's at work, she'll be back at five. Two: John went out to look for Blake."

"Blake's with Amy," Matthew added.

"Hmm, then I don't know when he's coming back," he said.

"Why do you want to see them anyway?" Jamie asked.

Francis sighed, "You could say our friends here have some business to discuss with her and her family."

"Can we come in?" Matthew asked.

Jamie and Michel glanced at one another and he shrugged, "why not? Come in, welcome to the
Jamie stepped back as the nations walked in and Michel gestured them to the living room. She closed the door and strolled in after them. They sat around the coffee table as a teen-aged boy with a brown curl snatched a cookie from the plate. She turned off the TV and sat in the loveseat on the right. Arthur, Francis and Matthew sat on the couch, while the five men sat in the other loveseat and chairs that Michel brought in from the kitchen.

A short Asian man with brown eyes sat next to the brown haired teenager in the loveseat across from Jamie. The last three men took the three dining chairs from across the couch. The blonde man sat in the first seat. A taller Asian man with longer hair sat in the middle and a large silver haired man sat on Jamie's left.

Michel took his seat beside Jamie and asked. "So who's who?"

The nations shared cautious looks with one another but the teenager ignored their expressions and grinned, "I'm Feliciano Vargas, the nation of Italy."

"It-Feliciano," the blond man's tone was filled with irritation.

"Calm down Germany they know," Arthur proclaimed.

"You're Germany," Michel exclaimed, "should've known, your blond and blue eyed. Your people went crazy for it in the forty's."

Awkward silence filled the room and Jamie shook her head in embarrassment. She decided to change the subject, "so, um, Mr. Germany, in public should we call you-" she waited for him to finish her sentence.

"Ludwig Beilschmidt," he answered as he rubbed his temples.

"Cool," she said uneasily and glanced to the Asian man next to Feliciano, "what's your name?"

The man's eyes widen in surprise, he didn't seem like he was ready to speak to anyone, "I-I'm Honda Kiku, the nation of Japan."

"Oh you're Jap-aaaaahhh" Michel cried out in pain and turned to Jamie. "Why did you pinch me?" he rubbed his arm.

"To stop you from saying something stupid," she hissed in his ear. Then she focused her attention on the last two nations, "and you two are?"

The long haired Asian man lifted a brow at her curiously but answered, "I'm Wang Yao, the nation of China."

"And I'm," the silver haired nation lifted his hand in a mock wave, "Ivan Braginski, the nation of Russia."

Jamie's eyes widened as Michel tensed beside her.

Awkward silence filled the room once again.

Before anyone could say anything, Jamie rose to her feet, "Tea, we need tea. Michel, help with me the tea."

Michel ignored her and glared at Ivan. She then, had to practically drag him into the kitchen. "Get
in here," she whispered harshly as she finally pulled him to the sink.

"I can't believe that bastard had the nerve to show his face here," Michel focused on matching his tone with Jamie's so the nations wouldn't hear them.

"I know, but we just have to stay calm and-

"Stay calm! Hell no, that son of bitch will feel my wrath. He's not gonna get away with what he did to Amy."

"I know Michel. But he's a nation, he won't be running for the hills when he sees your sassy slaps of vengeance. He will smack you down like a fly." She grabbed the kettle from the stove and started to fill it up with water.

"What are you doing?" he asked suspiciously.

She lifted brow at him, "making tea."

"I thought that was an excuse, so we could come in here and talk about how we're going kick Ivan's ass back to Russia."

"You are human, he's a nation, take a moment and think about that for a second." Jamie placed the kettle on the stove and turned the knob to high.

"I don't care if he's a monkey's uncle! He's a dead man!"

Before Jamie could snap out a comeback, she heard the front door open and John Hawkfeather's voice called out for them. "Jamie. Michel. We're home-" he stopped in mid-sentence, most likely because he was greeted by five nations he had never seen before in his living room.

Jamie and Michel ran back to the room and found John and Aponi standing in the front of the room with confused expressions on their faces. "Who are these people?" John asked.

"How rude of us," Francis rose from his seat, strolled to Aponi and guided her to take his seat. "These people are some of the other nations. All of us here make up the G8," Francis proclaimed.

Introductions were passed around with John, Aponi and the other nations. Jamie tensed when she saw John and Ivan shaking hands like longtime friends. If only he knew what I knew.

Then she caught Michel walking towards John, "Mr. H, I need your help in the kitchen." Michel then pulled him into the kitchen.

Jamie cursed and followed them in.

"Michel, what's gotten into you?" John twisted his arm out of Michel's grasp.

"You have tell Ivan to leave," Michel said in a low whisper.

"Why?" he asked.

"Mr. Hawkfeather, don't listen to him, he doesn't know what he's saying," Jamie came up and tried to cover Michel's mouth.

"No. I don't care if we promised Amy, her dad needs to know," Michel kept her hand at bay.

John grabbed Jamie and placed her beside Michel, "What do I need to know," he asked, concerned.
Michel scorned Jamie and she sighed, "Ivan tried to rape Amy."

Then she and Michel quickly summed up the story that Amy told them on the beach. As they clarified their tale John's eyes widened and his brows knitted together in worry wrinkles. Jamie noticed these changes and stopped, but Michel kept going.

"He tore her dress, that's why you guys never saw it. Then he was kissing her and Amy bit him and-"

John held up his hand for him to stop and turned to Jamie, "is this true?"

She inhaled through her nose and closed her eyes, "yes."

The kettle whistled and everyone in the room jumped in surprise. John looked to the black pot with annoyance and opened the cabinet above the stove to grab twelve mismatched tea cups. He pulled out a tray from the bottom cabinet and sat the tea cups on the tray. He began to pour boiling water into each cup. He did all this in silence.

"Mr. Hawkfeather, are you okay?" Jamie asked, worried.

"I'm fine," he said and dipped in a jasmine tea bag into each cup.

Jamie and Michel glanced at one another and when John was done, he picked up the tray and walked into the living room. They followed right on his heels and were a bit shocked that he greeted them with his usually cheerful smile. He sat the tray down, "we got jasmine tea," he proclaimed and began to hand out each cup to his guests. They said their thanks and finally when he reached Ivan, John's smile widened. "Here you go."

Ivan reached out for the cup, but in a blink of an eye John threw the scorching liquid into his violet eyes. Ivan screamed and cursed as he rose to his feet. John then took the chance to sucker punch him in the face. Ivan was blindsided and fell to the floor, John gripped his hand into Ivan's white scarf and hauled him out the front door. He threw the Russian down the steps and yelled, "Stay the hell away from my daughter!" He slammed the door and locked it. He took a deep calming breath and faced his startled guests. "Matthew. Arthur. Francis. May I have a word with you in my room," it wasn't a request but a demand.

He walked into his room that was in the hallway at the bottom of the staircase. Jamie and the rest of the group turned to face Arthur, Francis and Matthew. Their faces were blank with emotion as they followed John to his room. When they were inside, Jamie could hear John yelling at them.

"Well," Yao blew at his tea, "I guess we now know where Amy gets her temper from."

Michel smirked, "Sorry to disappoint ya, but John's the calm one."

"This is like totally amazing!" Feliks said cheerfully.

Toris sighed, "It would help if you could carry some of these bags. Also, when we're on the subject, why do you need so much stuff?" He held two bags on each arm, along with a massive umbrella tucked under his armpit and an empty bag around his neck. "Why do you need this bag anyway? There's nothing in it."

"That's for my seashells, duh." Feliks was wearing green swim trunks and a white tank top. He
turned back to face the ocean, "I'll go find the perfect spot!" He ran off the broad walk, towards the water.

Toris rolled his eyes, "you meant a spot for your seashells," he mumbled.

"Here let me help," Eduard took two of the filled bags. His trunks were dark blue and his t-shirt was gray.

Toris said his thanks and pulled off the bag from his neck. Raivis came running from their rental car. He was wearing red trunks and a graphic tee, "Have you guys seen Peter?"

"No," Toris answered as he fixed his white fisher hat to cover his face from the sun.

"There's Mr. Sweden's car," Eduard pointed to a large gray van.

"Eduard, watch what you say," Toris whispered.

Once the van parked, the Nordics and Peter came pouring out. All the countries wore swim trunks that bore the designs of their flags. They also wore long tank tops and had towels draped over their shoulders. Peter spotted them first and came running.

"Wow, this place is so wicked cool!" Peter took in the sights of Summerland's beach.

"No wonder they call this town Summerland," Erik proclaimed, "its still April but it feels like early June."

"What are we waiting for?" Mikkel grinned, "Come on!" He pulled Lukas and Erik towards the ocean.

"Stop," Tino exclaimed, letting his parental instincts kick in, "You need to put on sunscreen!"

After they applied sunscreen, Mikkel, Erik and Lukas dived into the water. Toris, Tino and Berwald set up the umbrella and towels on the sand. Raivis, Peter and Eduard followed Mikkel's group, bringing their multicolored beach volleyball. Felix grabbed his empty pink graphic bag and began to pick out seashells.

Toris sat right under the large blue umbrella and kept every piece of his skin away from the harmful sun. He watched everyone from his shaded place and smiled, this was peaceful he thought.

"Toris," Tino offered him the sunscreen and he took it. "Do you need me to get your back?"

Toris tensed and shook his head, "no, I'll keep my shirt on." He pulled the hem of his white t-shirt down to his blue trunks.

Tino nodded, "okay," and he turned back to talk with Berwald.

Toris rubbed in the white lotion into his limbs and face. During this, his mind began to ponder on the nation's meeting earlier that day. In the beginning Toris planned to stay in the background and pray for it to end without any tears. But the meeting quickly escalated to an uncontrollable situation that he didn't expect to be started by Amy.

He closed his eyes and a smile perked at the corners of his mouth. He shouldn't have been surprised. She was Alfred's daughter. She had his strength and his passion. He knew that threatening her family and friends would cause her to act out; Alfred would've done the same. Maybe not throw a podium at Prussia, but Toris didn't complained, he actually found that funny.
Once again, he witnessed how inspiring Amy was. Before Austria, when Germany informed them that the next nation of America was discovered, Toris made a promise to Alfred. That he would watch out for his daughter and make sure no harm would come to her. He really had no idea why he made that promise. Maybe he wanted to pay back some of his debt to the American man, or maybe he wanted to prove to him that he had gotten stronger in his absence.

Whatever the reason was, he decided to keep a watchful eye on Amy. This decision only increased with determination when he learned of Ivan's intentions. Alfred was able to keep Ivan at bay; he needed to do the same for Amy.

His plans didn't go as he originally thought. He was able to distract Ivan on the balcony but the Russian quickly got the upper hand. Toris felt a cold shiver go down his spine. Ivan's kiss was just as cruel as he remembered. Ivan bit into his lips and forced him to open up for him. It only rubbed salt into the wound to have Amy watch his humiliation. His mind reverts back to their brief moment of eye contact; her blue eyes were filled with such surprise and disgust. For him or for Ivan, Toris didn't want to know.

"Hey guys!" Mikkel called out, "you all won't believe what we found."

From a short five minute walk from their beach spot, Mikkel and the others stumbled upon Amy and the small boy known as Blake, sleeping together on the shore.

"How did you find them?" Tino asked.

"Well it's like this," Mikkel began, "we were playing volleyball and I was totally winning and-"

"To sum it up," Lukas interrupted, "this dimwit hit the ball to hard and it came soaring next to the little one." He nodded to the light brown skinned boy.

Toris glanced to Amy, her skin was beginning to turn pink and her hair was covered with sand. Before he could comment, Feliks beat him to it. "She like, doesn't look so good."

"We should move camp here," Tino proclaimed and Berwald agreed.

After they moved their towels and umbrella, Toris made sure that Amy and Blake were directly under the shade of the umbrella. He folded his towel and placed it under Amy's head, then grabbed Feliks's towel and did the same for Blake. During this, he couldn't help but think about Amy's compassion for the boy. How gentle she was when she held Blake in her arms and soothed him with a song. Her voice was so soft at that moment; he had to focus to hear the lyrics.

Toris remembered his time with her in Austria's house. In the beginning she was irritated and scared; he didn't blame her when she took some of that frustration out on him. Toris understood, besides a part of him knew he deserved it. He wasn't a hero; it was Amy that had to save him from Ivan, not the other way around. No matter what Amy said to encourage him otherwise, he knew he was useless.

He sighed and watched Blake as he snuggled closer to Amy. He smiled, the scene was adorable. Amy looked so peaceful and content; he liked this, Amy being genuinely happy. Back in Austria, she seemed so unapproachable. He admitted, when Toris first laid eyes on her he was captivated by her elegance and beauty. But she had placed a mental wall between her and everybody else. Then when they were alone, he got to see Amy's tenderness. Being truthful himself, Toris believed she pitied him for displaying his fear for Ivan. She held him just as she held Blake; a scared child.
Coddling Toris in her arms and soothing him with sweet words. Even if Amy argued that they comforted each other, he knew she would have been fine without him.

"We better put sunscreen on them," Tino's voice snapped Toris from his thoughts.

"I got dibs on America," Mikkel grinned and grabbed the sun block.

"You can't just place dibs on her, you possessive ass," Erik exclaimed.

Feliks snatched the sun block from Mikkel, "I'll get the boy," he said and spread the lotion over his face and arms. Blake wore a shirt and jeans, so most of his skin was covered.

When he was done, Mikkel snatched it back. He squeezed some sunscreen into his palm and rubbed his hands together. "This would be even better if she was wearing a bikini," his smile widened.

"Okay," Lukas tugged on his ear; hard. "You are starting to creep me out; more than usual."

"Ahh-ah, ow, ow, ow," Mikkel whimpered as Lukas pulled him back to the ocean.

Erik smirked and tossed up the beach volleyball, "Ready for round two?"

Eduard, Peter and Raivis followed him to the water. Peter and Raivis did spare one worried look towards Amy. But they trusted their friends, so they weren't that concerned.

"Here," Feliks hands Toris the sun block, "take care of America. I'm gonna check out these amazing seashells." He turned to the shells in the sand, his eyes twinkled with delight.

Toris tightened his hold on the lotion and faced Tino, practically begging with a look to take his place. But Tino and Berwald were talking among themselves, completely forgetting Toris's existence.

Toris turned back to Amy, still fast asleep. He sighed once again; his nerves were on high alert and it didn't help that he had to touch Amy.

No, I don't have to touch her, he thought.

I just have to cover her up. Yes, get the towels and cover her where ever skin is showed. He grabbed the towels, but stopped. What if the others need their towels? Then, I just have to watch her and make sure she's under the umbrella's shade.

No, I can't just sit here and watch her, I would be no better than Denmark.

He needed to wake her, but what if she expected that he was taking advantage of her? He would never harm Amy, but what if she believed he would?

He mentally groaned he was over thinking this. Before he could second guess himself, he squeezed the lotion in his hands and rubbed it on her face. Her milky white skin was surprisingly soft. Her cheeks were pink and smooth, and her hair was silky soft when he had to push aside her bangs to touch her forehead. Amy's eyes flickered under her lids and Toris froze his fingers were centimeters away from her temple. She sighed sleepily through her nose and settled back into her deep slumber.

Toris slid his fingers to her ears, then to her jaw and chin. He surged with sensation when the tip of his fingers brushed against her lips. He pulled back feeling ashamed and guilty with himself. He
rubbed his eyes and glanced back to Amy, why couldn't Finland have bought those spray on sunscreen bottles?

He shook the bottle and squeezed more lotion into his hands. He patted Amy's neck and collar bone. His eyes subconsciously fell to her chest and he blushed. He clipped up the two buttons from her breast to her neck and made sure that area was covered with her blouse. He swiftly moved on to her arms and stroked his hands over her elbows, forearms and hands.

When their fingers touched, Toris's mind fell back to secret passage way. Amy's hands roaming over his body and squeezing his hand for comfort. Then when she held him, he couldn't help but think that her body fit so perfectly against his. That her head suited the crook of his neck and her arm was just the right measure to be wrapped around his waist. Goose bumps spread throughout his body at the thought of her breath on his neck and her chest against his.

He shook away the thought. He was at her legs now and he just wanted to finish as quickly as possible. When he got to her last leg, his fingers slowed. His hand held her toned calf as the other massaged the sun block from her foot to her knee. His fingers tingled as they caressed her skin. Amy wasn't just beautiful; she was gentle, courageous and strong. He truly admired her.

Amy moaned in her sleep and Toris snapped his head up to find her eyes fluttering open. She blinked at him in confusion and then her eyes widened in terror. She screamed and slammed the heel of her foot into his face. The last thought that crossed his mind in that moment, was that he deserved it.

I felt the tips of fingers caressing my leg and when I looked up my eyes were blurred, so at first, I thought Toris was wearing a black suit and took on the complexion of sickly gray. It wasn't till he was lying in the sand with his hands to his face, did I realize Toris was wearing swim wear and his hair was its natural light brown color.

"Oh. My. God!" I knelt beside him, "Toris are you okay? I'm so sorry, I-I-"

"No, Ms. America, I deserved this," he whispered behind his hands.

"What's going on?" Blake asked sleepily as he rubbed his eyes.

Someone laughed and I looked up to find a guy with jaw-length blond hair and green eyes. "Ha, you got him good."

"This isn't funny Feliks," another blond haired young man said.

"Ah Tino, lighten up," Feliks grinned.

Then a large man with glasses walked up to Toris and handed him a towel, "you're bleeding," he said in monotone.

"What?! Let me see," I forced him to move his hands away from his face. His nose was swollen, red and it was turning black and blue. Blood was streaming from his nostrils and dripping from his chin. I paled and slid the towel over his nose. "I'm so, so, so sorry, Toris."

"No, don't apologize. I deserved this," he whispered again.

"What the hell?! You don't deserve to get kicked in the face. Why do you think you do?!" I
exclaimed.

He looked away from me and whimpered, "Forgive me Ms. America."

"Forgive you? I'm the one who should be asking for your forgiveness."

"No, I don't deserve it."

"What the fuck," I said frustrated, "just take the damn apology!"

"I can't!" he cried.

"What's wrong with you?!!" I said irritated.

"A lot of things," Feliks laughed.

I looked up and found entire group of half-naked men surrounding me and Toris. "Why are all of you here?" I asked in a calmer voice.

"Uh," another blond haired man with a curl lifted a brow at me. "We took your advice, came to the beach, you know, mini vacation."

"Right," I nodded and I checked my phone. I had four missed calls from Arthur, one from Jamie, ten from Dad, fifteen from Melissa and six voicemails. I checked the time and it was one, twenty-five. I've slept for nearly three hours. "Ah shit! Blake, get your stuff we need to go," I proclaimed as I grabbed my jacket and shoes.

"But who are these people?" Blake asked as he slid on his shoes.

"They're nations, that one is Sealand," I pointed to Peter, "that one is Latvia," Raivis. "Lithuania," I gestured to Toris, "that one is Denmark, and I have no idea who the rest of you are."

"I'm Poland," Feliks proclaimed.

"Norway," the guy with the blond curl said.

"Iceland," a guy with silver blond hair raised his hand.

A guy with a bowl cut hair style and glasses spoke, "I'm Estonia."

"I'm Finland," Tino smiled, "and this is Sweden." He pointed to the large man behind him.

Blake blinked at them, "I have no idea where any of you are."

Blake and I were met with silence.

I rolled my eyes, "That's the American public school system for ya." I grabbed his hand, "I'll show you a map later, but now we gotta go."

"What about your seashells?" Feliks called after us.

"Keep them!" I shouted and pulled Blake along back to my jeep. We jumped in and sped out of the parking lot.
Once we were home, Blake sighed and climbed out of the jeep. I followed behind him, "Hey, don't have such a long face. I'm sure she won't be that mad -"

"Blake!" Melissa cried out and ran out of the house. She fell to her knees in front of Blake and gripped him into a massive bear hug. "Oh thank the Great Spirit, you're okay!"

"Heh, you're starting to sound like Grandma," I said, trying to lighten the mood.

She glared at me and rose to her feet, "Do not joke with me right now."

"Okay," I mumbled and glanced to my feet.

"Amy," I looked up and found Dad on the porch. He was leaning on the rail and he was giving me a stern look. "I need to talk with you."

I side glanced to Melissa, "What's up with Dad?" I whispered.

She shook her head, "I don't know." She was clearly angry and refused to look at me as she walked back into the house with Blake's hand in her's.

"Why didn't you tell me or your mother about Russia?" he asked the moment we were alone.

My eyes widened, "What are you talking about?"

"Russia, Ivan, whatever you want to call him, I don't care. All I want to know is why you didn't tell me about what he did to you in Austria."

My jaw dropped, "I-I-" I stuttered at first. "I didn't want you guys to worry."

Dad shook his head and inhaled through his nose.

"How did you find out?" I asked.

He sighed, "He was here."

"What?! He isn't allowed to be anywhere near you guys; none of the nations are." I exclaimed.

"They didn't seem to get the memo," he said and nodded to the door. "The rest are in there."

I gritted my teeth, "Ah hell no." I stomped up the steps and busted through the door. "You people have a lot of nerve."

Francis was the first to rise to his feet, "Ami, mon cher."

I raised my hand to his face. "Don't." I turned to Ludwig, "when I said to visit the community, I didn't mean my family."

"Your family is part of the community, technically we can visit them," he answered in a calm voice.

I noticed that he had a white patch over his cheek. I smirked, he hasn't healed yet. "Well technically, I don't care. Now get out of my house," I pointed to the door.

"Amy," Dad squeezed my shoulder, "Do not talk to them like that. I thought we raised you better than this." His eyes narrowed at me with disappointment.
That look sent my confidence downhill and made me feel like I was two inches tall. I blinked back tears and turned to face the floor.

Everyone was quiet till Sanjay spoke, "Michel, Jamie, could you take the children upstairs."

Jamie lifted the white and blue baby seat with both hands and followed Michel to the second floor with Blake and Blair beside him. Sanjay and Melissa moved to stand beside me and Grandma stayed in her seat next to Arthur. I breathed in and asked in a gentle tone, "What are you doing here?"

"We need to inform you about the G8," Ludwig answered.

"What's that?"

"An organization for the strongest stable base economies of the world; when Alfred disappeared, China took his place, but now that you're here. China is no longer needed."

"I'm just as needed as any of you are," Yao proclaimed, "my economy has grown over the years. I have every right to be here."

"Fine," I shrugged, "he can keep my place."

"No, Amy you're America. Your country's economy is connected to all of ours." Arthur said.

"Don't know why, seeming that a lot of America's stuff is made in China," I informed.

"See, her nation doesn't offer us anything. I'm a better choice," Yao said.

"I agree," I raised my hand.

"No you don't," Arthur exclaimed, "we started the G8 with America."

"I have a question," the nations turned to face Sanjay, "why does China have to leave?"

Ludwig said seriously, "this is a nation discussion. It has nothing to do with you."

Dad stepped up, "with all due respect, Mr. Germany, you are in my house. Discussing what you will do with my daughter-"

"Take this with no offense," Ludwig interrupted, "America is not your daughter. She is a nation."

"I raised her." his voice rose with authority, "She is every much my daughter."

"You want me, there's guys are part of the package deal," I proclaimed.

Francis shook his head, "Amy, this is what most of the nations fear; following your family's advice rather than your government."

"My government was founded by the people; these guys are just as much a part of my government as any arrogant fool in congress." I crossed my arms, "now why is it so important for China to leave? There are eight of us here."

"Russia-san is part of the G8," Kiku said.

The room dropped twenty degrees as goose bumps spread over my arms and shoulders. "It's official, I'm out."
"Amy-" Arthur called out to me as I tried to walk away.

"No, I don't want to be anywhere near him, and if I can avoid him. I'm taking it."

"Amy, you have to be part of the G8," Dad said calmly.

I stared at him in disbelief, "you can't be serious."

"I am. You are America; the G8 is large part of the nation's defense and economy stability."

Ludwig glared at Arthur, Francis and Matthew, "What did you tell him?"

"What he needed to know," Arthur said without batting an eye.

Ludwig messaged his temples, "this is not happening. This is not happening."

"There, there Germany, everything's going to be okay." Feliciano gave a carefree smile.

"Do I really have to?" I whined.

"Yes." Everyone but Yao exclaimed.

I sighed, "Fine."

Yao rose to his feet, "what about me?"

"How about we kick Russia out of the G8," Arthur suggested.

"I second that motion," I proclaimed.

"Russia's economy is needed," Ludwig remarked.

"Then, let both me and China stay."

"No, the G8 has to have eight members."

"Then can't we just call ourselves the G9 and get it over with?"

"But my stationary has just been restocked," he mumbled.

"You mean to tell me that the whole reason we're talking about this, is because you don't want to change your stationary." I brushed my hands through my hair and walked to the stairs. "I'm done."

"Well," Grandma rose from her seat, "nothing left to do but start dinner."
"They're staying for dinner, of course they're staying for dinner," I mumbled as I towel dried my hair. I decided to take a quick shower, mostly to rinse out the sand and to change into a pair of worn out jeans and a graphic tee.

"Girl, what's your deal?" Michel asked as he clicked through the TV channels.

"My deal? They are here." I gestured to my closed bedroom door.

"Sweetie you did tell them to visit the town," Jamie said as she rocked Raiden in her arms.

"My family is not part of the town. This," I waved my hands around my room, "is my sanctuary from those weirdos."

Jamie shrugged, "I thought they were nice."

"You didn't spend a week with them. They're so, ugh!" I pulled at my hair, "I don't even have a word to describe them. They're irritating, territorial and-and seem to only live in the past." I paled, "What if I end up like them. Reminiscing about the past rather than living in the present?!"

"Honey, please realize when I say this, I say it with love. Shut up." I opened my mouth to say something, but Michel held up his hand, "Don't talk, just sit and listen. It's time for some overdue tough love." He placed his hands on my shoulders and sat me down on the window seat. He turned to the twins, "Could you guys take Lady and go play outside, please."

Blair pouts, "I don't want to miss this!

Blake grabbed her hand, "We're going, come Lady," he patted his leg with his spare hand.

"You give up too easily," Blair hissed as they walked out the door and closed it behind them.

Michel turned back to me, "Now, Amy you need to be the bigger person here and let go of whatever resentment you're holding for these guys."

"But."

"No buts. You're a nation, they're nations. Like it or not you're going to be spending the rest of your life with them."

I slumped, "You're not helping."

"Maybe not but I am." He sighed, "Amy we're not going to be here as long you will."

I looked him in the eye, "Don't."

He shrugged, "but it's the truth. That's why you need to have some friends."

"I don't need them."

"What the hell are you so scared of," he said, irritated.

"I ain't scared."
"Yes, you are," Jamie spoke and we both turned to face her. "In the beginning, when you first found out about being a nation, you denied it. Denied Arthur, Francis, and Matthew, you just wanted to put a wall between them and you. And then when you finally let them in, they hurt you."

"Well, we made up," I crossed my arms.

"No you didn't. Matthew told me what happened at the Emerald, you walked out on them and told them they weren't acting like a family."

"That sounds like a rejection to me," Michel chimed in.

"They don't seem to care."

"Yes they do," Jamie shifted Raiden from one arm to the next. "Just like Michel said, you're afraid that if you let them in again, they'll hurt you. You're acting the same way with the other nations. You can't use us as an excuse anymore."

I knitted my brows at her, "what do you mean by that?"

"You were using us as an excuse to keep the nations at arm's length, but now that they know about us and can't harm us. You have nothing left but yourself holding you back."

Before I could say anything, Jamie handed me Raiden. "We're going grocery shopping with Sanjay; we'll be back in an hour."

Then Michel followed her to the door, "so play nice." He wiggled his fingers in a farewell and closed the door.

What the fuck just happen.

I groaned and leaned myself against the wall. Raiden began to squirm and his face twisted in a cry. He wailed and I winced, "hey, shoo, its okay, its okay," I soothed.

He continued to scream/cry and I rose to my feet to rock him in my arms. Then with one hand, I connected my iPod to my speakers, put the volume at low and played my Lana Del Rey playlist. "Hush, hush," I whispered and began to hum along with the song 'Radio'.

After a few more cries, Raiden finally begins to settle and I relaxed. "So you like Lana Del Rey?" I nodded in approval, "Good taste."

My door opened, "Is he okay?" Melissa asked.

"Yeah Mel he's fine," I smiled, "it's not my first rodeo."

Melissa closed the door and walked to sit herself on the window seat. "I understand why you don't want to be near them."

"Melissa, were you ears dropping?" I said playfully, "I'm shocked."

"I'm trying to be serious here."

"Fine," then I whispered to Raiden, "Your mama's no fun."

"I heard that."

"She also has super hearing, you'll never get away with anything," I giggled.
Melissa shook her head, but she still had a smile on her face. Then her voice grew stern, "Amy, I'm worried about you and I'm scared for you. I mean, you know what happened when the Europeans came to America. They pillaged the native tribes, raped the women and killed men and children alike. And their diseases nearly wiped them off. How Alfred could even deal with that, I can't imagine; and to add insult to injury, he was fought over for land. I wonder, did they decide to mark him with a pen? The head and arms belonged to the English while the torso belonged to the French. Oh and let's not forget about the Dutch, the Finnish, the Swedish, the Russians and the Spanish."

I nodded, "I get. I could be torn apart." The memory of my nightmare caused a cold shiver to go down my spine.

"I don't trust them," she said. "What will stop them from doing the same thing to you? Maybe not colonizing the country, but trying to claim you; who knows, maybe Arthur, Francis and Matthew are just waiting for their right moment to strike."

A protective nerve sparked to life. "They wouldn't do that," I said without hesitation. "You may not trust them Mel, but I do. They've had my back and," I sighed, letting the truth sink in. "They care about me. Even when I hurt them, they still care. And even when they hurt me, I-I care."

Melissa rose to her feet and picked up Raiden from my arms, "That's all I needed to hear," she smiled and walked out of the room.

Melissa Arora closed the door behind her and found three blond nations waiting outside Amy's room. "See, I told you guys she cares." She walked to the guest room with the balcony, for it was the only room with a spare crib.

Arthur was the first to speak, like always. "Is it true? You don't trust us?"

She sighed, "In the beginning," she rocked Raiden with an Indian lullaby that Sanjay taught her. "But as I got to know you, I could see that you only wanted to be in her life. And maybe, just maybe, you all wanted to be part of this family." The baby's eyes closed and he laid his head on her shoulder.

She noticed their eyes widened in confusion and she smiled, "I can see why. Alfred and my grandfather were close. Close enough for them to meet each other over the years and for Alfred to allow Grandpa and our family to raise his daughter. I'm sure you all were curious about us."

Francis chuckled, "yes, we were."

Melissa laid Raiden gently into the soft cushion of the crib as Matthew proclaimed, "you're right you know."

"I'm right about a lot of things; you have to be more specific."

"About us wanting to be part of the Hawkfeather family; maybe Al is left here somewhere. If only John Senior was still alive, he could've told us stories. It would've helped, you know. Being a nation, our leaders expect us to be wise, strong and emotionless."

"Like that ever happens," Arthur and Francis shared a knowing glance.

"They seem to forget that we experience feelings like humans do. All this time we were waiting for
Alfred to be found or to hear the worse, now that we have, it's sad yes, but we have closure. But if only we knew sooner, if only Al could have just-just," Matthew blinked back tears. "None of this would have to be so forced."

Melissa strolled over to the room's closet and pulled out family albums from the top shelf. "I have a story to tell you guys." She separated the albums by the oldest to youngest on the bed. "This is not the first time Amy has kept people she loves at arm's length." She sat on the bed and began to scroll through one of the albums. She stopped at a picture of a grinning five year old Amy. "We told Amy she was adopted when she was five. She started asking questions on why she didn't have dark hair or eyes or why her skin was so light. Mom would tell her she got her looks from her Spanish blood." She smiled, "I wonder does Spain look like Amy?"

Arthur smirked and Francis said, "No, not at all."

She nodded and turned another page through the album, "When Dad told her the truth, she became distant. She would avoid us and hide away in the stables for hours. You all want to know how she got her nickname? She would run off into the forest, at first Grandpa would tell Mom not to worry and to let her be. But one time, Amy was gone for three days. We were terrified, running around the forest searching for her and when Grandpa found her, she was playing with two grizzly cubs and was snuggling together with the mother."

The countries stared at her, wide eyed. "You can't be serious," Arthur said.

"Grandpa took pictures," she pulled out two photos and handed them over.

The pictures displayed Amy, her hair long, curly and tangled. She was covered with patches of dirt and leaves and she was barefoot. In one, she had wrestled a bear cub to the ground but the second cub was already on top of her. The mother was nearby but she didn't seem fazed that a human child had joined her cubs in play time. The second photograph showed the mother bear nuzzling Amy with her snout.

"Dad had a tranquilizer gun, so it didn't take long to get Amy away from the family of bears. Dad was able to get them transported to a national park and Mom had an iron grip on Amy for the weeks after."

Melissa sighed and continued to scroll through the photos, "Amy never told us why she ran off with the bears, but we believe it was because she didn't feel like she was part of our family anymore. She didn't trust us when we told her we loved her, she didn't believe us anymore.

"But when she came home that day, Mom started yelling at Amy but in the end she broke down and smothered her in a hug. I think it was that moment when Amy's walls came crumbling down."

"Are you saying that we need to hug her?" Matthew asked.

"I don't think that will end well," Arthur proclaimed.

"No," Melissa smiled, "just give her time, she'll come around." She rose of the bed and grabbed her purse from the nightstand. She pulled out an envelope and handed it to Arthur.

He pulled out a stack of photographs from the clean white envelope and Francis and Matthew moved in closer to take a look. "They're pictures from Johnny's wedding," Melissa said. She knew every photo they were shuffling through. Pictures of Amy dancing with each of them, Francis and Amy posing with the bride and groom; Matthew and Amy wielding jazz instruments with The Fedoras and there was even a photo of Arthur being tackled by the kids and Amy standing over
him, giggling. The last two pictures they came to was of all four of them sitting around a table. One was a display of them talking and laughing among themselves and the second was of them smiling at the camera.

Melissa grinned, "She can't hide her affection for you guys."

The Lana Del Rey playlist continued to play as I lounged on my three window tower seat. My knees were bent and I sat up with a pillow behind my back. I caressed Grandpa's ring with one hand and twirled the ends of my dream catcher with the other. My finger stopped at a wooden figure of a bear and I smiled. Then I tilted my head towards the window and stared into the afternoon sky.

“You can't use us as an excuse anymore.”

I'm not.

“You're afraid if you let them in again, they'll hurt you.”

I'm not.

“You have nothing but yourself holding you back.”

"I'm not," I whispered and closed my eyes, trying to think about anything else besides these confusing emotions. I glanced to Alfred's letter on my lap. I've read it five times, but Alfred only seemed to have left more questions than answers. I mean, how many people did he knew? Sophie Ross and Carlos Lopez, did they know what Alfred was? Were they friends? Well, Alfred met Sophie during the seventies; we all know what went on in the seventies.

I laughed to myself, all the stories Sophie could tell me. Even Carlos could shed some light on the mystery of Alfred's double life. The life he kept hidden from the other nations; his human life.

The house in Virginia, the storage room, would it hold answers? For the female nation Alfred supposedly married? Why would Alfred confine in Grandpa, Sophie and Carlos? What made them trustworthy? Also, who was Karen?

I turned to Grandpa's journal on my nightstand, I've haven't read another entry since the day I found it. I took two big steps to snatch the journal and sat back down in my seat. I opened to the first page.

June 10, 1955

I must be insane.

There has to be a logical explanation for Alfred F. Jones. He must age well or he must be the son of the man I met when I was seven. They cannot be the same person.

Hell, when I look at what I just written, I know I can't fool myself; because I knew what I saw and I know it's real.

First time I met Alfred, I was just a child, traveling in the pow wows with my family. We are tribe
made up of different members from each Native American tribe. The native families here travel through the country together and are homeschooled by our wise men and women. Every other weekend, we stop in a major city or town and hold a festival there for the people. What I don't understand is, how could one person be there every weekend; every town, every city, if he wasn't following us.

For months Alfred was there. Watching us dance and perform. Buying our paintings and carvings and eating our food.

I was not the only one to notice back then, the council took notice but most importantly my father took notice. My father, Tyee Hawkfeather, the chief of our mixed up tribe called Alfred out and instructed for him to meet him and the council later that day.

Father never told me or my brothers what happen that night, but Alfred was never seen again; till now.

I'm sixteen, I'll be seventeen on the 22nd. That means ten years have passed, and Alfred has not aged since.

I may not be chief, but this is my tribe, my family. I will not let some strange white man poke his nose into our business.

I confronted him after my part in the war dance; he was skimming through our paintings for sale.

I took a deep breath, hoping that I was wrong. "Alfred F. Jones."

He turned to face me; his hair was still dirty blond and parted in the middle. His eyes were still blue and his skin was smooth with not a single wrinkle. He smiled, "Hello, um do I know you?"

"Doubt it, but you know my father, Tyee Hawkfeather."

His face gave nothing away, but his smile grew wider. "Oh are you one of Tyee's boys. Tristen? Clay?"

"John," I hissed. Of course he named my two older brothers first before me, was he trying to tick me off or was he an idiot? I tried to found out. "Who are you," I commanded.

"Uh, don't you know? You called me out," he said.

I bundled my fist into his clean pressed suite and brought his face an inch away from mine. "Don't play stupid with me. I saw you when I was seven years old. But that can't be, you must be the son of that Alfred my father met or-"

Alfred grinned, "Are you hungry? I know I am. Are you free? Of course you are." He pulled my fingers apart from his tie and began to drag me out of the art tent and down the street. "There's a Denny's just down the street from here, I've been there a few times; they have amazing steaks." As he continued to talk, I tried to break away from his grip, but his hold on me was strong. He didn't pay attention to when I clawed at his hand or punched his arm.

No one else seemed to notice my struggle, for Alfred walked quickly and weaved around people easily. I almost tripped several times before we reached the small restaurant.

"Table for two," Alfred asked the host.

"Help," I cried, "I'm here against my will!"
The host glanced at Alfred worriedly and he laughed, "Oh John," he wrapped his arm around my shoulders and ruffled my hair. "He's such a kidder." Then he whispered in my ear, "If you want me to answer your questions, you will have lunch with me."

I glared at him and I shook his arm off. The host didn't want to bother with us and simply lead us to a table (in the colored section of course), gave us our menus and walked away.

Alfred watched the host head back to the front and he turned to me. "So Johnny-"

"Don't call me that," I narrowed my eyes at him.

He held his hands up in mock surrender, "Sorry, sorry. So, how's your family?"

"I believe I'm asking the questions here," I said.

"Oh come on, can't we have a normal lunch? Ask questions, talk about the weather, catch up with family news, you know, like friends do."

"We're not friends."

He sighed, "Kid, you have to work with me here."

"Who are you calling a kid? You're what? Two, maybe three years older than me," I proclaimed.

"Try two hundred and fifty-three, possibly more." he smiled.

Before I could say anything, our waitress walked up to our table. "Hello, I'm Betty; I'll be your waitress today. What would you like to drink?"

"Coca cola," Alfred gave our waitress a carefree smile, as if he just didn't confess to me that he was over two hundred years old.

When the waitress turned to me, I sighed, "Water please."

She nodded and walked to the counter. Alfred glanced to me, "have you ever had coca cola? It's good stuff."

"It's acid in a bottle," I proclaimed, "how people can drink it, is behind my understanding."

He shrugged his shoulders, "I didn't like it at first but over the years it grew on me."

"When did you first drink coca cola?" I asked.

"When it first came out in Atlanta, 1886," he answered.

I snorted, "Are you messing with me? There's no way you're that old."

"But I am," he grinned and our waitress walked over and place our drinks on the table. "What can I get you boys?"

"I'll have your steak, with a side of spinach and mashed potatoes," Alfred handed her his menu.

They turned to me and I stuttered, "I'll, uh, just give me what he's having." The waitress nodded as she wrote down on her pad and headed to the kitchen.

"My turn," he grinned, "how's your family?"
"I'm not here to answer questions."

"But we had a good system, I'll ask a question, you answer it and then you ask a question and I'll answer it."

I knitted my brows at him, "how is it your turn?"

"No, no," he wiggled his finger at me, "that's counted as a question and it's my turn."

I rolled my eyes, "My family's fine."

"Is that all?"

"Yes," I hissed.

"Fine," he shrugged his shoulders, "your turn."

"Do you really think you're over two hundred years old?" I asked sarcastically.

He smirked, "I don't think, I know. How old are you?"

"Sixteen, I'll be seventeen in a few weeks."

"Oh I remember when I turned seventeen, well mostly when I was able to look seventeen."

"And when was that?" I played along.

He took a moment, "Mid-seventeen hundreds, maybe."

"Are you insane?" I asked.

"It's not your turn," he sang.

I brushed my hands through my hair in frustrated, "has anyone ever told you that you're irritating."

He laughed, "Dozens, especially my siblings. I know that you have two brothers, how are they?"

I sighed, "They're just fine. Both are on sure paths to becoming council men and Tristen will be chief just like Father."

"Hm, I'm hearing a bit of resentment in your voice," he smirked.

I glared and refused to humor him. I had a mission and I expected to get answers. When our waitress came back with our food, we said our thanks and I waited for her to be out of hearing distance.

"If you're not insane, and happen to be over two hundred years old. What could you possibly be?" I asked with all seriousness in my voice.

"Can you keep a secret?"

Before I could shout my frustration at him, he took his steak knife and slashed his wrist. I gasped and tried to leap out of my seat. But Alfred held me by the arm and forced my head down to look at his wrist.

My eyes widened as the skin fused together and the blood stopped flowing. It only took a second
and his wound was gone, leaving nothing but unharmed skin. He released his hold on me and leaned back into his seat. He grabbed his napkin and wiped away the blood that was left over. I watched him with wide, terrified eyes.

"Don't give me that look," he smiled, "I'm not a monster, just a nation." His smile grew wider, "I'm America." He then continued to tell me of his origins. About being a representation of American culture, race and government. I don't know what it was that made me snap; maybe it was because he called himself the representation of America and he was a white man.

"You are not America," I hissed. "You are the white man's version of America. Your government treats us as if we are second class citizens but you won't hesitate to call us in for war. And when we come back, you still treat us like crap."

"This is about your uncle, isn't it?" he asked.

The next few minutes came in a blur as rage clouded my thoughts. I slammed my fist into his cheek and he fell back along with his chair. "You have no right to talk about my uncle!"

The people in the restaurant stared at me with scared and worried eyes. Then a middle aged white man snarled at me, "Damn Indians, they're a violent bunch no matter how much they try to act like us. They're still savages."

"What did you say?!" I flared and before I could even get close to him, someone held me back.

"Calm down John, he's not worth it," Alfred exclaimed as he pulled me out of Denny's. He then walked me back to the pow wow by the hand and sat me down on a wooden bench. I don't know how long we sat there, watching the people walk by as the day waned down. But after what felt like hours pass, I just had to ask.

"How did you know my uncle?"

"Johnny," he nodded with a smile, "met him when we were in Europe; he was good soldier and a great man."

I nodded, "I was named after him."

"You look like him too," he blinked back tears, "I'm sorry."

I turned to him, "for what?"

"He fought. He fought so hard for this country and when he got off that boat in New York, he was beaten to death by a group of hateful drunks. He deserved a hero's welcome, not to be killed in a dark alley way and left for dead."

I inhaled through my nose, to calm myself, "Is that why you're here? To apologize? It's not like you killed him."

"But it was my people."

"If your America, aren't we your people to?"

He snorted, "You're right, that whole division in race is even affecting me."

"The war ended when I was seven, why did you follow our tribe in the months after?" I asked.

He took a breath. "I found out about a whole new side of me that I didn't even know existed. I
needed guidance, and Johnny told me about your tribe, how your father gathered members from other tribes and called it The United Natives." He smirked, "Johnny always said it wasn't the most original name he could come up with." He took another breath, "Then he would tell me about how all of you would travel from coast to coast to teach people about native culture; it's amazing. We could learn something from you all."

I lifted a brow, "what do you mean?"

"The native tribes have had battles and feuds between themselves for decades before the Europeans even set foot here. Those battles were bloody and many of your ancestors died. Yet all of you can put that aside and live together."

"Mostly because we all had one common enemy," I said with bitter humor in my voice.

He chuckled, but it was sad. "That's how most friendships start."

We shared a knowing glance and remained quiet for a few minutes. Then a new question emerged from my subconscious, something I've wanted to know, but never knew it till now. "What did you and council talk about that night?"

"I mostly talked to Tyee, asking for guidance and he allowed me to have a vision quest."

"Can nations have vision quests?" I asked.

A grin spread wide across his face, "does this mean you believe me," he bantered. Then he checked his watch and rose to his feet, "I have to go, I was only able to stop by for lunch." He gave me his hand to shake, "Goodbye John, I hope we meet again."

I pulled my hand away, "I hope we don't."

He gave me a carefree smile and turned his back to me, "I believe this is the start of a beautiful friendship."

"You're delusional!" I called after him.

Alfred only waved his hand in farewell and continued to take his stroll to city hall.

It was only minutes after he left did I notice a brown leather book on Miss Isi's sale table. She has amazing talent with leather, and the cover caught my eye. It was simple but yet elegant. I have no idea why I brought the journal. Yes, it's pretty but I'll never remember to write in it and it seems like a waste that I brought this for only one entry.

But I needed to record this, because maybe this is the day I have lost my mind.

I smiled at the last sentence of the entry, "You and me both Gramps."

Then I heard a high scream and I looked out to find Blair and Blake playing with Lady. I smiled and closed the journal. The playlist ended and I went up to turn the speakers off till I heard a new voice join the playful cries. "Hello!"

Peter?!

I jumped back to the window and swung it opened. Peter and all the other nations from the beach
were standing in the front yard. They were all dressed in casual clothes and they all carried food in their arms. "What you all doing here?" I cried.

They all looked up and Tino answered, "You told us to come."

"What? No I didn't."

"Yeah, you did," Peter proclaimed and pulled out his phone, "you sent me a text, inviting us to dinner."

I knitted my brows in confusion, "I haven't been on my phone," I said as I patted myself down for my smartphone.

"We have," Blair called out and held up my phone.

"You little-" I gritted my teeth and climbed out the window. Once I landed on the ground, I turned to face the twins. "Give it to me."

"No," Blair stuck her tongue out at me. "This is what happens when you kick us out!"

"Blair! Give it to me!" I took a step towards her and she ran between the nations. I chased after her, "You little brat!"

"Blake catch!" she threw my phone and Blake caught it with both hands.

I turned to him, "Blake," I said calmly, "give me back my phone."

He side glanced to Blair and ducked behind Erik. I leaped after him and he weaved around the nations. He then tossed it to Feliks, "hot potato!"

"Feliks," I held out my hand.

He grinned, "This seems like fun," and threw it to Mikkel.

"Mikkel!" I called out as an evil smile spread over his lips and he flung it at Lukas

"Stop! Seriously, give it back!"

"That depends," Lukas twirled my phone in between his fingers, "What's my nation's capital?"

I guessed, "Uh, Norwiega?"

"Did you just make that up?" Lukas asked.

"No," I lied.

He shook his head and threw my phone to Tino. "Oh it's my turn ya! Do you know where my capital is?"

"I don't know and I don't care," I said annoyed with this stupid game.

"Oh that's too bad," Tino sighed and threw it up to Berwald.

I ran up to the freakish tall man and jumped for my phone as he held it up over his head. Then he hurled it over and I followed it as it landed in Sadik's hands.

"What are you doing here?" I asked in a high voice.
"I called Japan to hang, but he said he was here so I decided to join the party." He gestured to his side where Heracles and Gupta stood. "These guys wanted to come along to."

"Hello America," Gupta greeted and Heracles just nodded.

I inhaled through my nose, "Alright, cool, just give me my phone."

"No, this is too entertaining," he smirked and tossed it over to Toris.

I didn't bother to ask, I just held out my hand to him. He was about to give it over till a hand snatched it away from him.

That hand belonged to Gilbert Beilschmidt.

"I know this is a stupid question, but why are you here?" I asked, defeated.

He smirked, "tracked Ludwig's phone, didn't realize it would lead me to the forbidden zone."

"Then you should give me my phone and leave."

"But we just got here," a young man with dark hair and green eyes whined. Then he grabbed my hand in an exaggerated handshake, "Hey there, I'm Antonio Fernandez Carriedo, also known as Spain." Then he pulled a young boy from behind; he was fair skinned, had golden hazel eyes and dark hair with a curl to the side. "And this little cutie is Lovino Vargas."

"Get off of me, you bastard!" he shoved him off and turned to face me. He cleared his throat and gave a polite greeting.

I focused my attention on Gilbert, "phone, now."

"You'll get it miss sassy pants, after you apologize for this," he pointed to his swollen nose.

"I already did."

"Yeah, but I don't think you meant it. I believe you need to be more sincere."

I had a bad feeling where this was going but I still asked, "What do you want?"

He smirked, "A kiss, right on the lips."

Everyone was silent, waiting for me to make a move. I took a deep breath and gave him my sweetest smile. "Okay."

He blinked, "really?"

"Of course, now close your eyes," I said lovingly.

He lifted a brow in suspicion and I placed my hand on his cheek. "Don't you trust me?" I whispered as my fingers caressed his jaw and the back of his ear. A slight shiver passed over his shoulders, but no one else noticed except for me. I pulled my hand back but I lingered, "Close your eyes," I batted my eyes up at him.

"You won't regret it," he grinned as he did what I told him.

"Neither will you," I said through a forced smile and patted my leg. Lady came to sit at my side and I bent down to pick her up. I stepped closer to Gilbert to whisper in his ear, "keep in mind, I
like to French kiss." I prepared Lady, "Pucker up." I guided my dog's snout to Gilbert's lips and she lashed out with her tongue. His eyes shot opened and he stepped back, but not before I seized my phone from his grasp.

I placed Lady on the ground and I grinned, "Victory!"

Mikkel cried out in laughter, "its official I love this girl!"

I slid my phone into my jean pocket, "Word of advice nations, if you want a kiss from me, ya'll got to try harder than that."

"Is that a challenge I hear," Sadik's eye sparked to life as he placed hand near his ear, mimicking the gesture for him in need to hear well.

"Maybe, or you might be losing your hearing old man." I grinned and Gupta chuckled. Then I walked to the front door, "Blake, Blair, Lady, get the house." They came running and I smacked the twins on each of their bottoms as they passed through door. "Don't take my phone you little brats." Then I turned to face the nations and sighed, "Get in here."

"We're invited?" Raivis asked uncertainly.

"Yes, now hurry up, before I change my mind."

The nations quickly followed the twins in and I greeted them each as they walked in. Gilbert cut in front of Feliks, "You will pay for that," he hissed at me.

"Try anything and I'll throw you under a bus," I threatened.

Then Feliks pushed aside Gilbert to get inside, "like, move!"

"You heard him," I pushed him through the door.

Toris came next and I whispered, "I'm sorry about your face and I will make it up to you. I know where my dad keeps the good whiskey."

He chuckled, "thank you," and walked in.

Antonio and Lovino were the last to enter and I was about to close the door behind me, till Johnny's BMW and Sanjay's van drove up.

"Johnny!" I called out in excitement and ran to his car. He parked and both he and Celine climbed out. I leaped into his arms for a crushing hug. "When did you get here?"

"Our plane landed two hours ago," he gestured to the house, "who were those guys?"

"Nations, be prepared they're kind of a handful."

He grinned, "don't worry I'll give them the old Johnny charm."

I shared a quick hug with Celine as Sanjay, Jamie and Michel came up to us with bags of food in their arms. Everyone shared affectionate greetings as Johnny, Celine and I helped them with the rest of the food. When we entered the living room, we found the nations circled around the living room table and they were laughing. Curiously got the better of me, so I poked my head in between Peter and Raivis; pictures of my childhood were spread over the table. Melissa had brought out every photo of my life. Every embarrassing moment, every middle and high school function, every goofy face and every dressed up Halloween, was on that table and the nations were eating it up.
"This is the Halloween when we dressed her up as pumpkin," Melissa held out a picture of me on my first Halloween.

Tino was the first to look at it, "Aw, she looks so adorable!"

"More like hilarious," Erik laughed and passed along the photo. The countries would take one look at the image and they would burst out laughing.

"Awesome, we're doing show and tell? I got tons of pictures and videos on my flash drive," Michel grinned.

Melissa clapped her hands, "should we get the home movies out?"

"No!" I said horrified.

"Yes!" Michel and Jamie cried out over me.

"I'll go get them," Melissa ran up the stairs and Dad gestured for us to set the grocery bags in the kitchen. Once I was done I ran after my sister, "Melissa," I called out.

"Hush, the baby's sleeping," she snapped softly.

I lowered my voice, "You're already showing them my baby pictures. You do not need to show them the home movies."

"Oh come on Amy it will be fun."

"It will be mortifying," I hissed.

She brought down the tapes from the guest room closet shelf. "For you maybe, but it will be fun for us," she smiled.

"You are evil. I see where your kids get it from."

She giggled and walked down the stairs, "I'll take that as a complement."
Laughter roared from down stairs as my family continued to display my childhood photos and movies.

"Amy loved to get dirty," Melissa's voice ringed out, "we could not keep her out of the mud."

"Well, wasn't she just a little piggy," Lukas snickered.

"Did she eat like one too?" Feliks giggled.

"I got a picture of her with pie all over her face," Johnny said, "It was when we were kids, and I dared her to have pie eating contest with me."

"Did she win?" Erik asked.

"No, she'll never beat her big brother," I could practically hear the superior smile on his face.

Sadik snorted, "I'm surprised she wasn't fat."

I began to bang the back of my head against my bedroom door. "Why is this happening to me," I whimpered.

"Amy," Jamie's voice resounded from the other side of the door, "come down stairs, we're having a good time."

I rose up and opened the door, "You may be having a good time, but I'm not." I tried to shut the door in her face, but Michel grabbed it and pushed his way through.

"You can't hide in your room forever," he proclaimed as he shut the door behind them.

"I can try," I exclaimed and sat at the window seat.

Jamie rolled her eyes, "Amy, it's not the end of the world."

"Why does it feel like it," I grumbled.

"Is that Amy, naked," Peter exclaimed from down stairs.

"She had a habit of taking off her clothes when she was two," Dad informed.

"She even took off her dress when we were at a friend's wedding once," Melissa added, "it was so funny. She was running around the dance floor and Mom and Dad were trying to catch her."

"Does she still have this habit," Heracles asked in all seriousness.

"No, she keeps her clothes on," said Grandma.

"Aw," Mikkel pouted, "I was kinda hoping she would come down and run around for us."

Everyone cried out in laughter.

"Maybe the world has ended," Michel said.

"I want to die." I curled myself into fetal position and hid my blushing face in my arms.
"Oh come on Amy you're not the only one with embarrassing childhood memories. I bet the
tions have some to," Jamie added.

"Yeah, but when they were kids cameras didn't existent!" I snapped.

"Stop pouting," Michel picked me up in a sitting position and gave me a side hug. "You're gonna
be okay."

I titled my head into the crook of his neck, "thanks," I whispered.

Jamie sat on the bed across from us, "the nations told us what you did to Gilbert," she giggled,
"now someone should've taken a picture of that."

I grinned and pulled myself away from Michel, "No one is going to let him forget it though."

We shared a small round of laughs and Jamie quickly changed the subject. "We met Heracles," she
smiled flirtatiously, "he's so hot."

"Now you have to be with Toris," Michel added, "So I can have Heracles."

"No!" Jamie exclaimed, "he belongs to Amy, no touchy touchy!"

I rolled my eyes, "clearly you guys have not let this go."

"Also," Michel said, "What happened to Toris's face?"

"I," I took a deep breath, "kicked him."

"Yes!" Jamie grinned, "Point reduction: fifteen!"

"No!" Michel turned to me and began to shake me by the shoulders. "It was an accident! Tell me it
was an accident!"

"What the-yes, yes, now let me go!" I shoved him, but he didn't seem to care. He only turned to
Jamie and exclaimed, "Ha! Only five points! I'm still winning!"

"What the hell are you two talking about?" I exclaimed.

Michel and Jamie shared a worried glance till Jamie answered, "We're keeping score."

I inhaled through my nose, "For your teams." They both nodded and I shook my head, "seriously?"

"What? We're just having some fun," Michel proclaimed. "And I'm winning!"

Jamie focused on me, "Why did you kick him? Did he say something? Did he try to make a move
on you and you didn't want it?"

"No," I sighed, "I thought, I thought it was dream."

"A dream," Michel perked up, "you've been dreaming about him! Okay, now was it a wet dream
or-"

"No," I glared at him.

"What were the dreams about?" Jamie asked.

"Was it anything romantic?" Michel grinned.
"If you call burning my house down romantic, then yeah it was totally hot, pun intended."

Michel winced, "Okay, well, it's not that bad."

"He burned down my house with my parents trapped inside," I informed.

They were silent till Jamie snapped her fingers, "ten point reduction."

Michel glared at her, "I'm still ahead!"

"Not for long," she turned to me, "come on Amy, I know your keeping something from us. You wouldn't kick Toris in the face if you only had one dream about him."

I groaned, "Fine. I kicked him in the face because I thought he looked like a ghoul, ready to eat me."

"Eat you?" she knitted her brows in confusion and disgust.

"It was dark, I was running around, the nations were darkly gray and one of them took a bite off of me."

"Toris?!" Michel said horrified.

"No, Victoria." Then I swiftly summed up the story, "Toris found me after and he held me and began to," my face heated in embarrassment, "kiss my shoulder and neck."

"Oooh, someone's blushing," he smiled.

"Shut up! It wasn't like that! He did that so he could suck my blood."

"Like a sexy vampire sort of way?" he said hopefully.

"More like a flesh eating zombie sort of way." I sighed, "Then he held me down so the other nations could come and eat me."

"Walking Dead style?" Jamie asked.

I nodded and they winced, "that's disturbing," said Michel.

"Yeah, it was," I shook off the goose bumps.

After a few moments of silence, Jamie grinned, "I'm winning."

"What?" He did the math and cursed, "Dammit."

I gritted my teeth in irritation, "Okay, what's with these points?"

"Oh well," he pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket. "We made a list."

I quickly read it:

Team Affection Points

Hand Holding: 5 points

Hug: 5 points
Kiss (on cheek): 5 points
Kiss (on lips): 10 points
Loving Embrace (which has to last for a good 60 seconds): 10 points
Sharing a Special Moment: 15 points
Dirty Dancing: 20 points
Wet Dreams: 20 points
Hot Hookups: 25 points (if reached second base: 50 points; if reached third base: 100 points)
Sex: 200 points

Point Reduction
Nightmares: 10 points
Physical Pain: 15 points (if accident: 5 points)
Hurt Feelings (on either side): 30 points
Unfaithfulness (on either side): the points will be reduced when followed by the section above.

I crumbled up the piece of paper and threw it at them, "Is my life just a game to you!"
"If it makes you feel any better, Heracles is winning," Jamie added.
"It doesn't!" I exclaimed and then I counted to ten as I took deep calming breaths. "You know what, whatever. If you two want to make teams, keep points, write made-up romantic stories about me-go ahead, I don't care anymore!"

Michel and Jamie shared a look with one another and then they turned to me. "Are you giving us permission to write fanfiction about your life," Michel grinned evilly.

My eye twitched, "I'm going out." I slipped on my riding boots and opened my window, "don't follow me."

Once I landed on the ground, I sprinted to the open field and sat myself on the metal gate. I whistled and a black figure came trotting in my direction. Midnight's dark onyx coat shined in the sun as his powerful legs moved in perfect sync. His silky hair bounced with each step and his eyes glowed with delight once I was in his range of sight.

I really needed some alone time with Midnight. He was my own personal therapist; ready to listen when I was troubled. And I was definitely troubled.

"Hey Midnight, how's my big boy?" I smiled as I roamed my hands over his snout and neck. I breathed, taking in his musky scent, "You wouldn't believe the day I had." His nostrils twitched under my touch and he moved in closer to my forehead. "The nations drove me crazy today. Then to make it worse, they came over for dinner and my brother and sister are showing them every mortifying video and picture of me." I brushed my fingers through his mane and he closed his eyes...
in content. "I needed to get away from them; ironically, it's my family and friends I'm talking about."

"Hmm, and after all you went through to keep them. It is ironic," a feminine voice spoke from behind.

"Ugh, Jamie, seriously, I just want-" I turned around and found a teenage girl I never met before. She was petite with long platinum hair and dark blue eyes. She wore a dark indigo dress, with a long skirt, puffy sleeves and two bows tied around her waist and on the top of her head. "You're not Jamie," I stated the obvious.

She lifted a brow at me casually, "were you expecting her?"

"No, I actually wanted to be alone," I clapped my hands together. "Now I guess that's out the window," I mumbled the last part.

Her face was expressionless as she stepped toward the gate and held her hand out to Midnight. He hesitated at first but allowed her to pet him. "He's a beautiful horse," she said.

"Yes, he certainly is." I reached out and he came back to my side with his snout grazing my cheek and hair.

I caught the mysterious girl watching me from my perspective version. The moment I turned to face her, she shifted forward but for a tiny second, I almost thought she was smiling. "Um, let me guess, you're a country."

"Does that upset you? You clearly don't want us here," she proclaimed.

"You heard me didn't you," I said this more as a statement than a question.

"I came in around the part of 'you wouldn't believe the day I had.'" Her voice rose higher as she spoke in an accent to mock me.

I snorted, "you call that an American accent? What were you trying to pull off? The southern bell?"

"Actually I was going for the spoiled reality TV star," she answered.

"Oh, you gotta add more whine into your voice, you gotta sound like an annoying bitch that needs to be slapped," I informed.

"You sound like you had experience in this." She cleverly said.

"Ouch, okay, kinda open myself up for that one." I looked at her, "so what brings you here to my humble home."

"My sister was invited by Estonia."

"The bowl cut guy?"

She smirked, "yes, that's him. Anyway my sister didn't want to come by herself and begged me to tag along. I can't say no to her, so I agreed."

"Hear that Midnight," I ruffled his mane, "the scary Ice Queen is just a big softy."

"Ice Queen?"
"That's the name I decided to give you since you haven't introduced yourself."

She sighed and turned to the open field, with a faraway look on her face. "I'm Natalia Arlovskaya, the nation of Belarus."

My eyes widened, "Ah, no way, really?"

She turned to me, all business like, "yes."

"Cool, I've always wanted to go there, ever since I saw Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D."

Her eyebrows knitted together in confusion, and I said, "You know, Agent Coulson lives. He dies in Avengers but he's brought back thanks to experimental drugs but it turned out it was alien blood and tech." Her face did not change, but I continued, "He puts a team together and they go around taking care of S.H.I.E.L.D. business." Her face still displayed the same puzzled look, and I finished my ramblings in a whisper, "it was on abc, had like six seasons and they kept crossing over with the movies and stuff."

She shook her head, but a small smile played on her lips. "Was my nation the setting for this movie?"

"It was TV show and yeah it was, for some of the episodes in season one." My voice grew in confidence, "I remember when I saw it; it was so green. It wasn't a city, more like a town; maybe it was the countryside. I don't remember, but it was so beautiful. I knew I just had to see it one day, so I added it to my notebook."

"Your notebook?" she asked, curiously.

"You know, like a bucket list. The things you want to do before you die." I placed my forehead against Midnight's. "When I was six, I was too sick to go outside, so I all could do was read or watch TV." Midnight stepped back and grazed along the gate, "Mom kept child blocks and timers on my TV, so that I could only watch educational television and cartoons for three hours a day."

"After my cartoon time was up, I would usually watch PBS, Animal Planet or the Discovery Channel. But there was this one show, I think it was on sometime of cultural channel." I shrugged my shoulders, "ah well, the channel had a show, Are We There Yet?: World Adventure. I know cheesy title, but hey it was a kid show. They would take the kids to different countries and film them as they toured around the cities."

"Being sick and stuck in bed all the time, I kinda made a promise to myself that if I ever got better, I would go out and see the world. So after a couple of episodes I started to make list of the nations I wanted to visit. But that list quickly turned into a notebook spiral, where I wrote down all the buildings I wanted to see, all the festivals I wanted to attend and all the food I wanted to try. Mostly the food, because I couldn't eat anything else but soup and crackers," I grinned at my small joke.

Natalia didn't smile at my comment but continued with, "do you still have that notebook?"

My cheeks heated in embarrassment, "Yeah."

"Well, it's a good thing you're a nation, you will get to travel and visit every country. For each world meeting is hosted by a different host country every six months."

"Hold on a minute, a world meeting is every six months," I grinned, "that means I don't have to deal with them for months at a time?" I was giggling with joy as I jumped off the gate, "finally there's a light at end of this tunnel!"
"Ms. America, you are part of the G8," she informed, "the G8 meets every month, including the world meetings."

I stopped doing my victory dance, "what? No way!"

She simply nodded and I mumbled, "Of all the nations I could've been, I just had to be America."

Natalia heard me, "it's not like you had a choice."

"I know," I sighed.

Then Midnight came trotting back and began to nudge me with his nose. "Yes, yes, I know." I caught Natalia staring at me and Midnight and I felt like I had to explain. "He wants to go for a ride," he continued to nudge me, "and he doesn't seem like he'll wait for the saddle." I side stepped to his left and swung myself over his back.

"That seems unwise," Natalia advised.

I gave her a carefree grin, "You worry too much." Then I kicked my heels and Midnight leaped in a full gallop around the open field, which was the length and width of a football field. I rode Midnight around the fence, warming him up and before I could call out for Natalia to open the gate. Jack came running after me, with Natalia on top. We pulled our horses to a stop.

"Care for a race?" she asked.

I grinned, "You sure you can keep up? How long has it been since you rode? Hold on, I know the answer, centuries." That was usually how all the nations answered a question like this.

"Try a century and half," she said as she adjusted herself on Jack. "Are you afraid I'll beat you?"

"Oh, those are fighting words," I exclaimed and trotted to the gate. Natalia followed and stopped beside Midnight as I opened the gate. I guided Midnight out as Natalia rode beside and I closed the gate. I leaped back on Midnight and directed him to the race trail.

The race trail or the Horseshoe as we called it was a track that wrapped itself around a twenty foot radius. There were two starting points, these points were six feet apart from one another, but as you ran the trail, it would curve outward. Then the trails would turn inward and connect to complete the horseshoe. That connection was wide enough to hold two horses in the middle (so you'll know if you're losing if you had to step aside for another horse to pass). Finally, when the horses come back around each of them should be on the spot opposite of where they started.

"The horse that gets around the Horseshoe and back on the opposite point from where they began, wins." I explained.

She nodded and then asked, "What's the wager?"

"I don't know. Do we really need one?"

"Well it's not any fun without a wager."

"Okay, okay. Hmm, if I win," I took a moment to think. Then I asked, "Can you request to be a host country?"

"Yes, if you haven't been a host for more than two years and the current host allows it."

I grinned, "If I win, you have to be the host country for a world meeting and during that time I want
"you be my own personal guide."

"Done," she said without hesitation, "Now if I win, I wish for you to sing for me."

I gave her a look, "You want me to sing for you?"

"Yes," she nodded.

I shrugged my shoulders, "o-kay."

She said nothing as she moved to stand at the right starting point. I took the left and curled my fingers into Midnight's mane. "On three, one," I leaned down so my face would brush against his neck. "Two," I squeezed my thighs and took a deep breath, "three!"

We both kicked into a gallop and I instantly lost sight of her as we rode deeper into the forest. When I could no longer keep track of the long haired beauty, I placed my focus on the race. "Come on boy, we can do this," I whispered and gave a soft kick. Midnight beats his hoofs into the ground as he picked up speed. I leaned in low and gripped on to the mane and body of my horse. I breathed in the moss infested forest and took a quick moment to lift up my head so the cool breeze could hit my face. The trees towered over the trail, sunlight beamed through small openings between the leaves. The rays of light warmed patches of skin as I sped under the branches and once Midnight curved inward, I was able to spot streaks of platinum through the haze of green and brown.

Natalia came speeding around the corner. Jack's long legs were smashing against the ground as his mane and her hair blew together in sync. It seemed so natural for her to be on a horse. I almost expected her to bear armor and a sword when she came into my line of sight. She was bent low so that her face brushed against Jack's neck and her dress danced in waves behind her.

We crossed paths in a blur of black, brown and blond. I heard a small, echoing cry of laughter as she passed and I smirked. So she can smile. I kicked harder and Midnight leaped around the curve. I had no idea if I was ahead or if she was, for the forest was so thick, both of us could only catch glimpses of one another. I arched my back and squeezed my knees to Midnight's gut as I raised my bottom off his back. "You got this Midnight," I exclaimed and he pushed forward. The light at the end of the track was close and I grinned.

We burst out into the field of my backyard and I pulled back on Midnight's mane. He trotted to a stop and I turned back to the left starting point. Natalia was nowhere to be seen. I was about to yell out that I had won till Natalia's voice called out, "It's about time."

I snapped my head around to find her sitting on Jack as she combed her fingers through his mane. "I almost thought you got lost."

I sighed, "how far was I off?"

"You came in a minute or so after me."

"A minute?! Damn I'm off," I proclaimed as I guided Midnight back to the gate.

"I believe you owe me a song," she said.

I slid off Midnight and opened the gate, he immediately jogged back into the open field and Jack was right behind. I locked up the gate and turned to Natalia, "I should warn ya, I'm tone deaf."

"Are you trying to wiggle out of our bet?" she lifted a brow at me curiously.
"No. I just want to know why?"

The tips of her lips curled a bit, "I want to prove a theory."

I rolled my eyes, *what's with the vague answers*. "Fine, just don't complain to me when I sound like a dying cat."
Chapter 30

The moment I opened the kitchen door, we were met with the aroma of sweet and sour chicken and miso soup mixed with the scent of pasta, fried empanadas and enchiladas. The smells overwhelmed my nostrils to the point that I had to pinch my nose. Dad, Antonio, Francis, Feliciano, Kiku and Yao were spread out through the kitchen, each making different dishes. Pork dumplings, steamed buns, strawberry crepes, flan and those were the dishes that I knew.

"Hey everyone," I greeted.

"Leave the door open," Yao exclaimed as he stirred chicken in the wok.

"There's too much steam in the air," Francis waved his hand over the stove as he paced a three pans of sliced potatoes mixed in with some type of yellow sauce.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Creamy au gratin potatoes," he answered. "Don't worry you'll love it."

"I would rather have the crepes," I gestured to take a strawberry from a plate, but Francis slapped away my hand.

"Non, non," he wiggled his finger at me, "that is for after dinner."

I stuck my tongue out at him and glanced to the stove, there were two massive skillets. One carried brown liquid filled with rice while the other had chicken, shrimp and sausage. I tilted my head, "what's this?"

"That's paella," Antonio grinned, "you serve it on the rice, with the chicken, meat and shrimp on top. I also added tomatoes and oyster shells to the mix."

I nodded, "awesome."

"We also have sesame seared tuna and sushi," Dad gestured to Kiku, his sleeves were rolled up and he had a green bandana tied around his face to push back his hair. "The others brought las-ineciai, that's Lithuanian bacon buns, Latvian style baked onions, stewed cabbage, kar-jalan pies and sve-nsska kott-bullar," Dad struggled over the foreign words. "Also known as Swedish meatballs," he finished.

"I also brought Koskenkorva viina," Tino came in with two large vodka bottles. He squeezed through the kitchen so he could place them on the table, "by the way John, you don't have to put so much force on the s in svenska."

"Svenska," Dad said in a more confident voice.

Tino smiled, "you got it."

"Wow, you guys are really going all out," I grabbed Natalia's hand, "come on Nat, I'll show you to my room." I quickly pulled Natalia through the crowded kitchen and walked in to the living room. The countries were still gathered around Melissa as she continued to show pictures, but the number of nations had increased.

A tall woman with short blond hair was talking among Grandma, Eduard, Toris and Feliks. Then
there were four Asians, all four were dark haired and dark eyed. Two were men and the other half were women. One of them with a curl saw me first, "Ms. America," he shouted happily with his arms in the air. His sleeves were extreme long as they ruffled over his hands. He wore a long yellow jacket, with an orange shirt, purple jeans and gray shoes. "Welcome home!" He wrapped his arms around my shoulders and nuzzled his face in my hair.

I patted his back, "it's good to be home, even though I've been here this entire time." Then I whispered to Natalia, "who is this guy?"

He heard me, "I can't believe you don't know me! I'm Korea!"

"Which part?"

"I represent the southern part," then he gave me another hug, "oh you're so cute and hug-able."

I laughed, "Dude are you on something?"

"He always acts that way," an Asian guy with shaggy hair spoke, "if only we could bottle it." He wore jeans and a long sleeved red hoodie.

"Hello Ms. America," the Asian women came to greet me with handshakes. "Thank you for opening your home to us," said the one with wavy hair. She wore a light pink summer dress that came to her mid thighs along with a matching flower in her hair. The woman next to her had her hair tied in a low pony tail and wore dark jean capris and a green blouse.

"Not a problem," I proclaimed. Then the woman with short blond hair walked over. She wore a high waist black skirt that came to her knees and a tucked in blue blouse that matched her eyes. But it was too small, for the buttons were barely able to contain her massive breasts.

"Hello Ms. America, welcome home," she nodded to me.

"Sister, she's been here. She was only hiding," Natalia proclaimed.

"Hiding?" her voice suddenly became high, "why would you hide? I thought," she became nervous, "I thought you wanted us to be here?"

"I do, I just didn't realize it till all of you showed up."

Tears began to form in the corners of her eyes, "why do you sound so mean when you say that?"

"Uh, hey, hey, no need for tears. I was joking."

"Amy," Grandma narrowed her eyes at me in disapproval, "Did you make Irunya cry?"

"No, I didn't mean to. I'm sorry."

"Please Sister," Natalia placed a hand on her shoulder, "stop crying."

Then the front door swung open and four more nations walked in. They wore casual summer clothes and had food and wine bottles in their hands. I recognized Roderich and Akram, but I had never met the other two. One nation was a woman with long light brown hair and green eyes. While the other was an Asian guy with glasses and flopped to the side black hair.

"Klahan," the Asian woman with the green blouse walked up and gave a quick hug to the Asian guy with glasses.
"How many nations are coming over?" I asked.

"They should be the last," Korea proclaimed.

The group spots me in the crowd and came to introduce themselves. "Ms. America," Roderich nodded his head to me.

The woman with long hair beamed at me, "We didn't get the chance to meet," she grabbed my hand. "I'm Elizabeta Héderváry the nation of Hungary."

Arthur stood by Akram's side, "Amy, you remember Akram." He was dressed in the clothes that he wore in the picture that Arthur showed me. He must like that outfit, I thought to myself. Akram placed his palms together and bowed to me.

During our small chat, I quickly discovered that I had just met the Asian countries. The shaggy haired man was Li Chun the nation of Hong Kong, the one with long sleeves was Yong Soo Im the nation of South Korea, the woman with wavy hair was Mei Xiao the nation of Taiwan, the one in the green blouse was Kim Lan the nation of Vietnam and the one with the glasses was Klahan Hyusen the nation of Thailand.

Like I said, who the hell could keep up with all this?

"Oh guys, I found the video," Melissa cried out in a fit of giggles and began to connect Dad's laptop to the TV.

I tensed, "what video?"

She grinned mischievously at me, "You're see." She typed a key on the computer and the TV screen displayed a ten year old Johnny and a twelve year old Melissa. The nations gathered around the TV and fell silent.

"Is the camera on?" child Melissa asked.

"Yeah," Johnny exclaimed, "bring her out."

Melissa was wearing a purple dress that came to her knees and her hair was in a high ponytail. She reached inside a baby carrier and picked up a ten month old baby with fair skin and short golden curls.

"Aww, it's America as a baby," Yong Soo exclaimed happily.

"You were so cute." Melissa pitched my cheek, "what happened?"

"Ha, ha, very funny," I said as pulled my cheek away.

"Mom wants us to film her laughing," Johnny said in the video, "do something."

Melissa made a goofy face at me and bounced me on her knees. I displayed nothing more than a confused widen eye stare. After the fifth face she made, she turned to the camera, "she's not laughing."

"Here," Johnny adjusted the camera so it would face the both of them and sat next to his sister's side. "Let me see her."

She hands me over and Johnny placed me on his knees. He begins to hum a tune and move my arms to the beat. Then he sang, "I like big butts and I can not lie
"You other brothers can't deny

"That when a girl walks in with an itty bitty waist

"And a round thing in your face

"You get sprung -

Melissa then smacked him over the head. He hissed in pain and glared at her, "Ow! What was that for?"

"You are not singing that song to our baby sister," she proclaimed.

He mumbled, "It worked on F.R.I.E.N.D.S."

"That was a sitcom," she smacked him again and this time I giggled.

"See the song worked," Johnny grinned.

"No stupid, she likes it when I hit you."

The movie cuts to the next scene. The year in the corner of the film was 2005 and a teen-aged Johnny was fixing the camera to face me. I was four at the time, my hair was in a curled tangled mess and I was wearing a dress with sunflowers on it.

"Okay, Amy, you ready?" Johnny asked as he was giggling.

I nodded eagerly and he pressed a button on the radio, which was playing a Sir Mix Alot song: 'Baby Got Back.' I began to sing along with the music, thou, I was off key and I would usually mumble the lyrics. But then I would scream out, "Baby got back." Then I would shimmy my bottom and jump around like was I hyped up on sugar (most likely that was the case).

Johnny was trying to conceal his laughter throughout the entire clip.

Everyone in the living room however didn't. My faced heated as the nations kept rewinding the clip just to see me dance. Then Gilbert smirked at me, "you like big butts Ms. America."

"I-I-I," I stuttered till I got a better grip on my nerves, "I was four! I didn't know what I was doing!"

"Oh," Melissa pressed a few more keys, "she knew what she was doing."

The next video came from an iPhone camera and it was filming me in a dance room at the rec-center. This was before I started high school; my curly hair was in a low ponytail and I twerking to the same song that was in the last two videos. My butt was facing the camera so everyone got a clear view of my ass in black yoga pants. It only got worse, I was singing along with Sir Mix Alot; loudly.

"But I gotta be straight when I say I wanna

"Till the break of dawn

"Baby got it goin' on

"A lot of simps won't like this song

"Cause them punks like to hit it and quit it
And I'd rather stay and play

'Cause I'm long, and I'm strong

And I'm down to get the friction on

'So, ladies-

I jumped around the face the camera and I froze like a deer caught in the headlights. Then the video cuts to Michel's grinning face, "This is so going on YouTube."

The clip continued with me chasing Michel down, screaming at him to delete the video. The nations were cracking up; several of them couldn't even breathe.

My nails dug into the skin of my palms, "he promised me he deleted that."

"Clearly he didn't," Lovino took a breath from his laughter.

"Michel," I shouted and walked towards the stairs.

"He's not here," Melissa called after me, "He went with Sanjay, Johnny and Jamie to our house to get tables and chairs for everyone."

"Of course he did," I mumbled and speed walked to my bedroom. As I slammed the door, Raiden stirred and wailed. "Crap," I hissed and walked back into the hall. Melissa was running up the steps and I gestured her to stay. "I got this."

She smiled, "Thanks."

"Don't misread this. I'm gonna get you for this," I waved my hands over the crowd of nations.

She rolled her eyes, "Love you too, sis."

I gave a tiny smile and walked into the guest room. When I closed the door, the noise from downstairs instantly softened to hushed whispers. But not all was quiet. Raiden was doing his signature scream/cry and my ears were beginning to ring. I shook it off and picked him up, "hey buddy, I'm sorry I woke you," I soothed as I rocked him in my arms. I walked over to the balcony's glass door and began to hum a song; it took me a couple of tries for me to sing anything else but 'Baby Got Back'.

"Hmm, so you do like that song," a voice proclaimed as I jumped and held Raiden closer to my chest.

"Ah, shit! Natalia don't scare me like that." Raiden cried louder and I began to lightly bounce him in my arms. I turned to her, "someone needs to give you a bell."

The door opens and Blair, Blake and Lady walked in. "Is Raiden okay?" Blair asked.

He was still crying, "What do you think," I grumbled.

"Let me hold him," Blake sat on the bed and held up his arms.

I handed Raiden over and Blake positioned him so his head was on Blake's shoulder. He whispered a song in Hindi as he rubbed his back. Melissa then walked in with a bottle, "he must be hungry."

Blake hands his little brother over and Melissa adjusted him onto his back and began to feed him.
She turned to me, "Grandma said she'll handle the nations for now, but you have to go down there. They are your guests."

"Technically," I pointed to her children, "They're *their* guests."

"So I was right, you didn't want us here," Natalia said and we tensed in surprised, clearly we forgot that she was in the room.

"No, Amy's just being unreasonable," Melissa proclaimed and I stuck my tongue out at her.

Natalia sat next to Melissa on the bed, "are you ready?"

I lifted a brow at her, "for what?"

"Our bet," she said as she crossed her legs.

"What bet," Blair got between her and Melissa and grinned up at me.

"Oh, yeah, I lost to her at the Horseshoe, now I have to sing for her," I quickly explained.

"You beat her," Melissa beamed at Natalia and held her hand up for a high five, "you go girl."

Natalia cracked a brow in uncertainly, but she still lightly tapped her palm to Melissa's. Blake hopped off the bed and pulled out the keyboard from the closet. Mel hands over Raiden to Blair, "could you hold him?" Blair nodded, cuddled her brother in her arms and continued to feed him. Lady then took her chance to hop on the bed and lay herself beside Blair.

Melissa helped Blake with the keyboard as I got the black stand. I placed the stand near the balcony and Mel sat the keyboard so she would face our small audience. Blake ran out of the room and came back five minutes later with a chair. Melissa thanked her son with a kiss and Blair snickered, "Momma's boy."

Blake ignored her and sat on the corner of the bed. Natalia was now in the middle of the twins as I stood at the glass door of the balcony, "Any requests?" I asked.

"I doubt you would know any Belarusian songs," said Natalia.

Blair threw up her hand and began to wave it in the air, "Oh, oh, I know one, I know one!"

"Is it a song that can be played with just a piano?" I questioned.

She took a moment to think about it and then she pulled her hand back down, "No."

"I still remember that Avril Lavigne song," Melissa added.

I nodded, "I do too. Should we wait for Johnny then?"

"No, I got this," she smiled as she cracked her fingers and sat at the keyboard.

I leaned against the glass door and took a deep breath. That was the cue for Melissa to play the soft beginning of 'When You're Gone' by Avril Lavigne. I rolled my shoulders and tried to relax; singing was not my strongest trait.

"I always needed time on my own

"I never thought I'd need you there when I cry
"And the days feel like years when I'm alone
"And the bed where you lie
"Is made up on your side"

I sang in a soft tone, but still my voice was too rough for such a calming tune.

"When you walk away I count the steps that you take
"Do you see how much I need you right now?"

Melissa composed the music to make the piano the main source of the song. She added extra notes to make up for the missing guitar and I continued to sing the chorus.

"When you're gone
"The pieces of my heart are missing you
"When you're gone
"The face I came to know is missing too
"When you're gone
"All the words I need to hear to always get me through the day
"And make it okay
"I miss you"

I took a short pause as Mel moved her skilled fingers over the keys. My knees were beginning to buckle and I almost had a half a mind to face the glass door rather than Natalia's watchful eyes. I side glanced to Melissa and she smiled at me. My confidence rose and I placed all my focus on Mel and her kids. I imagined that it was just my family here in our home, that the nations were nowhere to be seen or heard from. That I could let go of my nerves and have fun with it. Even if I messed up, we would just laugh and keep going.

"I've never felt this way before
"Everything that I do reminds me of you
"And the clothes you left, they lie on the floor
"And they smell just like you,
"I love the things that you do"

I caught Blair pulling away the empty bottle from Raiden and sitting him on her lap. Raiden's eyes found me as he watched me curiously. I smiled and allowed my voice to rise in volume for the chorus once again. Then I closed my eyes and sang the next section of lyrics with passion.

"We were made for each other
"Out here forever
"I know we were, yeah, yeah
"All I ever wanted was for you to know" 
"Everything I do, I give my heart and soul" 
"I can hardly breathe; I need to feel you here with me, yeah-"

"That's enough," Natalia's voice rose over the music, which surprised Melissa. Her fingers pressed on the keys in a deep shrieking halt and the sound made my eyes shot open. Natalia was already at the door, "thank you for the song."

I called out, "Nat-"

She walked out the door without even a backward glance.

"So," Michel walked to one end of a round table as I stood at the other side. "She asked you to sing for her, then once you were about to end the song, she told you to stop and walked out of the room."

We lifted the table and walked in the direction of the backyard as I said, "rude, right?"

He nodded as he walked backwards, "yeah, but I can see her point. You sang a song from Avril Lavigne, and don't get me wrong I love her. But that song is a little depressing."

"It was the only thing that came to mind and all we had was the keyboard. Sorry we couldn't call up The Fedoras and have the stage set up for a jam session." I exclaimed as we sat the table down.

"That would be so cool," he grabbed a table cloth from the back porch railing and covered the table with one flap. "I bet the nations would love that."

"I'm not singing in front of them. My knees were about to give out with just Natalia watching me. Imagine if it was all of them."

He shrugged his shoulders, "just imagine them in their underwear."

I shook my head, "no thanks, I'd rather not be scarred for life."

Sanjay and Johnny brought in the sixth and last table from the front. "You sure it will be enough for all of us?" Sanjay asked.

"Yeah, each table could hold up to eight to ten people," Johnny answered as he took another cloth from the rail and spread it over the table.

We arranged the tables in a wide oval in front of the back porch. All the table cloths were different colors and graphics. The two in the curve of the oval were blue and yellow. On the right, two tables were covered in graphic cloth with flowers and leaves on it. While on the left, the cloths had small bird and bear designs.

Jamie ran out of the house and stopped herself on the rail, "She's coming up the driveway."

We leaped over the back steps and rushed through the kitchen. Everyone was gathered in the living room, waiting for my mother to walk through the door. My family was standing in front of the large party of nations, facing the door.
Mom was wearing her pink scrubs and her hair was tied in a ponytail. The moment she opened the door we shouted together. "Welcome home."

She yelped as she jumped and dropped her keys. "What's going on?"

Dad came to her side and picked up her keys, "The nations decided to pay us a visit." He hangs up her keys and gestured her to the nations. "Everyone this is Jessica, the love of my life," he grinned.

"John," Mom turned her head away as a blush formed over her cheeks.

"Aw, your mom and dad are so cute," Jamie whispered to me.

I grinned, "Come on," I grabbed her hand, "dinner's ready."

Serving plates were split up and spread out evenly. Pitchers of water, tea, lemonade and liquor were in the center of each table. Bowls and pans were placed around the pitchers, but each had various choices of food. Some tables might have a certain dish, while others may not. Most likely we'll end up passing them around so everyone could have chance to try the paella, the Swedish meatballs, the creamy au gratin potatoes and all other cuisines that the nations were so kindly enough to cook for us.

Everyone took their seats. On the right, closest to the back porch; Dad and Mom sat themselves with Ludwig, Feliciano, Gilbert, Roderich, Elizabeta, Antonio and Lovino. Next to them, Jamie and the twins were seated with Akram, Klahan, Heracles, Sadik and Gupta. The rest of the Asian countries sat with Sanjay and Melissa at the table with the yellow cloth while Grandma, Johnny and Celine sat with the Nordics at the table with the cloth of the small graphic bears.

Michel then took notice of Natalia, Irunya, Feliks, Peter and the Baltics sitting at the table on the far left. He rubbed his hands together, "time to gather intel on Toris."

I groaned, "Please don't tell him about the whole team thing."

"I won't. Besides, Jamie and I agreed not to get involved with you and your potential nation boyfriends. Or girlfriends." Michel winked at me and sat himself between Eduard and Toris. "Hey guys just so you know, now that I'm here," he slapped his hands on the table, "this is now officially the cool table."

"Pfft, please," Celine rolled her eyes. "This is the cool table. We're with the original Vikings."

"Technically only three of us were Vikings," Erik commented.

"Really," her eyes sparked with interest, "which ones?"

"Guess," Tino smiled.

She smirked, "you were one of them."

He shook his head, "nope."

"Well I know one was Norway," Grandma added, "mostly because I learned it from that show on the History Channel."

"Oh the one called Vikings," Mikkel asked and Grandma nodded, "ah I loved that show."
"I'm putting my money on the big guy," Johnny pointed at Berwald.

"And you would be correct," said Berwald.

"Okay which is left," Celine asked and she was met with the answers of Denmark and Iceland.

All three of my family members took a moment to think it over. Then they all guessed at the same time, "Iceland."

"What?!" Mikkel exclaimed, "Norway founded that little brat!"

"So he wasn't a Viking?" Johnny asked.

"Of course he wasn't! Plenty of my people were Vikings and damn powerful ones at that."

"Ha!" Lukas smirked, "Your people didn't even come close to mine."

"Don't start with me Lukas. I can still kick your ass any day of the week," Mikkel sneered as he poured himself another glass of vodka.

"If it makes you feel any better, you all are number one in my book." Johnny then poured himself a cup of Koskenkorva, "To the Vikings!"

Everyone from the table cheered as they clicked their vodka glasses together and dunk it in one gulp. That pretty much started the conversation for the rest of the tables.

Mom took a bite from the paella, "Mmm, Antonio this amazing. You have to give me the recipe."

"Of course," he smiled, "anything for the mother of America."

"Stop calling me that," she narrowed her eyes at him, "it's silly."

"But it is true," Elizabeta said, "You raised Amy."

"Yes, you raised her to be a little bitch," Gilbert murmured.

"Brother, be polite," Ludwig said through gritted teeth.

Mom held a hand up to him and turned to Gilbert, "John told me of your little ordeal with my daughter, and I must say you are delusional if you think Amy will find you attractive. You are an arrogant man with a disturbing case of narcissistic personality disorder. To put it frankly my daughter was raised to have better taste."

Roderich smirked, "well said."

"Thank you."

"Hey, whose side are you on?" Gilbert exclaimed.

"Not yours," he proclaimed.

Everyone else shared a grin as they passed around the pasta.

Blair began to bombardment the nations with questions. "Are you the real Heracles? Or were you named after him?"

"Um-" Heracles was about to answer but Blair had a short attention span.
"Did you know any of Pharaohs? Did you live with them? Did you know King Tut? Queen Cleopatra?"

"Well-" Gupta was also cut off.

"Why are you named Turkey? Is your national bird the turkey? Do you also have Thanksgiving?"

Sadik knitted his brows at her, "What, no-"

She then turned her attention on Akram, "What's India like? Do you ride elephants where ever you go? Do you like Bollywood movies? I like Bollywood movies. Do you cross dress? Cause a lot of actors in Bollywood movies cross dress. If you do cross dress, are you a pretty as lady?"

Akram gave her an uncertain look and Blake pulled on Blair's arm. "You're being rude."

"They're valid questions," Blair exclaimed and I froze, she was becoming a mini Michel. There are two of them now. My worst fear has been realized.

Blair went back to her questions, "What it's like to be nations? How do you become a nation? How old are you? When did you meet each other? Are you all friends? Did you all ever had to fight each other?-"

I blocked out the rest of her questions and moved on. Sanjay and Melissa were chatting among the Asian countries. Raiden was with them and the nations were taking turns with the small bundle of joy.

"Aw, he's so tiny," Yong Soo grinned as he grasped Raiden's hand.

Mei was holding him, "he looks so much like you," she said to Sanjay.

He smiled, "thank you."

"If we had known you just had a baby we would have brought a gift," Kiku added and bowed. "I am sorry for our insensitive behavior."

"It's alright Mr. Japan, besides you made us sushi." She took a bite, "Mm, it's been almost year since I had any."

"Believe me," Sanjay added, "you gave her the best gift anyone could have given her."

"Let me see the little one," Yao asked and Mei handed him over. "Hello there," Yao's voice became soft and soothing. "You're so cute, I have a half mind to dress you up as panda."

Melissa clapped her hands together, "Yes, we can dress him up like that for Halloween. He'll look adorable."

"Will you send us pictures?" Yong Soo asked.

"Sure," she said as Yao continued to make cooing sounds so that Raiden would smile.

I scanned the area for an empty seat but most of the tables were occupied with the maximum number of guests. It was as if karma was backhanding me in the face when I found that a seat was open with Arthur, Francis and Matthew. I haven't really spent much time alone with them since the Emerald. I took a deep breath and walked to the table with the blue table cloth. "Hey guys," I greeted and sat myself in front of them.
All three of them raised their brows at me in surprise but they remained quiet. We would then exchange the minimum use of words as we passed dishes around to each other and to the other tables. I glanced to my food and then to the countries; Arthur was on my right as he ate a fried empanada with a fork and knife. Francis sat on the left nibbling on a pork dumpling and Matthew was between them picking at his salad. The silence was digging into my nerves to the point where I couldn't take it anymore. I slammed my fists on the table, "okay seriously, the silent treatment, I thought you guys were above this."

"Are we ma chérie," Francis asked with a condescending smile.

I closed my eyes and connected my head to the table. "Don't you idiots get it," I mumbled, "I'm," I sighed. "I'm letting you in."

Arthur asked, "In where?"

I rose off the table and groaned. "Really, you're gonna play stupid. Okay then, let me just say this. You are a smothering, worry wart and you love to be right especially when you're wrong." I turned to Matthew, "you are a door mat for these two. And sometimes I just wonder, why would you even deal with their crap." Then I faced Francis, "And you flip like a coin. You're either the flamboyant weirdo or the depressing storyteller."

Then I focused on all three of them, "no I take that back. You all flip like coins; one minute you're happy and like to be around my family. The next you tell me to drop them and go off with you and be a nation." I shook my head, "why am I even bothering with you? Why am I even trying to-" I took a breath, "to understand you." I covered my face with my hands, "Listen, I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I said you weren't acting like my family and I guess that was somewhat intentional-

"You guess," Matthew interrupted.


"Okay, are you done," I hissed.

"Non, I believe it is our turn to say what we want," Francis began to count off his fingers. "You are stubborn as an ass. You refuse to move even an inch for anyone."

"You have no self-control," Matthew continued, "you lose your temper and attack anyone that's in your way."

Arthur followed, "I never thought I would say this, but you are too sarcastic even for me. Sometimes I have half a mind to struggle you."

I snorted, "You and me both."

We were silent for another minute or two till I said, "You three always seem to find the right buttons to push."

"So do you," Arthur dinged into the inside pocket of his jacket and pulled out an envelope. "But like your sister says you can't hide your affection for us."

I skimmed through the photos of me, Arthur, Matthew and Francis at Johnny's wedding. The four of us dancing and posing together with genuine smiles and laughs made my lips curl into a grin.

"And you guys can't hide your affection for me." They remained quiet as I flipped to the last photo of all four us grinning at the camera. "You know, before Ivan decided to screw with us. I was beginning to like you guys."
I glanced to Arthur, "We really get on each other's nerves, but I can't help but mess with you. It's too much fun," he cracked a smile and I continued. "Mattie, you're the sweetest, most understanding guy I ever met. You're like a puppy, no matter what we do wrong, you'll just wag your tail and everything will be okay. I like that about you.

"Francis," I paused, "you and I get along pretty well, especially when we mess with this guy." I gestured to Arthur and he glared. "Oh don't give me that look; you know you like it." He shook his head and I continued with Francis, "You're also wise, kind and you have a way with kids. Lali adores you and that's big in my book." I focused on all three. "Now that I think about it, the kids loved all three of you. Mattie has the baby polar bear, which won some points. And," I turned to Arthur, "they like to tickle you and make you dance."

Arthur sighed, "Do you all enjoy this; toying with me like I'm your own personal entertainment."

Francis held up his thumb and index finger an inch apart from each other. "A little bit."

I giggled, "You guys also make me laugh."

"I like it when you do," said Arthur, "You have his smile; just yet another quality you have of his."

"You're also brave and loyal to anyone that deserves it," Francis added.

Matthew set his eyes on me, "Let's just hope one day we'll be one of those people."

I beamed, "you guys already are."

_The End. . . . . .

_For now. . . . . .

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